

# CASA MARIANELLA POSADA ESPERANZA ABRI LUMIERE



**SHELTER AND SUPPORT FOR IMMIGRANTS SINCE 1986**

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## Mission Statement

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



<b>Executive Directors</b> Jennifer Long, Adult Shelter Patti McCabe, Posada Esperanza	<b>Posada Esperanza Family Advocates</b> Jazmin Banos-Nava Inna Grudtcina
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<b>Managing Director</b> Melissa Buhrt	<b>Abri Lumiere Staff</b> Molly Brown
<b>Administrative Director</b> Sonja Engelstad	Ashanti Ellis Cindy Hall
<b>Adult Program Coordinator</b> Justin Davis-Metzner	Diana Pina Benny Rangell
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# Introduction



PHOTO BY SONJA ENGELSTAD

## Casa Marianella

Jennifer Long

2022 has been a remarkable year at Casa Marianella. We have successfully resettled over 400 asylum seekers. We have also provided temporary housing and transportation to 250 unexpected arrivals. We admire the stubborn persistence of our residents as they start a new life in an unfamiliar place. I am proud of our shelter staff who provide the tools for our residents to develop self sufficiency and find housing in a city where housing is almost impossible to find.

I want to thank Anmol Mehra, Maximum Building Potential, and Tom Hatch for providing houses free of rent to expand our shelter capacity. Paul and Heather Dennison helped us buy a house to serve families this year. We now have 10 houses and 3 loaner houses. This has increased our nightly capacity to 150. Thanks to all of you who make our work possible. We cannot do it without your support.





## Posada Esperanza

Patti McCabe

2022 at Posada Esperanza has given a temporary home to nearly 200 women and children who were new to this country and found themselves with no place to sleep. We wish that these families didn't have to be pushed into such a crisis in order to get the basic assistance needed to live their lives. But at least we are glad to be able to welcome them into our safe and supportive homes. We are grateful to have the ability to provide them with the basic essentials to be safe and well, and to accompany them on their work towards self-sufficiency.

We have been impressed by the patience and support that the families have offered each other, as we have been over capacity all year. We consider our capacity to be 13 families at a time but this year we have often served 15 or more families at a time. Regularly, a mom with children calls or arrives at our doorstep with no safe place to sleep when we have no available bedrooms. The other families make room for them in their bedrooms or in their living room.

As a staff, we partner with the other families to provide hospitality to the new family. In turn,

the community that supports our work joins in with their generosity to create this safe and supportive home for the families.

As we stretch our space to assist more families, we have been ever hopeful to further increase our capacity to serve. Thanks to the generosity of Josie Knight, we are now making plans to build a new house on our property on the Rainbow Ridge cul-de-sac.





## Abri Lumiere - A New Family Shelter

Stacey Eyman, Program Director

A generous donation in July 2022 allowed us to purchase a cozy duplex in Northeast Austin. Its proximity to schools, clinics and grocery stores made it the ideal plot for our newest program, the Abri Lumiere family shelter

Abri Lumiere is roughly translated in French to mean "Shelter of Light". Its creation is a testament to Casa Marianella's undying adaptability and ever-shifting resident population. Over the last several years, an increasing number of families have arrived at our collective doorstep. Neither the Posada Esperanza women's and children's shelter or the Casa Adult Shelter have been an ideal fit for these families. Addressing this need, our staff birthed Abri Lumiere - a program that provides full-service shelter and holistic case management for two-parent and single dad families.

