



## **Free Migration Project 2019 Annual Report**



*Fidel, Keyri, Yoselin, and Edwin remain in sanctuary with their mother, Carmela, with legal support from FMP (photo credit WHYY).*

In 2019, Free Migration Project continued its fight for the liberation of immigrant communities and a world without borders. In our third full year of operations, amidst increasing ICE raids and deportations, we supported families living in sanctuary churches in Philadelphia and around the country; provided legal representation to clients in community-supported deportation defense campaigns; continued our work with the Shut Down Berks Coalition to close the Berks family detention center; and coordinated the second annual Open Borders Conference in New York City.

Despite the enduring heartbreak of family separation and the injustices facing immigrant communities, we remain resolved to continue to fight at the intersection of law and

community organizing for freedom of movement for all people. We are grateful to celebrate our 2019 victories and look forward to what lies ahead in 2020 and beyond.

## **Shutting Down the Berks Family Detention Center**

FMP is a member of the Shut Down Berks Coalition fighting to end family detention in Pennsylvania. FMP coordinates legal strategy for the Coalition and serves as its fiscal sponsor. Jasmine Rivera, coordinator for the coalition, joined FMP's board in 2019. Several student interns have supported the Berks campaign under FMP's supervision.



In 2019, the Coalition helped bring the Berks family detention center to the attention of the Pennsylvania Auditor General, who issued a scathing report calling for the prison to be closed. The Auditor General cited the case of a three-month-old infant held for weeks in 2019 at Berks in unsanitary and unsafe conditions, along with routine violations of the Flores Agreement's prohibition on holding children for more than 20 days, including a six-year-old child who had been

incarcerated at Berks for six months by the end of 2019.

In collaboration with Aldea PJC and the National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild, FMP litigated an appeal in Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court of a petition to intervene on behalf of formerly-detained families in the pending effort to revoke the Berks state-issued childcare license. We believe that the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services has not adequately represented the interests of families detained at Berks. As one mother formerly imprisoned at Berks said:

It's time to close this center. While my daughter and I were there, my daughter got very sick. The confinement traumatized us emotionally. I want to tell those people with the power to close that place to think of the kids,

their health. All the people there have family members here in the United States, who are waiting for them with open arms.

Together with the Shut Down Berks Coalition, we continue to push Governor Tom Wolf to use his authority to free the children detained at Berks, and we are exploring new legal challenges to shut it down forever.



*In July, FMP co-organized the Lights for Liberty march in Philadelphia, as part of a national day of action to mobilize the public against family separation and detention of immigrant children.*

## **Fighting for Families Living in Sanctuary Churches**

Working with New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia, FMP continued to provide legal representation to families living in sanctuary in Philadelphia churches. FMP also provides legal and strategic support to the National Sanctuary Collective, a network of sanctuary campaigns across the country. FMP is a founding organizational member of the Collective. FMP has traveled to Washington, D.C., with the Sanctuary Collective to advocate on behalf of sanctuary leaders with elected officials.

FMP coordinated a legal defense against the egregious civil fines that ICE issued against sanctuary leaders around the country. In late June, ICE issued retaliatory civil fines of up to \$500,000 each against a small number of women living in sanctuary around the country. In collaboration with the Austin Sanctuary Network, Grassroots Leadership, and other advocates, FMP coordinated a legal defense with counsel for seven of the sanctuary leaders. In October, ICE rescinded the fines for each of the seven women.





In December, ICE doubled down on its efforts to silence and deport the brave women fighting for their families and communities from inside sanctuary churches across the country. ICE is threatening to renew the civil fines and is raising the specter of criminal prosecution. FMP continues to coordinate legal and strategic support for the women currently under threat of renewed civil fines from ICE.

*In November, FMP joined with clergy, community members, and organizers to demand action from federal legislators to defend families living in sanctuary.*

## Keeping Families Together

Free Migration Project currently provides direct legal representation to approximately 70 individuals and families in their immigration proceedings. This includes cases before the immigration agencies, the immigration courts, the Board of Immigration Appeals, and the federal appeals courts. We worked with grassroots groups to elevate the cases of our clients Darwin and Jose to win their freedom from ICE detention. Through a collaborative effort, Darwin was reunited with his partner and younger brother after nine months of forced family separation by our federal government. Their story reflects how LGBTQ families continue to experience discrimination and persecution by ICE and other federal agencies in 2019.



*FMP's client Darwin (R) was reunited with his partner, Oscar (L), after he was granted asylum and released from ICE detention in Louisiana.*

## **Second Annual Open Borders Conference - New York City**

In October, FMP sponsored the second annual Open Borders Conference in New York City to raise awareness and understanding of open migration policies. Speakers addressed pathways for enacting this vision, discussing how open borders policies could dramatically improve public safety, prosperity, and equality. Conference topics this year included the framework guiding the #AbolishICE movement; the practice of church sanctuary; citizenship and open borders; and the migration crisis triggered by climate change. We are excited to continue to foster dialogue about free movement and expand the scope of what is acceptable in migration policy.



## **Growing Our Capacity**

In November, FMP started the hiring process for a Program Coordinator who will work to elevate strategic public-facing campaigns, liaise with organizational partners to amplify the impact of collaborative legal and organizing work, and refine and disseminate the message of open migration in public discourse. With added capacity, we hope to expand beyond our current core competency of providing legal services and support in order to better achieve organizational objectives within the community. In order to accommodate our growing capacity, we also moved to a larger space in June.

FMP's executive director and Board continued outreach to potential board candidates, and the Board has increased in size from five members at the end of 2018 to eight members by the end of 2019.

FMP continued to build its web presence and digital engagement program utilizing its WordPress site, social media accounts, and Action Network platform.