

300 migrants await processing in Albuquerque

By Elise Kaplan / Journal Staff Writer

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Raymond Quintana, left, and his 18-year-old daughter Annette Quintana sort through clothing donated for the 300 migrants who were sent to Albuquerque from El Paso over the weekend. The migrants are seeking asylum and are waiting to be processed. (Adolphe Pierre-Louis/Albuquerque Journal)

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As an increasing number of migrant families show up at the United States' southern border, the El Paso nonprofit organizations that have been housing asylum-seekers are running out of room.

So, about 300 men, women and children were bused to Albuquerque on Sunday to stay at hotels while they are processed to be sent around the country to stay with their families or sponsors as they await formal hearings.

Matt Ross, the city's communications director, said the migrants have turned themselves in at the border and are officially requesting asylum.

"Each has a sponsor in the United States and the sponsor pays for their travel," he said. "That's what's happening now. They're coming through Albuquerque where they stay for a short time, a day, overnight, couple of days while their sponsor – wherever that person is – arranges transportation."

He said no city dollars or taxpayer money is involved in housing or feeding the migrants.

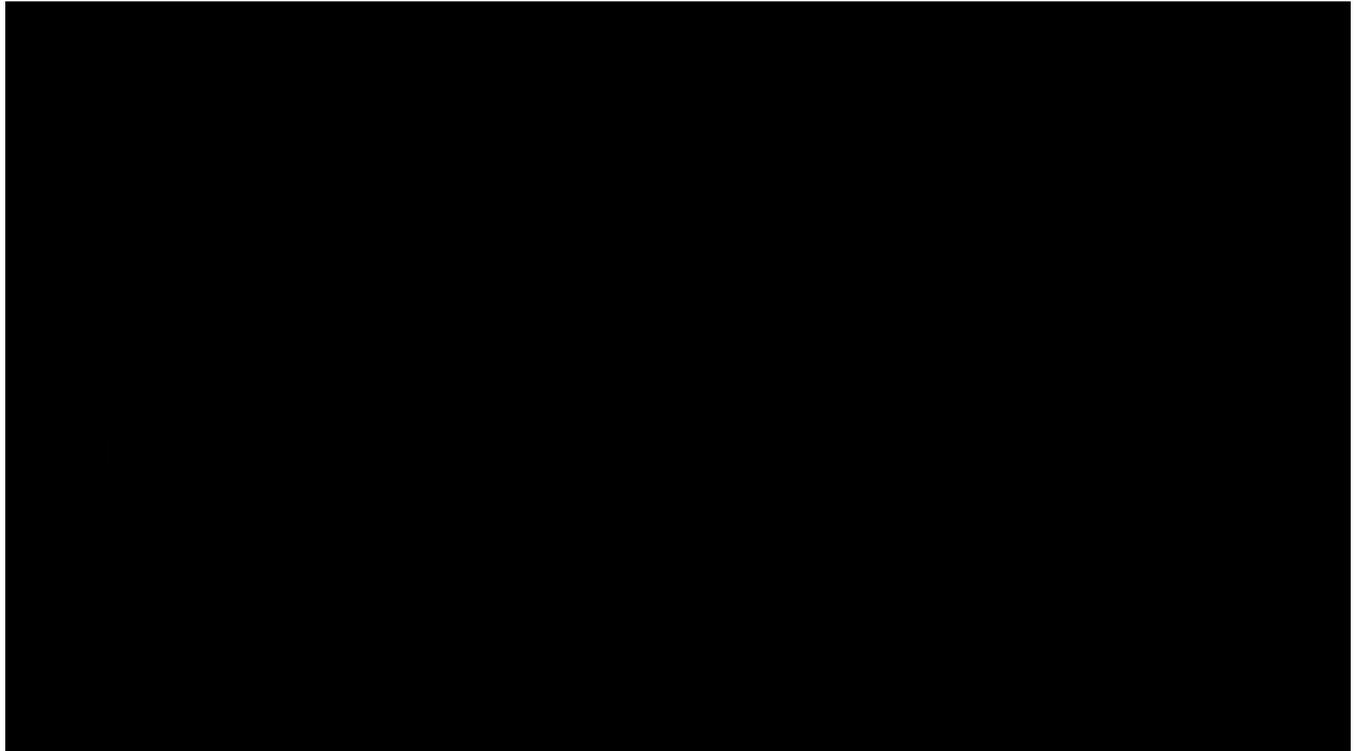
On Sunday morning, Annunciation House in El Paso called to say it didn't have room for 300 migrants and they were going to be sent to Albuquerque instead, said Father Vincent Chavez, of Saint Therese of the Infant Jesus Catholic Church.

He said he and other volunteers jumped in to help provide food, clothing and other necessities Sunday evening. He said the migrants, about half of whom are children, have been traveling or walking to the U.S. for more than 12 days. The adults are equipped with GPS ankle monitors while their asylum cases are processed.

"We see them just as people fleeing extortion, violence, economic reasons, and wanting hope and a future," Father Chavez said.

The group is staying at a couple of hotels around the city, but Chavez said they're keeping the locations private to guard against anti-immigrant protesters.

He said it's the third large group of migrants sent to Albuquerque in the past year, and the second in recent weeks.



"The first one that I was aware of was last summer," he said. "I think it's going to become a regular occurrence."

Chavez said Sunday's group is from Central America, including El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. He said community members and parishioners have been donating diapers, food, clothing, backpacks and more to help the migrants feel welcome.

"They're tired and grateful," he said. "The young children are not sure what's happening, but they've been traveling, they've been walking for days. ... They're children, though, so they're playing and exploring this new world."

While religious and community groups have been collecting donations and helping the migrants settle into the hotels, the city of Albuquerque's Office of Equity and Inclusion has helped coordinate volunteers.

"There's no one organization running the whole thing; it's organized by committee," said Michelle Melendez, the office's director. "We're serving in a coordinating role and as liaisons."

She said she expects to see more migrants coming to Albuquerque to be processed for the foreseeable future.

“We think El Paso has been pushed to its limits,” Melendez said. “The reason Annunciation House is looking for additional resources up here is because they don’t have enough to support the large numbers being released by ICE.”

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