

Intro to JFON- Kalamazoo 2019



Justice for Our Neighbors (JFON) is a ministry of hospitality that welcomes immigrants by providing free, quality immigration legal services. JFON-Michigan's Kalamazoo site opened late 2015 at First United Methodist Church and serves immigrants throughout Southwest Michigan.

Shared Dreams

Applying for funding to the Kalamazoo Community Foundation is not just a submission of pieces of paper. Two years ago, we applied for funding and several of the JFON leadership were invited to chat. Here we paraphrase the dialogue. "What is your dream?" The answer did not take a lot of thought. "We need a full-time attorney." After fleshing out our reasons, they replied, "Why don't you request that amount to position your organization to grow and hire a full-time attorney?"

Kathy Purnell was hired in July, 2018 as our first full-time attorney. Prior to her joining JFON-Kalamazoo, she was already "mid-career." Her career had spanned two decades as an attorney (licensed since 2008), a professor of political theory and public administration, and as a nonprofit administrator. During her interview, she shared her own dreams of transitioning away from her previous type of legal work, back into human rights and immigration work, which shaped her early legal career including the DePaul University College of Law's Asylum and Immigration clinic and a post graduate ACLU immigrant detention fellowship. These dreams have deep roots; Kathy is, herself, the daughter of a Korean immigrant mother and an African-American father from the Deep South who served in the US Army. She grew up in New York City; her family situation integrated cultural and religious backgrounds from two sides of the globe. She witnessed firsthand what it meant for an American citizen to commit to walk with immigrants to build a new family and life together. This experience grounds her commitment to practice immigration law, embrace equity and value diversity.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS A full-time attorney has enabled the Kalamazoo site to link effectively with JFON-Michigan's three other locations statewide and the National JFON headquarters in Washington. The attorneys in JFON-Michigan touch base via phone weekly to share experiences, give advice, support each other and strategize to expand service while reducing operational costs. For example,

many youth that have cases in Kalamazoo are in removal proceedings. These cases require travel to Detroit Immigration Court. Because of our linkages to the JFON-Michigan network, we now have the capacity to accept more local cases because we have the ability to ask the Metro Detroit-based attorney to cover a hearing on behalf of our Kalamazoo client. In our work with unaccompanied minors, under contract with Bethany, Christian Services, the preparation of elements of a submission are often shared between JFON-Traverse City and Kalamazoo. This type of linkage was vital when JFON-Kalamazoo was between attorneys. Attorneys, mostly from Grand Rapids, were able to handle any case load that was left behind when our previous attorney resigned.



Attorney Kathy Purnell, third from left, with immigrant student leaders at MLK Social Justice Teach-in at WMU, Jan. 2019

COLLABORATIONS

In addition to the strength we draw in association to other JFON networks, we've also become associated with other immigration-related groupings in the Kalamazoo area, facilitated by Kathy Purnell's local connections and the efforts of some of the volunteer leaders of JFON-Kalamazoo. Some of them will be obvious from the following list of many of our accomplishments for the year.

- In the partial year of 2019, to date as of August 15, there have been total of 139 active cases, which include everything from Naturalization cases, Adjustment of Status cases for Refugees, Asylum cases, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status cases and T-visa cases.
- Snapshot of June 2019: In our most recent month with clinics (June 2019), 14 cases were opened; 11 were closed. In that month alone, we served nationals from the following nations: Cameroon, Congo, Korea, Mexico, Nigeria, Rwanda, USA, and visited the detention center twice for legal intakes.
- 10 intake clinics are scheduled for the year. This is augmented by monthly family-based intakes at Kalamazoo Public Library at the main and Oshtemo branches.
- Preparations are being made for a naturalization clinic. To date, volunteers have been trained. The clinic will be held in late September 2019. This will serve a larger number than a regular intake clinic.
- Beginning in October 2018, there have been 13 intakes and referrals at the Calhoun County Jail that serves as a detention center for ICE. A video presentation is being created to explain to those detained their legal standing and possible options in English, Spanish and Arabic. It can also be shared with the families of the detainees.
- 900 copies have been sold of the poetry anthology, *Immigration & Justice for our Neighbors*.
- JFON-Kalamazoo is active on the Law Design Team of Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (TRHT) under the stewardship of the Kalamazoo Community Foundation.
- 2019 Pride Partner at the Kalamazoo Pride Festival in June
- Cooperating with Census 2020 in outreach programs for Hispanic, Congolese, and Syrian communities.
- Coordinating student involvement in various formal ways with Kalamazoo College, Cooley Law School (Kalamazoo) and Stryker Medical School.

