



Notes from the Rocking Chair

Nola Grannies

Number 1

January, 2020

Edited by Melody Lee and Ann Sayas

Because the Grannies (and Granddads) really rock!

Distribution of Care Kits

Because of the new policy of detaining asylum seekers in Mexico, the number of care kits has dropped dramatically. From August, 2018, to December, 2018, there were 7,223 kits distributed. However, from August, 2019, to December 2019, only **2,502 kits** were given out, and of those, 898 were passed out in the evening. During this period of time, there were 12 morning shifts and 27 evening shifts with no travelers coming through the station. There were only five documented shifts with no Grannie coverage, three of which were during Christmas week.



That #*+^~)) Parking Problem

Premium Parking threw down the challenge gauntlet by making parking for the bus station an expensive proposition. Grannies have responded with dedication, creativity, resilience. We will find a way to make our way to the bus station with our care packages and smiles for the asylum seekers. Granny Beth Bochnak has sent out the plan for reimbursement if that is needed. Do save all those receipts. As soon as a new treasurer is appointed, you will be able to get monthly reimbursement.

So get your computers primed **and** fill out those SignUp Times.



January may be warm; but it needs more of you to sign-up. January may be cold, but it needs more of you to sign up. February may have Carnival, but it needs more of you to sign up. Please check the sign-up and fill in the blanks. We encourage you to carpool or park on the street, but we will reimburse you for parking if necessary.

If you are having a problem with SignUp Genius, please email me at bethnolagranny@gmail.com. Thanks for all you do. <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/8050d44ada82ca3fe3-busstation>

Leadership Team Updates

The Leadership Team will meet monthly. A new treasurer will need to be chosen. See ad below. Members of the team can be reached through nolagrannies@gmail.com

Fundraising -- Maggie Tidwell, Cam Mangham

Finances -- TBD

Shipping, Inventory, Packing -- Mary Ann Bohlke

Volunteer Signups -- Beth Bochnak

Outreach -- Kate Reynolds

Social Media -- Erin O'Brien, Chrissie James, Kate Reynolds

Newsletter -- Ann Sayas

Email Contact -- Annette Broussard, Rebecca Brown

At-Large -- Chrissie James, Chris Well

Liaisons to partners

Mujeres Luchadores - Mary Ann Bohlke

Familias Unidas -- Claire Brooks

Voces Unidas -- Maggie Tidwell

ISLA -- Kate Reynolds

La Semilla -- Chris Wells

Brownsville -- Maggie Tidwell, Cam Mangham

Our Website is Up and Running.
nolagrannies.com

Gracious Granny Gratitude is extended to those three technologically savvy ladies who waved their digital wand and created a site for us to use Let's hear a resounding Brava for all their work. all together now —
Kate!!! Chrissie!!! Jess!!!

That's Kate Reynolds, Chrissie James, Jess Roberts

Be sure to check out the interview on the website. Chrissie and Kate were interviewed by the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association which aired on Cox Communications channel 76 on Sunday, January 12.

SAVE THE DATE...

On January 26, 2020, the Xochiquetzally Cultural Project will present a dance recital at Peter and Paul Hotel, 2317 Burgundy St. Grannies have been invited to speak. Join us for a wonderful afternoon of music, dance and stories.



Grannies Celebrate Holidays at Catalino's

On December 14, Addie and Hugo Vasquez, owners of Catalino's, prepared a delicious buffet lunch for Nola Grannies as we gathered to celebrate the holidays and our work with the asylum seekers. In the picture to the left, Chef Addie serves Granny Cam Mangham.

Nola Grannies also wish to congratulate Addie and Hugo on the birth of their daughter Yatzi, who was born on December 28th at three o'clock. She weighed 7 1/2 lbs.

