



News Release

For Immediate Release
October 24, 2019

For More Information Contact:
Tina Bruno Stanley @210-559-5277

JFON Houston Part of \$2 Million Grant to Help Asylum Seekers

Houston – Justice For Our Neighbors Houston (JFON Houston) announced today they have been chosen to partner with the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and Church World Service to be part of a \$2 million project aimed at helping asylum-seekers in Houston, Florida and New York.

The UMCOR funded project will provide coordinated assistance to asylum-seekers in the three service areas – providing access to a broader range of support to safely live in the U.S. and secure relief from deportation.

Through the partnership, JFON Houston receives a three-year grant from UMCOR to add a full-time immigration attorney specializing in asylum to their legal team. The new hire is expected to allow the non-profit to serve another 60 asylum clients over the next three years as well as more than 100 other migrants who will receive advice and counsel about their legal options.

“Being awarded this grant and the ability to partner with UMCOR and Church World Service is a blessing to us and the clients we will be able serve,” said Manne Favor, Executive Director of JFON Houston.

“We have seen a great increase in the number of asylum-seekers in the Houston region and have sadly had to turn many away because we are at capacity – as are most all the non-profit immigration legal services providers in the area.”

Favor applauds UMCOR’s passion to provide a holistic approach to helping asylum-seekers. He says the collaboration will help integrate asylum-seekers into their new communities and help them become productive members of society much quicker than trying to navigate everything alone.

“UMCOR isn’t an organization that just talks about doing what is right,” added Favor. “They research best practices and then provide the funds and the oversight to make meaningful change.”

Immigrants who cannot afford an attorney for their asylum case are not provided one by the government, which is a contrast from criminal law proceedings.

A 2015 study by Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse showed that without legal representation only 1.5 percent of women and children who had passed their credible fear interviews were granted asylum in the United States.

"Without legal help, most asylum cases don't make it through the lengthy and complicated court procedure," said Joy Green, JFON Houston Legal Director. She explained that being found to have credible fear by an asylum officer can be the beginning of an asylum claim and that the average backlog for asylum claims in Houston right now is between two and three years.

"UMCOR puts into practice the commandments of God and the biblical teaching of Jesus to love your neighbor and welcome the stranger," said Favor. "At a time when the United States government has announced it will assist in resettling the lowest number of refugees since 1980, this partnership and investment by the Methodist Church will truly be a gift from God for many immigrants fleeing torture, trying to protect the lives of their children and live legally and productively in the United States."

Additional services offered under the collaboration include helping participants find affordable housing, registering children in school and enrolling in English classes. In addition, once applicants are eligible to work, they can receive job search assistance.

"Our clients are anxious to work," Green said. "They are excited begin their lives in the United States, learn English, support their families and become stable members of our workforce."

The greater Houston region hosts the third largest population of undocumented immigrants in the United States. More immigrants are deported out of Harris County's immigration courts than any other county in the country.

JFON Houston provides low-income immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers with affordable, high-quality immigration legal services regardless of race, ethnicity, ideology, religion, gender identification or country of origin.

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Editor's Note: For more information about Justice For Our Neighbors Houston please visit www.JFONHouston.org.