

November 13, 2022 - Minutes of Joint IJC/SJC Luncheon with Legal Aid Lawyers, Discussion of CAPAS

Present: Laura Anderson, Eloise Ayala, Betty Barriga, Sue Burgess, Myrna Charry, Joanne Collins, Jacqueline Cornel, Lorrie Douglas, Kathy Guilmette, MaryLou Proudfoot Kennedy, Trisha Lane, Herb Levin, Patricia Omeara, Dick Schwartz, Dennis Shaw, Helen Sokolski, Gurio Vinzeni, Nancy Weaver, Sharon Whitehill, MaryJane Williams, Ted Zawistowski

The purpose of meeting is for us to better understand the CAPAS program and needs of immigrants, especially those seeking asylum. To this end, we had an opportunity to ask questions of the Legal Aid lawyer. In addition, we wanted to ask for the support of the Social Justice Committee. Lastly, we asked those attending to sign up for driving, taking children on outings, offer English language practice and lessons and other needs.

We learned from the Legal Aid folks:

- While the immigration laws are national, the interpretation of the laws is inconsistent. Judges are inconsistent. Approval for asylum seekers in court in New York City is high - 95%/98% and in Miami - 4%. More applications are approved in California, on the west coast, San Francisco has higher success rates.
- When crossing the southern border, the border patrol can give a person a quicker path to asylum but again, this experience is inconsistent. Border Patrol agents sometimes grant parole and sometimes do not, seemingly not according to the circumstances of a migrant.
- Do non-citizens qualify for WIC, food stamps, Medicaid? There are some programs that the family might qualify for. No to Medicaid.
- If non-citizens get government support, does it hurt their chances to qualify for legal status? It depends on federal policy. The children could qualify for support. The mother is seeking asylum, not the children.
- There are alternative paths to legal status besides asylum seeking.
- Many immigrants have little support. The fact that we have provided a home for this family is huge. Any thing we can do to help is amazing.

Venezuelan Family

- Sorangel is mother's name. Children are Lucia (5) and Luciano (2). They are fleeing political persecution. She left home in Venezuela. Journey perilous and difficult. Crossed the border in July. Lived in Texas until recently coming to Florida.
- Since Hurricane Ian, they have been living in Red Cross shelter in Englewood.
- Children are on a waiting list for the Head Start program.

CAPAS Program:

- CAPAS stands for Congregational Accompaniment Project for Asylum Seeker. It is a project started by the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee in 2019.
- CAPAS has determined that Sorangel and her children qualify for support under this program.
- CAPAS has grant money. We have been encouraged to apply for \$5000 matching grant. We have \$3000. Ken Brennen offered \$500 if others would donate \$500.

Background

- IJC has spent several months discussing the possibility of participating in the CAPAS program. We have learned more about asylum and spoken at length to the CAPAS

Project manager. We have had speakers from two congregations who have participated in this program.

- We identified and contacted potential partners, started a fundraising plan. We voted to support an asylum seeking family.
- We requested, and received approval from the UUFCC Board to pursue fundraising for this purpose.
- An organization in Michigan who supports immigrants contacted the Indivisible group in SW Florida. Indivisible contacted Betty. Betty met with social worker at Red Cross shelter who introduced her to Sorangel.

## Needs

- Housing. Trisha Lane and Kathy Guilmette have opened their home to family.
- Legal Support. Legal Aid Society has looked at Sorangel's information and agreed to represent her through the asylum-seeking process.
- Medical. Non-citizens can access medical care in Sarasota County at public health clinic.
- English-learning. Mother needs folks to teach/practice English.
- Drivers. Would people be available one day a week? Children to day care? Mother to English classes? Both to doctor's visits.
- CAPAS suggests using Slack software (to coordinate volunteers and keep track of donations, expenses, needs).
- Money. Initial budgeting estimates a cost of approximately \$15,000/year. Expect to support family for one or two years. We have applied for a Faithify grant. Asking \$10,000.
- Would people ask for support from their home congregations in the north? Would people contact other UUs that they know to ask for support from other congregations? Perhaps a monthly stipend - a commitment to send support monthly.
- Child care. Children could come to fellowship - MJ and Sandy are working in the morning and would be willing to be one adult if another were there to entertain the children. Plans to transform former minister's office back to nursery in the works.
- We are reminded that it is best practices to have two adults present at all times with the children.

Betty asked Herb if Social Justice would partner with Immigration Justice for this project. The Social Justice committee will discuss this.