

CASA MARIANELLA
POSADA ESPERANZA
ABRI LUMIERE



SINCE 1986

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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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Patti McCabe, Posada Esperanza

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Case Manager

West Cosgrove

Bike Program

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Benefits Clinic Coordinators

Gabriel Salgado

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Posada Esperanza Family

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Sarah Gallitre

Abri Lumiere Family

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Margo Johnson

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Natalia Drelichman

Sarah Lopez

Tekle Mezgebe



Introduction

Casa Marianella

Jennifer Long

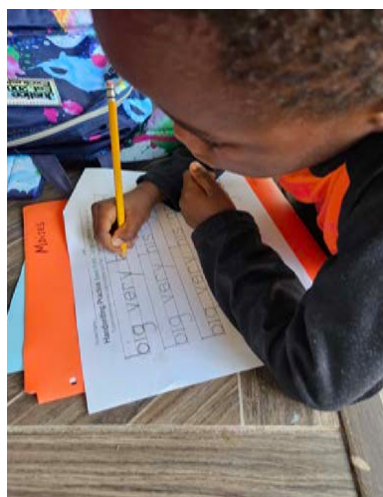
In 2023 Casa Marianella has resettled 573 people from over 54 countries. All of Casa's residents came to the US border seeking safety. Although they are legally allowed to be in the US to obtain asylum, they are not given food, shelter, legal services, or a work permit as they try to support themselves and navigate a complex legal system. Casa residents live with us for 3 months on average and during that time they have access to medical care, legal services, and ESL classes. We can refer them to apartments when they move out. Casa's biggest challenge is that there is not a network of similar houses in every city in the United States. In fact, there is a small handful of groups trying to provide support to our neighbors in need. We are grateful for the support of the Austin community, both financially and with volunteer hours. We continue to hope for more partners to back us up in this work.



Posada Esperanza

Patti McCabe

This year we have been receiving many visits from women who used to stay at Posada Esperanza. They are coming to enjoy nostalgia from the enjoyable and safe moments they spent at Posada. They reminisce on how impactful it was for them to receive an open welcome at such a difficult moment in their lives. And they come to share and celebrate that they now feel stable and well. For those who moved out recently, they know where to go to find their good friends and hold the toddlers who miss them and call them Auntie. For those who moved out a while ago, they go around to introduce themselves to the new families, offering friendship and some words of advice. And many of the women are coming back to help. When they moved out of the shelter they knew that as soon as they could, they would like to contribute to the lives of the new families coming to Posada Esperanza. They are coming now with donations of food and clothing. They are coming with contacts for new jobs. And for those who now have a car they are offering rides to the store, school, or clinic. The lives of the families staying in the shelter are enriched by the assistance, friendship, and contributions of the families who have stayed with us before. Gracias! Obrigada! Merci! Thank you!





Abri Lumiere

Sarah Gallitre

My favorite hour of the day at our family shelter “Abri Lumiere” is seeing the kids from all of our families get dropped off by the school bus in the afternoon, run into our backyard to take turns on the swing set, play together speaking three or four different languages, coming from so many different stories, making friends beyond everything.



In July, we celebrated the first anniversary of our new family shelter “Abri Lumiere” – which stands for “shelter of light” in French. Abri Lumiere was created to receive two-parent families as well as single dads and other family structures with a male adult who previously had nowhere to go - the main shelter at Casa Marianella being reserved for adults and Posada Esperanza being reserved for women and children. Ever since we’ve opened our doors, our shelter has been full. In 2023, we received 30 families from 16 different countries and we helped enroll 39 kids in school.

We are incredibly grateful for all of our supporters, volunteers, and donors who are making our work possible every day: thank you for helping families build themselves the safe and happy new life they deserve in the US.



CASA MARIANELLA 2023

Total Residents Served:

Casa Marianella 311
Posada Esperanza 151
Abri Lumiere 111

We housed 573 people from
54 countries this past year.







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.

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.

Travis County Women Lawyers' Foundation, Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati, Baker Botts LLP, Hines & Leigh, P.C., Paul Parsons, P.C.



