



2021 ANNUAL REPORT

Artwork by Michelle Angela Ortiz/Familias Separadas Project
Photo Credit: Colibri Workshop

FREE MIGRATION PROJECT

Open the borders, close the jails





Photo credit: Chris Henry on Unsplash

In 2021, Free Migration Project underwent big changes while continuing to advocate for the liberation of immigrant communities and a world without borders. This year we celebrated our fifth full year of operations. We hired a new Staff Attorney and expanded our capacity to provide high quality immigration legal representation to low income families. We also continued our work with the Shut Down Berks Coalition and the End Medical Deportation Campaign, as well as coordinating the fourth annual Open Borders Conference.

Internally, we completed a strategic planning process and look forward to meeting the goals we set for ourselves. We're grateful to have been able to do this work for another year, and we look forward to what 2022 may bring.

In solidarity,
Free Migration Project Staff



IMMIGRANT DETENTION

Photo credit: Shut Down Berks Coalition

Shut Down Berks Coalition

At the beginning of 2021, with a new administration in place, the Shut Down Berks Coalition pivoted to a two-pronged approach in its advocacy to permanently shut down the immigrant prison. The new approach involves targeting the Biden administration at the federal level and the Berks County Commissioners at the local level. In late February 2021, all of the families in the prison were released to their loved ones and sponsors. Although this was an encouraging victory, we soon learned that ICE and the Berks County Commissioners had been colluding to turn the prison into one for immigrant women as young as 18 years old.

The Coalition has since decided to continue advocating for the permanent closure of the immigrant prison. The prison has remained empty through the fall, but ICE has indicated they may start bringing in women before the end of the year. As a core member of the coalition and as an abolitionist organization, we remain committed to fighting for the closure of this prison.

Family Liberation Abolitionist Network



In late 2020, members of the Shut Down Berks Coalition identified a need to bring together other groups working to close family detention centers at the national level. In early 2021, the Family Liberation Abolitionist Network (FLAN) was created. FLAN brings together a diverse group of organizations, groups and people committed to working to abolish family detention in the U.S. by using direct action to hold elected officials accountable to end the family prison system.

Although we are currently focusing our efforts on the local fight at Berks, which is no longer a family prison, we are proud to have helped convene this forum at a crucial time. As a network, we worked with legislators to support the introduction of the Freedom For Families Act in the U.S. House and Senate. This legislation would bar the continued spending of tax dollars on immigrant family prisons and put an end to the detention of families. The introduction process led us to establish important relationships that will help us in many other areas of advocacy.

In mid-December, news broke that no families remained in family detention centers in the U.S. We celebrate this step forward, but join other groups in calling for a permanent end to family detention rather than rebranding it to "reception centers," as the administration has proposed.

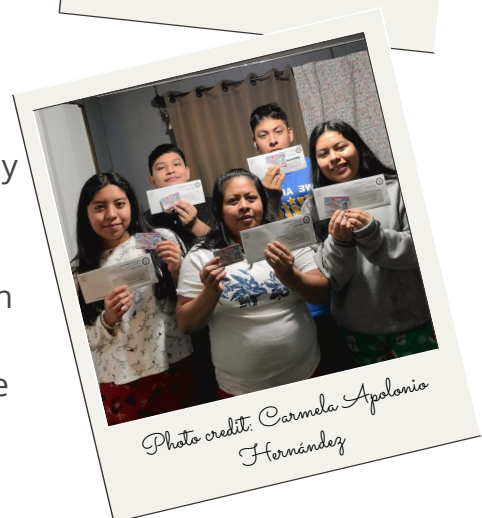
CHURCH SANCTUARY

Photo credit: Dan Mall on Unsplash

Carmela Libre Campaign

Our client Carmela Apolonio Hernández and her four children won their sanctuary victory in the spring after ICE announced that she “is not a priority for enforcement.” Carmela and her children had been living in sanctuary in Philadelphia churches since 2017 under threat of imprisonment, deportation, and family separation by ICE. In May, Carmela and her children received provisional approval of their U visa, a type of humanitarian protection from deportation.

Carmela and her children fled Mexico in 2015 after three close family members were killed by a drug cartel. Carmela applied for asylum, but her application was wrongfully denied. The family was targeted by ICE and threatened with deportation. We are overjoyed to celebrate Carmela and her family’s victory! Their courage inspires us to keep working for a world where borders and immigration enforcement are a thing of the past.



