

CASA MARIANELLA

Austin, TX



shelter and support for immigrants

Since 1986

2019-2020

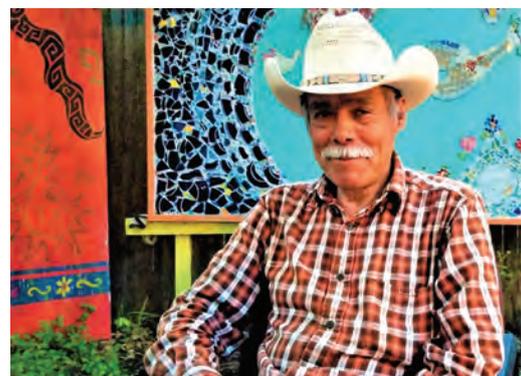
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Mission Statement

Casa Marianella welcomes displaced immigrants and promotes self-sufficiency by providing shelter and support services.



Staff

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Posada Family Advocates

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DIRECTOR LETTERS



Letter from the Director

Jennifer Long

I am excited to report that Casa Marianella has plans to expand! In the next couple of years, we expect to add two nine-bedroom houses and rebuild our original shelter at 821 Gunter into a two story house. These additions will greatly increase our capacity at a time when Casa Marianella is one of the only shelters of its kind in the US.

There is a great need to provide housing to those arriving at our border fleeing danger. There are some excellent organizations doing that. The unique service that Casa adds is to actually resettle people into safe and secure housing. In the past year we resettled 425

people. We would like to be able to help more.

This past year we were surprised by the arrival of a steady stream of families from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola who arrived at our door with no notice. So far, we have received 150 of these families. This surprise influx was the most challenging experience of our 35 years. We had to find emergency space in the already full houses, help the families stabilize after their tumultuous journeys, and find a place where they could pursue their asylum claims.

One of our goals for the past year was to find some national partners who could help

provide shelter for asylum seekers. We ultimately were able to place 30 of the families with 14 groups around the country. We are working toward building the sort of support system that people arriving from refugee camps enjoy. We are very grateful to the City of Austin and Travis County for helping to make this service possible, and to all of you who help out in so many ways as well.

Posada Esperanza

Patti McCabe

Families have been flowing into Posada Esperanza over the last year. Crisis levels of families have been arriving on the doorstep of Casa Marianella's Adult Emergency Shelter. From there we have tried to send many families to host programs in other parts of the county. But many families are exhausted from travel, have no family connections elsewhere, and wish very much to stay in Austin. For these families Posada Esperanza has worked to make space to accommodate as many of them as possible. As a result, we have sheltered record numbers of women and children in the last year. One of the gifts that Posada Esperanza has always been able to provide immigrant families experiencing homelessness is a community of families who have so much in common. They can rejoice together in the basic gift of safety. The pain of losing family members or of suffering at the hands of a domestic partner is mutually understood. They can share in the longing to be again some day with family they had to leave behind. These connections bring healing and practical assistance in managing life when your heart is across the globe.

This year we have seen a new experience that many of our families share in common. Most have experienced the metering system that allows asylum seekers only to enter the U.S. in a trickle and in a hard to understand system. This system forces people seeking safety in the United States to camp out on the northern border of Mexico to wait their turn to enter into the U.S. to ask for political asylum. In these camps the families sleep on the concrete with no protection from the weather. The children have no school. There is no way to work for money to buy food and therefore they have to wait for a church to bring them food, usually not enough. Many of the families feel desperate waiting so long, watching their children suffer hunger and cold. Some of them decide to try to cross the river themselves. Sometimes the river is deeper and stronger than they expected and they are grateful when immigration officials save them.

The Posada families who have been arriving this year have a new set of people who they worry about—the friends they made on the border of Mexico waiting in these camps. These new friends who were camped near them huddled together for warmth and shared bread so that each child might have a little something to eat. For the families who are safe now in the United States, they know that some of the friends they made on the border are still there camped out. They feel worried when the cold fronts come in, knowing that they don't have jackets and blankets or enough food.



