



# NOTES FROM THE ROCKING CHAIR

NOLA GRANNIES

ISSUE #3, APRIL 2019

Because the Grannies (and Granddads) are rocking!!

Edited by Melody Lee and Ann Sayas

## DONATIONS NEEDED

ICE has been releasing many more than 100 travelers per day, and they planned to release another 5,000 people last week. This is good news. We want everyone held in detention released, and we want it to happen now. Those of you who have been to the bus station know how brave these travelers are and how much they need our help. Since the number of people passing through the bus station has nearly tripled over the last month, the NOLA Grannies are now spending over \$1,000 each week providing care kits and other needed supplies, and we're nearly out of money. The care kits cost \$1.92 per person and include snacks, water, hand sanitizer, tooth brushes, toothpaste and a packet of tissues.

### **For donations by check**

mail to Nola Grannies, % Pat Driscoll, 450 Upstream Street,  
New Orleans, LA 70123

### **For cash donations through Paypal**

[https://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=\\_s-xclick&hosted\\_button\\_id=DLWGMEEAN9LM8&source=url](https://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=_s-xclick&hosted_button_id=DLWGMEEAN9LM8&source=url)

## Amazon wish list

View the NOLA Grannies Amazon Wish List: [https://www.amazon.com/registry/wishlist/314ZW7YL11TEJ/ref=cm\\_sw\\_em\\_r\\_mt\\_gm\\_wl](https://www.amazon.com/registry/wishlist/314ZW7YL11TEJ/ref=cm_sw_em_r_mt_gm_wl)

# GIVE NOLA DAY

GREATER NEW ORLEANS FOUNDATION 

## May 7

We are thrilled that Nola Grannies will be participating in GiveNola Day on May 7, Here is the link:

<https://www.givenola.org>

You need to read the whole story to get it right.

If you have a **COSTCO membership** and would like to purchase directly from them and deliver to us, we purchase the following items from them. We can provide you with a delivery address once you are ready.

Welch's Fruit Snacks - 80 individual bags per box

Nature Valley Oats and Honey Granola Bars - 98 packs (2 each) per box

Austin Peanut Butter Crackers - 45 packs per box

Capri Sun Juice Boxes - 40 boxes per case

Kirkland Water - 40 bottles per case



## Thank You with Granny Gratitude for your generosity!

---Thank you, Joyce and Dave Thomas. for bringing water week after week and for the back-breaking labor that involves.

—Thank you to TraderJoe's for the variety of fruit, bread, bagels, muffins, and even avocados that are enjoyed by all. Many of the Asylum Seekers have not had fresh fruit in weeks if not months.

—Thank you to Patrice Fisher, who made the arrangements with Trader Joe's and brings all the wonderful goodies to the terminal.

---Thank you, Mary Ann Bohlke, for your donation of adorable stuffed Easter rabbits!

---Thank you, Tracey Couret, for the decks of playing cards that help to keep the older children amused.

---Thank you to the parade goers who brought in Mardi Gras stuffed toys. They were a big hit.

---Thank you, Kathleen Mellon and Grannies of Northhamton, Massachusetts, for your generous donation.

—Thank you to the National Office of Grannies Respond for their generous donation.

—And even more thanks to the over 270 donors who have responded with compassion to the great need.

YOU FOLKS ARE THE BEST!!!



# Total Care Kits from August - April 15th

# 14,634

## Monthly totals

### 2018

Aug	320
Sept	1,146
Oct	1,703
Nov	1,706
Dec	2,268

### 2019

Jan	1,797
Feb	1,829
Mar	2,548
Apr	1,288 through April 15



## Our weekly care kits through April 15

Mar	3-5	516
Mar	3-11	516
Mar	3-18	638
Mar	3-25	718
Apr	4-1	653
Apr	4-8	566



## VOLUNTEERS AT BUS STATION URGENTLY NEEDED!!

Volunteers to serve as greeters of the asylum seekers are needed for shifts at the bus station to hand out care kits as some people are doing the lion's share. Arrive at the Greyhound bus terminal for 6:15 for the morning shift and 8:15 for the evening shift. Spanish speakers are also needed for all shifts. Weekend times are a special need. For those who cannot commit to a regular shift, there is now a substitute signup for those who would be able to fill in in a pinch. Send the "Nola Grannies Volunteer Guidelines" (found at the end of the newsletter) to [nolagrannies@gmail.com](mailto:nolagrannies@gmail.com)



### All about SignupGenius from Beth Bochnak, Volunteer Co-ordinator

Welcome to SignupGenius. Once you sign the Volunteering Guidelines/Ground Rules form, you will receive an invitation from sign-up genius. This means that you are in our system as a volunteer. Once you accept the invitation, you can create an account for yourself, and access SignupGenius from anywhere. The Signup program will remind you that you signed up to be a greeter or a packer 2 days in advance. It also allows you to cancel (please don't!) or swap your time with someone else.

