



Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

July 16, 2014

URGENT REQUEST FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST TO PARTNER IN PROVIDING SERVICES TO UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FROM CENTRAL AMERICA

Dear colleagues:

With this message, LIRS is putting out a nationwide call for **housing** and **case management services** for Central American migrant families who are currently being detained in the US/Mexico border region. Housing is needed for a few hundred families, case management could potentially be needed for thousands of women and children.

In recent months, Central American families have been crossing the southernmost border of the United States in unprecedented numbers – recent estimates are that 39,000 individuals have made the difficult journey with their families since October of 2013, in addition to tens of thousands of Central American unaccompanied children who have also migrated here. Gang-related violence and organized crime are at an all-time high in Central America, and have sparked the mass exodus. Almost all the families are coming from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, countries with staggering homicide rates and powerful gang networks that tout “join or die” mottos.

The influx in family arrivals – particularly mothers with children – has overwhelmed the border. In response to the resulting humanitarian crisis, the Department of Homeland Security recently announced its intentions to shift US government practice and hold families (mothers and children) in immigration detention facilities. The U.S. government plans to open family detention facilities, beginning with the recent opening of a 700-bed detention facility located on the grounds of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Artesia, NM.

Detention is no place for families and children, and LIRS is strongly advocating for humane alternatives. We are now in conversation with government officials about options that would allow families to be released into the care of communities that are prepared to offer hospitality and support. There is definite interest and openness to the ideas we are putting forward; at the same time, the situation is volatile and the Administration’s approach to the situation is shifting rapidly in response to developments on the ground and in the political arena. One of the unknowns is whether there would be funding available from the federal government to support alternatives to detention for families.

In this atmosphere of uncertainty, LIRS is reaching out to get **an initial sense of the potential capacity in our networks and in the broader community of Lutheran social ministry organizations**. Our ability to persuade the government to pursue alternatives to detention, treat families humanely, and provide funding for needed services will be enhanced if we can make a credible case for the capacity we can offer. At this point, we want to explore with you two different models of service that would be targeted to the different circumstances of detained Central American migrants.

These two models are: **case management** for families with pre-existing ties to sources of support in the community, who will need case management services to comply with their legal process and to be healthy and effective members of the community, and **Houses of Welcome** for people without community ties, who need housing and other material support in addition to case management. Below you will see more details about these two program approaches and the needs.

Case Management for Central American Families with Pre-Existing Community Ties

The vast majority of Central American families crossing the border and being held in the harmfully expanding detention system have close ties to family or friends somewhere in the United States. These US-based family and friends - in our view and in our experience - will in most cases be able to provide for basic material necessities. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) will only release people from detention if they have an identified address to which they would be going. However, even if material needs are met by relatives, families released from detention will need case management support to help them navigate the complex legal process before them, and to access services and community support that might be available to them. They will also need social support and connections. The availability of case management services, and particularly help in complying with court appearances and referrals to legal services, will also be a requirement for the government to agree to release these families into community-based alternatives to detention.

We are **exploring capacity to provide case management services to potentially thousands of Central American families**. Most of the families consist of mothers and their children. They will not have legal status and will not typically be able to work legally until their immigration status is resolved. These families will be going to communities where there are already other Central Americans living – which may mean anything from major metropolitan areas to small communities where agricultural or other economic opportunities for migrants have attracted Central Americans. In this model, case management services would be provided through the end of the adjudication process, which is estimated to be a one year or more process.

If your organization is interested in providing case management services, these are the questions we would like to explore with you:

- Does your organization have a track record of providing case management services relevant to these women and children? Do you have the skills and expertise (including Spanish language capacity), or could you develop the appropriate skills if provided with technical assistance from LIRS or a peer organization?
- What scale of service could you offer (numbers of families and individuals) and geographic area?
- What funding or other resources would you need in order to be able to provide the case management services we have described? What funding or other resources would your organization be able to secure for these services?
- Is your organization able to engage congregations or others in the community to help with material donations (for families who have this need), friendship, mentorship, or other support needed by newcomers to your community?
- Would your organization be able to secure low-cost or pro bono immigration legal services? What about medical or mental health services?

- Is there an existing Central American community in your area of service? If yes, does your organization currently have any relationships in that community or would you be able to develop these?
- Would your organization be prepared to partner with LIRS and our network to: evaluate outcomes, learn to promote good practice, and engage in community education and advocacy for migrant women and children?

Houses of Welcome for Central American Families without Existing Community Ties

A very small percentage of the Central American families now being detained have no connection anywhere in the United States. We would estimate this number to be several hundred families. In order to be released, these families will need stable secure housing and other services.

