

KHN ACTION FOR ASYLEE JUSTICE

Since 2017, KHN has become increasingly involved in demands for justice for refugees & asylum seekers. This timeline highlights some of our actions & ongoing commitments.

THROUGHOUT 2017

KHN Tikkun Olam committee works with Faith Action Network and other groups to amplify community actions opposing ICE detentions, targeted bans and other growing atrocities. Connections with NWIRP, Entre Hermanos & HIAS established.

HHD 5779

Tikkun Olam chair shares opportunity to support M&M during our HHD appeal. A guest offers a home on Puget Sound, Asylum seekers are prohibited from employment, **KHN commits to financially supporting M&M through their asylum process.**

FALL WINTER 18-19

KHN members learn how to bond asylee detainees out of ICE detention and begin taking direct action to secure release of detainees. Working with HIAS, KHN President bonds M's 18 year old brother out of ICE detention in San Diego and brings him to PNW. Three other asylees are bonded out through member organizing with HIAS, Entre Hermanos & NWIRP.

SPRING SUMMER 2019

KHN continues to protest and organize. Additional funds are raised to support M&M. Working with Entre Hermanos KHN member family becomes emergency sponsor of Transgender woman asylee, bonded out from San Diego. Skills and knowledge grows.

SEPTEMBER 2019

M&M, although legally married as they entered the U.S., celebrate their marriage with a seaside wedding thrown by KHN members and friends. KHN dances with the bride & groom!

SUMMER FALL 2020

COVID throws immigration processes into further disarray. M&M continue to gather their defense. Xenophobic rhetoric grows during the pandemic and the long election cycle.

JAN 28 2017

KHN members are the first protesters (literally!) on the scene at SeaTac airport where Muslim people are detained by immigration officials in response to Executive Order 13769, **Trump's Muslim Ban**. The "Never Again is Now" protest began by Jews grows to the thousands.

SPRING 2018

Magdiel, Mirna and baby Joshua, are in the 2018 Central American caravan, traveling north from Honduras. After crossing the border, they are detained separately – Mirna and Joshua in Texas and Magdiel in San Diego. Mirna makes her way to family in the PNW. Magdiel remains in ICE custody for 80 grueling days.

HHD 5779 ONWARD

KHN forms M&M support teams, led by team of KHN Spanish speakers, teams furnish the house, secure ESL and preschool classes including daily transportation, set up phones, and a million other supports. M&M part of KHN life as well as their family & parish communities.

OCT 27, 2018

White supremacist kills 11 worshippers during Shabbat services at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA, saying "HIAS likes to bring invaders in that kill our people. I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I'm going in" KHN organizes community-wide vigil & service with PNW immigration rights organizations.

TISH B' AV 5779

KHN & Rabbi Zari Weiss organizes regional CLOSE THE CAMPS ICE protest in solidarity with Jewish organizations across the nation on Tish B' Av, the first such national Jewish protest against government in the U.S.

WINTER 2020

KHN co-sponsors bond fund fundraiser and expands support for M&M as they prepare for their new baby to arrive. Trump administration further limit asylee access. opportunities to bond asylees out of detention dramatically decrease.

JANUARY 2021

The Immigration Judge grants M&M asylum in a 23 page decision commending their bravery. The US does not appeal, M&M and their children are welcome to stay in the U.S. and pursue life and liberty.

From a narrow place..

KHN engages in activism to change policy and practice, but we also have a commitment to stand with one asylee family as they navigate the ICE and immigration gauntlet. Here is one member's account of our journey together.

Magdiel, Mirna and their two-year-old son, Joshua, were part of the March 2018 Central American caravan comprised primarily of Honduran citizens. After crossing the U.S. border, they were detained separately – Mirna and Joshua in Texas and Magdiel in San Diego. Mirna had relatives in the Pacific Northwest and arrived in the Seattle-area in early May. Twenty-one-year-old Magdiel was detained in abhorrent conditions for more than 80 days. Magdiel finally arrived in Seattle (20 pounds lighter) but relieved to be with his family at the end of July.

During KHN's 2018 High Holiday services, our Tikkun Olam chair told congregants we had an opportunity to support the asylees. Our six-month commitment would include finding the young family a place they could call home; furnishing their new space; helping them navigate the new system, financial support and whatever it would take to help them get on their feet. That was part of "the ask" at services that day.

