



FIRST FRIENDS

of New Jersey & New York

First Friends Safe Sanctuary Policy

Who is First Friends of NJ & NY?

Since its founding in 1997, the mission of First Friends of New Jersey and New York has been to uphold the inherent dignity and humanity of some of our nation's most vulnerable populations -- immigrants and asylum seekers detained in the four (4) U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities in northern New Jersey – and those recently released. We accomplish our mission by providing compassion and hope through volunteer visitations; a telephone hotline set up in each of the facilities; funds for phone calls to families and attorneys; a volunteer pen pal program; donated stationery and stamps for writing letters to friends and family; resettlement assistance upon release including cash assistance for food and rent; and advocacy for the safety, health and freedom of our clients, most of whom are people of color from Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean and Africa. First Friends staff and volunteers serve as a lifeline for those in detention—a compassionate face and an affirmation of humanity in the midst of a dehumanizing environment.

Who are Immigration Detainees?

The detention of immigrants is the fastest growing prison industry in the United States. Every day, 42,000 immigrant detainees are held in detention centers throughout the country. Each year, between 280,000 and 300,000 immigrants are held in over 250 detention facilities, operated by the federal government, by private prison corporations or local county jails (detentionwatchnetwork.org). Detainees include both individuals and whole families, including children and asylum seekers. Immigrants from across the world are detained (imprisoned) for a variety of reasons which include but are not limited to:

- Asylum seekers fleeing persecution in their homeland because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group;
- Border crossings, for economic reasons, or waiting many years to be reunited with a family member;
- Undocumented workers who were caught in a raid and are awaiting deportation;
- Visa overstays;
- Individuals who have committed a crime, served their time, found to be without correct documented papers and are detained waiting for deportation.
- Lawful permanent residents are subject to deportation for minor offenses such as buying stolen jewelry or possession of marijuana, which are misdemeanors for U.S. citizens but deportable offenses for lawful permanent residents.
- Many immigrants in detention are married to U.S. citizens and have U.S.-born children. Most immigrants face civil charges relating specifically to their immigration status. However, some immigrants have been charged with identity fraud for using false social security cards, which is a criminal offense. Depending on these charges, detained immigrants may proceed to either civil or

criminal court. Whatever their circumstances may be, detainees suffer from inhumane treatment in all aspects of their detention.

Scope of the Problem

The rapid transition from the street into detention is deeply unsettling. It can result in confusion, distortions of reality, withdrawal, apathy, and ultimately psychological breakdown. More importantly, asylum seekers who come to the United States to escape danger in their home countries only to find themselves in detention undergo entry shock, fall into despair and are re-traumatized. Those in immigration detention often have no idea when their imprisonment will end. In these cases, each day is filled with uncertainty and anxiety, making it very difficult for them to cope with life in detention.

A friendly visitor can help detainees cope with the stress and isolation of detention and be a link to the “outside world”. A consistent visitor can provide a thread of stability in a situation of seeming chaos. For example, the changing shifts and rules made by officers at the jail, dorm mates suddenly leaving, round-the-clock “counts” and searches, and delays in the detainee’s scheduled court appearance. Visitors can affirm an individual’s humanity in the midst of the turmoil.

By visiting people in detention, volunteers demonstrate that they care about our detained friends’ and that others do as well. The visits may also provide individuals with the knowledge that there is someone with whom they can share their concerns and who cares for their welfare amidst hopelessness and confusion. Because the friends we serve are vulnerable, confidentiality is a major concern. We ask that our staff and volunteers ensure that all of the information about our friends in detention is kept confidential.

For those volunteering as pen pals, letters to detained friends can provide solace, encouragement and a personal connection across walls and barbed wire. The letters represent to the person receiving them and to others around him or her that someone recognizes they exist—that they are not alone and have support. Some detained friends have reported that guards treat them better when they receive letters and visitors.

Purpose

The purpose of this Safe Sanctuary Policy is two-fold:

- 1) To demonstrate First Friends’ unwavering commitment to provide hope and compassion to immigrants and asylum seekers in ICE detention through its detention, release and post-release services;
- 2) To provide clear guidance to staff, board members and volunteers on how to carry out First Friends’ mission in ways which protect and empower those we serve.

Types of Abuse

It is imperative First Friends staff, board members and volunteers be aware of the types of abuse that can occur when working with immigrants and asylum seekers in detention: 1) breach of confidentiality; 2) re-traumatization; 3) overstepping boundaries (e.g., physical, intellectual and emotional).