We aren't able to help their friends camped out but we are able to focus on helping the families with us to be safe and well today. We partner with the moms to help them gain self sufficiency in just a few months of staying in shelter with us. If their friends from the camps end up in Austin one day, the families who ar-

ABOVE: Special thanks to volunteers Octavia and David Norris for transforming the rooms at Posada Esperanza into warm and welcoming spaces.

rived before them will be ready to lend them a helping hand.



Posada Esperanza

Anna Clements

Although the policy of separating parents and children legally ended after the summer of 2018, family separation has by no means come to an end. Many residents of both Posada and Casa have family members who are still detained, and communication is limited to expensive pay-per-minute phone calls from within detention (detained people cannot be called), or handwritten letters.

Lately, family members at Posada have been kept apart for longer lengths of time and with more obstacles delaying release. Several of our residents have had spouses and children over the age of 18 transferred from one center to another, often moving to more rural places where access to legal aid and other services is minimal. One Posada mom is currently separated from her 20-year-old daughter, who complains of insufficient food and lacks medical care for her severe health problems. Her younger siblings wonder daily when they will

see their sister again. Another's husband has been detained since July, during which time he missed the birth and first 5 months of his first child's life.

These instances are not uncommon. Behind the beauty and joy that so many of us get to experience at Casa and Posada is hardship and injustice that does not end upon arrival in the U.S. As circumstances continue to worsen, we remain inspired by the strength of our families and thankful for the continued support of our community.



YEAR IN NUMBERS



Democratic Republic of Congo

155

Eritrea

55

Honduras

48

Mexico

40

Angola

37

FROM 10/1/18 - 9/30/19 WE SERVED:

Agency wide total: **496** individuals

Casa Marianella Adult Shelter: **267** individuals

Posada Esperanza Women and Children's Shelter: **198** individuals

Casa Salaam Shelter for Intact Families: **31** individuals

We served individuals from **31** different countries

^^Note that the countries in bold colors are those that had the highest representation





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PROGRAM REPORTS

Casa Marianella Immigration Legal Services

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 appli-

cations at no cost and representing individuals in their naturalization cases. In fall 2019, the City of Austin began providing funding for these clinics, so we can continue to help our fellow 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.



