

Casa Marianella

2018



shelter • support • solidarity

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Jennifer Long

Now entering its 33rd year, Casa Marianella continues to adapt and grow in its efforts to support those who come to the US seeking safety. We receive the majority of our residents directly from detention centers, where they were sent after asking for help at the border. Sometimes they've been held in these centers for more than a year. We get as many as 50 letters a week from detained people asking for our sponsorship, which can help to get them released. As we are able, we write back, offering a bed, ESL classes, legal services, medical care, and help getting to immigration appointments. We are always happy to see people set free. We believe that everyone who asks for asylum in the United States deserves to be treated respectfully. We are glad to do our part to meet this responsibility.

This year we've been working hard to find partners around the country who can join us in our mission. We envision a national network of houses that will offer immigrants the support they need to begin a new life. We've been delighted to find allies so far in Kansas, Kentucky, and Ohio, but we need a lot more help. People in distress are migrating all across the globe. Only a small percentage ever make it as far as the US border. We want to be able to give them the sort of welcome that honors their dignity and their human rights.

We have been thrilled this year to experience a surge of help from volunteers and donors. The crisis at the border has brought wider awareness to the way our country treats immigrants, and to the necessity of finding alternatives to immigration detention. Please join us in working to build a real solution.

LETTER FROM POSADA ESPERANZA

Patti McCabe

This year at Posada Esperanza has been filled with new life and joy. Most of the women who come to us have endured painful crises. They have fled their birth countries under the threat of death. They have walked through dense jungles and dangerous, crime-filled regions. Some have escaped men who abused their bodies and minds for years. On top of all this, many of these women arrive at Posada expecting a child. There are risks for the pregnancy during these hard times, and little chance to enjoy the anticipation of the new baby's arrival.

When pregnant women reach Posada, they finally find some respite from the dangers they've been facing. Many have not received any prenatal care. Our caseworkers will help them get signed up for health insurance and a doctor's appointment right away. A wonderful donor and volunteer, Ari, will organize a baby shower, where the new mom will be pampered with attention and gifts. Within just weeks of meeting their new community members, other Posada residents will come to visit them in the hospital and assist them at their births.

In the past year alone, moms at Posada have given birth to twelve babies. That's a lot of love, hope, and sweetness. One of our moms gave birth to twins. Two of our moms gave birth on the same night, just doors down from each other at the hospital. And all of our moms know that they have a safe and comfortable home to return to with their babies, a home where they can rest and recover and bond.



This year we've also had the chance to help several families reunite. When families with a mom, dad, and child come to our borders asking for asylum, they are almost always split up. This has been the norm for years. In many cases, the dad of the family is sent to a detention center while the mom and children are released to find a place to stay while they wait for their case to be processed. Posada Esperanza receives many of these mothers and children. They will spend months, sometimes years, waiting and wishing for the release of their children's father. The mother must learn to support the family alone. But this year we were able to help ten fathers rejoin their families. We watched many of these dads meet their babies for the first time. It's a bittersweet moment. The fathers weren't able to be there for the precious early days of the child's life. But now they can be together and support each other as a family.

Thank you to everyone who lifts up the work of Posada Esperanza—with your words, your thoughts, your donations, and your time. You all make it possible for our residents to have a place to live and be supported as they navigate these difficult and beautiful times.





CASA SALAAM

Rose Miller

As I write this, Casa Salaam has been open for about eighteen months. During that time we've housed nine families consisting of seven men, six women, and 17 children. When we opened the doors of the new house, we envisioned it as a space primarily for two-parent families. What we didn't anticipate was the rise in the number of single men arriving with children, nor the theme of family separation that would not only dominate headlines but directly affect the lives of our residents.

With the exception of two families, all of the Salaam residents to date have been from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and most of them have experienced family separation of some sort—whether through the administration's "zero tolerance" policy or through the circumstances of their perilous migration journeys. Our families have faced enormous challenges: a woman who was separated from her children at the border and put in detention for six months, not knowing what had happened to them; a father separated from his six-year-old daughter at the border and taken to detention while she was put in a youth shelter across the country; a father and four-year-old son making weekly trips to the T. Don Hutto Detention center in Taylor, Texas to visit the boy's mother who has been fighting her case for over six months; the list goes on. Some of these families stay with us only briefly while we work to find them housing in other parts of the country. Others have called Casa Salaam their first home in the United States while they make the tough transition to life in a new land. I am honored and humbled to be a part of these journeys toward a life of peace and security.





