Matthew 25/Mateo 25 SoCal and the Ecumenical Collaboration for Asylum Seekers’

**Manual for Host Families and Support Circles**:

A Compilation of Best Practices for Accompanying Asylum Seekers

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**Portion in Spanish -- Guía Práctica accessible** [**here**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yoPOA9RijLX5HU_0DTwyO2WOQwKA0mvh0iOoznrbsMs/edit?usp=sharing)**.**

**Introduction to the Manual (English Portion)**

In creating this manual, we have sought to include the best practices from experts in this field -- whether they are experts from their professional, academic, or personal experiences. The contributions included in this manual are the beginning of an organic creation that will continue to be updated as sponsors, support circles, and others gain experience and as the current administration continues to arbitrarily change both laws and how the systems work. Thus, we ask you approach with grace, realizing this is just the beginning of a compilation of the wisdom and knowledge that exists throughout this community. This resource contains three different portions: an English manual with detailed steps and structures, a Spanish handout, and a portion for Puentes, our bilingual, bicultural millennials who play a key role in bridging immigrant and English speaking folks in order to best support the immigrant families.

This manual also does not provide comprehensive background on immigration policies, on history, or on theology regarding caring for immigrants, but we encourage you to do our own research and learn as much as possible about all sides of this issue. There is a list of resources at the end of the manual for you to begin this process. This manual is also focused on asylum-seekers, as that is the main population we are walking with right now. Once they receive asylum approval, the resources, requirements, and benefits available will be different.

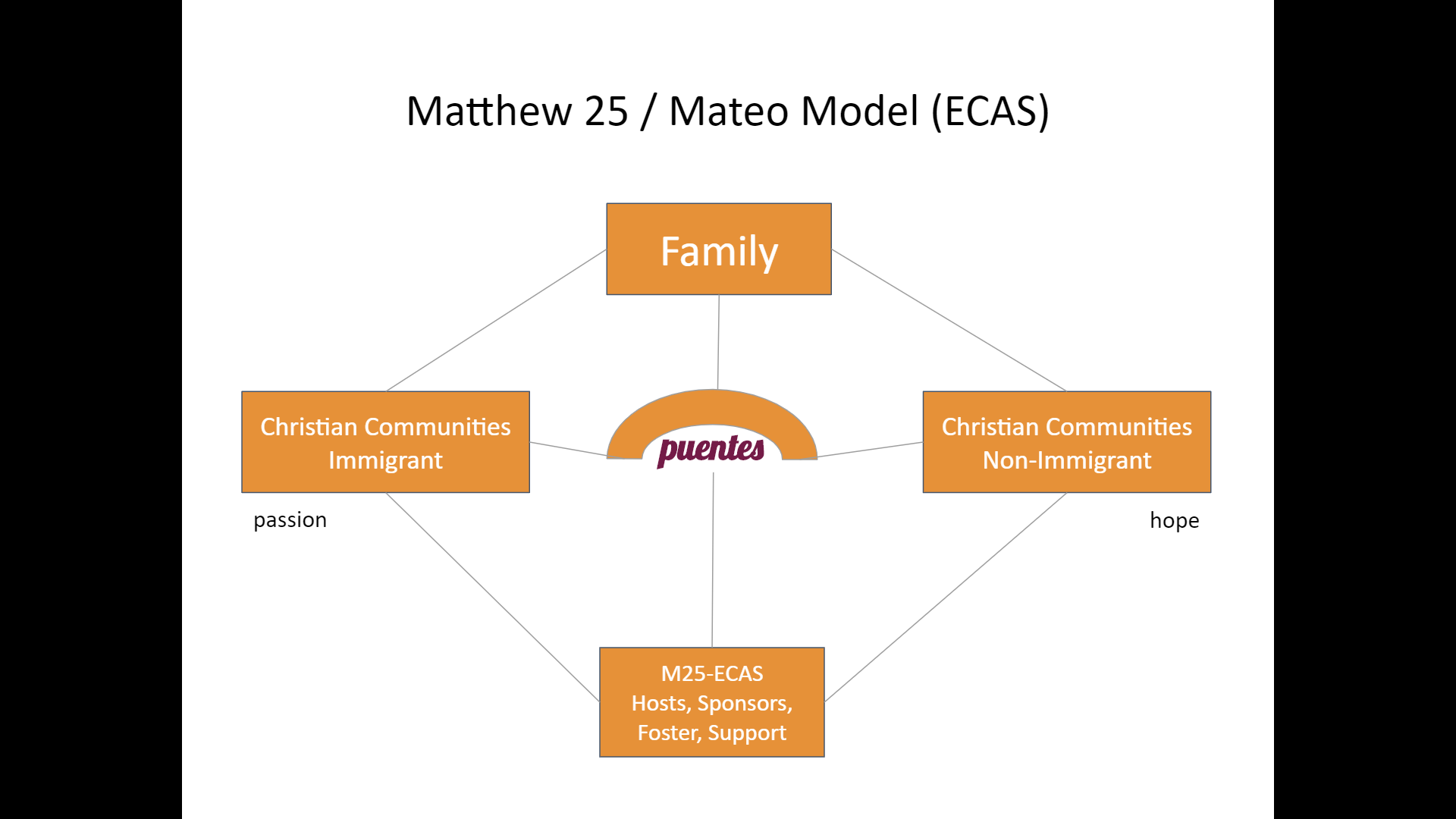
In engaging with asylum seekers and with other members of the Body, it is important to be aware of who you are and how that affects how you engage and behave. Everyone comes from a unique context -- be it ethnicity, culture, income bracket, or personality. Knowing self assists in loving others. Everyone also comes in with blind spots to their privilege and how that affects their worldview. Humility, therefore, and openness to change and correction is necessary. Because of the system we are working with, questions will not always have answers. We encourage everyone to be creative and use their networks wisely. This is a community work and an individual is never solely responsible for -- or the solution to -- anything.

**What is Matthew 25/Mateo 25 SoCal and ECAS?**

Matthew 25/Mateo 25 SoCal is the lead agency of the Ecumenical Collaboration for Asylum Seekers (ECAS). ECAS is a coalition of faith-based organizations, denominations and refugee support ministries in the Los Angeles area who have come together to respond to the global human rights crisis which is increasing the number of families seeking asylum. ECAS is particularly focused on Central American families. We use a model sponsoring and supporting asylum seekers which centers the perspectives of immigrants, and intentionally engages immigrant and non-immigrant congregations in support circles. As aforementioned, the lead agency for ECAS is Matthew 25/Mateo 25 – a bipartisan Christian coalition to support and defend the vulnerable in the name and Spirit of Jesus. Our core partners are the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles, the Southern California Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, the Pacific Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in the USA and the Southwest California Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. CLUE, IRIS, IMMDEF, WE CARE and Freedom from Immigrants are all active members of our steering committee. This manual was constructed from materials from interviews with individuals from Al Otro Lado, ECAS Staff, Matthew 25 organizers, Immigrant Defenders, the LA County of Education, IRIS, CLUE, WE CARE, the Pacific Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church, and the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles.

**Explanation of M25/ECAS Model**

In Matthew 25/Mateo 25 SoCal and ECAS, our model involves three parties: Immigrant churches, English speaking white/multi-ethnic churches, and *puentes* -- bicultural, bilingual millenials who serve as bridges between congregations. Immigrant and English speaking congregations work in equal partnership, coming alongside asylum seeking families in different, but equally valuable and needed ways. It is important to honestly evaluate who should provide what. English-speakers are often better at navigating systems - legal, medical, school, ESL classes - and sometimes have more transportation capacity or resources. Members of the immigrant churches are usually better at visiting and encouraging the asylum-seeker, introducing them to the city, and helping them to find housing and work when the time is right. The asylum seeker may naturally prefer to attend church with the immigrant church members (although sometimes the experience of an English-speaking church can also be useful and interesting.) Puentes understand both worlds and therefore bridge both congregations. In bringing together immigrant and non-immigrant populations, they are able to exchange hope and passion and embody the Body of Christ.



Another important aspect of our model is the creation of covenants between the asylum-seeking family, the host, and support circle members. There are two covenants to create -- One is between the host and asylum seekers that is more of a Roommate Covenant (more information on this can be found in “Housing”). The other covenant is a covenant for the host, support circle, and the guests. Hosts and support circles will begin this process at a retreat they will attend before receiving a family. This covenant goes through different tasks that the support circle can come alongside in and, in making it, members of the support circle will sign up to help in those specific areas (or recruit others to help in those areas). A chart laying out these tasks can be found here: [Support Circle Chart](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1G-WNu182dyiyjnaBhIm_BXvOi5MTgX-C/view?usp=sharing), and an example structure of an older version of the covenant (when both covenants were combined) can be viewed here: [ECAS Pacto](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1T5-Pady_f1nTekrsT6wQZHgLxomsNGBo/view?usp=sharing). Both of these covenants will be formed with the asylum seeking guests with the help of one of the Lead Organizers.

Our goal in accompanying is to empower them to, at the end, be independent and also rooted in community. The model works towards this in three stages.

* Stage 1: Intensive support and accompaniment in the first month or so. In this stage, those accompanying should help the guests make and keep appointments and teach the basics of navigating society.
* Stage 2: Transitional stage -- shifting towards independence. The role of the support circle and hosts is to empower and encourage them to do things on their own.
* Stage 3: Independence. The role of the support circle and hosts now is to be community with and for them.

Because the experience of each asylum seeker varies, the time spent in each stage will vary. These stages also will likely not line up with the stages covered under “Housing”.

**Important Terms Glossary:**

**Refugee vs. Asylee**

Both **Refugees** and **Asylees** must prove that they meet the definition of a “refugee” under Section 101(a)(42)(A) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (I.N.A.): The term "refugee" means: “any person who is outside their country of origin who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.”

While a **refugee** requests protection while still overseas in a safe third country, and then is given permission to enter the U.S., a person requests **asylum** while present in the U.S. or at a port of entry. **Asylees** must wait until their case is approved to access many public benefits and must wait at least 180 days to be work qualified. **Refugees** have immediate access to social services, public benefits, employment authorization and family reunification. Refugees are resettled by a resettlement agency that helps with their case.

**Roles in M25/ECAS:**

Host: the person/family with which the asylum seeking family lives with. A host might be a *short term host*, hosting for about two weeks while we connect with the individual’s family or find a longer term option, or a *long term host*, hosting for three to nine months.

Sponsor: Legally, the person responsible for an asylum seeker. This may or may not be the same person as the host. Legal sponsorship does NOT mean a sponsor can be prosecuted for the actions of the guest.

Point Person for Support Circle: the individual responsible for coordinating the support circle and acting as the point person for the host, asylum seeker, and for Matthew 25/ECAS.

Support Circle Member: an individual involved in the network supporting a particular asylum seeker or asylum seeking family. They may be from an immigrant church, a non-immigrant church, or from the community at large.

Puente: means “bridge” in Spanish -- the bicultural, bilingual millennials and Gen-Xers (20-40 years old) who are core members of support circles

Intake Coordinator for ECAS: Luis Enrique Gonzalez, responsible for initial interview and placement as well as guest support and organizing gathering of guests -- (323) 496-7178, luiseglez07@gmail.com

Lead Organizers for ECAS Networks:

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**Basic Overview of Central American History (to be added to)**

What causes individuals and families to migrate from Central America to seek asylum? The situation in Central America, specifically the Northern Triangle, is not simple or new.

