

Film Screening & Panel Discussion - Life Inside ICE Detention

On July 17th, Indiana AID had the opportunity to partner with the Indianapolis Liberation Center to host a film screening and panel discussion on the experience and impacts of ICE detention. We are grateful to each person who turned out for the event, to Indy Liberation Center for graciously providing us the venue and sharing about the event, and to each of our Indiana AID volunteers who shared about their experiences during the panel discussion. We especially wish to express our thanks to Miguel, an individual who was recently released from ICE detention, who is a valued partner in our group, and who willingly shared his lived experience of being detained for 9.5 months by ICE. Miguel has had various poems shared in past Indiana AID newsletters and he graciously allowed for us to share his responses to the panel discussion and his newest poem in this newsletter.

During the event, we showed a documentary titled “The Facility,” by the organization Field of Vision. The film follows the lives of immigrants who were detained and seeking release during the early onslaught of COVID-19. The documentary gives an excellent example of what much of Indiana AID’s visits look like as we support and meet with our detained partners through virtual video visits. As the film describes it, “filmed using the cameras attached to tablets installed inside the detention center cell-blocks, the film is a unique, real-time chronicle of a life in an immigration detention facility, and of a struggle for freedom and accountability.”

We highly encourage viewing this free, 25-minute documentary and have included links to both an English and Spanish version of the film in the email connected to this newsletter. Both versions can also be found at Field of Vision’s website: <https://fieldofvision.org/shorts/the-facility>

This event was also an opportunity for a small fundraiser for Indiana AID and to share about volunteer opportunities. Unfortunately, at our last in-person visit to the jail, we were staggered to see how much ICE detention has grown at the facility, and we recognize that there is no way that our funds, solely provided through donation, will be able to cover the type of helps we’ve provided up to this point. We’ll speak more on this point in our next newsletter, but we were very appreciative to have the opportunity through the event mid-July to make more people aware of what’s currently going on with ICE detention here in Indiana.



One Man's Lived Experience

As stated earlier, one of our partners, Miguel, recently won the right to leave ICE detention after 9.5 months of being separated from his family. We asked Miguel during the panel discussion to share about his experience and his answers are below.

My name is Miguel Avila Romano and I am a Mexican immigrant. I was born in Cuernavaca, Mexico. I immigrated to the US about 22-23 years ago. In August of 2023 I was arrested by immigration officials and jailed in the Clay County Justice Center here in the state of Indiana. During my incarceration I became aware of the work done by the Indiana AID volunteers and 3 months after my detention began, I started collaborating with them, writing poems for their bimonthly newsletter. Now that I am free, I continue to write poems and collaborate with the group how I can, in order to continue helping immigrants in detention.

Can you walk us through what your day-to-day experience was like in the Clay County jail?

- For me, being detained in Clay County was one of the worst experiences of my life. It was like a pause in my life, where time seemed to stop but, at the same time, it also advanced and retreated constantly. Every day was the same routine, nothing changed. It was like living in a movie that repeated over and over again. The uncertainty there, the desperation and levels of stress surged in indescribable ways!

What were the conditions like at the jail? How would you describe your experience?

- Clay County is one of the worst places for any Hispanic immigrant; and not only for Hispanic immigrants but for any immigrant from any part of the world. It's like a jail within a jail, where they push detainees to the true limits of humanity.
- They sent me to Block "E," a dirty, toxic place that smelled very bad. The floor of the showers and the shower curtains were covered in mold. The toilet bowls were encrusted with dirtiness and bacteria which could be smelled even outside of the cells in the area where we sat to eat.
- They kept us totally separated from the outside world, completely restricted from sunlight, from fresh air.
- Access to the law library is practically null, supposedly there ought to be one? Frankly I never saw it. The only thing available is a small cart with a variety of books, and it took days, sometimes more than a week, to have access to the books.

What were your relationships like between you and the COs (correctional officers)? What about ICE?

- My experience with the guards was very impactful. Of the more than 25 guards that I met, I can say that there were only 4 of them, 3 of those being female officials, who tried to be more humanitarian and understand our situation, and there was only one official who spoke Spanish fluently.

