

2025



*Casa Marianella
Posada Esperanza
Abri Lumiere
- since 1986 -*

Shelter and support for migrants



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Mission Statement

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

Cover art and all other drawings,
courtesy of Casa Marianella resident
Roxana Rodriguez Pernia of Venezuela.



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KP

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Introduction

Casa Marianella

Jennifer Long

Since the end of World War II the United States has offered asylum to desperate people coming to our borders seeking safety. At Casa Marianella we feel so proud to be part of the effort to allay some of the suffering in the world. During World War II some people who tried to come to the US were returned to deadly situations. The US came out of the war recognizing our obligation to do our part to make space for people fleeing for their lives. After all, many of our ancestors came the same way. Everyone on the planet has a human right to safety. At Casa Marianella we are able to help 150 people a night in 12 houses to get access to medical care, legal services, ESL classes, and ultimately a stable place to live. Those people come from all over the world and their stories of persecution make us grateful every day to be able to serve them. It's so good to be in the City of Austin, which has supported Casa Marianella since the beginning in 1986. We have also benefited from so much community support. Thank you all so much for your help with our work.



Abri Lumiere

Spencer Foster

Every Wednesday night, the staff and residents of Abri Lumiere have a house meeting at the bright red and yellow picnic tables in front of the shelter. Our agenda items range from resolving minor disputes about cleaning a small house that's shared by way too many people, to laughing about absurd would-you-rather icebreakers. The darker discussions can pivot from haunting memories of residents' lives left behind to lamenting present encounters with racism and facing the looming fear of unjust deportation and family separation. Warsan Shire writes in her poem "Home" about asylum seekers that "no one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land." Similarly, Abri Lumiere's families would not lightly undertake the dangerous journey, crossing continents and jungles by foot towards this foreign country called the United States, if they had better options.

As the number of families with children migrating to the US via the southern border has proportionally increased over the years, the need has grown for resettling services like Casa Marianella that specifically consider the unique experiences of asylum-seekers. The need has also exploded for temporary shelters like Abri Lumiere for families with male adults who cannot be served by shelters specifically for women and children. We've been honored to fill this vital niche in the landscape of social services in Austin for over 2 years now, and we look forward to many more years of successful move out stories and house meetings. Thank you to all our supporters who make this work possible!



Posada Esperanza

Patti McCabe

Casa Marianella's Posada Esperanza campus serves women and children who have traveled to Austin from myriad countries across the Americas and Africa and then found themselves in a housing crisis in Austin. Posada Esperanza promotes self-sufficiency by offering these women and their families a temporary home and supportive services to place children in school, find jobs, complete paperwork, and adjust to living in a new culture after often-traumatic journeys.