1) Breach of Confidentiality: For all who work in immigrant and refugee assistance, from lawyers and social workers to asylum seekers themselves, confidentiality is paramount. Many of those in detention fear for their own lives or the lives of their family members whom they have left behind. They are also painfully aware of what might happen if word gets out—especially in their home country—that they are seeking asylum in the U.S. Immigrants and asylum seekers may also be very sensitive about personal details from their experience. Only they should decide with

whom to share their personal information.

Guidelines for maintaining confidentiality:

- Always maintain the confidentiality of your conversation with the detained friend—whether they during visitation or through pen pal letters—unless instructed otherwise by the friend, or if that friend says something indicating that he/she might be a danger to himself/herself or to others (at that point you should contact the First Friends Volunteer Manager or Program Director).
 - If you tell other people about our experiences with a detained friend, use pseudonyms (i.e., ‘Rose’ or ‘Frank’) and only speak in general terms about the detainee’s story. Identifying details should not be discussed (e.g., “The man from Madagascar who was a journalist and came here as a stowaway...”).
 - Volunteers may share any concerns or questions with First Friend’s staff. Together we will maintain the confidentiality of the detained friend within the organization. However, it is preferable that volunteers not discuss confidential matters with other volunteers. They can seek support from one another on general concerns.
- 2) Re-traumatization:** In addition to the psychological impact of being in detention, many of those detained have previously experienced severe psychological trauma. In many cases, these immigrants may be recovering from torture, human trafficking, and other painful and abusive experiences. Under these circumstances, it is very helpful for those individuals to have a friendly and supportive person in their life and to establish a meaningful human relationship when they cannot be visited by friends and family.
- 3) Overstepping boundaries:** For the protection of our detained friends, it is important to not overstep physical, intellectual and emotional boundaries.
- **Physical Boundaries:** refers to personal space and physical touch. Be aware of what’s appropriate and what’s not.
 - **Intellectual Boundaries:** refers to thoughts and ideas. Please respect others’ ideas and be aware of appropriate discussion. This boundary can be violated when someone is dismissive or belittles another person’s thoughts or ideas.
 - **Emotional Boundaries:** refers to a person’s feelings. Create a limitation on what to share or what not to share. Do not criticize, belittle or invalidate another person’s feelings.

It is important to remember to not take away someone’s power. While they may be in a temporarily vulnerable position, many immigrants and asylum seekers in detention centers are some of the most courageous, intelligent, gifted and resourceful people you may have the privilege of meeting. Do not romanticize them as the “detainee” or victimize them to the point of taking power away from them. Many have been successful business people, survived horrendous situations, traveled the world to arrive here, learned to speak several languages, attended university, and have been leaders in their families, towns and schools.

Please be aware of the following:

It is critical to learn to distinguish what visitor volunteers can and cannot do regarding supporting someone in their immigration case. It is **NOT APPROPRIATE TO CONTACT THE DETAINED FRIEND’S ATTORNEY.** If

there appears to be a problem with communication or the quality of representation, please instruct your detained friend to contact First Friends. There should be a poster in each dormitory which has a toll-free code to call First Friends.

- Do not discuss or communicate information regarding a person's case with or within hearing distance of detention facility employees, immigration authorities at the facility, other people in immigration detention, or anyone outside the detention facility except other volunteers in your visitation program
- Do not contact the embassy or consulate of the person in detention unless asked to. For example, asylum seekers are fleeing a country where their government persecuted them or where the government could not or would not protect them. They may not want someone to inform their governments that they are in U.S. detention. Similarly, do not contact local expatriates from the detained immigrant's home country without being asked to.
- Throughout the week, people in detention have authority figures telling them what to do, when to do it, and where to be. Ensure that you, as a volunteer visitor or pen pal, do not become another negative authority figure.
- If you become romantically involved with your detained friend, you must change your visiting status from a First Friends' visitor to an unaffiliated friend. Depending on the rules of the facility, it may mean that the friend will have to add your name to his/her visitors list. You may contact me to find out how to proceed.

