



IMPACT REPORT 2021

Dignity & Compassion for Immigrants



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear First Friends Supporter,

Big changes in 2021 made it a challenging and exciting year for First Friends.

The biggest change was the closing of three of the four detention centers in New Jersey. In August, Governor Murphy of New Jersey signed a bill prohibiting local governments from making new and renewing current contracts with ICE to detain immigrants in county jails. Essex, Hudson, and Bergen counties no longer detain immigrants for ICE.

First Friends was a member of a coalition that fought to get the state to recognize that the detention of immigrants was so wrong that no matter how attractive the revenues and jobs they generate, local governments should be barred from these contracts. The new law reaffirms First Friends’ belief in the evils of mass immigrant detention.

Yet these closures, along with the pandemic, meant that First Friends, which was built on the foundation of volunteer visits with detained friends, had to find a new way to help. With the surge in the number of immigrants entering the country rising to previously unseen levels, there was a greater need than ever for the kinds of things that First Friends does so well.

Our board, staff, and volunteers recognized this challenge and met it head-on with creative solutions so we could continue our lifesaving services while adapting to the changing landscape of detention. First Friends has had an exciting and successful year, making more changes than ever before in the history of the organization, and helping more people in different ways, all of which you will read about in this report.

I want to thank the donors who have provided the funds we needed to continue our work and the volunteers and staff who have given so much time and energy, ensuring that First Friends remains a beacon of hope for our friends in need. It is both an honor and a great pleasure to work with you.

Best regards,

Rohit Ruhella

Rohit Ruhella
President, Board of Directors

OUR MISSION

First Friends of New Jersey and New York upholds the inherent dignity and humanity of immigrants who are impacted by the immigration enforcement system. We provide compassion and hope through connections with volunteers dedicated to helping them survive detention, gain freedom, and rebuild their lives.



Illustration by a friend who was detained



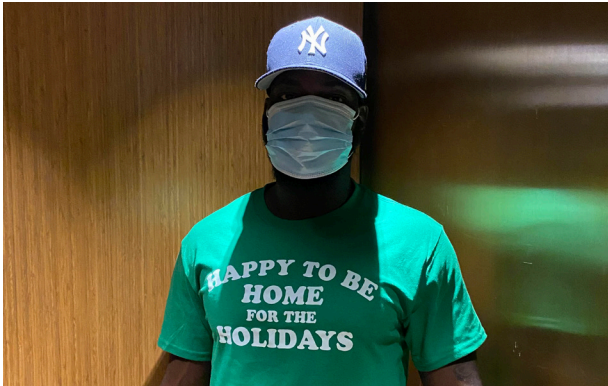
First Friends Board Member Emily Kullmann, Program Director Jackie Zapata, and Volunteer Manager Bernardo Flores at “Free Them All” rally at Elizabeth Detention Center

OUR VISION

A society where immigrants are welcomed, valued, and empowered.



Bernardo and Giselle Holloway, Executive Director, delivering Stamp Out Despair kits



A released friend

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear First Friends Supporter,

In 2021, the pandemic and the closing of the Bergen, Essex, and Hudson detention centers halted our visitation program. Our detained friends were transferred to centers out of New Jersey, far away from their families and attorneys. We wanted to continue helping immigrants and asylum seekers remaining in the Elizabeth Detention Center, but to help our transferred friends, we would have to learn where they had been sent and find ways to work with them long distance.

Other populations of immigrants also needed our attention. When out-of-state detainees contacted First Friends for the first time, we had to enroll and work with them long distance, something that was then beyond our scope of services.

Also, while posting bonds at the ICE field office in Newark, our staff realized that many of the immigrants crossing the Mexican border were finding their way to New Jersey and New York and needed help.

Each of these three groups needed services that had to be adapted to new circumstances or created anew. And our volunteers and staff have met this challenge. For example:

■ Volunteers found a way to keep in touch with friends transferred out of state: They created a business card with our main phone number that was small enough for friends to tuck into their clothing when they were transferred in the middle of the night with barely enough time to get dressed. Cards were placed inside Stamp Out Despair stationery kits, which were quickly delivered to the jails. The cards asked friends to call us collect if they were transferred. Many did.

■ We were no longer able to visit face-to-face with friends who had been transferred out of state or with people in distant centers who wanted to sign up for visits. How this problem was solved through virtual visits will be revealed elsewhere in this report.

■ Many families from Central and South America come across the border with little but the clothes on their backs, and First Friends has expanded its mission to help these newly arrived immigrants who are required to do regular check-ins with ICE. Knowing our reputation, ICE asked us for a poster to display at the Newark field office promoting our services to this vulnerable population. The poster includes our WhatsApp number, allowing people to contact us at no cost. We have already received requests from 33 families.

