

Inside the Immigration Pipeline

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Before starting this project, we had already worked with Eileen Markey, who runs immigrant law clinics at St. Nicholas of Tolentine. High school students can volunteer with immigrant children while their parents meet with Fordham Law School professors to discuss their immigration status and navigate the court system. Often, the lawyers find it difficult to speak with these immigrants, whose native language is Spanish, so many students step in as translators or scribes.

After choosing immigration, a topic we are both deeply drawn to, we reached out to Eileen Markey to discuss how we could help. Options ran the full length of the immigration system: scribing at the New Sanctuary Coalition's weekly pro se law clinic, accompanying people to their ICE check-ins and court hearings at 26 Federal Plaza, sharing weekly dinners with recent arrivals at St. Mark's Church in the Bowery, canvassing day laborers outside the Bronx Home Depot, and supporting the families of detainees at Delaney Hall in Newark. Of all of these, the work that needed the most attention, and that we were best placed to take on, was at Delaney Hall, a detention center plagued by injustice.

We asked Eileen Markey to connect us with the head of Pax Christi, an organization that provides daily support for immigrants. She introduced us to Kathy O'Leary, the head organizer, who walked us through the injustices there, starting with the lack of any indoor waiting room. Families are forced to wait for hours on end in the parking lot outside, in crushing summer heat or winter cold. She also told us how little the public knows about Delaney Hall, including its exact location, tucked beside Newark's airport for easy deportation, and how the facility withholds basic details like the dress code visitors are required to follow.

We decided the best way to make real change was to create a website and a pamphlet we could hand directly to families with a loved one detained there. With help from a local printing store, we printed a four-page infographic pamphlet that includes everything a person needs to know before visiting Delaney Hall; you can find it [here](#).

We also helped serve breakfast after the Saturday morning service at St. Nicholas of Tolentine, on Fordham Road in the Bronx. On the International Day of Hospitality, several Fordham University students helped us hand out 300 of the pamphlets during a procession to St. Nicholas of Tolentine Church. We found it especially appalling that, while the immigrants had entered the country legally, they still faced deportation without appearing before a judge or tribunal, a gross violation of the Fifth Amendment's guarantee of due process.

Many social injustices are covered online, raising awareness with each click. But our research turned up almost nothing about Delaney Hall, an absence that seemed designed to keep visitors away. So we built a Delaney Hall website, which Eileen Markey now shares with the dozens of immigrants she works with. The website is available [here](#), and our goal is for the website to help more and more people each day.

Speaking Spanish also made it easier for us to communicate. We sensed that speaking their language put them at ease, as if it confirmed our solidarity. We hoped that receiving help from kids like us, who are from a different world, who didn't look like them, but showed up on a Saturday morning to serve them food, would give them hope. In Matthew 25:40, Jesus explains, “What you have done for the least, you have done for me.” Without hesitation, Jesus would have shown solidarity with the immigrants. Gustavo Gutiérrez, the Peruvian priest often called the father of liberation theology, described this as God’s preferential love for the poor. That love starts with the people a system pushes aside, like the families left waiting outside Delaney Hall.

Throughout this process, we dug into the immigration system and came face-to-face with injustices we had never known about. It is easy to read about immigration policy and feel nothing; it is much harder once you have watched a family wait outside for hours, with nowhere to sit and nothing to eat because someone decided the building did not need a waiting room. Looking ahead, we plan to keep showing up at these events and have figured out how to print and distribute our pamphlets cheaply enough that, with any luck, no family will arrive at Delaney Hall only to be turned away over something as arbitrary as a dress code.

In today’s climate, where sensationalist headlines are easily accessible, we must have structured, reliable information available, both for people who wish to visit detainees and for others who want to learn more about them. The absence of that information is what makes this work urgent.

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Visitor's guide and pamphlet: warm-caramel-fc578b.netlify.app