

AFSC New Jersey Immigrant Rights Program

FY23 Proposal to Friends Foundation for the Aging

1. Has the identified problem changed?

Our previously identified problems have generally remained the same, but some of the economic needs have intensified. Immigrant seniors increasingly feel the harsh consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic with inflation affecting their ability to afford food and housing. Stable housing, food security, and access to adequate physical and mental health care are the greatest needs among the senior immigrant population.

In addition, we are pleased to share that immigration detention has decreased dramatically in New Jersey over the last 15 months. The number of immigrants being held in detention has gone from 2,000 to under 200. While AFSC has been a long-time advocate for the closure of NJ detention centers, a significant percentage of detainees have been transferred to other states or summarily deported. Even though only a small percentage of our immigrant seniors have gone through the detention system, the overall detention-to-deportation pipeline affects them by tearing immigrant families and communities apart and by allowing our country's persistent racism and xenophobia to flourish.

Finally, ongoing anti-immigrant sentiment and scapegoating of immigrants has led to harsh immigration policies and reduced access to services for immigrant seniors. Many of our clients continue to experience barriers in accessing services and public benefits due to their immigration status and pervasive discrimination.

2. Have your solution or goals changed?

The overall goal of AFSC's Immigrant Senior Project remains to provide senior immigrants with supportive case management that alleviates barriers to accessing benefits and services. Our Project is unique, both in terms of its focus on elder immigrants and in the individual case management it provides. Our understanding of immigrant benefit qualifications, immigrant specific policies, and social work services has allowed us to combine these components and provide critical support for an often-forgotten group in the immigrant community.

Through the initial grant from the FFA combined with other funding sources, we have been able to expand our social work capacity over the last seven years. In 2022, we promoted Jonnelle Tavarez to Supervising Social Worker. Leveraging our experience, we secured funding from the state to hire four additional social workers who work with detained immigrants, immigrants facing deportation, and unaccompanied minors. Jonnelle supports a team of four social workers, plus social work interns, who annually serve approximately 100 immigrant clients in total. Among them, several are aging seniors. The expansion of AFSC's social work team makes our services and expertise more accessible to immigrant seniors from across the state.

3. Will your efforts/actions to impact the problem change? Describe.

On the individual level, we work toward positive changes that impact the lives of immigrant seniors and their families. On a wider systemic level, AFSC provides support to immigrants within a hostile and unjust system, seeking to reduce the number of immigrants, including seniors, who experience poverty, discrimination, and the harsh effects of detention. Access to services and advocacy support are vital for the physical and psychological wellbeing of seniors, allowing them to live dignified lives and putting them on more equal footing with others. Through working directly with seniors, AFSC staff are better equipped to speak to their experiences and to call for systematic change, including supporting public campaigns that expand immigrant eligibility for benefits and other immigration policy changes.

In the coming year, AFSC's Immigrant Senior Project plans to:

- Provide case management to current clients, adding an additional 6 to 8 senior immigrant clients to increase their access to needed services.
- Supervise and support the social work team members, including interns, who serve immigrant seniors in ICE detention facilities or in the community.
- Advocate for senior clients to ensure they receive the benefits they are entitled to and that they are treated with dignity.
- Conduct community presentations regarding immigrant eligibility for public benefits and particular issues facing senior immigrants.
- Research new services and update [the existing resource lists](#).
- Support state and national advocacy campaigns to expand eligibility for immigrants seeking public benefits.

4. Are there changes in funding or program implementation partners?

Through AFSC's positive track record in providing social work services, we have secured additional funding to grow our social work team and expand the reach of our services. Three social workers support immigrants who are detained in ICE detention facilities or were recently released from detention, as well as their families who remain in the community. One social worker supports immigrant youth and their families. In this expansion, Jonnelle supervises four other social workers, while continuing to provide direct individual case management services to seniors and consulting on and indirectly assisting with other seniors through the four social workers. This growth has also allowed us to expand networking efforts and identify potential community partners. Social work team members have connected with Bridgeway Rehabilitation Services of NJ, Mental Health Association of Essex County, and Haven Adolescent Respite to explore potential opportunities for collaboration.

5. How will you know if your actions are having an impact?

The impact of AFSC's Immigrant Senior Project Impact is evaluated by the continuous monitoring of each client's progress toward their intervention plan goals. We know we are having an impact when immigrant seniors gain or regain access to a service or benefit that increases their stability and eventually social mobility. The rapport and trust developed in the working relationship also allows Jonnelle to provide much needed support to alleviate feelings of isolation, which are common among older adults. Finally, Jonnelle tracks all services provided for each client, routinely checks in with each client, and gathers survey data to monitor each client's improvement and satisfaction with services rendered.

6. How will you sustain the program after the grant period?

Thanks to support from the Friends Foundation for the Aging, AFSC has been able to widen our scope of services, build our expertise in the elder services in New Jersey, and expand our social worker team over the last seven years. Current funding sources for this work include the State of New Jersey (through Legal Services of New Jersey and Kids in Need of Defense), the van Ameringen Foundation, the Friends Foundation for the Aging, and individual donors. While social work, mental health services, and case management services funders are scarce in philanthropy, we continue to vigorously seek funding for this program from other sources.

7. A project budget and amount of request.

We are asking for \$50,000 for the coming year. Please see attached for project budget.