

# Sin Barreras/Without Barriers, Inc. 2019 ANNUAL REPORT

## Introduction

Sin Barreras is a Charlottesville NGO offering services to the mostly Hispanic immigrant community. Founded in 2012 by area residents concerned that immigrants were not availing of social services because of language obstacles and there was no organization adequately addressing other Hispanic immigrant issues, it earned its 501(c)(3) status in July 2014. After three years run by volunteers, in 2016 it began paying its first part-time employee, now in 2020 up to one full-time and three part-timer staff. Overseen by a five-person Board, it is also assisted by two long-term volunteers and two-dozen short-term ones. This is its fifth Annual Report.

## I. Executive Summary

Sin Barreras' now-completed second Three-Year Strategic Plan focused on improved service provision via workshops on topics of Hispanic community interest and one-on-one client services, improved functioning, and strengthened Advocacy with like-minded organizations.

Responding to the increasingly anti-immigrant national rhetoric, Sin Barreras provided direct services this year to 4,300 people and indirect services to another 3,825. Summarizing:

- Total direct and indirect clientele summed to 8,150 people, up by almost 2,500 from last year.
- We offered office visit services to 1,159 one-on-one clients in 2019, over **twice** as many as last year.
- We presented 15 workshops to 1,388 attendees. Almost half of these were Mexican citizens renewing documents through SB's ongoing relationship with the Mexican Consulate.
- We responded to over 1,800 telephone calls, up 15% from 2018.
- We assisted 527 clients in immigration and legal affairs, up 35% from last year. With the continued pro bono services of three immigration lawyer colleagues and our two accredited representatives, we provided DACA and immigration consultations to 372 clients, a 29% increase from 2018, not counting nearly 170 citizenship tutoring sessions.
- For the seventh year in a row, we co-hosted *Cville Sabroso*, Charlottesville's only Latin American music and dance festival with over 3,800 attendees (not shown in the chart.)
- We have dramatically expanded our Advocacy this year on many different fronts to be discussed in more detail below.
- Again this year we have benefitted from enormously strong volunteer time: just under 8,000 hours in 2019, representing an in-kind value equivalent of over \$194,000
- Also this year we won important grants to help meet payroll: from the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation, the Bama Works Foundation, the City of Charlottesville, various church and community groups, and several generous individual donors. Our financial position is enough to close to covering 12 months of operational costs planned in 2020.
- And our President and Founder, Fanny Smedile, has won the Governor's Latino/x Leadership Prize for 2019. What wonderful recognition of her contribution!



## II. Accomplishment Detail

### A. Workshops and Other Community Events

The first pillar of Sin Barreras' Mission is providing group services and workshops focused on Hispanic immigrant community needs. We hosted fifteen such events this year for over 1,388 attendees, a 14% increase from 2018. Two of these were facilitated for the Mexican Consulate offering 625 people the opportunity to process their Mexican government documents without an all-day trip to Washington, D.C. Eight other events were put on by the Charlottesville Community I.D. project where Sin Barreras volunteers, and others, supported 539 people signing up for local identification documents. Others included English as a Second Language classes each week, two financial literacy workshops, mammogram visits, a dental exam day, a tenants' rights workshop, and more. Not even



Mexican Consulate Visit

included in this total were 240 people who attended the "Multicultural Health Fair" co-hosted by SB, the Latinx Health Initiative, the National Coalition of 100 Black Women and other, which offered cardiovascular and diabetes screening, dental services, vision screening, stress reduction and other health care topics, and a similar number of people enjoying the Albemarle County Bike Fair afternoon.



Financial Literacy Workshop

**Leadership Development:** In conjunction with the Sacred Heart Immigrant Center in Richmond, we co-hosted a two-semester, 80-hour study program in Civics and Leadership Development for fifteen Hispanics. Created by the Sacred Heart Center – now in its fifth year offering it in Richmond (though the first in Charlottesville) -- the course awarded a Certificate of Accomplishment from the University of Richmond on successful completion of studies to all fifteen course participants. Our Mayor, the Charlottesville Mayor, Nikuyah Walker and Police Chief RaShall Brackney, and other local officials participated in the ceremony!



**Symposium:** Sin Barreras replicated our 2018 first-ever Symposium on the Hispanic experience—in 2019, for the Spanish-speaking audience. Three morning events took place with six different presentations: two on U.S. involvement in the Americas and immigration law; two on the health situation of the Hispanic community and contributions to U.S. society; and two on current immigration law and ICE enforcement practices. Twenty people attended and each of the presentations was filmed and is available on our website.



