

UIDN UPDATE JUNE 2021

That was quick! As the nation – and world – simmered in the record-breaking heat, it was easy to miss the rapid passage of this year. It is half over, but so many of our concerns at the turn of the calendar are still with us. New leadership in Congress and the presidency has been churning out unprecedented amounts of Covid recovery funds while a major fraction of our population and elected leaders continue to deny the reality of the pandemic and even the legitimacy of last year's election. Here in Ulster County, we keep our fingers crossed that Covid is really behind us, while we survey the new challenges it has brought, and the old ones still with us.

At UIDN, our focus is on the impact of these events on our immigrant friends. Many were laid off during the pandemic, without the social insurance buffers that helped others in that situation. Briefly recognized as the “essential workers” they are, they could not turn that recognition into payments for food or shelter. A temporary moratorium on evictions for non-payment of rent helped many and is still in place after multiple renewals, but it simply delays a looming crisis of homelessness for those who fell far behind, exacerbated by galloping gentrification in Ulster County. That is why UIDN focused intently on direct support of food and shelter needs over the past year.

Fortunately, most jobs for our immigrant friends have resumed. Some of our friends will qualify for federal recovery aid, but most will not. Meanwhile, NY's legislature passed the EWF (Excluded Workers Fund), a bill to fund excluded workers' relief, and that relief is targeted intentionally to help people like our friends. THANK YOU, NY LEGISLATORS!

All things considered, the first half of 2021 has been a time of slowly shifting gears in the work of UIDN. Covid and Trumpism are hopefully behind us, along with their threats to deprive our hard-working friends of food, shelter, and legal protections. We therefore can return to helping our friends find a secure place in our country and in this county, like all the Americans who, as immigrants themselves, came before them.

FOOD AND SHELTER: Two tireless teams of UIDN volunteers can look back at June as a month when the shift in needs became apparent.

- Our **weekly free food pantry** at Holy Cross Santa Cruz Church in Kingston serves immigrant families who walk or carpool often with their children. Fewer people have needed food as their jobs have resumed, so we are within our food and household support budget to date. The event, Wednesdays, 4-6 p.m., remains an opportunity to meet community members and learn more about their lives and needs. A collaboration with the **Institute for Family Health** (IFH) allows us to offer simple health checks and information on how to access care when their staff joins UIDN on the first Wednesday of each month. As we learn more about our friends' health needs, we will be able to plan further health initiatives.

- The need for financial assistance with shelter costs has not lessened. Though some families have been helped to keep up their **Rent and Utilities** payments, others have accumulated threatening levels of debt. Since our financial resources are limited, we have developed much appreciated collaborations with larger regional charities that accept our referrals. From January through May, we raised and distributed close to \$130,000 in direct shelter assistance. In January, we helped 29 families with \$29,000 in rent bills and 39 with \$11,000 in utilities bills. In June, by contrast, only two families requested help with rent (\$800) and four needed help with utilities (\$400). Others were referred to cooperating agencies.

We have also joined a coalition of Ulster County organizations (Catholic Charities, Department of Social Services, Family of Woodstock, RUPCO, and the Salvation Army) working together to help county residents apply for the federally funded Emergency Rental Assistance Program. ERAP applies to only some of our immigrant friends and requires that landlords agree to accept payment from ERAP to address their tenant's debt. In our overheated real estate market, some landlords would rather refuse payment so they can terminate or evict their tenants and sell their property. We are checking in with landlords who have cooperated with UIDN in the past to encourage them to accept ERAP if their tenants are eligible.

A greater potential benefit for our friends will come from the NY State program, **Excluded Workers Fund (EWF)**, which is expected to begin accepting applications in mid-late August.

Our tireless volunteers are working with Family of Woodstock and the Worker Justice Center of NY on these initiatives and on getting the word out to our immigrant friends.

IMMIGRATION COURTS REOPEN (REALLY!) Time and again, since March 2020, a date has been set for immigration courts in NYC to reopen, only to be postponed for months as Covid held us in its grip. Once again, we've been told of an opening date: Tuesday, July 6, and this time it seems to be for real.

For immigrants seeking asylum, the decision of this court is an essential element in their bid to obtain permanent residence or their hopes for future citizenship for themselves and their families. US laws make this process an extensive, elusive, and expensive quest. And, while the "Court" (an administrative arm of the Justice Department, not a part of the federal judiciary) plods along, month after month, other federal agencies, notably ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement), stay alert for any mistake that can enable them to deport you.

