**Florida Congregation Welcomes Asylum-Seeking Family with Assistance of a Matching Grant from UUSC**

The Immigration Justice Team at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Charlotte County (UUFCC) spent years building congregational and community connections, so the UUSC’s [Congregational Accompaniment Project for Asylum-Seekers](https://www.uusc.org/initiatives/asylum-is-a-human-right-uuscs-congregational-accompaniment-project-for-asylum-seekers-capas/) (CAPAS) seemed like a natural fit to further their commitment to migrant justice.

The CAPAS program supports communities of faith as they host and accompany individuals and families seeking safety through the process of obtaining legal asylum in the United States.

“This was just the perfect kind of project for this Fellowship to do and to emerge into a truly justice-seeking fellowship,” says member Myrna Charry.

Immigration Justice Team member Betty Barriga agrees. “We are a small congregation, and I think we have done enough to give us the assurance that we could do this and we are in for the long haul.”

The Fellowship had only recently begun the process of becoming a CAPAS congregation when they were presented with the opportunity to host an asylum-seeking family in their community. Angelica\* and her two young children were staying in a local American Red Cross shelter when Hurricane Ian struck the area. The shelter was damaged in the storm and the family suddenly needed a new place to live. UUFCC, whose church building was also damaged by the hurricane, decided they needed to say yes to hosting the young family. Solidarity after disasters, recognizing that we are all in this together, is an important way for communities to build resilience and foster healing.

Angelica and the kids moved in with Trisha and her wife, Kathy. This transition has been a big adjustment for everyone, but the support of the congregation through the sharing of tasks makes it possible. Fellowship members help with transportation to appointments and ESL classes, they assist with grocery shopping, and they volunteer to take the children to parks to play.

In addition to the support and guidance offered to all congregations participating in the CAPAS program, UUFCC was the first congregation to be awarded a grant from the Dottie Mathews Congregation Action Fund.

This fund offers matching grants of up to $5,000 for groups welcoming new guests through CAPAS. These grants are intended to assist groups in raising the funds needed to host asylum-seekers and can be used by CAPAS groups in any way they see fit to support their local CAPAS program for things like housing, clothing, food, medical expenses, ESL courses, cash stipends for the asylum-seeking guest, transportation, and more.

Becoming a CAPAS congregation has been overwhelming at times, but UUFCC sees their decision as one in alignment with their UU values.

“The congregation is really turning a leaf and putting their feet on the ground for justice and for humanity and for a family in particular. They can actually visualize what justice looks like. It’s not amorphous like maybe it was before,” says Myrna. “It’s invigorating to the congregation. I think it will make the congregation only more vital and better able to reach out into the community.”

“It’s heartwarming to know we are making a difference in three lives,” says Kathy. “That’s the difference it has made in my life, knowing that I am doing what I believe in.”

“I’m hoping that it will bring many of us [in the congregation] closer together because we are on a shared mission to help this family to get asylum, to acclimate to the United States, to be independent,” says Trisha. “Our house has shrunk,” she says with a laugh, “but we are having a blast!”

Having the support of a CAPAS congregation can make a significant difference in the life of an asylum-seeker and in the potential outcome of their request for asylum. Your congregation is needed now more than ever to create more stories of welcome. To learn about becoming a CAPAS congregation and the Dottie Mathews Congregation Action Fund matching grants, please visit [**uusc.org/capas**](http://uusc.org/capas).

*\*Name changed to protect the asylum-seeker’s privacy.*