



# ***JUBILEE PARTNERS REPORT***

## **Spring 2021**

***“I will now rise up,” says the Lord. “I will place them in the safety for which they long.” Psalm 12:5 (NRSV)***

On Monday afternoons in the Jubilee School, a group of women gather to share from their hearts about their experiences of the week, and to reflect on the process of emotional healing that they are going through. The sharing circle opens each week with the lighting of a candle, to remember women who are still threatened by violence, held in detention, living in abusive relationships or trapped in exploitative work situations. The women at Jubilee take this moment each week to sit together, praying that all these people may be delivered into safety.

Most of the families coming to Jubilee these days have been through a very recent encounter with violence and trauma in some form. Violence is a force in the lives of all refugees, of course, though in some cases the trauma associated with fleeing their homes is years in the past by the time they arrive in the United States. Most of the families at Jubilee right now, however, have come out of emergency shelters or immigrant detention centers, and these families have faced violent and traumatic experiences only weeks or months ago. The trauma may be related to war or gang activities, domestic abuse, or labor trafficking. It may have occurred while the family was in their home country, here in the United States, or during the difficult journey to the U.S. border. As a community, we are learning something right now about what it means to walk alongside people in the very early stages of recovery from these experiences.

One member of our community, Brenda, lived through a situation in her own life that is similar to ones faced by families now coming to Jubilee. Brenda first arrived at Jubilee in 2017, and she is now a novice in the community and a member of the team providing leadership of our hospitality program. Because of her personal experiences, she is in a special position to support the women in the Welcome Center, and also to help the rest of us to better understand their experience here.



**Watercolor-painting with the women.**



**(Above & Below) Denia, Chou, Sue, Elizabeth, and Brenda prepare delicious Honduran pupusas for the community.**

Before coming to Jubilee, Brenda spent time living in a women's shelter with her newborn daughter after leaving an abusive situation. She describes the cloud of anxiety and uncertainty that enveloped her in that time:

"I was very concerned about how I was going to get ahead, since I hardly knew anything about this country — and more because I was a new mother. I did not know how to speak English, I did not have relatives close to help me. At that time the uncertainty was great — the dark place in which I found myself, and the fear that I had. I couldn't see any solutions to my problems. I didn't even know whether to trust the shelter."

Brenda talks about how debilitating these feelings of anxiety were in those first months. For example, she wanted to learn English in order to better provide for herself and her daughter, but she found that the anxiety she was feeling made it impossible to make progress with the language. When Brenda talks about the women here at Jubilee, she emphasizes that it takes time for this general sense of anxiety and fear to begin to lift. She also emphasizes how informal gestures of neighborliness and friendship — things that are easy to offer in this



community setting — can play a very powerful role in helping to make a person feel safe and secure.

Mental health services play an important role, too. Each of the residents in Jubilee's Welcome Center right now is connected by phone with a professional counselor who speaks her native language and has experience working with victims of violence and abuse. These weekly counseling sessions help people to develop strategies and skills for coping with the ongoing effects of the trauma. Recently, Brenda and another woman in the Welcome Center, Silvia, have also participated in a pilot workshop that is being developed by Elaine Zook Barge, a trauma and resilience educator and friend of the community. The workshop is designed specifically to help immigrants and refugees address the trauma of migration.

Silvia shared recently what she has learned through these classes and also through her counseling sessions. Silvia said that she has come to realize that she is a brave and very strong woman who has not been broken or defeated, despite all the storms she has faced. This, she said, makes her feel very valuable. Silvia went on to talk about the process of healing as she is experiencing it right now. "I try to forgive, to feel at peace, leaving my past behind, accepting what happened; to no longer cling to my past and no longer live in it. In my spiritual life, I try to get closer to God and to love him."

The Women's Circle started several months ago with the purpose of providing a safe space where women at Jubilee could share stories, feelings, and thoughts like this with one another as they travel on their journey of healing. The circle includes both Welcome Center residents and women from the Jubilee staff. In any given week, there might be an art activity, a time to speak in response to some question or prompt, or a time to reflect on the week. Jubilee volunteer Sarah Dunham organized the Women's Circle. She explains, "It's not counseling; it's not a group therapy session. It's a space to be seen and heard, and that's a really important step as people are facing and dealing with their trauma: to have a safe space to share."



**Lorraine and Cedar love babies.**



**Kids participate in the children's story at worship.**

**Be sure to check out Jubilee's brand new website! Same address, new look:**

**[www.jubileepartners.org](http://www.jubileepartners.org)**

Jubilee volunteer Denia Flores, who is now facilitating the group, describes how meaningful the Women's Circle has been to her personally as she grieves the death of her husband from COVID last year.

“For me, the circle of women has been a special space. I share about all the changes that I have had to make to move forward, and share with the women how God has been with me all the time. The circle of women gave me strength and ideas about how to commemorate my husband one year after he passed away. This is a space where we can express our feelings. It is a space for smiles, to pray together, a space to encourage each other and to know more about the people in the group, to have more connections, deeper relationships.”

Another participant in the Women's Circle, Ulyana, described how the communication and conversations in the circle have helped to draw her out of her own thoughts when that is what she needed. Ulyana also talks about the importance of moving and engaging with the things and the people around her as she copes with the effects of her trauma. "I try to do different activities at Jubilee so I don't sit, because if I do that my mind would just go on thinking and thinking, and that's not healthy for me. So that's why I like to help with the garden or to do some cleaning at the K-House. Sometimes I do it by myself, and sometimes with other people. Also, sometimes I go for a walk. I like to move since I feel that gives me life. For me, movement is life."

Ulyana shared as well about her process of healing over the past few months. "When I came to Jubilee, in the beginning I was in a depression and it was going back and forth for some time. But now I feel much better. Sometimes I have depression, but it's just for a short time and that makes me feel better. When I was depressed, I practically did not see the world; everything was closed and dark. Now I see the colors of the world, and the joy of living."

"The promises of the Lord are promises that are pure," says Psalm 12. The psalm promises us, like many other parts of Scripture, that God hears the cries of people who are mistreated and that God is at work in our world to bring healing and justice. We don't know the ways or the time in which this work unfolds, but we can see its fruit in the lives of the families here. For that we are thankful.

## *from the people of Jubilee*

**A couple groups of young people from the New Meadow Run & Maple Ridge Bruderhof communities joined us for several days of work projects, music, meals, games, and fellowship.**

### Who we are

Jubilee Partners is an ecumenical Christian service community in northeast Georgia. We offer hospitality to refugees, asylum seekers, and other immigrants who have fled violence or persecution.

We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization; donations are thus tax-deductible. Your donations and support of our work are most appreciated.

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**Left: Spring Volunteers hold up their “paper plate awards” at our celebration picnic at Lake Hartwell.**

**Below: The kids bounce to their hearts’ content all day long at Brayan’s birthday party.**



**Above: Lorraine & MuLa Paw build bench seats in their wood-working class.**

**Right: Margaret looks on as the big kids play a socially-distanced game.**



**View Jubilee’s newsletter in color online at [www.jubileepartners.org](http://www.jubileepartners.org)!**

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**Spring 2021**



The Women's Sharing Circle display their crafted flower barrettes.