

Housing a Migrant Family



Family Alicia has worked with since 12/23

at Second Unitarian Church

Congregational Meeting

March 30, 2025

Chicago Migrant History: 2022 – 2024

Starting in August 31, 2022, the State of Texas began busing asylum seekers through private charter buses to Chicago at regular intervals. Texas officials dispatched buses full of migrants to Chicago, Washington D.C., and New York City. While most asylum seekers are from Venezuela, individuals and families are also from all over the world, including countries from Africa, Europe, and the Middle East.

The City of Chicago also saw an increase in asylum seekers arriving through other modes of transportation, often without resources. NGOs and local governments along the border purchased airline or bus tickets to other cities like Chicago without any coordination. Since August 2022, the city has shouldered the responsibility of caring for more than 50,000 men, women, and children.

As a Welcoming City, Chicago has a responsibility to provide access to shelter, food, and medical care to everyone regardless of immigration status. Many of our new arrivals walked hundreds of miles, navigating great danger through multiple countries, in pursuit of safety and opportunity in the United States. Chicago is committed to assisting each family and individual, providing human services with respect and dignity. (City of Chicago Welcoming City website)

When the migrants first arrived, they had nowhere to go, so they were sent to police stations all over the city to sleep on the floors. As the city worked to open New Arrivals shelters, they slowly started clearing out the police stations until they were fully cleared out in December 2023. The city opened about 27 new shelters all over the city to house over 15,000 migrants. The shelters were very crowded and there were many challenges with the operations of these shelters. By the spring of 2024, the city started giving migrants a 60-day time limit in these shelters as Chicago moved to shut down the New Arrivals shelter program. Starting in October 2024 the city transitioned to the new One System Initiative which merged the New Arrivals shelter system into the already existing shelter system for unhoused Chicagoans.

To help with the temporary housing crisis, some faith-based initiatives stepped in to help churches house migrants. The Unity Initiative was a partnership between the city and a group of churches. The Faith Community Initiative, which has been around for years, began working with more churches to help them house new arrivals as well. Thousands of migrants were scrambling for housing once their stay at the shelters ran out. Finding an apartment was nearly impossible for most of them since they had to wait many months before getting work permits so they could make enough money to pay housing costs. They also had no credit histories or background checks that were required by most apartment leasing companies. It soon became apparent that housing was the number one need for the tens of thousands of Chicago's new arrivals.

Current Climate: 2025

With the outcome of the November 2024 election, it became clear that things were about to get much worse for immigrants, migrants and refugees in the United States. As soon as the new administration began work in January 2025, dozens of executive orders were issued to cancel programs that helped our new neighbors. Not only were migrants forbidden from entering the country legally as refugees or through one of the legal pathways for migrants, but the administration also began taking away the legal status of many who had already arrived and went through the required process to gain Temporary Protected Status (TPS). The current administration then began mass deportation efforts. This administration has since stated that anyone who is here undocumented, is now considered a criminal. This means that anyone here without documentation, whether they've been here for 6 months or 6 years is now at risk of deportation, even if they've never committed a crime. They even signed a new law that says even if a person has just been accused of a crime, but never given due process, they can still be deported. This has caused great fear and panic. Our immigrant communities are scared to leave their houses for fear of getting picked up by ICE, which has been happening all over the country.

So now the need is not only just housing, but also safe and supportive housing. **Sanctuary.**

Congregational Accompaniment Project for Asylum Seekers (CAPAS):

Accompaniment as a Response to Injustice

People both within and beyond migrant communities are resisting the ongoing immigration injustice in our country. People of faith are in solidarity with immigrants, demonstrating the interconnected web of life, and upholding the worth and dignity of all. Volunteers have joined border organizations to offer legal information and to staff the short-term shelters. Neighbors and friends have created networks to accompany migrants to immigration hearings, legal and medical appointments, and check-ins with ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement). Interfaith groups are providing rides, translation services, and transitional housing. Community groups are meeting migrants at bus stations with supplies for their journey while others help them find work. No part of this work is too small.

In all forms, accompaniment is an invitation to witness, to listen, and to show up. It is a practice of being human together in the face of dehumanizing systems and circumstances.

Accompaniment is an opportunity to build relationships with those who are most impacted. Many people who engage in accompaniment become deeply transformed and grow more committed to disrupting harmful systems and acting for a more liberated future for all.

(from the CAPAS handbook)

Family Selection and Integration

Based on a tour of the 2U building with Pastor Beth Brown, the head of the Faith Community Initiative, it was decided that Rev. Jason's office would be the best place to house a migrant family. Due to the size of the room and of the church in general, we'll be looking for a family of 3 – 4 people, or even a couple of single adults. As part of the Faith Community Initiative, we will receive assistance in the selection and onboarding of our new family. We'll be looking for folks that are motivated to work and make progress towards finding their own home, without a violent past or current drug use. The Faith Community Initiative will assign us a caseworker who will help make sure the match works for both parties. We will work together to create an agreement that is signed by the family to ensure that everyone is on the same page regarding building usage and safety.

