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Gentrification & Gender Expectations: Women in  
the Fruitvale

**“Being active and organizing in our own community makes me have a sense of having control of the bad that is happening around us.” – Latina in the Fruitvale**

Building a member base with working class immigrant Latinas is tremendously challenging for both the potential members and the organizer because of their time limitations. The tenants in the Fruitvale should be influencing the decision-makers when it comes to tenant’s rights, these Latinas are the ones with the greatest understanding of how dire the inhabitable housing units are. When



Mariela migrated from El Salvador when she was three years old. When she arrived she did not recognize her mother she her mother, “you are not mother, my mother is in back at home.” She aspires to go to cosmetology school because she worked for Macy’s as a makeup artist and she always has clients who ask her to do their makeup due to her talent. She wants to become a member of CJC because she believes that if the people in her community do not get up and make a difference things will continue to be uninhabitable and unsafe.

they become the empowered leaders that Causa Justa :: Just Cause wants them to be, they will have the confidence and tools to inform their community about their rights and ignite passion in others that is needed to fight against a system that is not allowing them to flourish. That is why it is vital to continue the recruitment of these women so they can be the catalyst of change in their communities & local government.

The Immigrant Rights Campaign’s goal is for potential members to become aligned with Causa Justa :: Just Cause’s vision and goals and to provide them with the “necessary support and training” to become leaders in their community, in turn “this grows [CJC’s] work, their leadership and power.”

Training these potential leaders of the Fruitvale would build capacity for Causa Justa :: Just Cause’s Tenant Clinic. The Oakland Tenant Clinic is a great resource for the community, but it is very limited in capacity. There are only one full-time staff member, one part-time staff member, and 9 volunteers who put in about 3-4 hours a week, the clinic is open only 29 hours a week to serve 92,248 tenants, which is 60% of Oakland residents(US Census). The clinic runs by an appointment based system and the only way to make an appointment is to call CJC’s main line, leave a voicemail, & wait to get a call back from a volunteer. That volunteer assesses the case then refers them out to another organization or schedules an appointment that will take place within the next 2-4 weeks. The Tenant Clinic assists tenants to deal with their tenancy issues, for example: evictions, repairs, breach of contract, rent increase, harassment, illegal entry, estoppel, move outs/ deposits, and tenants in foreclosed properties.

The Clinic’s counselors in Oakland, Princess Beverly

Williams and Chantal Garcia manage individual cases by writing letters to landlords based on the California Civil Code 1941.1 which requires landlords to provide a habitable place to live, California Civil Code 1942.5 which prohibits retaliation from landlords when tenants ask for repairs, and California Civil Code 789.3(v) prohibits the landlord to the change the locks without an proper eviction process. Also, the counselors base their work on the Oakland Tenant Protection Ordinance, which defines what landlord harassment is and reiterates that not making repairs in a unit is a form



of harassment. Counselors give information to the client on their rights as tenants, refer them to free or reduced legal services for Unlawful Detainers & to further the actions against land lords when the reports are not happening. Once there is a member and potential leader in an apartment complex this woman can be a resource for her neighbors when it comes to knowing about their legal rights as a tenant and even as an undocumented immigrant.

After, having done outreach in the Fruitvale for 4 months as part of the IRC team and facilitating different trainings we had the opportunity to sit down with 15 individuals who attended these trainings to have a one-on-one with us. Most of the women interviewed for the one on one's were mothers. The women of the Fruitvale strive for a better life for themselves and their family, but the obstacles that come with being an immigrant and of working class impedes them from acquiring their dreams and goals. Some women would like to be legally here, they would like to learn how to speak English, go back to cosmetology school, or provide decent housing for their family. Even though the husbands work they still need to be employed as well since the bay is not affordable. After they work long hours as domestic employees, janitors, waitresses, cooks, they come home cook, help their children with their homework, and sometimes volunteer at their children's school, attend computer or citizenship classes, prepare for the next day and do it all over again. Having to add the burden of having bed bugs, cockroaches, or leaking pipes is something so unnecessary to someone who is already overburdened with the life of a working class family.

The systematic issues that are created by capitalism and patriarchy force these women to work in physically arduous jobs and in places that are limiting in professional growth. There is great amount of people who are opposed to giving amnesty to undocumented immigrants because they claim they do not belong here even though these Latinas are the ones who are rearing the children of upper middle class families, cooking the meals and cleaning the restrooms in restaurants where they don't want to pay the real worth of their labor. Also, racism perpetuates the continuation of only offering Latinas in the US to have employment in service, cleaning and the hospitality sector. The American people do not believe that is worth investing in these individuals. By getting the opportunity to become educated they can contribute to society in a way that can give them more of a return in investment. For example, giving out grants to the DREAMers to receive their bachelor's degree would give many Latinas and their children to rise above poverty and have a better chance at life.



Rosa

comes home every day from a 7 hour work shift at Aroma Café to a cockroach & rat infested house, with a 10 year old sticky carpet that is falling apart.

She has 3 children, but was not reunited with her eldest until he was 15 years old. She had not seen him since he was in grade school. His journey from Acapulco, Mexico to Oakland, California took 4 months. Rosa "did not sleep a complete night for those 4 months." She would love for her children to go to college, but she knows it will be difficult for her eldest to do so.