News from our Partners

Nola Grannies is committed to helping with the whole issue of immigration as much as volunteer resources and financial resources allow. With less money needed to support the distribution of care kits at the bus station, leadership decided to distribute grants to local grassroots groups that need help in battling the inhumanity created by our present immigration policies at the border. Nola Grannies will be the conduit of financial help to the following groups: Mujeres Luchadoras, Families Unidas, Voces Unidas, La Semilla, ISLA, and Team Brownsville in Brownsville, Texas, which is helping seekers stranded in Mexico. The forthcoming financial report will detail the grants distributed in 2019.

La Semilla

Granny Hillery Gazzaniga states that ,La Semilla currently has 6 children attending. 2 very sweet and talented girls that are very interested in arts and crafts ... they would love a granny to bring a special project! The 4 boys (3 of which are brothers) are very playful and love games like red light, green light. It really is 2 hours of fun and also helpful for the parents to be able to attend their classes! Also, any Grannies who volunteer may take Spanish classes for free and could practice their new language skills with the kiddos! **La Semilla - The Seed** is a 501c3 non-profit educational institution which started out focusing on the socioeconomic and educational needs of the Latino community. offers childcare to parents who are enrolled in English classes. Help is needed on Tuesday and Thursday nights from 7 - 9 at First Grace United Methodist Church on the corner of Canal and Jefferson Davis Pkwy (3401 Canal Street). Use the **La Semilla** signup to volunteer. The link for the sign up is:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/9040C48ABA623A4FA7-childcare>

Immigration Services and Legal Assistance

ISLA provides pro bono removal defense representation for immigrants detained at the Pine Prairie ICE Processing Center. Homero Lopez, Jr., Executive Director of **ISLA**, stated there were about 2,000 immigrants detained in 2018. Today there are about 7,500 to 8,000 immigrants in 10 for-profit centers in Louisiana. Louisiana has the second highest number of detainees following Texas. Most of the immigrants are asylum seekers. **ISLA** has represented 35 immigrants who bonded out or won their court case.

Granny Power Spreads



Familias Unidas en Accion has a many-faceted program: offering help to families newly arrived in New Orleans, providing a network for these families connecting them to earlier arrivals, and encouraging youth to find their voice and advocate for themselves. And—YES!!!—we have already found some ways in which Grannies can bring their gifts and energy to the work of **Familias Unidas**.

The next step in our work together is sewing classes, taught by Grannies and FOGs (Friends of Grannies) .**Familias Unidas** already has new sewing machines; we are providing material, supplies, and teachers. The first session (five weeks long) begins on Wednesday, Jan 22, with two teachers and six students. Together with **Familias Unidas**, after the first session we will evaluate the class and decide what comes next. Possibilities include more sewing classes and a weekend “sewing lab” with a Granny or FOG overseeing the participants.

STAY TUNED: we fully expect more opportunities to work together. For more information/suggestions/excuses to go out for coffee, contact Claire Brooks, cvbnola.com.

GRANNY POWER!

Team Brownsville



As a result of Trump’s inhumane and illegal Remain-in-Mexico policy, thousands of asylum seekers are living outside in dangerous, deplorable conditions at the Mexican border. This policy has also greatly reduced the number of refugee families we are able to serve at the bus station. Therefore, if asylum seekers cannot come to us we will go to them.

The NOLA Grannies have planned a trip to volunteer with **Team Brownsville** at the Mexico border for a week in early March. We are raising funds for supplies (tents, sleeping bags, etc. for the camp for van rental and gas and to help Team Brownsville with the cost of thousands of meals they serve weekly in the camp. Granny volunteers will cover their own food and lodging.

Thank you for contributing to the success of this effort through donations to our **Go Fund Me** project. Any donations will be well-used and deeply appreciated.

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[DonateShare](#)

From the Station A Volunteer Profile

Granny Yolando Lorio is one of the very faithful Grannies, who can always be found at the Greyhound Bus Station as lead on Thursday nights. She started the night shift.

