Forced migration and legal processes deeply impact the mental health of immigrants

Peer Support Program at VIA, states:

New York, NY - Since its founding, VIA has considered mental health as one of the fundamental pillars of care for migrants, especially those experiencing

migratory grief. In the past three years, and with an even sharper focus after the pandemic, the organization has been monitoring the variables that affect the mental health of migrants, managing to identify two key factors closely related to the legal and emotional challenges of the migration process. The two key factors In its ongoing mission to support migrants, VIA has identified two key findings that have redefined its comprehensive care strategy. Liliana Torella, Coordinator of the Peer Support Program at VIA, states that these discoveries have allowed the organization to revise its approach and expand its

services to more effectively meet the needs of the migrant community.

The first finding reveals a strong correlation between the legal aspects of the migration process and the onset or worsening of mental health symptoms. "The stress of complying with legal procedures, the uncertainty about the outcome of migration processes, and the emotional impact inherent in each stage of the process can trigger or deepen psychological issues in migrants. In response, VIA has been preparing audiovisual and awareness materials, both in-person and

online, to encourage responsibility for both aspects: the legal and the emotional," explains Liliana Torella. The second finding is that this phenomenon affects all migrants but has a more severe impact on those whose migration is forced or traumatic, such as asylum seekers and refugees. Despite the increase in support requests from migrants of various nationalities,

Liliana Torella "The stress of complying with legal procedures, the uncertainty about the outcome of migration processes, and the emotional

impact inherent in each stage of the process can trigger or deepen psychological issues in migrants." —Liliana Torella

legal and mental health institutions that address these specific cases in the migrants' native languages. Torella emphasizes the importance of working together with other organizations to bring visibility to these issues, expand the scope of and create more effective empathetic "VIA calls strategies. for collaboration between lawyers and psychologists, proposing a specialized service that integrates both aspects. Addressing

VIA has discovered a significant shortage of

general anxiety is not the same as addressing the anxiety caused by an asylum interview, which can revive trauma. This requires specific professional handling to achieve outcomes," Torella notes. "With these advances, VIA reaffirms its commitment to providing comprehensive and effective support to the migrant community, working for their well-being both legally and emotionally," adds Torella.



It wasn't until December 2019 that Patricia discovered VIA through the organization's With SEP, Patricia learned the importance of caring for mental health and having a support jacket donation winter program. The network. "It's important to feel that you're not experience left such a strong impression on her that in January 2020, she attended the last inalone, that you have the tools to face each situation," she advises. person meeting of the Peer Support Program (PSP) right before the pandemic hit the world.

never missed a PSP session. "I live in Brooklyn, and at first, I had no contact with other Venezuelans here. Finding VIA was like seeing a light in my path. I told myself: I'm going to join. I had just given birth. My daughter was four months old. [Joining VIA's activities] was like my connection to my country. Peer Support? I didn't even know what it was, but I was going to go," Patricia recalls.

Patricia, a cook in a Brooklyn school, says that SEP changed her life positively in every way. She shares that the group became a support network. "There [I held on through] each meeting every 15 days with Dr. Liliana, Dr. Rachel Lee, and later with Dr. Adriana Gioni.

Even after, she attended every session virtually

every other Monday. Isolation, motherhood,

and her status as an immigrant in a country she

barely knew were the key reasons why she

has lived in New York since 2018. She left

Venezuela due to its precarious economic and

political situation.

There was also that connection with other mothers, with other migrants in the same situation as me, seeking asylum, [understanding] how the process worked," she affirms. Patricia clarifies that her involvement with VIA wasn't just seeking legal advice. "It was about being there. I felt like I was part of

climates. This initiative began modestly eight years ago with just a few dozen donated items. Since

then, it has become the groundwork of VIA's

Humanitarian Assistance Program. Hector

"What started with coats and items from

neighbors, family, and friends has become a

significant activity, allowing us to donate more

than 300 coats, 600 toys, and 300 meals every

Despite VIA's growth, the last three years have

posed new challenges. According to NYC

Arguinzones, VIA's Co-Director,

winter."