ALICE KLEBERG REYNOLDS FOUNDATION



Benefits Clinic

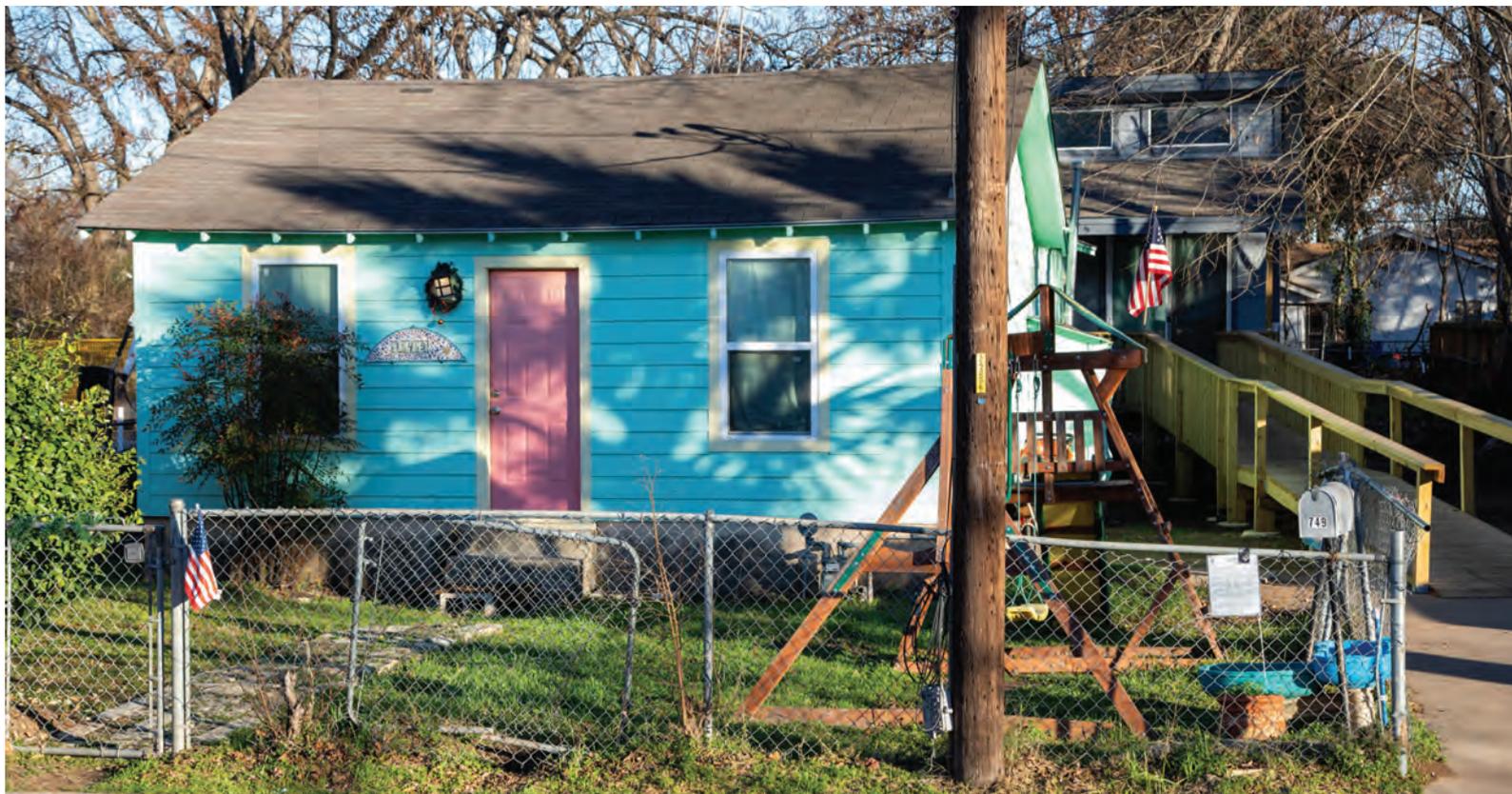
Julianne Mannix

At Casa Marianella, we believe that healthcare is a fundamental human right. The Benefits Clinic assists shelter residents and members of the community in accessing healthcare and public assistance. In the last year alone, we connected nearly 700 people to free or low-cost medical, dental, vision, and mental healthcare services. We have seen the incredible impact this care has had on our client's lives. Clients have had their vision and hearing restored, received gender-affirming care, and have begun the process of healing the wounds acquired on their journey.

The Medical Access Program (MAP) of Travis County has enabled hundreds of our clients to receive affordable, comprehensive care

without the burden of long waiting periods or crippling medical debt. The Benefits Clinic is open to the public Monday-Friday, from 10AM-4PM





Radical Hospitality

Kate Poor

ABOVE: Thank you to Architect Matthew Helveston and volunteer general contractor Andrew Gate for their work on new construction at Casa Salaam.

Radical hospitality at Casa Marianella enables residents to settle in their own homes upon leaving Casa. It's one of the factors which separates us from many other shelters, which essentially end their relations with residents upon move out.

Casa's mission hinges on its ability to successfully assist current residents in becoming self-sufficient renters, thus creating space for new arrivals. This is made more difficult by Austin's dwindling affordable housing market. Casa residents face additional challenges presented by their complex immigration cases and an increasingly limited number of work opportunities. Limited access to accepted identification cards and proofs of income are another issue.

Asylum-seekers, excluded from many rentals due to these challenges, often end up in precarious, crowded, and sometimes fringe or unhealthy arrangements. The few viable rental options often have notorious reputations for unmet maintenance requests and taking advantage of their tenants. Casa Marianella's housing team fights unjust fees, exploitative conditions, and errant eviction notices. These are some of the most significant challenges facing Casa in the ever-changing Austin housing market.

