

Asylum Seekers Sponsorship
Answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. **Background.** In March 2021, the Racine Interfaith Coalition (RIC) put out a call for local congregations to consider becoming a sponsor for asylum-seeking immigrant families or individuals who have been granted the legal permission to seek asylum. Because of the previous administration's policy of separation, caging children, and deporting their parents without asylum hearings, the backlog was huge. Various national immigrant rights networks were being asked to help work with the new administration to find safe places for these asylum seekers while waiting the one-two years that a case currently takes. Joe Cushing and Nada Kutz brought this to OBUUC's Social Justice Committee (SJC).

SJC decided to discern whether sponsoring an asylum seeker is a natural extension of our past and current immigration justice work. A small Asylum Seekers Task Force was formed, chaired by Robert Stuligross, with Diane Lange, Amy Randolph, Stuart Bard, Joe Cushing, and Naoki Nakamura as members. The Task Force investigated the financial, legal, housing, schooling, and health care resources that are available in the Racine area. Robert Stuligross and Amy Randolph are taking a break from our activities at the moment.

The Task Force learned that the Unitarian Universalists Service Committee (UUSC) has formed CAPAS (Congregational Accompaniment Project for Asylum Seekers), to support communities of faith as they host and support migrants through the process of obtaining legal asylum. It grew out of a collaboration among several organizations, beginning in the spring of 2018, to assist migrants from Central America by recruiting and supporting individuals and families to open their homes as sponsors of asylum seekers. CAPAS is currently supporting more than 25 congregations that are already hosting or are in the discernment process of hosting an asylum seeker.

The Task Force has worked with Rev. Dottie Mathews, a retired UU minister, who is the leader of CAPAS and Rev. Charlie Ortman, another retired UU minister, on developing a plan to educate the OBUUC congregation and gaining congregational support for becoming an Asylum Seeker Support Congregation.

2. **Terms and Definitions**
 - a. **Asylum seeker:** An *asylum seeker* is a person from another country who has entered the asylum process in the United States. The process begins at the border or within the US, when a migrant declares a well-founded fear of violence or persecution in their home country due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. If this initial "credible fear" testimony is provisionally accepted, the person is allowed to stay in the United States until their case is determined in court. However, the previous administration has severely restricted entry into the

United States through the Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP) and U.S. health law, section 265 of Title 42 (Title 42). Under MPP, asylum seekers entering the U.S. from Mexico are returned to Mexico where Mexico is presumably providing them humanitarian aid until the immigration proceedings are finalized. Under Title 42, asylum seekers are turned away and even expelled because they presumably present a risk to the U.S. public health. The current administration has continued this practice and it has become very difficult for asylum seekers to enter the country.

- b. **Parole:** In the immigration system, people seeking asylum or who are otherwise detained may have the opportunity to be considered for “parole”. This means they can be released into the care of a trustworthy person who will support the person while they wait for a final court decision.
 - c. **Sponsor:** A *sponsor* is a US citizen who has agreed to offer safe shelter, food, and basic support for an asylum seeker, without any expectation of an exchange of services in return. When a congregation undertakes sponsorship, it is still necessary to have a primary host home with a person willing to be named as the official sponsor to immigration authorities.
 - d. **Sponsoring Congregation:** This designates a faith community that has decided together to join in the support of an asylum seeker (this can be either an individual or a family). In addition to identifying the community member willing to provide a safe home for the migrant(s), a sponsoring congregation provides the team of willing volunteers who will help the migrant find an immigration lawyer, navigate public transportation, find appropriate health care, raise funds, show up for ICE check-ins and court hearings, and get connected to the community.
3. What is the OBUUC Asylum Seekers Sponsorship?
- a. The OBUUC community will join in the support of an asylum seeker or family to walk with them to gain asylum status and establish a new home in this country.
 - b. An OBUUC member will petition the immigration authorities to release the asylum seekers into our care.
 - c. Another OBUUC member has agreed to open their home for the asylum seekers.
 - d. The OBUUC community and others are invited to join in the journey through a variety of support activities and financial donations.
4. What is the duration of the program?
- a. It is hoped that within 12-18 months, the immigration court will take up the asylum seekers’ case and make a decision on their fate.
 - b. In some cases, the asylum seekers may decide to move to another location where they have access to some friends. In those cases, the program may end sooner.