When you sign up, you will be asked in the comment section for your phone number, whether you speak Spanish, and any comment you have. We ask you to answer these questions so the Lead will know who in the group speaks Spanish and how to reach you if necessary. These comments are available to anyone. Only the administrator can see the questions you answered when you first signed up.

We hope you find using this new system easy and helpful. If you are having a problem with Signup Genius, please email me at [bethnolagranny@gmail.com](mailto:bethnolagranny@gmail.com). Thanks for all you do. See you at the bus station!



## Attention Grannies! Time for Training!

We are happy to announce that our organization has gotten so big that we need to start a **Granny Greeter Training Program**. We are thrilled to have so many new people signing up to be Greeters, but the Leads are feeling overwhelmed by the arrival of so many travelers in the last few weeks (over a 200/day at times) and some of our Volunteers have been left wondering what to do. The Lead Grannies have not had a chance to do the on the job training that we did "back in the old days" of August, when the arrival of 15 people seemed like a lot.

We are asking **all of you** who signed up to be Bus Station Greeters in March or April to come to the first training session. *Even if you have already completed some shifts*, you will have to complete the training in order to continue at the Bus Station. As you know, we are there at the generosity and forbearance of Greyhound. Granny operations in other areas have been shut down. In the future, we will be having more of these trainings as well as training for Leads. Bring us your comments, questions, and opinion of Sign Up Genius.

**When:** Wednesday, April 24, 5:00-6:45 PM

**Where:** Meeting Room at the **Rosa F Keller Library and Community Center**, 4300 S. Broad Ave. Parking is available.

## Granny Jargon

**Leads** — individuals in charge of setting up the crates and bags at the terminal.

Arrives at 6:15 AM and 8 PM for set up.

**Greeters** — individuals who hand out the care kits, offer toys, sanitary napkins and other miscellaneous items on hand, always with a welcoming smile

**Spanish Speaker** — encourages the asylum seekers to sit in the area near where the Grannies are giving out items. Helps answer questions about bus tickets. Shows them maps so they can get a sense of where they are and where they're going.

**Asylum seekers** — individuals who are leaving their homeland because of fearful and often violent circumstances. They have been interviewed by officials at the border and a credible fear has been established. Their sponsor has supplied a bus ticket, and they are on their way to make connections. The next step is a hearing before an immigration judge which may take years. The adults may be wearing an ankle bracelet and may need to know where they can recharge it.

**Packers**—individuals who meet every Monday afternoon at 12 PM in order to pack the care kits for the coming week.

**Care Kit** — a quart size plastic bag which contains snacks, water, hand sanitizer, tooth brushes, toothpaste and a packet of tissues. It costs \$1.92.

**Locker** — the Greyhound terminal has graciously provided lockers for the storage of the daily needs.

**Glass Room** — the Greyhound terminal office has a large glass window. Inside is a long counter used to assemble the care kits.

## Leadership Team

**Fundraising** — Maggie Tidwell

**Finances** — Pat Driscoll

**Shopping, Inventory** — Mary Ann Bohlke

**Data, Terminal, Donations** — Dinah Shannon

**Volunteer Coordinator**— Beth Bochnak

**Organizer** — Dave Thomas

**Outreach** — Kate Reynolds

**Social Media** — Erin O'Brien and Chrissie James

**Email Management**— Annette Broussard and Adrienne Petrosini

Members of the leadership team can be reached through [nolagrannies@gmail.com](mailto:nolagrannies@gmail.com).

## Kate's Morning Reflection - Bus station April 6, 2019

### A not so typical shift

On Saturday April 6th, I was the lead for the morning shift at the bus station. Since we've been seeing increased numbers this month, I got there extra early and hauled out 80 care kits with water, plus the usual assortment of toys, bags, diapers, and sanitary products. There was a wonderful box of fruit that I took out, too. The bus tracker showed that the buses were going to be late. The morning's greeters showed up; Diana, Maela, Lindsey, and a new volunteer, Ileana. Lindsey and Ileana were the fluent Spanish speakers for the morning.

The Miami-bound bus arrived with 34 travelers whom we helped with their tickets and sorting out some of their travel issues, and we provided them with care kits. Because we had a full complement of Grannies, Lindsey gathered together groups of ticket holders and explained how to read their very confusing and often yard-long tickets. This was a big success and a seemingly empowering experience for these folks who could gain a sense of control over their own journeys rather than having to depend on helpful strangers (who appear sporadically at some stations along trip) to tell them where to wait, and where they were going next during their travels.

