# **Dinner and Toy Drive** This year, the Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA) organization hosted its eighth consecutive Christmas Dinner and Toy Drive, an event that has become a symbol of solidarity and hope for the migrant community in New York City.

**VIA Hosts Its Eighth Annual Christmas** 

VIA's Christmas Dinner brings the most authentic flavors of Venezuelan cuisine to life. The menu includes hallacas, pan de jamón (ham bread), ensalada de gallina (Venezuelan Chicken Salad), torta negra (Black Cake), rice pudding, and ponche crema (Punch Eggnog), transporting attendees to warm memories of their roots. This year, the organization served 300 meals and

distributed 200 toys to children, bringing joy to families in need during the holiday season. Niurka Meléndez, co-director of VIA, emphasized the impact of this initiative, which began in December 2017. "On average, we've delivered over 2,100 meals and more than 2,500 toys over the years. This is a day filled with emotions and one of our most iconic activities, and we are incredibly proud to see how those who were once beneficiaries are now part of the team making this beautiful event possible."

Meléndez highlighted that the event is more than just a celebration: "It's an honor to see that those who have received this gesture of solidarity want to pass on that same joy to the



the heart." VIA's Christmas Dinner and Toy Drive is a powerful reminder of how unity and empathy can transform lives. This event not only nourishes bodies but also lifts reaffirming VIA's commitment to the migrant community and its mission to build a future filled with opportunities and hope.

new migrants arriving in New York. VIA is truly a multiplier effect when things are done from

them on social media. According to Carlos Jiménez, Asylum Seeker: "VIA's Legal Videos Are a Blessing for Migrants"

For more information about this initiative or how to collaborate, visit VIA's website or follow

### ago, like many other Venezuelan migrants, carrying a mix of uncertainty, dreams, and the desire to build a better life. What began as a move in search of greater opportunities became a migration journey filled with challenges but also discoveries. His story is

by VIA. Upon arriving in the United States, Carlos faced the same reality as thousands of asylum seekers: disorientation, lack of information, and the inability to afford legal representation. His first days were spent in a shelter as he sought guidance from local organizations. His life took a turn during a resource fair, where he encountered Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA)—a moment Carlos describes as "a blessing."

Carlos Jiménez arrived in New York two years

do so, he downloaded a tutorial video from VIA's YouTube channel that explained how to complete the asylum application. **Learning and Taking Action:** The Power of VIA's Free Resources began watching VIA's educational YouTube videos, in which immigration attorneys and experts who collaborate with VIA (\*) provide step-by-step explanations for completing immigration applications and accessing humanitarian protection programs in the United States. Wasting no time, he used

New York City public libraries to access

computers and the internet, gathering all the

watching the videos and taking notes. It was a long process, but every video on VIA's channel

gave me clarity. When I had everything ready, I

attended VIA's in-person legal orientations to

ensure I didn't make any mistakes," Carlos

explains. His efforts paid off: he successfully

free audiovisual resources,

information he needed. "I spent entire days at the Fifth Avenue library

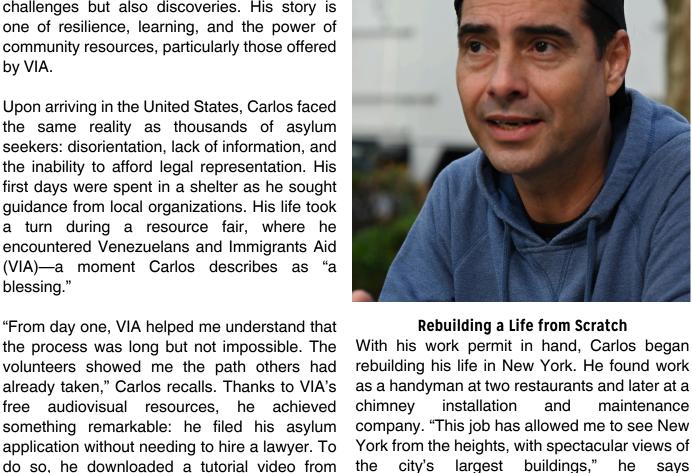
submitted his asylum application on time, received confirmation of initial completed fingerprinting, and, after 150 days, used another VIA tutorial video to apply for his work permit and Social Security number. "Everything is in the videos. You can even do it from your phone. VIA makes it possible for any migrant, even without resources, to start their immigration process correctly," Carlos emphasizes.

commitment to the community, VIA is excited to announce the launch of its redesigned website. This project, led by Ronald Rosales as the driving force behind the reengineering initiative, and funded by The WES Mariam Assefa Fund, supports this VIA"s effort.marks a significant

platform that reflects its identity and fosters

deeper connections with its audience.

