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The Good Neighbor Fund

There are 12 million people living in the US who do not have documentation. They are similar to the many immigrants who came before them to the U.S. -- they are looking for a better life for their families. Since the attempts of the Senate to craft a bi-partisan bill to allow for a path to citizenship failed in the summer of 2007, the issue of Fair Immigration Reform has increasingly become a political wedge issue. The Bush Administration has increased "enforcement" of immigration laws and has empowered the Department of Homeland Security to conduct dehumanizing raids, tearing apart families and violating the constitution that our country was founded on. These range from major workplace raids where hundreds of people are seized to house invasions where between 1 and 20 people are seized to drivers of cars being racially profiled and pulled over by law enforcement officials.

The Pioneer Valley is not immune to this activity. The stories speak for themselves.

In May, 20 armed Immigration officials stormed a 2 family home in Springfield without a warrant. These officers terrorized and dehumanized the families in their homes. They pushed their way into the home, knocking a 14 year-old boy to the floor. They removed Teresa from the shower. They forced young children to sit on the couch for two hours while the raid took place. Upstairs, Elora and her sister hid in the shower with their hands clamped over their children's mouths for 45 minutes, escaping detection by the ICE officers. 10 people disappeared that day. Only two of the ten people had legal representation, provided by ADP Worker Center / Casa Obrera, they received voluntary departure. The others were deported.

In June, Crista was involved in a small car accident after she experienced a health related blackout while driving. While at the hospital, she was arrested and put into detention. She was transferred to Bristol County jail where she was denied access to her urgently needed medication. After the ADP Worker Center / Casa Obrera intervened with her doctor and attorneys by filing an emergency humanitarian release form, she was deported to El Salvador, where she will not receive the medical attention she needs. She leaves behind her daughter, a student in the Amherst Public Schools. Young Crista is preparing for her deportation hearing in early 2008. The ADP Worker Center / Casa Obrera has coordinated a team to lead her legal battle.

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In August, Marcilene was pulled over by police while heading to work. She and her brother were arrested, finger printed, handcuffed and shackled on the side of the road. They were not told what they had done wrong or what they were being charged with. Marcilene repeatedly told the officers she had a work visa. After two hours on the side of the road, the ICE officials drove Marcilene home, uncuffed her and said she could go. They followed her to her door and pushed their way in behind her. They then searched the house and arrested 6 people. Two of them were deported. The other four disappeared. None had legal representation.

There are many more examples of our neighbors being dehumanized and terrorized by our government. For this government-sponsored activity to continue, it requires the complicity and silence of its citizens. Each of these stories shares a common outcome - none of the people involved understood our legal system and none had access to private legal representation.

The ADP Worker Center / Casa Obrera and our allies are working with over 50 families in similar situations. ADP Worker Center members have identified an urgent unmet need - families need access to legal representation and need financial assistance to pay for it.

ADP members and our Allies created the Good Neighbor Fund to fill this urgent need.

The goals of the Good Neighbor Fund are:

1. To raise the awareness of our community of the urgent need for Fair Immigration Reform.
2. To create a safe community that honors and respects all of our neighbors regardless of their country of origin or their immigration status.
3. To raise money for legal assistance for families facing deportation or in detention.



*For more information on the Good Neighbor Fund
and how you can make a gift to help your neighbors,
contact the Alliance to Develop Power / ADP 413.739.7233*