Community Action

ISSUE 3 - SUMMER 2023

Spring Ambassadors
Meet our newest team member: Luis Carretero

AB1000 VS AB1748
Showdown in Sacramento

Engaging The Community
Rising Voices 2023
Community taking the power back
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From the Executive Director

Ana Gonzalez - Executive Director
The Center For Community Action and Environmental Justice
By Ana Gonzalez, Executive Director CCAEJ

As a mother, resident of Rialto, and a leader in the Environmental Justice Movement, I am devastated by the leaders in our community who continue to prioritize profit over the health and well-being of our families. The rapid increase in warehouse development has led to a decline in air quality, displacement, and physical and mental degradation of our community members.

My own son’s health deteriorated due to the poor air quality in our area, and as a survivor of domestic violence, I ran away from my home to protect my family. These experiences motivated me to fight for the health of my community and led me to become Executive Director for the Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice.

Despite lawsuits, appeals, and interventions from the California Attorney General, we have not been able to stop the building of warehouses in our area. Our leaders lack the understanding of the catastrophic impacts and are blinded by greed.

The proliferation of warehouse development has led to the disappearance of orange groves, open space, commercial, and residential land. This has resulted in increasing bad air days, traffic chaos, noise pollution, and degradation of the quality of life and health of our communities.

While some argue that warehouses bring jobs and save the economy of the region, it is clear that automation is on the horizon and will replace these jobs. The union trade jobs are only temporary, and the long-term jobs that remain are low wage, no benefit, and no dignified jobs where a family can survive and create generational wealth.

We need to collaborate to find solutions that benefit all and protect the health of our families. We must save the farmland and open space that is left and understand how valuable it is to our survival. Most importantly, we need to stand up and speak up against these injustices. Officials can brag about bringing in jobs without acknowledging the harm placed upon those families of color living in the front-lines. This political setting is changing but redirecting the needed changes is a challenge.

I fear that it will never be enough to fulfill the greed of corporations and the rich that thrive on exploitation and degradation of our communities. It’s time for our leaders to prioritize the health and well-being of our families over profits, and it’s time for us to take action to protect ourselves and our communities.
City of Rialto Unites Against The Pepper Ave. Project
Mayor Takes Stand for Community

By Jovanny Aguilera, Organizer CCAEJ

In a momentous city meeting on Tuesday, the residents of Rialto delivered a collective blow to the proposed project on Pepper Ave. by Howard Industrial Partners. Despite a close three-to-two council vote, community members considered the evening a triumphant win. Rarely had the city witnessed such cohesive unity and opposition to a development plan. The pivotal role played by Mayor Debora Robertson cannot be understated, as she fearlessly stood up for her community and directly challenged the industrial partner questioning how he could arrogantly disregard all of the community's wishes and still proceed with his plan.

For me, as an attendee at the meeting, it was an emotionally charged experience that left a lasting impact. The atmosphere was electric, with citizens voicing their concerns and standing in solidarity against the project. One after another I heard the cries and desperation for their voices to be heard. It was heartening to witness the mayor aligning herself with the Rialto community, demonstrating a profound understanding of her community's needs. Despite the loss in council member votes Mayor Robertson's unwavering support recharged the community's determination to protect the interests of Rialto. Her words amplified the room and let everyone know that as long as she still had a seat the table that the citizens would still have hope.

During the meeting, it became increasingly clear that our opposition was not a blanket rejection of all warehouse projects. We emphasized the importance of cultivating developments that would provide valuable skilled labor jobs, fostering economic growth and prosperity. The unanimous desire for progress, coupled with a genuine concern for the welfare of our community, permeated the room.

The meeting marked a significant turning point, a collective victory for the people of Rialto. It showcased the power of unity, underscoring the impact of a community rallying together for a common cause. Mayor Robertson's impassioned advocacy and her willingness to champion our concerns exemplified true leadership.