<https://www.amnestyusa.org/fleeing-for-our-lives-central-american-migrant-crisis/>

<https://medium.com/s/story/timeline-us-intervention-central-america-a9bea9ebc148>

**Principles/Principios (from the ECAS Guide):**

The Ecumenical Collaboration for Asylum Seekers (ECAS) has a set of principles which govern our work together – ECAS tiene principios los cuales guían nuestro trabajo juntos:

* Immigrant-Centered/Centrando los Inmigrantes: The asylum-seekers make the decisions about their lives, not their sponsors/hosts or support circle. Los buscadores de asilo hacen las decisiones sobre sus propias vidas, no sus patrocinadores/anfitriones o circulo de apoyo.
* Independence-Interdependence/Independencia-Interdependencia: Our goals are to both support the immigrant guests in attaining independent capacity to navigate this society and also to support them in finding and developing a caring community. Nuestras metas son apoyar a los huéspedes en su búsqueda de la independencia – la capacidad a navegar esta sociedad por sí mismo – pero también en su búsqueda y desarrollo de una comunidad verdadera de apoyo mutuo.
* Faith-Centered/Centrando la Fe: We are prayerful people and commit to pray for each other. Somos gente que oran a Dios; nos comprometimos a guardarles uno a otro en la oración.

**How to Edit this Manual**:

As mentioned, this manual is a work in progress, subject to change as regulations and systems do. If a recommendation in this manual is wrong or if, through experience, another resource is found that works well or better than those included -- please don’t hesitate to contribute that to the manual. If there is something you would like to add or change in this manual, please comment on this Google Doc by highlighting the portion you would like to change or section you have information to add to, and then clicking on the icon that will appear to the right of the document. In the comment, please describe what should be changed/added. If you could also please include your name and information in the comment, this could facilitate communication if there are questions. Someone from Matthew 25 will work to incorporate this into the document itself.

**1) MEDICAL**

**First Look:**

Adults in the process of seeking asylum in California are entitled to emergency Medi-Cal coverage, as well as My Health LA (MHLA). Children in the process of seeking asylum are eligible for full Medi-Cal, including dentistry. The process of enrolling in these programs is outlined below, as well as other resources that can be accessed. Regardless of how they go about it, within the first couple weeks, each asylum seeker should have a general physical regardless of whether they feel good or not. Many of them have not had a physical in years, have undergone trauma, and may not be aware of the way their body has been negatively affected. Services available differ based on whether the individual is an adult, a child, a pregnant woman, or an unaccompanied minor. Resources will also vary based on location within LA county.

In connecting with services, asylum seekers should not apply for federal programs. When asylum seekers apply for a status, they have to prove they are not going to be any kind of extra charge for the government. Federal programs use money from the federal government, and therefore should not be used by an asylum seeker. However, county programs like My Health LA or state programs like Medi-Cal can be accessed. In addition, communication with the individual’s legal team, if they already have one, is important to be clear about what types of access and treatments should be sought and when. Those accompanying should not assume the systems understand the status of asylum seeker. Assumptions could hinder the legal process, so consultation with the legal team is necessary. If they’re working with legal representation, always do what the lawyer recommends.

Connecting the immigrant family with medical resource programs is a matter of helping the family distinguish what is needed and then getting the level of medical care they need. Every family’s experience will be different and dependent on where they live, but regardless, there are services they can access.

**What is the medical problem? (Emergency or Routine?)**

If it is a non-emergency, **routine** medical problem...

* Step 1: Find the community clinic closest to where the host family is living
  + My Health LA (MHLA) -- for those who are older than 19
    - <http://dhs.lacounty.gov/wps/portal/dhs/mhla>
    - Community Partners with MHLA -- group of 200 clinics giving adults access to free and low cost health care
  + Another pathway is the Community Clinics Association of Los Angeles County (CCALAC), more information at [ccalac.org](https://ccalac.org/) -- a network of over 300 community clinics that is geared towards serving the low income, not necessarily documented population. They will work with people who do not have Medi-Cal and should take all comers.
    - A lot of MHLA Community Partners are also part of CCALAC, it is simply another resource website.
  + Not all clinics have urgent care, but this information can be found on the website.
  + Be wary of walk-in clinics because they will charge you -- try to find a community clinic.
* Step 2: The host/sponsor should prepare a letter (to be used for multiple different services, beyond medical) detailing the situation -- that they are covering the expenses and basic needs of the immigrant family.
  + Sponsor Letter format to include: the sponsor’s name, the fact they are hosting/sponsoring [insert name] for [insert amount of time] because they are seeking asylum. Therefore, they are unable to work. I am covering basic needs, but can only cover a certain amount. For this reason, I am trying to help them qualify for low income benefits.
    - No need to provide too much information, but still try to get low income benefits.
  + Proof of address is also needed -- can say in letter they are staying with me and here is my info.
  + Another way to prove address is any form where it has the address of the person -- such as the “Notice of Release and Proof of Service”, a form given to them when they are released from detention. This can be used as a form of ID throughout the asylum seeking process.
* Step 3: Either make an appointment to go in or go in person to get set up with services.
* Step 4: If the asylum seeker encounters a routine medical problem, someone can accompany them to the clinic. At the clinic, they should talk to the person in finances/enrollment specialist. When they meet whoever comes, they should say they want to apply for a program and they will ask if the individual qualifies for low-income.
  + The letter the sponsor wrote should be shared now and is very helpful.
  + The clinic’s finance person/enrollment specialist will share about the different programs available.
  + Even if the individual has no income or proof of income, they can still get emergency Medi-Cal
    - Usually they will get it for a year and then they can renew it.
    - If the personnel at the clinic is questioning they do not have an income and why they are not working, they can explain they are seeking asylum and therefore legally cannot work. This should be explained in the letter.
  + Children will get Medi-Cal faster and, usually, if they are minors they can pass it to the parents (and vice versa -- if parents qualify, minors qualify as well until they are in their early 20’s).
* **What to do if** issues are encountered at a clinic:
  + Those accompanying should remain respectful. Even if the personnel at the clinic is being rude, do not engage. Engaging and reacting rudely might negatively affect those they are trying to help.
  + If the individual at the clinic is not familiar with what asylum seekers can access, those accompanying can remind them that asylum seekers *do* have access.
  + It may be worth visiting another clinic if one particular clinic is extremely difficult.
  + Those accompanying should not assume the asylum seeker will qualify for programs or receive the benefits that they do.

If it is an **emergency** medical problem...

* Every medical service provider, by law, accepts people without documentation -- the issue is how big of a bill the family will get at the end of it and then who will pay for it.
* Emergency options that should be cheaper:
  + Go to a public, county hospital – there are three of them in the LA area

1. LAC+USC County Hospital -- 2051 Marengo St, Los Angeles, CA 90033

2. Olive View UCLA Medical Center - Sylmar, CA

3. Harbor UCLA Medical Center - Torrance

* + Urgent care, instead of emergency rooms which tend to be much more expensive
    - Some of the community clinics will have urgent care
  + Catholic hospitals tend to have charities associated with them that could help offset costs
* When an individual goes in for an emergency medical problem, they will be asked if they have insurance. If they have not already enrolled in emergency in Medi-Cal, they will have to apply and will receive temporary coverage lasting six months.
* Outside of LA, emergency services are much more expensive.

**ID Options** to use in the process of seeking medical care:

* Matricula (ID from their country) works for ID **if** they ask
* If the asylum seeker has a passport, they can show that
* If they don’t show any of this, the “Notice of Release” form can be used as an ID and they can explain they do not have an ID because it was taken away when they were released
* When they go to meet with the clinic’s enrollment specialist, they should bring their birth certificate, if they have it, ID’s from their country of origin, and any orders they have from immigration court (or copies of any of these)

**Special Populations:**

* Pregnant women have a lot more coverage than anyone else (besides children) -- prepare them that, up until birth, they will have good health care but afterwards it won’t be the same
  + Specific resources for pregnant mothers:
    - Maternal and Child Health Access through the Wellness Center
    - Planned Parenthood
* Children have greater access to healthcare and Medi-Cal
  + If the child is under 18 and enrolled in a LAUSD school, LAUSD has program called CHAMP (Children’s Health Access and Medi-Cal Programs) – program that enrolls all children in health insurance that don’t have it.
  + Each school has a Title I coordinator and they are the go-to person with children who have a variety of needs. They can also assist with connecting with medical care.
  + CA passed blanket medical coverage for anyone under the age of 26, documentation not required. Each child, then, should be able to access medical care.
  + Immunizations/TB Testing (if needed) -- can get at a free clinic or in the public health system context
    - Important for school, so this is something that should be done soon
  + Maternal and Child Health Access is a great resource -- for women and children. Call them to determine whether or not someone’s Medi-Cal is active. They are experienced at working with unaccompanied minors and folks without documentation.
    - * Phone number: (213) 749-4261
* LGBTQIA+/Queer Individuals -- Asylum seekers come with a variety of sexual orientations and gender identities. Often, they have experienced discrimination and abuse in their country of orientation. They may need special attention in order to feel welcome and receive appropriate care. This includes medical and therapeutic services designed to serve them. In connecting with medical services, therefore, those accompanying should look for opportunities that will serve them and their needs well.

**Resources**:

The excel sheet accessible here: [Los Angeles County Service Area Providers](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B9azhb2ORjcmRmx3cWNnSTNyalQ3bmw4UDA5YzZ1eHNSTTk0/view?usp=sharing) has a breakdown of resources based on region within LA -- including health centers and what services are offered there. Below are specific resources that have been recommended highly:

* St. John’s Well Child and Family Center ([www.wellchild.org](http://www.wellchild.org), 323-541-1411)
* The Wellness Center LA (thewellnesscenterla.org)
  + Like other clinics, children can get MediCal, and adults can apply for My Health LA
  + M/W/F -- first come, first serve at 8:30am, immigrants can go into the clinic and be helped
* Catholic Hospitals
* Planned Parenthood
  + Sexual/reproductive health exams and services are easy to access and free or very low cost
  + General health exams are also accessible
* Pacific Clinics in San Bernadino
* Riverside’s Department of Health and Riverside University Health System
* LA County DPH Nurse Clinic -- can help with vaccinations and TB testing
* Olive View-UCLA Medical Center Human Rights Clinic ([www.lahumanrights.org](http://www.lahumanrights.org)) -- can complete forensic evaluations to assist asylum seekers with their case
* Divine Health Care Services

**Cross-Cultural Component:**

The process of seeking medical care is already complicated for many who speak English and are familiar with how systems work in the US. A lot of families seeking asylum are walking into a system they are very unfamiliar with, especially if they are from a rural area. Therefore, the process of enrolling in medical programs and accessing services can be very daunting. People may not understand basic things like vaccinations. Those accompanying should seek to help them understand and feel empowered to access services independently.

