



In search of safety: Help asylum-seeking families in San Diego

BACKGROUND

Having fled political turmoil and rampant violence in Central America and other volatile regions, thousands of individuals reach the US/Mexico border to request asylum in the United States each year. While many asylum seekers will remain in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention as their case proceeds, families with at least one minor child are released into the community - but without a plan or any information on what to do next. Many have relatives in the US and travel to other parts of the country after a short stay at a migrant shelter, but 2-5% remain in San Diego.

Of those who stay, most do not have family or other social ties in the United States, and come with little to no financial resources to sustain them as they wait for their case to be heard - which can be one to two years after the initial court filing.

In addition to the challenges of navigating an unfamiliar community with limited English proficiency, they are unable to obtain work authorization until 180 days after filing an asylum application, and are not eligible for any government-subsidized benefits with the exception of emergency Medi-Cal for minors. Without case management support, asylum seekers struggle to meet their basic needs, and many are at high risk for homelessness, exploitation and human trafficking.

IRC RESPONSE

In January 2019, recognizing the unmet needs of asylum seekers who remain in the San Diego area, IRC launched a case management program. IRC caseworkers provide effective and hands-on case management to suit each client's unique needs and assist them in stabilizing their lives and preventing homelessness. Since January 2019, IRC has:

- Served approximately 145 individuals in long-term case management. A majority are families, but some are single individuals in very vulnerable circumstances, such as those who identify as LGBTQ or people with serious medical or mental health needs.
- Supported an additional 19 families or individual asylum seekers with short-term case management support.
- Served clients primarily from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Russia, China and Ukraine.

CURRENT NEED

The IRC is in need of additional funding to expand staff capacity to take on additional cases, host know-your-rights workshops, and facilitate wellness groups. In addition, there is a need to build out legal capacity on the team to support asylum applications and cases internally.



"You have two options... You flee your home...or you live with the consequences that one of us or a close family relative will be murdered. And they will murder you, just like that." – IRC client Valentina



A majority of clients in IRC's asylum seeker case management program are families with at least one minor child, and many are survivors of torture.