Thanks to our Donors

Our prayer is that our stewardship of the funds which we receive from generous donors will bring about a multitude of blessings to those whom we serve. Annual expenditures of \$125,000 require a lot of different funding sources, both large and small. The donors listed below currently contribute amounts of \$1000, or more.

- Kalamazoo Community Foundation
- Stryker Johnston Foundation (three years)
- Richard Knapp Fund, managed by the First United Methodist Church (three years)
- Greater Southwest Michigan District of the United Methodist Church
- The Battle Creek Community Foundation
- United Methodist Women
- First United Methodist Church (office space with utilities and security)
- Individuals who are contributing on an on-going basis



AT THE BORDER

In January of 2019, Coral Cervantes was among five staff from JFON-MI who went to Tijuana, Mexico to volunteer with a San Diego-based organization that helps immigrants in their attempts to request asylum in the United States. Coral is a full-time legal assistant with JFON-Kalamazoo and is also an active member of another immigrant-ally organization here in Kalamazoo. The daughter of immigrants, Coral is keenly aware of the hardships immigrants experience before, during, and after they cross borders.

At the southern border, the number of persons needing urgent legal assistance is in the thousands and the workload for attorneys and their allies is incredibly high. Seeing only 30 people was considered a light load, leaving little time to provide more than barebones legal assistance. Here in Kalamazoo, we are able to focus on a smaller group of clients (approximately eight people per clinic), which provides the ability to build an attorney-client relationship and provide more comprehensive assistance. Those with whom we establish a client relationship can be served until there is no more need. For an asylum-seeker, for example, the case will likely be kept open for years. At the border, the inability to provide wrap-around services, however, cannot stop volunteers from taking action and doing what can be done. This level of dedication was evident across the board, from those who cleaned the toilets to those who served food to those who provided legal services. Coral herself volunteered to run the legal clinic the second day she was volunteering, and put her bilingual and organizational skills to good use.

For immigrants attempting to enter the USA without authorization, attorneys informed them of the potential consequences. Those seeking asylum benefitted from an orientation to the credible-fear interview process to help them understand the process, and why certain types of fear of return to their home countries may not make them eligible for asylum in the United States. The goal was to prepare people and allow them to make informed choices.

In the mornings, the JFON team worked at the San Ysidro and El Chaparral ports of entry. Coral explained how traumatic this experience could be for asylum-seekers' getting prepared to seek entry into the US. For instance, volunteers would give the kids and adults thick socks to wear because they needed to wear their warmest layer. Why? Because when asylum-seekers' initial cases are processed, US authorities generally require them to strip to a single layer of clothing. They are frequently detained for days in what they call "la hielera" or "the ice box" which is a very cold detention center. So, the families will want to wear

the warmest clothes first. Volunteers would hold up blankets to create "human curtains" so people could change into their warmest clothing right in the middle of Tijuana's crowds. Coral also explained that volunteers would have the kids and parents sign affidavits of support that could give guardianship to someone they trust in case they didn't see each other again.

Despite the difficult work, Coral would still love to go back to Tijuana. A special grant made her trip possible. National JFON currently offers travel assistance and stipends for people with legal skills to make the trek that Coral made. Justice for Our Neighbors is at the border!



Coral Cervantes at the border wall, on left, with attorney Alex Gillett and Raquel Owens from JFON-Grand Rapids

NOW Is the Time to Protect Immigrants

Justice for Our Neighbors provides free or low cost legal assistance to immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers who cannot afford private attorneys. Because immigration courts are civil courts, there are no court-appointed attorneys for immigrants. However, these cases often involve literal life and death matters. Some judges say it's like death penalty cases being held in a traffic court setting. Immigrants who attempt to represent themselves are much less likely to be successful. A study from 2011 showed that 97% of detained immigrants without attorneys were deported. Your gift makes a difference.

Make an Impact Today

We receive 100% of our funding from private foundations and individuals like you who care deeply about preserving the freedoms upon which America was built. Thank you for investing in this mission.

Gifts

Please complete this form, detach, and send with your check or gift information to: JFON-Kalamazoo, 212 S. Park Street, Kalamazoo, Mi 49007.

Electronic Gift

You can also give a gift to JFON electronically. Monetary donations are accepted any time [online](#).

My/Our Information

Name: _____

Street address: _____

City, State and Zip: _____

Keeping in Touch

- I would like to receive the e-newsletter at the email address listed below.
- Please contact me regarding a planned gift.
- I would like to join those who volunteer, at clinics or In others ways.

**Justice for Our Neighbors-Michigan is an IRS-recognized 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit charitable organization.
Your gift may be tax deductible under the law.**

Services are offered by appointment only. People seeking services should call (269) 743-2501.

Read more about Justice for Our Neighbors at www.jfonmi.org, www.umc-kzo.org/JFON and at www.njfon.org.

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