"I feel like a giant weight has been lifted off the shoulders of my family and me. We still have to fight for my U-visa but I can't wait for the approval of my case [while] breathing fresh air." -Carmela Apolonio Hernández (March 2021)

National Sanctuary Collective



The National Sanctuary Collective, also called Colectivo Santuario, is made up of immigrant leaders who had taken refuge in sanctuary churches, immigrant organizers, attorneys, and allies in faith communities spanning multiple states—Utah, Colorado, Texas, Ohio, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Massachusetts, among others. Members of the Colectivo work to build collective strategies for liberation for all people living in sanctuary in the U.S.

Free Migration Project staff were active participants in the organizing efforts of the Collective. In the spring, with the announcement of new ICE enforcement guidelines and after ardent organizing efforts, most of the Sanctuary Leaders were able to leave the churches where they had been living. Some leaders had lived in churches, many with their children, for years. Free Migration Project is deeply honored to have supported these families through their sanctuary fights, and we are happy they were able to safely leave their sanctuary churches!

ICE Civil Fines

Vicky Chávez and her two young daughters took refuge in the First Unitarian Church of Salt Lake City in early 2018. Vicky and her older daughter had fled violence in Honduras in 2014. Vicky had applied for asylum, but the arbitrary, unjust, and hostile legal system led to a deportation order. After Vicky and her daughters took sanctuary, ICE targeted her and a small number of other outspoken immigrant leaders living in sanctuary churches with exorbitant civil fines of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Free Migration Project

coordinated with other organizations and the targeted leaders to sue ICE for violating their constitutional rights. In April of 2021, after sustained litigation and advocacy, ICE rescinded its policy of issuing retaliatory civil fines against immigrant leaders. In April, Vicky and her daughters received a stay of removal and safely left their sanctuary church.



Photo credit: Kim Raff for The New York Times



MEDICAL DEPORTATION

Photo credit: Tina Vásquez at Prism

End Medical Deportation Campaign

In June 2020, Jefferson Torresdale Hospital attempted to deport A.V., a member of the Philadelphia community, after he suffered catastrophic brain injuries as a pedestrian in a motorcycle accident a month before. His family reached out to Free Migration Project, and we quickly mobilized community members, advocates, medical students and city council members to stop the deportation. Once the deportation was successfully halted, A.V.'s family asked FMP staff to continue organizing against this awful practice, because they “hope no one else has to go through something like this again.”

Free Migration Project continues to lead the coalition that formed in regular meetings to organize against medical deportations. In the last year, we have produced a comprehensive report about medical deportation and launched a pilot project to better understand people’s knowledge about the subject. We are also working on an End Medical Deportation hotline and have begun efforts to change local policies to protect immigrants against medical deportation. We hope that this campaign brings together many sectors of the community to put a stop to this heinous practice. Hospitals should not be deporting immigrants, and immigrants should not have to fear deportation when they are seeking medical treatment.

COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED DEPORTATION DEFENSE CAMPAIGNS

Photo credit: Clay Banks on Unsplash

Free Migration Project works with grassroots organizers and community groups to build collaborative campaigns to stop the deportation of community members. Through legal defense, media engagement, direct action, digital organizing, and engaging elected officials, Free Migration Project and its community partners have been able to stop deportations or help people gain legal status. Here are two of the people we have supported in 2021:

Juan

In the summer of 2020, Juan was arrested just outside of Philadelphia during protests against the killing of George Floyd. Juan was unable to post bail after ICE issued a detainer for him. Free Migration Project staff coordinated with lawyers and community members to campaign for Juan's release, and finally in March of 2021, Juan was able to walk free to rejoin his family.



Karina

Karina Ambartsoumian-Clough came to the U.S. as a child with her family seeking asylum. Karina became stateless after her country of birth, the Soviet Union, dissolved. Karina co-founded United Stateless, an organization that advocates for the rights of stateless people. Free Migration Project represents Karina in her immigration case. Despite being married to a U.S. citizen and also a DACA beneficiary, Karina has not been able to apply for a green card because she is stateless. Free Migration Project is working with United Stateless to identify solutions for Karina and other stateless people in the U.S.

EDUCATION & OUTREACH

Photo credit: Barbara Zandoval on Unsplash

Open Borders Conference

Free Migration Project hosted the fourth annual Open Borders Conference on November 6, 2021. This year's conference was a space for people to envision a world without deportation. We joined important conversations about what abolition means in the immigration context, how the global issues of climate change and COVID-19 impact an open borders analysis, and many other topics. From our keynote speakers Ilya Somin and Karma Chávez to all of the wonderful panelists and moderators, we were inspired by the wealth of knowledge and experience that was brought together. This year we were able to provide interpretation in Spanish and American

Sign Language (ASL), as well as establish the Open Borders Conference Language Justice Fund to keep the conference accessible for all for years to come!



