

Access to Justice: LIRS's Alternatives to Immigration Detention Project

About Immigration Detention

Every day the United States government incarcerates approximately 34,000 men, women and families in more than 250 facilities authorized to hold individuals detained for civil violations of immigration law. This massive detention system, comprised of federal, state and local jails, comes at an enormous cost - \$2.051 billion in fiscal year 2012 - to taxpayers, families, immigrants and communities throughout the country. Refugees, asylum seekers, survivors of torture, and victims of human trafficking and violent crimes are amongst those held while their immigration case is processed and the very real potential for deportation lingers indefinitely. Being confined in prison or prison-like conditions can be deeply re-traumatizing and harmful, especially for those who have suffered torture and trauma in their home country. Detention separates families, inflicts unnecessary pain and suffering on immigrants and their families, and exacerbates both a human and economic crisis that this country struggles to repair.

LIRS believes that detention is an inhumane and fiscally irresponsible default response to migration in the U.S., and we strive to create a more just system that treats every individual with the respect he or she deserves. We believe the government could meet both its humanitarian and enforcement obligations, if and when it properly utilizes community-based alternatives to immigration detention.

Alternatives to Immigration Detention Project

Community-based alternatives to immigration detention welcome individuals as they enter the United States and/or are released from the custody of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) *and* await a final decision on their immigration status. This form of alternatives does not unnecessarily restrict individual liberty while ensuring compliance with federal mandates (i.e. does not rely on global positioning systems, house arrest, etc.). It provides culturally appropriate case management, ongoing legal assistance, and housing to individuals who demonstrate a need for such services and are eligible to be released from detention. With access to holistic care, including but not limited to health care; educational opportunity; vocational training and employment skills-building; spiritual support; and social engagement, individuals eligible for community-based alternatives are empowered to integrate into their new surroundings and encouraged to fulfill ongoing legal expectations. We trust that individuals will appear for their mandatory appointments, be better equipped to restore their personal dignity and pride, and more thoroughly integrate into their communities when offered ample information on the legal and social systems to which they are subject. We also believe that community-based alternatives can be effectively implemented in a manner that is more cost-effective than incarceration.

Community Support Network

In partnership with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA), in 2012 LIRS launched the Community Support Network, a national service model to examine the efficiency of community-based services as an alternative to immigration detention. This initiative inspires volunteers and funds non-profit service agencies to offer a continuum of care that facilitates immigrants' release from detention and provides immediate support and stabilization services, torture and trauma rehabilitation, and eventually long term integration. In 2014 LIRS was successful in launching a network-wide database, ATJ Net, to facilitate the collection of comprehensive client and service information. In 2014, the Community Support Network served more than 200 people post-release.

Detained Torture Survivors' Legal Support Network

In addition, LIRS manages a federal program that offers critical legal services for survivors of torture impacted by immigration detention. In 2012, the Detained Torture Survivors' Legal Support Network identified 318 survivors in immigration detention, connected survivors to 25 non-legal service providers, and represented 108 survivors in ongoing deportation proceedings. The Detained Torture Survivor Legal Support Network identifies survivors through Know Your Rights presentations, legal presentations on the fundamentals of immigration law and deportation proceedings. Over 12,000 immigrants in detention attended a presentation in 2012.

The Community Support and Detained Torture Survivor Legal Support Networks are complementary projects that aim to expand an infrastructure of quality service provision to assist individuals negatively impacted by immigration detention. Further, the networks work cohesively to generate an invaluable knowledge base of best practices and evidence to better support policy change. Imperative to the success of these projects is the networks' capacity to collect, analyze, and disseminate information specific to the individual and programmatic outcomes of their service interventions.

Network Partner Sites

LIRS focused grants in 2014 to seven hub communities where local partners provide comprehensive services to individuals released from detention: Austin/San Antonio, Texas; Boston/Worcester, Massachusetts; Chicago, Illinois; Newark, NJ/New York, NY; Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota; Seattle/Tacoma, Washington; and Tucson/Phoenix, Arizona.

Partners in Austin/San Antonio, TX

- Casa Marianella
- American Gateways
- Center for Survivors of Torture
- Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services

Partners in Boston/Worcester, Massachusetts

- Political Asylum/Immigration Representation Project
- Ascentria Care Alliance (formerly Lutheran Social Services of New England)
- Refugee Immigration Ministry

Partners in Chicago, IL

- Interfaith Committee for Detained Immigrants

Partners in Newark, NJ/New York, NY

- First Friends of New Jersey and New York
- American Friends Service Committee
- Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
- Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Newark

Partners in Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN

- Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota
- The Advocates for Human Rights
- Guadalupe Alternative Programs
- Conversations with Friends
- Sarah's... an Oasis for Women
- Simpson Housing Services

Partners in Seattle/Tacoma, WA

- Advocates for Immigrants in Detention Northwest
- Northwest Immigrant Rights Project

Partners in Tucson/Phoenix, AZ

- Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project
- Restoration Project – Casa Mariposa
- Puente Movement

Other Visitation Ministry Sites

- Casa de Paz, Colorado Springs, CO
- Indonesian Lutheran Fellowship, Seattle, WA
- El Refugio Visitation Program, Decatur, GA
- Lutheran Social Services of Georgia, Atlanta, GA
- DC Detention Visitation Network, Bethesda, MD
- Hutto Visitation Program, Austin, TX
- UUC Visitation – Standing on the Side of Love, Seattle, WA
- Trinity Lutheran Church, Eden, TX
- Families for Freedom, New York, NY
- Conversations with Friends, St. Paul, MN
- First Friends of New Jersey and New York, Newark, NJ
- Interfaith Committee for Detained Immigrants, Chicago, IL