
SANTA BARBARA RAPE CRISIS CENTER

CENTRO CONTRA LA VIOLACION SEXUAL

VOLUNTEER NEWSLETTER

Volume 12, Issue 9, SEPTEMBER 2007

IN THE NEWS: FORMER TRANSGENDER INMATE SUES STATE TO STOP SEXUAL ABUSE

August 3, 2007

Alexander Lee, Director, Trans/Gender Variant & Intersex Justice Project (TGIJP)
Jovida Guevara-Ross, Executive Director, Community United Against Violence (CUAV)

Alexis Giraldo is a young Puerto Rican woman who served over two years in California prisons. Unlike most women, she was placed in a men's prison and endured repeated violent rape by her male cellmates. She begged for help from prison staff, reported her injuries to doctors and therapists, and meticulously documented her situation. No help came.

How could this happen? The answer is simple: Alexis is a transgender woman, and California lacks policies to protect her. Transgender women are identified as male at birth, but self-identify and live in the world as women. California's prison system classified Alexis as male, even though she had been taking female hormones since 2004. When she was assaulted -- an inevitable occurrence under this backwards classification system -- and reported the attacks to prison staff, they condoned the brutal violence against her by refusing to help.

Alexis' story is not unique. Transgender people are over-represented in prison due to severe employment and housing discrimination, which leads many to participate in "survival crime," including theft and sex work. A 1997 study conducted by the San Francisco Department of Public Health found that 65 percent of transgender women in San Francisco had been imprisoned or jailed. Once in custody, they encounter widespread sexual and physical violence, and even murder. In a recent study commissioned by the state, the Center for Evidence-Based Corrections at UC Irvine found that 59 percent of transgender people in California prisons were sexually assaulted -- a rate nearly 15 times higher than in the general population.

What is unique about Alexis' case is that after winding through an exhausting bureaucratic complaint process, she courageously filed suit against the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and the staff members who allowed her to be raped. The suit was heard in San Francisco Superior Court over the past two weeks. Alexis raised serious constitutional questions about the state's failure to protect transgender people in prison, particularly the inadequate policies that subject the majority of transgender people to sexual assault while in the state's custody.

Instead of recognizing the need for policy change in the face of overwhelming empirical evidence, Attorney General Jerry Brown's office vigorously fought the suit. Brown's office used every desperate argument possible: they claimed that Alexis was lying, despite thorough documentation of the violence against her. They



denied the systemic nature of anti-transgender violence in the California prison system, despite objective research demonstrating the problem. They repeatedly used male pronouns to refer to Alexis and claimed that the state was unaware of her gender identity, despite her obvious feminine appearance. They unethically delayed the case until Alexis was paroled and then argued that her claim was moot; the judge then dismissed her constitutional claim against the state, saying that because she was not in custody she no longer required relief from the state's inadequate policies.

The behavior of the attorneys representing the state was so outrageous that it brought over a hundred people to protest outside the courthouse during the trial. It is astounding that Attorney General Brown would choose to sanction systemic sexual violence rather than take steps to end these horrific human rights violations.

California imprisons more people than any other state, and the need for change is clear. We need to abandon the illusion that locking people up creates real safety. We must work to give communities resources to avoid poverty and criminalization, and to respond to the root causes of violence. For transgender people, this means having access to basic needs: meaningful employment, affordable housing, safe education, and accessible healthcare.