In an effort to strengthen its mission and



Carlos Jiménez

# Carlos never let fear or loneliness hold him

Despite being alone in the United States,

enthusiastically.

resources,

States.

back. His message to other migrants is clear: "Seek information and reach out organizations like VIA. They have everything need: legal guidance, educational resources, and community support. Don't give up because you can make it." **VIA: A Beacon of Hope for Migrants** For Carlos, VIA represents much more than a

nonprofit organization: "It's a blessing. It's the

path others have already walked and now share with you. They teach you how to do

everything, step by step." Thanks to VIA and his determination, Carlos is now awaiting his asylum interview, which is a crucial step in his process. In the meantime, he continues working and dreaming of a future full of opportunities. His story is a testament to the impact of community organizations and the power of

accessible knowledge. Through VIA's free

immigration process but also regained the hope and confidence to build a new life in the United

Carlos not

only began

(\*) The Nolivos Law Firm, Attorney Victoria Gamez, Co-Counsel NYC, and the PRO SE PLUS Project. **VIA Launches New Website Built on Innovation** and Functionality to Serve Migrants

**Newsletter and News Archive** 

Another major addition to the site is the

complete archive of newsletters. This new page

not only organizes all past editions but also

makes subscribing effortless with an intuitive

button. Rosales remarked, "The goal was to

connect more directly with our community,

are now displayed chronologically, allowing

visitors to stay informed about the latest events and projects. "We wanted users to not only read our news but also feel up-to-date with the real-time impact we're making," said Rosales.

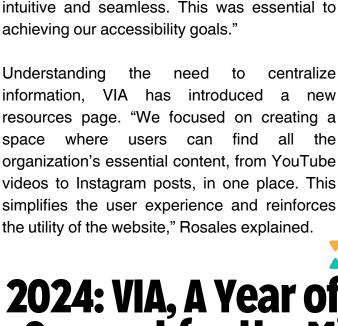
**Simplified Donations** 

#### ensuring anyone can stay informed with just one click." milestone in the organization's digital evolution. With a focus on innovation, accessibility, and The redesign of the News Section prioritizes functionality, VIA aims to provide an online content organization and relevance. Articles

A Cohesive and Modern Design cornerstone of the project was establishment of a Design System, ensuring a consistent and professional visual experience.

According to Rosales, "A design system not

only enhances the aesthetics of the site but also ensures that every user interaction is



the United States.

Throughout the year, VIA organized a total of 200 events aimed at providing support,

information, and a sense of community to those

safe space for 565 beneficiaries. These

activities strengthened emotional resilience and

In parallel, VIA celebrated the cultural richness

and joy of the community through 11 cultural and recreational activities, bringing together 528 attendees in events filled with a sense of

awareness

migration are also prominent in VIA's agenda this year. Through 24 forums and panels, over 900 participants joined discussions amplified diverse stories and emphasized the need for inclusive solutions to the challenges faced by migrants, especially those fleeing

connections

about

meaningful

belonging and hope.

and

oppressive regimes like Venezuela's.

Dialogue

individuals with shared experiences.

Recognizing the importance of facilitating community support, the donations page was completely optimized. Rosales

"Redesigning the donations page was crucial. Our focus was on eliminating barriers so that anyone interested in contributing could do so quickly and easily." A Renewed Commitment to the Community VIA's website redesign represents not only a technological leap but also a renewed commitment to the community. The enhancements reinforce VIA's mission to be a

reliable and accessible resource, providing an

online experience designed to connect, inform,

and create impact.

"This project was a collaborative effort that reflects our vision as an organization. We want every user to feel that this site was built with them in mind," concluded Rosales. Explore VIA's new website at www.vianyc.org. (\*) A set of reusable components, patterns, style guides, and principles that help maintain visual and functional consistency across digital products or design projects.

**VIA Expands Its Reach Through Digital Content** 

VIA's impact extended beyond in-person

events. The organization broadened its reach

this mission. Every person we help reaffirms

Niurka Meléndez highlighted the transformative role of the community: "At VIA, we build bridges that connect dreams with realities. We are the

2024 is a testament to VIA's unwavering

commitment to its mission, showcasing how

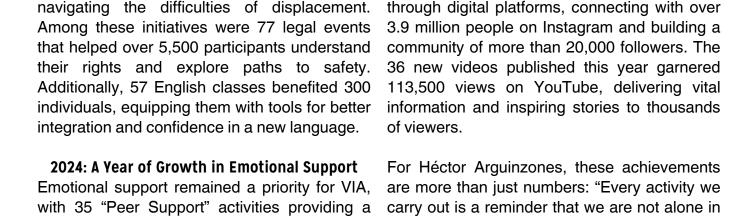
community

our belief in resilience and human potential."

support network people need to start anew."

and

# organization's essential content, from YouTube videos to Instagram posts, in one place. This www.vianyc.org/donate simplifies the user experience and reinforces 2024: VIA, A Year of Achievements and Support for the Migrant Community



among

compassion

meaningful change.

U.S. institutions.

