



Feet in 2 Worlds

The People Who Show Up: Inside a Community's Effort to Respond to ICE Raids

Today's story comes from reporter Sophia Sleaf with the Los Angeles Reporting Collective. What does it take to mobilize when ICE arrives?

This story follows Proyecto Pastoral, an organization running one of L.A.'s rapid response networks in Boyle Heights, as volunteers learn how to respond to and confront the emotional toll of immigration enforcement. At the heart of it: a community trying to care for families — and for one another.

Quincy Surasmith: This is Feet in 2 Worlds, telling the stories of today's immigrants. I'm Quincy Surasmith, Managing Editor.

This year, the Trump Administration made immigration raids one of its highest priorities in the U.S., giving ICE mandates to execute detention and deportation operations across the country. In June, these operations began to prominently target the city of Los Angeles and surrounding areas.

I live in Los Angeles, and I remember feeling shocked and in disbelief at seeing the sheer quantity and ruthlessness of these raids. I also remember how many Angelenos came together to respond. Many gathered in protest, such as at the heavily publicized demonstrations in downtown LA. But less spotlighted were the many different groups — big and small — who led know your rights trainings, or recorded and reported on ICE raids, or informed families when someone had been detained. These were the groups responding to the needs of LA's many immigrant communities in a time of crisis.

Today's story of one such group comes from reporter Sophia Sleaf with the Los Angeles Reporting Collective. And be sure to stay afterward for a quick conversation with Sophia about her story.

Here's Sophia:

[Sound: crowd chatter outside of training]

Sophia Sleep: Los Angeles is not the same place it was before ICE enforcement ramped up summer 2025. Life in the city has changed for undocumented immigrants and for their friends and family.

Event Speaker: Keep calm and stay safe. We're not trying to be reactive out there. Record from a distance. Don't get too close. If you are recording...

Sophia: Dozens of volunteers are gathered in a small church in East LA for a training on “rapid response” as in: how to respond to ICE activity... rapidly.

Event Speaker: This training is making sure we all feel confident, clear, and connected when our neighbors call us because ICE is outside their neighborhoods.

Sophia: These volunteers they get notified about potential immigration enforcement in their community and go out to verify for their neighbors. Which is no easy task, according to Alma and Dulce, two of the new trainees.

Alma: That just really like eats at my spirit of like, there's so many people who don't have anybody advocating for them.

Dulce: I did not think I was gonna live this in my lifetime or in the lifetime of my children.

Sophia: Alma and Dulce are two community members who've been learning how to offer support during reports of ICE around the neighborhood.

Event Speaker: The more we get the word out, the less fear we'll have in our communities, the more empowered they will feel.

Sophia: This rapid response network on the east side is led by Proyecto Pastoral at Dolores Mission, a nonprofit I worked with before becoming a journalist, which gave me a unique window into how this network functions. So what does it take to figure out what's really going on when someone reports ICE activity to the network?

Kike Velasquez: Okay, let's go. I am parked on the street. We'll go out this way.

[Sound: walking]

Sophia: Kike Velasquez is Proyecto Pastoral's director of organizing. I joined Kike one late summer morning to document, up close, every single step of the rapid response process.

Kike: I have materials here with me, you know, red cards, and I have the, uh, hotline phone number, flyers...

Sophia: He tucks away the materials in one of those like bright yellow high-vis vests with an abundance of pockets.

[Sound: car rumbling]

Sophia: Kike drove down the 10 in his sedan to conduct a “neighborhood check” in Boyle Heights. Like for so many of the Proyecto staff and volunteers, the work... is deeply personal for Kike.

Kike: I am an immigrant myself. I came like many, um, millions of Latinos or foreign-born people, undocumented.

Sophia: And now, Kike’s helping to support other immigrants in his community. The type of neighborhood check Kike’s en route to conduct? It all starts with a message reporting ICE activity.

Voice Message: “Right now there are multiple officers, border patrol, along with multiple vehicles, over a dozen of each, all positioned...”

Sophia: When a message like that comes in, staff members try to get every bit of detail about the potential ICE activity.

Kike: Is it a van, is it a car, is it a pickup truck? What color, you know, license? What's the address? You know, intersections? How many people? You know, what is it that they're doing? How long have they been at the place?

Sophia: And then all this information gets relayed on a rapid response Signal chat to more than 80 volunteers. Volunteer rapid responders go and verify if, in fact, immigration enforcement is taking place.

Kike: Then people say, I am available on my way, or I'm not available. And then if we need back up.