Since its opening, Abri Lumiere has enabled 8 two-parent families and 3 single dad families to remain together while receiving services. Our team works to connect them to school enrollment, childcare, medical coverage, counseling, legal guidance, housing support, ESL classes, and more. There are few family

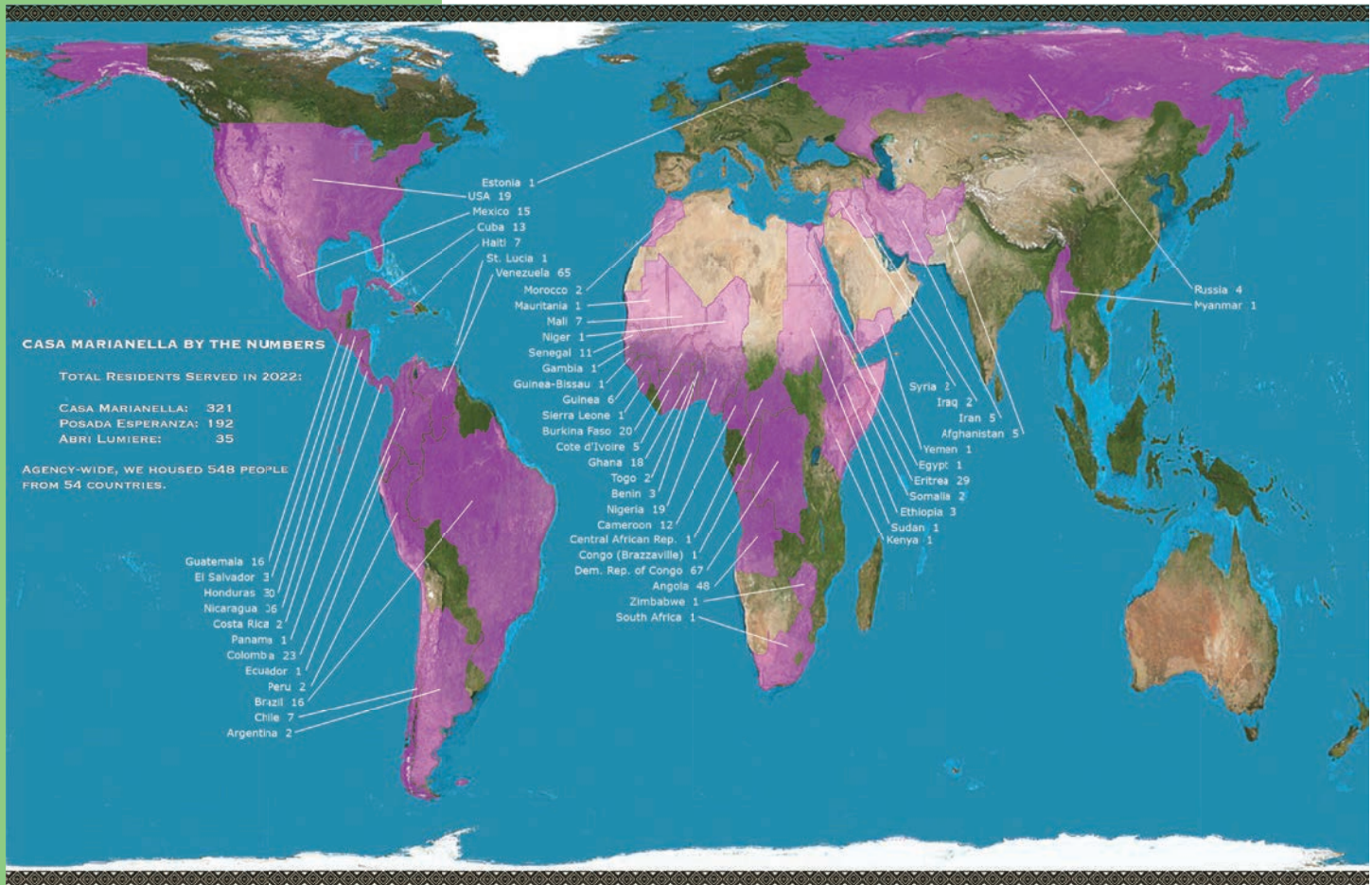
shelters in Austin that serve families with both kids and dads and none that cater to immigrants. We continue to have a waitlist that exceeds the capacity of our fledgling program - the need for this type of shelter is unfathomable.