As in 2018, we also participated in events hosted by partner entities: Charlottesville's Festival of Cultures; a community mobilization event put on by *Indivisible* Charlottesville; several workshops put on by our sister organization, *Creciendo Juntos*; and others, providing Sin Barreras information to hundreds people whom we would otherwise not reach.

## **B. One-on-One Services**

Our second pillar of activities is one-on-one services, responding to over 1,800 telephone calls in 2019. We also conducted 1,159 individual appointments, **more than double** 2018's total.

**Legal Consultations:** For 155 clients we advised on many "big" legal issues: detention, bond hearings, job discrimination, divorce and custody cases, court appearances, driving offenses, and others. But we also bring about other quality-of-life improvements. A dozen or more people requesting help to obtain titles to their automobiles. Dozens of request for assistance in dealing with traffic court. Dozens of requests for Virginia State Police reports. Over a hundred documents translated (sometimes provided by volunteers who continue to help even after moving to Massachusetts and Colorado!) Dozens of permission letters so minor children can leave the country. Lots of clients with previous income tax return errors that need to be corrected, some of whom who had to get advice on scheduling a repayment plan. One person needing paperwork to establish guardianship for an unaccompanied Honduran minor. Our call log is filled with hundreds of such "small" accomplishments. In the fall, we enhanced our legal assistance with the arrival of a second lawyer volunteer offering advice on such legal topics.

**Immigration:** Meanwhile, immigration is likely *the* most important issue facing most of the area's immigrant community. Three years ago Sin Barreras received USG recognition to offer immigration services from two Department of Justice-approved non-lawyer volunteers called Accredited Representatives. Also benefitting from the contribution of three local immigration lawyers, in 2019 Sin Barreras had five pro bono volunteers providing immigration services. This year, we counseled 539 DACA and immigration clients, **more than double** the figure from last year. These efforts resulted in the following successful outcomes: twenty-eight people achieved their citizenship dreams; fourteen people received or renewed their Green Cards; twenty-five people renewed their DACA status; and forty-two people processed U visa, T visa, asylum and other petitions (still in process.) See Section III for a few stories.

**Language Training:** A service begun last year was one-on-one English-as-a-Second-Language training for thirteen Latinos who want to integrate better into U.S. society. UVA student volunteers from Madison House, the Latinix Group, and Migrant Aid helped carry out this training, an initiative that will continue in 2020.

**Legal Assistance Fund:** Several years ago, Sin Barreras received a special donation to create a set-aside fund to help immigrants with difficulties paying USG document fees or other pressing financial needs. One beneficiary of that fund this year was a, penniless Honduran woman who came to Sin Barreras for assistance with her asylum claim and whose case we were able to 'prep' for transferring to a local immigration attorney. Another was less dramatic—a loan to a young DACA applicant – without SB he didn't have the money to file. He is now repaying the loan! Use of this fund has been a wonderful addition to our services.

**Naturalization Exam Coaching:** The Naturalization exam requires knowledge of 100 civics questions, writing a dictated sentence, and some conversational English. Many applicants are ill-prepared for this test,



**Two new citizens in the same ceremony!**

and coaching them takes months sometimes—sessions every two weeks as the client painstakingly memorizes civics questions and learns how to write an English sentence. This year we provided 167 such tutoring session. So far every clients has passed his/her test, with citizenship being the prize!

**Eye Examinations and Eyeglasses:** This year with the collaboration of the Virginia chapter of the Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity NGO we have begun monthly eye examinations and free eyeglasses distribution for those who do not have health insurance to cover such costs. In the Fall, we had three such evenings benefitting a dozen-and-a-half patients. Some of our UVA Medical School volunteers report –in awe— that many of these people should never have been driving without glasses, and now they can! With a recently-won grant from the (Dave Mathews’) Bama Works Fund, we will expand this service in 2020.



**LADYS:** In 2019, Sin Barreras was awarded a support grant to LADYS (Leadership, Advancement, and Development of our Young Sisters), a program of the Alpha Rho Chapter of Sigma Lambda Upsilon at UVA. The grant will help LADYS to empower a dozen or so young women of color in middle and high school through biweekly workshops and one-to-one mentoring in topics such as college and career preparation, service to the community, pride in one’s culture, and others. We are pleased to add LADYS to our cadre of volunteers!

**Asylum Support:** During the year we prepared several complex asylum petitions, which we then handed-on to immigration colleagues for filing and case management.

