

Justice for Our Neighbors South Texas

119 East Kelly Avenue, Pharr, TX 78577 (956) 787-1080

Spring 2011

Alicia's Story

Alicia and Noel were teenage sweethearts in Honduras in the early 1980s. By the time they graduated high school, they were already married and living together with their first daughter. Noel was a native-born United States citizen, however, and he decided to move his growing family to California in search of better job opportunities. When Alicia told him that she did not want to leave her home, her family and friends, he threatened to take the baby and warned that Alicia would have to cooperate if she hoped to see her daughter again. Fearful of losing her child, Alicia reluctantly allowed herself to be smuggled into the country in the trunk of Noel's car. Once they made it across, Noel apologized for having threatened her. He couldn't stand to lose either Alicia or the baby, he said, threatening her was the only way to keep the family together.

Their relationship continued to deteriorate, however. Noel refused to allow Alicia to take birth control, and she continued to have children. He called her a "wetback." When she told him she wanted to return home to Honduras, he said, "Then go. But you can't take the children."

The threats and the insults intensified until they ultimately culminated in violence. One day, when Alicia was five-months pregnant with her fifth child, Noel kicked her .

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Texas Bar Foundation Supports JFON

Thanks go out to the Texas Bar Foundation for their generous grant of \$10,000 to support the work of JFON-South Texas. The presentation was made by members of the Foundation including Sonia Falcon, International Bank of Commerce Senior Vice-President and attorneys Chuck Murray, Roberto Ramirez, Ray Tomas, Gary Gurwitz, Rebecca Vela, Sofia Ramon, Dan Worthington and Bill Ellis.

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Jesus said "...I was a stranger and you welcomed me."

Matthew 25:35

A Word About JFON

Justice for Our Neighbors (JFON) is a locally owned and operated ministry founded by The United Methodist Church Committee on Relief (UMCOR). Briefly, the two priorities of JFON are: first, to provide high quality immigration legal services and a warm welcome to immigrant newcomers in our communities and congregations. A top priority for me is the relationships that are built as a result of the program; relationships like the one I experienced getting to know "Alicia" in the story at the left.

Secondly, to foster greater cross-cultural community building and deeper moral reflections about the justness of current U.S. immigration policies through education for mission and advocacy

There are over 25 JFON regions country-wide. UMCOR provides training, legal oversight and attorney's malpractice insurance.

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Engaging Children—part of every intake clinic



Integrating Health & Wellness



Martha Williams, R.N., Wesley Nurse with Pharr United Methodist Church, is on hand at each Pharr clinic to offer health information, blood pressure screenings and referrals to other agencies. Each month Martha focuses on a different health issue.

At a recent clinic, a healthy breakfast of whole-grain pancakes, yogurt, applesauce and more was provided to all clients, visitors and volunteers, prepared by Martha and the health committee of the church. Along with a warm welcome and great food, Martha gave valuable information about nutrition to each person.

JFON-South Texas seeks to serve holistically, welcoming our immigrant friends and helping to open doorways to the fullness of life.

A Word *(continued from page 1)*

Intake “clinics” are held monthly at each location. Clients, seen by appointment, are initially interviewed by a trained volunteer who gathers information and copies of documents. The client then sees the attorney for legal assistance with completing documents, etc. and learning what their rights are. Compliance with current immigration law is maintained in all instances, and the client’s privacy is always respected.

Texas Bar Foundation ... *continued from page 1*

The Texas Bar Foundation solicits charitable contributions and provides funding to enhance the rule of law and the system of justice in Texas, especially for programs that relate to the administration of justice; ethics in the legal profession; legal assistance for the needy; the encouragement of legal research, publications and forums; and the education of the public.

The mission of the Texas Bar Foundation states that their contributions provide funding “especially for programs that relate to legal services for the underserved,” such as JFON.

In presenting the check to Rev. Carole Lahti, Regional Coordinator, MaryAnn Garza, Clinic Coordinator and Rev. Melanie Monroe, pastor of Pharr United Methodist Church, Ms. Falcon said “While the Texas Bar Foundation reaches every corner of the state, on a personal note, I am thrilled that this particular program has been granted, since I am also from the Valley..”

A huge thank you to all the members of Texas Bar Foundation for their support!!!

Mary Ann Garza, Pharr Clinic Coordinator

Mary Ann Garza, a member of First United Methodist Church, McAllen now is the servant coordinator of the Pharr Clinic. Mary Ann is shown below interviewing clients at a recent intake clinic.

