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## Help for immigrants at risk of deportation

Expansion of Rapid Response Network unveiled at City Hall

BY JOHN ORR  
Daily News Staff Writer

Mountain View Mayor Ken S. Rosenberg minced no words on Aug. 30 at City Hall: "Here we go again, trying to protect ourselves against the federal government."

The occasion was the launch of the Rapid Response Network, which brings together Santa Clara County officials, local immigrant leaders, business leaders and a number of community service groups to help those who are experiencing crisis at the hands of Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Rosenberg welcomed a crowd of residents, county supervisors Joe Simitian and Dave Cortese, Chief of Police Max Bosen, community leaders and a crowd of news cameras to the event by noting that Mountain View "is a city that has declared itself a human rights city."

He added that the City Council has recognized the Rapid Response Network as a necessary program that is meant to provide information and resources to people who need help.

A press release announcing the launch event noted that "Dozens of families have been torn apart by indiscriminate immigration enforcement actions for many years, but at a particularly accelerated rate in the past six months."

There are currently 4,852 individuals in Santa Clara County who are in deportation proceedings, according to network documents.

The families and communities of those detained ... are left flustered and traumatized in the wake of deportation actions," according to the press release. "The vast majority of those affected by immigration enforcement are an integral part of our community — mothers, fathers, aunts, and uncles, as well as our economy — carpenters, housewives, students, and service workers."

Simitian, speaking to the



Shonda Ranson / City of Mountain View  
TV news cameras, left, record speeches Aug. 30 at Mountain View City Hall as the Rapid Response Network is launched to help people encountering immigration problems. The posters read, "Protect our community. Report ICE activity! Call 408-290-1144."

crowd on Aug. 30, said there are three key components to the Rapid Response Network:

- "We want people to know their constitutional rights;

- "We want eyes and ears in the right place at the right time, for accountability in the system; and

- "We want to lift the weight of anxiety off the shoulders of our friends and neighbors."

The Rapid Response Network press release gave an example: "ICE detained a young man in Mountain View on his way to work. The network was activated,

a team was sent to the home and the family was immediately connected to reliable legal service providers and an accompaniment team.

"The network counts on an increased capacity ... due to community and volunteer investment — hundreds of responders, most U.S.-born citizens, have been trained as legal observers in order to respond to enforcement alerts."

The Rapid Response Network — which was unveiled less than a week before the Trump administration was ending the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA) — is to work by giving support and advice to people under threat of deportation and their families. Some 800,000 residents, nationwide, have been helped by DACA, and may now be in jeopardy.

Santa Clara County has allocated \$50,000 each to People Acting in Community Together and to Sacred Heart Services to help support the network.

To report ICE activity and get help from the network, call 408-290-1144.

# Mountain View VOICE

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*Listos Mountain View members, from left, Tania O'Connell, Maria Dinard, Sarah Livnat, Jill Rakestraw and Diana Wegbreit pose for a portrait.*

## Local group fights to protect immigrants' rights, kids

*By Kevin Forestieri*

Fear and anxiety spread among the local immigrant community last week after federal immigration officials conducted a nationwide sweep targeting sanctuary cities and counties, leading to the arrest of two undocumented Mountain View residents.

But a group of local parents from the Castro and Mistral elementary school community is vowing to assuage the fears

of deportation with action. The newly formed group, called Listos Mountain View, has assisted dozens of immigrant families with information and essential documents needed to ensure that parents and children are prepared if Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents knock on the door.

Listos Mountain View, which consists of nine Mistral parents, began aiding undocumented families in the Castro community earlier this year after

finding that the countywide "Know Your Rights" campaign did little to explain what residents without citizenship need to do in order to prepare for an ICE raid, according to Jill Rakestraw, executive director of the group. The more they heard from the families, the more it became clear that contingency planning was a big weak spot.

"The families are worried about being separated and

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## IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS

whether their kids are taken care of," she said. "And they don't know how to deal with that."

