



“At this shelter, when people arrive we attend to them, we talk to them, and they tell us their stories.”

SOCIAL INVESTMENT PROFILE:
Albergue para Migrantes, San Juan Bosco IAP



Organization San Juan Bosco Migrant Shelter

Name Gilda Irene Esquer Felix

Position Legal Representative at the San Juan Bosco Migrant Shelter

What is the purpose of the shelter? The San Juan Bosco Migrant shelter is one of many deportee shelters in Nogales, Sonora. The shelter has ran since 1982, when it was started by Juan Francisco Loureiro and his wife Gilda. Here they provide food, shelter, and clothing to people headed from or to the U.S.

How did you begin working at the shelter? Gilda begins to recollect her history and says, “Well, I saw the necessity there was for a shelter in the past. Back then, there weren’t places for migrants to get help. People who were deported would arrive here in Nogales. They were sent back here to Nogales without anything. They didn’t have a place to go or a place to get help.” She then mentions how often migrants would have to huddle in plazas or by the railway station.

“It used to get so cold at night here in Nogales. We decided to help.” Since then, the shelter has remained open and in business, hosting around 100 migrants a day.

What has kept you working at the shelter for all these years? “We didn’t think we would need to be open all these years. But year after year, deportations have gotten worse,” Gilda says. In 2019, about 850,000 apprehensions were recorded, which were the highest they had been in 12 years.

“The situation hasn’t improved at all.” Having worked at the shelter for decades, Gilda has developed a unique view on current immigration issues.

What major changes have you noticed regarding immigration?

“In the past, migrants were able to cross more freely. Now, it’s more difficult because the U.S. has installed more surveillance and walls. It’s much much harder and there’s more risk involved.”

“There are more people who want to cross. We receive many resigned people who have fractured their spines, heels, or knees attempting to cross.”

What is your favorite part of working at the shelter?

“I love being able to attend the people we receive daily. I also like to take notice of who arrives. Each person who comes by is so different.”

“When people arrive, we attend to them, we talk to them, and they tell us their stories. The migrants from Central America, who suffer so much to reach this area, always have so much to talk to us about.”

What’s a regular day at the shelter like?

“Each day is about the same. We receive people, refugees, and we feed them. The amount of people we receive has changed a lot due to COVID-19. Now, we receive 60 people at the most most..”

Despite many challenges in the past decades, the San Juan Bosco Shelter is still open. “We have been here for 38 years and never have closed. During the influenza, we didn’t close. Even now, we’re still here. After 38 years. “

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