Host families and members of the support circles that come from more privileged backgrounds should be aware of how their privilege in accessing systems or perhaps never having had to enroll in Medi-Cal or low income services affects their interactions with the migrant families in this process. While those accompanying may be accustomed to moving through systems easily, they cannot assume it works for everybody, especially people of color or immigrants. To be an ally in the medical field is the ministry of presence. Allies should not argue or demand from the medical staff, but simply accompany them and encouraging them to become fully autonomous. Physically being-with on the first visit will be comforting to the asylum seeker. The goal is full autonomy, not dependence or enabling.

Culturally, in medicine, people from Central America are not going to question authorities from the medical field and will assume they know best. This is one area where puentes are essential, therefore, as puentes are bicultural and are able to navigate alongside the asylum seeker. Mental health is also another area in which, culturally, most immigrant cultures have different attitudes towards. More on this can be found under “Trauma”.

**After Asylum is Granted:**

Once an individual has asylum, they qualify for refugee benefits including health benefits. These benefits are managed through refugee assistance agencies or through the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS). After they are granted asylum, there is a requirement for a health exam, the Refugee Health Assessment, within 30 days. IRIS, the Interfaith Refugee and Immigration Service, has case managers that can walk with people through the refugee benefits system ([www.iris-la.org](http://www.iris-la.org), (323) 667-0489). Getting in touch with people who know the refugee benefits system and can help manage cases is important as only 11% of refugees or people who have been granted asylum actually access the benefits available to them. Other general resources for people once they have been granted asylum include:

* Office of Refugee Resettlement: [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/)
* Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange: [www.coresourceexchange.org](http://www.coresourceexchange.org)
* Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service: [www.lirs.org](http://www.lirs.org)
* Episcopal Migration Ministries: [www.episcopalmigrationministries.org](http://www.episcopalmigrationministries.org)
* United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)
* BRYCS -- Bridging Refugee Youth & Children’s Services: [www.brycs.org](http://www.brycs.org)
* Church World Service: [www.cwsglobal.org](http://www.cwsglobal.org)

**2) LEGAL**

**Important Terms to Know:**

* I-589 -- the application to apply for asylum and for withholding of removal
* A-Number -- Immigration Identity Number, given to an asylum seeker while in detention, before they apply for asylum, can be found on the “Notice of Release and Proof of Service” Form
* ISAP -- Intensive Supervision Appearance Program, a private corporation responsible for electronic monitoring (ankle bracelets), work with ICE. ISAP is located at 316 W 2nd St., Suite 400, Los Angeles, CA 90012.
* USCIS -- United States Citizen and Immigration Services
* ICE -- Immigration and Customs Enforcement
* EOIR -- Executive Office for Immigration Review. Contact info based on court can be found [on the website.](https://www.justice.gov/eoir/eoir-immigration-court-listing)
* EAD -- Employment Authorization Document, the work permit that allows them to work, more info on this in “Work” section.
* I-765 -- form to file with USCIS for employment authorization, lawyer should aid with this
* Principal applicant -- the individual who has faced the persecution
  + If there are two adults who are married and they each have faced persecution they can file separately, their children will be their derivatives
* **Flexibility -- needed at all times throughout the legal process. At times, an asylum seeker may have an appointment the next day. Here is a particular way that support circles can become involved in aiding with transportation.**

An individual as one year to file for asylum (to submit their 589) from their date of entry. The process of finding legal representation can take a while, so those accompanying the asylum seeker should begin this process as soon as possible. In the meantime, though, they will have appointments with ICE and, if they have an ankle bracelet, with ISAP. Throughout this process, paper copies should be made of all documents they have, all forms they sign, everything. Electronic back-ups would be best to assure they will never be lost.

**First Week**:

After an individual is released from detention, in the first week, they will have an appointment with ICE. This is not court -- it is just a paperwork appointment. Therefore, support should assure the asylum seeker understands this and that they should not be stressed. The first ICE appointment will likely take a few hours. To this appointment, they should bring:

* all the paperwork given to them when released (with copies made and kept where they are staying)
* In some cases, the immigrant is required to give phone numbers of other people they know in the community, to show deep ties. Before the appointment, create a list of four or five other people besides the sponsor, ideally the support circle soon, that they have the name and number of -- just in case.

If they have an ankle monitor, expect to go to ISAP as well, which may be in a different building.

After the first ICE appointment:

* Expect a follow up visit from ICE within a couple of weeks. At the beginning, the visits are likely to be weekly. Afterwards, they will become less frequent. For this reason, a guest should not stay in a home with undocumented residents.
* Start calling EOIR (see above) right away
  + Have the individual’s A-number ready
  + Calling them will give the individual’s court date and whether or not they are in the system
    - If they’re not in the system yet, it says to call the local office, but this is actually not needed, it more likely means they are delayed in putting people into the system. Calling won’t do anything to help. They will be put in the system eventually.
  + It is recommended to call EOIR about once a week to make sure the asylum seeker know their court date
    - The call should give the details of the court date: town, judge name, and address
    - NTA -- “Notice to Appear” Form should also include this information
* Check the mail fairly regularly
* Begin the process of looking for legal representation (resources below)

If the asylum seeker has an ankle monitor:

* They may have home checks, in which they are asked to stay at home during the hours specified. This information will be given at their ISAP appointment. It is important the individual complies with this and is at home when they should be there.
* If the ankle monitor starts acting up (i.e. not charging or blinking weird), call ISAP officers right away. They may ask the individual to come in right away.
* Instructions regarding the ankle monitor will vary based on ISAP office. In general, though, advance notice should be given if the individual is going more than a few hours away or if they are moving
* ISAP may call unexpectedly and ask them to come in for a variety of reasons, such as water damage, or for no clear reason at all, so have members of the support circle available to aid with transportation as needed

**Legal Representation:**

**Typical Steps** in the Legal Process (note: this is not a timeline per se, as it is hard to predict a general timeline because of rule changes) (will work well in flow chart)

1. The lawyer will fill out and file 589 or have their first hearing called the “Master Calendar Hearing” and the lawyer will file the 589 there
   1. The Master Calendar Hearing is a very short hearing, in which the judge will ask if the individual admits to the charges on the Notice to Appear (essentially that the individual does not right now have a legal way of being in the US but has entered)
   2. At this, they will also schedule the next hearing if the individual has filed for asylum
   3. Depends on lawyer how they choose to go about it
2. Psychological Evaluation -- to document PTSD
   1. If the asylum seeker has inconsistent memories or their stories may have changed, it may be attributable to mental state
      1. You may need someone to do a psychological evaluation for their asylum case, even before they have their attorney. More information under “Trauma”.
   2. The lawyer can include the psych eval with initial filing or later on
3. The attorney will help the individual apply for their Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
4. Individual Merits Hearing
   1. In which the asylum seekers give the documentation of their claim and the lawyer will question witnesses
   2. Trying to prove their basis of fear is under the five bases to qualify for asylum
5. Asylum is granted or denied
   1. If granted, the individual automatically becomes work-certified and able to access refugee benefits
   2. If denied, the process varies. They may be able to appeal, may be given 30 days to report back for deportation, or may have other pathways.

The available pathways at finding legal representation:

In short, the goal is to exhaust every available option. At the initial meeting with a legal service provider, they will conduct a legal assessment and see how feasible winning this particular asylum case is. An individual seeking asylum may get turned down a lot, but persistence is key.

(To be added: a flow chart laying this process out)

* Options for representation: pro-bono, low bono, or private
  + Currently, pro-bono legal service providers are extremely saturated with cases. It may be quite difficult to find someone willing to take the case
  + Low bono services -- will not charge as much as private attorneys
    - Will usually cost ~$5000
  + Paying for it with funds from support circle, churches, or other non-profit organizations such as the LA Justice Fund
    - Private attorney will cost $20k-30k
  + Working with a DOJ-accredited individual who can help with forms and parts of the process
  + More information on the process of finding legal representation: [here (in Spanish)](https://rise.articulate.com/share/bebDOWgJQVdB_GzD5ETy-hmSS9Hgtsku#/lessons/IFF_-mwOwRvjRcLMZWPS0nI8Uk5Xei__) and [here (in English)](https://youtu.be/H-ftMz31LuI).
* Make list of non-profit organizations in the area -- some may give consultations for free or refer cases to other attorneys
  + Go to nonprofits that give consultations for free because sometimes they will refer the asylum seeker to another organization to get further legal services
  + Though most will not give referrals to private attorneys, some may
* If the asylum seeker is unhappy with the lawyer -- in the original contract there should be a Dissolution Clause.
  + Important to read contract
  + If unsatisfied and want to switch lawyers, but have put down a deposit, the firm will give at least part of the deposit back and should be able to give the asylum seeker a breakdown of files and the billable hours they and their team have spent on their case.
  + An attorney can likewise at any time to decide not to represent an individual, but the situation is similar in this case
  + If paying for a private lawyer, you should have expectations and they should be responsible to those expectations
* If family members are separated into different cases -- it is okay. Sometimes one family member’s case is stronger depending on the basis of their claim. Sometimes there are conflicts, and it is about advocating for one family member in a different way than the rest.

**Rules to Remember**

Throughout the process, there are some **rules** that should *always* be adhered to, regardless of what kind of legal representation the asylum seeker is using:

* When working with a law office or organization, **always** ask to talk to the attorney themselves. Along these same lines, do not agree to just meet the attorney at court, meet with the attorney *before* going to court.
* Clarify exactly what the attorney will represent the asylum seeker in (i.e. will they file for asylum but not represent in court? That is okay -- but clarify what they are agreeing to)
  + Be specific on terms and cost of representation -- What are they charging for?
* Always get copies of any paper the individual fills out or sign. Even if they say they’re keeping it on files, ask for a copy.
* Always get receipts.
* Always provide *all* information honestly. Even if it doesn’t seem to be important to the case, share just in case.
* If the individual does not understand something -- **ask**. This is an important area for sponsors and support circles to advocate -- translation into Spanish imperative. Every time they are interacting with a lawyer who does not speak Spanish, a translator should be present.
  + If the individual speaks a language other than Spanish or English, the lawyer should be able to find someone to translate, though it may cost slightly more.
* **Never miss a court date**, even if the individual does not have an attorney or even if the attorney says they are excused -- if they had a date, they should show up, and show up on time if not early. (A missed appointment is an automatic deportation order)
* Never leave original documentation behind at any organization or office
* Contracts are important!! Always read them thoroughly and ensure the asylum seeker understands them. If they have *any* questions, ask the attorney.
* Every legal case is different -- just because a certain thing worked for someone’s cousin does not mean it will work for another person, regardless of how similar their cases might seem to an outside perspective. That is the way the system is working -- thus, being flexible and patient cannot be emphasized enough.

