



2020 Annual Report

Open the borders, close the jails.

Summary



In March our client Suyapa was able to safely leave Sanctuary with her four youngest children after fighting her deportation from inside a church for 18 months.

In 2020, Free Migration Project fought for the liberation of immigrant communities and a world without borders. In our fourth full year of operations, during the COVID-19 pandemic, 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 prison, coordinated the third annual Open Borders Conference, and launched a bilingual online legal resource for the immigrant community and advocates.

Despite the many obstacles posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing state violence against the immigrant community and communities of color, 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 have been able to do this work for another year and look forward to what 2021 may bring.

In solidarity,

David Bennion, Executive Director
 Adrianna Torres-García, Program Coordinator

Fighting to End Family Detention in PA

Shut Down Berks Coalition



This summer, FMP helped organize a "die in" at Governor Tom Wolf's residence to bring attention to the incarcerated families at the Berks family prison.

Free Migration Project is a member of the Shut Down Berks Coalition, which fights to end family detention in Pennsylvania. We coordinate legal and communications strategy for the Coalition and serve as its fiscal sponsor. Earlier this year, we served as co-counsel in a lawsuit against the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services for failing to protect children detained at the Berks family prison during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pennsylvania courts refused to intervene, so we have continued to work with the Shut Down Berks

Coalition to fight for families that are at urgent risk of deportation through the #SafetyForThe28 campaign.

As part of the Shut Down Berks Coalition, we continue to push Governor Tom Wolf to use his authority to direct an emergency removal order to be issued so the families detained at Berks can be released to sponsors in the U.S. We urge the governor to work with the Berks County Commissioners to convert the building to a more beneficial use for Berks County residents.



In February, SDBC and Temple University's Sheller Center for Social Justice convened press and community members in front of the Department of Human Services in Philadelphia to mark four years since PA DHS revoked the license of the Berks family prison.

Fighting for Families in Sanctuary Churches

[#CarmelaLibre & the National Sanctuary Collective - Colectivo Santuario](#)

Working with New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia, FMP continued to provide legal representation to Carmela Apolonio Hernández and her four children, who have been living in sanctuary in Philadelphia churches since 2017. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we had to find creative ways to engage elected officials and community members in the #CarmelaLibre campaign. Thanks to community pressure, several members of the Pennsylvania Congressional delegation have collaborated to support Carmela and her children in their effort to win their freedom.



Our client Carmela Apolonio Hernández in front of the Germantown Mennonite Church, where she lives with her four children.

FMP also provides legal and strategic support to the National Sanctuary Collective – Colectivo Santuario, a network of sanctuary campaigns across the U.S. Since 2019, we have also coordinated a legal defense effort against the egregious civil fines that ICE issued against several sanctuary leaders around the country.

Informing & Educating the Public

ImmigrationInfo.org



On October 1, we announced the launch of our new online legal resource: ImmigrationInfo.org.

Free Migration Project staff, along with web developers and law students, worked this year to build a free, fully bilingual (English-Spanish) online immigration legal resource for immigrants, their families, and those who support them. We developed ImmigrationInfo.org based on the principle that information about the immigration system should be accessible, relevant, and understandable. We hope to make the website multilingual in the future. The U.S. immigration system is confusing, complex, and often hostile to immigrants and their families. Some lawyers and *notarios* take advantage of this complexity to exploit clients. Politicians use the

immigration system as a weapon to target immigrants for political gain. In the face of an immigration legal system designed to harm immigrants and their families, ImmigrationInfo.org's objective is to provide reliable information to impacted people and their loved ones so they are safe and free. The website's October launch marked the beginning of a long-term collaboration between community members, organizers, attorneys and advocates to provide free and reliable information about the immigration system.

Third Annual Open Borders Conference

Along with Pangea Legal Services, we sponsored the third annual Open Borders Conference on November 21 to help educate the public about open migration policies. The virtual conference was entirely bilingual (English-Spanish). The conference created a space for activists, scholars, organizers, lawyers, students, and members of the community to come

together to learn why open borders would lead to dramatic increases in public health, safety, prosperity, and equality; why the pandemic does not justify the global apartheid of the current immigration and citizenship regime; and what it would mean to #AbolishICE. The conference included four keynote speakers, four panels, two breakout groups and a book talk, for more than 12 hours of programming spaced across 12 time zones.



Photo credit: Open Borders Steering Committee

Delivering COVID-19 Relief

PA Immigrant Relief Fund

As the COVID-19 pandemic began to threaten the safety of our communities and Congress sought to exclude noncitizens from government relief, FMP collaborated with organizations in Pennsylvania to provide cash assistance to our most vulnerable clients. The PA Immigrant Relief Fund was a joint project to provide direct emergency assistance to people excluded from federal COVID-19 assistance programs due to their immigration status or the immigration status of a family member and who needed immediate financial assistance. We joined 32 other organizations to distribute \$800 in cash assistance to 859 individuals across Pennsylvania between April and October 2020. FMP was able to distribute cash assistance to 19 of our clients who were not eligible for federal COVID-19 assistance programs.

