

# Intentional Communication about People in Migration

Sister Eileen McKenzie, FSPA



**Kino Border Initiative**  
**Iniciativa Kino para la Frontera**

How do you feel...

...regarding your **KNOWLEDGE** when communicating with others about migration?

...about your **SKILLS**?

...regarding **EMPATHY** for people who are on the move?



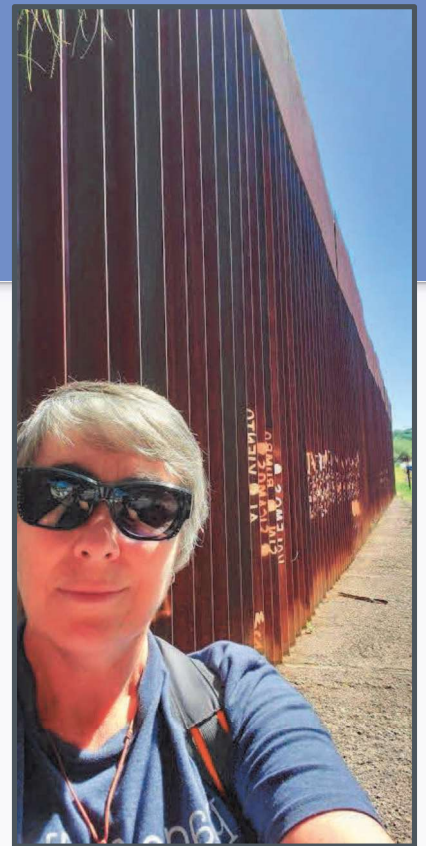
# Overview

1. Grounding: Why me, why us, why now?
2. Best Practices for Communicating about Migration
3. Hear stories of movement and accompaniment
4. Q&A
5. Calls to Action

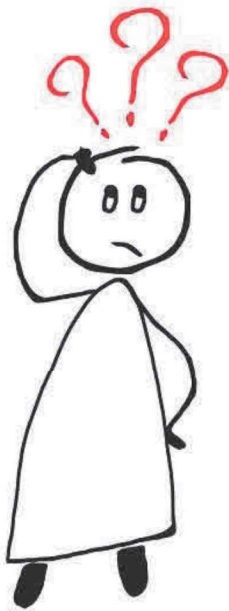


## Sister Eileen: Why this is important to me

- Migration as a sign of the time
- Pope Francis and Church's call to serve the needs of migrants and refugees
- FSPA Founders immigrated to serve immigrants
- Kino Border Initiative



Why is this important to US?



# Why Now?



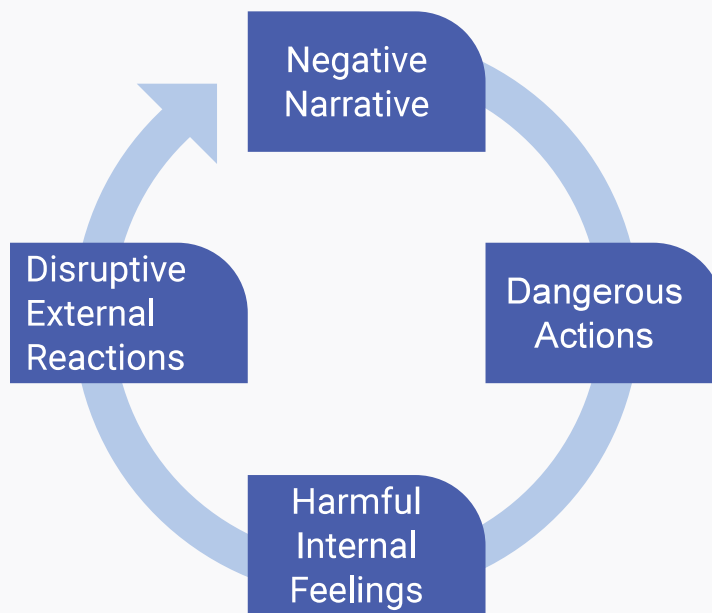
Images: Federation for American Immigration Reform, NDTV, The Guardian, X

# Why now? Dehumanizing Stories about Migrants Dominate



Source: "The Power of Everyday Language to Cause Harm," Alex Kapitan





Dr. Rhonda Tsoi-A-Fatt



## The Dehumanization Cycle with Latino Migrants

# Assumptions in Disrupting Dehumanization

1. People are open to learning and/or understanding
2. Every person's feelings are valid even if they are not based on facts.
3. There are some rubbish ideas about people but not people who are rubbish

## POLL: Which of the following are best practices for communicating about migration?

1. Mythbusting
2. Telling stories
3. Modeling learning
4. Emphasizing the humanitarian crisis
5. Lifting up shared values



# Best Practice: REFRAME AND HUMANIZE



## Reframe

Instead of	Use
Asylum Seekers	People escaping violence Families seeking protection
Illegal	Irregular status Someone who crossed between ports of entry

## Be Careful...

The term “illegal” - the way a person crossed does not necessarily determine legal status.