BAKER BOTTS

Hines & Leigh
IMMIGRATION ATTORNEYS

Support Letters

Katherine Tallman, Makenna Brandt, and Olivia Amore Petipas

This year the support letters team has maintained correspondence with thousands of people in detention nationwide as well as their loved ones around the globe. The majority of people we hear from are detained in facilities in Texas, Louisiana, and California, but we communicate with people detained in 85 different locations nationwide. While a large portion of the people we support with a sponsorship letter are from the Americas, there are also a considerable number of people from countries such as Angola, Russia, Turkey, Mauritania, and Senegal.

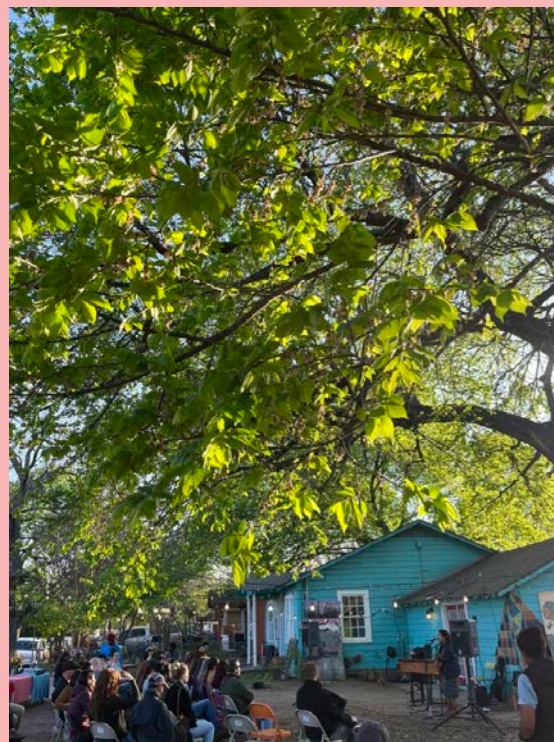
The support letters program started in 2013 with just one employee communicating with a few people in detention. With the expansion of immigrant detention, we found it necessary to broaden our support services to detained people. Our team coordinates with other non-profit organizations and grassroots communities for legal assistance, bond payment, and post-release transportation. In a given week, we receive over 200 letters from people in detention centers and 1,000 calls.

Through our communication with those detained, we are met with the harsh reality of the uncertainty, confusion, and inexplicably horrendous conditions that our clients are met with upon entering ICE's detention complex. Many battle language and even literacy barriers as they begin their legal processes. There are seemingly endless obstacles in obtaining their release from detention and path to asylum. Other folks comment on the unsanitary living conditions of the detention facilities, and the racism, homophobia, and transphobia they suffer while detained, many of whom are fleeing the same discrimination in their home countries. It is hard not to share the same anxiety and desperation when reading someone's letter or speaking with them over the phone.

Lives continue to be lost while in ICE custody, yet detention continues to expand. There are nearly 40,000 people in immigrant detention. The amount of immigrants in detention has doubled in the past three years. We are forced to recognize that the danger to migrants seeking refuge in our country is not only something that they are attempting to escape in their own countries, or must face during their journey to the United States, but continues right here at home.

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

We continue to hope for a day when a program such as ours is no longer necessary, and migrants are not detained upon arrival, but instead granted the opportunity to pursue their cases while living in community across the country.



Housing Report

Laura Smith

When people come to Casa, they have often been living in a status that would be labeled 'homeless' for many months or years.

They left the dangers, exigencies and familiarities of their countries of origin and former lives. Their shelter along this often risky route has been unreliable, meager or non-existent.

At our shelter, they are still technically classified as homeless. But many finally feel like they are Home. They reunite with friends they met on the way to the US or in detention. They make new friends from around the world.

But their journey of becoming "housed" is just beginning. Casa is a place to land and regroup, yet the turnaround to living independently and self-sufficiently begins for most almost as soon as they arrive here. As staff, we daily witness our residents' heroic motivation to hustle and work even as they adapt to a new life and proceed through their legal process.

Austin is amenable to new immigrants in many ways. With plentiful opportunities to work in hospitality and construction as well as a decent indigent healthcare program and a relative atmosphere of societal support and acceptance, Austin can be a good place to launch a new life in a new country.

Housing in Austin, though, continues to present challenges. Most of Casa's newly-arrived clients fall into the category of "extremely low-income" individuals, defined as those making 30% or below Austin's median family income.

