**Vilma and Sergio**

Vilma, an indigenous woman from a small village in Guatemala, made the impossibly long and arduous trek with her son Sergio to the Southern US border two and a half years ago. They were detained by ICE on May 22, 2018, under the Trump Administration’s cruel family separation policies. Sergio was held in a detention center for children in Texas. Vilma was brought to the Federal Detention Center in Seatac and then to the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma. On July 18, 2018, she was released, thanks to the pro-bono work of Steffani Powell, an Olympia-based immigration attorney, and her bilingual legal assistant extraordinaire Alejandra Hunt. A member of SSA paid for Vilma’s plane ticket back to Texas, where she was dramatically reunited with her 12-year-old son. Their family separation was one of the first cases in the nation to go public and be at least partially resolved. They are living currently in a small city in Texas. Sergio, now 15, is in high school and studying hard in his third language. Vilma finally received permission to work and has found part-time employment. She has felt daunted by the prospect of learning English, but recently felt more confident to begin taking classes.

The highly respected Texas Civil Rights Project is the lead organization on their cases, with different law firms representing them both pro-bono. Everything has been slowed down due to backed-up courts and Covid-19. Vilma’s case for asylum and withholding of deportation will finally be heard in the fall of 2022.

They initially had housing support in Texas from a local organization there. When that ended, a core of Strengthening Sanctuary Alliance members stepped up financially to keep them from becoming homeless. Eventually, those members asked SSA to commit to covering the gap in donations to meet the rent and some additional expenses. We now send $925 per month. We are also researching organizations in their area that can offer other kinds of support. Our goal is to help provide Vilma with adequate resources, skills, and guidance so that she will feel increasingly confident and empowered on a path to stability and self-sufficiency.

*De parte de Vilma: Solo Dios pagará algún día el apoyo que me están brindando. De corazón les agradezco mucho a todos ustedes la organización de Olimpia. Son personas muy importantes para mi porque sin el apoyo de ustedes no sé cómo sería ahora pero gracias muchas gracias.*

From Vilma: God will bless you [repay you] some day for the support you are offering me. From my heart I thank all of you in the Olympia organization. You are very important to me because without your help I don’t know where I would be now but thanks, many thanks.