Our second bus, the Atlanta-bound bus, came quite late. When it finally arrived, Evelyn at the desk told me that the bus driver would not be letting anyone off his fully loaded bus because of the short turnaround. She also said that there was an additional overload Atlanta bus stuck in Baton Rouge because Greyhound did not have a driver to continue the route. There was no estimated time for departure that she could find. Not able to serve the bus riders sitting outside, nor being able to wait around for what could be hours and hours for this overload-bus, I decided to call the morning done. So, we returned everything to the locker area, and I said goodbye and thanks to the wonderful greeters I had that day.

After the greeters left, I checked with Evelyn, who reported that the overload-Atlanta-bound bus



was still in Baton Rouge without a driver, with no ETA in New Orleans. So I restocked boxes, put kits in crates, tidied-up the locker area, and went into the lobby to sit, collect myself, drink my hours-cold coffee, and send numbers to Dinah. While sitting there, and only 15 minutes after I was told it was still sitting driverless in Baton Rouge, the overload-bus arrived and unloaded what turned out to be another 34 travelers. I made the decision that, even though I was alone, I would pull everything out of the locker area and distribute kits and supplies to this new group of people. When several of the travelers saw that I was struggling, they offered to help. A sweet Honduran teenager of about 14 carried the diapers around and offered them to the parents with little ones; an *Abuela* from Guatemala helped me hand out care kits (*how apropos!*); another traveler distributed fruit; and a fourth stood at the front of the station pointing travelers, who were still getting off the bus, to our area. I can't tell you how wonderful it was to have these people help. And the experience provided me with not only much needed help, but also one of those "AHA" moments we all have now and then.

In that moment, while I watched these asylum seekers basically take control of the operation, I realized that during this 20-minute interlude in their lives, these weary folks had claimed something they hadn't had during their process of crossing the border and the days, weeks, and sometimes months they had been incarcerated and under ICE control - *self-determination*. Self-determination is the ability to control one's own life and to decide what is needed and be instrumental in getting it. It is what social scientists call *agency*. In this short time period, they were no longer the victims, the victims of the crime, corruption, and the poverty of their homes and the victims of our country's cruel and dehumanizing immigration process. They had reclaimed a tiny bit of the self-determination which they had been forced to surrender when meeting their first U.S. Border Control Officer earlier in their travels. By taking over the care kits and greeting functions of our work that Saturday morning, these people were asserting their ability to help themselves and to once again determine and meet their own needs, even if only on such a small scale. Back when they had left their homes in Central America, they had determined that remaining was not an option. They planned their escapes from crime and poverty and made brave and often difficult decisions to travel to our country and change the circumstances of their lives for

the better. But since they had been in our government's custody, their ability to determine their own fates, in both the short and the long run, had been stripped from them.

There is a saying, originally a Latin saying, that is used in the disability community and also used extensively during the fight against apartheid in South Africa. It goes like this...

*"Nothing about us, without us, is for us."*

It came to me while I was watching my new volunteers. We spend hours upon hours at the bus station doing this amazing work. And I'm certainly moved by the dedication and energy of my fellow Grannies. But ultimately, for me, this tiny interlude in the lives of the asylum seekers who passed through our bus station and my life that morning reinforced my understanding that we really are the helpers in this situation, and they are the leaders. And, for me, there is joy in being the helper here and being led by those who aim to determine their own fates.



Artwork by Ricardo Levins Morales

<https://www.rlmartstudio.com/product/nothing-about-us-button/>



In March Maggie Tidwell and Mary Ann Bohlke journeyed to Homestead Detention Center in Florida for a 6-day stay. Here is Mary Ann's Story.

I went to the Homestead Detention Center with some hesitation but ended up being glad I decided to join Maggie on her journey.

**Homestead is a prison in rural Florida for unaccompanied minors seeking asylum.**

I went to Homestead for three reasons. I went to show the children that people on the outside knew they were there, and they were not forgotten or totally alone. I went to "bear witness" ... a powerful way to communicate resistance. I went to save myself.

When I got back from Homestead, I struggled with answering the question “how was it?” that I kept getting from friends. When I finally found the word “powerful”, the answer came more easily.