Over the past several years, the adult shelter has developed a unique housing program to bridge the gap. The goal of the Casa Housing Program is to provide temporary housing for newly-arrived immigrants who are able to pay monthly rent and bills while they obtain identification documents, credit history, and income verification to be able to qualify to rent their own housing.

For many shelter residents, moving into our shared program apartments allows them to continue to stabilize their income and status in the US and fosters a greater Casa community. With at-will leases, our clients are able to have a measure of self-sufficiency and to overcome some of the barriers they would initially face in getting an apartment of their own.

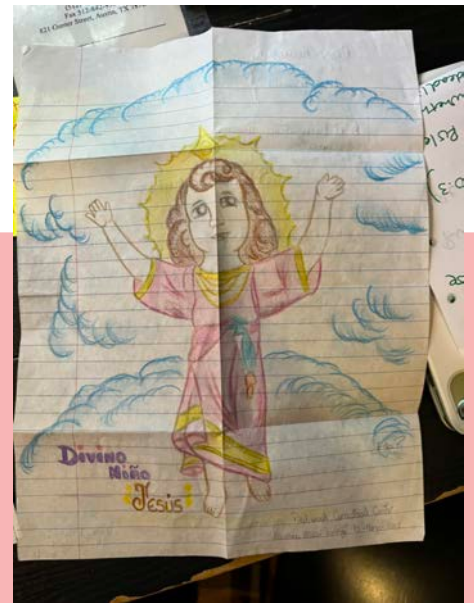
Austin's Rapid Rehousing grant helps people experiencing homelessness get into safe and sustainable housing, by covering the upfront costs of moving as well as occasionally spotting residents during the vagaries of employment or emergencies in their first year of being housed.

Casa Marianella has a stellar record of 80% or more of our Rapid Rehousing recipients being consistently in stable housing for their first vulnerable year of transitioning out of Casa shelter.

Our informal support from local donors, as always, helps us to provide quality furniture and home goods.

We are grateful for the opportunity to be part of the crucial and tender step in people's lives of getting and staying housed in Austin. We are grateful that our civic neighborhood is a safety net and welcoming place for immigrants.







English Class

ESL Coordinator

Our ESL classes build community & English skills

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, practical knowledge for life in the US, 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.



Ed Wendler Award for Outstanding Service to the Immigrant Community

The 2023 Ed Wendler Award went to the Louisiana Advocates for Immigrants in Detention (LaAid). LaAid has provided incredible service to asylum seekers who are released suddenly from detention in rural areas of Louisiana. LaAid provides temporary housing and arranges travel to the asylum seeker's destination. This group's work has helped Casa Marianella directly by managing the very challenging transfer from the rural detention center in Louisiana to Casa Marianella in Austin. We are incredibly grateful for their hard work and wonderful service! Other Ed Wendler Award winners include: Edna Yang and American Gateways, Denise Gilman and the UT Immigration Clinic, Celia VandeGraaf and the Center for Survivors of Torture, the Worker's Defense Project, Barbara Hines, Bishop John McCarthy, Bob Libal and Grassroots Leadership, Jonathan Ryan and RAICES, Austin City Council, Hospice Austin, Refugee Services of Austin, Nicholas Yagoda and CommU-nity City of Austin, and the Karnes Pro Bono Project.



Bicycle Program

Julian Root

For the last several years, Casa Marianella's bike program has been a resource to avail refurbished bicycles to residents at no cost but the patience to wait and the promise to lock the bike, once they finally have it.

In its first year of operation after opening in April 2022, Casa's bike shop—"El Tallercito"—cranked out over 150 bicycles for residents, in addition to innumerable on-the-fly repair jobs. We operate out of a 7' by 14' enclosed trailer on Casa property, which has slowly taken the form of a bicycle repair shop over the last year and a half. Thanks to the generous donation which enabled the purchase of the trailer and many of the supplies contained within, as well as the evergreen support of Austin's Yellow Bike Project—from whom the majority of our bicycles are donated—the bike program continues to thrive.