I'll start with my first experience at the bus station two years ago. There was a Guatemalan family in my neighborhood who asked me for a favor. They needed to buy a bus ticket for a relative. The passenger turned out to be an asylum seeker who was being released from a detention center in Texas. When I went to buy a bus ticket, the ticket agent named Jackson helped me. It was to be my first of many encounters with Mr. Jackson. Because he was so easily exasperated, I never forgot him. When I gave him the passenger's name, he just looked at me and remarked how all these people have so many names. So I asked him if he got many of these people coming through the station. He said yes, hundreds. Of course, I didn't believe him.

Two days later, I picked up the asylum seeker because her brother was afraid to go to the station. I was told she would be wearing a blue jacket, and would answer to Maria. Well it seems all asylum seekers had blue jackets and many answered to Maria. I did find her and took her to her family.

A year later, I joined the Grannies and encountered Jackson, the ticket agent, again. I learned there were many asylum seekers coming through the bus station. I always looked forward to seeing Jackson on my shifts. I found out he would always try his best not to leave anyone behind. I think the homemade desserts I brought him helped because he always had a smile for me. He has moved on to another job, and we now have very few asylum seekers at the station. This past year volunteering at the station has been a very gratifying experience for me.

From the Production Line

NOLA Grannies Who Pack

Granny Martha Ward

Picture this: a storage unit in a facility on St. Charles. Sometimes the air-conditioning works. Sometimes it does not. The lights only respond to motions that are still a mystery. The unit is small. It is packed to the wire ceiling with supplies for the Care Kits.

Every Monday Grannie Mary Ann organizes a group of seven to nine Grannies---which is all the space will hold---and we start. First: move out all the tubs of special stuff and donated items into the hall. Then check supplies that other Grannies have shopped for and delivered to the unit. Open and count the juice boxes. Then we know how many Kits to pack. Set up the two card tables and the paint-covered A-frames with a louvered shutter on top---they will be the assembly line. One Grannie breaks down boxes and sorts trash. Another keeps track of how many Care Kits we are packing. Others suggest some assembly line efficiency that will make our work easier.

When we have packed our quota of Kits, we repack the storage unit. We leave the Kits in plain sight of those who come at random times to pick them up. Recently, we received a gift of perfect, handmade, brightly colored cloth bags to use for each Care Kit. Each Kit looks specially-made for the person who will take it. We hope that the special stuff--- toys, dinosaurs, tiny cars, tote bags, women's care products, and blankets when we have them--- will reach those who need them.

Each week, we express our gratitude to the other links in the chain of caring---the shoppers, the package receivers, the deliverers, the leads, those who meet the busses, the Grannies who raise money, keep the books, keep us in touch with each other, and volunteer to organize. Each week, we mourn the hardships and traumas we know that the people we serve endure in their countries of origin, in their journeys, and at the hands of US authorities. And each week, we are simply glad to see one other again---Grannies-in-Arms.

The network of Bus station helpers across the US – An overview of the collaborative effort to greet and assist asylum seeking travelers on Greyhound buses.

NOLA Granny Kate Reynolds – Outreach Coordinator

I'm often asked by NOLA Granny volunteers about the various bus routes that we service. They also ask what happens to the travelers we see once they leave the New Orleans station. So I wanted to take a little time here to explain the larger picture and describe the network of helpers for the travelers on the morning and the evening buses we greet daily at the Greyhound station.

THE GROUPS. We meet three buses a day at Union Terminal, two every morning and one every night. The first morning bus, bus 1246, starts in Houston and ends in Atlanta. Most of the travelers on buses that start in Houston have come from various places across the southwest. A majority of them do come from Texas but also we greet travelers from as far away as San Diego who have transferred onto the buses from Houston. Unfortunately, there are no volunteers allowed in the Houston station, so once travelers get there, they must navigate the transfer on their own. Along the way from Houston to their final destination, there are many stops; however, the stop at the Greyhound station in New Orleans is the first one where there is both a lengthy stay and where volunteers are waiting to help the travelers.