**Governor’s Award for Latino/x Leadership:** We take enormous pride in announcing that Governor Ralph Northam has awarded the Governor’s 2019 Latino/x Leadership award to our President and founder, Fanny Smedile, in recognition of her many years of selfless service to the Hispanic community in Virginia. Bravo, Fanny! We will be celebrating this award with the community in a suitable event in the upcoming months.

### C. Advocacy

The third pillar of our service to the community, Advocacy, was given a big boost this year by the formation of a working group of SB supporters dedicating specific attention to broader messages impacting the community. Meeting twice a month, among the group’s important accomplishments has been the preparation of fifteen position papers which the SB Board has then approved and published on our website. Among them are the following:

- **Denial of Bond for Asylee:** Opposition to denial of asylee opportunity to post bail.
- **Fewer asylum cases:** Opposition to establishing the annual ceiling for asylee applications **ten times less** than in previous years.
- **“Border Crisis”:** Opposition to the Attorney General’s “zero tolerance policy” of separating children from parents – knowing beforehand the USG did not have the capacity to track them—and then “losing” over two thousand children in the system.
- **“National Emergency”** (sic): Opposition to the President declaring a supposed national emergency to confront a wave of asylum candidates fleeing violence in Central America.

- **Temporary Protective Status:** Support of 300,000 (largely) Central Americans who have lived in the U.S. for sometimes 20 years, contributing meaningfully to U.S. society.
- **Children in Custody:** Opposition to an undefined time limit to keep children in jail.
- **First Safe-Country:** Opposition to requirement that people apply for asylum in Central American countries where citizens themselves are fleeing systemic violence.
- **ICE Raids:** Opposition to court decisions saying ICE has the right to break into immigrant houses with impunity.
- **DREAM Act:** Support for a permanent solution to DACA children's immigrant status.
- **Immigration Fee Hikes:** Opposition to substantial hike in fees for immigrant petitions.
- **Public Charge legislation:** Opposition to denying immigrant petitions if the family has benefited from previous U.S. social services [now approved by the Supreme Court.].
- **Remain in Mexico Policy:** Opposition to forbidding asylum candidates to come into the U.S. and prepare their asylum petitions with U.S. support networks.
- **Border Wall Funding:** Opposition to the diversion of \$3.6 billion to build the wall.
- **ACRJ:** Denouncing the Albemarle County Regional Jail's policy of informing ICE 48 hours before completion of Hispanic inmates' sentences.
- **Drivers Licenses:** Statement of support for helping Hispanic become eligible for Virginia drivers licenses, as sixteen other States do, including (last month) New York state.
- Further information on each of these topics is available at <http://sinbarrerascville.com> under the "Issues" tab.
- We have also engaged in a number of other activities, as follows:

**The Virginia Legislature:** As in the last seven years, Sin Barreras organized a "Visit-Your-Legislator Day" to Richmond, which was particularly important this year because of the Democratic majority in the Virginia Legislature for the first time in twenty-six years. Advocacy on drivers licenses for all was high on our list of topics. Dozens of Hispanic Charlottesville residents accompanied SB Board members in making these presentations.

**The Albemarle County Regional Jail:** Sin Barreras has been an active member lobbying the Albemarle County Regional Jail to change its policy of informing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) 48 hours in advance of Hispanics finishing their jail sentences. Also lobbying against the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program, we supported the end to the practice of the regional jail receiving jail space payment for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detainees.

**Meetings with Local Political Leaders:** Once during the year accompanying an SB-nurtured Leadership group, we met with our Senator, the Honorable Creigh Deeds, discussing priority Hispanic issues. Several times we met with the Charlottesville Chief of Police, RaShall Brackney.



Meeting with Police Chief

**County outreach:** We co-hosted several get-to-know-you events between our community and the Albemarle County during the year, a bike fair (above), and several Board members accompanying the community and ACPD officers who walked with in a three-hour, pre-dawn pilgrimage through the city celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe Day.

**DACA Rally:** We participated with about 150 others in a rally to support DACA in front of the Federal Court house in Charlottesville.

**Public Information:** From time to time, we are asked to present Hispanic issues to various groups—not so much Advocacy as “provision of community information.” One such event was to sixty people at the MERCK Pharmaceuticals plant in Waynesboro.

**State-wide Activism:** We also were co-hosts of the Virginia Coalition of Latino Organization’s (VACALAO) State-wide Sixth Annual conference held in Northern Virginia.