**Caution Needed:**

Unfortunately, there are an abundance of people who will take advantage of asylum seekers or not provide them with the quality of service they deserve. Therefore, be wary of these red flags:

* Anyone reaching out directly to the asylum seeker offering to do their case
  + If the asylum seeker receives a call and hasn’t previously talked to them -- red flag! Even if they know details of the case, there may have been a data breach. If they claim to know an individual that the migrant knows or has talked to, call that individual just to confirm.
* People who say they can do it faster or they know other laws to “skip the line” or that they have special access because they used to work in DHS
* People who ask for money up front without a contract
* People who are rushing the asylum seeker (this is not a legal sale, they should be patient and want to help the individual make their own informed decision on their own time)
* Taking legal advice from anyone who is not accredited
* Anyone in the state of CA claiming to be a Notario
  + In Mexico, a notario is a legitimate attorney. In California, however, the word “notario” has been banned because of how often it was used to deceive people. If someone is a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) or someone who is qualified to do taxes -- it is illegal for them to call themselves a notario. Thus, hesitancy is recommended
* Someone who is a lawyer but not an immigration lawyer claiming the system is easy for them because they are a lawyer -- the forms are complicated and take experience and training
  + If immigration is not the area of expertise of an attorney, they may understand the documents, but the rules are changing constantly
* In general: if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is

An ethical law firm *should*:

* Explain contracts to the asylum seeker
* Not ask for original documents -- or if they do, they will be very specific as to why, will share how long the original documents are needed and then will return them.
  + For the most part, organizations will only take copies because having original documents is a liability

How to verify if a person is a legitimate attorney:

* Look them up in the CA Bar website
  + This will show their Bar Number, any disciplinary actions filed against them, and when they were approved to the bar
  + If they are not there -- this is a red flag!! This means they were disbarred, their license was not renewed, or they never passed the bar originally.
* If they were not licensed in California, ask where they are licensed, and check on the bar website from that state
* If someone claims not to be an attorney, but a DOJ accredited representative (someone certified to help fill out forms), this can also be checked online
  + Accreditations must be renewed periodically and should be current
  + There are levels to DOJ accreditation and not all are able to fill out all forms -- especially asylum forms.
  + If an individual is DOJ accredited, has additional training, and is supervised by an immigration attorney, they can represent an asylum seeker in a court of law -- but if this information is not disclosed at the beginning, this is a red flag

**Legal Resources:**

* Immigration Advocates website: pulls up legal service providers based off of zip code: <https://www.immigrationadvocates.org/nonprofit/legaldirectory/>
  + Pull up closest providers, and start calling, trying to schedule appointments with places on that list
  + Some organizations have walk-in resource and attorneys will come and do intakes and assess their case
* Loyola Immigrant Justice Clinic
* KIND organization -- pairs children with lawyers
* Immigrant Defenders Law Center
  + Offers universal representation to unaccompanied minors who were detained in ORR
    - Regardless of factors involved in the case
* LA Justice Fund
* CDSS Partners
* Self-Help Center at the Immigration Court
* Public Counsel Immigrant Rights Project -- one possible legal org that works with asylum seekers
* Esperanza Immigrant Rights Program ([esperanza-la.org](https://www.esperanza-la.org/)) -- run a Self-Help Center at Immigration Court – does legal orientation for anybody in terms of immigration
  + Will do initial consult and will help people fill out actual asylum application (bare-bones)
  + especially helpful for folks who don’t have representation and have to represent themselves
  + [www.esperanza.us](http://www.esperanza.us) also has resources
* [Know Your Rights](https://drive.google.com/file/d/17JWqpYl7NRGtTDmJtM1QRc4Cg5OqFQAU/view?usp=sharing) Legal Information: important to share with the asylum seekers
* [Spanish-English Legal Terms Glossary](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B9azhb2ORjcmMm1yRlA4eU1nX3g3ZVZON0tqRU0zNVVpVkY0/view?usp=sharing)

**2A) DOCUMENTS**

As a rule, **always make multiple copies** of any documents or forms the asylum seeker has or receives -- electronic backups if possible.

Important documents an asylum seeker may have/may be able to get:

* Because they do not have a Social Security Number (SSN), they will have an **A Number** (Alien Registration Number), which is their immigration identity number
  + They have an A number even before filing for asylum, even while they’re in detention.
  + This will be their ID number when they are waiting to get a work permit.
* In general: Working with relatives in the home country can help with needed documentation.
* A **passport** from their home country
  + *Note*: An individual seeking asylum should only get a passport if the lawyer recommends it or if ISAP tells them to. By applying for a passport and going to the consulate, they are availing themselves of the protection of that country -- which, when seeking asylum, may present issues because individuals seeking asylum, by definition, are unwilling or unable to avail themselves of the protection of their home country. Some lawyers will recommend not getting a passport because it may make someone easier to deport, but others may recommend it. Default to what the lawyer says.
  + Getting a passport will not threaten their asylum case if ISAP is telling them they need to do that
    - Recently, asylum seekers have been asked to get passports to get their ankle monitors, to be taken away when they take the ankle monitor off. If their passport is taken away, they will not be able to get another one for a while. There is not a process at this point that has proven successful at recovering documentation that has been taken away from them.
  + They can get a passport by going to their local consulate. Usually there is an online portal to find a date to make an appointment. At this appointment, they will be able to apply for a passport. If they also need a country ID, or a **matricula**, they should be able to get one in the same appointment.
  + Read carefully what they need to bring to the appointment (varies per country)
    - Definitely bring the documents they were released with
    - If they have photocopy of old documents, bring those
    - Any birth certificates and other old IDs
  + Both the matricula and passport cost money, amount differs based on country
  + At the appointment, they should be prepared to have their picture taken
  + After their appointment, it can take up to three or four months to receive it
* A **school ID,** which works in some cases as a photo ID
* “**Notice of Release and Proof of Service**” Form given to asylum seekers when they are released from detention
* **CA State ID --** can be obtained when they have a work permit, more info under “Work”
* **Birth certificate --** If the individual does not have their birth certificate with them, it is important to get a copy of it and, eventually, to ship the original, from their home country. Embassies will not expedite this process, so it is likely better and faster to work with the individual’s family in the home country.
* **Vaccination records** -- More information on this can be found under “Medical” and “Education,” but children will need vaccination records to enroll in school. If they do not have vaccination records from when they were released, the child will need to be vaccinated again.

**2B) BANK ACCOUNTS**

It can be difficult to open a bank account without a social security number, but some banks or credit unions will accommodate individuals with an A number and another form of ID. If the asylum seeker has a passport, a school photo ID, or other kind of ID that the bank accepts, they can try to open an account at a nearby bank or credit union. In opening a bank account, a letter from the sponsor explaining the situation, similar to the letter described in “Medical,” could be helpful. Mostly, asylum seekers will need a savings account. If the bank denies the asylum seeker’s application, those accompanying should follow steps like being turned away from a medical clinic -- calmly take a step back and try another bank. It may just depend on the branch, bank, or individual at the bank talked to.

Certain credit unions in particular, such as the Episcopal Community Federal Credit Union, were formed specifically to serve quality banking services for immigrant and low income communities. The Episcopal Diocese in LA’s general phone number is (213) 482-2040, ask for the credit union and then ask to speak to Erla (last name to be added soon) if help is needed. To open an account at the ECFCU, they can open an account with their country ID, or matricula or an ITIN number (more info on this under “Work”) [more info on the ECFCU to be added soon] Contact for Erla: [ecfcu@earthlink.net](mailto:ecfcu@earthlink.net)

To send money back home, asylum seekers can use a variety of services, such as service called MoneyGram or, if they know how to do so, can transfer money between bank accounts.

**3) EDUCATION -- CHILDREN AND ADULTS**

**For Children:**

Getting minors into the educational system is a necessary and important process to start as quickly as possible. The process and resources available will change based on what district the host family is located in within the Los Angeles region. However, in this section also are resources at the LA County level that can work with many different districts.

**Basics**:

Because the process of enrolling in the school system in the US is likely very different from that of the education system in the home countries of the immigrant families, explaining the requirements of the American school system to the parents of the children and empowering them to make decisions for their children is key to walking with them to independence. Hosts/members of the support circle should explain that education through 12th grade is free to anyone, regardless of immigration status, that children being in school and attending regularly is required by law until the age of 17, and that all children must be vaccinated and TB tested to enroll. Families, from being released, have a 30 day window to enroll their children (if 16 years old or below). Beginning to look into schools within the first or second week of the longer term stays is highly recommended.

There are English Learner Development (ELD) and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at the majority of schools in LAUSD and LA County. If the school closest to them does not have an ELD program, the school should either provide support daily with them in the classroom or refer them to another school, or district, that has adequate services. In going through school, they should never have to sit through English classes without any sort of translation or take tests in English before they are proficient in it. If this does happen, the host or members of the support circle should advocate alongside the parents to get the child the services they need.

**Principles for the Host/Support Circle:**

In accompanying asylum seekers through accessing educational services, hosts should hold the “walking with” principle at all times. If extra support is needed in the education process, hosts or support circle members can ask people in their congregations or networks who are educators, members of the school board, or school employees. Developing relationships with people in the school district could be a good strategy for long term partnership in walking with asylum seekers. Throughout the process, hosts and support circle members can connect asylum seekers with people they know and share their resources of relationship with them.

Education can be really difficult for children seeking asylum. Going to a new school, navigating friendships, having to master a new language and also do well in other subjects will inevitably be tough, but, regardless, is important. Parents, likewise, may be intimidated by both the system and the thought of the children possibly outlearning them. To help offset this, hosts should empower parents, connecting them with resources, so they can be present in decisions made. Practically, parents should, if they haven’t already, create an email address, as most schools use email to correspond with home. If a guest is illiterate, the host and support circle may need to provide more support with the communication process. When fliers or letters come home from school, hosts should walk through it with them and translate if need be, especially if a note is a disciplinary notice. Even if there is a translator, there may be culturally different understandings of words. As a host or support circle member, simplifying language and saving face will help them not feel embarrassed as they navigate the education system.

**Steps to Enrollment:**

1. Find the closest public school
2. Visit the school’s enrollment office or, if part of LAUSD, the School Enrollment Placement and Assessment Center (SEPA)
   * Documents to bring:
     + Vaccination records
       - Most children are getting vaccinated in detention at the border, but they may not be given record of that when they are released.
       - If the child is not yet vaccinated, or do not have records of it, the enrollment office at the school or the clinic can help
     + Birth Certificate or Verification of Release Form as ID (refer to “Documentation” section)
     + Proof of residency in the area -- a sponsor letter or piece of mail
3. Once enrolled, alert the counselor about the situation of the child. No need to tell every detail, but they should know the child is seeking asylum. This information is important in case the child needs to leave school for court appointments, has behavioral issues associated with their trauma, or has a run-in with the police.

