



# Las Libres Newsletter

No. 3 Fall 2009

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For all of those who  
have invested in the important  
work of *Las Libres*,  
we thank you  
on behalf of the woman we  
serve.  
Together we will keep up  
the fight  
against injustice.

***Todos los derechos para  
todas las mujeres todo el  
tiempo!***  
**All rights for all women...  
always!**

## ***The Current Fight For the Right to Abortion for Rape Victims in Guanajuato***

On Friday, May 8th, the Guanajuato State Congress passed an amendment to the state constitution protecting life from the moment of conception. This legislation immediately throws the Guanajuato penal code—that allows a legal exception for abortion in the case of rape—into conflict with the state's constitution. *Las Libres* has been fighting since its founding to help women who have been raped to gain access to legal abortion, even though in practice, not a single woman in the state of Guanajuato has ever obtained a state-sponsored abortion. Now according to the



Children in Las Cruces working with volunteers from Las Libres.

constitution, that right has been completely taken away.

*Las Libres* has been facing this new barrier to women's rights head on. A coalition has been formed between members of *Las Libres*, members of la Asociación para el Desarrollo Integral de Personas Violadas (ADIVAC) and members of El Centro de Derechos Humanos Victoria Diez. These groups have met several times for capacity building between the organizations, strategic planning, and resource sharing.

When the amendment was passed, there was a window of opportunity in which women in Guanajuato State could file "*amparos*," a form of legal action similar to habeas corpus, in which individuals seek protection from a law they feel violates their rights. The coalition began its work together by helping 167 women file *amparos* with the state. This served *Las Libres*' mission in three ways: it sent a message to the government that there will be a continued action until women are afforded their rights; it implied education and conversation with individual women about the current attacks on their rights; and it sent out a message to other women in the state, as newspapers published the number of *amparos* filed, that they are not alone and that there are women working together for reproductive justice!

### ***Continued Work in Las Cruces and San José de la Luz: a Look at One of Las Libres' Programs*** by Lauren Hart, current *Las Libres* intern

Having worked with women's groups in multiple capacities in the US, I came to *Las Libres* prepared to do the same here. When told there was a need for someone to help out with the children who come to the training workshops, I was at first a little nervous. Could I keep children in control for two hours?



Picture drawn by children in San José de la Luz.

Since then, I have worked with children in the communities San José de la Luz and Las Cruces. Both of these experiences have been invaluable to me. Seeing the impact that *Las Libres* has on so many children has been amazing.

The experience I had the first time I went to Las Cruces is worth recounting. Verónica Cruz Sanchez drove a car full of people to Las Cruces—a three and a half hour drive. As we pulled into town, we were met by a crowd of around thirty children all cheering. As we

drove the rest of the way to park, the children ran alongside the car beaming and cheering. They were so excited to see Verónica.

It is not hard to see why these children were so excited. For years Verónica has been making the long drive to work with these children. She knows them well and welcomes any newcomers. She listens to them and engages with them on serious topics, valuing their opinions and ideas.

The second time that we visited Las Cruces we talked with the children about the right to decide. Vero asked the children what they had the right to decide with regard to their own life and each child wrote these down on a poster. Responses included the right to decide if she wanted to continue with school, the right to decide

who she will marry, the right to decide when she would have her first sexual experience. I was impressed by the maturity with which the children approached this exercise and the seriousness of the topics we discussed.

The photo above is from a group I led at San José de la Luz. We talked about human rights and what rights are necessary for a person to survive. One of the girls drew this picture after our discussion. Working with the children of Las Cruces and San José de la Luz I found that not only were the children excited to be engaged in

### ***Billboard funded by Las Libres is forcibly removed***

learning and discussion, but they were motivated, thoughtful, and approached the exercise with concern and energy.

Before the July 5th elections, Las Libres sponsored a billboard located along a major highway. This billboard was removed without consulting Las Libres and without explanation.

La Jornada, a nationally-recognized newspaper from Mexico City, featured an article on the 29th of June about the billboard and the current situation in Guanajuato and other Mexican states (to see the article follow this link: <http://tiny.cc/Article614>). The billboard, pictured above, reads:

**In Guanajuato,**

**Imprisonment for rape victims.**

- **130 rape victims have been jailed between 2000 and 2008**
- **231 rapes have been registered in the last two years**
- **The majority of the perpetrators are free**
- **Zero legal abortions from rape since 1978**

**Don't vote for the PAN party that is against a life of dignity and freedom... because they are violating our rights.**

This situation further highlights the silencing, in countless ways, of women in the state of Guanajuato. In the short time this billboard was up, it caught the attention of La Jornada and gave a voice to many women whose rights had been violated by the state. Las Libres continues to find creative ways to speak out against oppression.