We are launching a nationwide call to congregations and organizations like yours to establish Houses of Welcome. **A House of Welcome would provide communal housing to vulnerable migrant families** as they wait for the decision in their immigration legal processes.

LIRS is already partnering with organizations to serve people as an alternative to immigration detention, and we would propose to build on this pilot model that has been developed. LIRS' existing community based model is designed to welcome individuals released from the custody of ICE whether they are in the early stages of the legal process or awaiting a final decision on their immigration status. The program provides culturally appropriate case management, ongoing legal assistance (through direct service or referral), and housing to individuals who demonstrate a need for such services. We are currently piloting the community based model in seven hub communities nationwide: Austin/San Antonio, Texas; Boston, Massachusetts; Chicago, Illinois; Elizabeth, NJ/New York, NY; Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota; Seattle/Tacoma, Washington; and Tucson/Phoenix, Arizona. To learn more visit: www.lirs.org/housesofwelcome.

Current LIRS partners in the community support program provide communal housing to vulnerable migrant families as they wait for the decision in their immigration legal processes. Our partners provide this safe place to live for a period of 6 months to 1 year, provide time for migrants to stabilize from their traumatic journey and adjust to life in the United States. In addition to meeting immediate needs, community support sites refer residents to appropriate services including support, case management services, physical and mental health services, employment/vocational counseling, legal services and ESL classes. Families benefit from mutual support from other residents and the larger church and concerned community. The goal is for residents to leave the community support program with the confidence and support needed to thrive as an integrated member of their new community.

The existing LIRS community support model will be an important source of training and technical support for new Houses of Welcome. LIRS will facilitate mentoring and the transfer of knowledge and experience.

Core elements of the community support approach are highlighted below. The desirable characteristics for a House of Welcome are:

- Up to 1 year of housing at no cost to families
- Up to 1 year of assistance with food and other basic necessities for the families
- Appropriate family and communal living space with access to a private bedroom, communal kitchen, bathroom, living/dining room, phone, and laundry machine

- Case management support from a social service organization with appropriate expertise
- Access to low-cost or pro bono legal services
- Spanish language capacity
- Active engagement and support of local congregations and volunteers.

Desirable characteristics for a community intending to organize a House of Welcome are:

- Located in a community with a strong Central American migrant presence and Spanish language capacity
- Located in a safe neighborhood, close to reliable public transportation and public schools
- Located within a reasonable driving distance of an immigration court and in close proximity to free or low-cost immigration attorneys
- Thriving community and spiritual centers
- Strong partnership with local congregation or community group who can provide volunteers, mentors and additional friendship and support
- Proximity to low-cost medical and mental health providers and other appropriate social services

This approach has enjoyed enormous success in servicing individuals. For example, Sarah's Oasis in St. Paul, MN has provided shelter and supportive services to over 600 immigrant women since 1996, many of whom are survivors of violence, abuse and torture. Sarah's Oasis meets pressing physical needs, while also fostering spiritual and emotional healing through communal living and access to supportive services. Reflecting on her time at Sarah's, one resident shared, "We are from different countries and we speak different languages, and every day we learn from each other."

With the large influx of Central American families, we are exploring *new sites of hospitality and support*. We are calling upon volunteers, congregations, Lutheran social ministry organizations, and local organizations to help identify and leverage untapped community resources and transform vacant or underutilized community spaces into a House of Welcome. We recently sent a letter to congregations across the country asking for their help and support, and we have enclosed that letter for your information.

Today, we are asking if you have any available housing options for Central American migrants:

- **Do you have a vacant care facility, apartment building, parsonage, school, church or dorm to serve as a House of Welcome?**
- What would it take to ready this space for housing Central American migrants? What investment would be needed, what capacity does the housing have, and when could it be ready?
- Would you be able to secure donations to furnish the house (if needed) and to provide food and clothing for the residents?
- Would your organization have the capacity to manage the House of Welcome? What funding or other resources would you need to manage the House and meet the basic needs of the residents we have described? What funding or other resources would your organization be able to secure for these services?
- Case management will be an essential service at each House of Welcome. If these are services you would like to offer, please address the questions in the previous section.
- How well does this housing match the desirable characteristics we have identified above? And the community?

- Would your organization be prepared to partner with LIRS and our network to: evaluate outcomes, learn to promote good practice, participate in network activities and engage in community education and advocacy for migrant women and children?

Funding

There is not yet an established source of funding for new Houses of Welcome or large scale case management. Federal government agencies have expressed an interest in quickly receiving a proposal from LIRS as to what this might look like and cost. We would like to contribute the strengths and capacity of our network and Lutheran organizations as part of the solution in this crisis. So this invitation to you is to assess your interest, the assets you would bring to this response, and your own projection of reasonable costs. In some cases, you may also have ideas for leveraging local resources that might, for example, launch a House of Welcome without US government funding.