**Resources Accessible through Schools:**

* Title 1 Coordinators, the individuals in charge of the funds to help disadvantaged students achieve academic success. They can connect students with other resources including MediCal.
* Free/Reduced Lunch Program -- children seeking asylum should immediately qualify for free school lunch. This information should be shared in the enrollment office when they enroll.
* Beyond the Bell Expanded Day Programs -- after hour and weekend programs through LAUSD, with many opportunities completely in Spanish.
* School counselors can connect children with psychological services, as most schools have access to or partner with an organization that offers therapy. If students can talk to a mental health service provider at school, a place where they hopefully feel comfortable, this will also mean their parents or support circle members are no longer responsible for driving them to therapy.
* The SEPA Center, as mentioned above, will help children enroll in school, with vaccinations, refer for mental health, make referrals to legal, conduct assessments to place in grades, and more. They will not ask about immigration status. This is a valuable resource to grow familiar with. More information [here](https://achieve.lausd.net/sepacenter#spn-content) or at (213) 482-3954. They are located at 1339 Angelina St., Los Angeles, CA, 90026.
* There is an abundance of information on the LAUSD website, especially regarding programs for Spanish speakers. Specifically, the information under the Multilingual and Multicultural Education Development, Program Options will be helpful.
  + Information on the website in Spanish and English, so the parents of the child can be involved in the process and can decide.
* The LA County of Education (LACOE) has an app called WIN (What I Need) for people who are more technologically savvy. Through the app, people can find services and information on how to access them. More info here: <https://www.ourchildrenla.org/win-app/>.
* If the child is registered as homeless, there are programs to help pay for uniforms and backpacks. Technically, when asylum seeking families are not paying rent, they can access homeless benefits. However, remember -- they cannot access federal programs until they have been granted asylum. Consult the legal team before registering as homeless and accessing these programs.
* If the child is an unaccompanied minor, there is a program in LAUSD specifically for them. The child’s legal team or Title 1 coordinator can connect the child with those benefits
* LAUSD We are One -- Resource for Immigrant Families: <https://achieve.lausd.net/weareone>
* Resources for those working with Immigrants:
  + <https://protectingimmigrantfamilies.org/community-education-resources/>
  + <https://www.lacoe.edu/Home/Immigrant-Relations/Resources-for-Students>
* Further contacts: Carolina Sheinfeld, the Immigrant Relations Coordinator for LACOE ([sheinfeld\_carolina@lacoe.edu](mailto:sheinfeld_carolina@lacoe.edu)) and Nicole Mitchell at the SEPA Center (nkm2268@lausd.net)

**Special Education/Learning Disabilities:**

Being diagnosed with a learning disability or being placed in special education can be difficult to understand and approach. Often, students whose first language is not English or students of color get mislabeled and placed in special education classes when, in reality, they are perhaps not being challenged or something else is at play. If a student gets placed in special education, parents and hosts should advocate to ensure their children are not being misdiagnosed and are getting the support they need. Discerning whether or not they are struggling because courses are rigorous and they don’t have the support necessary or if they are struggling because they have a learning disability is tedious, but necessary.

This process can also be difficult because, culturally, learning or mental disabilities carry stigma in Latin American cultures. In addition, the parents will likely trust the system and not contest it initially. Those accompanying should explain, empower, and walk with parents of the students to help them make knowledgeably, informed decisions.

**Rules Regarding Age:**

` If an individual enters the school system at 17 years of age, they still have the right to four years of a high school education, until the age of 21. Anybody part of the ESL/ELD program also has until 21 to graduate. Educators may want to push them to adult school, in which case a conversation should be had with educators, parents, and the student to lay bare the pro’s and con’s and empower an informed decision. In adult school, the level of resources and care and attention to their studies will be different from what they have experienced in grades K-12. When the student enters the system, even if a student enters the system at 17, they have to pass their English courses first in order to take the full credit classes. For example, they will take ELD Biology, but this will be for partial credit and is not equivalent to credits received from a regular biology course. This just means completing high school is more difficult than for the average student.

**Unaccompanied Minors**

If an individual is not living with a guardian on record, they have the right to make decisions about their own education -- for example, whether they want to leave school or transition to an adult school. Sponsors are technically not legal guardians. Normally, schools do not work with students without the presence of the guardian, but the McKinney-Vento Act, created originally for homeless students, allows them to be the sole decision maker regarding their education. If the school asks for a parent or guardian of the student, the host can refer them to the McKinney-Vento Act for the individual to establish their rights.

If the parents of a student are in deportation proceedings, filing a Caregiver Affidavit Form can designate another individual to make educational or medical decisions in the case their parent or guardian gets deported. Parents/guardians can overrule a decision made by the Caregiver at any time. The child’s legal team should be consulted about the form and the best way to maintain the educational rights of the student.

**For Adults:**

Adult asylum seekers will likely want to start working as soon as they can. However, if they do not have a work permit, they could spend time learning English or continuing their education, if they so desire. Those accompanying can lay out the options and encourage, but ultimately the decision of whether or not they want to learn English or pursue education is up to the asylum seeker themselves. Hosts should also not assume asylum seekers are proficient in reading or writing. If they are not or if they struggled in school as children, the thought of going to school could be extremely intimidating. Hosts can encourage them and support them to learn at their own pace, but should be careful about giving false hope.

**Options:**

* ESL classes at libraries, churches, or non-profits. Search online to see those available locally.
* LAUSD Adult School programs
  + Many locations, easily accessible
* Community Colleges
  + Usually more intensive
* Tutors, if school is incompatible and there are funds.
* *Avoid* for-profits -- You should be able to find a free option.

**General Details:**

Classes will likely be in the early morning or at night to accommodate for those with jobs. There will likely be different levels of classes that they can progress through. To enroll, bring whatever identifying documents they have. There should not be issues encountered in enrolling because there are no requirements. Depending on location, classes may fill up quickly, so sign up quickly.

Through adult school, individuals can get a discount TAP card and student ID after consistently attending for two weeks. The ID will provide access to the library and computers. They can also qualify for low-income assistance to pay for books.

**Further Education:**

If an asylum seeker wants to finish their GED or pursue trade certification, they can go through adult schools, occupational centers or community colleges. While most will not become professionals, those accompanying can encourage the asylum seeker that, if, per se, they do physical labor, they could one day be a supervisor or own their own business. Encourage them towards a goal to reach someday, but not an unrealistic goal. Occupational centers can teach technical skills such as mechanics, electricity, or hairstyling through short programs that last one or two years.

**4) TRANSPORTATION**

**Overview**

In LA county, learning how to use public transportation independently is essential to empowering the asylum seekers and is a much better option than driving. In short -- the sooner an asylum seeker feels competent at navigating the public transportation system, the better. When transitioning from accompanying and teaching the public transportation system to catalyzing independence, host families should not only be encouraging of the user’s capacity to become used to the systems, but also should ask about the doubts the user has regarding the systems and validate areas of concern.

When host families and support circles begin to approach the question of transportation, they should first consider and reflect on how their experiences differ from that of an asylum seeker, based off their privilege and position in American society. This privilege may be evident in the fact that a family has never had to use public transportation because they have other transportation options or in advantages encountered in the application process or in navigating through the city. This being said, teaching about the public transportation system needs to, above all, accommodate the user. Though members of the support circle or host families may be used to driving everywhere, always driving or Uber-ing the immigrant families is not a good way to be an ally to asylum seekers, as that will not be sustainable or realistic after the beginning stage of transition. If those accompanying the immigrant drive them everywhere and think waiting for the bus, for example, is ‘bad’ or taking the train someplace is inconvenient because it takes longer than driving, this will set up unhelpful expectations that a car is a necessity and thus that getting a car and Driver’s License is necessary. The DMV system can be very intimidating, especially for those unfamiliar with it. Along those lines, owning a car takes a lot of one’s income to pay for not just the car but also gas and car insurance. Therefore, cultivating realistic expectations will lead to sustainability when they are independent. Public transportation should be the main form of transportation used. In the course of seeking asylum, some things may arise that are “emergencies,” such as an appointment with ISAP that was not anticipated. Even in these cases, we encourage families to use public transportation.

Transitioning an asylum seeker to independence may be a long process or a shorter process depending on the individual’s previous experience with transportation systems. Sponsors and support circles should navigate with them at least once around the area to places they have to go commonly: the clinic, immigration court, school, etc. and talk through, for example, which bus one takes to the clinic and which bus to take back home.

Possible strategies to help in the transition:

* If someone is often getting lost or is insecure in their navigating of public transportation independently, helping them learn how to use apps on their phone such as Google Maps to navigate through public transportation systems will increase confidence and capacity for independence.
* As the migrant grows more familiar with systems, a fun way to test independence might be to choose a place to meet them at (i.e. an ice cream shop) and then celebrate when they get there. This could also be a good way to build trust and relationship between those accompanying and those being accompanied.
* Working alongside the asylum seeker to create a general schedule and how to keep it in order to keep track of important appointments
  + Schedules are a very North American style of approaching time, but helping the immigrant to understand that, for instance, for important medical appointments they should arrive on time, if not earlier than the time they are given
  + With public transportation, learning how long it takes to get to a location and factoring that in to give ample travel time
* Important to remember: though host families may balk at the idea of walking in the LA weather, most of the immigrant families are no strangers to walking.

**How to Use Public Transportation**

Everything about the public transportation systems most commonly used in SoCal can be found at <https://www.metro.net>. There are 3 commonly used forms of transportation that cover different areas of and around LA county. The Metro Rail system has 6 different lines. When arriving at a certain rail station, one will need to buy a TAP card - costing generally $1-$2. These TAP cards must be loaded with train fare, of which a one way pass for that specific line costs $1.75. Transfers from one line to another are free but you must tap your card at the transfer station. The metro rails, if not delayed - come every 7 minutes to their respective stations. There are also many metro busways, which generally cost $2.50 to ride. There is also the Metrolink and Amtrak, Metrolink costing about $7 for a day pass and Amtrak usually $20+. Information on this can easily be found online.

There are resources to assist with paying for TAP cards. If the individual is going to school, including adult school, they can get a discount TAP card through school. There is also a program for reduced priced rides for low-income folks called LIFE -- Low Income Fare is Easy (<https://www.metro.net/projects/life/>). To qualify the migrant for LIFE, the sponsor should provide a letter explaining the situation, as some programs require people to be working in order to qualify. This letter can be the same as that used in looking for low income medical care (more info under “Medical”).

* Sponsor Letter format to include: the sponsor’s name, the fact they are hosting/sponsoring [insert name] for [insert amount of time] because they are seeking asylum. Therefore, they are unable to work. I am covering basic needs, but can only cover a certain amount. For this reason, I am trying to help them qualify for low income benefits
  + No need to provide too much information, but still try to get low income benefits
* Though these benefits may seem small, walking with the asylum seeker to gain access to these resources will empower them when they are fully independent.

**5) WORK**

**Applying for a Work Permit/EAD**

Legally, asylum seekers are allowed to work if they have an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). The asylum seeker has to wait 150 days from the day their asylum case is filed before they can *apply* for their work permit. The earliest they can work is 180 days after their asylum case is filed, if they have received their EAD. The asylum seeker’s legal team will file the work permit application at the 150 day mark and walk with them through the application process.

In the past, individuals would receive their work permit about four weeks after they file their application. However, under this administration, work permits have been taking longer and longer, and some have not been getting it at all. This can be frustrating for those accompanying who may be accustomed to systems being consistent and working. Patience and flexibility are therefore key. The process of applying for work permits is one area where case advocacy could help push it through. More information on this can be found under “Individual/Case Advocacy.”

Once an individual is granted asylum, they automatically become work certified, even if their EAD has not yet come through.

**Before Employment Authorization**

Working without employment authorization is not recommended by lawyers. It is imperative that the asylum seekers know that they should never use someone else’s Social Security Number (SSN), identity, or claim anywhere, especially in writing, to be a citizen. Doing any of these will negatively impact their case and are against federal law.