The Benefits Clinic

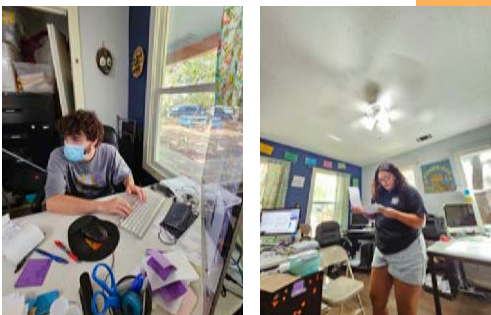
Gabriel Salgado, Gabriela Nelson, Jean Ulacio, Jessica Morales-Lopez, and Rosalinda Palomo Ramos

The Benefits Clinic assists both residents of Casa Marianella and 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 service and to state benefits like SNAP (food stamps) and Medicaid. We will also refer people to housing and legal services, how to find ESL classes, pregnancy care, and other resources they are interested in. People can come to us when they require assistance with making medical appointments, responding to medical bills, or understanding benefits mail. We now serve over 1,000 different people each year, including hundreds for whom it's their first time receiving services from the clinic. 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

Our email address is benefits@casamarianella.org



Delivering Comfort: Bridging Cultures Through Food Delivery

Ellie Petri

For Posada Esperanza residents, food is a form of nourishment and a source of comfort. In a foreign environment, the taste of one's favorite dish provides a sense of normalcy and familiarity. This feeling of home is especially important for immigrants who have left their native countries searching for a better life. Food not only brings them a connection to their past but also a sense of belonging, a realization that there is hope for the future.

The ingredients for these comfort meals would not be accessible without the generosity of organizations and volunteers who contribute their time and resources to ensuring our pantries and refrigerators remain stocked. In particular, we are incredibly grateful for Fred and Gloria from Keep Austin Fed, who drop off food donations every week.

After successful careers, Fred and Gloria decided to retire and travel the world together. When asked what made them volunteer, Gloria said:

"Travel makes you see the world through the eyes of other cultures. America is one of the richest countries in the world. In many ways, we don't use our resources wisely. Food waste is one of those areas... We saw that by volunteering with Keep Austin Fed, we could have an impact on the residents' lives."

And an impact they make. For the last three years, Fred and Gloria have been driving to Trader Joe's every Wednesday to pick up fresh groceries that would otherwise be discarded and deliver them to Posada Esperanza. Residents, especially the children, are always excited and eager to help bring the groceries inside. "It is always memorable to hear the happy chatter of the children telling us, in their language, which of the fruit is their favorite," said Fred and Gloria.

Gloria and Fred from Keep Austin Fed are examples of selflessness and community making a difference. In a world often marked by divisions, the simple act of delivering and sharing food can bridge gaps and cultivate understanding, reminding us of the potential for positive change when we come together as a community.



Thrilling Times at The Thinkery

Darby Duncan

This summer as the Abri children awaited their first-ever school year in the United States they had the opportunity to visit the Thinkery Children's Museum. The Thinkery provided the children with free hands-on interactive STEAM exhibits and programs. This was a wonderful opportunity for the kids to paint, play in water stations, and learn about abstract forces such as gravity and momentum. Everyone was so pleased with their experience on this outing that many asked if we would be returning the next day!



Untitled

Sultan, Casa Marianella Resident

Like me my heart wanted you all the night.
Was knocking on the door all the night. _____
Tears were like voiceless prayers that Allah heard.
All alone, I wanted you oh lover all the night. _____
I cried like the rain, drop by drop for you.
Like rain drops o spring, I wanted you all the night. _____
I cursed myself very much.
Death you didn't come, I wanted you all the night.
My (Sultan) where have you been that
you weren't here?
My heart's broken water pot, I wanted you all the night.



We human beings are a migratory species

West Cosgrove

We human beings are a migratory species.

Groups of modern humans, *Homo sapiens*, began their migration out of Africa some 60,000 years ago.

Ever since humans have been on the move. Even today, three percent of the world's population, at least 258 million people, are seeking a better life beyond their place of birth.

Some people can choose to move. But hundreds of millions of migrants and refugees are forced to move. People move to escape drought and floods, hunger, poverty, war, and other human rights violations.

Climate change is also a driver of human migration that many people expect will dwarf all others in its impact.

The United States is a nation of immigrants, but we still have no idea how to deal with new immigrants. I would suggest that the US has no immigration policy. Instead, we have an enforcement-only approach to dealing with migrants.