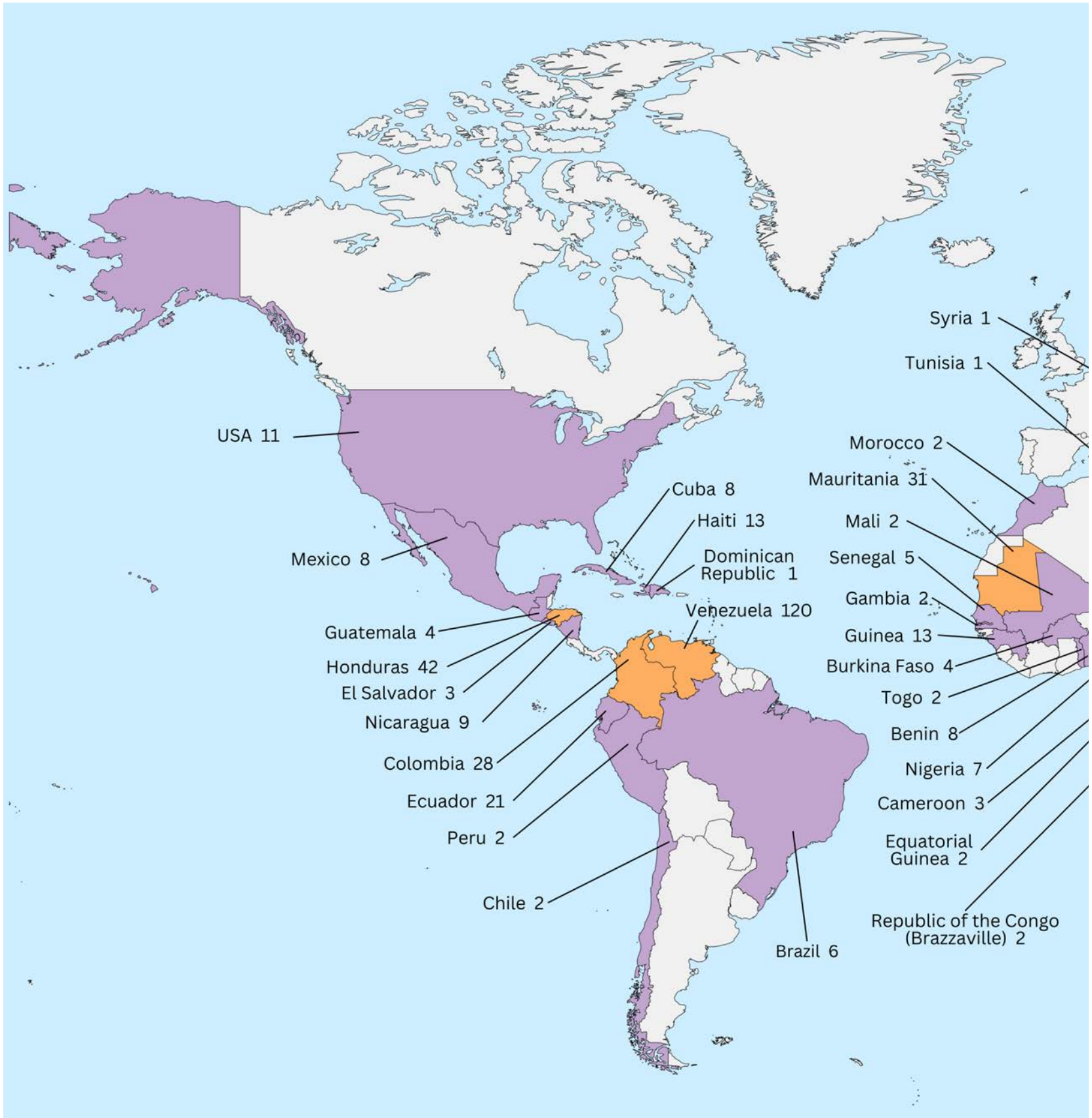
Low Design Office Architecture and FORGE Landscape Architecture have designed a new community dwelling, garden, and playscape for Posada Esperanza. LowDO has worked inclusively with Casa staff and residents to design the new building, beginning with a series of on-site engagement workshops in which visual cards and translators helped facilitate conversations between the design team and residents about their experiences and priorities. This participatory process has informed the development of all aspects of the design.

The project has taken shape as a structure and landscape that center much-needed shared gathering space. Modest bedrooms upstairs will increase capacity at Posada, while an adaptable "great room" below will connect directly to an outdoor covered porch and landscape, maximizing opportunities for gathering and connecting while providing flexible areas for services and tutoring.

The project aims to break ground in early 2025. Construction will be completely supported by donations. All are invited to help Casa Marianella meet our remaining fundraising goals to ensure the full design can be realized, helping to provide a foundation of safety and stability upon which new residents can build productive futures in Austin.