In light of all of these obstacles to long-term independent housing, we are very fortunate to have a wide range of supporters who

help us access housing justice for our clients. This past year, Casa Marianella gratefully became one of the recipients of the City of Austin's Rapid Rehousing rental assistance grant, which intends to support neighbors in Austin experiencing homelessness quickly transition into sustainable housing. The Rapid Rehousing fund has enabled Casa Marianella to counter the void of services available to aid individuals seeking housing who are facing the simultaneous and compounding hurdles of homelessness and immigration. With the aid of the Rapid Rehousing assistance, Casa has been able to cover many of the high upfront costs associated with moving, so as to help residents transition out of shelter quickly and effectively. The Rapid Rehousing fund has also equipped us to better protect our past residents from losing their housing when emergencies arise.

Rental assistance funds like these help our clients stay housed in the long term—over 80% of Casa Marianella residents successfully move into and maintain stable independent housing post-shelter. This year, fortified by the Rapid Rehousing grant and a strong team of housing advocates, we assisted an historically high number of residents to transition successfully into their own homes.

Casa is also grateful for the assistance of community volunteers who assist with all angles of the rehousing process. Community

building, in addition to finally settling in a safe place to call home, constitute essential bonds that aid in the resettlement, adjustment, and post-trauma recovery process for many of our residents who are still reeling from the trauma and turmoil of their displacement, journey, and incarceration in the US.

To maintain Austin's reputation as a viable city for immigrants, we will need to expand services for immigrants—including affordable housing that will accept asylum-seeker and immigrant tenants, where our migrant neighbors can feel welcome, secure, and at home.

If you'd like to learn more about supporting our rental assistance funds, assisting with move outs, providing housing, or collaborating with Casa Marianella on advocacy for housing justice for immigrants in our community, please contact our team at housing@casamarianella.org. We're carried forward by and deeply indebted to the support we receive from our Austin family.





ESL Teachers Empower Students

Kathleen P

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

--Maya Angelou

Keeping Maya Angelou's quote in mind, our 74 volunteer ESL teachers this past year (plus many guest presenters) worked to make sure our students felt seen, heard, empowered, equipped, and hopeful!

With Casa at double capacity, combined classes of adults & children, the permanent loss of our largest classroom, & classes filled to standing room only, this year has been our most challenging yet! Our teachers have responded with enthusiasm, creativity, and empathy. Our students have really embraced the program!

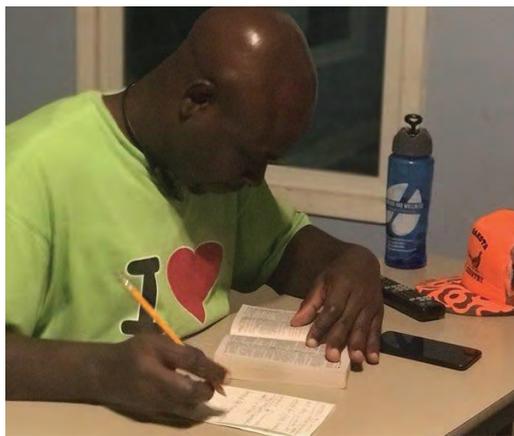
Our beginning classes focus on survival English, while our advanced class focuses on cultural orientation and practical knowledge/skills needed for life in the US. Joanna Men-

dez, LMSW, from the Refugee Services of Texas, teaches a weekly psycho-education class and invites speakers from the Austin Police, US Dept of Labor, Austin Public Library, and others.

To mix things up, we've had art activities, show and tell, improv games and skits, and theatre activities that build community and challenge us to express ourselves in creative ways.

Teaching ESL is one of the most demanding but rewarding volunteer positions at Casa. Our teachers take training at the Literacy Coalition of Central Texas, attend teacher meetings, receive coaching, create custom lesson plans, and present them to classes using interactive methods and solid ESL pedagogy. We offer free English classes to our residents and the public Monday-Thursday, 7:30-9:00 PM.

For more info, contact our ESL Coordinator at esl@casamarianella.org.



Detention Letter Team

Julian Root

“How do people end up at Casa Marianella?”

This is one of the most frequently asked questions among those curious about Casa. While Casa is an emergency shelter accepting people off the street, other residents arrive through corresponding with our detention letter team. With each day’s mail, we usually receive anywhere from five to twenty hand-written letters from detained people, hoping to be accepted into Casa’s program. Some have only been detained a few days; others have been in ICE custody for over a year. Written in Spanish, French, English, Portuguese, and even Lingala, these letters usually read like communiques from a warzone. The most horrific details of torture, murder, sexual assault, kidnapping, and extortion make for the most compelling cases for inviting detained people to Casa’s program.

