

WELCOME STRANGERS

A Timely Story about Loving Thy Neighbor

Take Action Guide

There are dozens of ways to act as a good neighbor to someone affected by immigrant detention. Here are some suggestions and resources to help you explore what supportive role you may play. We encourage you to ask a friend to join you. As the proverb goes, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." Groups in pockets across the country are doing the following:

1. Befriend an immigrant in detention.

- » [Casa de Paz](#) has a pen-pal program that allows volunteers to write to immigrants in detention, offering friendship to someone who is isolated and cut off from their family, friends and community. It is a great way to remind them that they're not alone - we see them, and care about them.
- » [Freedom for Immigrants](#) has an interactive map that shows all the detention facilities across the US. It also lists all of the visitation programs in their nationwide network.

2. Learn about your immigrant neighbors.

- » Host a gathering with interested friends and family and invite a local immigrant advocate to speak. Use this as an opportunity to learn what the greatest needs are in his/her community.
- » Connect with advocacy groups already serving in your area. Many community organizations, churches and congregations have well-established programs that support immigrants.
- » Take a border immersion trip. A civic group or church could direct you to such an experience.
- » Read, listen and/or watch immigrant stories. A good place to start is Sarah's book "[The House That Love Built.](#)" You can also use podcasts, books, articles, films and other media to gain perspective about different experiences. Do this with a friend or group to discuss your reactions.

3. Connect with immigrants in your community.

- » A local advocacy group or church can connect you with immigrants in your neighborhood or community and help you find ways to show them loving support.
- » Organize a transportation program to give immigrants rides to important tasks including medical appointments, immigration court hearings, or their regular ICE check-ins. It is also helpful to offer rides to people who would like to see family members who are still detained.
- » Help vulnerable families develop a preparedness plan in case a parent is detained or deported.
- » If they struggle with English, form a team to help them with everyday tasks like filling out school forms for their children.
- » If you befriend a detained immigrant, they may have a spouse or partner who's undocumented and can't visit them. If so, offer to take their children to visit the detained parent.

- » Purchase phone cards for detainees to allow them to call their family regularly. Their connection to loved ones keeps up their hope.
- » Ask the detention facility's program director which immigrants never have visitors, then gather volunteers to visit and encourage them.
- » Gather a group to make greeting cards to send to people in detention so they don't feel forgotten on holidays.
- » Ask lawyers you know to represent an immigrant as part of their firm's pro bono legal work. An immigrant's chances of winning their case increases by 80 percent when they have an attorney. A good resource is [American Immigration Lawyers Association \(AILA\)](#).
- » Secure someone's release on bond. This is a multiple blessing - it allows them to be with their family and to work and earn money while their case is in process. This, too, increases their chance of winning by 80 percent. Sometimes, to secure a bond release, a judge requires an immigrant to have a sponsor to take them in; ask church families or several churches to join together as cosponsors, with supportive strength in numbers.
- » Enlist families, groups or churches to take in immigrants as they are released from detention. Most need brief temporary shelter and support as they begin their journey to reunite with their loved ones. It doesn't take much; simple things like a phone call to their family, a hot bath and a home-cooked meal provide peace as nothing else can. All of these things are simple to do, yet they mean the world to families going through one of the most difficult times of their lives.

4. Urge your congressional representative to end immigrant detention and to call for inexpensive, humane alternatives.

- » Freedom For Immigrants offers an [interactive map](#) of all detention centers in the U.S. and has launched a project called "[End Detention In Your District,](#)" informational briefs highlighting immigrant prisons and jails in Congressional districts throughout the country.
- » [Families Belong Together](#) strives to end family separation and promotes up-to-date actions you can take to get involved and stay involved.

5. For your own growth, try these creative exercises:

- » Put yourself in the shoes of someone in this film. Ask what you would do in their situation. Walk around in their world and imagine their family's realities. Then imagine how that experience would feel if they had the support of a local group behind them.
- » If your ancestors immigrated to the United States, what were their motives? Compare them with someone's situation in the film. What hopes, motives, and yearnings do your family and theirs share?

6. Finally, if you want to explore starting a hospitality home like Casa de Paz, visit casadepazcolorado.org or email sjackson@casadepazcolorado.org.

You'll never regret befriending an immigrant. Doing it will change two worlds, theirs and yours. And even your smallest act as a good neighbor ripples outward to the community and even the world.

This guide is adapted from the appendix of "The House that Love Built," by Sarah Jackson and Scott Sawyer. Deep gratitude to them for their inspiration and advice.