MAMA SANA VIBRANT WOMAN
Elena Colon

Mama Sana Vibrant Woman has been working with pregnant folks at Casa Marianella and Posada Esperanza since 2016. Over the course of 2017 the partnership between the two organizations grew stronger as we built new ways to provide comprehensive prenatal and postpartum support. Posada Esperanza staff members have attended MSVW's birth companion training for the past two years. This training gives them a greater understanding of the complexities of working with women of color who live at the intersections of immigration, racism and colorism, and in dealing with immense amounts of trauma. When I started working at Casa Marianella in June of 2018, it allowed me the opportunity to provide "in-house" support and specialized medical case management for pregnant residents. The organization has seen a growing need for this support as pregnant women arrive at the border at an increasing rate.

In September 2018, in an effort to cater to this need, Mama Sana Vibrant Woman started a series of pregnancy and birth circles hosted at Casa Marianella, where we provide on-site community prenatal support and education. In our eight-session, culturally specific support groups, we offer a range of free services including exercise classes, nutrition support, access to birth companions, and access to a network of midwifery care. All sessions include childcare, a nutritious meal, and transportation assistance. Our hope is that with these classes being more accessible, we can outreach to the greater Austin immigrant community and increase the range of our culturally appropriate services to meet all the needs of the brave mamas we love and support.



BIKE PROGRAM
Josh Collier

The Casa Marianella bike program is alive and well. We recently received a generous donation of twenty yellow Ofo bicycles, along with ten others built by the Austin Yellow Bike Project. You may have seen the Ofo's around town as part of the competition among start-up companies to corner the app-based bike rental market. Well, they lost, and the company kindly donated hundreds of their decommissioned bikes to YBP. After hosting a series of work parties to swap out the bikes' proprietary bolts, YBP has generously passed many of them on to us. These are tough bikes that should serve our residents well. We're glad to be able to offer free and independent transportation alternatives. Bikes are a speedy and affordable way for our residents to commute to work, stay fit, and get to know the streets of their new home. We thank YBP for their continued support, and look forward to rolling out more bikes in the new year.

Please e-mail donations@casamarianella.org if you have a bike to donate or volunteer@casamarianella.org if you are a bike mechanic seeking volunteer opportunities.



CASA GARDENS

Kathleen P.

Our Casa Marianella landscape and garden beds are filled with a wide variety of plants to nurture and enrich our community, providing food, fragrance, shade, and an uplifting environment. We cultivate fruit trees and shrubs; seasonal garden beds; and herb gardens with butterfly larval host plants, edible flowers, and herbs used for cooking, tea, and fragrance. We've also planted a wide variety of native plants that serve as caterpillar hosts for 67 different types of Central Texas butterflies. Additionally, we grow numerous native and adapted plants that together provide nearly year-round nectar sources for bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds, as well as many native plants with berries and seeds for birds. Our large shade trees also help cool our houses and outdoor areas.

We'd love to have volunteers to help us maintain these plants, landscape beds, and garden beds that need regular weeding, compost, and mulch. We're thankful for the many volunteers who helped us this year!

If you are familiar with native plants and would like to help, please let us know. If you are a certified arborist and would like to help us maintain our trees, we'd also love your help. Email volunteers@casamarianella.org.



BENEFITS CLINIC
Victoria Baxter

There are numerous factors that play a role in an individual's overall well-being; stable housing is just one among the many needs of someone arriving in a new country. We want to ensure that our clients are taken care of holistically, which includes access to physical and mental health care. Our Benefits Clinic works to see that our clients' needs are met by connecting them with local, state, and federal programs. We help clients determine what benefits they may be eligible for and offer free assistance filling out and submitting applications. For some clients, we provide benefits case management to make sure that they stay covered. These services are available to Austin community members as well as Casa Marianella residents, regardless of immigration status or citizenship.