The Year in Numbers



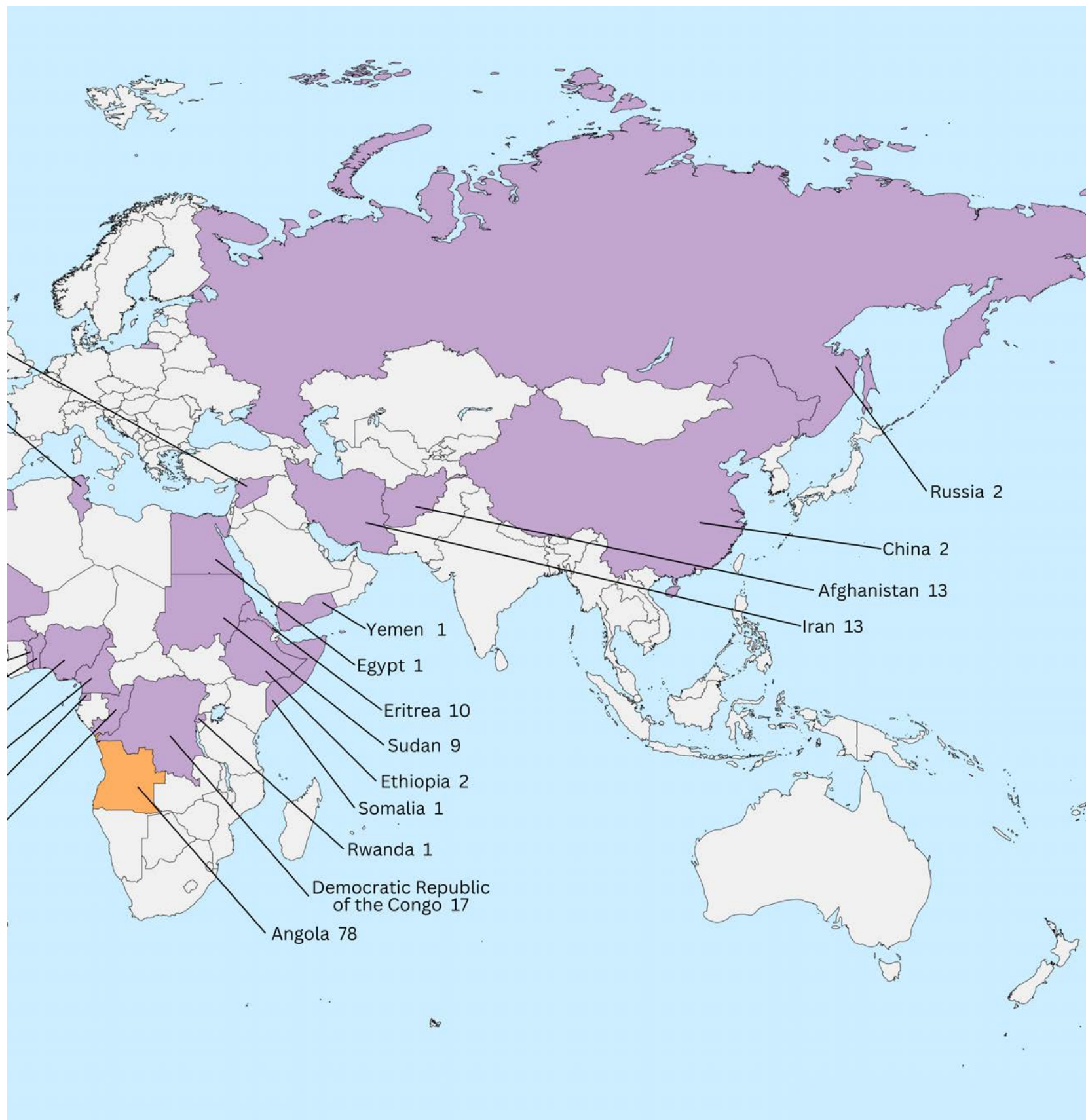
We housed 513 individual residents from 43 countries over the last year:

Casa Marianella—279

Posada Esperanza—114

Abri Lumiere—120

The five most represented countries in our shelters (highlighted in orange) were
Angola, Colombia, Honduras, Mauritania, and Venezuela.



Abri Lumiere Turns Two

Spencer Foster

Abri Lumiere celebrated its 2-year anniversary in July with a big party!

Everyone chipped in and spent the whole day preparing for a feast. Our residents got up bright and early to cook their favorite dishes from each of their home countries with ingredients provided by local community partners. A staff member who moonlights as a professional DJ got everybody dancing. Volunteers set up tables and chairs and then played soccer and musical chairs with the kids. A local shaved ice truck set up in front of the house and donated snow cones. Amy's ice cream donated a giant box of vanilla. Even previous Abri residents even joined and brought along their friends and family members as well as elaborately decorated home-made cakes. It was a joy to listen to inspirational success stories from former clients and for current residents to hear their words of encouragement.



Abri Lumiere's 2nd birthday party was an excellent opportunity to acknowledge and appreciate the most important part of work: community found in the simple joys that make us all human, regardless of where we come from. We can't wait for Abri Lumiere to turn 3!





Housing Update

Laura Smith

When people come to Casa Marianella, many have experienced homelessness for months or years, journeying from their countries of origin with sporadic shelter and facing constant insecurity. Casa Marianella provides a place to rest and regroup, reunite with friends from the journey, and build a new global community. The path to self-sufficiency also begins immediately and every day, we witness residents' heroic drive to work hard as they navigate new lives and legal processes.

