



San Diego Rapid Response Network Migrant Shelter Services | Legal Services

The following is an excerpt from Jewish Family Service of San Diego's upcoming white paper on San Diego Rapid Response Network Migrant Shelter Services. The full white paper will be linked here when available, as well as published on www.rapidresponsesd.org and www.jfssd.org.

Since the beginning of San Diego Rapid Response Network (SDRRN) Migrant Shelter Services, operator Jewish Family Service of San Diego (JFSSD) has provided a range of legal services and information to ensure people seeking asylum have the resources and support they need to have a fair day in court and safety in the United States.

JFSSD entered its shelter work with more than a decade of experience providing holistic, culturally competent, trauma-informed, legal and other supportive services to immigrants in and around San Diego County. As a result of this experience, legal support was integrated into the shelter operation from the very beginning, focused primarily on helping guests resolve issues with their immigration paperwork, such as change of address or change of venue requests – especially for the few individuals whose original sponsors and final destination had changed.

As the shelter operation grew and more processes were formalized, the JFSSD legal services team began providing more robust services and legal information to families and individuals traveling through the San Diego region.

The team consists of six staff members – two partial accredited Department of Justice representatives, one program assistant, two fully accredited representatives, and support from supervising and directing attorneys – who are dedicated solely to providing legal services and information to SDRRN Migrant Shelter Services clients. This group has had to remain nimble and adaptable in the face of ever-changing immigration policies and procedures, such as Title 42 and the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) commonly referred to as “Remain in Mexico,” that continue to impact daily shelter operations, numbers served and the asylum system overall.

An example of a policy change that greatly affected their work occurred when MPP ended and resulted in an increased need for legal services. As more people were released into the U.S. after their initial court hearings rather than back into Mexico, JFSSD provided a general orientation to all arriving shelter guests outlining next steps and what to expect through the asylum process in addition to providing an array of *pro se* legal services. These orientations continue today and provide an opportunity for individuals with questions or issues with their immigration paperwork to quickly receive support and answers before they travel out of the shelter's care. During the wind-down of MPP in February 2021, JFSSD also began sending members of its legal services team directly to Ports of Entry to offer services and address any discrepancies with paperwork issues on the spot. By collaborating with national

partners and immigration agencies on both sides of the border, these efforts proved to be especially effective at increasing the processing efficiency and significantly reduce the amount of paperwork issues that need to be addressed at the shelter itself, allowing staff to spend more time focusing on other aspects of the operation.

In addition to a general orientation, every guest at the shelter receives:

- **Legal Screenings.** All guests entering SDRRN Migrant Shelter Services have their immigration paperwork reviewed by shelter staff, who are trained to identify and flag any issues that might need to be resolved by the JFSSD legal services team, or if a guest qualifies for a full individual legal assessment, such as if they were previously enrolled in MPP.
- **Legal Empowerment Presentations.** Five days a week, JFSSD immigration attorneys visit the Migrant Respite Shelter (formerly Testing, Vaccination, and Resource Centers, or TVRCs)) to provide “Know Your Rights” information, an overview of the asylum system and what guests can expect during the next steps in their case. Guests are grouped by native language, and are given the opportunity to address any questions or special needs related to their immigration paperwork, such as making corrections, printing out parole documents, requests to change addresses or court hearing venues, etc.
- **Legal Empowerment Packet.** All shelter guests receive a [Legal Empowerment Packet](#) that has proven critical to the success of individuals being able to move forward in their asylum cases. Each packet is provided in the guest’s native language and includes information on the next steps in their legal journey, how and where to present themselves for their next court hearing, asylum application deadlines, how to submit change of address and venue request forms, instructions for printing out parole forms (if applicable), lists of pro-bono resources available in their final destination cities, and the importance of securing legal representation to assist with their case.

Pro se Assistance

Because the JFSSD legal services team’s capacity only allows them to provide full representation for a limited number of cases, the team also provides *pro se* assistance to as many individuals as possible for those who will represent themselves throughout their legal proceedings.

From July 2020 to January 2024, JFSSD provided *pro se* legal assistance to over 5,800 individuals. Support includes helping people with requests to move their court hearings from one location to another, changes of address with court and immigration, and assistance with work permit applications for those who entered using CBP One applications and receive parole for 1 year or more.

More recently in December 2023, after the federal administration’s announcement to expedite work authorization for non-citizens who entered using the CBP One app (which is the pathway for majority of shelter guests) the JFSSD legal team has focused on providing *pro se* legal assistance for form I-765, the employment authorization document. In the first two months, the program assisted 4,026 guests.

This additional support has been extremely beneficial, as these individuals are often more focused on finding shelter rather than their legal proceedings, and JFSSD helps ensure their cases continue to move forward.

Legal Representation

As staff capacity and funding allows, the JFSSD legal services team provides full, pro-bono legal representation for the small percentage of families and individuals who intend to stay in San Diego through the duration of their asylum proceedings. Many of these cases are identified and referred by SDRRN Migrant Shelter Services staff, with a priority on the most vulnerable.

For shelter guests who no longer have a sponsor upon arriving to San Diego, JFSSD provides an increased amount of legal support. This can include updating Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on their status, accompanying them to the ICE office for various appointments, attending court hearings, etc.