The clinic has helped hundreds of families, single adults, youth, and pregnant women gain access to Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), CHIP Perinatal, Travis County's Medical Access Program (MAP), CommUnityCare Sliding Fee Program, ACA coverage, SNAP Food Benefits (food stamps), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). We also refer Asylees and Refugees to local resettlement agencies, who can connect them with further benefits services.

We aim to serve an even greater portion of the Austin community, so this year we're focusing on outreach. This effort has included hosting and attending clinics for community members to apply for benefits. Although we already have staff that speak English, Spanish, French, and Italian, we now also have access to translation software that allows us to serve more people without worrying about the language barrier. We look forward to reaching even more folks in the new year.

LEGAL CLINIC
Elise Harriger

Casa Marianella's legal clinic, Casa Marianella Immigration Legal Services (CMILS), exists to provide free immigration legal services to residents, ex-residents, and community members living under the poverty line. We have assisted many individuals with a variety of matters, such as U visas, T visas, Special Immigrant Juvenile petitions, Asylum, Withholding and Convention Against Torture, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), family petitions, applications for green cards, naturalization, and applications for work permits.

This past year, CMILS has been busy putting on free citizenship clinics to help eligible individuals prepare their naturalization applications at no cost; helping to organize general immigration clinics with Know Your Rights presentations and free attorney consultations; and assisting DACA recipients to renew their applications in free group settings. We are excited to continue our work to help some of the most vulnerable Texans.

CMILS says thank you to all of our wonderful donors! We could not do our legal work on behalf of Casa residents and the immigrant community without you.



ESL CLASSES

Kathleen P.

One of the most demanding but rewarding volunteer positions at Casa Marianella is teaching ESL to both residents and students from the public. This past year, we've had close to 60 different teachers who elected to take training, attend teacher meetings, create custom lesson plans, and present them to classes using interactive methods and solid ESL pedagogy.

The adult ESL program continues to play a significant role in helping Casa fulfill its mission of creating community with Spanish-speaking immigrants and international refugees by providing hospitality and promoting self-sufficiency. Our beginning classes function as more typical ESL classes, but with an even greater emphasis on speaking, while our intermediate/advanced class is a topical class taught with ESL pedagogy. It's really an ESL/Cultural Orientation/Health Literacy/Financial Literacy/Workplace Literacy/ESL for Refugees and Asylum Seekers/ESL for Trauma Survivors/Public Speaking/ESL for Life in Austin/Life Skills/Community-Building/Confidence-Building/Conversation/Affective Skills class, but we call it English class for short. Many of those topics are built into our beginning class curriculum at some level as well.



We use adult ESL instructor training for all our teachers and adult ESL pedagogy in all our classes. Open enrollment and varied work schedules mean that our teachers never know who they'll have in class each night or how many students will arrive. Our teachers rise to the challenge and create an encouraging, empowering classroom environment as they lead their custom lesson plans with interactive activities.

In addition to offering regular classes, we often invite guest speakers to address a number of topics of particular interest or benefit to our students. We offer one-to-one tutoring as well.

This past year, we've developed a close relationship with UT's Department of Theatre and Dance, as well as Austin's Teatro Vivo, and have attended several performances that relate to the concept of identity, acceptance, immigration, and home. Additionally, actors and directors have been guest speakers in our classes. UT graduate audiology students also come to our ESL classes regularly to offer free hearing screenings for our students.

We offer free English classes to our residents and anyone from the public every week Monday-Thursday, from 7:30-9:00 PM.

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

Melissa Buhrt

Across all programs this past year we hosted a total of **415** residents. Out of **330** exits, **306** were successful, a rate of **93%**. Casa Marianella hosted **256** total residents, **194** of whom have moved on to stable housing. Casa Salaam hosted **26** total residents, **18** of whom have moved on to stable housing. Posada Esperanza hosted **133** residents, **94** of whom have moved on to stable housing.

These residents arrived from a total of 36 different nations, including Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, China, Colombia, Cuba, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Haiti, Honduras, Iraq, Mexico, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Togo, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, and Venezuela. The greatest numbers of residents came from Eritrea (94), the Democratic Republic of Congo (61), and Honduras (36).