Everyone in detention has a story like these. All of these people are hoping to win asylum in the US. Their cases may never get off the ground if they do not have a sponsor to receive them if and when they are released. Unfortunately, Casa has the capacity to send only ten sponsorship letters a week, resulting in a long list of names of detained people waiting to receive a support letter. While those more vulnerable in detention may receive a prioritized place on the list, most will have to wait several months. Every day, office staff fields calls from detained people wondering about the status of their letter. Though the work of explaining to detained people that they will have to wait—and that our letter does NOT guarantee release from detention—is emotionally taxing, there is ample reward in finally meeting someone with whom we’ve been corresponding when they finally get out of the cab and are welcomed into Casa.



Bicycle Program

Julian Root

The reasons to encourage Casa residents to get on bicycles are as diverse as the residents. Overall, cycling plays an invaluable role in Casa's mission of encouraging self-sufficiency. Bicycling provides free transportation. The health benefits of cycling—both mental and physical—are innumerable. Our residents who regularly bicycle to their various engagements enjoy the boost of spirit that comes with cycling. Independence from buses and paid/donated car rides is cherished.

Cycling also provides therapy for traumatized people. The Ghisallo Cycling Initiative knows this and has been inviting Casa residents to participate in their "Golden Rollers" program, which gets seniors and others on tricycles in a local park. Our residents love it! Ghisallo leads guided rides and cycling

education classes, and we are excited to begin partnering with them to get our residents more informed about cycling.

In addition to our partnership with Ghisallo, we've been continuously grateful to the Austin Yellow Bike Project for their support of Casa. Through their generosity with the OFO yellow bikes, we've been able to get virtually every resident who's wanted a bike on to one during their stay at Casa.

Additionally, Casa thanks Kryptonite for their generous donation of eight new locks, East Side Pedal Pushers for their generosity with their angle grinder, REI for their advertisement of our program, and all members of the Austin cycling community who have donated a lock or bicycle!



Homeopathic Medicine

The absence of medical attention in detention centers and migrant camps is one of the most fundamental problems with our current immigration protocol. Many new Casa residents have not received any medical attention at all in the United States, beyond the perfunctory doses of ibuprofen given to all who complain of any condition.

Therefore, the Casa community is eternally grateful to Hector Kuhn Naranjo for his work in our homeopathic medicine clinic. Hector has received a Master's Degree in Oriental Medicine, as well as acupuncture and homeopathy certifications in the US, Colombia, and Germany. The clinic itself is located on-site, and serves as an oasis of tranquility and nurture. Hector gives every patient a chance to

tell their story uninterrupted, and thus begins the process of medical rehabilitation.

In addition to providing acupuncture and herbal medicine, Hector meets privately with all new residents to assess their medical needs. Using the structure of 'narrative' medicine, Hector takes the time to hear a great deal of residents' stories, serving as both a therapeutic listener and conduit for medical care. When Hector deems homeopathy a viable treatment, he administers it. When something more immediate is required, he is quick to alert office staff, who then make arrangements for residents to visit clinics or hospitals with MAP cards in hand.



Border Trip

Drew Bernstein

In late October, the new staff members from Casa Marianella and Posada Esperanza departed for Brownsville, TX, to participate in the organization's annual border trip. We spent three days meeting and volunteering with Casa's partner organizations in the Rio Grande Valley, which helped us to understand what's happening near the US/Mexico border, a factor directly affecting our work at Casa.

Our first stop was the South Texas Human Rights Center, founded by Eddie Canales in 2013. STHRC's work includes running a missing migrant hotline, doing forensic analyses on found bodies, and placing water caches on

their land for thirsty migrants to drink. Eddie accompanied us to a stretch of highway, where we installed a plastic barrel full of gallon water jugs: a simple act which can mean the difference between life and death for migrants.