If the asylum seeker chooses to work before they have a work permit, they should know that if ICE comes, this might threaten their open case. It would also be best if the host family does not know what they are doing, so that, if ICE questions them, the host can honestly say that, to the best of their knowledge, they have not been working. Other members of the support circle can know, as it is unlikely ICE will question them. The support circle can also come alongside in finding “neighborly tasks” for asylum seekers to do for a donation.

When undocumented individuals work, they can file their taxes with an individual tax ID number called an ITIN (Individual Taxpayer Identification Number). This number is issued by the IRS. ITIN status can be checked by calling 1(800) 829-1040.

If an individual chooses to work unauthorized, it is better for them to go to an official day laborer network, as it will be safer than going on a street corner or Home Depot. The National Day Laborer Organizing Network (ndlon.org) has member organizations and work at a variety of locations. Contact NDLON ((626) 799-3566) to find one in their neighborhood. Their website also has valuable resources, including a [Central American Exodus Curriculum](https://ndlon.org/resources/central-american-exodus-curriculum/) (in Spanish).

**When Employment is Authorized**

When an asylum seeker receives their EAD, they are eligible to work after going through a few more steps. They will receive a notification that their application has been approved and, with that notification, will have to go get a Social Security Number and then, after they have their SSN, they will have to get their State ID from the DMV. The lawyer will provide the information on how to go about this process and which documents to bring. To get their SSN, they should call and make an appointment through the automated system (it is in Spanish). Once they get their social security card, their EAD is still not valid without proof of authorization and therefore the asylum seeker should take their social security card and approval notice, go to the DMV and get a State ID. With the State ID, they can get the EAD approved and can be authorized to work.

With an authorized EAD, they can find work and begin to work. Members of the support circle from immigrant churches can help and be core in connecting them with employment opportunities. Support circle members can also help connect them with resources. Depending on what the individual used to do for work, they may be able to find a job similar to what they used to do. Labor centers, such as LA County Work Source Centers (213-744-7300), are also helpful in the process of finding work. At the labor centers, asylum seekers can sit down with someone, share their skills, and then, when someone calls the labor center, they will contact people for work based on the skills they have shared. Labor centers will not send people to do a task they don’t know how to do, but could lead to connections to find later work.

In looking for work, they may need to create a resume and gather references, depending on what kind of work they’re seeking. Those accompanying can offer support in this area.

Other things to know:

* The EAD will have an expiration date on it. It is the employee and employer’s responsibility to resubmit an EAD with a new expiration date before it expires.
* If ICE comes to their place of work, the asylum seeker can tell them they have a permit and should not worry. There should not be any consequences or issues with working with an EAD.
* In addition, when their asylum application is approved and they become a LPR (Lawful Permanent Resident), they will have to notify the social security office again and get a different social security card that no longer has a qualification on it. The employee is responsible for resubmitting paperwork to their employer after they receive their new social security card.

**Laws Regarding Employers** to be aware of:

* Employers cannot ask for a birth certificate.
* Employers cannot demand to see a green card
* Employers cannot ask whether or not an individual is a citizen, unless being a citizen is a criteria of the job being qualified for.
* Employers cannot say their EAD is not valid -- this is grounds for a lawsuit.

**6) INDIVIDUAL/CASE ADVOCACY AND MANAGEMENT**

This section delves into what it looks like to walk alongside asylum seekers in systems as well as working with the Intake Coordinator from ECAS, Luis Gonzalez (his contact information can be found in the introduction). As support circles and host families accompany immigrant families in the process of seeking services, there are unique advocacy opportunities they can play as members of the Church that may help. However, in all advocacy, the focus should be kept on the family seeking asylum, not on the individual helping them.

**Working with the Matthew 25/ECAS Case Manager(s):**

In accompanying, host families and support circles likely have “what if?” questions. If or when these scenarios happen, it’s important not to panic and immediately call up Luis, for example, without first thinking through other options. Below can be found basic guidelines for these “what if?” situations:

* **If** there is a situation in the house and you are the host/sponsor or **if** the host family, member of the support circle, or asylum seeker themselves is panicking, for any reason…
  + Step 1: Calm down. Take a deep breath.
  + Step 2: Start writing an email message to whoever you think you can solve it.
  + Step 3: Re-read the email. See if there’s something you or a member of the support circle can solve.
  + Step 4: If there is still something you cannot deal with, then push send. Most likely going through the first three steps though will help you realize other ways to work through the issue or that it’s not that big of an issue in the first place.
* **If** the asylum seeker is applying for a service and keep being told no, even when they explain they are seeking asylum…
  + Step 1: Ask for details why they are being denied. Gather information respectfully. Also ask for a business card/phone number for the office, if they don’t already know it.
  + Step 2: Walk away
  + Step 3: Review what went wrong in the process of trying to access the service.
  + Step 4: Calm down. Sometimes people tend to call people who they think can help on the spot, get very frustrated, and don’t provide the information that is helpful.
  + Step 5: Let Luis or whoever is in charge of the case know, with details, what happened and then both review what’s normal
* **If** there is something involving police, immigration, or ICE…
  + Always call Luis or whoever is in charge of the case -- but don’t call in a panic. If you call panicked, without information, likely they will not be able to help and will also get panicked.
* **If** there is a fight, for example, between the children of the host family and the children of the immigrant family…
  + Step 1: Try to calm everyone down. Try to keep the conflict from escalating to the level where it becomes between the parents.
  + Step 2: The immigrant parents and host family parents should together try to mediate conflict between the two individuals -- depending on the scale, this might be doable and can be handled quickly
  + Step 3: If the conflict cannot be mediated between the two families, call whoever is the point person for the support circle or the case manager. What may be needed is to take one child to another location for a day or night, and then to see what the situation is, negotiate and work to solve things.
  + Note: if the situation has reached that level, there should have been a conversation before it escalated to the level of a fight
* For all of these **if**’s -- know and be conscious of people’s schedules and hours. For example, for the case managers, try to be respectful of their lives
  + **If** there’s an emergency at night or something happens, for ECAS/ Matthew 25’s current intake coordinator/case manager, Luis, send a text message in the moment. If he’s awake he will reply. If not he will get back to you in the morning.

**Accompanying Asylum Seekers in Case Advocacy in Systems**

In advocating, the focus should be kept on the family seeking asylum and their needs and desires. In sharing the story of the asylum seeker, the details should only be shared when it is necessary. Advocates should seek to be humble and conscious of their motives for sharing the details. Details of the asylum seeker’s story should never be shared to make the host family or members of the support circle look good.

Members of the support circle, the host family, or the legal sponsor are able to visit their local Congressperson as a constituent of their district. For example, say the asylum seeker does not have a passport and the consulate is delaying, or the asylum seeker’s application for a work permit is taking much longer than it should. With the permission and guidance of the individual’s legal team, a host can contact their Congressperson by going online and filling out the Congressional Casework Authorization Form. After filling this out, they can have a meeting with their congressperson and share that they have an individual in their district who has an ankle bracelet and needs to work. While the success of this meeting is not assured, it might help and has helped others. Congresspeople likely have an immigrant case manager who can call and perhaps add pressure to push the process forward.

Advocates call also schedule a call with members of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) subcommittee, even if the advocate themselves is not part of their district, they are a part of their constituency. Members of the DHS subcommittee can call immigration and act in different ways than other congresspeople. Matthew 25/Mateo 25 SoCal can assist in this process of connecting with representatives or people further up the ladder.

If a person wants to advocate for an individual case, there has to be an agreement in which the person whose case is being worked on needs to give permission for the documents of their case to be shared with that office. This should be checked with the legal team to ensure that sharing those documents will not work against their case if shared with someone who may be more conservative.

Advocating on behalf of asylum seekers with congresspeople can be a way of ministering to them. People usually advocate for things that impact their own life, so ministering on behalf of another is a ministry in itself -- impacting congresspeople who call themselves Christians to show up as people of faith. As members of the body of Christ, advocates want to change the system because they see and walk with people who do not have the power to speak for themselves or vote. The interest of the church is the interest of the migrant -- what is effective and just for asylum seekers? Advocating as the church changes the narrative, as the Church seeks to carry stories in a way that both honors the dignity of individuals and that could potentially lead to change the system for alter individuals. As people of faith, our responsibility is not to craft policies but it is to seek to make sure our laws are grounded in values of compassion without fear and are therefore inclusive and seeking to make our communities better. Advocating on behalf of individuals or families, this will inevitably lead to systemic advocacy.

There is no requirement to be an expert in immigration policy in order to advocate. As a constituent actively partnering with asylum seeking families, the experience is what is impactful as to why policy should change to something that will serve migrants. If the advocate shares their personal story, it could be helpful to share how the experience of accompanying has impacted them and made them view the system differently. However, the story of the advocate should not become the center of the work of advocacy.

It is also imperative in advocacy to avoid the good immigrant/bad immigrant narrative. Perpetuating this narrative only divides the migrant community. While it helps to emphasize the contribution of a particular person, it should not be done in comparison to other immigrants.

Even if there is not an issue encountered in the case, advocacy can occur on many different levels. Following up after with the congressperson can continue your ministry to them, as usually their experience is that when a need is met, they never see those constituents again. By returning to express gratitude or advocate for other issues, there opens an opportunity to develop an ongoing relationship which can work towards policy that helps many similar families.

**7) TRAUMA**

Most, if not all, immigrants have gone through traumatic experiences -- back in their home countries, during their journey to the States, in detention centers -- that will affect them each in different ways. In interactions, host families should strive to be a calm, understanding, and supportive presence and to create a space that accommodates what they need. However, host families are not psychological professionals and must understand their limitations. In this section, we will introduce how hosts should approach interpersonal interactions in a trauma-informed way and how to approach connecting asylum services with professional help and services.

**Interpersonal Interactions**

In general, host families and others accompanying them should strive to be supportive, calm, and respectful. They should approach with validation of the asylum seeker’s experience. At the same time, the asylum seekers do not owe any details of their story to the host family or support circle and should not feel pressured to share. If, when trust is developed, they may want to share their story and how they continue to be impacted, but this should by no means be expected by the host family or support circle. If they do choose to share, those they share with should validate and affirm their experience but should not claim to understand and know the solution.

Healing from trauma, though it should be approached like a physical illness in that it merits professional care, is a long process that will likely take the rest of the asylum seeker’s life. The process of healing from trauma is more a journey of learning to cope with and live with their new reality than going back to who they were before all these things happened to them. Those accompanying should be conscious of these realities and provide support as needed.

**Consent** is key as a guide in all interactions and goes both ways. In physical contact, people should ask if it is okay to, for example, hug another person. Consent is also important in managing space -- what is someone’s personal space and respecting that. Always asking for consent and respecting if the individual does not give consent is important because if someone has been a victim of sexual or physical abuse, not asking or going against their consent could trigger past trauma and negatively affect the trust between the asylum seeker and others. Consent should be asked for beyond physical interaction also -- “Is it okay for me to pray with you?” or “I’ve noticed you’re quiet -- is it okay if I sit with you or would you prefer to be alone?” (If they are quiet, don’t force conversation or interaction. Respect the boundaries they set.)