The goal is to give families a clear understanding of their current immigration status — and take immediate steps to legalize immigration status when possible — as well as help obtain identification and passports for travel in and out of the country. The emergency plan also includes legal documentation for child care authorization, meaning kids left stranded following an ICE raid have a place to go if their parents are detained. Without it, social workers are often forced to transfer kids to a county shelter and search for temporary placement. "If it's a single mom who has no family here and nobody who they can hand their kids off to, they need a guardian," Rakestraw said. "Some of us have stepped up to be guardians."

The grassroots effort came together following the November election, said Sarah Livnat, a parent and former PTA president at Mistral Elementary School. The anti-immigration policies and rhetoric of the Trump administration — as well as President Donald Trump's comments on the campaign trail — left many

families at the school "distraught and upset," prompting her and other parents to find some way to help.

The group caught the attention of county Supervisor Joe Simitian, who in late June helped secure \$25,000 in county funds to boost the group's efforts. Simitian told the *Voice* that Listos Mountain View is part of an important continuum of services needed to make sure immigrants are treated fairly and have access to legal representation. He said he is proud to see constituents, without direction from the county, step up to help residents in need.

"The folks in Mountain View on their own came together to do their part to help," he said. "You just gotta love it when people step up to do the right thing."

While small and fairly limited in scope compared with the broad immigrant services provided by the county, nonprofit groups like Listos are a powerful ally in bringing help to hard-to-reach populations in the county, especially in areas far away from the population center and the seat of county services in San Jose, Simitian said.

At a Listos Mountain View meeting last week, members focused heavily on how to reach as many families in the immigrant

community as possible, particularly the largely Spanish-speaking, lower-income families from Mexico and Central America who make up a large portion of the Castro community. Cultural awareness, thoughtful and bilingual events, building a network of trust — whatever it takes to convey that the events aren't putting anyone in a dangerous situation. Although the grant is intended to help anyone — not just families with kids at public schools — the group has found that the Castro campus offers an open, safe line of communication with immigrant families who have been forced to live in the shadows. When they invited representatives from the Mexican consulate and a lawyer to the school in April to talk about emergency planning, more than 70 people showed up.

"The families are at the schools every day, the kids are there, and it's right in the center of the neighborhood," Livnat said. "Any time you can get a lot of people to show up is a big victory."

One of the biggest challenges the group faces is that initial, uphill battle of gaining trust with a community fearful of divulging personal information. A well-advertised event at the public library may end up with next to zero attendance while

a surreptitious meeting in the Mountain View Senior Center will draw plenty of families.

"The people who are living in the shadows are known to each other," said Diana Wegbreit, a Listos Mountain View member. "They go to church together, they know who their resources are. They're pretty darned successful to be managing here; it's just a matter of (us) finding a way into those networks."

### ICE targets sanctuary cities

Last week, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement announced it had completed a four-day immigration roundup specifically targeting so-called sanctuary jurisdictions, arresting just shy of 500 people across the country — 27 of whom resided in Santa Clara and San Francisco counties. In a statement, ICE officials claimed that cities and counties that adopt sanctuary policies, such as limiting local law enforcement's cooperation with federal immigration agents, are protecting "dangerous criminal aliens" and undermining public safety.

Rakestraw said that kind of political posturing from ICE in press releases is largely ineffective at scaring the immigrant community, but seeing someone

local get taken away by ICE — often in a discreetly marked van — every few months does keep a constant level of fear in Mountain View. On Sunday, Sept. 24, an El Salvadoran teen was reportedly arrested by ICE somewhere in the downtown area, Rakestraw said. Immigration officers were looking for his brother, who had a criminal record, but incidentally took him instead, she said.

"Yes, the messaging has heightened fear in people, but it's a thousand times higher because of the boy who got picked up," she said. "If ICE comes in every two to three months and picks someone up, they keep up that fear and hope that they can force people to pack up and move."

Simitian said the ICE raids on sanctuary cities serve as an important reminder to the community at large of the "weight of anxiety" that perpetually hangs on undocumented immigrants, that there's a real, tangible threat that people who are here illegally may be taken away from their families.

"It's also a tangible reminder of why it is important to have groups like Listos Mountain View in place and adequately funded to do their work," he said. ▀

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