



Three Years of Miracle Mondays: Consistency, Community, and Shared Small Miracles

In his novel *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, John Boyne wrote: “A home is not a building or a street or a city or something so artificial as bricks and mortar. A home is where one’s family is, isn’t that right?” For thousands of migrants who have come to New York seeking guidance, support, and dignity, and also for those who are part of VIA, that home has been St. Paul and St. Andrew Church.

Since 2022, and over more than 120 consecutive Mondays of sustained work, the Miracle Mondays resource fair has supported more than 12,000 migrants from different nationalities, languages, and life stories. Week after week, this space has become a safe and welcoming point of connection, aligned with VIA’s mission to empower informed, humane, and sustainable integration.

Listening and walking alongside those in need

“Miracle Mondays was born out of an urgent need, but it has been sustained through consistency and the trust of the community,” says Héctor Arguinzones, co-director and co-founder of VIA. “This is not just about providing services, but about being present, listening, and offering support with respect.”

Every Monday, something happens that, for many, feels like a small miracle. Timely legal guidance. A warm breakfast. A change of clothes. A stroller. Hygiene products. A gesture that can change the course of a day and sometimes an entire week. The focus is primarily on legal, cultural, and community orientation, recognizing that clear information and close accompaniment are essential tools for integration. “Accompanying people is much more than helping,” says Niurka Meléndez, co-director and co-founder of VIA. “It means walking alongside them, recognizing their dignity, and building community even in the midst of uncertainty.”

Reflecting on three years of partnership between St. Paul and St. Andrew Church and VIA, the church’s pastor, Lea Matthews, emphasizes that trust and human connection have been the foundation of this collaboration. “Working with Niurka and Héctor has taught me that trust and relationship are not accessories to collaboration, they are its center,” she says, underscoring that VIA is not simply a partner organization, but “the heart of all our migration ministries at St. Paul & St. Andrew.” Along this shared path, she highlights the leadership of Héctor Arguinzones and Niurka Meléndez, who, drawing from lived experience, “resist narratives of pity and advocate for the autonomy of well-informed individuals and collective power,” bringing a calm and steady presence even in highly complex contexts.

Two organizations united by a humanitarian relationship

Building on the work of Miracle Mondays, Pastor Matthews notes that the very understanding of what it means to be a church has been deeply transformed. “Through this partnership, our understanding of ‘church’ has expanded in ways I never imagined,” she explains, pointing to the growth of bilingual ministries, equity-based and mutual community programs, and accompaniment spaces such as Sacred CourtSupport. “None of this would have been

possible without the foundation of trust that VIA established and continues to cultivate. We follow their leadership. We listen. We build alongside them, not above them,” she affirms, acknowledging that VIA’s commitment to dignity and community care has shaped not only shared programs, but also the congregation’s ethical and human stance.

Three years later, Miracle Mondays represents far more than a resource fair. It is a sustained practice of solidarity in action. It is proof that consistency also creates change. It is organized community, week after week, building a future together. VIA’s directors agree as they extend their “gratitude to St. Paul and St. Andrew Church for opening its doors and becoming a home for the vulnerable immigrant community in New York, and for walking alongside VIA every Miracle Monday.”

Measuring impact through the voice of the community

The results of the satisfaction survey conducted at the end of 2025 confirm the sustained impact of Miracle Mondays on the lives of participants. Responses reflect a high level of gratitude and positive feedback, with comments describing the space as “very good,” “excellent,” “perfect,” and “very kind,” along with messages of appreciation for both VIA and St. Paul and St. Andrew Church. These findings show that the program not only responds to urgent needs, but also leaves a positive and lasting impression, strengthening trust and a sense of accompaniment throughout the migration process.

The survey also reveals a strong willingness to participate again and to recommend the program within the migrant community. Of those surveyed, 95.89 percent indicated that they are “very likely” to attend the resource fair again, while 98.63 percent said they are “very likely” to recommend it to other migrants. In addition, 94.52 percent stated that they would “definitely” recommend Miracle Mondays, confirming the high level of trust the program has built over time.