Minimizing the Opportunity for Harm

- Volunteers are required to attend training sessions for visitation and post-release activities
- Pen Pal volunteers are provided written guidelines on the appropriate way to write to immigrants in detention
- Volunteers interested in doing post-release pick-ups of our clients are subject to background checks through the Sterling Volunteer Verification system
- All volunteers must fill out and sign a volunteer interest and confidentiality agreement
- Only adults 18 and older can serve as volunteer pen pals, visitors and drivers. Children who want to volunteer for our programs like "Stamp Out Despair" or attend our events must be accompanied by an adult.

Topics to avoid during volunteer visits and in pen pal letters:

- The detained friend's court case
- How he or she ended up in detention
- Religion
- They might want to talk about any or all of these topics, but that is up to them
- For our detained friends, First Friends volunteers are different from everyone else in their lives because they aren't forced to tell them anything they don't want to

Volunteers must call FIRST FRIENDS with any concerns they encounter, such as the following:

- **Legal matters:** (upcoming court dates, need for a lawyer, filing appeals, etc.) We can answer questions about the process but cannot give opinions or secure legal assistance.

- **Mental and physical health concerns:** depression, suicidal symptoms, prolonged illness, sudden weight loss, etc. Urge the detainee to file a written request for medical attention. It would be good to share your concerns with FIRST FRIENDS for the record.
- **Urgent detainee needs:** contact with family, immediate or impending release.
- **Allegations of mistreatment or abuse of a detainee inside the facility.** If the detainee makes allegations, note the time, place, and a brief description of what happened with as much detail as possible. Call FIRST FRIENDS quickly and let us follow up. Encourage detainee to file a grievance report.
- **Unprofessional conduct of detention center/county jail staff** towards the volunteers such as:
 - Lengthy wait time
 - Visit cut short or denied
 - Inappropriate officer conduct
 - Visitor strip search
- **Volunteers may realize he/she is not a good match for a detainee,** First Friends Coordinator will provide you a new detainee.

Volunteers aren't able to provide any legal advice or become involved in the friend's legal case. If there is any concern about the friend's case, please contact a FIRST FRIENDS staff member.

Volunteer Forms:

See the Volunteer Application and Pen Pal Guide (Attachments A and B).

Reporting:

All friends regardless of whether they are enrolled in the pen pal/visitation program have a profile stored in the Vianey database system which includes their personal information and the name of their assigned volunteer. Volunteer pen pals and visitors report any issues/concerns to the Volunteer Manager via email or phone call. The Volunteer Manager enters the details into the Vianey database system for future reference and for staff to review and act on.

Definition of Terms

Department of Homeland Security (DHS): is charged with "protecting" the United States. In 2003, the Department of Homeland Security Act, DHS absorbed most of the former Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and took on its duties. DHS split immigration related duties between three separate agencies: (CIS)-Citizenship and Immigration Services, (ICE)-Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and (CBP)-Customs and Border Protection.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE): oversees and administers all matters relating to enforcement of US immigration laws.

Immigrant: a person who comes to the U.S. in order to establish their residence here for economic betterment, family reunification, etc.

Undocumented: An informal term to describe noncitizens that have no government authorization to be in this country.

Refugee: an individual who is outside their country and unwilling to return 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. (1951 Geneva Convention and U.S. Immigration Law).

Asylum seeker: an individual seeking asylum in another country based on similar characteristics as a refugee. US immigration law requires that people who ask for asylum at an airport or point of entry into the U.S. must be detained. Affirmative asylum seekers are those who ask for asylum after entering and within 1 year of residing in the US. They are not detained.

Asylee: a person granted asylum in the United States.

Asylum office: the branch of ICE that makes decisions on asylum cases and does 'credible fear' interviews in the detention centers.

EOIR: The Executive Office of Immigration Review is a separate agency from the ICE and part of the Department of Justice. It administers the immigration courts inside the detention centers.

Detention: People are detained at every step of the "immigration process": (1) awaiting adjudication of asylum or adjustment applications; (2) picked up and jailed without charges; (3) pending immigration proceedings; (4) after being ordered deported, while ICE is actively trying to remove them; and (5) sometimes indefinitely, when ICE knows it may not be able to deport someone with an order of deportation.

Criminal Alien: a noncitizen legally in the U.S. who has committed a felony at some time in the past and is deportable. The definition of a felony was drastically broadened by the 1996 Immigration Act.

Deportation/Removal: Expulsion of a noncitizen from the United States. People who can be deported include noncitizens (including green card holders) with past criminal convictions; visa overstays; refugee/asylum seekers; and those who entered without inspection (for example, by crossing the border unlawfully). Once removed, a noncitizen faces a time period that prevent his or her return or sometimes they are permanently barred.