While Austin offers new immigrants a welcoming environment with supportive work opportunities and healthcare, the Casa Housing Program serves to bridge the gap between housing needs and challenges. Our unique program offers temporary housing for new immigrants as they stabilize their income and secure IDs, credit, and income verification. With flexible leases, clients gain independence and begin overcoming barriers to obtaining their own housing.

This level of support is made possible by Austin's Rapid Rehousing grant, which goes towards moving costs and emergency assistance. Over 80% of our clients who receive this funding secure and remain in stable housing after their first year in Austin. Local donor support also enables us to provide quality furniture and home goods, creating a true sense of home. We are grateful to play a part in this crucial step toward stability, and we value Austin's welcoming embrace as a safety net for immigrants starting anew.



Posada Family Spotlight: Moving On, Moving Up

Karen Ardila



Let's take a moment to honor two remarkable families whose strength and courage transformed their lives.

First, we celebrate a family from Venezuela—Francisco, Ismerlys, and their three spirited children—who left behind everything they knew, facing the immense challenge of starting over.

They arrived here with dreams but quickly encountered the harsh realities of navigating an unfamiliar land. Living in separate shelters tested their resilience, yet they held onto hope and each other. With unwavering determination, they took their first steps into the job market, ready to rebuild and find a path forward.

Our second story features a family from Colombia: Alexander, Ana Sofia, their two children, and their cousin. Like their Venezuelan neighbors, they grappled with the difficulties of shelter life and the weight of separation. But rather than letting these hardships break them, they embraced the opportunity to work, learn, and grow stronger together in this new country.

Today, both families are thriving in homes of their own, surrounded by love and a sense of belonging. Their stories remind us that the journey of an immigrant is often filled with sacrifice, struggle, courage, and unity, and can lead to new beginnings filled with joy and stability.

Here's to family, resilience, and the incredible power of hope.



Home is Here: A Concert for Casa Marianella

Casa Marianella's Home is Here benefit concert at ACL Live was a huge success! In total, we raised **\$60,000** to build a new building and communal space at the Posada Esperanza campus.

We are extremely grateful to our community for coming out to listen and dance to amazing music while supporting the future of our work. Thank you to the incredibly talented lineup of musicians who performed: Carrie Rodriguez, Fastball, Britt Daniel from Spoon, Adrian Quesada, Jon Muq, Casa board member Tekle Mezghebe Teklehaymanot, Patty Griffin, David Pulkingham, Kevin Russell, and Money Chica.

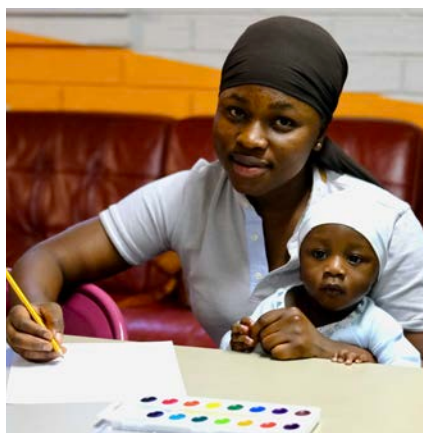


ESL Classes

KP

We love our volunteer English/ESL teachers! Our beloved adult ESL teachers draw on their creativity and flexibility to create engaging, practical, custom lessons that help our residents improve their English skills and cultural knowledge as well as build community and confidence. Additionally, we host guest presenters on a variety of important topics and fun activities.

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 Gunter St adult shelter classes are Monday through Thursday, 7:30-9:00 PM. This past year we've had more than 80 teachers who have volunteered over 4,000 hours. Volunteer teachers also lead classes at Posada Esperanza, Abri Lumiere, and Casa Karibu.



Casa Marianella Immigration Legal Services

Olivia Petipas

Casa Marianella's legal clinic, Casa Marianella Immigration Legal Services (CMILS), exists to provide free *pro se* immigration legal services to residents across our shelter network.

We have assisted many individuals with various matters, such as Asylum, Withholding of Removal and Convention Against Torture, Temporary Protective Status, and applications for work permits in addition to weekly Know Your Rights presentations and open clinic hours.