Our dreams are big. We want to have space and staff capacity for every family who calls on us for assistance. We continue working to make Abri Lumiere a place that feels safe and comfortable. This includes an extensive backyard project with a playscape, sports equipment and outdoor seating. We're also renovating the garage to serve as an office.

Abri Lumiere is off to an energetic start and we appreciate our community's collaboration in providing our families with the best possible services and environment.



# Year in Numbers



## From 12.01.2021 - 11.30.2022 we served:

**Total Residents served agency-wide: 548**

### Breakdown of residents served by shelter:

Casa: 321  
 Posada: 192  
 Abri: 35

**Agency-wide we served residents from 54 distinct countries.**

### Countries with highest representation:

Democratic Republic of Congo: 67  
 Venezuela: 65  
 Angola: 48  
 Nicaragua: 36  
 Honduras: 30  
 Eritrea: 29  
 Colombia: 23

### Exits:

Agency-wide Exits: 356 Successful/ 419 Total (85%)

Casa Exits: 234 Successful/263 Total (89%)

Posada Exits: 115 Successful/149 Total (77%)

Abri Exits: 7 Successful/ 7 Total (100%)



# Donor Spotlight



PHOTOGRAPHY BY SONJA ENGELSTAD

## Volunteer/Donor Spotlight

Tony Fernandez, Sonia Galvez

The smell of fresh paint hung on the walls as we awaited the sound of tiny feet running down the empty halls. The kitchen drawers sat stockpiled with clean silverware, wooden utensils and baking pans. Friendly decor hung on the walls. Upstairs, one room sounded like a construction zone. Tony Fernandez, wielding a power drill, puts the finishing touches on the final addition to our new shelter before we open our doors.

Tony invested months working with our staff to prepare our newly donated duplex for families at our Abri Lumiere shelter. His late mother, Sonia Galvez, carefully kept and maintained many of the items we now cherish in our shelter. Tony continues his mother's legacy by sharing so many of her lovely household items with our families since her passing. Generosity, perseverance, and deep compassion are some of Tony's traits, and live as a testament to Sonia.

Tony's support was essential and came at a critical time. His dedication and tireless presence helped our shelter open in a timely manner to receive awaiting families. He helped us acquire everything we needed to be well-stocked and operational. He also helped us find, purchase, pick up, deliver and build bunk beds that we needed in each room. Tony did everything from helping us hang pictures on the walls to searching online for additional items we needed. He even spent time this summer in our hot garage fixing the door so we could move things in and out more smoothly.

Tony has gone above and beyond in his support of our shelter and we want to say a big thank you to both him and his mom, Sonia Galvez for all their support and investment in the community. We are deeply grateful!





# Program Reports

## Benefits Update

Gabriel Salgado

In the Benefits Clinic, we help both residents of Casa Marianella and community members apply for benefits programs ranging from regional medical insurance programs to state benefits like SNAP and Medicaid to childcare services. We help refer people to housing and legal services, ESL classes, pregnancy care, and any other resources they are interested in. We also assist in navigating medical appointments, medical or insurance bills, mail, or other applications and bureaucratic processes. We are located on the Casa Marianella premises.

Our hours are  
12:00PM-6:00PM Monday-Thursday,  
and 10:00AM-4:00PM Friday.

Our phone number, which can be called or  
texted, is 262-706-1620.

Our email address is  
benefits@casamarianella.org.

Happy New Year from the Benefits Team!  
Gabriel, Julieta, Spencer, Isaac  
- January 2023



## Casa Marianella Legal Immigration 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 applications at no cost and representing individuals in their naturalization cases. Due to COVID-19, we have modified our clinics to virtual formats and individual representation. The City of Austin is providing funding for these clinics and representation, 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



PHOTO BY SONJA ENGELSTAD



## Support Letters

Katie Tallman, Olivia Petipas, Paulina Licon

This year the support letters team has maintained correspondence with thousands of people in detention nationwide. The majority of people we hear from are detained in facilities in Texas, Louisiana, and California, but we communicate with people detained in 75 different locations nationwide. While a large portion of the people we support are from the Americas, there is also a considerable number of people from countries such as Angola, Russia, Turkey, Nigeria and Senegal.