The number of people fleeing for their lives and seeking to enter the United States is increasing beyond the capacity of our cities and social service agency's ability to deal with everyone. Conversations in Washington DC, including in the White House, continue to focus on building more walls, mistakenly believing that any barrier will stop a person threatened with death from seeking life.

The first step in resolving our problems with immigration is to recognize and accept that we humans are indeed a migrant species. We have been such from the beginning of human existence. Solutions being offered by folks like Texas Governor Abbott, are not only cruel and inhumane, but will never work. You could say that migrating to seek a better life is in our DNA. It is who we are. It is what we do.

For thousands of people, Casa Marianella is a refuge in the storm. People leave their country, their homes, their families, and all that they know and love, risking their lives, making it across borders, and spending months in detention centers (nearly 40,000 people are currently held in detention), to live. To live the life that every human being deserves.





Empowering Immigrant Communities: Providing Safe and Inclusive Housing

Ellie Petri

Every individual should have access to safe and affordable housing. For our shelter residents, it is one of the many challenges they face on their journey to citizenship. To facilitate the process of finding a place to call home, we strive to provide as many resources as possible. One of those resources is Mandelyn Schubert with Equilibrium Properties.



Mandelyn not only manages many of the properties some of our past residents reside in, but she also goes above and beyond to provide safe and accessible housing. She understands that immigrants often face more than just economic challenges. Additionally, they must overcome cultural, social, and linguistic barriers. When asked about her everyday role as a property manager, she mentioned, “There are the little things that pop up for residents throughout their time with us who are new to the country. I’ve created photo cards for so many things! From how to use a dishwasher to what items go in which trash bin.” Through these thoughtful gestures and acts of kindness, Mandelyn has not only earned the gratitude and admiration of her tenants but has also left a lasting impact on their lives. Martha from Venezuela always tries to thank her with food when she sees her. Ada Maria from Honduras recently called her “mi angel de la guardia,” her guardian angel.

When asked about these moments’ impact on her life, she said, “I lay my head on a pillow of gratitude every night... this has also made me think about what I can do to make a bigger impact. [Equilibrium Properties] future goal is to find a way to offer permanent housing –home purchases – so our tenants can achieve even more.”



Providing housing for immigrant families is more than just a business venture for Mandelyn; it’s a testament to her empathy and compassion. As a result of her actions, newcomers can build successful lives in their new homes. Her work exemplifies the power of individuals to make a meaningful difference in the lives of newcomers, ensuring that every person, regardless of their background, can find a place to call home and thrive in their new community.

Resident Spotlight

Michael Hall

Tekle Mezghebe was 32 when he arrived at Casa in October 2019 after fleeing his home in Eritrea, which is also home of one of the most repressive governments in the world. Tekle, a well-known singer, musician, TV host, and anti-government activist, had fled the year before, urged to leave by his wife Winta, with whom he had two daughters. “Your life is in danger,” Winta said, after he had mocked the Eritrean dictator in a widely publicized interview. Tekle made it to California and then to a detention center in Livingston, Texas, where he was granted asylum. He heard about Casa, wrote a letter, and was invited to come live there. At Casa, Tekle, with his bright smile and genial personality, became a favorite of staff and other residents—and something of a celebrity to fellow Eritreans, who saw him as a hero for fighting against the government. Ever since he arrived, Tekle sought permission to bring his wife and daughters to the U.S.—and Austin. Winta and the girls were able to flee to Italy in 2021, and he visited them in a small town in the north and returned to Austin. Nine months later he had a new daughter, Mielahier, and while the family was approved for a visa in 2023, it didn’t include the baby, for whom Tekle applied for humanitarian parole. Finally, in late January of this year, the visa was approved for Mielahier, and Tekle and his wife and daughters were reunited.

Tekle has stayed busy in the U.S., playing music as well as writing and recording songs. He is still well-known back in Eritrea, and last year he was invited to be one of the main on-screen interviewers in a documentary on Negash Tekie, a famed ‘60s Eritrean singer. In 2022, Tekle was invited to be on the Casa board of directors, where he has brought his experience as a refugee as well as a community leader. Tekle stays connected to Austin by working as a delivery driver for a homeless shelter, where he transports people to doctor’s appointments. Tekle loves his job and sees himself in the people he helps—many of them professionals like himself who have found themselves living in hard times. “It’s not their decision to be homeless,” he says.



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

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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