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**CLINIC Publishes Manual on Employment Problems**

CLINIC released an advocacy manual for solving employment problems in Louisiana and Mississippi. This on-line guide offers instructive help with a growing advocacy issue – workers’ rights in hurricane-impacted areas.

“Employment Problems in Louisiana and Mississippi: An Advocacy Manual” is designed for both workers and social service providers. It does not require any prior knowledge of employment law.

The Manual outlines basic problem-solving techniques, answers common questions about workplace rights, and identifies situations in which legal advice should be sought. In addition, it includes descriptions of governmental agencies that address workplace issues, organizations that provide free and low-cost legal assistance for employment cases, low fee health clinics for workers, and resources for job placement, training and education.

This manual, model fliers, and other materials are featured on the CLINIC post-Katrina webpage (<http://www.cliniclegal.org/Katrina.html>).

**Setting Up a Community Relations Board with Local Police**

Some Gulf Coast programs within the CLINIC network have reported that there appears to be an increase in police surveillance and stops and arrests in and around Hispanic neighborhoods and work areas.

One way to establish a relationship with local police is to form a community relations board. This minimizes confrontational meetings or complaint procedures about police conduct that tend to be counterproductive and create a hostile atmosphere. A community relations board may even help avoid the need to file complaints in the first place.

Martin Gutierrez, Director of the Hispanic Apostolate and Catholic Charities of New Orleans, is a member of one such group. Martin is the only Hispanic member of the New Orleans Police Community Relations Board. The purpose of the Board is to provide a bridge between the New Orleans police and the community in order to promote and improve relations.

From Martin's perspective, the Board provides an opportunity for him and other community groups to educate police officers about the community – from getting to know the various ethnic groups and neighborhoods to making police aware of criminal activity in various areas. The board also provides local police with opportunities to educate the community about police procedures and new initiatives and programs.

The New Orleans Police Community Relations Board is also charged with reviewing cases of police abuse. Although the Board has no legal authority to change or reverse the police chief's decisions on police abuses cases, the review serves as a check on the police review process by various community groups. The Board reviews the facts of each abuse case (after the police chief has reached a decision), and issues an independent decision that may either support or disagree with the police chief's decision.

The New Orleans Board has met several times with the New Orleans police chief and representatives from the police unions. Martin believes the meetings are working well, although, initially, the police had concerns about community groups overseeing police work. The Board is still developing and discerning its objectives as the broader New Orleans community is made aware of the existence of the Board. Martin's immediate goal is to use the New Orleans bi-lingual media to advertise the existence of the Board, so people, particularly within the Hispanic community, will know to report concerns about police conduct to Martin.

If any other CLINIC programs are interested in approaching local police about creating such a group, please contact Laurie Joyce at: [lauriejoyce@comcast.net](mailto:lauriejoyce@comcast.net) or 415-459-4082.

### **Loyola Law School Files Suit Against HUD to Re-open Public Housing**

Lawyers from Loyola University School of Law filed suit in New Orleans on June 27<sup>th</sup>. They asked a federal court to re-open public housing in New Orleans and to block government plans to demolish existing damaged public housing. Upon filing of the suit, housing activists and community organizers held press conferences in New Orleans, Houston, and Baton Rouge heralding the lawsuit.

The sixteen plaintiffs listed in the class action suit allege that the demolition must be stopped since it would deprive thousands of public housing families of the ability to return to New Orleans. The plaintiffs object to the demolition plan, which is scheduled to proceed without hearing or due process protections for the former public housing residents.

There have been increasing protests in New Orleans about the lack of planning to rebuild public housing. Some residents have broken into their former apartments to start demolition and rebuilding on their own. Large protests are being organized in New Orleans for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July over the issue of public housing.

A copy of the lawsuit can be found at: [www.justiceforneworleans.org](http://www.justiceforneworleans.org).

[source: June 27, 2006 [www.justiceforneworleans.org](http://www.justiceforneworleans.org)]

### **The National Immigration Law Center Issues Report on Abuse of Workers in New Orleans**

On July 6<sup>th</sup>, The National Immigration Law Center (NILC) and the Advancement Project issued a report entitled, “And Injustice for All: Workers’ Lives in the Reconstruction of New Orleans” detailing abuses suffered by workers assisting in the post Hurricane Katrina reconstruction efforts in the New Orleans area. The two legal centers interviewed more than 700 workers over several months, concluding that poor and immigrant workers suffered a variety of labor abuses, homelessness, and harassment by local police and contractors alike.

The report calls on the government to ensure housing for low income families and challenges private foundations and the philanthropic community to invest in programs that create work opportunities for the poor.

Due to the lack of reliable transportation, decent, affordable housing or child care, hundreds of families interviewed for the report have had to accept jobs with meager wages, while sleeping in cars or moldy, flood-devastated buildings. Construction workers take further risks by working in toxic conditions. Often, they are denied overtime pay, or the pay they were promised, or, in some cases, any pay at all.

One case described in the report involves a mother who works in the kitchen of a restaurant on St. Charles Avenue, but cannot afford a New Orleans apartment. She and her children sleep on the floor of a relative’s apartment in the Iberville public housing complex. She and her children evacuated from New Orleans after the Hurricane, but returned due to feeling unwelcome where they were temporarily settled in Texas.

In another case, a labor broker recruited 80 young Apache men from the White Mountain Apache Nation reservation in Arizona. The tribal government paid the broker \$1,600 for gas and expenses for the men with the promise \$14-an-hour jobs in reconstruction. The broker dropped off the men in New Orleans and then disappeared. The men were homeless for days until they found a tent city in City Park where they paid \$300 per tent site a month and found barely enough construction work to get by.

Many workers reported that even when they found construction work, the paychecks they were given bounced or the bosses just refused to pay. News reports and politicians’ speeches about post-Katrina economic recovery were largely unfounded. Workers

pursued jobs at fast-food restaurants after being told that the businesses were paying huge bonuses, but the jobs turned out to be a false lure to low-paying, dead-end jobs and, in one case, a worker never received the promised starting bonus and her wages quickly fell from \$9.25 to \$5.15.

Another worker reported that he worked for four days doing cleanup and demolition work. His contractors then dropped him off at a fast-food restaurant on Canal Street and bought him lunch. They never came back. The man said he had to leave because he did not even have a single dollar to survive.

A Honduran man from Houston said he worked 12-hour days for 13 days straight with a crew of men, none of whom were paid anything. The men live in tents on Scout Island in City Park.

Police often interrogate the migrant workers, asking to check their skin for “gang” tattoos. A Salvadoran man reported that police entered the house he was renting (that had no electricity) and woke him and his friends looking for suspicious tattoos. When the police did not find anything they asked the men if they had jobs lined up for the next day. The police were pointing guns at the men. When the men said they did not have any work, one police officer said he needed work done on his house. The police officer returned the next morning to pick up the workers (although he did pay them for their labor.)

These labor violations and abuses are among many detailed in the labor report. The report can be found at: [www.advancementproject.org/publications.html](http://www.advancementproject.org/publications.html).

*To sign up to receive this electronic newsletter, contact Maura Collins at [mcollins@cliniclegal.org](mailto:mcollins@cliniclegal.org) or visit [clinic.kintera.org/katrina](http://clinic.kintera.org/katrina) to subscribe online.*