Our team coordinates with other non profit organizations and grassroots communities for legal assistance, bond payment and release transportation. In a given week, we receive roughly 200 letters from people in detention centers, and about 1,000 calls.

Through our communication with those detained, we are met with the harsh reality of the uncertainty and confusion immigrants face upon immediate arrival to the US. Many battle language and literacy barriers as they try to comprehend the legal processes that make up their world in detention. Some comment on the

unsanitary living conditions, racism, homophobia and transphobia they suffer while detained. Many of these struggles are similar to the factors that forced these immigrants from their homes.

There continue to be outbreaks of COVID, and we have also been informed of tuberculosis outbreaks in some detention centers. Other medical needs go unmet. Sadly, lives continue to be lost while in ICE custody. We are forced to recognize that danger to migrants is not only something they are attempting to escape in their own countries, but something which continues right here in the US.

Our priority is to accompany immigrants and assist in their release from detention. Their dignity, health, and hope are at the core of our program. We recognize that our role is small, yet we are grateful to often be the first step in welcoming people to Casa Marianella.



## Housing Update

Jennifer Long

When the residents of Casa Marianella have stayed for 3 months in shelter, we help them find a place to rent. Currently, the adult shelter works with apartments in the nearby Riverside neighborhood to find shared, affordable housing. We currently oversee stable apartments for 220 former Casa residents. The cost of housing in Austin comes as a shock to our clients. In addition, the process of getting housed involves a lot of unfamiliar skills: how to qualify for a lease, how to pay rent online, how to pay utilities, how to follow the rules of the apartments, how to renew contracts, and how to deal with repair problems. Finding housing is a hugely important part of Casa's work. Our goal is to move people to independence in a fairly easy manner. In addition, being in an apartment is an essential source of education about how housing works in the US. We are so grateful to still be able to help our clients find affordable housing in Austin's exploding housing market.



## ESL Update

Kathleen P

We love our adult ESL teachers & students! Our beloved adult ESL teachers draw on their creativity and flexibility to create engaging, practical lessons that help our residents improve their English skills and cultural knowledge as well as build community and confidence.

Our teachers thrive in our ever-changing environment in which we never know who we'll have in class on a particular night, what countries/cultures/languages they'll represent, how many students will attend, what gaps the students will have in their language skills, or what their background of trauma is. I love that our classes are such fun gatherings and places of refuge, learning, and encouragement. Our classes are Monday through Thursday 7:30-9:00 PM.





PHOTO BY SONJA ENGELSTAD



PHOTOGRAPHY BY SONJA ENGELSTAD

## Bicycle Program

Julian Root

This year, we've really upped the ante in our bicycle program. Thanks to an extremely generous grant from a community member, we were able to purchase a 7' by 14' enclosed trailer and outfit it as an in-house bike shop. Complete with all the tools needed for the restoration and upkeep of bicycles, we have set up and distributed over 150 bicycles to residents in the trailer's first year.

We are also extremely grateful to the ongoing support from the Austin Yellow Bike Program, who continues to supply us with used bicycles, parts, locks, and many other supplies needed to keep our residents rolling. Additionally, we have several dedicated community members who regularly commit their time to help fulfill the ever-growing list of bicycle requests.

Because it can take over a year for residents to be eligible for driver licenses, access to affordable and healthy transportation is essential for self-sufficiency. Therefore, we are proud to offer such an adaptive and well-loved system of bicycle distribution to our clients.





## Renovations - Turning a Shelter into a Home

Cindy Hall

Walking into an empty house can be daunting. The bones of the house are there. However, everything that makes it a home is missing - the furniture, the appliances, the decor, the PEOPLE. This summer, the staff at Abri Lumiere had the opportunity and the challenge to renovate a duplex capable of housing immigrant families. When we walked through the empty duplex that had been graciously donated to Casa Marianella, we came to the realization that it was in-need of some tender love and care before we were ready to open the doors. Each side of the duplex had its own challenges and quirks.