A guest at KHN's "ticket-free" services that day went home and told his partner about the need. The two offered the family a rent-free home on the shore of Puget Sound. KHN-ers quickly began gathering a household of furnishings. When the news came that Magdiel's little brother was detained in California, KHN Shammes President posted the bond and worked with HIAS to organize transport for him to join the family here. Contributions were abundant and the family had what they needed to settle in. KHN's Spanish speakers quickly set up multi-layered schedules for weekly groceries, doctors, dentists, therapists, pre-school, church. Someone arranged to pay their monthly phone bill; another found ESL classes at the local community college while others took both parents to and from classes four days a week. The tasks kept coming, and so did the volunteers. Naturally, those in the congregation involved in the day to day began to build deeper relationships as we grew to know one another. They were parented by several "Jewish mothers." Joshua's library grew larger each day. Mirna baked delicious cakes for our gala dessert dash and Magdiel helped as we built the sukkah.

Asylum seekers across the nation face random delays and confusing, exhausting hoops and set backs, and Magdiel and Mirna face the same challenges. The six months turned into a year which turned into another and now, it is two years later. The young parents are not allowed to work and paying them for their labor is illegal. The family has to rely on contributions from KHN and other community members for housing, food, clothing and all their financial needs. It is a deeply vulnerable position faced by so many. Without community support, refugees face exploitation and harm, instability and isolation.

Not long after they arrived at KHN, a congregant asked Mirna if she ever dreamed of a traditional wedding. She quietly replied, "What girl doesn't want to wear white on her wedding day?"

KHN came together to throw a story book wedding in September 2019. A beautiful dress came out of deep storage. Flowers were procured and turned into breathtaking bridal bouquets and center pieces. Our KHN teens and younger children blended with Mirna's family as they ushered the couple down the aisle that glorious day – our congregants provided everything they could and found others in our community to provide tables and chairs, a wonderful DJ, a homemade three-tiered wedding cake, etc. Everyone found a way to help whether it was tending the bar or washing dishes.

We celebrate each other's simchas and give comfort in times of stress and sorrow. In July, we all celebrated the birth of their daughter, Shelsea.

The loving couple who provided the home for them two years ago have continued supporting them along with our congregation. Recently, we worked together to make the move into a new home, and KHN continues to financially support the family..

Their asylum case will go to trial in December. More than 100 letters of support from congregants and from others with whom they have connected are already with their attorney and more are arriving every day. One of the most profound pieces of this experience is that this opportunity gave people a chance to engage at a time when in our history when many of us felt frustration, anger and helplessness. If people lacked money to pitch in, they gave their time, babysat, brought meals, helped fill out forms, showed up for hearings and meetings. The Spanish speakers at KHN formed a support group that came together simply because they could communicate directly with the family. The preschool drivers, fondly called the "retiree express" had four different people driving Joshua to school four days a week with two back-up drivers. Day by Day, Mirna and Magdiel rebuilt their lives.

Magdiel and Mirna's asylum case finally went to trial in December 2020. Their attorney received more than 100 letters of support from congregants and other supporters. Supporters could not attend because of the pandemic and the family was left to face the trial alone. The trial was grueling. Magdiel and Mirna were told to expect a decision—and with it their fate in the United States—in thirty days. The final wait was on.

On Martin Luther King's birthday, January 15, 2021, the family learned the asylum decision for their case. Many KHN-ers were called together on a Zoom call so Mirna and Magdiel could share the news. It was obvious from the moment the meeting began that the news was good. Both Magdiel and Mirna were relaxed and smiling, as if a heavy weight had been lifted off their shoulders.

They were safe. In a 23-page decision commending the family for their strength and perseverance in the face of terrible odds, the judge granted the family asylum.

Magdiel and Mirna and Joshua and Shelsea are free to live in the United States. And the family is wasting no time stepping into the promise of their hard-won freedom. Magdiel was in the social security office immediately applying for his card. The City of Seattle is helping with some support for the next few months and the family has finally been allowed to open their own bank account. Magdiel and Mirna are both looking forward to the opportunities ahead for them and their family and the chance to define their lives on their own terms.

KHN spent much of Passover 5781 reflecting on this journey to freedom. We knew that the quest for freedom is as relevant as ever and our work toward social justice is far from over. And yet, during the Seder we are taught to celebrate every gift and every triumph as if it, alone, was enough. So as we gathered to retell the Passover story, we added Magdiel and Mirna's good news to our Dayenus. Their triumph reminded us of the power of the Jewish values we put into practice, the impact of our collective actions to create a more just society, and the potential for our collective commitments to build a better world.

There is more to do, but we are thankful for this chance to cherish the wide expanse of freedom.