As I left the meeting that night, a sense of pride and accomplishment welled within me. The battle may not be fully won, but the unity displayed and the support garnered have laid a strong foundation for future endeavors. The City of Rialto stands as a testament to the strength and resilience of its citizens, ready to face future challenges with unwavering determination.
AB 1000 & AB 1748
Showdown in Sacramento
Week after week, month after month, and even year after year, CCAEJ has supported community members in their desire to address the rapid expansion of warehousing in the Inland region in recent years. At first, these behemoths landed in vacant and underutilized lands located some distance from our homes, schools, parks, and other important community spaces. However, in recent years they have crept ever closer, taking over truck storage yards, gobbling smaller warehouses, and even replacing portions of existing communities. In the process, our homes have been flooded with a toxic stew of pollution from the trucks serving these facilities, creating “diesel death zones” all around the region.

Over the many years of this fight, it has become clear that the only way we are going to be able to truly get the clean air our kids deserve is to take the fight to our elected officials in the State who have the ability to make the changes we need to stay safe. To address that, we and other partner community groups around the state have worked together with our Legislators to make this change happen, but it has not been easy. Last year, Asm. Reyes introduced Assembly Bill 2840 to establish buffer zones around our communities where mammoth warehouses would not be allowed. Unfortunately, that bill did not pass, but the lessons learned from the effort provided valuable experience.

This legislative session, we sponsored Assembly Bill 1000, again authored by Asm. Reyes. With AB 1000, we took the lessons learned from AB 2840 and improved the bill so that the largest warehouses taking over our communities would no longer be allowed to be built within 1,000 feet of our school, parks, homes, and other places where we learn, live, work, and play. This is the minimum distance that research has shown to be necessary to keep communities safe from the toxins of diesel. This strong bill would save many lives in our neighborhoods and allow countless numbers of children to attend school without having to deal with the added attention that asthma demands of them. And importantly, it would apply statewide, something which is extremely crucial as logistics uses expand beyond the Inland region to other communities around the state.
Unfortunately, though there is broad support for the concept of keeping warehouses away from sensitive users, many people are not onboard with putting that into law. While we were working on AB 1000, competing interests worked with another legislator from our region, Asm. James Ramos, to introduce AB 1748. It too would impose a setback from homes, but one of only one third the distance, far too close to actually keep the diesel pollution away from people. It also would apply to warehouses which are at least four times as large as under AB 1000, again meaning that it would apply at fewer places and putting more trucks in our neighborhoods.

After moving through the legislative process, both bills were not able to advance out of the Assembly and must now wait until January before either or both of them can move forward again. In the meantime, Asm. Ramos has convened a working group on the issue to hope to work in a more collaborative manner to come up with solutions to address the black mark of the diesel death zones in our region and help prevent new ones from being created elsewhere in the state in similar front line communities as ours.
CCAEJ had the privilege and honor of hosting its second cohort for the ambassador program, featuring a fresh team that contributed to an overall successful endeavor. The program consisted of a comprehensive series of eight classes, each focusing on different aspects of environmental justice. Every participant took great pride in their role as ambassadors, recognizing the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in their community. While the program initially faced a slow start with limited attendance, momentum steadily grew, allowing us to establish a dedicated core group of committed ambassadors.

Our primary objective was to conduct comprehensive outreach throughout the entire program, and we are pleased to report that the results surpassed our expectations. While we acknowledge that there is always room for improvement, we are continuously learning and striving to enhance our organizing skills for the benefit of CCAEJ. We found immense satisfaction in connecting with genuinely remarkable individuals and fostering meaningful relationships within our team. This program marks only the beginning of an exceptional project, and we eagerly anticipate the forthcoming program with great anticipation.
Participating in the Ambassador Program has undoubtedly been one of the most transformative experiences of my early adult years. It holds this distinction because it not only introduced me to the vibrant community that surrounds me, but also provided me with a profound understanding of Environmental Justice and its far-reaching impact on all of us. Prior to my involvement with CCAEJ and their ambassador program, I had never felt a strong inclination to actively engage with or contribute to my community. Like many others, I held the belief that “nothing gets done anyway,” which served as a barrier to my involvement. However, the invaluable lessons and community engagement experiences I gained through this program have completely altered my perspective. I now firmly believe that there is always a compelling reason to strive for the betterment of any community, as we all deserve a greener, more sustainable planet.

