



# VIA Marks a Historic Semester of Support for Migrants

In the first six months of 2025, Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA) reaffirmed its leadership in providing legal, emotional, and community support to migrants in New York and beyond. With 144 events, more than 7,059 participants, with an average of 74 per event, and a digital reach surpassing 3 million accounts on Instagram and 56,000 views on YouTube, the organization closed the semester with record-breaking numbers and an impact that extends far beyond what data alone can measure.

### A strong start fueled by commitment

For VIA co-founders and co-directors Niurka Meléndez and Héctor Arguinzones, this semester reflects the collective resilience of the community. “Every workshop, every legal consultation, and every emotional support session reminds us why we do this work,” they shared. “The community trusts us because they know we don’t walk alone—we walk together.”

Between January and June, VIA hosted 32 legal orientation sessions, both in person and online, supporting hundreds of migrants with critical processes such as asylum applications, preparation for preliminary or individual hearings, self-representation strategies, and guidance on forms of relief like the Special Immigrant Juvenile Visa, U Visa, and VAWA protections. In collaboration with Co-Counsel NYC, VIA also launched a virtual space featuring 16 live broadcasts that reached over 1,000 participants, keeping the community informed about key immigration issues.

### Mental health at the core of the mission

The Soporte Entre Pares (Peer Support) program remained a cornerstone of VIA’s work, with eight virtual sessions addressing topics such as anxiety, fear, depression, migration grief, and stress tied to legal processes. These sessions, archived on VIA’s YouTube channel, have accumulated 1,700 views, demonstrating their ongoing value as accessible educational and psychosocial resources.

Creative expression also emerged as a powerful tool for well-being, thanks to VIA’s partnership with the James Cohan Gallery. Through five crochet workshop cycles, more than 50 migrants found a space for creativity, resilience, and community. “Mental health is a right, not a luxury,” emphasized Meléndez and Arguinzones.

### Education as a bridge for integration

Education was another key focus, with 20 academic sessions and six personalized online English tutoring sessions led by ESL teacher Tilla Alexander, averaging more than 90 participants per cycle. These classes have become a crucial resource for the social and professional integration of newly arrived migrants, not only in New York but across the United States.

The organization also invested in mental health training for its volunteer team, focusing on resilience, self-care, and stress management. “We know that serving migrants in an increasingly politicized and misinformed environment requires both strength and balance,” they added.

This dual commitment—to protect migrants and to strengthen those who support them—is what, they say, makes VIA unique. “VIA is not only a leader in digital reach but also in building a responsible, empathetic, and resilient volunteer network that upholds the integrity of the support our community deserves.”

### Challenges and hope ahead

Looking back, Meléndez and Arguinzones noted that the work is far from over. “The challenges are immense, but the strength of our community is even greater. We will keep adapting, innovating, and fighting to ensure that every migrant finds in VIA a safe and supportive space.”

For VIA’s leadership, this semester is just the beginning of a year filled with potential. “This year is teaching us that when a community organizes and trusts, real change happens. The months ahead will be decisive as we continue building bridges and tearing down barriers.”