5. What kind of support will we be providing?
 - a. Settling In. At the beginning, the asylum seekers will be completely dependent on our support. Asylum seekers leave their home with little or nothing. We will bring them to Racine, help them get settled into the home sponsor's house, we will clothe them, feed them, provide them access to medical and mental health services, and provide them with necessities such as mobile phones, bus passes, access to ESL programs. We will also engage an immigration lawyer to build their case and file for asylum. Many asylum seekers are eager to earn money but do not have a work permit at this stage and are not able to open a bank account yet. It is common that the sponsoring organization provides them with a stipend, so they have some financial independence.
 - b. Getting Established. After about 6 months, most asylum seekers are issued work permits and Social Security Numbers. Our task will be to help them get employment and help them move toward independence. Additional language training and skills development might be needed. We anticipate that they will be still living with the home sponsors and require financial support. Their asylum case is still going on and they will have to present themselves to the immigration authorities from time to time.
 - c. Moving On. The final goal is for the asylum seeker to be given official asylum status to remain in this country, and for them to gain financial independence. Our task is to support them to achieve this goal. Once this goal is achieved, they have the ability to make a home at a location of their choice.

6. Why OBUUC?
 - a. UUs affirm the inherent worth of every person and believe that every person deserves a safe place to live. Asylum seekers have left their homes due to fear for their lives to look for a safe place to live. Due to MPP and Title 42 (explained above in Question 2), many asylum seekers currently have to wait outside our borders in stressful conditions in detention centers or other temporary shelters. The few people who are admitted into the country after thorough vetting need sponsors to be released from detention and prove their case in immigration court and establish a new life. It is an opportunity to put our faith into action.
 - b. OBUUC has a rich tradition of immigration justice support. We voted in May 2017 to become a Sanctuary Support Congregation. Our congregation has provided financial, political, and advocacy support for Dreamers and other undocumented immigrants.
 - c. This asylum project is a great fit with our UU Principles, including our recently passed 8th Principle. It expands our "beloved community" to include people beyond our national border. We have this opportunity to live our values of "commitment to the inherent worth and dignity of each person; justice, equity, and compassion in our relationship with each other; and our respect for the intricate and interdependent web of life." We will have many opportunities to walk side-by-side with the asylum seekers.

- d. It provides our congregation, who are not directly targeted by systemic, racist, violent policies woven into our immigration and criminal punishment systems, a chance to build relationships with those who are most impacted and use our power and privilege to create change.
7. What will RIC be doing? How are RIC's other member congregations involved, and what is each contributing to the effort?
 - a. RIC is conducting a fundraising campaign for our program and spreading the word to other member congregations.
 - b. RIC is working on legislative initiatives and supporting the training of legal assistants on immigration issues. RIC's Justice Project will be available to us.
 - c. They will co-sponsor our December 12 concert and help us spread the word.
 8. Why is a congregational vote not required?
 - a. When reviewing the project, the board and minister agreed that the project did not come to the congregation for a vote because it falls under the work of the social justice committee. OBUUC has no financial or legal liabilities.... the committee is following all procedures and policies required of a committee project.
 - b. The legal and home sponsors are taking on an ethical and moral obligation for the financial support of the asylum seeker, but they are not legally bound by this arrangement. According to U.S. law, neither the official sponsors nor the congregation are liable in any way if our asylum seeker commits a crime, unless the sponsor or members of our congregation have participated or can be implicated in the crime.
 9. Who are the "sponsors"?
 - a. Naoki and Leah Nakamura are the legal sponsors who will petition the US immigration office to release an asylum seeker on parole.
 - b. Patty Rieman and Joe Pourroy are the home sponsors who have committed to open their home to our asylum seekers.
 10. Who will be our asylum seeker?
 - a. OBUUC's Asylum Task Force is working closely with CAPAS to identify a good fit for our congregation. CAPAS is working with multiple organizations that are looking for a home for an asylum seeker who qualifies for parole.
 - b. Once CAPAS identifies a suitable candidate, they will notify OBUUC and will put us in touch with the asylum seeker. When both parties are satisfied with the match, we will make arrangements for moving them to Racine.
 - c. Depending on their current location, we may transport the asylum seekers by air or by ground transport to Racine.