Although six of the defendants were not found liable for Alexis' rape, and the seventh defendant's case resulted in a mistrial, the CDCR remains guilty of systematically violating the human rights of transgender persons. The state of California still has a moral and legal duty to protect transgender persons in its prisons. The CDCR should place transgender people where they feel most safe and provide them with gender-appropriate clothing, healthcare, and educational and vocational programs. Denying the need for such policies is unconscionable, and a clear indication that "cruel and unusual punishment" is alive and well in California. As California's Attorney General, Jerry Brown's mission is to "Ensure justice, safety, and liberty for everyone." In this case, he has failed the people of California.

~~~~~

Alexander L. Lee is the Director and founder of the Transgender, Gender Variant & Intersex Justice Project (TGIJP), a nonprofit legal advocacy organization in San Francisco. TGIJP is the only organization dedicated full-time to providing legal services and community organizing assistance to transgender persons experiencing human rights violations in California prisons.

Jovida Guevara-Ross is the Executive Director of Community United Against Violence, a San Francisco-based organization that works to end violence against and within lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities. Jovida's work prioritizes affirmative visions of healing, community building, and real safety for all people.



# **VOLUNTEERS OF THE QUARTER: ISAURA ALVAREZ & LORENA RODRIGUEZ**

---

SBRCC is honored to recognize Isaura Alvarez and Lorena Rodriguez for their invaluable contributions to the agency.

Isaura and Lorena have been volunteers with SBRCC since May 2006. Last year, they took the initiative to raise consciousness about SBRCC in the Latino community. They decided to hold an information table at the Swapmeet on Sundays because they knew that it was a meeting place for many Latino families. Their efforts had great success. Although at first people only came up to the table to ask what they were selling, after a while people began looking for the table in order to talk with Lorena and Isaura and tell them their stories. They noticed that many of the visitors were men who were looking for help for their friends, neighbors, and family members. Now when they go to the gym and other places around town, people recognize them as SBRCC advocates and come up to tell their stories.

## **ISAURA ALVAREZ**

Isaura affirms that she has always been a strong feminist, and that one of the principal reasons for this is her mother's strength. Both Isaura and her mother are domestic violence survivors. After Isaura's abusive father left home, her mother raised her ten children alone, always with a lot of love. Isaura shares that she experienced domestic violence from puberty through age twenty-two. One experience that really helped her was reading a book that explained that domestic violence is not only physical violence, but includes being ignored and other forms of emotional abuse. She read another book about healthy relationships and recovering after the end of a relationship. She shared that the books helped her in her recuperation from depression. Today, Isaura continues reading books that have an important message.

Isaura says that if she could make one change in the world, it would be to secure respect towards everyone, including between family members and friends. She notes that respect includes maintaining physical, as well as emotional, boundaries. It's important to her that different ways of thinking are all respected.

Isaura shares that the best payment she could receive for all her volunteer work is to be able to give information and tools to someone who needs help, knowing that they will be able to use them to change the course of their life in a positive way. She adds that her work with SBRCC has personally benefited her. She says, "I want to thank the center; having met everyone who works here has helped me grow a lot and helped me love myself much more than before."

## **LORENA RODRIGUEZ**

Lorena says that the opportunity to become an advocate came at the right moment in her life because she was looking for ways to help the community. Helping people is very important to her; even helping with a minimum detail like smiling at someone in the street makes a difference in somebody's day. She thinks helping people is like feeding the spirit; otherwise life would be monotonous.

She knows that social commitment is huge and that there is a lot of work to do for society, especially for teenagers. She said that it's very sad for her to see young people on the street using drugs. She shared that her sister has an alcohol and drugs addiction. Her sister's teenage daughter has been listening Lorena's advice about addictions, and thanks to that she is a big emotional support to her mom.

Lorena shares that she is feminist and she is proud about the historical changes that have been accomplished, including women's right to vote and other advances in women's rights. If Lorena could change something in the world it would be to eradicate social problems, like drugs.



Lorena said she would like to thank SBRCC for the opportunity to help, the job is very important because sexual assault is a problem that needs to be addressed. In the future, she hopes to see SBRCC grow and become stronger, continuing to educate and help people as it is now.

Lorena shares that the things she enjoys most include spending time with her family, going running and enjoying nature.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

---

### MONTHLY ADVOCATE MEETING:

**MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 17<sup>TH</sup>, 2007, 6:00-8:00 p.m.**

The advocate meeting for September will be the third Monday of the month. This is only a one time change until I secure another date and time which can accommodate more of you all. The topic for this month will be on how to use handouts/homework with crisis clients. Also, please contact me if you have recently attended a lecture, workshop or have read a book and you wish to document it to secure hours toward your in service.

~Yesenia Curiel, Crisis Intervention Coordinator

### PUEBLO IMMIGRATION VIGIL

**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12<sup>TH</sup>, 5:00pm**

PUEBLO is organizing vigils on September 12<sup>th</sup> to promote the unity and just treatment towards all families. PUEBLO is uniting with other organizations across the nation in response to the deportation of Elvira Arellano, an immigration activist who has been separated from her citizen 8-year-old son. There is a team of 30 people working hard to organize vigils in Santa Barbara and Santa Maria. **The vigil in Santa Barbara will be held at 5:00pm outside of Our Lady of Sorrows Church at, 21 E. Sola Street. Santa Maria's vigil will start at 5:00pm as well and will be located on the corner of Broadway and Cook in front of the city buildings.** Join us and support the immigrant community!

### YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION FORUM:

**MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 17<sup>TH</sup>, 6:30PM**

The Glendon Association's Violence & Suicide Prevention Alliance presents:

Monday, September 17th, 2007, 6:30pm  
13th Annual Suicide Prevention Forum  
La Colina Junior HS, 4025 Foothill Road, Santa Barbara

Youth suicide will be a special focus of this year's Forum in response to recent tragedies in our community.



The Forum will feature John Kevin Hines, a young man who survived his jump from the Golden Gate Bridge at age 19. Kevin returns to Santa Barbara to share his poignant story of mental illness and journey to recovery.

Topics to be discussed include ways to identify risk of suicide, effective treatment options, how suicide impacts populations such as seniors and youths, and support resources available to the community. Glendon will also premiere its new documentary illustrating ways to identify and assist those in suicidal crisis. There will be a question and answer period and the forum will conclude with a special closing ceremony.

The Glendon Association is looking for therapists to volunteer as on-site "spotters" on the day of the event. If you would like to be involved, please call the number below. We are offering 3 Free CEUs for MFTs and LCSWs. No reservations necessary. Sign up upon arrival on the day of the event. For further information contact 805-681-0415 or [jkelly@glendon.org](mailto:jkelly@glendon.org).

## **JOIN SBRCC'S TEAM FOR THE HEART & SOLE AIDS WALK:**

**Saturday, October 6, 2007**

17th Annual Heart & Sole AIDS Walk '07  
Saturday, October 6, 2007  
Chase Palm Park Soccer Field, Santa Barbara

Step Up! Step Out! Be a part of SBRCC's team of volunteers and staff at the Annual Heart and Sole AIDS Walk! The walk is a benefit for Pacific Pride Foundation's (PPF) HIV/AIDS programs and services, and SBRCC will walk to show our support for members of our community affected by HIV/AIDS. Together, we have a goal to raise \$500 for PPF's crucial community services. The route is 10-kilometers (6.2 miles) and leads walkers along the beach on Cabrillo Boulevard. The Walk ends with a beachside celebration with complimentary snacks, live music, free massages and an awards ceremony.

To join the SBRCC team, contact me at 963-6832 ext. 12 or [alena@sbrcc.net](mailto:alena@sbrcc.net). Thanks!

~Alena Donovan, Community Education Coordinator

## **SAVE THE DATE for CHOCOLATE DE VINE:**

**Saturday November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007**

Please save the date for SBRCC's Chocolate de Vine event to be held Saturday November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007, 7-10pm at the Santa Barbara Maritime Museum. Tickets are \$55 advance, \$65 at the door and \$95 for the VIP reception 6-7pm. Come and mingle with your friends and enjoy wine and delicious chocolate creations made by local chefs.

~Hilary Kleger, Development Director

## **HELP PLAN THE CHOCOLATE DE VINE EVENT**

SBRCC will be presenting an exciting new event this fall: Chocolate de Vine. The event is slated for Saturday November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007 at the Santa Barbara Maritime Museum. Additional volunteers are needed to plan and



organize the event as well as volunteer during the event. Current vacancies include: Food & Beverage Chair, Logistics Chair, Entertainment Chair, Decorations Chair, and Volunteer Chair. Additional people are needed to help solicit donations for the event. You can make phone calls or make in-person requests on your own time. Meetings will be held every other Wednesday at 5:30 pm at SBRCC. Meeting dates include: September 12<sup>th</sup>, September 26<sup>th</sup>, October 10<sup>th</sup>, and October 24<sup>th</sup>. Committees may hold additional meetings. Chocolate and other refreshments are served at all meetings. Please join us! Tell a friend! For more information, please call me at 963-6832 x 13.

~Hilary Kleger, Development Director

## **SELF-DEFENSE HELP NEEDED:**

**Saturday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 10am-2pm**

Advocates are needed for the next Self-Defense Workshop for Women on Saturday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 10am-2pm. We need you to be available for survivors and loved ones in the group to speak with during and after the class. Advocates may choose to actively assist with the class, or just be present in the office in case a participant would like to talk. If you would like to help, please contact me at 963-6832, ext. 12 or [alena@sbrcc.net](mailto:alena@sbrcc.net). Thank you!

~Alena Donovan, Community Education Coordinator

## **WANT TO SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE? BE ON THE ADVOCATE PANEL:**

**Tuesday, November 13<sup>th</sup> at 6:15pm at SBRCC**

Whether you've been an advocate for a long time or just a little while, we want to hear from you! This is open to all certified volunteers, not just those who work on the hotline! The goal of the Advocate Panel is to give trainees an opportunity to hear about real experiences from the Advocates who volunteer at SBRCC.

Please contact Katie Vasquez at 963-6832 x 19 or [katie@sbrcc.net](mailto:katie@sbrcc.net) to sign up!

## **GOOD SEARCH:**

**HELP SBRCC BY SURFING THE WEB**

There is a new search engine called GoodSearch. They donate advertising proceeds to the non-profit of choice. You simply do your internet search through GoodSearch and designate Santa Barbara Rape Crisis Center. To begin your search, go to [www.goodsearch.com](http://www.goodsearch.com) and write in Santa Barbara Rape Crisis Center under "who do you goodsearch for?" click "verify," then start your search.

Please use Goodsearch - powered by Yahoo!- instead of other search engines when you need to search the internet. Please use responsibly. If they suspect our users are abusing it - we could be removed. Please spread the word! The more people that use GoodSearch and designate SBRCC - the more the money will flow.

~Hilary Kleger, Development Director



## **QUEER AND TRANS SEXUAL ASSAULT:**

### **A YOUTH ISSUE**

SBRCC intern, Erin Johnson, recently completed a powerful zine (a do-it-yourself magazine) entitled "Queer and Trans Sexual Assault: A Youth Issue." You are encouraged to read the zine and to use it as an educational resource about issues of sexual violence against LGBTQ youth! To receive a copy of the zine, please contact me at 963-6832, ext. 12 or [alena@sbrcc.net](mailto:alena@sbrcc.net).

~Alena Donovan, Community Education Coordinator

## **DONATE OLD CELL PHONES**

Did you know you can support SBRCC by donating your used cell phones? The agency receives a financial contribution for each phone we collect, so please tell your friends and family to drop off their old and tired cell phones at our office.

~Ofelia Cervantes, Receptionist