These are just a few of the innovations we made so we can continue to serve as immigrants’ “first friends.” It’s been an exciting transformation that has required inventive and flexible volunteers and staff, supported by generous and loyal donors.

Many thanks for helping us continue with our important work.

With gratitude,

Giselle Holloway
Giselle Holloway
Executive Director

WHAT WE DO

HELPING FRIENDS SURVIVE DETENTION

- Dedicated help line
- Connecting friends with family members
- Volunteer visitors (in-person and remote)
- Pen pals
- Commissary funds
- Stamp Out Despair stationery kits



Donated supplies for Stamp Out Despair kits

HELPING FRIENDS GAIN FREEDOM THROUGH ADVOCACY

- Partnerships with advocacy organizations
- Meetings with legislators
- Media and communications
- Events (rallies, protests, vigils)
- Campaigns (petitions, letters, social media, calls)



First Friends at protest at Bergen County Jail
Photo credit: Dorothy Wetzel

HELPING FRIENDS REBUILD THEIR LIVES

- Bond assistance
- Transportation
- Housing
- Rent and utility assistance
- Food assistance
- Legal referrals
- Accompanying immigrants to court hearings



Board member Dorothy Wetzel and her husband hosting friend Ernest Francois

IMPACT STATS FOR 2021



Made 263 deposits in friends' commissary accounts, allowing them to purchase masks, soap, and hand sanitizer to protect them from COVID-19



Posted bonds for 16 friends so they could be free while awaiting their immigration hearings



Received 459 phone calls through our dedicated helpline from friends needing our assistance



Provided financial assistance 128 times to released friends and their families for rent, utilities, and food



Distributed over 250 "Stamp Out Despair" stationery kits to detention centers so that friends were able to write to their attorneys, families, and First Friends pen pals



Transported 56 released friends from detention centers back to their families



113 volunteers served as pen pals for our friends in detention

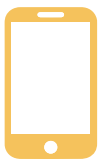
INNOVATIONS

DESPITE COVID-19 AND THE TRANSFER OF IMMIGRANTS TO FARAWAY FACILITIES, WE CONTINUE TO COMMUNICATE WITH OUR FRIENDS



VIRTUAL VISITS

After in-person visits were suspended due to Covid, we started to use online video visiting platforms provided by the jails to visit detained friends.



WHATSAPP/TEXTING

We made it easier for released friends and newly arrived immigrants to connect with us through WhatsApp and texting.



SOCIAL MEDIA

We are expanding our social media presence to find the best ways of communicating with friends, volunteers and supporters.



PEN PALS

We have continued to provide pen pals to stay in touch with detained friends by mail.



IN-PERSON VISITS

When possible, we continue to provide volunteers the opportunity to visit friends in person.



HOTLINE

Friends have continued to contact us through our dedicated helpline.

A HUGE THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS

On behalf of the First Friends' Volunteer Leadership Council, I want to thank you, our volunteers, for the work you have done, serving our immigrant friends – especially during the many challenges created by the pandemic. Your work has been a tremendous gift to so many!



Among the ways you have helped:

- Welcoming friends released from the Elizabeth Detention Center, celebrating their new freedom, helping them connect with Lyft rides, and providing overnight housing in your homes.
- Being pen pals and conducting video visits with our friends, many of whom suffer isolation and despair in ICE Detention Centers.
- Attending vigils that call for more humane immigration laws and an end to ICE detention.
- Helping assemble Stamp Out Despair stationery packets and write notes of encouragement to more than 250 detained friends.
- Writing letters and calling elected officials, advocating for release of detained friends, and passing pro-immigrant legislation.
- Attending virtual volunteer gatherings and keeping informed on challenges that immigrants without legal status face, both in and out of ICE detention.

Although three of New Jersey's detention centers have been closed, ICE detention and systematic deportation of migrants continues. First Friends' mission remains essential and firm: Support those who have suffered under the U.S. immigration detention system.

We are so grateful for your commitment to this community, and we look forward to your continued engagement in this very important work.

Thank you very much!