Our next stop was in Brownsville, where we spent the day with Ann Finch, the president of Team Brownsville, which provides humanitarian assistance to the asylum-seekers living around the Mexican side of the Brownsville-Matamoros bridge. Nothing could have prepared us for what we found: a tent city of almost 2000 people, living without adequate shelter or sanitation. They rely solely on charitable organizations like Team Brownsville for

food, water, and even the tents they sleep in. The government is constantly fighting to shut down the camp, turning off lights at night and threatening to remove the mere five portable toilets that Team Brownsville has rented. While at the encampment distributing water, food and basic toiletries with Team Brownsville, we had the opportunity to speak to some of the asylum-seekers: their stories are powerful and heartbreaking.

Amongst all the despair we witnessed along the border, we found hope in our partner organizations: the calm and beautiful respite that is La Posada Providencia shelter in San Benito; the team of lawyers fiercely fighting for the



rights of detained children and adults at the South Texas Pro Bono Asylum Representation Project (ProBAR) in Harlingen; the grassroots organization ARISE, started by women in the Alamo border colonia to move their community forward by demanding infrastructure improvements and empowering women and children.

All participants found the border trip to be a striking and humbling experience. Visiting Casa's partner organizations put our role into context: we cannot and do not do our

work alone. Meanwhile, witnessing some of the harrowing realities that our residents and other immigrants experience on their journeys to the United States renewed our compassion and vigor for our work in Austin.



RESIDENT SPOTLIGHT



Samuel's Story Emmalee Israel

I sat down with Samuel at a small table on the edge of his kitchen. He began peeling potatoes for lunch for him and his son, Gelson, as the television blared. From the northernmost region of Angola, Samuel identifies more as Congolese than he does as Angolan. While this creates a space for him to be welcomed into the Congolese community that is so vibrant at Casa, it put him at a striking disadvantage in his home country.

People from the Democratic Republic of Congo are treated as second class citizens in Angola. Samuel recounted the ways he and his family had been threatened by both government officials and their neighbors. After his wife passed away in a debtor's prison from an outbreak of yellow fever, he decided that he would flee his home country to seek asylum in Brazil with his seven-year-old son. However, upon arrival in Brazil, he saw the state of asy-

lum seekers living in abandoned buildings and being preyed on by traffickers; he knew that this was also not a safe place to raise his son.

Samuel understood that the journey to America would be difficult, but also that it would be worth it for Gelson to grow up in a safe place. They trekked through South and Central America on buses, by foot and in boats. Samuel expressed that the most hazardous part of the journey was crossing into Panama through the jungle. As they slept, they listened to the sounds of wild animals and insects around them.

When they finally arrived at the Mexico-United States border, they added their names to the list of those waiting to present themselves to seek asylum. After waiting for over two months for their names to be called, they decided to cross the river. They were intercepted by Border Patrol before even reaching shore and were detained.

Samuel recounted that after being released, a Senegalese woman in San Antonio gave them the address to Casa Marianella. They loaded up in a taxi with several other families and arrived at Casa in the heat of the summer.

Since arriving, Gelson has been enrolled in school, and Samuel has been a helpful presence at Casa, encouraging other residents and staff to taste his food and quickly offering his translation services. The two are optimistic for the future as they finish out their time at Casa.



New Residents, Old Friends

Casey McKenna

Although Posada is meant to be passed through on the way to a more stable living situation, many former residents keep the community alive and growing by giving back. Whether this be through donations, volunteering, or simply keeping in touch, they help make Posada feel more like home. Recently, I spoke to Shareefa Gyami, a former resident and current homework help volunteer, who reflected on her time at the shelter.

Shareefa's family came to Posada seeking assistance with very little to call its own; a familiar sight to many Posada families. Her return as a volunteer, however, was a little different. Now a well-dressed, educated college student, Shareefa was well aware of the distance between herself and the children at Posada. During her first day volunteering she was able to bridge the gap between them. "I told one of the girls that I used to live there and the way her eyes lit up, I could tell she felt more comfortable with me there." This shared experience allowed Shareefa and the girls she was tutoring to form a bond in spite of their differences. Shareefa hopes her presence will be considered an example of what the kids can achieve—not in spite of, but because of their lived experiences.

