

Stories of Hope

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CENTER FOR
HEALING
& HOPE



Office of Solidarity with Immigrants (OSI)

This article was originally written by Prairie Street Mennonite Church and shared in their church announcements on June 27.

Prairie Street Mennonite Church and partner organizations celebrated the opening of the Office of Solidarity with Immigrants (OSI) on Sunday, June 22. Representatives from Center for Healing and Hope, La Casa de Amistad, Autismo con Amor, Movimiento Cosecha, and Mennonite Central Committee joined members and friends of the congregation to offer a blessing to the space in the building where they will offer services to immigrants throughout the week. Additionally, descendants of J.D. and Minnie Graber were present for the official naming of the Esperanza Graber Room, formerly known as the Graber Room. Esperanza is the Spanish word for "hope," and the Graber family offers this new name for the hopeful future of ministry with immigrants at Prairie Street Mennonite Church.



With the OSI conveniently located at Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart, partner organizations are able to meet people where they are at. Jane Ross Richer, Immigrant Resource Coordinator at CHH, works in the OSI on Tuesday afternoons providing resource navigation, one-to-one support, and referrals to CHH's healthcare services and Immigrant Resource Fund.

"This partnership expands our reach, deepens our impact, and helps us to better serve residents of Elkhart" said Jane. "It's a beautiful example of what happens when organizations come together with a shared commitment to justice and healing. Thank you to Prairie Street Mennonite Church and all of the partners involved in making this possible."



Dara Marquez (pictured left above), director for community outreach at La Casa de Amistad, uses the OSI weekly to make resident ID cards available to Elkhart community members. She offered this reflection after the open house celebration:

A Reflection by Dara Marquez

Solidarity shows up in different ways, wherever we care, stand strong, and resist. Whether you're out there on the front lines, supporting from behind the scenes, or speaking up, it all matters. We remind each other that we're not alone; we're in this together with love and purpose.

As I gather my thoughts and memories to reflect on Sunday's open house at Prairie Street, I cannot help but remember 15-year-old Dara. Growing up down the road on Roys Ave, I spent time visiting my uncle and my grandparents. In 2007, a momentous year, I transitioned into high school while learning what it meant to be undocumented, all the while dreaming of what the next four years would hold. It was also the year my well-lived era as a single child came to an end with the birth of my sister, who will be voting for the first time this year. Notably, it was also the year I met the young people who were moving into the Jubilee House next door.

That year, I observed my dad and family becoming more involved in the fight against the demolition of what is now the Historic Roosevelt Center. (Community won that battle, by the way.) While I struggled to understand the implications of being undocumented, I was being introduced to conversations about community building, restoration, and the preservation of a history rooted in love and resistance. These precious moments radicalized me through the importance of relationship building.

My political formation unfolded without my realizing it until I found myself sitting next to one of my greatest friends, Jason, eating apples in the parking lot of the Elkhart County Jail, waiting for my dad's bail to be set and praying he wouldn't have a detainer placed on him. You could say I was introduced to community organizing by recent college graduates eager to change the world, who lived in the Jubilee House next door and wore keffiyehs to my family's carnes asadas. From a young age, I learned that standing together, loving together, and resisting together is the key to liberation—key to self-love, empowerment, change, and disruption. All of this has shaped my identity as an undocumented brown girl growing up, riding my bike around this neighborhood. It has empowered me to stand here today, proud of all your work that has brought us together.

We continue to stand strong, and I am proud of us and my family. Your presence in this Office of Solidarity with Immigrants is not merely about wanting to help; it's a political act that acknowledges the power structures at play. As neighbors, we are not here to be saviors but partners in this fight. We choose solidarity over saviorism, recognizing that we are all affected by these systems of violence, even if our experiences differ. All we can and must do now is care, stand strong, and resist together.

*"Oye mi gente traemos la fuerza
La libertad es mi única bandera
Listen my people,
my condors, my eagles,
no human being will ever be illegal."*