Voice Message: “I am on Whittier Blvd and Garfield and going to be driving around.”

Voice Message: “I’m about 3 minutes away from the park, I can go take a look.”

Sophia: When they arrive, there’s a few different scenarios about what they might find. First...

Kike: If you find nothing, you know, it’s just basically say clear everything is normal.

Sophia: A responder might not see any ICE activity, but they’ll go around to businesses and residents, trying to find out if they saw anything, and share resources like the cards in Kike’s vest pockets.

In the scenario when responders arrive and see potential ICE vehicles...

Kike: Then we tell people yes, confirmed, and we stick around just to see, ‘cause sometimes they just park their car and are kind of like assessing the situation.

Sophia: “Rapid response” can sound like “rushing in,” but often, it actually means waiting around to see what happens. But of course, it’s different when a responder finds that someone’s been taken.

Kike: We try to get as much information of, uh, the person who has been taken: name of the person, nationality, how it did happen... And with that information, we send it to legal support to see what attorney can actually take the case.

Sophia: But sometimes all those questions responders are trying to find out — is it ICE? Was someone taken? What can you do to help? – can be *really* hard to answer.

[Sound: car door opening and closing, parking, walking]

Sophia: It was one of these complicated cases that brought Kike to a quiet residential area off the 10 freeway on a hot September morning. He’d been there a few days earlier when someone reported an immigration arrest, but he wasn’t able to confirm what had happened. Kike thought maybe the people in the house had been too scared to open the door.

Kike: But we wanna know how they feel, how they're doing, you know, if they need any support, if they, um, are they doing okay psychologically. So I need to, you know, see what the story is. Um, we just wanna make sure that they're fine.

[Sound: footsteps]

Sophia: We walk down the driveway towards a single-storey duplex with potted plants and a wind chime outside.

Kike: Buenos días.

Maria: Buenos días.

Kike: Hola.

Maria: Sí, dígame.

Kike: Cómo le van?

Maria: Bien, gracias.

Kike: Somos de la red de respuesta rápida de esto de cuestión de migración.

Sophia: A woman in her 40s opens the door. We’re calling her Maria to protect her safety and privacy.

Kike: Esto es el número...

Maria: Ah, uh-huh...

Kike: ...que nosotros damos a las personas en caso de que hay actividad de la migración y todo eso para venir y apoyar a las personas....

Sophia: Kike explains who he is and why he's there. Maria shares that federal agents had come with a warrant for a family member, but it wasn't immigration-related.

Maria: Pues, no, no más decía que tenían una orden de cateo para toda la vecindad. Pues yo no sé es que ellos quebraron la puerta...

Kike: Sí.

Maria: Sí.

Sophia: The family member they were looking for wasn't there. But in their search for him, the federal agents ended up taking someone else, Maria's son-in-law, without a warrant.

Maria: A mi yerno sí se lo llevó inmigración, se lo llevaron pues así no más, como estaba con short y sin playera, sin, nomás con chanclas y todo.

Sophia: When they entered the home, the agents had asked for everyone's IDs.

Kike: What happened was that he couldn't find his identification, so when he couldn't deliver anything, they told him that sounds like you are here undocumented. And they took him.

Maria: Él no tiene, él está muy limpio, él no tiene tickets. Él no, nunca ha sido arrestado nunca.

Sophia: Maria's son-in-law had no criminal record whatsoever, and had lived in the U.S. since he was 4 years old.

Kike: We will talk to the legal nonprofits, and hopefully they can support. We'll see.

Sophia: On the way back to the Proyecto office, Kike talked about the gravity of what this all means and the impact it has.

Kike: What happened was, he's been here since four years old, and this is your country, this is your life. So it is just destroying families, destroying people's lives.

Sophia: It can be intense... not just for the people directly impacted, but also for the rapid responders and staff leading the network. A study last year by the Center for Effective Philanthropy found that 95% of nonprofit leaders they surveyed had some level of concern about staff burnout.

Raquel Roman: I know that we will get through it, but none of us knew that rapid response would turn into what it is now, and we didn't know that it would be to this level, right.

Sophia: For Raquel Roman, Proyecto Pastoral's executive director, staff wellness is something that's been on her mind a lot lately.

Raquel: My role is to support the team and the structures, because I've been with the organization for a really long time.

Sophia: I sat down with Raquel at Proyecto Pastoral's office. It's a yellow, single-storey building a few blocks from Dolores Mission Church. The walls are adorned with certificates, awards, and photos of the mothers who founded Proyecto decades ago.