**Between 1,700 and 2,000 boys and girls 13 to 17 years old are jailed here for indefinite periods of time.**

**THEY ARE INNOCENT OF ANY CRIME.**

Within an hour of getting to the Detention Center, we climbed on step ladders to rise above the green canvas tarp placed there. It was added to the chain link fence when folks began to show up at the center attempting to keep the youngsters from being seen. The only view you can get of the kids are on the big field used for soccer. I held a sign expressing the idea that got me involved in this work. I have wanted all asylum seekers to know ...”*no estan solos.*” I waved and held my sign, and then a couple of the 50 or 60 young men playing soccer waved back....a powerful moment for me.....but I wondered what they were thinking. We were to get wave- backs many other times during our visit, always giving a feeling of connection. But I never shook the wondering about what the children were thinking and what were they were making of us.

**On their 18th birthdays, children are moved to adult detention centers...**

**IN SHACKLES....**

Just the act itself of maintaining a presence at a place for six or eight hours everyday even if only for five days was also powerful. This daily vigil has been carried out for over sixty days and continues now. Witnesses have stood in the sun and the heat and in the rain. A message is clearly being sent to those in charge....we're here, we are not going anywhere and we are watching what you are doing. Different than the feeling of a demonstration or march.

**“Witnesses” have kept vigil at Homestead for 2 months and have vowed to remain until it is shut down.**

There were also experiences I didn't expect...like the changing of shifts. For several hours in the early afternoon we were able to engage with the staff. We would ask them to rethink their participation in the jailing of youngsters....hopefully prompting some to quit, or to speed up the process of reunification, or maybe slip some information out that could be made public...a whistle blower perhaps. We engaged with new hires being trained when they moved from place to place on the complex. We confronted delegations of visitors getting tours. We got to know the security folks and engage with the

delivery drivers. But the most unexpected part of this trip was forming a community, if only for 5 days, with creative, committed, can-do women and men, many our own age, standing up to this inhumane treatment of children. I learned a lot in discussion during the day and in the evening over a meal. This connection was powerful as well. I came back home strengthened.

**Homestead is a for-profit prison making investors in Caliburn \$750 to \$1,000 of taxpayer money per child daily (or \$1,500,000 per day).**

**An expansion to 3,000 beds is planned for the immediate future.**

**[For updates go to “Witness Tornillo: Target Homestead” on Facebook.](#)**

**From MYSWORK job requirements for youth care worker at Homestead**

- **Must be prepared and physically able to respond with the appropriate protocol in a variety of dynamic supervision situations with clients of 13-17 years in age.**
- **In a sudden or emergency event, staff must at all times be physically able to run, jump, lunge, twist, push, pull, apply approved restraint techniques and otherwise manage or coerce the full weight of an infant or adolescent.**
- **Ability to pass a medical examination to determine one’s fitness to satisfactorily and safely care for youth if accommodations are required.**
- **Able to communicate verbally and listen for constant surveillance of staff activities**

## Space in Between at the Ogden

Through May 12, the Center for Southern Craft and Design presents the multi-media sculptural work of Margarita Cabrera on the third floor of the Ogden Museum.

For some, a border patrol uniform represents security, others fear. For the women of Margaret Cabrera's craft collaborative, the cut-up pieces of uniform represent a canvas to use to tell their stories. Immigrant women gather to use indigenous embroidery to create pieces depicting their stories of crossing the border. Seen in the first room of the exhibit entitled Space In Between, the embroidered, pieced-together uniforms become sculptural cacti depicting joyful and sad stories that document the triumphs and difficulties of those who struggle to find their way to new communities.



In the second room, entitled Nepantla, an Aztec term meaning “the space in the middle”, a sculpture is based on a backpack that the artist saw at a U.S. Border Patrol station. Probably belonging to a teenage boy or young man, the piece contains a blue backpack, a water bottle, garlic cloves with bulbs, a medicine bottle, scapular featuring the Virgin of Guadalupe, Cigarette packs with ten cigarettes, a cd player, a wallet, and two “adult” magazines. All of the items are made of vinyl. The spaces between the items invite the viewer to create stories of friendships, cultures, geographies, beliefs, feelings, struggles,



In contrast to the other two rooms, the third room appears stark and cold. The quilt-wall hangings contain monotonous repetitions of items, such as irons or hairdryers, produced in the Maquilas or factories across the border in Mexico. The threads hanging from the pieces represent the hands that stitched and put together all the products that can be legally sent across the border while human beings cannot cross legally. We must give thanks that our lives are made more convenient by the people who assemble the appliances. Below on the left are irons, on the right, hairdryers.



Find several to go with you to view this amazing exhibit. As you talk about the exhibit, stitch together new and creative ways to view the asylum seekers.

craft collaborative  
softly spoken stories stitched  
foolish uniforms flipped artfully



