

ProBAR's Release Support Clinical Team

applies compassion and a collaborative spirit to serve clients at the start of their next chapter.

It was around noon when Raul Martínez, a Clinical Counselor at ProBAR, pulled into the Walmart parking lot to meet a client. ProBAR Staff Attorney and HIAS Fellow Lindsay Schenk was standing with the client and briefed Raul on the clients' hearing impairment that would necessitate an alternative to oral communication. Perhaps Raul could draw to communicate with the client about their purpose at the superstore? Raul took the phone out of his pocket and typed out that they were going to buy a phone for the client. Once the phone was purchased, the client video called their dad, who was emotional at the sight of his adult child. Raul thought “that’s what joy sounds like... it was the most rewarding experience I’ve had with ProBAR.”

Raul Martínez is part of the Release Support Department that only recently came to exist at ProBAR. Led by Director Nancy García, the Release Support Department provides legal education to sponsors of unaccompanied children and creates connections to legal and social services resources that support people to safely resettle after release from federal immigration detention. Brenda Piñero, now Director of Programs, developed Release Support’s Social Work program from its initial stage in 2018, recognizing that many of ProBAR’s clients undergo trauma and benefit from social workers and counselors delivering direct counseling services and providing other forms of support. When Raul joined this developing team, it was exciting. It was clear to all that this would be a lot of work, but there was an evident need, “and we were gonna fill it,” Raul recalls.



“that’s what joy sounds like... it was the most rewarding experience I’ve had with ProBAR.”

The Clinical Work team works with children released from Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) custody as well as adults previously subject to the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) program or detained in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody, whether or not they are represented by ProBAR attorneys. Clients are referred to the clinical work team by staff from other ProBAR departments as needs arise that would benefit from the expertise of social workers and counselors. Nora Rodríguez, who has been a Social Worker with ProBAR since the inception of social work services, says this work is “never boring,” as there is always something new to learn. “Each case,” she says, “is as unique as the needs of our client”.

“Each case is as unique as the needs of our client”.

Nora and Raul connect clients and sponsors with resources to assist with the transition out of custody and into the community. “We create a support system for our clients and their sponsors,” says Nora of her role.

We create a support system for our clients and their sponsors,” says Nora of her role. Whether it is assisting a child with flight arrangements to reunify with their family or helping an adolescent looking for low-cost medical services or eyewear, the clinical work team provides practical support where it is needed. Sometimes this requires Nora to research and collaborate with mental health care providers in areas where resources are limited or nonexistent—such as in some rural communities, or for Raul to contact dozens of medical facilities to identify a physician who can perform a specialized procedure for a client.

Release Support’s social workers and clinical counselors support the work of ProBAR’s legal services teams to seek the best outcome possible for clients. The referrals received from legal services staff create opportunities for cross-departmental collaboration that makes it possible to connect an individual, family, or sponsor with the right resources and services. In reflecting on a Letter of Support Nora provided for an attorney, she says, “we do our fair share of advocating for adult clients, and, in this case, the immigration judge approved the client’s release from an ICE detention facility.” It is this collaboration between the Release Support and Legal Departments that Raul says is particularly fulfilling. “We start with this small little seed, and as we keep working, we watch it grow and see what becomes of it”.

Nora and Raul both express a desire to go the extra mile, to dig deeper to provide the best support possible for clients. When the work is challenging, or when she is faced with an unknown, Nora says “I rely on my knowledge and skills as I search through different websites, make phone calls, and follow up with other agencies.” Raul and Nora find purpose and strength in the clients they serve. The tenacity and hope they see in their clients’ stories provide a model for their approach to their own work. And when given the chance, Nora says, “I remind them of how strong they are, how they made it through, how they survived. how they’re thrivers.”

“

“I remind them how strong they are, how they made it through, how they survived, how they're thrivers.”

”

It is the mutual support in the Release Support department that makes the team’s dedication and perseverance sustainable. “I know I can count on our ProBAR staff,” Nora says, “we’re always there to help each other, through brainstorming ideas and finding creative solutions to help our clients.

We have each other’s backs.”

“Coming in, I had a lot to learn,” Raul says, “Nora really helped me learn through her support. She has made my job fulfilling.” It is compassion, a collaborative spirit, and a desire to serve that has guided Nora and Raul in their work. And as the Clinical Work team prepares to grow, Nora says, “If it's this great with just us, imagine when more social workers join the team! We will have an awesome staff.”

ProBAR recently added new social workers to the Release Support Department and is actively hiring for positions on a team that embodies compassion and support- for clients and for one another.

To apply for vacancies within the Release Support department, [visit ProBAR's job board](#).

To learn from ProBAR's experience integrating social work into our legal services programs, please check out our recently released [Blueprint](#) for building a social work program designed to support other legal service providers with resources and guidance in this process.



AMERICAN **BAR** ASSOCIATION

ProBAR | South Texas Pro Bono
Asylum Representation Project

ProBAR
202 S. 1st Street
Suite 300
Harlingen, Texas 78550