During her stay at Posada, Shareefa recalls, she met one of her best friends. "She barely spoke English, but language was no barrier to our amusement. We played together as if we had known each other our whole lives and our moms actually ended up getting an apartment together once they left Posada." Though her relationship with Posada has changed with time, she remembers her stay fondly, recalling the times she and the other children played games with found objects and went to the Children's Museum. But what stood out for her the most was the way the environment differed from other shelters. "My family lived in many shelters, but the setup of Posada was uniquely beneficial for myself as a kid. Facilities are cold and distant, they have a hostile energy. A house brings people together and creates a home, it feels more welcoming."

GET INVOLVED

Convivio

See you at Convivio! Every last Sunday, Casa-Marianella throws a party!

From 6-8PM, all are welcome to enjoy fantastic international cuisine, live music, and friendly conversation. It's a wonderful way to meet the many people who have helped make Casa what it is, in a unique setting. Bring your dancing shoes!

Volunteer



Volunteer with us. Volunteers are essential to the survival of Casa. We have lots of different opportunities for all interests. Help out with administrative work, sort donations, drive residents to appointments, or just play basketball with the kids!

Please contact our volunteer coordinator:
volunteer@casamarianella.org or
posadaesperanza@casamarianella.org

Social Media

Follow us on social media! We are on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (@CasaMarianella). We regularly post updates about what's going on, and how you can get involved. We also have a regularly updated blog featuring writing about particular issues and events related to Casa.

Give us a look!
www.casamarianella.org/blog-page





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Gratitude and thanks to our supporters and partners!

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Faith Groups

Mosaic Church
Central Christian Church
University Christian Church
St. James Episcopal Church
St. George's Episcopal Church
St. Matthew's Episcopal Church
St. David's Episcopal Church
St. Hildegard's Church
First Baptist Church
Bethel Church
First United Methodist Church
University United Methodist Church
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Unity of Wimberley
Unity of the Hills Church
The Catholic Diocese of Austin
St. Austin Catholic Church
Santa Julia Catholic Church
Cristo Rey Catholic Church
University Catholic Center
St. John Newman
St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church
Grace and Peace Presbyterian
Westminster Presbyterian Church

First Presbyterian Church
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church
First English Lutheran Church
Gethsemane Lutheran Church
St. Catherine of Siena
Islamic Ahlul Bayt Association
Vox Veniae Church

Key Collaborators

American Gateways - RAICES, Inc.
UT Immigration Clinic - Caritas of Austin
Catholic Charities of Central Texas - Amplify Austin
Refugee Services of Texas - Equal Justice Center
Justice for our Neighbors - CommUnityCare Clinics
Workers Defense Project - Capital Area Counseling
Center for Survivors of Torture - Capital Area Metro Transit
Austin Yellow Bike Project - Ghisallo Cycling Initiative
Capital Area Food Bank - Keep Austin Housed
Save the Food
AmeriCorps/Front Steps - Grassroots Leadership
Literacy Coalition of Central Texas - Jesuit Volunteer Corps
Mama Sana Vibrant Woman - Andrew Gates
Posada Providencia: San Benito, TX
DASH: Ft Worth, TX
Casa Juan Diego: Houston, TX
Annunciation House: El Paso, TX
YMCA: Houston, TX
Interfaith Welcome Coalition: San Antonio, TX
Freedom House: Detroit, MI
Vive: Buffalo, NY
Dominican Sisters: St Catherine, KY
The Welcome Network: Owensboro, KY
Della Lamb: Kansas City, MO
Sisters of Charity: Cincinnati, OH
Clifton UMC: Cincinnati, OH
West Virginia Interfaith Ministry: Charleston, WV
Welcome Network: Chicagoland, IL

Su Casa Catholic Worker: Chicago, IL
Redeemer OPC: Atlanta, GA
Refugee Interest Group: Birmingham, AL
Adorers of the Blood of Christ: Wichita, KS
St Luke's UMC: Buffalo, NY
Rochester Refugee Resettlement: Rochester, NY
Ithaca Welcomes Refugees: Ithaca, NY
Interfaith Sanctuary Coalition: Syracuse, NY
Refugees and Asylum Seekers at
Catholic Community Services: Eugene, OR