If you can help or have other resources you are interested in providing, please contact LIRS Vice President for Programs and Protection, Mike Mitchell at MMitchell@lirs.org, or 410-230-2725. LIRS will prioritize partnership decisions on responses received by Tuesday, July 29.

To learn more about the situation and other ways to help, check out www.lirs.org/bordercrisis. LIRS will also be hosting two conference calls to review the information in this document and answer your questions. We invite you to participate in one of these calls which will be held:

Thursday, July 24th, 3:00 pm EST or Tuesday, July 29th, 1:00 pm EST
Dial-in: 1-800-326-0013; passcode: 1476139#.

Together, we can respond compassionately to the families fleeing violence and seeking protection in this country. We look forward to collaborating with you and providing hospitality and a compassionate response to brothers and sisters in need.

Yours in faith,



Linda Hartke
President and CEO

Enclosure



Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

BACKGROUND

The Need for a Community-Based Response to Assist Migrant Families Seeking Refuge

In recent months, Central American families have been crossing the southernmost border of the United States in unprecedented numbers – recent statistics estimate that 39,000 individuals have made the difficult journey with their families since October of 2013, in addition to tens of thousands of Central American unaccompanied children who have also migrated here. Gang-related violence and organized crime are at an all-time high in Central America, and have sparked the mass exodus. Almost all the families are coming from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, countries with staggering homicide rates and powerful gang networks that tout “join or die” mottos.

The influx in family arrivals – particularly mothers with children – has overwhelmed the border. In response to the resulting humanitarian crisis, the Department of Homeland Security recently announced its intentions to hold families in immigration detention facilities. The Berks Family Residential Center in Pennsylvania is the only family facility currently in operation. However, with only 85 beds, the facility does not have the capacity to meet the increasing numbers. The U.S. government plans to open additional facilities, beginning with a 700-bed detention facility located on the grounds of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Artesia, NM.

As part of our response to the humanitarian crisis, LIRS seeks to identify alternative forms of support for these families in the community. LIRS believes that holding families in detention is inhumane and potentially traumatizing, for prison practices break down family structures, risk separating parents and children, and isolate families from the support and services they desperately need. In 2007, LIRS and the Women’s Refugee Commission released “Locking Up Family Values: The Detention of Immigrant Families,” a report which investigated the jailing of immigrant families in the T. Don Hutto Residential Treatment Center in Texas and the Berks County Shelter Care Facility in Pennsylvania. It documented disturbing incidents of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) not only failing to meet the basic needs of migrant families in its custody, but undermining core family systems.

Community-Based Alternatives to Detention

Responding with compassionate action, LIRS is working in partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran church in America and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to mobilize concerned volunteers, Lutheran social ministry organizations, congregations and organizations to offer a more holistic and resounding welcome to these arriving families. We seek to welcome families by building upon our community based alternatives to detention model with expanded case management, housing and support appropriate for families.

LIRS’ existing community based model is designed to welcome individuals released from the custody of ICE whether they are in the early stages of the legal process or awaiting a final decision on their immigration status. The program provides culturally appropriate case management, ongoing legal assistance, and housing to individuals who demonstrate a need for such services. We are currently piloting the community based model in seven hub communities nationwide. These communities include; Austin/San Antonio, Texas; Boston, Massachusetts; Chicago, Illinois; Elizabeth, NJ/New York, NY;



Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota; Seattle/Tacoma, Washington; and Tucson/Phoenix, Arizona. To learn more visit: www.lirs.org/housesofwelcome.

The existing LIRS community support model will be an important source of training and technical support for new Houses of Welcome. LIRS will facilitate mentoring and the transfer of knowledge and experience. Current LIRS partners in the community support program provide communal housing to vulnerable migrant families as they wait for the decision in their immigration legal processes. Our partners provide this safe place to live for a period of 6 months to 1 year, provide time for migrants to stabilize from their traumatic journey and adjust to life in the United States. In addition to meeting immediate needs, community support sites refer residents to appropriate services including support, case management services, physical and mental health services, employment/vocational counseling, legal services and ESL classes. Families benefit from mutual support from other residents and the larger church and concerned community. The goal is for residents to leave the community support program with the confidence and support needed to thrive as an integrated member of their new community.

Core elements of the community support approach are highlighted below. The desirable characteristics for a House of Welcome are:

- Up to 1 year of free housing to families
- Up to 1 year of assistance with food and other basic necessities for the families
- Appropriate family and communal living space with access to a private bedroom, communal kitchen, bathroom, living/dining room, phone, and laundry machine
- Case management support from social service organization with appropriate expertise
- Access to low-cost or pro bono legal services
- Spanish language capacity
- Active engagement and support of local congregations and volunteers.

