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Snippets from San Antonio's Bus Station Ministry: Penelope (Penny) Boyer's Facebook Post, July 2, 2018

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Last Thursday, I joined the Backpack Ministry aka the Bus Station Ministry, a project of the Interfaith Welcome Coalition here in San Antonio which trained me the week before to go to the Greyhound Station to hand out backpacks filled with sundries and essentials for families being released from detention centers in Karnes and Dilley on their way to their sponsors across these allegedly United States of America. I had also been trained to sit with these folks, mostly moms with no English traveling with at least one child from fraught circumstances including who knows how long holed up in who knows what conditions at these detention centers after fleeing who knows what traumatic situation in who knows what country south of the Texas border, to sit with these moms and map their journey from here over the next few days. Four of us, from 10am to 5pm, distributed 55 knapsacks representing 55 families consisting of 2+ people. Over 100 individuals' tickets were analyzed and explained, maps were diagrammed showing where each ticket went, charts were filled in with arrival and departure times explaining layovers and when to change buses and when not to. We were the first people these people had met in the U.S. outside the detention centers. Some of us dispensed over the counter meds while others of us distributed toy truck and flirty finger puppets. Diapers and sanitary pads were readily received. Blankets, water bottles, coloring books and crayons, came in the backpacks which, in addition to the one or two recyclable grocery bags each family already had for all of their earthly belongings, became their only luggage--that and the clothes on their back. Sack lunches were

circulated. I stole a small stack of paper bags from the bus station's cafeteria counter to give to a mom for her listless son's vomit. A mom asked me if I could loosen her ICE-issued "ankle bracelet"--the women called them shackles I had read--she showed me how it was clearly bound too tightly; I could not help her, even though I wanted to cut the damn things off each of them. I got a hug around my legs from a little girl, and saw several women cry then stare distantly as their sobbing stopped. Some would need to sit there well into the evening before their first bus came. Most had several connections over the next few days; some wouldn't reach their destinations until Sunday night. This was Thursday; days of bus rides and bus stations ahead of them. Every so often a few families would be mobilized and moved to the priority area for boarding a bus that had just arrived. This would happen quickly, no time for goodbyes, swiftly off to the next leg of their journey. The ministry's phone was passed around for short calls to sponsors, informing them of arrival times. These rituals at the San Antonio Greyhound Station happen now daily. Fifty to seventy five families passing through there a day. Seven days a week. My day with the Backpack Ministry is Thursday.