In her volunteer position, MaryAnn schedules clinic appointments and volunteers to staff each clinic., coordinates the clinic activities, maintains supplies and a zillion other things needed to make a clinic run smoothly.



Mary Ann, thanks for your servant heart and your willingness to give so freely of yourself.

Alicia's Story *(continued from page 1)*

down the stairs. He walked down the stairs behind her; and as he passed her, he leaned over and said, "You should be ashamed—wallowing on the floor like that. What would the neighbors think?" That night, Noel raped Alicia repeatedly.

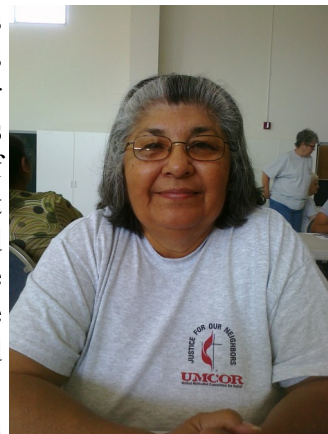
When Alicia awoke the next morning, she was hemorrhaging. She was taken to the hospital in an ambulance and delivered an extremely premature son who has suffered from profound mental and physical disabilities ever since his untimely birth.

Noel refused to file a petition with Immigration on behalf of Alicia. When Alicia's U.S. citizen sister petitioned for her, Noel returned the correspondence, claiming that Alicia did not live at that address. This was his way of perpetuating his control over her—by forcing her into a legally precarious situation so that he could continue to abuse her verbally, physically, and sexually and to threaten her with the loss of her children. Isolated from her sisters and totally dependent on Noel for financial support, Alicia had no escape and nowhere to turn for help.

That is, until she came to Justice for Our Neighbors of South Texas. Today, Alicia has obtained her first authorization to work in the United States and is awaiting her green card, both of which she applied for under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Thanks to JFON's team of attorneys and volunteers from the church and community—and thanks to the support of congregations and individual donors like you—Alicia has broken a cycle of abuse which repeated for 25 years. *(Names of people and places have been changed to protect privacy)*

The Servant Corner

Irene Raulston is this issue's featured servant. Irene has been an intake volunteer since JFON-South Texas started. She is a member of First United Methodist Church, Mission, TX, and she and her husband manage an RV park in Mission. Irene quickly establishes trust and friendship with new clients. Their tears and hers often flow together as she hears their stories, and her smile and prayers offer encouragement to everyone. Irene, thank you for all you do for JFON and our neighbors.



Standing: JFON National Staff Attorney, Danny Upton; Volunteers Earl Richardson, Claire Richardson, Irene Raulston, Carole Lahti, Shirley Melton, Ernesto Palma, Mary Ann Garza, Erica Richard. Seated: Friends of JFON

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Justice for Our Neighbors is supported by grants, fundraisers and donations from churches, organizations and individuals. Your support makes it possible to help Alicia, and others like her, as well as children and families in need. Your contribution will directly impact the lives of our most vulnerable neighbors struggling to make a better life for their families, to secure a job and to give back to society. Will you please help us help them? Your contribution is 100% tax-deductible. Please make your check payable to PCOP/Justice for Our Neighbors and mail to JFON, P.O. Box 626, Pharr, TX

Justice for Our Neighbors -
South Texas
P.O. Box 626
Pharr, TX 78577

Who We Are....

Justice for Our Neighbors South Texas is a program of the Pharr Community Outreach Project (PCOP), a ministry of Pharr United Methodist Church. PCOP is a 501c3 incorporated in the State of Texas.

For more information about Justice for Our Neighbors, go to <http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umcor/work/immigration/jfon/>

For more information about PCOP, go to www.pharrumc.com.

Thank You

Thanks to Bishop James Dorff of the Southwest Texas and Rio Grande Conferences of the United Methodist Church for selecting Justice for Our Neighbors South Texas Region to be the recipient of \$5000 on behalf each conference from the Texas Methodist Foundation's Endowment Fund.

Thanks to Alice Mar, JFON National Program Manager, for facilitating an excellent training retreat for our Board of Directors.

Thanks to all our volunteers and board members for the love they share, the time they give and the talent they bring.

Thanks to all who have given financial support to JFON South Texas ... churches, organizations and individuals.

Thanks to those who have made in-kind donations of office supplies, food for hospitality and much more.

Thanks to JFON National for all their support!



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