

A Month of Partner-Focused Updates

To those of our friends who practice different faith traditions, we at Indiana AID extend our best wishes in your recent observance of the important dates of Easter, Passover, and Ramadan.

Since our last newsletter, we have had multiple partner-related updates that we wish to share with you, both positive and not. As you walk alongside us in partnering with individuals in ICE detention, we know their stories don't stop at the small snapshot we provide here. Join us as we dive deeper into some of their stories.

A's Story, part 1*

**The name has been changed to protect the individual's identity who shared his story with one of our volunteers to be told here.*

A. grew up in a Central American country known for its violence. He describes the police as being implicated in the violence, or at least turning away to let it happen. After five of his brothers were murdered by drug traffickers, and a nephew was killed nearby, his parents and one remaining brother came to the US and received asylum. They have been living in Indianapolis for several years.

Meanwhile, A. was threatened by a person from the same drug trafficking group that had killed his brothers. He killed the person in self-defense. He was convicted and served eleven years of a fifteen-year sentence, including

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Williams' Story Revisited

*Williams' story was originally shared in our December '22 newsletter under a different name. Recently, **Williams' asylum case was approved and he was released from custody.** He is currently trying to find helps and resources until his work authorization paperwork is granted. He asked we re-share his story again, but using his full name, Williams Rodriguez-Espinal.*

I was born in Santo Domingo, where poverty, delinquency and injustice abound, and this is my story. We were 13 people who lived in the home of my grandmother and she worked every day to provide for everyone. I began to work at the age of 8 years old, cleaning shoes in the street and homes on Saturdays and Sundays. Weekdays I went to school in the morning. We never had money to eat at recess and we'd have to escape to pick up trash in order to get money to eat. I didn't like the idea because I always liked studying but when I'd get home, it was never a sure thing if there'd be a plate of food waiting for me. I went to school with the same uniform for 5 years straight. The taunting and comments began to annoy me a lot and the fights with schoolmates began daily.

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Feb/Mar 2023 Monthly Reports

February

- Visits - 11 virtual visits at Clay County jail
 - 10+ virtual visits at other jails where partners were moved
- Commissary - \$112
- Books - 2

March

- Visits - 4 virtual visits at Clay County jail
 - 10+ virtual visits at other jails where partners were moved
- Commissary - \$2,710.40
- Books - at least 3

A's Story, Part 1

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six months in solitary confinement. The prison was also rife with violence. He was released on probation but did not feel safe in that country. With help from his brother, he paid a person to get him into the US. He had been here for five months when he was detained by ICE. After being incarcerated at Clay for a few weeks he was transferred to Dodge County Jail in Wisconsin. His brother is paying an attorney to advance his plea for asylum. If this is denied, and he is deported to his country of origin, he is sure that he will be put back in jail and killed there by the drug traffickers.

When I asked about conditions at Clay, A. mentioned that it was too cold, that there was only one thin blanket at night, and that the food was insufficient and of poor quality, but all of these things were minor for him compared to his need to not be sent back to his country of origin. He has spent almost his whole adult life in jail and is eager to start a normal life. He hopes for work to pay back his debts (having borrowed money to get to the US and to pay the attorney), and eventually for a wife and children. His parents are elderly and are praying for his release. A. asks for our prayers for his asylum plea to move forward. He says he is trusting in God, that God's will will be done.

Williams' Story, continued

My grandmother always told me, "Son, don't let the teasing cause you emotions because it's not the uniform that's studying or learning, it's you." But everything was very dark in my life at an age that I couldn't really understand why I had to live a life of poverty to such extremes.

In cleaning shoes, I met a family who helped me. I went every weekend to wash their car, pick up dog poop, and clean their shoes. What I earned was a big help and, in that way, I began to help my grandmother with food for the house. In the neighborhood there was a gang called Blood ("Sangre"). I grew up in the middle of them because they held their meetings beside my house. At 10 years old I had to leave home; my brother and I decided we were too much of a burden for my grandmother. We lived on the shore of the beach under some stairs and during the day, we'd leave to ask for food from the restaurants near the beach and to wash windshields of the cars in the street. At that time, I came to know about weed. I began to smoke and then my brother began to sell drugs. We decided to return home but nothing had changed; we were mistreated, tortured at the hands of my grandmother's husband and their children. My uncle always saw us as different; I believe that was the reason why my brother left for the street. He became a gang member and did the dirty jobs for his boss. I was with him most of the time during the day but at night, I never saw him. One day he invited me to go with him to collect some money and that day my brother was killed by some police officers who belonged to the gang. My friend and I were able to escape and my brother and another guy died. I got a bullet in the leg and my friend, who had escaped with me, was found dead a month after that. I left the city and I spent three years running from these people until my contact, who told me that they'd found me, said that he couldn't protect me any more and that I needed to leave the country. This was the reason why I had to leave my country so urgently.

A's Story, Part 2

A's story does not have the same good news as Williams', unfortunately. He originally shared his story with his volunteer partner prior to being relocated to a different ICE facility. She stayed in touch with him while he was there and provided the update below:

A. came to the US fleeing violence in his home country. He started his detention at Clay then was transferred to Dodge in Wisconsin. The first time he saw the judge, she said he had too many documents for her to review in the scheduled time; she scheduled him back in 2 weeks. At the two-week hearing, she heard his case and said she would let the attorney know of her ruling in a couple of weeks. The days dragged by as A. waited to hear. His parents and one brother had been granted asylum several years ago, so it seemed that he had a pretty good case. A couple of times the attorney called him just to let him know that he hadn't heard anything. Finally the attorney called him with the news: his asylum plea was denied because he had not presented enough "credible evidence" of a threat against his life. Instead of being granted asylum, he would be deported.

After hearing this news, I (his conversation partner) was stunned. I couldn't understand how having had 5 brothers killed was not enough evidence of a threat. I also couldn't understand how his parents' and brother's case would be accepted and his denied. There was still some paperwork to be completed at the consulate of his home country before he could leave, and this took several weeks. He started working in the kitchen of the jail in Dodge, Wisconsin, just to keep busy. He read books and prayed. He called me with updates from time to time. I gave him information on a "Returning Migrants" program at the airport in his home country that would help with bus money if needed. He explained that he would be transferred to Chicago on a bus, then to a transit jail facility in Louisiana, then finally to his home country. He made plans for what he would do once he got to his home country. He was sure he would be killed if he showed up near his family's home, so he made plans to go to a friend in another area. As the days went by he seemed to have a more positive spirit, ready to deal with what was rather than hope for what wasn't.

Finally the day came. A. left a message for me that he was on his way. Using his A-number, I was able to follow his journey to Louisiana. About three days later, the ICE Detainee Locator showed "Search=0" and I knew he had left the USA. A few days later he left me a message on WhatsApp, confirming that he was in his home country.

A. and I were conversation partners from early November to mid-March. Every time we spoke, he expressed his gratitude for the personal support he received from me and from Indiana AID. Thank you, our supporters, for making this possible.

-Martha

Volunteer

Currently, our greatest needs are for...

- Spanish-speaking visitation partners
- Visitation partners who speak languages other than English and Spanish
- Financial support
- Volunteer drivers (add your name to an "on call" list to consider transportation requests)
- Website and social media specialists

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