ORIENTAL MEDICINE CLINIC

Jonah Galeota-Sprung

To step into Hector Kuhn Naranjo's clinic in Casa Daniel is to enter a different world. Outside, the cheerful chaos of Casa Marianella; inside, peace and calm and quiet. It is a refuge within a refuge. For many of our residents, Hector's services—acupuncture, herbal medicine, massage, and nutritional support—are an essential aid in recovering from their long and stress-ridden journeys. Hector helps to treat everything from simple aches and pains to complex, multi-factor conditions. This year he has continued to offer his services to the community at large, who now account for about half of his patients.

Consultations are available on Mondays and Fridays by appointment. Fees for community members are on a sliding scale.



RESIDENT SPOTLIGHT: MARICELA

Sofia Kimball

Maricela has never been one to shy away from hard work. In Guatemala, she married and started a family at a very young age. Her family's struggles with poverty forced her to put her desire to attend school on hold, and she never had the opportunity to receive an education. Instead of feeling discouraged, though, Maricela knew she just had to wait for the right time. Someday, she was sure, she'd be able to gain the skills and education she needed to make an impact on her own life and the life of others.

In Guatemala, Maricela was scared for her own safety, as well as that of her daughters. She knew she had to find a way to escape. Setting out on the long and dangerous road to the U.S. was daunting, but Maricela was prepared to leave all she had known and enter a new country with no education. She was no stranger to adversity. With her six-year-old daughter in tow, Maricela made the journey and arrived in Texas in July of 2018.

Maricela has been working hard to make the most of her new life in Austin from the moment she arrived at Posada Esperanza. Even while working as a cook six days a week for long hours, she has become an integral part of the Posada family, the restaurant where she works, and the Austin community at large. When she's not working to save up money for her own apartment, she's sharing meals with other residents, spending time with her daughter, and thinking of the future. Maricela's greatest hope is to continue with her education. She wants to master English, get a degree, and ultimately become a lawyer to help women experiencing abuse back in Guatemala. We're lucky to have such a wonderful professional, mother, and aspiring attorney staying with us at Posada Esperanza.



RESIDENT SPOTLIGHT: REINA

Anna Clements

For most residents of Posada Esperanza, finding a job while raising kids and navigating the challenges of life in a new country is a juggling act. Many will share childcare duties, allowing some the chance to search for work while others stay home to watch the children. Current resident Reina, though, has found a way to do both at once. In addition to caring for her daughter and other Posada kids, Reina spends her days cooking tamales, pupusas, and other Salvadorian specialties. She then sells these delicious treats—*de frijol, carne, calabaza, or queso*—at her daughter's school, to her neighbors, friends, and volunteers, and to the many others who have joined her growing circle of customers.

Reina stays devoted to her faith by going to church every Sunday. She loves reading the Bible and praying in her free time. She says her faith in God is what helps her to face adversities in life. In the future she wants to help other people in need while preaching the word of God. Her immediate goals are to learn English and to get a stable job so that she can obtain housing for her daughter and reunite with her children back in Mexico.



JOIN US FOR CONVIVIO!

On the last Sunday of every month from 6pm to 8pm, Casa Marianella celebrates. Expect great food, live music, and many different kinds of dancing. All are welcome.



VOLUNTEER WITH US!

Volunteers keep Casa Marianella going. If you're interested in helping out, email us at volunteer@casamarianella.org.

Many, many thanks to everyone who worked with us this past year!



DONATION WISH LIST

Casa Marianella

- Soap, shampoo, & razors
- Toothpaste & toothbrushes
- Men's clothing
- Undergarments & socks
- Fresh fruit, veggies, & milk
- Kitchenware
- Umbrellas
- Backpacks & suitcases
- Bikes, locks, & bike lights

Posada Esperanza

- Diapers size 4, 5, & 6
- Baby wipes
- Pots & pans
- Forks & spoons
- Blenders
- Blankets & beds
- Kitchen tables & chairs
- Basketballs
- Soccer balls

Many thanks to our supporters

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Capital Area Metro Transit
Yellow Bike Project
Capital Area Food Bank
Keep Austin Housed AmeriCorps/Front Steps
Grassroots Leadership
Literacy Coalition of Central Texas AmeriCorps
Young Adult Volunteer Program - Presbyterian Church (USA)
Jesuit Volunteer Corps
Posada Providencia
Literacy Coalition AmeriCorps
Amplify Austin



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