One particularly meaningful data point is that 100 percent of respondents reported feeling heard and supported by the team, a key indicator of the human quality of the accompaniment provided. Likewise, 89.04 percent said that the fair “changed or improved” their perspective on their migration process, reaffirming the value of clear information, respectful treatment, and access to tangible resources. Among the most highly valued supports were clothing donations, legal guidance, a nutritious breakfast, information about half-price MetroCards, and access to health insurance information. Together, these resources contribute to immediate well-being and strengthen migrants’ ability to make informed decisions about their future.

Nine Years of Community: A Dinner That Restores Humanity to the Migrant Experience



For the ninth consecutive year, Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA) held one of the most meaningful gatherings in its institutional history, the Traditional Venezuelan Christmas Dinner and Toy Distribution. Since 2017, this space has been far more than a celebration. It has been a sustained message to the migrant community in New York: you are not alone.

The event was born from the vision of VIA’s founders and directors, Niurka Meléndez and Héctor Arguinzones, with a clear purpose, to create a gathering that would restore a sense of belonging, recognition, and care to Venezuelan families living far from their country and loved ones. Over the years, the Christmas Dinner has become a collective ritual of identity, memory, and shared dignity. During the central remarks of this year’s edition, VIA openly acknowledged the particularly complex context currently facing the migrant community. “This has been a challenging and demanding year, a year marked by pressure, uncertainty, and fear for many migrant families,” the organization stated.

From that same place of truth and lived experience, VIA reaffirmed one of the core principles that defines how it works and how it builds community. “At VIA, we do not work for migrants. We are migrants.” This statement

captures not only an institutional philosophy, but also a daily practice grounded in empathy, shared experience, and genuine accompaniment.

Information gathered during the event reflected a reality that is as diverse as it is urgent: entire families, teenagers, and children who have recently arrived, many of them in the asylum process, facing economic hardship and, in many cases, their first winter under highly vulnerable conditions. In response, this ninth edition expanded its scope to include the donation of winter jackets and sweaters, a concrete action against the cold and against uncertainty.

Thanks to the support of donors and the volunteer and solidarity-driven work of dozens of people, many of them migrants themselves, the Traditional Venezuelan Christmas Dinner continues to be possible year after year. This ninth edition does more than honor a tradition. It reaffirms a promise. To keep building community, to keep putting faces to the numbers, and to keep demonstrating that when those who live the struggle lead the way, real change begins.

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Niurka Meléndez and Héctor Arguinzones Affirm “The Anthem Awards Are a Recognition That Belongs to All of Us”