PARDONS CAMPAIGNS

Photo credit: Kaja Reichardt on Unsplash

Pardons Project

Free Migration Project is working with VietLead, an organization that serves the Southeast Asian community in Philadelphia and South New Jersey, to help Cambodian and Vietnamese people who were deported due to harsh immigration penalties for criminal convictions return to their communities in the U.S. We are working with law students at the Sheller Center for Social Justice at Temple Law School to file pardon applications for community members. We are exploring options to prevent deportation for some at-risk people still in the U.S. and bring back others who have already been deported. We are advocating for reforms to the system that punishes immigrants convicted of crimes twice: first through prison and then again through exile.

Justice for Denis & Julio

Denis Calderon and Julio Maldonado are cousins born in Peru and raised in the U.S. since they were children. In 1996, a mob of young white men attacked them as they walked to Denis's neighborhood bar around the corner from his home in Northeast Philadelphia. The group first assaulted them with racist slurs, then with beer bottles, fists, and knives. When the police arrived at the scene, they automatically zeroed in on Denis and Julio, the two non-White men, despite the fact that they were the ones surrounded by a hostile group.





Denis and Julio were unjustly charged and eventually convicted of aggravated assault by a judge in a bench trial. Despite both men having longtime permanent resident status and Denis being married to an American citizen, when they were wrongly convicted, their legal immigration status was revoked. After they had already served the time they were sentenced to, Denis and Julio were sentenced once again to a lifetime of separation from their home and families through deportation.

Like many others, Denis and Julio have been torn apart from their families by the injustices embedded within and perpetuated by our immigration and criminal justice systems—racist systems that work hand in hand to target people of color and criminalize their right to move and live freely. We are fighting to bring Denis and Julio home to their families in the United States after 12 long years since being deported to Peru.





LEGAL SERVICES

Photo credit: Mauro Mora on Unsplash

A Growing Team

In January, Free Migration Project began the hiring process for a Staff Attorney who would substantially expand our capacity to provide legal services to immigrant clients. In May, Alexandra Santos Boheciamp joined the team!



Alexandra has a bachelor's degree in criminal justice with a concentration in law and society from the University of Puerto Rico. She also received her Juris Doctor degree from the University of Puerto Rico School of Law in 2020. While attending law school, she worked as a paralegal at a Washington, D.C. based law firm assisting with disaster recovery litigation.

Alex became interested in the legal representation of indigent asylum seekers after participating in the International Exchange Program at the University of Connecticut School of Law. This experience led to volunteering as an interpreter to assist detained asylum seekers in York County Prison, Pennsylvania. She later participated in the University of Puerto Rico's Immigration Law Clinic, where she provided legal services to immigrants with affirmative petitions and in removal proceedings. Before joining Free Migration Project, she worked as a law clerk for Aldea – The People's Justice Center. Alexandra is particularly interested in deportation and removal defense work.

A stylized illustration of several hands in various colors (blue, purple, orange, teal) reaching in from the sides to hold a large, light blue heart in the center. The background is a mix of soft, pastel colors.

STRATEGIC PLAN


Photo credit: Tim Mossholder on Unsplash

New Horizons

We have grown significantly since our founding in 2016. The strategic plan Free Migration Project staff and Board developed this year lays out the next steps for our organizational growth. We focus on four areas with specific goals for each area from 2022 to 2024: Program and Organizational, Personnel, Budget, and Communications and Branding. Free Migration Project staff conducted a survey of colleagues, peers, and coalition partners and held one-on-one follow up interviews to gather feedback on our strengths and opportunities as an organization. We also carried out a detailed S.W.O.T. (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis on our work so far to gain a better understanding of what we want to achieve in the next three years. Finally, we followed guiding questions suggested by the Board and incorporated Board feedback throughout the planning process.

Our growth strategy is ambitious: we plan to double our staff size over the next three years while bringing staff compensation more in line with that of peer organizations in our area. Every six months during the strategic plan period, Free Migration Project's staff and board will evaluate whether the organization is meeting the benchmarks on the plan's three-year timeline. We are excited to continue growing our organization and reach the goals we have set for ourselves!

BOARD



NO ONE IS ILLEGAL

Photo credit: Miko Guziuk on Unsplash

Leadership for Change

This year, our Board increased its leadership by activating its Executive Committee and creating a Development Committee, as well as voting to confirm the Board President, Jasmine Rivera. At the beginning of 2021, the Board had 12 members. Three Board members will have completed their tenure by the end of this year: Jessica Lee, Vipul Naik, and Jenna McElroy. We are grateful for the time and expertise they so graciously shared to make Free Migration Project better.