In 2024, CMILS strategically shifted its services from providing legal representation to a *pro se* model. CMILS became a Recognized Organization through the Department of Justice, enabling Casa Marianella to have Accredited Representatives provide services to our community. We thank our partner, American Gateways, for their crucial support during our transition and assistance to our program.



Around the World in “Happy Birthday”

Jazmin Banos-Nava

For many immigrant families, planning a joyful birthday celebration can feel out of reach. At Posada Esperanza, we want to make sure that every child feels special on their birthdays and that their parents can celebrate without feeling the burden of being unable to buy them cakes and presents.

This is made possible thanks to our partnership with BakeAWish, an Austin non-profit that delivers cakes made by volunteers, and the Birthday Project, a nationwide organization that delivers birthday gifts for children. Children get to request a cake design, which can range from superheroes to flowers, and a gift they really want for their birthday, whether it's a cute stuffed bear or a cool remote controlled toy car.

While parents may come from different backgrounds and cultures, they all come together to celebrate and ensure the kids at Posada have the best night ever. Every birthday is filled with claps, cheers, and Happy Birthday being sung in many different languages!





Volunteer Spotlight: ESL Tutoring at Posada

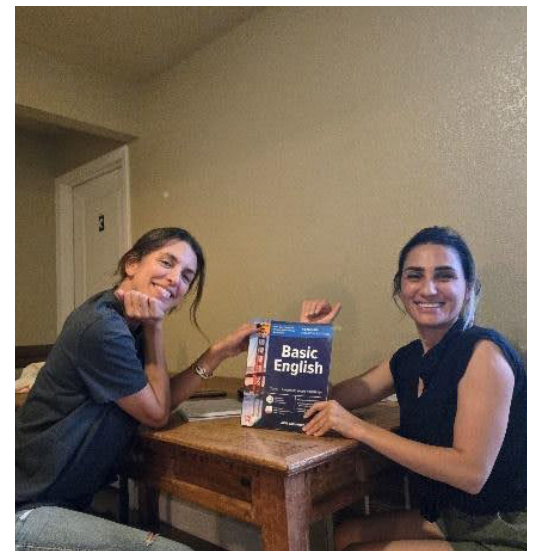
Benny Rangell

Thanks to our awesome volunteers, English learning at the woman and children's shelter marches on!



Ej (left) is an AISD High School Student and fits English tutoring in between his own classes and training for varsity soccer. Comfortable working in English or Spanish, no amount of math problems or spelling exercises can phase him.

Ellie (right) is an interior designer by day, but by night, she shoulders the heavy load of breaking down English phrases and verb conjugations with our residents. A native Austinite, Ellie is happy to support the diverse members of her community through language learning.



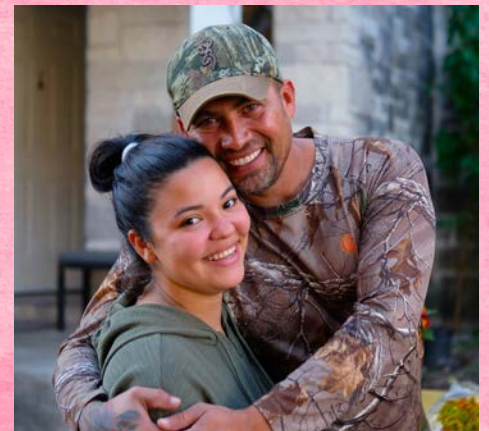
Bike Program

Julian Root

A bicycle is a universal symbol of freedom and self-sufficiency. Unburdened by bureaucratic gatekeeping and unaffected by legislative restriction, there is arguably no item more immediately empowering to any citizen of the world. For many recently arrived immigrants, the only obstacle is obtaining a bicycle in good operating condition.

Over the past five years, I have attempted to get Casa residents on bikes by nurturing a strong relationship with the Austin Yellow Bike Project (recipients of our 2023 Ed Wendler Award for service to the immigrant community), wherein they donate bicycles to us, which we then repair and distribute to our residents, along with a lock.

I'd be remiss in not acknowledging the massive debt of gratitude I have to the Yellow Bike Project as well as two dedicated mechanics - Justin and Petr - for their assistance in keeping this program going. We're well on track to put another 200-250 bicycles in the hands of recently arrived immigrants in Austin. Thank you!