As winter and the holiday season approaches,

VIA is preparing for another opportunity to

give. For the eighth consecutive year, VIA will

distribute winter coats, toys, and meals to

newly arrived migrants, many of whom are facing their first winter after fleeing warm considers VIA her second family. Through them, she could connect and receive legal guidance, thanks to online resources. Her gratitude towards the group was so profound that she volunteered. "This is a way to connect more with my country, whose situation

has worsened. The number of migrants arriving

VIA: A Second Family

Patricia is convinced when she says that she

going through this. Maybe I didn't participate; it wasn't what I felt like doing then, but I listened

to the other person. And I told myself: this is

happening to me too," she explains.

in New York City has increased. That's why I told myself I have to keep helping. I spoke with Niurka and Hector. I told them I wanted to be more involved. Use my time and skills. I want to help where a hand is needed, and I will be there," says Patricia with joy and emphasis.



VIA calls on the public for support, as many migrants come from countries where winter clothing is unnecessary, making their first New York winter particularly harsh. Along with providing warmth, VIA's volunteers will also deliver toys to children and serve Christmas meals, bringing joy and comfort to those facing an uncertain future.

This heartwarming tradition highlights the

power of community and the impact that small

acts of kindness can have on families in need. "With your contribution, we can continue to do

our part," Arguinzones highlights. "On behalf of

our community, we thank you in advance for

For more information about how to get involved, contact VIA directly or follow their

social media updates to see how they continue

to make a difference during this holiday

your support."

season.

authorities, over 100,000 migrants have arrived since the spring, a number that has far exceeded expectations. Arguinzones admits

To donate winter coats, toys, or funds to www.vianyc.org/donate

VIA Secures Significant Grant to Enhance Support for Migrants in New York City Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA) is thrilled to announce the receipt of a substantial grant aimed at bolstering our efforts to support migrants in New York City through the International Rescue Committee (IRC) that will significantly enhance our capacity to provide vital services to the migrant community. Niurka Melendez, VIA's Director, mentioned IRC as a Worldwide Ally for Humanitarian Crisis Founded in 1933 by Albert Einstein and a small that the organization has been awarded a grant from the International Rescue Committee group of humanitarians, the IRC assists people affected by humanitarian crises in surviving, (IRC). This grant is designated for the "Support of Reception of Migrants in New York City" recovering, and rebuilding their lives. Operating in over 40 countries, the IRC delivers lasting project. impact by providing healthcare, education, and Melendez emphasized, "We celebrate the new empowerment to individuals and communities. alliance with the IRC for the impact this will In 2023, the IRC and its partners reached over have on the work we do for the migrant 34.5 million people in crisis-affected regions. community in New York." **New Documentary "In Borrowed**

that while VIA cannot meet the needs of every support these efforts, visit: migrant, the group remains committed to helping as many as possible. "We may be small, but we're determined. Our goal this year is to distribute at least 300 coats," he said.

Time" Premieres at New York Latino **Film Festival** New York, NY - The documentary short "En Tiempo Prestado (In Borrowed Time)" from the acclaimed filmmaker Martin Blanco

presented at the 2024 New York Latino Film

The documentary tells the compelling story of Niurka Melendez, a Venezuelan mother, wife,

forced migrant. Since she arrived in New York City, Niurka has tirelessly worked through her organization, Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid

(VIA), to support forced migrants while awaiting

the result of her asylum application, which she

Martin Blanco, who first met Niurka when her son acted in his film "NIKKI," was drawn to her

Reflecting on their reunion, Martin says, "The more time I spent getting to know Niurka through her work, the more I became

Collection of

Poems Published

Against Racism,

Xenophobia, and

Aporophobia

The book "Crucible of Souls: Voices of the World Against Racism, Xenophobia, and

Aporophobia" (Crisol de almas: Voces del mundo contra el racismo, la xenofobia y la aporofobia") is now available on Amazon. This poetry collection features [nearly] one hundred

and

determination.