In a year marked by global and local challenges, Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA) has proven that commitment and solidarity can transform lives. Under the leadership of its codirectors and co-founders, Héctor Arguinzones and Niurka Meléndez, VIA closes 2024 with a track record reflecting a profound and sustained impact on migrant and refugee communities in

On October 26, 2024, VIA launched its annual winter jacket distribution program, benefiting recently arrived migrant adults and children in New York City. This initiative, part of the organization's broader efforts to comprehensive support to the community, continued with two additional distributions on November 9 and December 2. In total, 390 coats were distributed, all new and customized based on the requests received. Beyond providing physical warmth, VIA created

a safe and welcoming space where families found guidance and support on key aspects of

**More Than Just Coats** 

The distribution events went beyond simply

handing out coats. Crucial information was

guidance tailored to those beginning a new life in the country, helping them better manage

their resources and plan for their futures.

with the support of United

including financial

assistance

migrants,

their integration into the United States.

provided to

Additionally,

Healthcare,

personalized offered for health insurance enrollment,

VIA Participates in the National Immigrant Inclusion Conference (NIIC) 2024 From December 8 to 10, 2024, VIA had the honor of participating in the National Immigrant Inclusion Conference (NIIC) held in Houston,

VIA Distributes Nearly 400 Winter Coats to the Migrant Community ensuring families could access essential healthcare services. Another critical component was addressing questions about immigration processes such as asylum, TPS, parole, and procedures related to court hearings and ICE. These informational sessions helped debunk myths

> and reduce the uncertainty many migrants face. Emotional support was also provided,

> offering a space to ease fears stemming from

rumors and the lack of clear information about

"At VIA, we understood that providing primary assistance was just the first step. Our true commitment was to empower and support the

development of our community so they could

build a solid future in this country," said Niurka

The Need Remains Immense Meléndez noted that this accomplishment

would not have been possible without the

support of generous benefactors, allies like

United Healthcare, and the tireless dedication

Meléndez, co-founder and co-director of VIA.

## of VIA's team of volunteers, whose efforts brought this initiative to life. She also extended special thanks to Rohan Varia, a high school student, for his invaluable contributions in providing financial guidance to attendees during several sessions. "We recognize that the need remains immense. That's why we call on the community to support us with their donations to help meet the

growing demand. Every contribution makes a difference in ensuring that more families can face the winter with dignity and warmth," added

is combating misinformation. VIA actively works to counter harmful and confusing narratives that impact displaced communities, offering accurate and timely information that helps individuals navigate a complex system with clarity. A People-Centered Approach Niurka also emphasized VIA's client-centered perspective, stating that those they serve are not merely beneficiaries but partners in their integration process. This approach begins with listening to and understanding each person's challenges, aspirations, and cultural contexts,

enabling the design of programs that address

VIA prioritizes emotional support and mental

well-being—often overlooked but essential for

long-term integration and success. VIA's peer

support programs and psychological counseling

have been transformative, providing safe spaces

where individuals can heal, connect, and rebuild

their confidence. This reflects VIA's belief that

real needs rather than external perceptions.

true inclusion goes beyond legal status; it is about fostering human dignity.

Changing the Narrative on Migration Additionally, VIA is actively working to shift the narrative around migration. From perspective, immigrants are not a burden but valuable contributors to the social, economic, and cultural fabric of the communities that welcome them. Through programs that facilitate access to education, English language learning, and support networks, VIA helps individuals

reach their full potential. This shift in narrative benefits immigrants and

communities that embrace strengthening social ties and promoting collaboration.

the organization's commitment to equity, not only for its clients but also to strengthen the system as a whole. Another critical aspect

Meléndez.

forum titled: "Safeguarding Coordinated National Reception System." VIA's Approach to Justice and Equity York City and the Pro Se Plus Project. This empowers asylum seekers program

Texas. This event, recognized as the central gathering for the nonprofit sector working with immigrant communities, brought together over 1,300 leaders from more than 550 organizations across all 50 U.S. states, as well as Canada, Europe, and Mexico. VIA's participation as panelists was made possible by an invitation from the International

effectively represent themselves by providing them with clear and accessible information. Fairness as a Core Principle

When asked how VIA's work aligns with the principle of fairness, Niurka emphasized, "Fairness is central to everything we do as an organization. For us, it means ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances, have access to the same opportunities and rights, and understand their responsibilities."

Rescue Committee (IRC), reaffirming organization's commitment to inclusion, justice, and human rights. Niurka Meléndez, co-founder and co-director of VIA, was a panelist in the Framework, Resettlement, and Human Rights: A During her presentation, and aligned with one of IRC's "Basic Principles of Reception," Niurka highlighted VIA's justice- and equity-focused initiatives, showcasing two of its most impactful programs: large-scale legal services in New

VIA translates fairness into concrete actions. Through workshops, community presentations, audiovisual resources, and practical guides, VIA

that even the most vulnerable individuals have the tools they need to present

their cases effectively. This educational and

empowering approach not only provides legal knowledge but also fosters confidence to make informed decisions. Strategic partnerships with other organizations

and local leaders have enabled VIA to scale its efforts, making its services more accessible and sustainable. These collaborations underscore

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Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid

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