After leaving our station, the next stop where there are volunteers is Mobile, Alabama. In Mobile a group calling themselves **The Lights 4 Liberty** (L4L) volunteers provide supplies and hot food for the travelers. Bus 1246 arrives there around 10:30 each morning. It then moves on to Montgomery (a transfer stop for some travelers) and finally to Atlanta where it arrives at 6:30 PM the same day that it left Houston. In Atlanta there is a Grannies Respond group. It's called the **Atlanta Transit Angels** (ATA). The Atlanta Transit Angels had been meeting all of the Greyhound buses in Atlanta inside of the station until they were asked to leave the station last summer. They moved most of their operations to a different bus station across town where they meet buses on the Mexican bus lines, Tornado and Omni. However, starting a few months ago, they began to set up outside of the Greyhound station to meet bus 1246 and a second bus that comes directly from Memphis. Unfortunately, they no longer meet bus 1246 because of the winter weather.

The second morning bus we meet in New Orleans is the 1262. This bus also starts in Houston, but it travels east and then south, ending its run in Miami. Like the Atlanta bound bus, this bus also stops for an extended stay in Mobile, Alabama, around 10:30am where the L4L volunteers provide supplies and food for the travelers. Unfortunately, after Florida-bound travelers leave Mobile on Bus 1262, there are no volunteer groups to meet them for the rest of their trip to their sponsors in Florida.

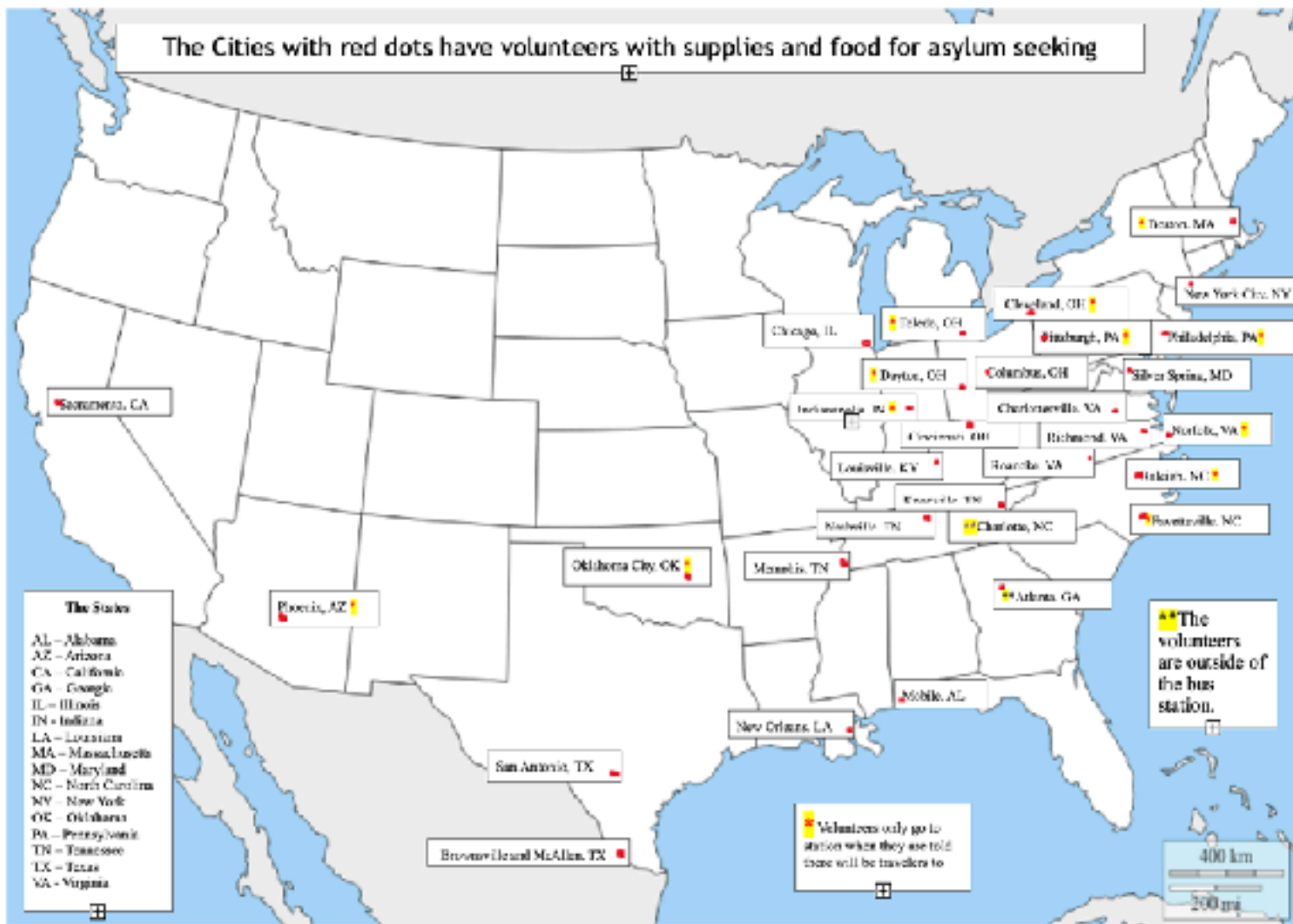
Our third bus is an evening bus, the 1596. It follows the same route as the 1246 from Houston to Atlanta. Because it arrives so late in Mobile, the L4L volunteers are unable to meet it. And then when it gets to Atlanta, there's no one there to meet the travelers due to its very early arrival time. Since most travelers on all of our Atlanta bound buses have to change buses in Atlanta, often there is no one to assist them.