Benefits Clinic

Gabriel Salgado and Rosalinda Palomo Ramos

The Benefits Clinic assists residents of Casa Marianella along with anyone from the greater community in applying for, referring to, and navigating medical, state, or other benefits programs in the Austin area. These range from regional medical insurance programs to childcare services to state benefits like SNAP and Medicaid. We refer people to housing and legal services and explain how to find ESL classes, pregnancy care, and other resources of interest. People can come to us when they require assistance with making medical appointments, responding to medical bills, or understanding benefits mail. We serve over 1,000 different people each year, hundreds of whom are receiving services from our clinic for the first time. Our services are provided in a walk-in format.

We are located in the orange house, Casa Poeta, 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 and our email address is benefits@casamarianella.org.



Support Letters

Makenna Brandt and Paulina Licon

The Support Letters team continues to support thousands of people in immigration detention across the country. While the majority of our correspondence is with people detained in Texas, Colorado, and Louisiana, we sponsor people from detention centers everywhere. As geopolitical conflict and natural disasters arise all over the globe, the nationalities of people seeking refuge in the United States—and at Casa Marianella—change every year. In 2024, the majority of people we sponsored came from Morocco, Russia, Venezuela, and Colombia.

Each week, through emails, letters, and phone calls, our team witnesses the violence of the immigration detention system. Our clients face seemingly endless barriers in obtaining release along with racism, homophobia, and transphobia while detained by ICE. Lives continue to be lost in detention with no repercussions. We are forced to recognize that the danger from which migrants are seeking refuge is something they must face here in the US.

As our political landscape is marred by more and more uncertainty and fear, and migrants trapped in our immigration system bear the brunt of this, the Support Letters team is committed to helping our clients maintain their dignity, autonomy, and one day, their freedom. We recognize that our role is small in the journey of our clients, yet we are grateful to be the first step in welcoming them to Casa Marianella.

Volunteer Spotlight: Abri's Heart

Mary Richardson-Perez

We are incredibly grateful for the volunteers at Abri Lumiere. They are vital to our shelter operations, and in assisting Abri families in a wide variety of ways. We strive to create a sense of normalcy and fun-filled activities for the children at Abri Lumiere. Volunteers are a huge part of making this happen. Every week they come to the shelter to offer art classes, after-school tutoring and drum circle sessions. They also help us coordinate various events, such as our Fall Fest Day. Alongside this we have volunteers who assist the adults by offering ESL classes, rides to doctor's appointments and assistance with job applications. Lastly, the newly painted bathroom walls, mulched front yard, newly built backyard shed, and various other shelter additions and repairs are all thanks to our amazing volunteers!



In Memoriam

Ricardo Macias

June 11, 1951 - January 31, 2025

A beloved member of the Casa family for a decade, Ricardo poured his heart and soul into keeping the outside spaces around our adult shelter looking spotless. He wielded his leaf blower relentlessly and organized trash and recycling bins in rain or shine, hot or cold, to help us meet our ultimate goal: to be a safe and welcoming home for migrants.

Ricardo lives on in the memories of countless Casa Marianella staff members, volunteers, and residents.

Que descanse en paz, Don Ricardo.



Get Involved

Convivio

Join us at Casa Marianella from 6-8pm on the last Sunday of each month for delicious food, live music, and community. November and December Convivios fall on Thanksgiving and Christmas. *All are welcome!*

Volunteer

Volunteers are at the heart of Casa's success. We have many different opportunities at each of our shelters for all interests. Please contact our volunteer coordinators at the **adult shelter**: volunteer@casamarianella.org, the **women and children's shelter**: posadaesperanza@casamarianella.org, or the **family shelter**: abrilumiere@casamarianella.org.

Social Media

Follow us @CasaMarianella on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter for updates on events, donation needs, and how you can get involved. We also have a blog where we post about specific issues and events related to Casa: www.casamarianella.org/blog-page.



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Key Collaborators

American Gateways • RAICES, Inc • UT Immigration Clinic • Catholic Charities of Central Texas • Amplify Austin • Austin Yellow Bike Project • Equal Justice Center • Justice for Our Neighbors • CommUnity Care Clinics • Workers Defense Project • Center for Survivors of Torture • Capital Area Metro Transit • Ghisallo Cycling Initiative • Capital Area Food Bank • 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 • Rochester Refugee Resettlement: Rochester, NY • Home is Here: New Orleans, LA • Welcome Center: Chicagoland • Foundation Communities