VIA achieves historic milestones during the first half of 2025

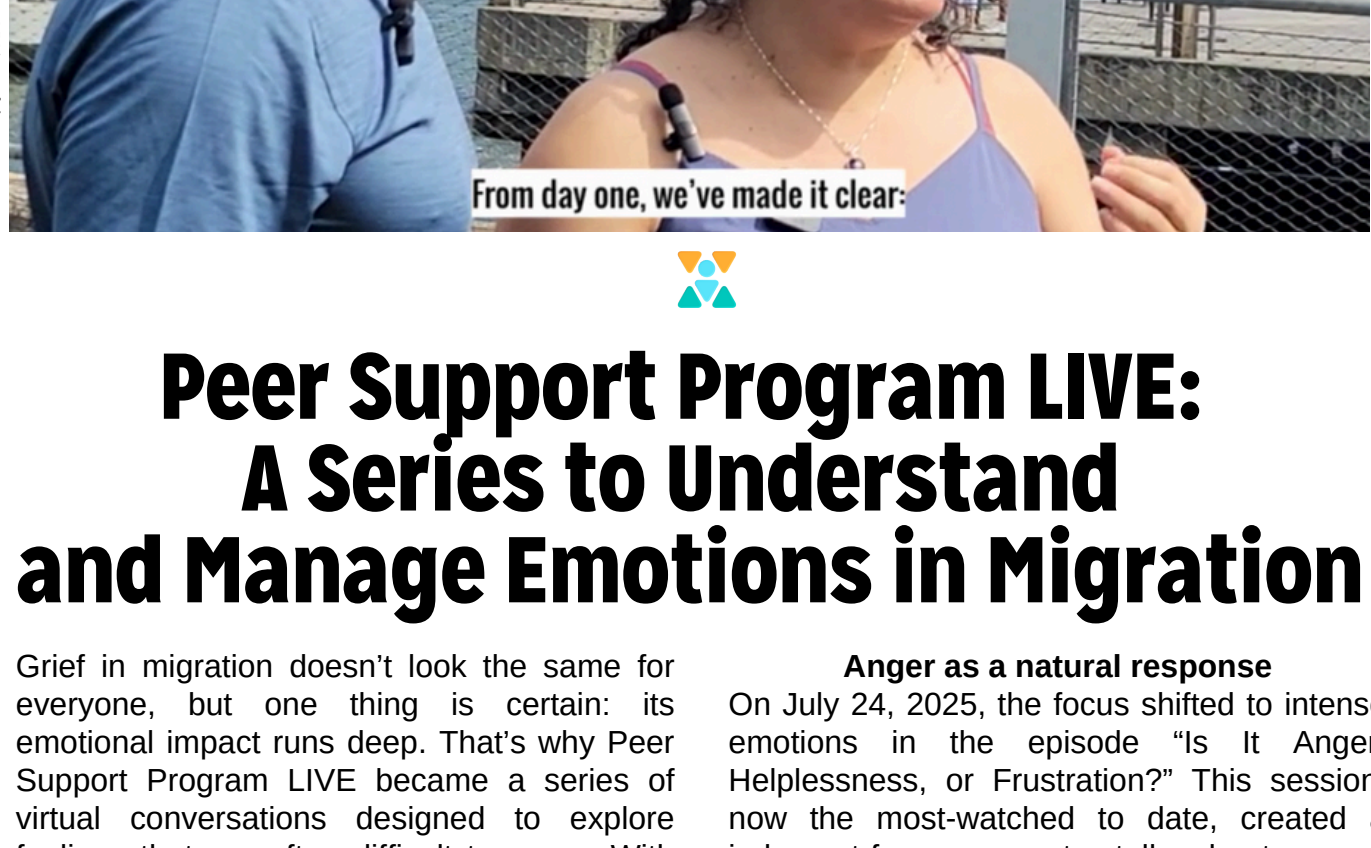
# VIA Celebrates 9 Years of Solidarity and Support for the Migrant Community

This September, Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA) celebrates nine years of accompanying, informing, and empowering thousands of migrants in New York and other cities across the United States. To mark this anniversary, the organization is preparing a series of special activities that reflect the spirit of community that has guided its mission since 2016.

The anniversary kicks off with the launch of a commemorative video, [available to watch here](#), that retraces VIA’s journey from its founding to the present day. In the video, co-founders Niurka Meléndez and Héctor Arguinzones share the challenges and milestones that have shaped these nine years, honoring everyone who has made it possible for VIA to remain a safe space of support for migrants.

The celebration will continue with in-person activities designed to strengthen community integration. Among them are Friendsgiving, a gathering where migrants and allies come together to share food, gratitude, and stories, and VIA en Bicicleta, a sports event that blends fun, health, and solidarity. Dates and details for these activities will be announced soon through VIA’s social media and official channels.