community organizer, asylum-seeker,

Festival on September 20th, 2024.

submitted over eight years ago.

passion

unwavering

enamored with the passion with which she including Martin Blanco, the writer, director, producer; speaks, with her vision to create a welcoming Rebecca Swaggart, community for forced migrants, and with her producer; Cristina Bevia, the cinematographer; strength to be able to do it all despite still being Ben Nissim, the editor; and Nick Mastorakis, uncertain about her own future in the US." who oversees sound design and mixing. Stansberry composed Niurka and her husband, Héctor Arguizones, documentary's music. Blanco also states, "A express gratitude for the opportunity to share special acknowledgment goes to Venezuelans their story through the documentary. "For VIA, and Immigrants Aid (VIA) for their invaluable contribution." this represents an opportunity to tell the story of

"individual

authors who address the challenges faced by migrants when encountering discrimination or social persecution in a new destination due to racism (the belief in the superiority of one ethnic group over others), xenophobia (hatred, repulsion, or hostility towards foreigners), and aporophobia (fear of poor or disadvantaged people). Puerto Rican author José Antonio Benítez Meléndez, who wrote the epilogue of the book, explained collection that the has "the eloquence to translate pain, hopelessness, and suffering into words that deeply touch our being

and invite us to commit to a better world. Almost a hundred writers from around the

globe show us that, although inequality is globalized, putting it into words is the most important step in the crucial process of ending it." Héctor Arguinzones, director of VIA, noted that "our organization is present within the pages of this work, as I was invited as a collaborator to write the book's back cover summary. This collection is a grand concert of voices that have turned virtuous pens into vocal cords, crying out for justice, singing with pride for their roots, dedicating poems of gratitude to those who

free and peaceful future." compiler, emphasized that "in editing the poems, not only was each author's lyrical style

selflessly aid the needy, and honoring with a respectful chorus of verses those seeking a Patricia Schaefer Röder, the book's editor and

respected, but also their form and aesthetic of

expression. This book is about catharsis and

available in both physical and digital formats.

Deportation." The presentation was part of a class by Professor Gisele Regatao at Baruch College in Manhattan. During the event, Meléndez shared her personal experience as an asylum seeker in the United States and explained the work that VIA does to support migrants in New York. The relationship between Gisele Regatao, a journalism professor at Baruch College, and Niurka Meléndez began several years ago when Regatao and her colleague Vera Haller interviewed Meléndez for a report on the

its foundation, which inspired us and continues to drive us to this day," they say. They believe

Niurka's journey echoes the experiences of

countless displaced Venezuelans striving to rebuild their lives worldwide. Niurka, who selflessly shares her knowledge with newly

arrived immigrants, embodies the belief that

The film's team includes talented contributors,

Niurka Meléndez,

Co-Founder of

VIA, Participates

in an

Immigration

Workshop at

Baruch College

Manhattan, New York - On September 17,

Niurka Meléndez, co-founder and director of Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA), led

the workshop "Covering Immigration and

progress when that is the sincere intention."

progress turns into collective

National Public Radio program (NPR) "The World," the longest-running global news program on U.S. public radio. Later, they met again when Regatao covered another story on newly arrived immigrants to New York at St. Paul and St. Andrew Church. In this recent talk at Baruch College, the VIA director spoke with students about the asylum process in the United States, the current situation of migrants in the city, and the impact of the nonprofit organization's work in the community. immigrant The discussion provided an opportunity for students, most of

whom immigrants children or immigrants, to connect with the realities of the migration process and migrant rights advocacy. Baruch College is part of the City University of New York (CUNY) public higher education system. With a highly diverse student body,

healing in the face of senseless rejection number of immigrants or their descendants. For more information about Venezuelans and "Crucible of Souls: Voices of the World Against Immigrants Aid (VIA) and their work, visit Racism, Xenophobia, and Aporophobia" is now





directed at others."





Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid

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the university is known for hosting a large