Parolees: non-citizens to whom the Attorney General has granted temporary stay for humanitarian or public interest purposes and who can be detained at any time. Status expires after one year (renewable at the U.S. government's discretion), and most parolees are prohibited from applying for legal permanent residency (LPR) "green card" or citizenship.

Expedited Removal: An individual can be removed on an order issued by an immigration officer, without the opportunity to go before an immigration judge. The US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) began implementing the expedited removal provisions of Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA) on April 1, 1997.

Intensive Supervision Assistance Program (ISAP): An Alternative to Detention program that ensure close and frequent contact by ICE with someone granted supervised release. A person subjected to these programs typically must make regular visits to an ICE officer or subcontractor and check in through telephone calls. Many people are also required to wear an ankle bracelet and are subject to curfew and other reporting requirements. These programs are frequently utilized for people who have final orders of removal but who ICE cannot deport (for example, because of lack of travel documents, or a country's refusal or inability to accept an immigrant).

Prosecutorial Discretion: The authority of the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security to refrain from placing a potentially deportable person in deportation proceedings; suspend or even terminate a deportation proceeding; postpone a deportation; release someone from detention; or de-prioritize the enforcement of immigration laws against someone because it does not serve enforcement interests.

Voluntary Departure: DHS may, in its discretion, allow a person to depart from the US at his or her own expense in lieu of being subject to proceedings. DHS will allow someone no more than 120 days to depart the US. If the person fails to depart, s/he will be subject to fines and a 10-year period of ineligibility for other forms of relief. Immigrants with aggravated felonies are ineligible for voluntary departure.

53 SOUTH HACKENSACK AVENUE, KEARNY, NJ 07032

(908) 965-0455



WWW.FIRSTFRIENDSNJNY.ORG

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VOLUNTEER INTEREST FORM

Thank you for your interest in volunteering with First Friends. Without the generosity of our volunteers, it would not be possible to fulfill our mission. The information provided in this application is confidential and for internal use only. Please submit the signed volunteer interest form by mail or e-mail.

General Information:

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____ Mailing

Address or PO Box: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip

Code: _____ Phone Number: _____ Email Address:

Are you over the age of 18 years old? Yes or No

Foreign Languages Spoken:

Please list your spoke languages and your level of proficiency (novice, intermediate, advanced, or supervisor)

Language: _____ Level: _____ Language:

_____ Level: _____ Language:

_____ Level: _____ **Skills:**

I heard about First Friends at/from: _____ I attended

First Friends' Volunteer Training: No or Yes Date Completed: _____ OPTIONAL: Tell us more

about yourself (hobbies, achievements, profession, skills):

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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VOLUNTEER INTEREST FORM

As a volunteer, I would like to:

VISIT A DETAINEE REGULARLY AT:

- Bergen County Jail (Hackensack, NJ)
- Essex County Jail (Newark, NJ)
- Elizabeth Detention Center (Elizabeth, NJ)
- Hudson County Correctional Center (Kearny, NJ)

OTHER VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES:

- Become a pen-pal to a detainee
- Provide office assistance
- Financially support on-going programs

ASSIST IN POST-RELEASE SUPPORT

- Volunteer to pick-up released detainees
- Provide overnight hospitality
- Provide mentoring to a released individual
- Host an asylee for at least 3-6 months as they try to get on their feet
- Provide accompaniment to appointments (ex: court hearing or social services)
- Donate used/working smartphones, international calling cards (ex: Uber, Shoprite, Visa)

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VOLUNTEER INTEREST FORM

First Friends Volunteer Agreement

I wish to become a volunteer visitor with First Friends at detention facilities or jails and or be a Pen-pal to detainees. I agree to the following:

1. I will abide by the visiting requirements established by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Community Education Centers (CEC), Corrections Corp (CCA) and County Jail Officials and or Pen-pal guidelines provided by First Friends.
2. I will report any problems with county jail staff to First Friends.
3. Should the person I visit and or write to report a problem with, I will report that problem to the First Friends staff.
4. I will visit a detainee at least twice a month. If I am unable to visit, I will write to the detainee and let him/her know.
5. I will contact First Friends if the detainee I visit or write to is deported, transferred, or is no longer at the detention center.
6. I will contact First Friends immediately if my detainee is to be released and needs resettlement assistance.
7. I will stay within boundaries and will not provide any legal advice or contact his/her immigration attorney.
7. I will protect the confidential nature of any information about any particular detainee, both during service as a volunteer and after I leave First Friends.
8. If I wish to discontinue my volunteer service, I will notify First Friends Program Directors or call 908-965-0455. I understand that I am representing First Friends; as a result, First Friends may terminate my services as a volunteer at any time and for any reason.
9. I am not expected to provide financial support to detainees. If I feel a modest deposit to a detainee's account is appropriate, I will contact First Friends.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Print Name: _____



VOLUNTEER INTEREST FORM

Volunteer Confidentiality Agreement

1. I acknowledge and confirm that as a volunteer with the First Friends Visitor's Project, I may acquire information on the organization, its clients, staff and volunteers, and about certain matters and things which are of a confidential nature and that such information is the exclusive property of the organization and will remain in the strictest confidence.
2. I affirm that the information referred to above could be used to the detriment of the organization and the volunteer activities and thereby undertake to treat as confidential all information, contracts or resources. I agree not to disclose the same to any third party either during the term I am volunteering for the organization or at any time thereafter unless required by law to do so.
3. I agree that any knowledge gained as a result of my involvement or position with the First Friends Visitor's Project will remain strictly confidential.
4. I agree to exercise due care to ensure that any information I may give to others in the course of my duties as a volunteer or otherwise is information that is required to be given and is given to a party entitled to receive such information.
5. I agree I will not discuss the details of my volunteer work with any representatives of the media or publicize any of the confidential aspects of my work orally, by written work, online blogging, Facebook, email, or any other medium of communication.
6. I understand that my personal information, including name, address, phone number, etc., will not be divulged without my prior consent.

I confirm that I have read the above statements and agree with them and I will therefore adhere to all confidential requirements contained in this agreement or as may be otherwise directed to me in writing by the First Friends.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Print Name: _____



First Friends of New Jersey & New York
53 S. Hackensack Ave
Kearny, NJ 7032
Tel: 908.965.0455
E-mail: info@firstfriendsnjny.org

Writing to Immigrants in Detention

Living inside of an immigration detention center isn't easy. Some people have said they feel lonely, confused, bored, and afraid. Being separated from family, friends, and all that is familiar is stressful. Being treated like a prisoner, while awaiting an unknown outcome, can take a tremendous psychological toll. Some—like the men

being held in these facilities—do not even have a chance to go outside. Often the food is unfamiliar, bland, and limited. Phone calls cost several dollars a minute, and therefore, are out of reach financially for many.

Your letter can be solace, encouragement, and a very real connection to the outside world in the midst of this difficult time in someone's life. When we write to men and women being detained, we are making a human connection across the walls and barbed wire. We are honoring the dignity of every human being—something not always done inside the centers. Your letter also sends a message to the person receiving it and the others around him or her that someone knows they are there. They are not alone. They have support. Some people have said that guards treat them better when they receive letters and visitors.

As your letter will mean so much to many of the people to whom you write, here are a few things to understand before you make a commitment to write to those being detained:

- **We write as friends.** We are not writing as lawyers, doctors, or social workers. We are one human connecting with another human being in solidarity as we seek to honor the dignity of all. Do not attempt to give legal advice.
- **Keep your promises.** Don't make commitments you can't keep. If you say you will write to someone, you must. Your letter means so much more than most of us can possibly imagine. You may not be able or willing to do what someone asks of you—call family, send money, etc. That is okay. Know your own boundaries. And talk with a facilitator of the writing project when questions arise.
- **Do not take away someone's power.** While they may be in a temporarily vulnerable position, many immigrant men and women in detention centers are some of the most courageous, intelligent, gifted, resourceful people you may have the privilege of meeting. Do not romanticize them as the "detainee" or victimize them to the point of taking power away from them. Many have been successful business people, survived horrendous situations due to their own resourcefulness, traveled the world to arrive here, learned to speak several languages, attended university, and been leaders in their families, towns and schools.

- **Be aware of your own power.** You have more “power” than detained immigrants due to your freedom and status in this country. Be careful to not abuse the power difference. And never do for someone what he or she can do for themselves.

- **Keep in mind your letters may be read by a guard.** Be tactful and conscious. For example, if you talk about immigration or the detention system with anger or disgust, it may be the detainee that will be the one who will suffer from your words, not you. We are here to be compassionate friends and to love everyone.