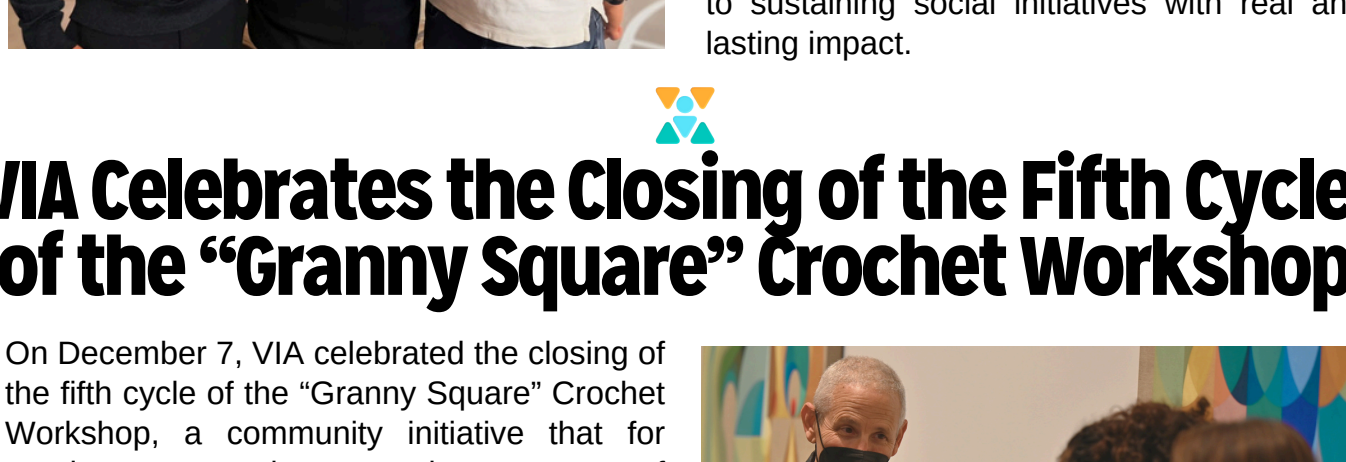
2025 was a landmark year for VIA. The grassroots organization received two recognitions at the Anthem Awards. Niurka Meléndez and Héctor Arguinzones, directors of VIA, emphasized that the award was not received as a trophy granted to an individual, but as a validation of a collective journey. “We are the community we serve and, through compassion and volunteerism, we show that when those who have lived the struggle lead the way, real change is possible,” they stated.

Speaking from their experience as a migrant-led organization, both leaders underscored the deeply collective nature of the achievement. “At VIA, we do not work for migrants: we are migrants. We carry the same fears, the same hopes, and the same responsibility,” they noted, explaining why the recognition feels human and shared.

Meléndez and Arguinzones also emphasized that awards of this magnitude carry an even greater responsibility. “They remind us that what we do matters and that we must continue doing it with the same humility, coherence, and courage that brought us here,” they expressed.



The organization concluded by highlighting that this achievement is the result of sustained collective work over time. “We celebrate together because this achievement was built in community. The Anthem Awards are a recognition that belongs to all of us. And we move forward knowing that solidarity is not a one-time gesture, but a sustained decision. This is VIA.”



A Night “Only in New York”: Poker, Community, and Social Impact

In a city that rarely slows down, one night placed solidarity and collective commitment at the center. That was the spirit of the event organized by Next Jump. This private company for four consecutive years has opened its doors to support purpose-driven social causes, reaffirming the essential role of the business sector in generating community impact.

In 2025, Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA) was selected as one of five beneficiary organizations of the initiative. More than 200 people, including professionals, partners, and participants with a strong philanthropic spirit, gathered at Next Jump’s headquarters in Chelsea for an experience that combined entertainment, community, and generosity, with a clear goal: turning one night of enjoyment into tangible support for those who need it most.

Beyond fundraising, the event stood out as a space for connection and solidarity, demonstrating that the alliance between private enterprise, philanthropy, and community is not only possible but essential to sustaining social initiatives with real and lasting impact.

VIA Celebrates the Closing of the Fifth Cycle of the “Granny Square” Crochet Workshop

On December 7, VIA celebrated the closing of the fifth cycle of the “Granny Square” Crochet Workshop, a community initiative that for nearly two years has served as a space of creativity, emotional support, and community for migrants and refugees.

Héctor Arguinzones and Niurka Meléndez, cofounders and codirectors of VIA, explained that this space “has been made possible thanks to the generous and sustained support of the James Cohan Gallery, which has opened its doors to more than 90 participants across five cycles and 35 classes, as well as the invaluable commitment of migrant instructors, volunteers, and our psychologist Liliana Torella, leader of the Peer Support program.”

In the words of VIA’s directors, “every stitch has been more than a technique; it has been a gesture of collective healing. Because at

VIA we know, from our own experience, what it means to be a forced migrant.

Meléndez and Arguinzones added that VIA believes in art as a tool for mental health and in the importance of creating spaces where learning, emotional support, and human connection are woven together. “Thank you for walking with us. We’ll see you in the next cycle, in 2026,” they concluded.