From our beginnings, UIDN has acted to assist immigrants keep their appointments before the court and their obligatory check-ins with ICE. The most important help in this regard is transportation to the City and back – which is a full-day process. Together with rides provided when a friend has an out-of-town medical appointment, transportation costs for UIDN can amount to nearly \$900 per month. As our food and shelter costs decline, this cost will likely be rising again soon.

Please bring this message to any asylum seeker you know.

To find out if you have a new hearing date scheduled, call 800-898-7180.

You will need to have your Alien (A) number when you call. ***You must not miss your scheduled court hearing. If you do not appear in court, the judge can order you deported.*** If you need a ride to your court hearing appointment, call UIDN's Helpline, 888-726-7276 to schedule a ride.

HELPING OUR FRIENDS GET A DRIVER'S LICENSE: Last year's Green Light campaign convinced NY State to reestablish the opportunity for non-citizens to get a driver's license. Since then, we have been working with Worker Justice Center of NY to help our friends pass the driver's license test. Together, we produced a 5-session, non-interactive, online webinar series in Spanish. See it yourself on UIDN's [website](#), the [WJCNY website](#), or [YouTube](#).

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA: UIDN's UPDATE newsletter only shows up once a month, but you can learn more about our work at our always-evolving [website](#), on [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#). The website and Facebook are available in English and Spanish. These sources help to get critical information to those who need it. In June, nearly 500 people viewed the driver's license webinar, and nearly 400 people viewed a promo for Catholic Charity's live session on how to apply for NYS's Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP).

SCHOOL IS OUT: For most public-school students, the school year that just ended was probably the worst they will ever live through, cut off from in-person contact with teachers and classmates. A large percentage of them in Ulster County had the added stress of learning in a new language while their families grappled with lay-offs and mounting debt.

Two years before the pandemic hit, UIDN volunteers had begun after-school programs and tutoring in Kingston and New Paltz. While major efforts were made to continue the well-received programs, the scale and format of the programs was not sustainable during the pandemic. For a list of summer childcare, fun, and learning opportunities for kids visit UIDN's [resources](#).

Now, the schools are hoping to make up some lost ground with in-person summer school programs. Meanwhile, volunteers from UIDN's original program have continued to connect with some of the students they knew. Whether we can resume the earlier effort next fall and build on it will depend on finding one or more volunteers who want to lead the effort, and others who are ready to tutor students in person again. If that appeals to you, please email [Helaine](#), the lead for Volunteer Recruitment and Coordination.

WHAT KEEPS US GOING: After four-and-a-half years, UIDN can look back on multiple accomplishments to support our immigrant friends and neighbors. Some of them were things we did all on our own; others were the result of collaborations we have been able to forge. But it is remarkable that the “we” in both cases were unpaid volunteers, learning as we went. UIDN has never had a single employee.

Without a doubt it is **volunteers** who keep us going. And given our ambitions, we have an endless appetite for new volunteers. Some come to us to fill a slot we have “advertised” in our media or as we talk with friends and neighbors. Others come with an idea of how to work with our allies to help our friends. We need and welcome both kinds of volunteers. To explore your options, please email [Helaine](#), UIDN’s volunteer coordinator.

However, volunteers alone could not have kept us going as we confronted the staggering costs of food and shelter facing our friends in a time of layoffs and illness. We also needed money. And we still do: Our goals for 2021 call for a revenue stream of \$437,000 including \$15,000 of in-kind food donations.

Lucky us! Our **grant-seeking** volunteers have proved to be exceptionally skillful and relentlessly energetic. Already, this year, 12 public and private non-profit grants have brought us \$260,000 for projects in 2021. And further grant applications are in the works.

And that leaves **individual contributions**. We need about \$160,000 in donations this year to accomplish our goals. And at the year’s halfway mark, we are a bit behind. If you have been one of our angels in the past, we hope you will give again to keep us on the job. If you have not taken this step before, we hope you will consider supporting UIDN with a tax-deductible donation. Please go to: <https://ulsterimmigrantdefensenetwork.org/donate>

Because, whether you donate or volunteer, or both – **YOU are what keeps us going!**

See you next month...