VIA invites all beneficiaries, allies, volunteers, and donors to join in this celebration and continue building spaces of support and transformation together. For more information and updates, visit [vianyc.org](#), email [vianyc@gmail.com](#), or follow [@vianycorg](#) on all social media platforms.



Niurka Meléndez and Héctor Arguinzones talked about VIA’s achievements

# Peer Support Program LIVE: A Series to Understand and Manage Emotions in Migration

Grief in migration doesn’t look the same for everyone, but one thing is certain: its emotional impact runs deep. That’s why Peer Support Program LIVE became a series of virtual conversations designed to explore feelings that are often difficult to name. With the empathetic voices of psychologists and specialists, each episode created a space for understanding, support, and practical strategies to protect the emotional well-being of the migrant community.

### Migration grief and its boundaries

On July 10, 2025, the series launched with the conversation “Am I Feeling Sadness, Migration Grief, or Depression?” led by Liliana Torella, a psychologist and leader of the Soporte Entre Pares program. The session, which quickly became the most-watched in the series, helped the community distinguish when the pain of migration is a natural part of the process and when it may be a sign of depression. Participants also received practical tools to begin managing emotions that, at first, can be hard to define.

### Panic and anxiety in the migrant experience

The second session, held on July 17, 2025, was titled “Am I Experiencing a Panic Attack or an Anxiety Crisis?” and focused on the impact of fear on emotional well-being. Torella explained how panic attacks and anxiety crises—common in the context of forced migration—can disrupt daily life and relationships. The conversation emphasized the importance of recognizing symptoms and seeking help as crucial steps in maintaining emotional stability.

### Anger as a natural response

On July 24, 2025, the focus shifted to intense emotions in the episode “Is It Anger, Helplessness, or Frustration?” This session, now the most-watched to date, created a judgment-free space to talk about anger, uprootedness, and helplessness—feelings that many migrants experience during their journeys. Torella reminded participants that seeking help is not a sign of weakness, but rather a sign of self-care, and that learning to manage these emotions is key to adapting and moving forward with emotional well-being.

### Information overload and mental health

The series concluded on August 7, 2025, with the session “Information Overload: How to Protect Our Mental Health in the Age of Excess.” The conversation, moderated by psychologist Adriana Gioni and featuring contributions from communications specialist Jesse Rylander, explored how constant news and social media consumption can cloud mental clarity and disrupt emotional balance. The speakers offered strategies to set healthy boundaries with technology and cultivate habits that promote calm amidst the noise of information.



PSP Live had a record attendance

# Migrant Community Gathered for the 2025 Edition of “Ice Cream Afternoon with VIA”

On July 26, 2025, smiles and hugs filled the room during this year’s edition of “Ice Cream Afternoon with VIA.” Thanks to the support of St. Paul & St. Andrew Church and the tireless work of VIA’s volunteer team, migrant and refugee families came together for an afternoon of joy, games, and solidarity.

Families enjoyed recreational activities, raffles, and, of course, the beloved Venezuelan frozen ice cream known as “tetas de coco,” lovingly prepared at home. The menu also featured light snacks and the always irresistible tequeños, the perfect complement to an unforgettable summer afternoon.

This activity, part of VIA’s culture and recreation program, aims to provide families with a safe space to socialize, integrate, and strengthen community bonds. “We continue to take concrete actions that reflect our solidarity and humanity,” said VIA co-founders Niurka Meléndez and Héctor Arguinzones.

“Ice Cream Afternoon with VIA” reaffirms the organization’s commitment to the emotional and social well-being of the migrant and refugee community, creating moments that transcend everyday challenges and build lasting memories of care and unity.

To view photos from this celebration, visit VIA on Instagram: [@vianycorg](#) or [vianyc.org](#).