Unit B was the first side of the duplex to be renovated. If a title were to be given to classify Unit B's challenges, it would be "The Attack of the Wasps". Never have I ever encountered so many wasps than I have in Texas. The wasps in this state are opportunistic. Any crevice, hidey hole or particularly good looking thicket of bushes will serve as the building blocks for their new nests. One nest is never enough. A network of nests ready to defend their territory is a must. When getting Unit B ready for residents to move in, we were charged with the task of clearing out the backyard that was filled with trash, cardboard, overgrown trees, and bushes. Unbeknown to staff and brave volunteers, there were hordes of wasps who had made their home in this paradise of debris. After a few stings and a phone call to an exterminator, we were able to get the wasps under control and clear out the Unit B backyard. With this hurdle crossed, Unit B was furnished thanks to volunteer donations, and in July 2022, our first Abri Lumiere family moved in.

While Unit A did not have any major wasp problems, the floors and walls of the unit were in-need of a good scrubbing. This side of the duplex still had carpet in it. Carpets do not last in our shelters due to the mass amount of people we house. While we as staff attempted to do

most of the renovations ourselves, ripping out the carpets and replacing them with vinyl flooring was above our capabilities. We enlisted the help of some professionals for that job. The job that was in our wheelhouse was the walls. Armed with Magic Erasers and elbow grease, we and some generous volunteers scrubbed the walls from top to bottom. Once the walls were scrubbed, we found some hidden leftover paint in the garage and began repainting the walls. As that paint began to run out, a volunteer helped us supplement our supply. Although we were determined to use all of the leftover garage paint and donated paint to our advantage, we decided to buy paint for the living room. Aside from the kitchen, the living rooms are the main common space in our duplex. Now, a dreamy sky blue living room is the first thing that our residents see when they step into the door. With the floors and walls complete and new furniture moved in, Unit A was open to new residents in October 2022.

Without the dedication of our staff and the immense help from our volunteers who donated their time and household furniture and goods, we would not have been able to make this house into a home. It is our hope that when our residents walk through the doors at Abri Lumiere, they might find a welcoming home and community where they can rest their weary feet for a while.





## Serving and Watching

Jeannette Doumbe

Serving others is the most rewarding experience, it has no price attached to it. We help by acting to fulfill a purpose, role, or function. In any human interaction, both parties perform and exchange, especially in direct contact. The person who decides to serve receives a reward for offering interpersonal growth in selflessness. The person receiving the service finds a solution to their needs. This serving interaction creates an environment full of positivity. Everyone has experienced a time of need and everyone has served in one way or another.

Staff at Casa Marianella, Posada Esperanza, and Abri Lumiere are given an opportunity to watch very special daily 'movies' that could be titled "serving and watching". Every day residents express their needs and every day dedicated people stand to find and bring solutions to their quests for the next step in their journeys on American soil. Watching these two parties interact seems sometimes very confusing because of the extreme diversity in languages and cultures, the beauty is the end result. At the end of the day, the majority of residents leave our shelters empowered, knowledgeable, and galvanized to embrace life. Their faces are turned up.







### St. Vincent de Paul

Patti McCabe

St. Vincent de Paul does fantastic work to assist those in need. At Posada we get to enjoy the great work of the St John Neumann SVDP program every week. On Friday afternoons we look forward to a black car pulling up to Posada Esperanza. Out comes Joel, barking orders to all of us to carry boxes of meat, vegetables, and most importantly donuts. While we joke around and pass out donuts Joel is assessing how our needs can match with the SVDP resources. The team at St John Neumann then organizes Christmas presents, back to school supplies, and furniture from the thrift store for our families' new apartments. Huge thanks to Joel and to all who lend a hand, a toy, a dollar to the work that finds its way over to the Posada families.

