What’s Next
Language Justice
By Yula Rocha
Respond was created in October 2019 by a collective of professional translators and interpreters devoted to what they call “language justice.” In partnership with migrants’ grassroots organizations and nonprofits such as RAICES and Al Otro Lado, they offer pro bono translation of legal documents and testimonies and interpretation services for clients in detention centers in the United States and Mexico. By May 2020, they translated 8,500 pages of documents and served 875 clients.

Volunteers at Respond hope to give migrants and asylum seekers a fair chance to defend their claims and make their legal case to remain in the United States. According to a 2018 Pew Research Center study, more than 44 million immigrants live in the United States, and one in seven US residents are foreign born. Most are integrated and speak English, but many still need help navigating US bureaucratic structures. While the United States is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, it is extremely inflexible in regard to language. It requires, for example, that all asylum evidence be submitted in English, which makes it almost “impossible for non-English speakers to navigate its systems,” Koren says.

“Most migrants, if not all, suffer from language barriers.
without the help of translators and interpreters because they cannot understand what is going on or [do not] have the ability to fully express themselves to the judge or asylum officer,” explains Aida Farahani, a pro bono attorney coordinator at RAICES, based in Texas.

The work requires much more than language proficiency. A deep understanding of the social, political, historical, and cultural contexts of the country where the migrant is from is required, too, in order to effectively advocate for that person’s legal status in court. “The translator can make all the difference to the case,” says Leticia Morales, who runs the Texas Nicaraguan Community organization in Houston, Texas, and works closely with Respond.

When the World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus a pandemic in March—only five months after Respond’s launch—the network rapidly positioned itself as a team of first responders. They quickly broadened their scope to provide information and resources in 78 languages, including Mandarin, Vietnamese, and indigenous dialects such as Quiché (or K’iche’). Respond also expanded their services: They translate official health guidance measures, from how to wash your hands to how to petition the government for the release of migrants held in detention centers who risk exposure to the virus. They translate a broad range of benefits resources, from documents on how to fill out a job application to those on how to enroll children in distance learning education. Respond interpreters also offer phone assistance for more immediate needs, such as helping migrants to make medical appointments, report domestic violence, and access services.

With increased offerings due to COVID-19, Respond saw a surge in volunteers, from a dozen a day in January to hundreds per hour three months later, in the midst of the pandemic. Bringing on board hundreds of new and diverse translators and interpreters, Respond could invest in more languages and expand outside of the United States. An Arabic-language translation team, for example, now works in Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa.

Some of the more qualified volunteers have even found paid work with Respond, through a very limited pool of funds raised by individual donations. The organization hopes to continue to offer these temporary jobs during COVID-19. In the near future, Respond plans to fundraise and apply for grants funded by organizations that are aligned with their values.

Many Respond team members are migrants themselves, like Fernanda de Oliveira, who leads the Brazilian Portuguese team and who witnessed her own relatives from Brazil trying and failing to pursue the American Dream after being detained and deported. Oliveira hopes through her work with Respond to utilize language for the greater good. “I know that language can be a powerful tool to exclude people,” she says, “but I would rather use it as an inclusive tool to build bridges and connect people.”

**SOCIAL SERVICES**

### Tools for Survivorship

**by Victoria A. Brownworth**

Andrea Constand has utilized the power of technology to transform her own traumatic experience to help other sexual assault and rape survivors.

Constand, a former basketball player who became director of operations for Temple University’s women’s team, was assaulted by Bill Cosby at his home in January 2004. Cosby, who went to Temple and was a donor and trustee, befriended Constand in 2002. Despite the more than 50 women who came forward with personal stories of rape and sexual assault by the entertainer, it was Constand’s court testimony that led to Cosby’s conviction and prison sentence, in April 2018.

After the trial, Constand determined to fight for all victims of sexual violence through founding the nonprofit Hope Healing and Transformation (HHT) in 2019, for which she currently serves as president and executive director. The organization aims to educate and inform survivors by providing them with legal knowledge and support. Through HHT, Constand created an app to help victims on their healing path. Launched in June, SAFEAPP “is an integrative program and support hub with a Mind/Body/Spirit program,” Constand explains.

SAFE stands for Survivors Achieving Freedom and Empowerment. The app’s 21-day program offers a sequence of lessons, divided into three separate modules, on the mind, body, and spirit to promote holistic healing.

“This is a trauma-informed app,” says Constand. Stewart Ryan, HHT’s legal representative, emphasizes how much Constand’s personal experience has shaped the program: “The person behind this app had the experience everyone fears when reporting sexual assault and that informs everything about SAFEAPP,” he says. The app, he explains, offers another path toward healing and accessing the justice system, even though “not everyone is ready right away to pursue criminal justice.”

Because sexual assault and rape victims are often treated like they are the criminals, the app seeks to provide them with “all the resources there are—from legal support to emotional support,” Constand says. “If you are not ready to run to the police or drive two hours from your rural area to a rape crisis center, then SAFEAPP is an alternative.”