Having undergone such a profound personal journey during that period of my life, I was presented with an extraordinary opportunity to channel my newfound commitment into a career. As the newest media specialist at CCAEJ, I now have the privilege of utilizing and expanding upon the knowledge I acquired. My role enables me to amplify the message and inspire individuals who, like myself, may have once questioned the feasibility of effecting change. I aim to convey the unwavering truth that our work is never complete, as we are dedicated to continuously engaging with the community and providing the necessary resources to empower individuals in their own communities.
By Melissa May, Organizing Coordinator
CCAEJ

We stand in gratitude with all our community and partners for a successful Rising Voices Community Engagement Conference, marking an exciting opportunity for change-makers and passionate individuals to come together and ignite positive transformation in the Inland Empire. This gathering promised to be a platform for sharing ideas, foster collaboration, and empower communities. As we embarked on this transformative journey, let us delve into the details of this exceptional conference and explore the significance of community engagement in today’s world.
Our hearts are filled as we witness the increasing recognition of the power of community engagement. In an era where individuals strive to be heard, this conference served as a reminder that collective voices are stronger and more impactful. The Rising Voices Community Engagement Conference acknowledges the potential of communities to drive change, highlighting the importance of active participation and collaboration at all levels of government and simply uplifting the neighborhoods folks live in.
The Rising Voices Community Engagement Conference serves as a catalyst for change by bringing together a diverse range of individuals, organizations, and communities. From environmental justice warriors, indigenous advocates, to deported veteran activists, to small business advocates, this gathering provided a unique opportunity to learn, share experiences, and develop innovative strategies to address pressing social issues. From thought-provoking panel discussions and interactive workshops to inspiring keynote speeches, attendees explored various dimensions of community engagement and its potential to create a better world.

Gratitude extends to the conference organizers, who have curated an exceptional lineup of speakers and facilitators. Esteemed community leaders, activists, and experts will share their experiences and insights, inspiring attendees to engage with their own communities. The conference aims to empower individuals to embrace their unique voices and actively contribute to the betterment of society.
Gratitude fills our hearts as we witness the conference’s commitment to empowering local initiatives. The Rising Voices Community Engagement Conference recognizes that change begins at the grassroots level, and therefore emphasizes the importance of supporting local projects and initiatives. Through mentorship programs, funding opportunities, and resource sharing, the conference aims to provide ongoing support for community-driven initiatives long after the event concludes.

Fostering Collaboration:

The Rising Voices Community Engagement Conference is also an exceptional platform for fostering collaboration among like-minded individuals and organizations. Participants will have the opportunity to network, connect, and explore potential partnerships. By pooling resources and sharing knowledge, attendees can amplify their impact and drive sustainable change in their respective communities.

Empowering Local Initiatives:

Gratitude fills our hearts as we witness the conference’s commitment to empowering local initiatives. The Rising Voices Community Engagement Conference recognizes that change begins at the grassroots level, and therefore emphasizes the importance of supporting local projects and initiatives. Through mentorship programs, funding opportunities, and resource sharing, the conference aims to provide ongoing support for community-driven initiatives long after the event concludes.
As the Rising Voices Community Engagement Conference concludes, let us embrace this opportunity to celebrate the power of community engagement. Through active participation, collaboration, and the empowerment of local initiatives, we can create a world that listens, values diverse voices, and works collectively towards positive change. With gratitude, we eagerly await this transformative event, eager to engage, learn, and contribute to a better future for all.

Thank You

to everyone who attended, sponsored, and volunteered for this amazing event. Without any of you this amazing conference would not have been possible. We can’t wait to see you all back for Rising Voices 2024.
The Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice (CCAEJ) is a progressive equity-based organization that embodies hope, unites people y pueblos, to create intersectional solutions that transform communities “to bring people together to improve their social and natural environment.” Utilizing the lens of environmental health, we achieve regenerative change by developing resilient BIPOC intergenerational leadership, through the power of community base-building. Through strategic campaigns, we cultivate inclusive self-sustaining neighborhoods, where everyone can live, work, play, and thrive.