### A Seminary Student's Reflection

Sarah Rutherford

*"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me." Matthew 25:13 (NRSV)*

I came to Casa in August of 2022 as a part of the service-learning program at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (APTS). The seminary began this program to give students the opportunity to serve the community through service work jobs. When I was accepted into the program, the director asked where I wanted to work. He started suggesting a few local nonprofits, but I already knew where I wanted to go: Casa Marianella.

After discovering Casa Marianella through a refugee advocate group at my university, I was captivated by their mission. Now, after four months of working part-time as operations coordinator, I find myself more invested in their mission than ever.

The work we do at Casa Marianella is quite literally the work described by Jesus in Matthew 25: feeding the hungry, nourishing the thirsty, welcoming the stranger. At first, I found it jarring to go between theological school and Casa. It is hard to process the shift from studying biblical Hebrew to speaking French and Spanish with new arrivals while getting them toiletries, bedding, and food. It is odd going from pondering the difference between hypostasis and proposon to trying to figure out a resident's next court date. There is a big difference between studying the Book of Hosea and scanning someone's immigration documents, carefully protected in huge ziploc bags provided by ICE.

Despite these incongruities, every time I work a shift at Casa, I am reminded that this is the gospel at work: trying to give everyone the opportunity to live a life free of fear, danger, and persecution.



Recently, I watched a resident sitting with his two young children at a picnic table in the backyard. They were coloring with a set of donated colored pencils after breakfast. The smallest child was too short to reach the table, so she sat on her father's lap while he handed her new colors. In the Bible, we read "they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid" (Micah 4:4 NRSV). There are no fig trees at Casa, but I realized that perhaps this glimpse of a peaceful morning was exactly what the prophet was talking about when he wrote this. No one shall make them afraid. May it be so.



# Get Involved



## Convivio

Join us from 6-8pm on the last Sunday of each month for a celebration of the Casa Marianella community at large. Mingle with current and former residents, staff, board members, and neighbors while enjoying tasty food and live music from around the world. All are welcome!!

## Volunteer

Volunteers are essential to the survival of Casa. We have lots of different opportunities for all interests. Although Covid-19 has eliminated most on-site volunteer opportunities, it has also created some new ones—particularly for drivers willing to shuttle food to off-site members of the Casa community!

Please contact our volunteer coordinator:  
[volunteer@casamarianella.org](mailto:volunteer@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](http://www.casamarianella.org/blog-page)





**Casa Marianella**  
821 Gunter St.  
Austin, TX 78702



[casamarianella.org](http://casamarianella.org)  
[info@casamarianella.org](mailto:info@casamarianella.org)  
(512)-385-5571

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Prince of Peace Lutheran Church • First English Lutheran Church • Gethsemane Lutheran Church • Islamic Ahlul Bayt Association • University Presbyterian Church  
Unity Church of the Hills

### Key Collaborators

American Gateways • RAICES, Inc • UT Immigration Clinic • Caritas of Austin • Catholic Charities of Central Texas • Amplify Austin • Refugee Services of Texas  
Austin Yellow Bike Project • Equal Justice Center • Justice for Our Neighbors • CommUnity Care Clinics • Workers Defense Project • Capital Area Counseling  
Center for Survivors of Torture • Capital Area Metro Transit • Ghisallo Cycling Initiative • Capital Area Food Bank • Keep Austin Housed  
Literacy Coalition of Central Texas • Jesuit Volunteer Corps • Posada Providencia: San Benito, TX • Freedom House: Detroit, MI • DASH: Ft. Worth, TX  
Casa Juan Diego: Houston, TX • Annunciation House: El Paso, TX • Interfaith Welcome Coalition: San Antonio, TX • Vive: Buffalo, NY  
Welcome Network: Chicagoland, IL • Rochester Refugee Resettlement: Rochester, NY • Home is Here: New Orleans, LA