#### **D. Cville Sabroso**



*Cville Sabroso*, central Virginia’s only Latin American music and dance festival, was another great success this year, with 3,850 adult attendees, up 60% from last year’s attendance, not even counting children! It was a beautiful day for music and fun: for Latinos and non-Latinos, families with young children, and the wider Charlottesville community of all ages. Different nationalities performed their countries’ music and dance dressed in colorful national costumes. Delicious ethnic food came from Hispanic-owned food

providers. Volunteers offered crafts and kids’ face-painting. *Cville Sabroso* shows the richness of Hispanic society and has become an integral part of Charlottesville’s cultural calendar.



#### **E. Grants**

Sin Barreras received generous support from numerous grantors in 2019. One was the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation (CACF) to defray part of the salary of our first full-time employee, another from the city supporting general administration costs. We also benefitted from local churches’ support, particularly the Thomas Jefferson Memorial United Universalist Church, and others. While we still operate on a shoe-string, institutional and private support has come forward this year to help us to maintain one full-time person and three part-time staff who organize, coordinate and supervise the wide range of our volunteer activities. We are enormously appreciative of these financial votes of confidence.

#### **F. Volunteering and Financing**

Volunteers are the backbone of our organization, and as in previous years, total volunteer hours have been gratifying. Total hours were 7,795, almost the same as in 2018. Average volunteer hours this year were 650 *per month*! Several highly active volunteers offered 95 or more hours a month; additionally we have two dozen ad-hoc volunteers, many of them UVA students who contribute during non-exam periods. Total hours were split: 66% for Board and core volunteers, 22% hours for UVA (and other) volunteers, and 11% for one-off events such as *Cville Sabroso*, workshops, and others. Using the established Virginia in-kind valuation of \$24.90 per hour to quantify this impact, the monetized value of this donated time was \$191,000. Finally, for the second consecutive year, our donations are well on the way to covering our expenses through the end of 2020.

### III. Human Stories behind Sin Barreras Numbers

One of our most satisfying successes is achieving favorable immigration outcomes for our client. One was helping a literacy-challenged sixty-nine-year-old Columbian refugee gain her citizenship. Another was our winning an appeal (!) – after twelve months of anguish—for a Honduran hairdresser of her Legal Permanent Resident status. Another, the son of a previously approved citizen, was a young man who had gotten into trouble on traffic stops and whose case was approved based on his heartfelt statement of pride at being able to live in and contribute to the United States. Two others were hotel housekeepers with little English who had to be coached for months to pass the language requirements and after nine months of study, succeeded! Each of these stories is an enormously enriching experience for Sin Barreras.

One asylum petition mentioned earlier was a young Honduran woman and her five-year-old son fleeing indescribable violence in her home country who was raped on her way to the U.S., is now carrying the pregnancy through to term, and is asking asylum in order to stay. Such cases are legally complex and frequently require five years (!) to be adjudicated. In this case, Sin Barrera did numerous interviews to help the young woman describe her case (of course, traumatic memory sessions for her), and prepared all forms and documentation, and then handed the case on to an experience immigration attorney colleague who will take it through to, we hope, a successful outcome in 2025.

**Testimonial 1** [*translation from Spanish*] “My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am from Honduras. I came to the U.S. in 2015 asking for political asylum because in my country I was persecuted because I denounced the death of my father to the police. I arrived to Harrisonburg, Virginia and began looking for help from an organization or a lawyer that provide free services and I couldn’t find anyone. In 2017 we moved to Charlottesville and here I found out from CHIP about Sin Barreras who helps immigrants with different cases; and I went to them and they helped me from the beginning to the end. Thanks to Sin Barreras I obtained political asylum for me and my son without spending one dollar, and for that I am very grateful to all the people who work in Sin Barreras. And my best wish is that God bless their lives, and to all who collaborate with Sin Barreras, my infinite thanks!”

**Testimonial 2.** “I’m very grateful for what Sin Barreras offers to our community -- the work they do is so important and meeting a real need in this area. I have been working with my tutoring student for the past year, and meeting her every Wednesday is always one of the highlights of my week. We have been working towards her citizenship and advancing her English skills. It's been so rewarding to volunteer with Sin Barreras and I'm so proud to see my student learning and becoming more confident every week! Thank you, Sin Barreras, for making a big difference in people's lives -- including mine -- in this community!”

### IV. Conclusion

Sin Barreras has had gratifying success in 2019: increasing most metrics and doubling our directly-served clients. With the help of important donors including the City, foundations, and generous private donors, we are now able to remunerate one full-time and three part-time staff as we become an ever more articulate voice of Hispanic concerns in central Virginia. We are enormously grateful to our donors and to the volunteers who make our work possible. As we brace for an election year brimming with anti-immigrant rancor, we commit to even further dedication to our cause, a better life for all Charlottesville-area immigrants.