One Man's Lived Experience - continued

- The rest of the guards were always very rude and some of them committed acts of discrimination, racism, abuse of authority, and with the language barrier, many of my companions suffered from verbal and psychological abuse.
- Many of the detainees, including as an act of desperation, tried to make "friends" with the guards, developing almost a type of "Stockholm syndrome" – and the guards obviously took advantage of that.

What were your relationships like with other detained individuals?

- Living with the other detainees was a very interesting experience and sometimes challenging. I met people from all over the world and from all types of backgrounds. The majority of people detained where just family people, caught up on their way to work.

*Miguel also shared an anecdote from having to spend Christmas in the jail. All of the men in the block pooled their commissary purchases and spread them all out together to share like a holiday buffet. They also tried to stay on the good side of the guards in order to ask for a **clean** trash bag to use in order to stir together a mixture of items that, Miguel assured the attendees, perhaps didn't sound great together, but tasted wonderful. Miguel explained that the men have no access to cook anything so, although they may get ramen or other items from the commissary that should be heated up, there's no kettle or hot pot, no bowls to heat them in. The men would use water from the sinks or the showers, which sometimes offered tepid to warm water, sometimes not. With the clean trash bag, they added the ramen, a variety of chips and other snack items, and created something that helped them celebrate the holiday while all far from their families and loved ones.*

An example of a recipe made from typical jail commissary items:

Menudo Kit

(Servings: 1)

- **1 small bag chicharrones**
- **1 bag crushed pretzels (preferably jalapeño-flavored)**
- **1 can Easy Cheese**
- **2 cups hot water**

Pour the chicharrones in a bowl or slit the packaging to make into a bowl.

Add crushed pretzels, hot water and cheese. Stir and enjoy.

Poem - "The Modern Auschwitz"

Miguel shared a poem during the panel discussion and talked about how his poetry was and continues to be a way for him to process what he's experienced during his detention. Below is his latest reflection.

"The Modern Auschwitz"

*Nine months of uncertainty,
Nine months of suffering,
Of isolation and segregation.
Absence of kindness, lack of warm-heartedness,
And lack of the warm sunshine.*

*Psychological torture and repression,
Racism and humiliation.*

*Why do they hate us so much, what are they afraid of?
Is so much discrimination necessary?
They walk all over our rights
In the new concentration camps.*

*It's "the modern Auschwitz,"
The new detention center,
That, disguised under the dirty new immigration law,
They go "purging" the town without fear of God!*

*Because of my skin color and my language
Persecuted and arrested.
Replicating history itself,
Nazism has returned!*

*Apprehended by the dozens,
Hands and feet with chains,
There is no mercy of any kind,
Minds and souls already broken.*

-continued-

Poem - "The Modern Auschwitz" continued

*Filthy bodies forced to march
To an uncertain destination
We cannot protest at all
Human rights on degradation!*

*Full wagons ready to depart,
We're going to get burned up alive!
Shut up! Be quiet!
They'll beat you up and expel you out!*

*If all the immigrants would leave at once
Can you imagine what would this nation be like?
If today ten of us are removed,
By tomorrow, one hundred will arrive!*

*Be strong, my brothers, go ahead!
That this here not be the end,
If we leave all together, this country starves to death!*

*Where are my brothers going to end up?
Will I see them again someday?*

*Nine months are eternal in the traps...
Of the "New Modern Concentration Camps."*

-Miguel Avila

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Volunteer

Currently, our greatest needs are for...

- Spanish-speaking visitation partners
- Visitation partners who speak languages other than English and Spanish
- Financial support/fundraising experience
- Website and social media specialists

Donate



<https://www.indianaaid.org/donate>

- Indiana AID is a volunteer group funded 100% on donations. Please consider a tax-deductible donation via the QR code or link above.
- Shalom Mennonite Church is our fiscal sponsor - you will be taken to their site's giving page where you will first select an amount to give and then choose the fund where you would like your money to go, "Indiana AID Fund." None of the money donated to Indiana AID goes to the church's budget.
- You can also donate by sending a check to the church with "**Indiana AID**" in the memo line.
 - **Shalom Mennonite Church**
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