John Curry, Chair
Volunteer Leadership Council

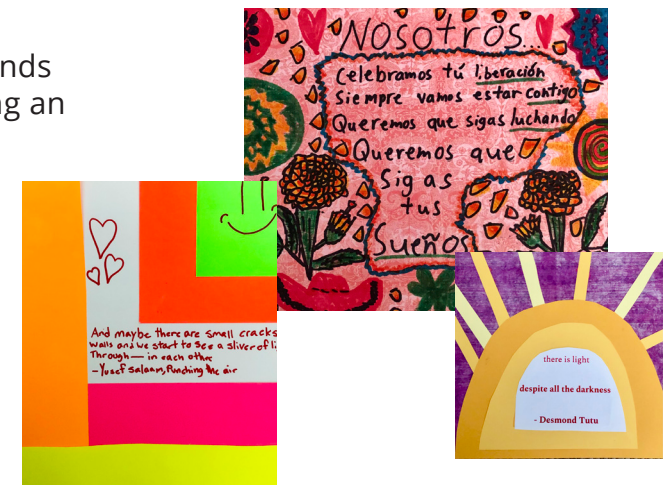
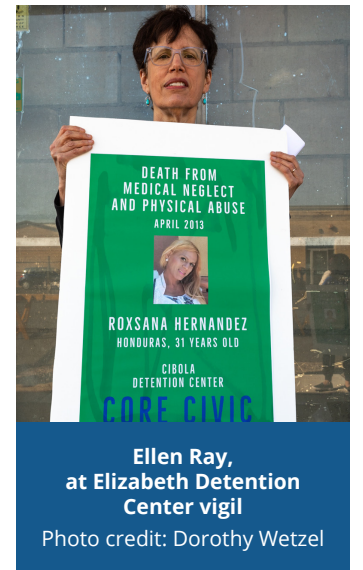
WHY I VOLUNTEER FOR FIRST FRIENDS

I have found my work with First Friends to be very gratifying, and I think a lot of that is because of my direct contact with detained friends. This is what makes First Friends different from other groups. I find it incredibly rewarding to visit friends in detention and to know that I was making a difference in somebody's life. Also, hearing from our formerly detained friends at volunteer socials and rallies is very meaningful to me.

My goal is to help people, but I also learn a lot from our friends. I feel I help them, but they help me, too. I don't want to be in a bubble, only interacting with people from my own background who see things the same way I do. We are living in an incredibly diverse state, and I love it. It's so fascinating to me to meet people from other countries and to see how they are trying to make it here in the United States. This is just the way I want to live my life.

First Friends does a good job of bringing different kinds of people together, building community, and creating an atmosphere where we all appreciate each other.

Ellen Ray, Chair
Volunteer Advocacy Committee



A FRIEND'S STORY

How Jack Helped Restart First Friends' Visitation Service

With the closing of three of the four immigrant detention centers in New Jersey, volunteer visits to detained immigrants dropped to almost zero. Friends we had been visiting were transferred to centers out of New Jersey, well beyond commuting distance. The greatest share went to the large detention center in Batavia, New York, roughly 40 miles east of Buffalo.

Visits were the engine that drove volunteer commitment to all our services and gave us insight into detained immigrants' needs and concerns, so valued by other immigrant rights organizations, and now visits were going away.

One solution was virtual visits, which volunteers could do without living near the detention centers. First Friends tried to set up a virtual visits program for over a year, but was frustrated by technological limitations.

Earlier this year, First Friends staff members determined that an app offered by each detention facility could be used to let detained immigrants meet with volunteers. First Friends now had the means to make virtual visits, but how could we get immigrants at distant centers to sign up?

This is where Jack comes into the story. Jack was an immigrant who had been visiting with a First Friend volunteer for several months before the closing of the New Jersey centers. Blessed with a magnetic personality, he charmed and cheered his fellow detainees, who found his kindness, intelligence, and upbeat manner inspiring.

When Jack learned how helpful First Friends volunteers and staff were, he referred fellow detainees to the hotline and visitation program and became a key source of referrals to First Friends at the New Jersey detention center where he was held. When that center closed, he was transferred to Batavia. Soon after arriving, he called our hotline, knowing we could help him and others he met there.

Jack became the first person to visit virtually with First Friends and helped adapt the program to a new, tablet-based app. Virtual visits had to be shorter and they defied scheduling, being held without set dates and times. To make up for this, several friends could meet with one First Friends volunteer using the app. These group visits enabled us to reach more friends.

With the virtual program now operational, Jack began to refer detainees to us again. Batavia housed almost three times more detained immigrants than the New Jersey detention center he had been transferred from, so he could make far more referrals. He then encouraged other inmates to start making referrals themselves.

Of the 60 friends we now work with in Batavia, 25 now receive virtual visits. Based on our experience there, we have begun virtual visits at the detention center in Goshen, New York. Our visitation program is alive and well!



THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

Thank you for your extraordinary generosity in support of our immigrant friends during these challenging times.

