



## Capacitar Letter from the Border

Dear Friends,

January, 2020

Special greetings from the Texas/Mexico border. This is the 19th year since Capacitar started working in El Paso and Ciudad Juarez. Sister Mary Ondreyco, SNJM, was part of our team as I led trainings on both sides of the border. These trainings were supported by the Holy Names Sisters' Immigrant and Refugee Fund, in partnership with funding from Paso del Norte Foundation in El Paso.

Since our last visit in 2019, life in El Paso has been impacted by many challenges: significant changes in government policies regarding immigrants and refugees, as well as the August Walmart massacre that killed 22 persons and wounded 24. Until last year, El Paso was considered to be one of the safest cities in the US. The hate crime, fueled by racism and bigotry, was carried out by a 21 year-old man coming from another area of Texas who "wanted to kill Mexicans". A manifesto was published by the shooter before his killing spree. It borrowed many concepts from the Great Replacement Conspiracy Theory, as well as from current violent political rhetoric and negative media coverage that decries an Hispanic invasion of the US. In contrast, Texas Senator Virginia Escobar described how El Paso has only shown kindness, opening its doors to refugees fleeing desperate situations. That is the compassionate spirit of so many of the people of El Paso that I have experienced over the years.

After the August killings, Kathy Revtyak, LCSW, and Janine Galliner, LCSW, leaders of Capacitar en la Frontera and the El Paso Child Guidance Center, reached out to many hundreds of local people and professionals who were experiencing great grief and trauma. Kathy and Janine led workshops and a trauma healing conference to empower people to deal with their own feelings, as well as to work with the trauma and grief of their communities. Needless to say, the Capacitar practices were a significant part of the trauma-informed theory and methods they presented.

As a result of this outreach, and in response to the hunger of people for healing, our new 4-module El Paso training was filled with over 85 men and women, with a waiting list of another 25. Participants came from a broad cross-section of organizations: emergency room personnel, chaplains and volunteers from El Paso and Miami detention centers, staff of



*Janine Galliner, Kathy Revtyak and counselors reflecting on trauma healing in their work with Capacitar en la Frontera and the El Paso Child Guidance Center.*

the El Paso youth detention center, teachers and counselors from one of the largest school districts in the area, school coaches and those working with youth at risk, social workers, university teachers, psychotherapists, medical professionals, religious, those working with addiction and recovery programs, volunteers who accompany refugees and immigrants in El Paso and Ciudad Juarez, a minister who works with trafficked women and children, a religious who works with women and orphans in Juarez, among many others. It was a joy to present the Capacitar tools to these remarkable people and to watch them enthusiastically take on the healing process.

One man who teaches and mentors several hundred counselors described how he wasn't quite sure what he was getting into when he first arrived. But after an hour of practicing Tai Chi and Fingerholds he felt like a new person. He wanted all of the teachers and counselors he works with to learn Capacitar to deal with their burnout. Another woman who heads the emergency room where many of the victims and survivors were brought after the massacre, said that the Holds, Acupressure Points and Fingerholds will be so helpful in her work. She often accompanies families when the doctor tells them that their loved one has died. A man who works with youth at the juvenile detention center said that the tools will empower the detained youth to learn how to manage their anger and strong feelings and to develop self-esteem. A young religious who accompanies refugee women and children in a center in Juarez, shared how the different practices will be invaluable for the refugees' traumatic memories, and will also give her ways to develop healthy boundaries and to manage her energy drain.

The 4-module Multicultural Wellness training will ultimately touch the lives of many thousands of people in El Paso and Ciudad Juarez. Part of the training involves a community practicum where each participant is encouraged to apply what they learn to a group in their work or community. This is the power of Capacitar's Popular Education approach, as inspired by the methods of Paolo Freire. As each person reaches out to teach others what they have learned, the healing work is multiplied many times over. At this time in our world as we face trauma at a global level, there are not enough therapists or counselors to go around. So a Popular Education approach to trauma healing can be significant in communities with few resources and can empower people with what they can do for themselves.

### Capacitar en la Frontera

Through the years, Capacitar's outreach has been bi-national, with trainings and teams on both sides of the border. El Paso is 80% Latino with families living for generations in both cities. For many years there was no wall separating



*Pat Cane leading Tai Chi and encouraging care of one's heart and spirit for the long haul*



*Practicing Capacitar skills as Teacher Student & Coach*



*Letting go of stress and trauma with the Holds*

these communities and people moved freely back and forth across the border. That certainly has changed. *Targeting El Paso*, a recent *Frontline* report on Public Television, described how El Paso was used by the government to experiment with new refugee policies, including the separation of children from their families



*Staffs of recovery programs and youth detention services discuss how to apply the practices*



*Mary Ondreyco teaches Switching*

and the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP). Under the law, migrants who sought asylum could remain in the US while their cases were in process. Now with the new MPP policy, they are sent back to Mexico (or Guatemala) to await their hearings. Thousands of refugees who have legitimate reasons for seeking asylum are now living and waiting on the other side of the border. In Juarez, many live in shelters, tented areas, under the bridges, or in deplorable conditions. Often they are targets of gangs and are victimized by robbery, assault or extortion. There are some centers, like Casa del Migrante or Las Americas that offer legal services and support. But because of the overwhelming numbers of refugees only about 4% are able to get attorneys or legal aid for their asylum appeals.

Along with the refugees, the drug cartels have also impacted Ciudad Juarez. Currently there are four cartels vying for control of the area with extortion, robberies, kidnappings, murders and assaults as their trademark. In our first years of working in Juarez, the city was known as the murder capitol of the world. Murders and disappearances are still common, with femicide now up to 3 women per day. As of January 25, 64 homicides have been reported so far this year in Juarez. In 2019 there were 1500 homicides, averaging 4 per day. A few days before our arrival, feminist artist and activist, Isabel Cabanillas, was brutally shot in the head. Her death incited many protests against gender violence throughout Mexico. At one of the bridges going from Juarez back into the US, stands a pink cross studded with nails representing the thousands of women who have been disappeared, tortured and killed over the last few decades.

In this context, Capacitar has grown in Ciudad Juarez. Sister Arlene Woelfel, OSF, who hosted our visit to the border, coordinates Capacitar Juarez with a team of Juarez women. Arlene has worked for years as a psychotherapist at the Human Rights Center Paso del Norte. She accompanies the Families of the Disappeared and works with victims of torture. Capacitar practices, such as, Fingerholds, Switching, Tapping, and the Holds, have been invaluable tools as she accompanies victims and survivors. Different members of Capacitar Juarez have also been doing outreach to refugees and children. Claudia, a Juarez team leader, supports refugees living under one of the bridges as they await their asylum hearings. While parents are filling out their legal documents, Claudia teaches the children Fingerholds and Switching as fun games. Similar outreach is also done by other members of the Juarez network, including: supporting women dealing with abuse, working with disabled children, reaching out to the imprisoned, and so much more.



*Women of Juarez celebrating life with the Leadership Dance during an advanced training*

It is a privilege to accompany the people of Juarez and El Paso. We plan to return to the border later this year and in 2021.

In peace and solidarity,  
*Pat Cane*  
Capacitar Founder/Director