

Proyecto Rio Grande Valley Update



Proyecto RGV is a ministry from **Embrace UCC**. It operates as an open and affirming United Church of Christ **emerging community** that seeks to do justice in the **Rio Grande Valley** for immigrants, refugees, people in the margins, LGBTQ+ humans, and support the people who love them.

Mission: Proyecto RGV seeks to address the polarization of political-religious division in our community through innovative ways that harvest **radical inclusion**. We aim to connect through community projects that promote human dignity and justice.

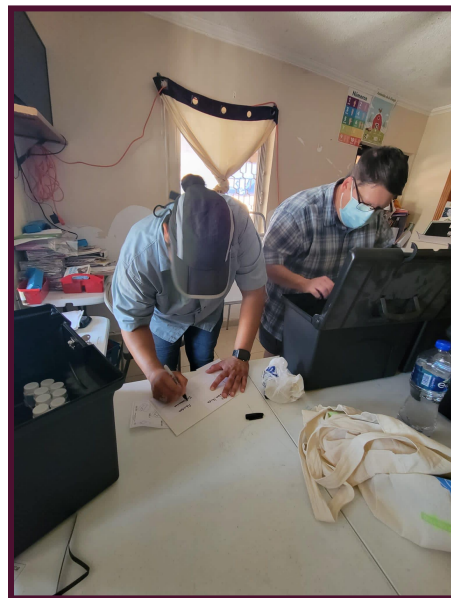
Vision: Create an open space where people in the Rio Grande Valley can connect, engage, and support individuals and families. Proyecto RGV cultivates a space where refugees of both physical and spiritual needs can find the **restorative power of love and hope** in the wilderness.

Proyecto RGV is an integral part of Embrace UCC outreach ministry that received grant funds to support their work. The funds provided by the **Grant Neighbors Helping Neighbors** impacted UCC Embrace by engaging the congregants in **justice work** with migrants. The grant has been an **educational experience** for our congregation as much as it is an opportunity to serve our

migrant neighbors in need. The grant also provides the church with an opportunity to travel to the US Mexico border to **connect** and distribute assistance to asylum seekers.

The direct engagement with migrants and the organizations providing them support has been an eye-opening experience of the suffering of the migrants, the **asylum process** and the **changing geopolitics** of the region. The engagement with the distribution of support for the migrants also allowed the congregants to **witness the hope** found in the core value of the meaning of neighbors helping neighbors. <https://www.facebook.com/ProyectoRGV/>

Joel Brotzman-Gonzales, who lives in the Rio Grande Valley in Harlingen and who is a virtual member (online attendee) of Embrace UCC and a part of Proyecto RGV, has been praying for an active UCC ministry in the Rio Grande Valley for many years. On our last trip to the Valley, Joel was able to accompany us to Reynosa to visit the migrant shelter and clinic and also took time to volunteer at the Brownsville Bus Station with Team Brownsville.



Proyecto RGV with Clinic Lulu

Joel shared: “The need is great on the Border in the Rio Grande Valley to serve our neighbors, especially migrants who are fleeing oppression in their own countries due to identifying as LGBTQ+. While there are many churches and religious organizations on the ground who are serving migrants, we in the UCC through Proyecto RGV are in the unique position where we are the **only faith-based program who will help, affirm, and celebrate those who identify as LGBTQ+**. As UCC, we have an obligation here on the border to fulfill our mission as a church - to welcome all, love all, and seek justice for all.”

The grant funds have impacted organizations and individuals in the US and in the Mexico Border in many positive ways. Cindy Candia an NGO working for **Angry Tías and Abuelas** at the **Lulu Clinic** at Border states:

“For months we have been unable to keep up with the medication needs that continue to grow at the pop-up clinic servicing the displaced asylum seekers. "Clinic Lulu" has given medical treatment to over 2,500 migrants to date. Haitians make up the greatest percentage of patients, here they receive quality, compassionate care with providers prioritizing language justice. Personnel capacity continues to increase as medical providers volunteer their expertise and time, but without funding we cannot fill the prescriptions. There has been a desperate need for the money necessary to purchase medication. We are appreciative of the generous contribution that will help us ensure the proper treatment plan is followed for each asylum seeker that entrusts us with their physical wellbeing.”



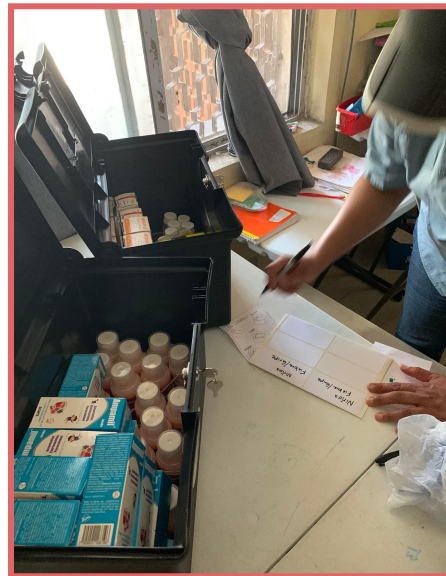
Proyecto RGV & Angry Tías Y Abuelas @ Clinic Lulu

Our work and your donations have a direct impact in the lives of asylum seekers as they wait at the US Mexico Border. During our journey we had the opportunity to talk to many of those waiting at the camps we serve. Their pain and struggle is visible not only due to the difficult conditions they experience at the camps; but also due to the uncertainty they live every day as they hope to begin a new life of safety and opportunity in the US.



Migrant Camp US Mexico Border

We wanted to share with you some of the conversations we shared with the asylum seekers. They are all quick to share about their hopes and dreams. We are truly inspired by their positive attitude in the midst of so much despair:



Proyecto RGV and Camp Nurse

One of them is an asylum seeker from Haiti, a certified nurse in her country who cares for those sick at the camp. She looks forward to continuing to care for others as she says, “it’s what keeps me hopeful, is **the only thing I know to do, to care for others.**”

Another migrant is a teacher from Haiti who gathers over 150 kids (at this camp alone) daily for a quick lesson. In his words, “it’s just one small way to keep their minds off their reality for a little bit.”



Migrant Camp Classes

Proyecto RGV Worship Service

During our previous mission trips we heard the need from our community for a safe space to worship. The RGV is currently under the microscope of **geopolitical and religious influences** that have made it **unsafe for LGBTQ+, those serving refugees and anyone in the margins**. Our small group had the opportunity to gather in person for the first time since 2020 with some of our ministry partners, UCC online members in the RGV and spiritual refugees for a worship service.



Our small group worships online with Embrace UCC and gathers online and in person for worship and support. We provide **the only justice driven, open and affirming denominational spaces in our community**. We have become a **respite for those in the margins in need for a safe space to worship and create community**.

In our conversations with the NGOs operating in the Rio Grande Valley area, volunteers and community members we identified the following needs and wants to continue the success of their mission:

- Establish partnership with inclusive organizations that celebrates and welcomes racial equality, immigration justice and LGBTQ+ individuals.
- Cooperation and support from religious organizations with progressive views that welcome and treat all with respect and humanity.
- Allow for an opportunity for volunteers to join in our efforts to gain insight of the reality lived by migrants at the border. The hope is that rather than to allow the government's/news narrative to dictate our perception of the migrants and the border, our missionaries will speak out of their experience. As our volunteers rejoin their communities they will serve as witnesses of how policies and conversations about the border affects migrant's lives and their future.
- An active and constant presence of progressive Christian church that provides a safe space to worship and build community.

For more information: <https://www.facebook.com/ProyectoRGV/>