- **Be sensitive** to the fact that the person reading your letter may be inferring messages differently than you imply due to their current circumstances. Loneliness, power differences, and language differences could play into the person being detained misunderstanding you or feeling more intimately connected to you than you intend.

- **We have a strict no-proselytizing policy.** It is not appropriate to try to convert anyone to your religion. It is important to give the detained immigrant the power to guide the conversation. If they bring up religion, then you may discuss the topic on their terms. Be careful to never make it seem like participating in a certain religion is necessary to receive letters from you. Keep in mind that it could be members of your religion that persecuted them in their home country. It is sometimes religious persecution that has caused someone to flee his or her home; so, religion in general may be a complex and painful topic. Some people may have faced death due to their beliefs, making it even more inappropriate to try to convince them to adopt your religious beliefs. All that said, if the person finds strength from their faith, it is appropriate to encourage them in their own faith. This may mean Christians mail Muslim prayers or poems to someone to whom they are writing. Even if you are not a person of faith, if religion is important to the person with whom you are in contact, you may want to ask for instance how their faith is sustaining them. Just remember that you are a friend there to uplift detained individuals through their own beliefs, not as a proselytizer seeking to convert.

- **We fully support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and inter-sex people.** Some people have fled their country because of attempts on their life due to their sexual orientation or gender identity and expression. We do not believe that being LGBTI is a sin and will never attempt to change anyone. We go far beyond tolerance. We celebrate the gifts of LGBT people.

Talk about your questions or concerns as they come up. Please call us at (908) 965-0455 or email bflores@firstfriendsnjny.org. **We are here to support you.**

WHAT TO WRITE

At first, writing to a stranger can feel intimidating. What do I say? How do I introduce myself? What if they don't respond? Craft a message from the heart and mail it with an open mind.

Ideas to keep in mind as you write to detainees:

- **Introduce yourself and state why you are writing:**

"First Friends gave me your name and I will be writing to you as a pen pal."

- **You may want to talk about yourself and your life** in the United States (i.e. family, job, and physical environment), current events, television or sports (they are especially starved for newspaper articles from their countries-both news items and sports are welcomed), interesting cultural traditions in the U.S.
- **You may want to ask about life** in the detainee's country and life in the detention center.
- **Know your boundaries** and set ground rules. Remember you are not an attorney, social worker or counselor. You are a friend that cares.
- **All information that the detainees share is considered confidential.**
- **Always include** the detainees 'A' number on all correspondence: EG. Malik Smith #999999999 and Jail ID 282533 (For Hudson County or E-12345 for Bergen)

The mailing address is:

Detainee's Name
'A' number OR Jail ID number
C/O "FACILITY NAME"
Address of the Facility

Important Suggestions:

- *We suggest for your privacy to use First Friends address as a return address. We will forward all correspondence to and from you.*
- Let us know about returned letters because the detainee is no longer there so we may assign you a new pen pal.
- Do not send loose stamps or stamped envelopes. They are considered CONTRABAND.
- Generally, First Friends does not recommend giving money to detainees. However, if you feel it is appropriate to provide a modest sum, **do not mail checks or cash**. Contact First Friends at 908-965-0455 and we will help you.

THE ROLE OF A PEN-PAL

As a volunteer pen pal, your letters provide:

- A boost to the morale of a detainee through friendship.
- A time when detainees can relax and correspond with someone.
- A sense that someone outside of the official world of detention knows and cares about "me."
- A way to discuss cultural differences or incidents that occur in detention.
- A help to FIRST FRIENDS by reading about detainee problems and, when appropriate, calling the office to discuss what you learned.
- An opportunity to learn about the legal process asylum seekers face and about other cultures and countries.

Volunteers aren't able to provide any legal advice or become involved in the friend's legal case. If there is any concern about the friend's case, please contact a FIRST FRIENDS staff member.

THE CARDINAL RULE

For all who work with friends in detention, from lawyers and social workers to friends themselves, confidentiality is important. Many friends fear for their own lives or the lives of their family members whom they left behind. They are also painfully aware of what might happen if word gets out (especially to their home country) that they are seeking asylum in the US. Friends may also be very sensitive about personal details from their experience. Only they should decide with whom to share this information.