The European Conquest of the Americas created a system of patriarchy; this has made negative consequences to Latin American women of even today. Recent Latin migrants hold on to their defined gender roles. Having done the 1-1's and listening to the stories of their journey from their country of origin to the United States proved their strength, resilience, and capability to overcome any difficulty. Yet they did not feel smart enough to become members of CJC or they felt they needed permission from their husband to invest their time in something outside of their daily tasks of being a wife and a mother. Having organizers in this community to be out there and letting these women know that they are worth the investment is vital for the anti-gentrification work in the Fruitvale. Empowering them to believe they are capable of making a positive change for themselves, their family, and their community is the goal of Causa Justa :: Just Cause. It is a difficult task to undo a lifetime of internalized oppression, but persistence, passion and continuous conversations with these strong women can allow them to become leaders.



After, fixing pipes behind the wall because they were leaking, management left this hole in the wall and rats come into the apartment.

The fact that many of these families are undocumented forces them into the shadows out of fear or having a sense of not having any rights in this country, because of their immigration status. These individuals understand that

tenant's rights exist, but they might believe that those rights are not extended to them and if they might have knowledge of these rights they do not want to exercise those rights in fear of retaliation from their landlords or managers (harassment occurs by threatening the tenant to call an immigration agent). Also, many of the entities that assist in the process of enforcing their rights as tenants, for example, getting repairs done or reporting an illegal rent raise exist in the Oakland City Hall and not having papers to prove their residency might intimidate them when dealing with city officials. The Immigrant Rights Campaign under Causa Justa :: Just Cause focuses on educating the immigrant population in the San Francisco Bay on their rights as immigrants dealing with federal agencies, the new license for undocumented individuals, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, Deferred Action for parents of U.S. citizens & Lawful Permanent Residents, and tenant's rights focused on the Spanish speaking population. Not speaking Spanish and not having the opportunity to have a contract or notification of eviction translated could be detrimental to a non-English Speakers.

There are direct and serious consequences if the residents of Fruitvale do not demand a better quality of living. Many of the repairs that need to be done are not just peeling paint or a leaking faucets. The biggest issues are leaking pipes or no ventilation in kitchens and restrooms which causes many problems like mold and parasite infestations. Breathing the air that is infested with mold and parasite feces can cause severe breathing problems and can cause allergies and asthma. "According to data available for 2010, Alameda County [where the city of Oakland is] has the third highest asthma hospitalization rate among all 58 California counties." "For Oakland, the rate of



asthma hospitalization among residents is 55 percent higher than the county rate and nearly two and a half times the California rate” (Department, 2013). Alameda County’s Asthma Start program has program that proves “in-home case management services,” reported that “40% of homes visited contained signs of mold. In the 1-1’s many of the potential members interviewed reported mold in their homes. During the outreach and the 1-1’s many tenants reported bed bugs, cockroaches, & rats (Department, 2013). All this can cause severe stress to any parent, but also can bring on serious financial burden to a family. If they have to do ER visits and their children do not have medical insurance, it can set them back thousands of dollars for just one visit.



The landlords place all the responsibility on the tenant to make repairs and take care of infestations. They either choose not to respond to the tenant’s requests or they retaliate by wanting to evict them. So many tenants take matters into their own hands and make repairs to the leaks, clean and paint walls with mold, and fumigate the premises out of pocket. 70 percent of Oakland residents pay more than 30 percent of their income towards rent (Department, 2013). The legal percentage for raising the rent in Oakland is 10% and if they are under rent control for 2015 it is only 1.9%. But many Landlords take advantage of the fact that this information is not widely available and when it is it usually it is not translated in Spanish. If the tenant does not dispute the Illegal rent increase within 60 days it becomes valid. Having these financial challenges and sometimes not having a secure job due to being undocumented creates a domino effect like getting their phone service disconnected or getting evicted.

This is detrimental to their lives, but also places a great challenge to continue the work of outreach and building relationship with the Latinas of the Fruitvale. Many times the organizers in the IRC Campaign would call these tenants to invite them to a “Know Your Rights Training” or to Café con Cause, which is the monthly member meeting for CJC and the phone line sounded busy or was disconnected and when a follow-up happened by paying them a visit; it turned out they had moved either because they were fed up with the repair retaliation from the landlord or they were evicted. Building momentum in a community for tenant’s rights is dependent on relationship-building. When there is no means of communications it builds barriers between the organizer and the resident of Fruitvale. That is why it is important to do continuous outreach in community centers like the Spanish Speaking Citizen Foundation or schools like the University Preparatory Academy in Fruitvale and door knocking in the larger apartment buildings. This helps in identifying which are the women who are rooted in their community and have a network of people which they can reach out to and spread the knowledge of their rights as tenants. Glendy, who is the parent coordinator at UPA helped the IRC team in coordinating different Know Your Rights Trainings in several topics like DACA and tenant’s rights. Also, having given out so many flyers and talking to so many individuals while door-knocking allowed the IRC team to have met 3 potential leaders of Fruitvale. These Latinas coordinated a “Know Your Rights Training” for their apartment building to talk about their repair issues, their rights, and the steps to take to demand for the repairs to happen.

#### **Steps to demand repairs:**

- Write a letter with the repairs needed and state the laws that protect the tenant



- Send it certified via USPS or make a copy of the letter
- Write a letter with the signatures of all the tenants in the building
- Call Oakland's Codes and Compliance to report the abuse
- Call the Rent Adjustment Program to receive a reduction of services (reduced rent)
- Call CJC to coordinate a city inspection of the building

The Latinas in the Fruitvale will be the authors of this vibrant and culturally rich community if CJC and other organizations continue to invest their time and resources in these resilient women. Change needs to happen from local, state and federal systems to the individual who does not feel powerful enough to make a difference in their own life or in their neighborhood. The only way the Fruitvale will move in the right direction is if the residents take control of tenant abuse and gentrification, by being the voices of their community. They have a deep understanding of the consequences of having parasite infestation, mold, or not having hot water for over a week... because they live it every day.



## References

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