



Report from the Tijuana Border January 2022

Sharon Franklin

La Casa de Paso is an emergency house at the Tijuana border started two years ago by Sharon and her partner Javier. La Casa de Paso provides short-term shelter; food; clothing and personal hygiene items; hot showers; and toys, books, and games for kids, along with a safe place of respite. La Casa serves primarily women and their children, because they are at the greatest risk while waiting at the border.

La Casa is not an RRC project, but we thought you'd like to read Sharon's report. Sharon is a member of the Oregon Community Asylum Network.



I wish I had good, or at least hopeful, news to report. As of the end of December, I have none.

It is heartbreaking at the border. No one is crossing. No one has crossed for many months. Families are stuck behind a chain-link fence, still in tents, waiting for something to happen. Some families want to leave El Chaparral—it is unsafe, there is no power there any longer, and it's cold and rainy, making things even more miserable. In addition, many people, most especially from Haiti, but also from Russia and many other places, continue to come. They have no place to go, no place to sleep. Shelters in Tijuana are full. And since no new asylum seekers are allowed in the tent area, they are sleeping on the ground outside of the fence.

It is dangerous there now. COVID is everywhere. Desperation is increasing. Javier has returned to La Casa de Paso three times in the last few weeks to find yellow tape, police, and dead bodies on the ground, first at one corner and then at the other corner of our street, and on the bridge we walk across every day. No details are known about the causes of death. It's best not to ask.

We are both so grateful that he finally got boosted last week. It took standing in line for 6.5 hours along with people waiting to get their first and second vaccines (!), but he got it!

Meanwhile, Javier feels strongly that one thing he can do amid all the ongoing trauma is to continue to bring groups of asylum seekers back to the house to shower, charge their phones, cook food, and give the children a chance to relax and play. There's nothing more to say about the health risks to Javier in doing this, but I know he feels it's one thing he can do to help people, and for that they are so grateful.

To be honest, they are always grateful for everything—and generous with the little they have. I've seen moms who had two diapers give one of them to a mom with an infant who desperately needed one. Javier told me that prior to the rain he saw people in the tent area gather up extra blankets and other items to give to people sleeping on the ground outside.

The reinstated MPP (Migrant Protection Protocol) order set to go into effect has people on both sides of the border in a panic. No one knows what it means and whom it will impact. Javier received nine calls from people we know in just one afternoon from asylees now in the U.S. We know these families. **They all crossed the border legally.** They called Javier, panicked, wanting to know if reinstating MPP means they will be sent back to Mexico. It is heartbreaking. At this point no one I have spoken with, including immigration lawyers, seems to know any details about exactly whom this ruling will impact.

To make matters even more confounding, today a woman in her 40s from Honduras came to the house asking Javier for help. We know her well and like her very much. I wrote a Humanitarian Parole Visa for her months ago, but the ACLU stopped accepting them the day after I completed her form, so she continued to wait. Today she fled where she was staying outside Tijuana and came to see Javier with a broken arm and black eye, the result of domestic violence inflicted by a man she had been with for some time. Because she was by herself and obviously the victim of violence with police reports to prove it, Javier walked her to the border and straight to the front of the line where people over 65 (like me) wait to routinely cross. He told her to “merge” with the main line when it started moving. She did and Javier watched the border patrol wave her across. If she makes it all the way across, it will be because she happened to meet a guard who *saw* her injuries and took pity on her. Sheer luck of the draw. [Note: As it turned out, she got part way and was returned “because she did not have Mexican ID.” So Javier will help her to get that and she will try again. And again.]

He takes people to get Mexican ID whenever possible, because without Mexican ID you can't work and can't receive money. He helps some people without proper ID by providing them his bank information to give to a relative so they can wire money for them to his account, which he withdraws and gives to the family. He regularly takes sick people to the clinic. Recently he took a family of six living in a tent in El Chaparral to see a small apartment. They liked it, so the next day he spent most of the day moving them. It is a lengthy process, especially with so many people. [As they moved in, neighbors confided that when it rains, “mud” runs down the hill from up above them. The implications are ghastly, but the family is willing to take a chance, so we'll see what happens.]

Meanwhile, all the rain has made conditions miserable for people in the tents. The tents are insufficient to keep out the relentless rain, so all their bedding and belongings are wet. Javier takes people to the laundromat to wash and dry their belongings. He also bought lots of heavy duty plastic and enlisted the help of a couple of men there to try to shore up leaking tents so they stay waterproof.

It appears that asylum seekers waiting at the Tijuana border, many of them for several years now, have been completely forgotten. Nothing is improved by keeping people living in conditions like this. No one is used to living in shelters or in tents with as many as five or six other people for months (and years) on end. Kids are not in school. Good hygiene is non-existent. It is wearing on the spirit, piling trauma onto the traumas already experienced, making a healthy transition into the U.S. even more difficult. Real change needs to come soon.

I want to end on a positive note, so here are Three Good Things! It's important to acknowledge and be grateful for all the good things that are happening!

One woman called Javier yesterday. We helped her cross about six months ago. You might remember A. —she stayed at La Casa the night before she crossed. It was her birthday, so Javier bought her a birthday cake, and we took her picture! She said she is with her beloved husband and her mother in upstate New York, and she is so happy! She's working now, doing well, and wanted to thank us once again for everything.

He also got a call a few days ago from a lesbian couple you might recall, who crossed with Humanitarian Parole visas, one of the last ones I wrote. One of the women was blind in one eye when we first met them. They were so sad. Javier took the woman to one doctor who gave her some drops, but they didn't help, so we paid for her to see an eye specialist. This doctor said she had a bad infection, cleaned out her eye, and gave her two different drops. Within a week her eyesight was completely restored—and then they got word that they could cross! They are now in Miami and told Javier they are doing well and are so happy there and think of us!

Last, the woman with two children for whom I started a GoFundMe is still looking for an apartment. Enough money was raised so far to pay the balance due her lawyer, which she was so grateful for! Money was sent for her to apply for MX Passports, so she has "official" ID that will help her to get other ID and open a bank account. She received the passports two days ago! I'm hopeful she will find an apartment soon so she and the kids can move out of the unheated garage they are living in now. When she finds one, we have almost enough money to pay six months' rent up front directly to a property management company, which often helps when asylum seekers do not have the required pay stubs or monthly income to apply. Meanwhile, someone offered to organize an Amazon Wish List once she finds an apartment, since she will have nothing except a few items her sisters can give her.

Wishing you all a wonderful New Year! To asylum seekers waiting at the border and asylees struggling here, I wish you Feliz Año Nuevo, one in which your most heartfelt dreams come true.

For more information on La Casa de Paso, please see <http://www.lacasadepaso.com> or the La Casa de Paso Facebook page.