



From Standing Bear to Standing Up for Others



Heidi | OIDO case manager (contractor)

A resident of Oklahoma, Heidi is a passionate traveler—visiting places of natural beauty with her husband—as well as a voracious reader. In one of her favorite books, she read about the concept of fraternity—the feeling of friendship and mutual support—which now guides her life and her work as a contract case manager at the Office of the Immigration Detention Ombudsman (OIDO).

Heidi's path to a life of service began when she was only five. Born in Colombia, her family emigrated to Venezuela, where her best friend's father—learning she was from Colombia—ordered her out of their house, saying all Colombians were thieves and telling her never to speak to his daughter again.

At home, Heidi's father helped her sort out her devastated feelings, explaining xenophobia and asking her to forgive the man for his ignorance. That moment was the impetus for a life of service, helping others confront social pain and rejection and teaching them to embrace the concept of fraternity.

THE SPIRIT OF FRATERNITY, PERSONIFIED

Intrigued by the power of education to further peace and compassion, Heidi earned her master's degree in lifelong learning and adult education from Penn State University and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in curriculum studies, with an emphasis in international and peace education, at Oklahoma State University.

In Heidi's life and studies, many have inspired her, especially three men who exemplified the spirit of fraternity and collaboration. When Ponca Chief Standing Bear stepped forward in pursuit of human rights for Native Americans in 1879, he was joined by two attorneys, John L. Webster and Andrew J. Poppleton, who provided pro bono support. Heidi saw their alliance as an essential step in promoting human rights in the United States. Standing Bear's statue stands not far from the Oklahoma facility where Heidi serves as a case manager and where the reminder of his efforts helps guide Heidi in her work. These moments of inspiration continue to reaffirm Heidi's commitment as an OIDO case manager to ensure safe and humane conditions in the detention environment.



A detainee she met at a meeting did not have a specific complaint but asked if he could sit there “just to cry.” He found the experience of detention overwhelming, mainly because of the grief he felt from leaving his family behind. Heidi gave him the time and space he needed and explained that counseling services at the facility were available to him, even as a Spanish speaker. This gave him a sense of relief—and her the satisfaction of knowing her work was providing help and comfort.

More recently, a detainee from Nicaragua was refusing to sign routine intake paperwork, which frustrated some of the facility staff. Heidi was visiting the facility that day and saw that the detainee needed assistance. She took him aside to speak privately to him in Spanish to understand his concerns. He expressed that he was having trouble understanding the forms due to his limited English proficiency and did not want to sign anything he didn't understand; however, he also thought there would be severe retaliation for making a complaint. Heidi spoke with him about human rights and human dignity and explained how in this country, we are allowed to express our concerns without retaliation. She also reviewed with the facility staff the commitment to provide language access support to detainees. Following this conversation, the facility provided the translation support that was needed, and the detainee signed the paperwork. For Heidi, the hero of that story was their collaborative spirit—one she attempts to foster in every situation.

Heidi remains grateful for the opportunity to use all she's learned to bring a spirit of peace wherever she goes—and the people she interacts with are just as grateful.

COLLABORATION NATION

To date, Heidi has helped detainees with a wide variety of issues, but for her, a couple of cases come to mind most vividly.

“Raise your words, not your voice.
It is rain that grows flowers, not thunder.”

Favorite dish

Pot pie

Hobby

French accordion

Favorite movie or show

“Amelie”

Favorite books

“Bittersweet,” by Susan Cain

“The Forgotten Principle:
Fraternity in Politics and Law,”
by Antonio Baggio

Favorite quotes

“My wish is that we all have Easter Vision; that we can look into death to the point of finding life, into guilt to the point of finding forgiveness, into separation to the point of finding unity, into wounds to the point of finding glory, into human beings to the point of finding God, into God to the point of finding humanity, into myself to the point of finding you.”

—Klaus Hemmerle

“Raise your words, not your voice. It is rain that grows flowers, not thunder.”
—Rumi