Billboard funded by Las Libres.

### ***A Summer at Las Libres By Clare Diegel***

Before embarking on law school in September, this summer I moved to Guanajuato to volunteer with *Centro Las Libres*. While visiting Guanajuato in the

spring, I met with Vero to discuss her work with *Las Libres*. I knew in the first ten minutes of our meeting that Vero was an incredible leader and advocate and that I wanted to work alongside her this summer. When I asked what hours Vero worked, she said, "all day, every day." I saw my first week that she is absolutely correct. I would like to share a few of my experiences to give you a 'behind-the-scenes' look at Las Libres and thank you for your continued support of the organization.

Despite its incredible beauty and charm, the dazzling city of Guanajuato lies in one of the most politically conservative and oppressive states in Mexico. This creates the need for a group such as *Las Libres*, that fights for the sexual and reproductive freedom of women and youth. It also makes the work of Vero, Rosy, and their amazing network of volunteers incredibly difficult. When I first met Vero at the lovely Centro Las Libres house, I was surprised to find a large and decorative sign on the front gate, proudly announcing "Centro Las Libres." I had not expected such a display because I had read online that many people in the government had denounced Las Libres for its important work and were not supportive of women's rights. I asked Vero if she had considered not displaying a sign for security reasons, and she said in her lightning-speed Spanish, "We are doing nothing wrong. There is no reason for us to hide from anyone. We are helping the people of this community and that is nothing we should be ashamed of." I was struck by her courage. After all, we were in Mexico, a country known for its rampant political corruption and precarious security. This woman was not afraid to fight for those in her community who couldn't fight for themselves.

Over the next several weeks, I attended meetings at the Las Libres house with leading feminists from around Mexico. These women are waging similar human rights battles in their respective states and Vero brought them together to discuss collaboration and the current political climate. Everyone around the table in these meetings was equally passionate about protecting the rights of women and children and brought their own experiences and expertise to share with the others. Two of these meetings stand out in my mind. One sought to hold a national conference for the rights of women and children in the next six months. The other meeting I was fortunate enough to attend laid the groundwork for a lawsuit that would exonerate women who were imprisoned for having abortions. This monumental undertaking shows the commitment of Las Libres and the breadth of its activities: from workshops in rural communities to lawsuits in federal court to leading protests outside of government offices, the small network of Las Libres is a strong force in the state and a leading voice throughout Mexico.

In addition to the constant lobbying and monitoring of government activities, Vero and Rosy frequently visit surrounding communities with volunteers to conduct workshops for women and youth. Nearly every week for many years, Vero has made the 4-hour drive to the community of Salvatierra. On a Thursday in June, I accompanied Vero and two other dedicated volunteers, Señora Luz and Racquel on their ritual trek to Salvatierra. Racquel is a doctor of natural medicine and packed her medicines and an oven in the back of her SUV for the workshop she would lead in the community. Throughout the class, which lasted about two hours, Racquel discussed natural medicines with the women in the community and taught them how to administer the medicines to their families. The women were fully engaged and asked questions throughout the workshop. As the session was closing, Racquel gave the women a homework assignment: she asked the ladies to compile a list of the illnesses each of their families have to confront most frequently. Racquel then instructed the women to bring their lists to the next natural medicine workshop she would hold so they could discuss the illnesses and learn about what the other women in their community were dealing with. While the family unit is immensely strong in Mexico, Racquel's assignment encouraged interfamily dialogue so the women could

learn from one another. Though this specific meeting was not focused on sexual or reproductive health, it empowered these women by giving them the knowledge to independently care for their families.

My time at *Las Libres* made a lasting impact on my views of efficacy, advocacy, determination and human rights. With limited resources and only 24 hours in a day, the wonderful people at *Las Libres* are waging important battles to improve the lives of Mexican women and children. And every day, they are succeeding. Now in the United States, I cannot give my time to help Vero and her team. I can, however, spare a little change and encourage you to donate as well.

### ***Las Libres Website Attacked***

Over the past summer the Las Libres was attacked. It was first attacked about a week before the 5<sup>th</sup> of July Mexican elections. We cannot prove who attacked the website but we do know that it was hackers who made it appear as if it had been infected with a virus that could damage the computer of anyone who chose to open it. Our volunteer computer engineer Kike Aranda spent several weeks working to fix it and it was back on-line by late August. Almost immediately, it was attacked again. We have since decided to change hosts and to include new security features in an effort to prevent future attacks.

During this time we have also been working on updating the website, especially since the new anti-abortion amendment. The website is being updated in both Spanish and English.



Verónica Cruz Sanchez, Executive Director of Las Libres, with children from Las Cruces.

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