Raquel: As a long-time immigrant rights activist and advocate this is part of who I am and who we are as an organization. And I think we have a long road ahead of us.

Sophia: Proyecto Pastoral has years of experience doing rapid response. But responding to reports of ICE had been just a small part of the work—until this summer, when it took on a whole new meaning.

Raquel: We were constantly on, 24 hours of sightings and going to be witness. If I'm not available, someone else is available. And that's been the rhythm of of of all of this.

Sophia: On top of all that, there's the impact of actually witnessing ICE enforcement. A University of Michigan study found that immigration raids can be deeply traumatic, yes, for the people targeted, but also for those who witness their impact across the community. For Raquel and Kike, the human cost of this work was clearest firsthand on June 6, when ICE raided a downtown clothing factory, marking a new phase of mass raids in Los Angeles.

Raquel: We were here in my office when I started getting alerts that there was ICE officers in downtown LA.

Sophia: But this — this wasn't just ICE.

Raquel: When we arrived, seeing the FBI there, I was shocked.

Kike: A big contingent of FBI agents came with big military trucks and vans to get the workers away

Sophia: Many of the employees had worked in the factory for years. Some had been in the country for three decades.

Raquel: These men were working, being responsible people of our, of our, community...

Kike: This is just workers. This is people earning a decent living, you know, trying to put bread on the table...

Raquel: Then seeing all of the men being taken, shackled, from arms to feet, put into these vans, um, while their family stood there watching them, was one of the most heartbreaking moments that I've ever witnessed.

Kike: And I saw the faces of these men, you know, it hit me really bad. I had to pull myself to the side, because it was too hard.

Sophia: Raquel, Kike, and the rest of the Proyecto Pastoral team are all in this to take care of their community. But in order to do that, they need to care of themselves too.

Kike: I mean, if it does affect you, you know, because it is, it is personal. I have to keep going, try to continue to contribute, and knowing that I need to check on my mental health.

[Sound: auditorium mumbling]

Event Speaker: When we organize under stress, we carry, more than the weight of the work, we carry the trauma of our communities.

Sophia: At the rapid response training in the church, the first part of the meeting is devoted to wellness.

Event Speaker: I'm gonna invite you to breathe in.

Sophia: Attendees are guided through a meditation.

Event Speaker: Breathe in love, exhale fear...

Sophia: ...as well as being taught different techniques to regulate their nervous system.

Event Speaker: Breathe in hope, exhale doubt.

Sophia: Dulce, one of the new volunteers, sees how essential it is to take care of herself.

Dulce: The challenging part is being overstimulated in the evening and then waking up and, and then back at it again. Today's training of wellness and mindfulness, we hear it, but to integrate is gonna be one of my priorities.

Sophia: Alma, another rapid responder, knows how important it is to keep going.

Alma: We have to continue because they need to know that they're not gonna do this without consequence or without witnesses and that we're gonna be witnesses. We just are all in this to help human beings, and that's very powerful for me.

Sophia: Raquel addresses the group to remind everyone about the importance of self care.

Raquel: Today we really wanted to come together as a community and as a rapid response team and wanted to make sure that you feel taken care of today.

Sophia: Because in order to do rapid response... sometimes, you have to slow down.

Event Speaker: Breathe in strength and exhale anything that doesn't serve you.

Quincy: That was Sophia Sleaf for the Los Angeles Reporting Collective. I wanted to learn more about Sophia and her story, so we met up to chat about it.

Sophia: My name's Sophia Sleaf, and my audio story is about a rapid response network in Boyle Heights.

Quincy: Us being from Feet in 2 Worlds, we work with a lot of journalists from immigrant backgrounds. Could you tell me a little bit about your background, yeah, where are you from?

Sophia: Yeah, so I'm from the UK. I grew up in Kent, which is right in the southeast corner of the UK and I moved to the US, like 10-11 years ago. When I moved to Los Angeles, I did a Masters at UCLA in Latin American Studies, and that is where I started researching around topics of immigration.

And then after I finished my master's, I started working for the nonprofit Proyecto Pastoral in Boyle Heights, which is a community based organization that works with the community in Boyle Heights. And so I left that role about a year and a half ago to move into journalism.

Quincy: Do you feel like your own immigrant background has shaped the way you understand this story, these issues?

Sophia: Yeah, I think definitely having my own, you know, direct experience of the US immigration system helps in terms of understanding. I mean, even as a British person, I'm very well aware that there's a lot of privilege that comes with having a British passport or being a white person when I cross the border. But it also it hasn't been easy. In my own path of getting my green card and feeling that stress and that uncertainty I guess helps me to kind of have some of that understanding of just like how hard it is to navigate an immigration system.