# Forced Migrants Find Emotional Refuge in “Peer Support Program”

When a forced migrant arrives in the United States, they don’t bring just a suitcase. They carry losses that no luggage can hold: family left behind, lost stability, a shaken sense of identity, and, often, the language barrier. For many, this experience can be summed up in one painful phrase: “starting from zero in the middle of nothing.”

On its seventh anniversary, Soporte Entre Pares (Peer Support Program, PSP) turned to those who have found emotional refuge in the program to gain a deeper understanding of its impact. A recent survey revealed compelling data on the importance of emotional support in navigating the grief of forced migration.

### Shared grief: an urgent need

Sixty-five percent of participants reported that they joined the program while experiencing deep grief or profound loneliness. “Many tell us they were in an emotional void when they found this space,” said Liliana Torella, PSP’s coordinator. “They say that here they found emotional support, a listening ear, and, above all, community.”

### Spaces that save lives

Participants highlighted the virtual group sessions and the ongoing support in the program’s WhatsApp group as the most valuable elements. “These are not luxuries; they are lifelines,” Torella emphasized. One participant shared in the survey, “Knowing that I could write at any hour and someone would read it—that saved me.”

### Challenges beyond emotions

The survey also shed light on the broader struggles that forced migrants face: access to dignified employment, health insurance, legal advice, language acquisition, and the ability to cover basic expenses. “These problems can’t be solved with a single response,” Torella explained. “But emotional support helps people feel less alone as they confront these challenges.”

Perhaps the most striking finding from the survey is that demand for PSP’s services far exceeds its capacity. On this anniversary, the number of requests to join the program surpassed available spots. “It hurts to know we can’t attend to everyone who reaches out,” said Torella. “This reminds us that the mental health of forced migrants cannot wait.”

### A proven model that transforms lives

The survey underscores a clear message: funding programs like PSP isn’t an expense; it’s an investment in resilience and dignity. “Every person who finds support not only rebuilds their own life but also strengthens the social fabric of the communities that receive them,” Torella affirmed.

PSP has become a proven, humane, and effective model. But to ensure that more migrants can access this support, it is urgent to bring in more resources and allies who recognize mental health as a fundamental right.



Liliana Torella said that PSP is a secure emotional space for many migrants

# VIA Prepares Holiday Campaign to Support Migrant Families

The nonprofit organization Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA) is gearing up to launch its annual fundraising campaign in September, providing winter coats, toys, and Christmas dinners for migrant and refugee families in New York. This yearly initiative offers comfort and solidarity to families facing the harsh winter months without the resources to meet their basic needs.

The campaign, which runs every holiday season, aims to raise funds to purchase warm coats for children and adults, deliver new toys to children in vulnerable situations, and provide complete Christmas dinners so that migrant families can celebrate the holidays with dignity, warmth, and a sense of belonging.

“Each coat, each toy, and each dinner represents much more than an item—it’s a gesture of love in the midst of so many hardships,” said Niurka Meléndez, VIA co-founder and co-director. “Many families arrive with nothing, and here they find their first embrace of welcome.”

According to VIA’s data, the demand for humanitarian support has grown significantly in recent years, driven by the rising number of asylum seekers and people forced to migrate. In response, VIA is working to expand the reach of its 2025 holiday campaign to ensure that more families receive support—so that no child faces winter without a coat or the holidays without a moment of joy.

The success of the campaign relies on the support of volunteers, individual donors, and corporate partners who contribute money, supplies, or time. While the campaign will be officially announced in September, donations are already being accepted through [vianyc.org/donate](#), where details about the initiative and additional ways to contribute will also be available. Those interested in volunteering or forming institutional partnerships can reach out now by emailing [vianyc@gmail.com](#).

Updates and calls to action will be shared on social media at [@vianycorg](#), where stories, testimonials, and progress updates will be posted throughout the campaign.

In a context of profound vulnerability, gestures like these help rebuild connections, restore dignity, and offer hope to those who have had to start over in a new country. This winter, VIA reminds us that every coat warms, every toy brings joy, and every shared meal can transform an entire Christmas.