11. How can the congregation support this program?

- a. Welcome our asylum seekers into our “beloved community”.
- b. Join the Task Force. The Task Force makes preparations for the asylum seekers arrival, plans and organizes fundraising events, researches and identifies local resources for the asylum seeker, and identifies and directs volunteers for the day-to-day activities. E-mail Naoki Nakamura at naokin33@gmail.com to join.
- c. Sign up as a Supporter. There are many tasks that need to be performed over a period of time. This will provide an excellent opportunity for members of our congregation to get personally involved and walk side-by-side with the asylum seeker through this challenging time. Help will be required for transportation to medical and legal appointments, purchase of food and necessities, coaching on the use of our bus system, enrolling and commuting to ESL classes, enrolling children into kindergarten or schools, and other tasks. More detail will become available when we know the needs of our asylum seekers. E-mail Naoki Nakamura at naokin33@gmail.com to let us know in what way you would like to help.
- d. Donate what you can. Asylum seekers have left their home with little or nothing and they are not allowed to formally work until they receive a work permit. This can take 6 months or more. Many of them have gone through traumatic experiences and need medical and mental health care. Immediate financial resources are needed to pay for their transportation to Racine, purchasing winter clothes for our climate, obtaining necessary medical and mental health service, and retaining an immigration lawyer. We also plan to subsidize our home sponsors for their additional food and utility bills and provide our guests with a weekly or monthly stipend, so they feel that they have some money to spend on their own.

12. How can I make a donation?

- a. OBUUC has created a special account named “OBUUC Asylum Fund” where all donations will be collected.
- b. To make an on-line donation with a credit card, please go to <https://obuuc.org/justice/asylum-seekers/>.
- c. Or, mail a check to OBUUC Annex, 419 6th Street, Racine, WI 53403, payable to “OBUUC” with the designation “OBUUC Asylum Fund” in the memo line.
- d. Because all donations are being collected and distributed by OBUUC, your donation will be eligible for a tax deduction to the extent allowable by law.

13. What kind of work will be done by the Task Force?

- a. organizing bilingual help as needed.
- b. planning and organizing fundraising activities
- c. coordinating travel from the detention or holding facility to Racine
- d. organizing initial shopping for basic necessities (most asylum seekers arrive with very few belongings)

- e. coordinating purchase of a phone and phone plan
 - f. identifying a pro bono or inexpensive immigration lawyer
 - g. organizing rides, accompaniment, and translation for ICE appointments, medical appointments, court dates, etc.
 - h. helping register children for school if applicable
 - i. provide childcare from time to time if applicable
 - j. setting up a bank account when possible, so the guest can manage their own funds.
 - k. keeping the congregation and minister up to date on all developments
 - l. there are many other tasks that need to be performed over a period of time.
14. Why is OBUUC sponsoring a December 12th concert and cookie walk for the public to attend at another church when we have not opened up our own church for the public yet?
- a. This asylum sponsorship project requires a substantial base of faith commitment and financial support. Early in the discernment process we heard concerns that this asylum project might impact OBUUC's own financial base of support if we did not expand beyond our own membership. We have reached out to family and friends to request support.
 - b. To extend the reach even further, we have made plans for a benefit concert to invite the whole Racine community to participate and support our program. We reached out to First Presbyterian Church in August to help us co-sponsor a concert and allow us to use their sanctuary as the venue. First Presbyterian Church is already meeting in-person for their worship services. We have also added the Racine Interfaith Coalition, the Kenosha – Racine Quakers, and Coming Together Racine as co-sponsors.
 - c. "Butterflies Across Borders: A Holiday Concert and Cookie Walk for Asylum Seekers" will be held on Sunday, December 12, 2 pm in the First Presbyterian Church Sanctuary. The event will be streamed live, and we are offering limited seating upon request. The Sanctuary space has a seating capacity of 400 people. Due to COVID safety restrictions, we are limiting seating to 100 people. Performers will be distanced from the audience. There will be mandatory physical distancing for seating with the assistance of ushers. Mask-wearing for all attendees will be enforced.
 - d. The Cookie Walk will be held in a separate room before and after the concert and will offer attendees the opportunity to purchase goodies for the holiday season. Proceeds will go to the OBUUC Asylum Fund. Mask wearing will be enforced. Cookie handlers will also be gloved and masked while they assist in selection and purchase of cookies.

End of Report