Desirable characteristics for a community intending to organize a House of Welcome are:

- Located in one of LIRS' existing 7 hub communities or in a new community with a strong Central American migrant presence and Spanish language capacity
- Located in a safe neighborhood, close to reliable public transportation and public schools
- Located within a reasonable driving distance of an immigration court and in close proximity to free or low-cost immigration attorneys
- Thriving community and spiritual centers
- Strong partnership with local congregation or community group who can provide volunteers, mentors and additional friendship and support
- Proximity to low-cost medical and mental health providers and other appropriate social services

This approach has enjoyed enormous success in servicing individuals. For example, Sarah's Oasis in St. Paul, MN has provided shelter and supportive services to over 600 immigrant women since 1996, many of whom are survivors of violence, abuse and torture. Sarah's Oasis meets pressing physical needs, while also fostering spiritual and emotional healing through communal living and access to supportive services.



Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Reflecting on her time at Sarah's, one resident shared, "We are from different countries and we speak different languages, and every day we learn from each other."

With the large influx of Central American families, we are exploring *new sites of hospitality and support*. For the majority of families with community connections and an identified place to stay with friends or family, there is a need for case management and help in building ties in the local community. For a smaller number of families (estimated at perhaps several hundred) with no relatives or community ties in the US, housing and other basic sustenance are needed alongside case management. ICE will not release families from detention without prearranged housing. Consequently, we are calling upon volunteers, congregations, Lutheran social ministry organizations, and local organizations to help identify and leverage untapped community resources and transform vacant or underutilized community spaces into a House of Welcome.

Together, we can respond compassionately to the families fleeing violence and seeking protection in this country. We look forward to collaborating with you and providing hospitality and a compassionate response to brothers and sisters in need.



Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Congregational Support to Help Migrant Families

In recent months, Central American families have been crossing the southernmost border of the United States in unprecedented numbers – recent estimates are that 39,000 individuals have made the difficult journey with their families since October of 2013, in addition to tens of thousands of Central American unaccompanied children who have also migrated here. Gang-related violence and organized crime are at an all-time high in Central America, and have sparked the mass exodus. In response to the resulting humanitarian crisis, the Department of Homeland Security recently announced its intentions to hold families in immigration detention facilities, and is expanding capacity beginning with a 700-bed detention facility located on the grounds of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Artesia, NM.

Detention is no place for families and children, and LIRS is strongly advocating for humane alternatives. We are now developing a proposal to the federal government for a program that would allow families to be released into the care of communities that are prepared to offer hospitality and support.

If we succeed, families released from immigration detention will need your help, your generosity and your collaboration with other volunteers and organizations. Together, we can provide adequate alternatives to detention that the families seeking protection deserve as they navigate complex legal processes. Specifically, LIRS is seeking support from volunteers, congregations, and organizations to mobilize the establishment of “Houses of Welcome” to serve migrant families who would otherwise have no possibility of release from immigration detention. A House of Welcome would provide communal housing to vulnerable migrant families as they wait for the decision in their immigration legal processes.

How Your Congregation Can Help

- **Donate and/or lease a vacant parsonage, school, church or dorm to serve as a House of Welcome*.**
- Organize a congregation wide clothing/furniture drive to donate locally to a House of Welcome when such needs are specifically identified.
- Sponsor a family or multiple families at a local House of Welcome, providing regular transportation, friendship and support.
- Host regular community or educational opportunities for families living in the community or at a House of Welcome.
- Provide Spanish interpretation services, case management services, or immigration legal assistance with appropriate expertise.

*For more information on Houses of Welcome and what is needed, see our accompanying “Backgrounder” or visit the LIRS website at www.lirs.org/housesofwelcome.

As the situation at the border develops we will be identifying additional ways for congregations to help. Some other ways to get involved right now include:

- Explore becoming a foster parent for a migrant youth who has no caregiver. See information on our foster parent recruitment campaign at www.lirs.org/fostercare.
- Visit immigrants who are detained in your region, so they know they are not alone. See <http://lirs.org/act/visitation/> for a complete guide to detention visitation.
- Get engaged as an advocate, beginning with a commitment to our #ActofLove campaign, which you can read about at www.lirs.org/actoflove.
- Donate to LIRS at www.lirs.org/actoflove/donate.



Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

If you can help or have other resources you are interested in providing, please contact Matt Herzberg at MHerzberg@lirs.org, or 877-291-1061. To learn more, check out www.lirs.org/bordercrisis.