- \$78,950**
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"We were all immigrants at one time, and I strongly believe in First Friends' mission to uphold the inherent dignity and humanity of today's immigrants who are so unjustly treated by our government."

"My gift goes directly to immigrants who need help right now in the form of phone cards, bail money, or transportation to their families."

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

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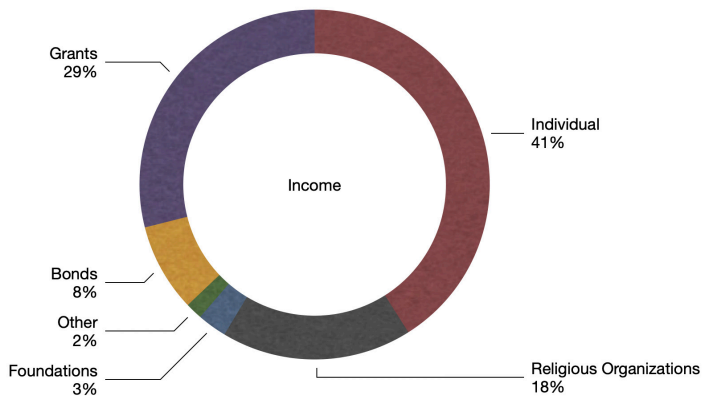
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“
First Friends speaks to my deepest value, we are all connected. The name is the gift. To be a First Friend; to be offered friendship from another. This is a blessing no amount of money can buy.
”

FIRST FRIENDS FINANCIALS

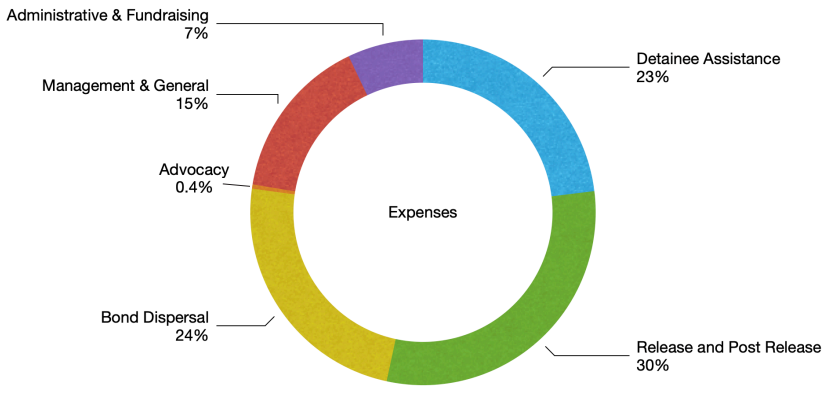
INCOME (IN THOUSANDS)

| | |
|-------------------------|----------------|
| Individual | \$191.2 |
| Religious Organizations | \$82.1 |
| Foundations | \$12.7 |
| Bonds | \$38 |
| Grants | \$135 |
| Other | \$7.3 |
| Total | \$466.3 |



EXPENSES (IN THOUSANDS)

| | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|
| Detainee Assistance | \$103.5 |
| Release & Post Release | \$136.3 |
| Bond Dispersal | \$107 |
| Advocacy | \$1.75 |
| Management & General | \$68.9 |
| Administrative & Fundraising | \$31.8 |
| Total | \$449.25 |



FIRST FRIENDS STAFF

Giselle Holloway
Executive Director

Bernardo Flores
Volunteer Manager

Jackie Zapata
Program Director



FIRST FRIENDS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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ART BY LREI STUDENTS FOR FIRST FRIENDS

Artwork throughout this report was created by the following students at LREI - Little Red Schoolhouse and Elisabeth Irwin High School. First Friends staff made a presentation to the students in September 2021 to promote understanding and compassion for immigrants. The students, who are studying poetry, said they were inspired by the presentation and created these works of art to be given to immigrants and asylum-seekers whose lives have been impacted by detention.

Jane Belton Faculty **McKayla Etheridge** Grade 11 **Miles Friedman** Grade 12
Sam McGee Grade 11 **Jonathan Melchor** Grade 11 **Henry Toll** Grade 12
Ava Yang Grade 12 **Elliott Ziebarth** Grade 11

COVER PHOTO

First Friends staff and volunteers with recently arrived friends. Photo credit: Dorothy Wetzel

BACK PHOTO

Notes of encouragement for detained friends created by students at the Dalton School in NYC





FIRST FRIENDS

of New Jersey & New York

53 S. Hackensack Ave.

Kearny, NJ 07032

Visit

firstfriendsnjny.org

for more information and to donate

Need Help?

Contact us at info@firstfriendsnjny.org / 908-965-0455



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