Consent also applies if the immigrants share their story with anyone in the support circle or host family. Things told in confidence show their trust in someone, and sharing without consent violates that trust. Always ask, therefore, if they give permission for their story to be shared. If they give permission, assume that permission is only for the specific instance asked for and is not universal. Also, their story should be told in a way that upholds the dignity of the individual because they bear the image of God, instead of continuing to victimize them. In asking for consent it is also important to remember that interactions between host families and asylum seekers inevitably involve power dynamics, and this may lead to them agreeing to things they, in reality, might not want to do.

Trauma, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), or Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) can manifest in many different ways. Even if someone has not been diagnosed or is not fully diagnosable with ASD or PTSD, because they have likely undergone traumatic experiences, they will likely still exhibit elements of trauma. When someone has PTSD and get triggered, they often get flung back into what happened and might show signs of panic or get very spacy. If this happens, whoever is with them should try to be a calm presence and not add to their distress.

**Different ways trauma may manifest**:

* Someone who is hypervigilant (startle easily, anxious, on edge)
* Somebody who is withdrawn, blank, not present, maybe even dissociated
* Somebody who is cheerful, upbeat, give off the image of being fine, but has squished down the trauma and may at some point begin to emerge as they begin to feel safe and settle in and settle down
* Someone who acts out abuse on other people, likely because they were abused themselves.
* Adults may have substance abuse issues

**Possible Practical Changes** (note: everything depends on the individual. But there are some suggestions that *may* be useful to consider) These are common things that some have used to help:

* They may need to move furniture to be able to see the door
* Sleeping with the light on may help with their ability to sleep, as sometimes the dark overwhelms them and takes them back
* As PTSD is often much worse at night, make kitchen and public spaces open at night, give permission to not have to say in a space if they feel freaked out
* Try to understand and notice what their triggers are – whether it’s noise or being left alone for long periods of time, and then work with what you observed (i.e. share schedule of when you will be gone, so they know when you’re there and can anticipate absence)
* Respect their own space, engage as much as they want to be engaged, give some opportunity for music in the room, night light in the bathroom, things that create safety, or a greater sense of it
* If they are a child and are in school, putting their situation on the radar of a school counselor could help provide context if they have behavioral issues
* If the host or member of the support circle notices the individual seeking asylum engaging in an activity that they really enjoy, supporting that activity and looking for other options similar to that activity can help them feel more comfortable and engage socially
* The host should check about prescription drugs kept in the house if the asylum seeker shows any signs of being suicidal

**Regarding Substance Abuse:**

Adults or teenagers dealing with trauma may begin using or abusing substances as a way to cope with their trauma and . If they are an adult, they are responsible for their own decisions and are within their rights to drink alcohol and access other substances. Their autonomy should be respected, even if the host might personally disagree with it. However, the host has a right to set standards for their home and to expect those standards will be respected. If those standards are violated, contact ECAS organizers and the Intake Coordinator. A mediation process may be effective in resolving the situation. Sometimes, a mediation is not effective and the guest needs to relocate. There is no way to know the history of use or addiction in those being accompanied. Some may hide dependence well or lie about where they go. If they suspect or become aware that an individual they are accompanying is using substances and/or hiding it, hosts and support circles should approach with understanding balanced with awareness and consult staff.

Connecting the individual with support groups for substance abuse recovery could help them, if they are interested. Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in Spanish, “Alcoholicos Anonimos,” can be found throughout the city by searching online or [here (in Spanish).](https://www.aa.org/pages/es_ES/find-aa-resources)

**Self Harm/Suicidal Issues:**

If an asylum seeker is expressing suicidal intent or a desire to self harm, there is a legal requirement on the person who they share with to report this behavior to a professional. This information, as far as we know, will not jeopardize their case in any way. If this happens, having conversations about connecting the asylum seeker with professional help is extra important. The trauma people go through in the process of seeking asylum is hard to fathom and, unfortunately, some may not be able to heal.

**Connecting with Professional Help:**

The role of the host family and support circle is not to solve their problems and have all the solutions, but to get the asylum seeker to a space where they have agency. Connecting the asylum seeker with help -- be it professional therapy or alternatives -- is key. Those accompanying must begin the process with clear communication and a conversation with the asylum-seeking family to see if they want to. In this conversation, the host should explain what therapy is like and the possible benefits of it. If someone in this conversation has had personal experience going to therapy or counseling, they can share a personal testimony about what therapy was like for them, what their fears/hesitations were going in, and, generally, how it helped. At no point should anyone say “you need to go to therapy” -- the asylum seeker needs to have agency in making their own decisions. After explaining an overview of therapy, taking into consideration the recommendations below, those accompanying can ask “would you want to try it out?” Agreeing to try and go to the first appointment is an important step in the process of connecting them with regular care. Because of the cultural differences in attitudes towards mental health, the puentes could be very helpful in this conversation. If they express interest, see below for resources to connect them to.

If you are the host or member of the support circle and you are unsure of how to address the importance of mental health, excusing yourself from walking with them in this is wise, as the focus should be on their journey and not yours. Hosts and members of support circles should not invalidate their experience or deter them from mental health services.

(flow chart to be added to illustrate process and pathways)

**Cross Cultural Considerations**

In most immigrant, collective cultures, therapy and psychological help is a taboo subject with a lot of stigma surrounding it. Latin American cultures vilify and downplay therapy as something only “crazy” people do. In having the conversation above, it should be explained that going to therapy does not mean the migrant is crazy or institutionalized, but instead that in therapy they can talk about and process things they might not feel comfortable or able to share with their hosts or new friends in the support circle. Therapy is confidential.

Similarly, the church has played a role in stigmatizing mental health issues as “not trusting God” or as something to be “prayed away.” If churches coming alongside view prayer as the solution, we can affirm and say yes, we will pray and we will also seek help. This doesn’t dismiss the power of the prayer but also recognizes that science and spirituality can coexist to care for individuals wholistically.

Power dynamics also play into getting mental health help in both having the conversation and finding services. In having the conversation, the asylum seeker may agree to go meet with a professional but not follow through with making the appointment or going to it. While that could be perceived as being flakey or not caring, this will more likely be a sign that they didn’t truly feel comfortable agreeing originally and simply gave a polite yes. In connecting with services also, asylum seekers will likely find it more difficult to relate to and trust a white psychologist than one who shares their background or is another person of color. Even if the therapist is not fully bilingual, they will likely still feel more comfortable with a person of color, as they will see someone who looks like them.

**If Interest is Expressed...**

* The clinic they’ve connected with may offer mental health services, call to make an appointment. My Health LA covers mental health services.
* St. John’s Well Child and Family Center offers mental health services specializing in trauma
* If it is for a child enrolled in school, the counselor will be able to help or refer them to professional services
* Matthew 25/Mateo 25 SoCal has connections at Fuller Seminary in their psychology department
  + $5 per session for 12 sessions for asylum seekers in our network
* Lawyers may have recommendations for psychologists for continual treatment after an initial psychological evaluation. Documenting the story of trauma/PTSD symptoms could help in the asylum case.

Regardless of which service they choose to go through, those accompanying should look up who is offering the services and make sure they are qualified to work with asylum seekers and work in Spanish. If those accompanying would not go to that place for themselves, they shouldn’t recommend it to another. Try to get as much information about who they will be working with as possible so that they can feel comfortable going into a strange situation. Once a particular service is chosen, call with them to make an appointment and set a date. This creates a level of commitment for them to follow through. Accompanying them to their initial visit may help them feel more comfortable and less trepidatious.

**Alternatives**

Many immigrants may not want to go to therapy or may find that therapy is not effective for them. However, in either of these cases there still exists options to help them seek healing in a way that is comfortable and effective for them at the stage in their healing they are in. Alternatives to professional care are dependent on the person and their preferences, but options like those below may help:

* Spending time in nature or a garden
* Writing their story in a journal
* Drawing/art therapy
* If they are connected in an immigrant church, meeting with the pastor to receive pastoral care may be a lower barrier of entry and they may feel more comfortable talking to a pastor than a doctor
* Meeting with other asylum seekers in a support group type model facilitated by someone with training and experience in trauma-informed care

**Self-Care for Hosts and Support Circles**

Walking closely with people who have undergone trauma can be difficult and, at times, overwhelming for people. Often it can be difficult to recognize when those accompanying begin to internalize other people’s trauma and deal with the effects of secondary vicarious trauma. Hosts, especially, should be sensitive to their own emotional well-being in caring for asylum seekers. Support circles can provide support in this area, being present to listen and care for the emotional health of the host in addition to the asylum seeker. In supporting people through secondary trauma, support circles can be a listening ear, validate emotions, check in to see how the host’s self-care is going, and be understanding presences in other ways as well.

**Resources**

* The National Child Traumatic Stress Network’s [website](https://www.nctsn.org/), which has a variety of resources specific to immigrant and refugee populations.
  + [List of Resources for Immigrant Trauma](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/nctsn_resources_traumatic_separation_and_refugee_and_immigrant_trauma.pdf)
  + [Tips for Caregivers](https://www.nctsn.org/resources/traumatic-separation-and-refugee-and-immigrant-children-tips-current-caregivers) (and in Spanish [here.](https://www.nctsn.org/resources/separacion-traumatica-ninos-migrantes-y-refugiados-consejos-para-padres-cuidadores))
  + [Helping Immigrant Pregnant Women Exposed to Trauma](https://www.nctsn.org/resources/helping-latin-american-immigrant-pregnant-women-exposed-trauma-reflections-mirroring)
  + [Stigma Surrounding Trauma Treatment in the Hispanic Community and Recommendations for Engagement](https://www.nctsn.org/resources/stigma-surrounding-trauma-treatment-hispanic-community-and-recommendations-engagement-tf)

**8) INTERACTING CROSS-CULTURALLY**

Throughout the time asylum seekers live with a host family, various cultural differences will inevitably arise in interacting and living together. Differences are not bad, but could lead to conflict and broken relationship if interacted with poorly. Therefore, with the guidance of the puentes, hosts should seek to be conscious about the cultural dynamics at play in accompanying and living with asylum seekers.

At the start, hosts and asylum seekers should work to have clear, regular communication and begin building trust with each other. To facilitate this and to be welcoming, hosts should invite questions and open conversation about anything. At the beginning, both parties will sit down with an ECAS organizer and craft a roommate covenant to discuss and agree to guidelines regarding the house and behavior in the house. More information on the housing covenant can be found under the “Housing” section below. Hosts should also share their basic schedule each day, as a general overview of activities around the house will help both in sharing common utilities like the shower and in helping individuals who have experienced trauma to feel comfortable.

In communication, if the host does not speak the same language as the asylum seeker, they both should try to meet in the middle. If one member of the support circle speaks, for example Spanish, hosts should try not to always depend on them to translate, but could ask them to help teach both parties a small amount in order to facilitate communication. Apps like Google Translate or Word Reference could also be helpful.

**General Attitude**

In working cross culturally, hosts should seek to be uplifting of the image of God in the individual they are walking with. Hosts, as people in the system of privilege, have an important role in walking with people whose dignity in many ways have been defiled and should seek to be part of the restoration, while also asking the question, “how is walking with them going to liberate *me* from my own blind spots of privilege?”