ALERT SYSTEM. Alerting the groups who meet the travelers after they leave New Orleans as to how many travelers are coming has become much more important since the number of asylum seeking travelers has steadily decreased over the past 3 or 4 months. The folks in Mobile defrost meals once they hear how many travelers are coming. When they know our numbers, they can defrost the right number of meals. If, for example, there is a pregnant mother with a toddler going to Silver Spring, Maryland, I will also let the people in Mobile and Atlanta know there may be diaper needs. Since I know these travelers' final destination and the bus that they will be changing to in Atlanta, I'll transmit that information to those people who will be meeting the pregnant mom and toddler on the continuation of their trip north after Atlanta. I'll also let the folks in Silver Spring know the mom's and toddler's final destination, since they have contacts with an OB/GYN who has offered to see pregnant asylum-seekers staying in that area.

If I do know what the final destination is, I can contact people at that destination, and they can have materials ready for the travelers that may need to access lawyers, nonprofits, and assistance when they arrive in their final destinations to be with their sponsors and continue the asylum process.

OVERGROUND RAILROAD. This explanation shows that the network of groups meeting travelers is quite large. Many of these groups are affiliated with the **National Grannies Respond/Abuelas Responden** organization like we are, and others are not. But, all of these groups have the same goal - to make the journeys from detention to sponsors an easier one by providing food, supplies, and smiles to the weary travelers. We all post daily, and sometimes several times a day, on a closed Facebook group established by folks at the **Mariposa Collective**, a Memphis-based group who meet asylum seeking travelers transiting through their station in Tennessee. It's hard to say how many bus routes are met each week by all of the groups out there, but we are all part of the grassroots effort the Grannies Respond organizers named the "Overground Railroad." Our daily inter-group collaboration makes the system of traveler work as smoothly and seamlessly as possible!

The following map shows the various bus stations where there are groups meeting asylum seeking travelers as they pass through way stations, transit points, and arrive at their final destinations.



ALERT SYSTEM WORKS. Beth Bochnak reports, “This morning my jacket with my car keys and a credit card was donated to a traveler. The incredible email chain was able to get hold of the people in Mobile, and they met the buses, and they found my jacket and my car keys and my credit card. Very exciting day so far!”

Thanks

The editors wish to thank all who contributed to this issue. It is so important to share our Granny experiences. Please consider writing an article, about 400 words, 12 font. Submit to newspaper at nolagrannies.com.