As a volunteer with First Friends, your behavior can affect the reputation of the whole group. Therefore, it is important for you to maintain the confidentiality of the person you visit in immigration detention.

Here are a few guidelines to keep in mind.

Always maintain the confidentiality of your conversation with the detainee, unless instructed otherwise by the detainee or if the detainee says something indicating that he/she might be a danger to himself/herself or to others (at that point you should call the Volunteer Manager).

If you tell other people about the experience of visiting, use pseudonyms (i.e. 'Rose' or 'Frank') and only speak in general terms about the detainee's story. Identifying details should not be discussed (i.e. The man from Madagascar who was a journalist and came here as a stowaway....).

As a volunteer with First Friends, you may share any concerns or questions with our office. Together we will maintain the confidentiality of the detainee 'within the organization'. However, it is preferable that you not discuss confidential matters with other volunteers. You can seek support from other volunteers on general concerns you encounter.

ISSUES THAT SHOULD BE REFERRED TO FIRST FRIENDS

Please call FIRST FRIENDS with any concerns you encounter, such as the following:

- **Legal matters:** (upcoming court dates, need for a lawyer, filing appeals, etc.) We can answer questions about the process but cannot give opinions or secure legal assistance.
- **Mental and physical health concerns:** depression, suicidal symptoms, prolonged illness, sudden weight loss, etc. Urge the detainee to file a written request for medical attention. It would be good to share your concerns with FIRST FRIENDS for the record.
- **Urgent detainee needs:** contact with family, immediate or impending release.
- **Allegations of mistreatment or abuse of a detainee inside the facility.** If the detainee makes

allegations, note the time, place, and a brief description of what happened with as much detail as possible. Call FIRST FRIENDS quickly and let us follow up. Encourage the detainee to file a grievance report.

- **Unprofessional conduct of detention center/county jail staff**
- **Volunteer may realize he/she is not a good match for detainee**, First Friends Coordinator will provide you a new detainee

STAYING WITHIN BOUNDARIES

What are Personal Boundaries?

- **Physical Boundaries:** refers to personal space and physical touch. Be aware of what's appropriate and what's not.
- **Intellectual Boundaries:** refers to thoughts and ideas. Please respect others' ideas and be aware of appropriate discussion. This boundary can be violated when someone is dismissive or belittles another person's thoughts or ideas.
- **Emotional Boundaries:** refers to a person's feelings. Create a limitation on what to share or what not to share. Do not criticize, belittle or invalidate another person's feelings.

Know your boundaries and limits regarding which needs you can meet and which ones you cannot:

- It is important to learn to distinguish what volunteers can and cannot do regarding supporting someone in their immigration case. It is **NOT APPROPRIATE TO CONTACT THE DETAINED FRIEND'S ATTORNEY**. If there appears to be a problem with communication or the quality of representation, please instruct your detained friend to contact First Friends. There should be a poster in each dormitory which has a toll-free code to call First Friends.
- Do not contact the embassy or consulate of the person in detention unless asked to. For example, asylum seekers are fleeing a country where their government persecuted them or where the government could not or would not protect them. They may not want someone to inform their governments that they are in U.S. detention. Similarly, do not contact local expatriates from the detained immigrant's home country without being asked to.
- Throughout the week, people in detention have authority figures telling them what to do, when to do it, and where to be. Ensure that you, as a pen-pal, do not become another negative authority figure.
 - If you become romantically involved with your detained friend, you must change your visiting status from a First Friends' visitor to an unaffiliated friend. Depending on the rules of the facility, it may mean that the friend will have to add your name to his/her visitors list. You may contact me to find out how to proceed.

YOUR CORRESPONDENCE MAKES A DIFFERENCE!

Thank you for taking the time to build a hopeful, encouraging, human connection through letter writing to individuals in immigration detention. You are part of building a human network of hope, solidarity, and tangible support. Honoring the dignity of every human being is the foundation for this lifeline of hope. Your participation in First Friends means a great deal to detainees. You are showing them that they are not forgotten which in turn is a tremendous boost to their morale. Thank you and please keep in

touch! Additional Resources

To learn more about detention:

www.firstfriendsnjny.org

www.detentionwatchnetwork.org

www.rightsworkinggroup.org

www.nationalimmigrationproject.org



Find Us and Join the Conversation

Facebook: First Friends of NJ & NY

Twitter: @FirstFrndsny

Blog: <http://www.firstfriendsnjny.org/blog.html>