Choose descriptors thoughtfully: is it relevant that this person has migrated? Do we apply the term “migrant” evenly?

# Best Practice: HUMANIZE AND REPLACE



**Don't repeat dehumanizing messaging-  
repeating reinforces the message**

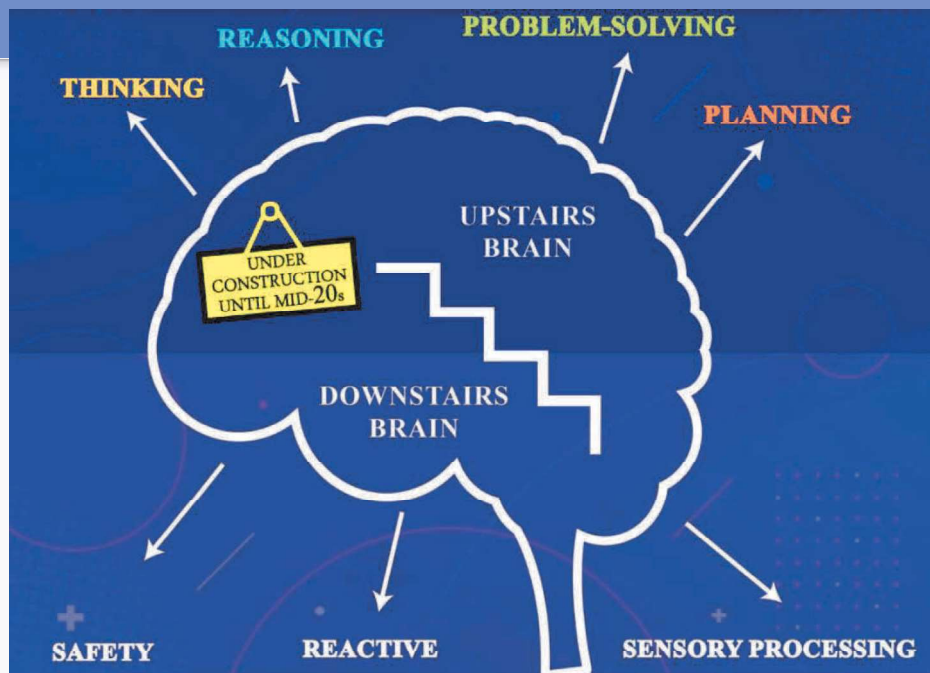
<b>Instead of</b>	<b>Say</b>
"It's not true what people say, that migrants are criminals and drug smugglers"	"We hear a lot of different messages about people arriving the US, but I've found that all the families I've met are seeking safety and really want to get settled and contribute to the community."
	"I met this woman named Stella who blew my stereotypes about migrants out of the water."

# The 2 parts of the brain

**Downstairs brain:** basic functions (breathing, blinking), impulses and emotions (like anger and fear).

**Upstairs brain:** more intricate mental processes like planning, decision-making, self-awareness, empathy and morality.

**If we don't feel safe, we cannot access empathy and critical thinking**



## How to calm the “downstairs brain”

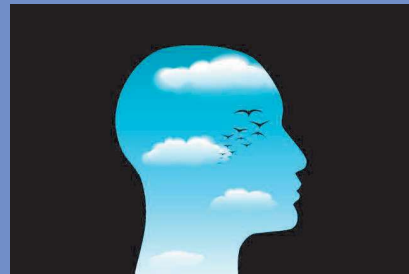


**Acknowledge the fear or concern:** (rather than dismissing)

“I hear you, we all want to make sure our border is handled in a way that keeps everyone safe.”

“I can understand your concern about resources. When I go food shopping, I can’t believe how much prices have gone up.”

## How to calm the “downstairs brain”



### **Include details about the process**

Families seeking protection at the US-Mexico border go through fingerprinting, background check, DNA swab and are asked to provide contact information for their sponsor before they receive their court date and can travel to be with family.