The goal of hosts, when walking with migrants is not to give them the same things the host has, but it is to be an agent of creating a beloved community in this particular situation. This is how power dynamics should be considered. Though a host may have good intentions, intentions come with blind spots that the hosts should actively seek to be aware of and deconstruct. When someone has facets of privilege, being aware of them should not lead to guilt, but instead is an opportunity to act with greater compassion and learn from those with less privilege. An individual from an Anglo church may have certain easily attainable resources, but what they can learn from a migrant church is that they have different valuable resources. When both combine together, along with what both can learn from the sisters and brothers they are accompanying -- this creates beloved community. When this happens, the protagonist of the story can change and the story becomes a collective story of brothers and sisters living out what the body of Christ looks like.

Accompanying asylum seekers will challenge the way hosts and support circles assume they should act and be as a people of faith. Each story and migrant is challenging those who accompany them to be better Christians and witnesses and to unlearn their assumed knowledge of what the kingdom of light should look like. The journey will inevitably be uncomfortable, but feeling uncomfortable is okay -- and encouraged. Pressing in humbly to the uncomfortable can push people closer to the heart of God.

**Celebrations**

Throughout living life together, there will be celebrations. Hosts can invite them to join in their celebrations and ask the asylum seekers if they have any traditions, such as Dia de los Muertos, that they would like to celebrate. Hosts or support circle members can invite them to go to their churches, but should not force them to -- let them decide if they want to go to church and, if they do, which church they go to.

**Conflict**

Conflict, on some scale, is inevitable and can end positively if it is approached well. When a conflict arises, the host should, first, take a step back and consider if this is a real issue worthy of addressing. When addressing conflict with the other party, first state what you observed happened and then share how it affected you. Try not to make assumptions. While some host parents may be shocked to see an asylum seeking child be spanked by their parents -- this is a cultural difference and not, in the vast majority of cases, any kind of abuse. If conflicts arise and children are involved, refer to the “Individual Advocacy” portion of this manual.

**8A) HOUSING**

In ECAS/Matthew 25’s current model, housing is divided into the three stages outlined below:

**First Stage** -- Temporary housing, focused on providing what people require. This is usually provided by people in their own home. First stage housing can be pretty basic accommodations, but should still be livable in and not exploitative. Two weeks

**Second Stage** -- Transitional housing, for three to six months. Usually in a home.

**Third Stage** -- Independent housing, best within immigrant populations. This still may require intervention guaranteeing they will be able to afford rent.

In the first stage, hosts and asylum seekers together should create a **Roommate Covenant**, such as the [example here](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1T5-Pady_f1nTekrsT6wQZHgLxomsNGBo/view?usp=sharing), starting from a place of needs, not rules. Sponsors should refrain from assuming these needs. In creating the covenant, there is a power dynamic involved that can be tricky to navigate. The roommate/housing covenant will be created in a neutral setting with help from the puentes and/or Matthew 25/ECAS staff. In the housing covenant, boundaries on time the asylum seeker will be staying there, guidelines regarding drugs and alcohol, and other topics such as those found in the above example.

Regarding pets: many immigrants from the Global South do not have pets in the house; most North Americans do. In the early conversations about housing, a conversation about hesitations or customs surrounding the pet.

In living together, asylum seekers may not know how to work various electronic appliances around the house, such as an electric stove or washing machine. At the beginning, therefore, hosts can walk through how they use appliances around the house -- if the oven or dishwasher, for example, is used or used for storage. Other cultural differences may show up in small ways as time goes on, like in different customs around toilet paper.

The goal of the host family is to serve and be hospitable, coming alongside the asylum seeker to empower them to independence. We want to avoid at all costs a situation where an asylum seeking family is completely dependent on the sponsor -- this creates an environment ripe for dispute and frustration and is not beneficial to any party involved. Accompanying is built on presence. In North American culture, individualism influences relationships. Thus, many seeking to serve feel they have to do something for another person in order for them to feel like they are accompanying them. However, simply *be*-ing with the immigrant families is a way to love them.

The immigrant family may want to help around the house or in the yard and while generosity should not be denied, it should also not be taken advantage of. Hosts should honor them and be conscious of dynamics so that they do not become exploitative. Refer to “Work” for more suggestions in this area.

**Computers and Phones:**

Phones are an important survival tool and should be talked about in a conversation early on with the support circle, host, and guest. While a phone is needed, the latest iPhone is not. There are many different pathways to getting a phone and cellular data plan and the support circle should talk through each. Getting a pr-paid phone for at least a month or two with one or two months on it at the beginning would be a good way to start, and then further conversations can decide the details of: what kind of phone, what kind of phone plan, if it can call internationally, who will pay for it, etc. In regards to prepaid phone plans, the cheapest

If the guest is studying, a donated computer can be a great help, and almost a necessity in today’s world and schools, especially at higher levels. Computers can often be accessed at the library or at school.

**Regarding Belongings:**

When hosting someone in one’s home, there can be a tendency to micromanage and hold onto belongings possessively -- this is my home, my space, my things. However, if someone is opening their home, they are sharing their home, space, and things. This might take a shift in attitude to be more open-handed with belongings or how people interact with their furniture.

In addition, in working with asylum seeking individuals, those accompanying may feel the asylum seekers should have a variety of toys and convenience products. However, the reality is, when the family becomes independent, they will probably not be able to afford most of these things. Therefore, hosts and support circles should acknowledge the layers of privilege they come from and try to cultivate realistic expectations and find ways to balance and ease transition.

**Effects of Trauma in Housing**

Though more on this will be covered in the section called “Trauma,” there are specific ways trauma may affect the behavior of asylum seekers at home. One way trauma manifests is in depression-like symptoms, including sleeping a lot or not cleaning up after themselves. This could at first be construed as laziness, but there is likely a deeper reason. Support circles are key here to discern what issues can be fixed with a simple conversation and what issues may have been talked about but are not changing because of their trauma, and then to creatively try other avenues. Similarly, getting them cable as a way to distract them may increase their sense of normalcy, but may also be a way to numb and avoid responsibilities. Support circle members should try to be aware and sensitive to this and support as needed.

**Resources for Housing** by area can be found in this excel sheet: [Los Angeles County Services by Area](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B9azhb2ORjcmRmx3cWNnSTNyalQ3bmw4UDA5YzZ1eHNSTTk0/view?usp=sharing).

**8B) FOOD**

Within the first few days, members of the support circle or the host family should show the asylum seekers and accompany them to the local grocery store to promote autonomy. In thinking about taste, asylum seekers may not be familiar with or like American or Americanized food. Similarly, members of the host family may not prefer their ways of cooking. Both parties should be okay with the other saying “no, thank you” -- most prefer food to be saved for later than wasted, so being respectful and honest is key. The hosts should always **ask** about the customary food of the guest. Get the basics of what they use. This does not mean there needs to be two separate fridges, but there is a simple expectation to ask the asylum seeker what they want to eat and to try to provide that for them.

If a member of the host family has dietary restrictions (i.e. vegetarian or gluten free), people around them are not required to operate under the same restrictions (i.e. if they like meat, get meat, even if you’re vegetarian). Cooking for each other is a great way to build community, as eating together is core to being the family of God. However, food preferences may need to be explained to the cook. Once asylum is granted, asylees will be eligible for food stamps and other government-funded food services.

**9) RESOURCES**

Films:

* “Voces Inocentes” -- a film about the civil war in El Salvador to provide background context to what is causing the current immigration crisis

Books:

* Welcoming the Stranger, by Jenny Yang and Matthew Soerens -- a good, basic introduction to immigration from a moderate perspective
* Your God is Undocumented, by Ched Myers
* The God Who Sees, by Karen Gonzalez.
* Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America, by Juan Gonzalez.
* Manana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective, by Justo Gonzalez
* Latina Evangelicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins, by Loida Martell-Otero, Zaida Maldonado Perez, and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier
* The Local Church, Agent of Transformation: An Ecclesiology for Integral Mission, by Rene Padilla and Tetsunao Yamamori
* The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, by Eric H. Law -- on power sharing in multicultural leadership
* Pedagogy of the Oppressed, by Paulo Freire -- introduction to power structures from the perspective of a person of color
* The Art of Critical Pedagogy, by Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade -- about race dynamics
* Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church and the Bible, by M. Daniel Carroll R. -- good background for how the issue got to where it is today, as well as the role of the church

Websites

* U.S. Chamber of Commerce -- Immigration Myths and Facts (has not been updated since 2016, but is still a valuable resource): <https://www.uschamber.com/report/immigration-myths-and-facts-0>
* National Immigration Forum Website: <https://immigrationforum.org/>
* Matthew 25/Mateo 25 Website, Resources Section: <https://www.matthew25socal.org/faqs>
* To find who your legislator or representative is: <https://advocacy.ucla.edu/find-your-legislator/> or other online resources can aid.
* Bread for the World: <https://www.bread.org/> -- can provide background and information on advocacy at different levels

**PUENTE PORTION**

This section is for puentes and delves into what it is like to be a bridge as well as key skills and practices to develop resilience in the journey. Puentes, as described in the introduction to the manual, are bicultural and bilingual individuals between the ages of 20 and 40 who are a key part of the Matthew 25 community.

Puentes are agents of change with unique gifts. Because they are either immigrants themselves or the children of immigrants, they have practical secular experience at navigating systems with their parents, helping pay bills, and translating. They also have gifts to see beauty in physical diversity, diversity of life experience, and diversity of worldviews that allows them to exist and belong in both worlds. They hold strongly to a sense of justice for their community and know that the kingdom of God is real and present here.

Because of their particular giftings, puentes are important to facilitate connections between faith leaders and congregation members. Until a puente can help facilitate a conversation between faith leaders of immigrant and North American churches, there will not be genuine relationship. On the same level, pastors, especially immigrant pastors, should invest in the development of puentes for the sake of the community. Puentes partnering with immigrant churches could lead to pastors and members of those churches learning how to incorporate gifts of advocacy into working with members of congregations who may be undocumented. Overall, puentes are vessels of hope and passion and are core to the work we do.

Being a puente requires one to be skilled in creating spaces for courageous communication. Puentes learn how both North American and immigrant churches think and, in that, can learn how to draw both towards a beloved community. In this, puentes can draw everything each community sees as a potential threat as a gift, while also understanding their own prejudices. Because of this, they are able to name what needs to be named in a culturally sensitive way.

Puentes must also learn to draw boundaries and care for themselves so they can sustain their work resiliently and maintain a vision for beloved community. Being a puente can be difficult. Finding support in the community of other puentes and finding hope in their faith are key when difficulties arise. Other spiritual practices core to the puente journey include:

* Unlearning internalized oppression, especially in their spirituality -- Part of being a puente is learning to see oneself reflected in Scripture as a person of color and learning from the non-white Jesus how to speak truth to power. This journey will take time, but will be a process walking with other puentes.
* Discerning how and when to share one’s story -- Every puente has a unique story of which they are the expert of. When they share the story of their experience and their community, it is their unique point of view that doesn’t invalidate the experience of other folks of color. However, stories are powerful -- sharing vulnerably and courageously can foster unity across division. But puentes will develop wisdom regarding when to share their stories.
* Becoming aware of personal blindspots and deconstructing harmful ideologies -- Entering into this work, everyone comes with their own blindspots. Puentes, though, are willing to push those boundaries and, as a community, work through them together.