"The Faith Community Initiative empowers migrant families and individuals to stabilize, acclimate, learn, earn, heal, and then thrive. This initiative creates partnerships across and within faith traditions in order to optimize support so that no one faith community is overly burdened. The goal of this initiative is to provide faith communities with the tools and framework to provide housing, support, and accompaniment that can successfully provide our new neighbors with what they need to attain confidence, legal and medical services, education, economic stability, emotional wellness, and empowerment." (for more info, see their website listed under community resources.)

Ongoing Sanctuary Support

The **2U Sanctuary Support team** was created in February to plan for the ongoing support of our housed family. Each member of the current team of 8 has committed to 5 – 10 hours a week of assistance. The areas of service will be led by a service area coordinator with the help of various volunteers, including the dozens of people that are part of our 2U Migrant Assistance Team.

- **Transportation** – Amanda Thompson (if education assistance is not needed) securing monthly CTA passes, assisting with learning to use the CTA, Divvy, rideshare etc, coordinating necessary rides with volunteers to appointments when necessary
- **Housing** – Alicia Obando and Sarah Byrne setting up their room at 2U, assisting with issues of housing at the church, helping to find and move into an apartment
- **English** – Heike Eghardt enrolling the family members in ESL classes and scheduling practice sessions with volunteers
- **Cultural Acclimation** – Kieran Binney help getting them a phone, a State ID, seasonally appropriate clothes, connections with local cultural organizations, finding local community resources

- **Health (Physical and Mental)** – Ashlea Woodley and Janet Scanlon connect to primary care, connect to mental health care, enroll in public benefits
- **Employment and Finances** – Brenna Lemieux and Alicia Obando social security card, Asylum application and work permit, find employment, open bank account, create a budget, ensure monthly stipend from the church
- **Education** – Amanda Thompson enroll children in school and monitor any school issues

Until the 2U shower is installed, the migrant family will be able to shower twice a week at Amanda Thompson’s home near the church. They’ll also be able to shower twice a week at the Broadway United Methodist church down the street. Volunteers have stepped up to take their laundry home once a week for washing.

We do not plan to publicly announce that we are housing migrants, but we are also not hiding the fact that we are doing this. All people/organizations that utilize our church property will be notified that a family is living in the church basement. In talking to other churches, no one has had a decrease in rental income due to housing a migrant family.

Congregational Training

Alicia attended ICE Watch training through Palenque LSNA, which serves Logan Square, Hermosa and Avondale. They agreed to provide KYR (Know Your Rights) and/or ICE watch training to 2U. Pastor Beth Brown has also stated that she would be happy to provide specific faith-based training to church staff. All 2U staff are fully in support of this initiative.

Finances

A monthly stipend will be given to the family to pay for extra food not found at the food banks, a CTA pass, drug store items, clothing not found at the donation center, and other essentials. We have been working with other area UU churches for assistance with finances. There are 2 that have so far expressed interest in partnering with us this way. Alicia will be meeting with them next week to discuss this partnership further.

In the meantime, there is a bank account that Alicia manages that was set up for ongoing Private Sponsor Group work with refugees. Most of this money came from two previous plate shares and some from private donations. The 2U plate share committee has approved the shifting of this money for our housed family now that the refugee programs have been halted by the current administration.

Community Agreements

Before the family moves in, they will meet with the FCI caseworker and 2U leadership to tour the church and go over and sign the agreement. This agreement will include parameters for usage of the church, safety protocols and contact information for church leadership and the FCI caseworker. A sample of such an agreement used by a different church is attached. This is just a sample and will be customized for the needs of our church.

Community Support

Second Unitarian will be utilizing the support of many community organizations to provide care for the family that will be housed at the church. These include, but are not limited to:

- **The Faith Community Initiative and Pastor Beth Brown**
(<https://www.faithcommunityinitiative.org/>)
- **D19 Mutual Aid Group** – their donation center can provide clothing, hygiene and some household items such as bedding, towels, stroller, back packs, toys, etc...
(<https://sites.google.com/view/19thdistrict/home>)
- **Congregational Accompaniment Project for Asylum Seekers (CAPAS)**
(<https://www.usc.org/resources/congregations/congregational-accompaniment-project-for-asylum-seekers-capas/>)
- **Northside Community Resources** (<https://www.northsidecommunityresources.org/>)
- **Asylum Application Advocates** – holds monthly workshops to help migrants file their asylum applications. Some workshops are held at 2U.
- **UUANI** – is connecting us with other UU churches doing migrant work
<https://www.uuani.org/>
- **ICIRR** – Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
<https://www.icirr.org/>