In Pennsylvania, program recipients came from diverse backgrounds, with approximately 62% Latinx, 7% Asian, and 9% Black. The PA Immigrant Relief Fund raised \$686,700; one hundred percent of all contributions were distributed directly to individuals in need. We are proud to have been part of this effort from the beginning, and we are grateful to have had the opportunity to aid our clients in this way!



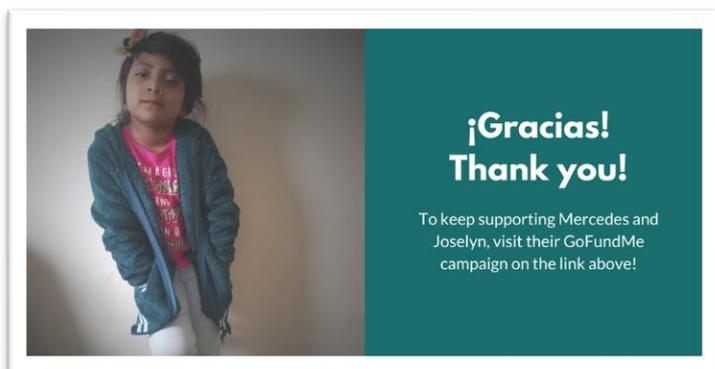
Photo credit: Pennsylvania Immigration & Citizenship Coalition

Keeping Families Together

Free Migration Project currently provides direct legal representation to approximately 70 individuals and families in their immigration proceedings. This includes cases pending before the immigration agencies, the immigration courts, the Board of Immigration Appeals, and the federal appeals courts.

Mercedes and Joselyn (Names have been changed at the request of clients, to safeguard their privacy.)

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were approached by colleagues and community members about Mercedes, a Guatemalan mother who was being released from county jail and needed to be reunited with her children. Mercedes came to the U.S. to protect her family from



FMP raised \$4,500 for Mercedes and Joselyn to stay safe and get back on their feet amidst the COVID-19 health crisis.

violence in her home country. In her own words, Mercedes wishes for her children “to be able to receive a proper education and succeed in life”. In pursuit of these hopes, Mercedes made the courageous decision to embark on the journey from rural Guatemala.

After being targeted by local police without access to adequate interpretation, Mercedes spent more than three months incarcerated in county jail. Her children were sent to a neighboring state to stay with a family member. Upon her release, Mercedes’ priority was to reunite with her children, especially 7-year-old Joselyn, who was traumatized by being separated from her mother. Thanks to our partnerships with community members and organizations, FMP was able to reunite this family, provide them a safe space to shelter in place, and even raise \$4,500 to help them get back on their feet. We continue to work with this family as their legal counsel.

A.V. and End Medical Deportation Campaign

Patient A.V. is a Guatemalan man who suffered serious injuries after being hit by a motorcycle in May of this year, including broken legs, fractured ribs, and severe neurological trauma. He was taken to Jefferson-Torresdale Hospital in Northeast Philadelphia to receive life-saving medical care. In June, Jefferson Hospital informed A.V.'s family that he would be transported to Guatemala on a private charter plane on June 24. At the time, he was bedridden and required long-term care and rehabilitation. His family and advocates reached out for help. We quickly mobilized community members, Jefferson medical students, and Philadelphia City Council members to convene at the hospital on the morning of June 24 to stop the scheduled private deportation. The hospital agreed to delay the deportation, and we continued to work with A.V.'s family and advocates until he was safely placed in a rehabilitative facility.

Along the way, we learned more about medical deportation, the unregulated practice of private deportations by hospitals. We are now working with community partners and elected officials to push for policy changes to stop this abhorrent practice in Philadelphia and beyond.



Photo credit: Our Prism and Tina Vázquez

Expanding Our Capacity

Program Coordinator

In November of 2019, FMP began the hiring process for a Program Coordinator who would 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. In February of 2020, Adrianna Torres-García joined the FMP staff. Adrianna obtained a Master of Arts in Social Work, Concentration on Social Administration, from The University of Chicago, and a Baccalaureate of Arts in Psychology from Universidad de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras. Originally from Puerto Rico, she has an extensive background in social and scientific research, as well as experience in policy and advocacy in nonprofit organizations. She began her involvement in the field of immigration as a Child Advocate for the Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights in Chicago. She also volunteered for University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration's End Family Detention Project and the Dilley Pro Bono Project at the South Texas Family Residential Center in Dilley, Texas. Adrianna is interested in the intersection of policy advocacy, law, research, and community organizing as a tool for the empowerment of the immigrant community. With Adrianna's added capacity, this year we expanded beyond our core competency of providing legal services and support in order to better achieve organizational objectives within the community. FMP also continued to build its web presence and digital engagement program utilizing its WordPress site, social media accounts, and Action Network platform.

Staff Attorney

In December, FMP began the hiring process for a new staff attorney to substantially expand our capacity to provide legal services. The staff attorney will also work to curate information for our online legal resource, ImmigrationInfo.org.

Board

FMP's Board has increased in size from eight members at the end of 2019 to 12 members at the end of 2020. This year, the Board increased its involvement in supporting the work and mission of FMP through committee participation and participation in selected program work.