

Casa Mateo

Hope Through Hospitality

*For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink,
I was a stranger and you welcomed me... Matthew 25:35*

OUR MISSION

Casa Mateo welcomes displaced immigrants and asylum seekers by offering hope, hospitality and support services in an effort to promote self-sufficiency. Our goal is to create a shelter where vulnerable people who lack access to housing and basic necessities can resolve their immediate crises and begin rebuilding their lives.

OUR STORY

In 2019, parishioners from Christ Church Cathedral took their first of many trips to the southern border of the United States. They visited refugee encampments in Matamoros and shelters in McAllen. They met with US government officials, ranch owners, and faith-based and community leaders, all of whom are seeking to respond to the growing humanitarian crisis. The group also met with people fleeing violence, persecution, and devastating poverty to seek asylum in the US. Most arrive with no access to food, shelter, medical care or knowledge of how to navigate our country's legal asylum process. Their reasons for leaving their countries of origin are heartbreaking and the stories of their journeys are harrowing.

In early 2022, some of those same Cathedral members learned of a short-term emergency shelter in Houston that was inundated with men, women and children from all over the world who were desperately seeking help. Arriving with articles of clothing and a willingness to help, the parishioners soon learned that the demand for another shelter far outweighed the need for donations or volunteers. Through meetings with leaders from the City of Houston, nonprofits and other faith-based organizations, they were overwhelmed by the outpouring of support and pleas to build a new shelter. The group also developed a relationship with an Austin-based shelter whose 90-day program and comprehensive services help families build new lives with remarkable success. Inspired by that model, they proposed the creation of a similar facility in the city of Houston. The Episcopal Diocese of Texas generously offered a 6-acre campus and building, Christ Church Cathedral granted seed funding to make the needed modifications to the campus, and Casa Mateo was born.

CASA MATEO

Each year, tens of thousands of individuals arrive at the southern border of the United States. They travel there to escape untenable circumstances in their countries of origin, hoping to seek asylum in the US. An asylum seeker is a person who has left their home country to seek protection from persecution and serious human rights violations. The act of seeking asylum is legal under US law. The vast majority of those who are allowed to enter the US and pursue this claim are families, including women and children. The city of Houston is 350 miles from the border and home to one of sixty-eight immigration courts in the US, driving many families to our area.

All people who arrive in this country possess the gifts and capabilities to live a meaningful and productive life, but most immigrants experience inordinate disadvantages that impede their path to success. After enduring a typically months-long, dangerous journey, most asylum seekers arrive in the US without any possessions or knowledge of how to navigate life in this country. After the difficult trek, many experience lingering emotional trauma, urgent medical needs, and other immediate crises. Most do not speak English and the language barrier makes it extremely difficult to find work and the help they need, let alone to decipher the US's complex legal system. These are daunting obstacles that can easily derail any chance of success for a newcomer.

Most asylum seekers want the opportunity to live in a safe environment where they can create a healthy and productive life for their families. They are filled with hope and an aspiration to work and educate their children, but often do not possess the tools or resources to fulfill these goals. Opening in early 2024, Casa Mateo will offer nine to ten furnished bedrooms, individual showers/bathrooms, a laundry facility, shared kitchen, common areas and fenced, outdoor recreational spaces. Residents may stay for up to 90 days, allowing the time to address their immediate crises in a safe, welcoming environment while working on a long-term plan that leads to self-sustainability. With a comprehensive list of services designed to meet the specific needs of each family,

Casa Mateo will offer case management to assess each situation and devise a plan tailored to provide or connect families with the help they need. Through numerous partnerships across the city, Casa Mateo will work with existing organizations serving the immigrant population, connecting our residents with decades worth of expertise. At its inception, Casa Mateo will have the ability to shelter and serve over 200 family members a year with space and plans to grow.

The availability of safe shelter not only staves off homelessness in our community, but also protects this vulnerable population from threats of crimes such as human trafficking and extortion. Offering hope through hospitality, along with other vital resources, Casa Mateo provides an opportunity for families to not only survive, but to thrive in our community.

HOW TO HELP

Through generous gifts from the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, Christ Church Cathedral and other donors, Casa Mateo has a campus and initial funds to begin the development of this much-needed shelter. We are actively seeking partners to help fulfill our mission. Over the course of the next year, our Board of Directors and other volunteers will be working to raise money to complete the space, hire staff and begin operations. For more information, please contact info@casamateo.org.