

“Look For the Helpers”

Fred Rogers once said, “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, “Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.” Reflecting back on all that this year has held and the harm that has been wrought on our immigrant neighbors – it is truly heartbreaking. It can feel overwhelming and we may ask ourselves, *what difference can I make as just one person?* But there is a famous quote that says, “the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” We want to reflect on the important, necessary work that has happened over this year; not to gloss over or minimize the immense devastation that so many families are feeling, but to “look for the helpers” in the midst and to continue forward with energy and purpose.

- Federal judges are pushing back on some of the administration’s immigration policies
 - A federal judge blocked IRS from sharing data with DHS for immigration enforcement
 - A federal judge ordered up to 615 people released on bond who were detained in Chicago without warrants/probable cause (this was appealed and we are awaiting a decision)
 - More than 220 federal judges have ruled against this admin’s mandatory detention policy
- Nearly 7 million people attended more than 2,700 ‘No Kings’ protests in all 50 states in October, a large focus of the protests being on this administration’s immigration policies
- Rapid response networks continue to grow and coordinate community efforts to protect immigrant neighbors and document ICE actions
- Faith leaders from many different religions and from all across the state have organized multiple rallies & prayer vigils outside of Indiana detention facilities
- Indianapolis Public Schools refused to release a student to ICE officers without a court order. When the state’s attorney general attempted to sue IPS, the community protested loudly

Indiana AID’s impact in 2025 (so far):

- We have provided over **\$45,000** in direct aid to immigrants in ICE detention in central Indiana
 - Over \$32,000 in commissary alone, close to \$9,000 in book purchases
- We have provided consistent, caring, weekly virtual visits to hundreds in ICE detention, we’ve gone in-person every month to visit ICE detainees at Clay County jail, & we’re expanding our presence at Marion County jail
- We’ve assisted family members trying to support their loved ones - finding them in different systems, seeking case updates, providing resources on legal representation, and more
- We’ve provided volunteer training/informational sessions for more than 125 potential volunteers and concerned community members
- We’ve participated in multiple speaking engagements, presentations, rallies, interviews, community resource fairs and tabling events, all with the goal of expanding the community’s awareness of ICE detention in Indiana and its impacts on our immigrant neighbors

Bittersweet Holidays in Detention

No one values their own freedom as a fundamental human right until it is taken away from them. Being detained abroad, in a country with a different language and culture, is a very traumatic experience that no one would wish on anyone, especially when you find yourself in an immigration detention center. It is well known that there are too many injustices, human rights violations, and discrimination.

I was held in immigration detention for an extended period, and no matter how hard you try to adapt to your new situation, it is difficult to do so, as you are faced with an unknown fate; no one knows what will happen the next day, there is a lot of uncertainty. The language barrier is a huge disadvantage for most inmates; and every time the loud doors open, you don't know if they're coming for you or for your cellmate. Often, you do not know where they're taking you - whether you're going to "mandatory recreation" (so they can search through your belongings) or if you are going to the infirmary; if you're going to a court hearing or being sent to segregation; they could be sending you to another detention center with almost no notice or deporting you for good - who knows. For those of us who have children here in this country, we live in fear of never seeing them again.

Just when you thought things couldn't get any worse, you realize that you no longer have any friends; everyone forgets about you. Many inmates find that, for various reasons, even their own families turn away from them. You have lost everything and everyone, ending up with only a complete stranger as your cellmate. Since both of you only have each other, building mutual trust becomes inevitable, regardless of personal preference.

As the end-of-year holidays drew near, that is when sadness and nostalgia become nothing but pure psychological torture. I remember that, in order not to fall into depression and to stay sane, and thanks to the tremendous support that the Indiana AID organization always gave us by sending us Bibles and other books, we began a Bible study every night. Many of us managed to find a little peace and serenity, which I think is called "spiritual growth." Suddenly, some things began to change for the better, others not so much. The food began to improve, and they treated us with a little more respect, or maybe I was just getting used to being there, but what surprised me most was Thanksgiving Day! That day, the food was delicious and plentiful! Shortly after, on Christmas Eve, between 15-20 members of the House of Prayer church came to visit us. They brought us gift bags with small hygiene items and treats, and they sang a song of praise with a guitar.

A week later, another church anonymously sent us large bags with plenty of snacks, ramen noodles, lots of sweets, prayers, and bottles of Ranch Habanero (my favorite!). After all, we spent some bittersweet holidays in detention, people from different countries with diverse cultures and different languages, hanging out together without resentments, like a big family, trying not to lose our minds over the family we all left behind...

-Miguel Ávila



Lives Changed in an Instant

Thanksgiving 2024 was a joyous time for my family. My husband, Omar, and I had just finished painting our kitchen and living room, we decorated for Christmas, and enjoyed taking our daughter to the movie theater for the first time to see Moana 2. Everything felt right in the world. December 2024 was an especially big month for our family—our daughter's birthday is December 5th, Christmas was around the corner with all the magic that comes with having a toddler, and we had been bursting with excitement to share our news: we were pregnant, and baby number two would be arriving in July 2025.

But the morning of December 4, 2024 brought everything to a halt. It began like any routine day: we woke up, got ready, packed lunches, and walked to our cars. My husband turned left out of our driveway, and I turned right. Just a typical Wednesday... until it wasn't. Unbeknownst to me, my husband was stopped before he could even make it down the street. He was pulled over by ICE.

It took nearly two hours before the news reached me: he was being held at a facility on the west side of Indianapolis. I left work immediately and drove straight there. An officer confirmed that he was in the back, that ICE had not set a bond, and that he would be transferred to Clay County in Brazil, Indiana. Once fully processed, he would receive a PIN number and be allowed to call. That day and the long night that followed felt endless. Finally, around 11 p.m., the phone rang.

This experience has robbed my family of countless simple joys over the past year—from Saturday morning cartoons and breakfast together, to birthdays and holidays. But the hardest moment came with the birth of our son, Santiago. He arrived on July 18, 2025, the beautiful missing piece to our family. About two weeks later, during a routine pediatric checkup, I was told Santi had a heart murmur and needed an echocardiogram. At Riley, I sat nervously watching the screen, hoping everything was okay.

It wasn't.

Santi was diagnosed with four holes in his heart—two larger, two smaller—classified as an ASD (atrial septal defect) and VSD (ventricular septal defect). Life has been difficult for him from the start. He struggles to gain weight, to breathe comfortably at times, and his little heart works far harder than it should. After months of waiting, he is finally within the weight range required for surgery, scheduled for December 12th. It is yet another milestone, another terrifying moment, that my husband will miss—another challenge I must navigate alone.

Despite everything, I share our story not for sympathy, but to shine a light on the reality so many families like mine quietly endure. Our lives were changed in an instant, and the consequences have rippled through every birthday, every holiday, every ordinary moment that should have belonged to us. What keeps me going is the hope that one day my children will have their father back home, where he belongs, and that no other family will be torn apart the way ours has been. Until then, I will continue fighting — for my husband, for my children, and for the simple right to live our lives together as a family.

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2

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5

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