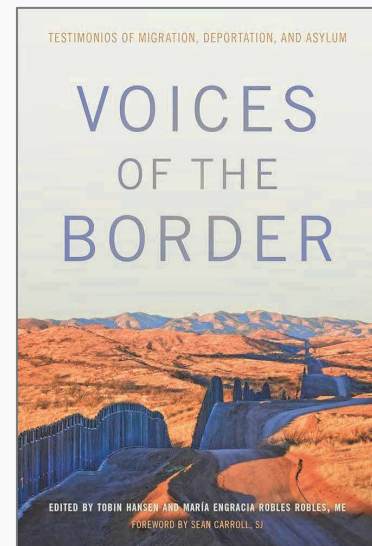
## How to calm the “downstairs brain”



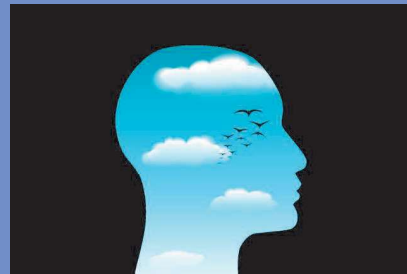
### Use stories:

- Reduce defensiveness
- Teach complicated concepts
- Change individual behavior
- Promote social change

Source: NETWORK Catholic Lobby for Social Justice



## How to calm the “downstairs brain”



### Connect to SHARED VALUES

Instead of	Use
Language of scarcity: “They should have...” “It’s about rights...”	Focus on shared values: “We all want our families to be safe. People who are migrating want the same.”

# Best Practice: NORMALIZE LEARNING AND REFLECTION



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When I reflect on it...

When you step back...

In the real world...

When I put myself in their shoes...

I was surprised to learn...

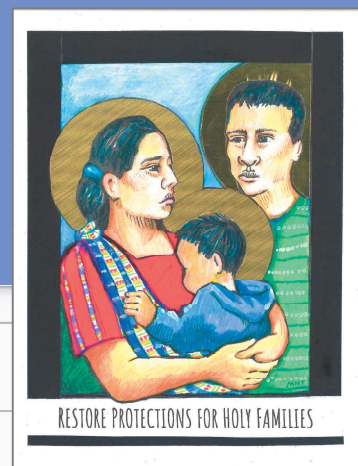
# Best Practice: HOPEFUL, CONCRETE FRAMING



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<b>Instead of...</b>	<b>Say...</b>
Overwhelmed	Stretched Getting creative
Crisis	Challenge
Emphasize obstacles	Celebrate generous responses Name what's going well Where there is forward movement

# Best Practice for Faith Communities: PERSON-CENTERED, VALUE FRAMING



INSTEAD OF...	TALK ABOUT...
Justice	Solidarity, Social Mission
Rights	Dignity of the person, shared values like faith and family
Focus on numbers, disconnected facts	Focus on PEOPLE - always link to <b>scripture or Catholic teaching</b> : the Holy Family, the Israelites fleeing Egypt, Ruth & Naomi, Joseph in slavery, <b><i>the history of our own congregations</i></b>

## Positive Reframe: Migrants Bused to Massachusetts



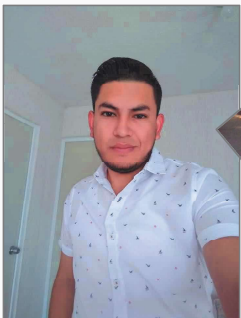
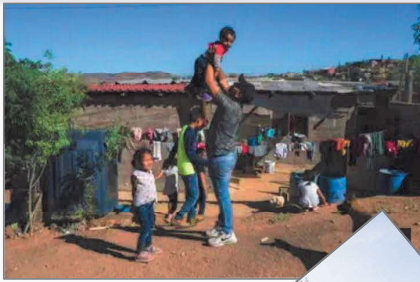
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"These immigrants were not met with chaos, they were met with compassion. We are a community & nation that is stronger because of immigrants. **The community coming together with water, food, interpretation help, & resources to support these families represent the best of America.**"

"Our island jumped into action putting together 50 beds, giving everyone a good meal, providing a play area for the children, making sure people have the healthcare and support they need. **We are a community that comes together to support immigrants.**"

- Dylan Fernandes  
Massachusetts State Representative

Images matter!  
*What do these communicate ?*



Rate this message as Humanizing or Dehumanizing  
1 - most dehumanizing, 5 - most humanizing



5,000 Miles, 8  
Countries: The  
Path to the U.S.  
Through One  
Family's Eyes

NYT July 8, 2024

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