Quincy: Coming from an immigrant background myself. I'm Thai-Chinese American. It's very, very, very obvious to me how much of a city of immigrants Los Angeles is.

Sophia: Something I love about Los Angeles is that you can go into different neighborhoods and feel like you're in a whole different place, like each neighborhood has its own different feel and culture and so I think that's something that definitely has drawn me to Los Angeles.

Quincy: Take us back to earlier this year, y'know when there were starting to be ICE enforcement actions and apprehending people and raids, and then even after that, when the President starts to deploy National Guard troops here.

Take me back to that moment for yourself and maybe for the folks you were working with. How were you feeling and what, what were those days like for you?

Sophia:

Yeah, I mean, that was part of the the impetus of wanting to create the story, because I knew that the organization Proyecto Pastoral had done rapid response for many years, and had set up the network during the first Trump administration, and kind of had been activated earlier in the year, and so really was ready.

But when the raid started happening at the scale they did back in early June, it really did feel like a huge turning point, I think, for everyone in the city.

But I remember that morning, I was already in the signal chat that the Rapid Response Network has. I could hear the like dings, like loads of dings going off and you know, there had been some activity before that, but this was something very, very different. And when I was reading the messages and then was like, okay, this, this, this is happening.

It was like, people need to get down now to downtown. They were at the Ambience Factory, a clothing factory in downtown Los Angeles. And so I went there to kind of see what was happening. But the arrests had already been made. People had already been taken.

And so, yeah, it was very clear that this was something different to what anything that had been going on before in terms of the scale and the militarization of the raids.

Quincy:

Something that I really remember from this time is just like this polarity of feeling so shocked and helpless in one end, but also seeing all these community organizations really step up.

Why did you choose to produce your story about this specific Rapid Response Network, this, this organization's efforts?

Sophia:

Yeah, I mean, mainly because I had a relationship there already, because I used to work there, and so I knew what was going on more specifically with that Rapid Response Network. And so I wanted to, I guess, give people that maybe don't have that insight into rapid response networks as to what does it take? There's so many people out there that are just constantly on responding to help protect their communities.

I think also there's a lot of very grassroots networks of people that have come together and create Neighborhood Watch, which is incredible. But proyectos is maybe a little more unique in that it's housed within a community based organization that has a long history, and the Rapid Response Network was already kind of established years before.

Quincy:

Tell me a little bit about what are some of the things that surprised you in the process of reporting this story.

Sophia: I think there was so much that I wanted to be able to put in there but that, yeah, learning that for it to be a story, and an audio story really needs to have like one clear theme that you're focusing in on.

Quincy: What would you say is the theme of the story that you were really building around?

Sophie: The story's kind of, in my eyes, in two parts, where, at the beginning part is like, what does it take logistically? Like, what does it mean to do it? What does that look like?

And then the second part is more about like, what does it take for the people that are doing it, and what does it take emotionally and physically, in terms of, like, the exhaustion, and how do we kind of balance that?

Quincy: What was something you learned new working on this story that you may not have known before?

Sophia: I think in one of the interviews — the interview with Raquel Roman, the executive director of the organization, I asked her about how this work fits into the organization's work as a whole. Because the organization does many things, from like childcare, youth development, organizing, homeless shelters, so so many things, this is just one little piece of the work.

And so I asked her, kind of like, how — how it fit in with the organization as a whole.

Raquel: Yeah, I think next, well, next year will be our 40th anniversary. And I think this work is aligned to the work that started 40 years ago. I know that the women and Father Greg Boyle started this work to create safe spaces for our youth and our families. And when I think about all the work that has happened in the last three years, it's always been in response to something that is affecting our community.

And so this is definitely part of that. We're responding, and we're also trying to create a safe space for our youth and our families. And so it's very much aligned to who we are as Proyecto and walking with being in solidarity and making sure that the people in our community, all of us are treated with dignity and equity and and we are valued as human beings of this society.

Sophia: It didn't make it into the audio story, but it was something that I learned about how she sees the work being like, really a continuation of the work that the organization has been doing for 40 years, which is responding to needs within the community. And that's, yeah, at the core what Proyecto does. If there's a need, then the organization will evolve to meet that need.

Quincy: How important was it for you to be able to center immigrants from immigrant communities in Los Angeles in this story?

Sophia: Yeah, I think that was another kind of piece of why I thought it was important to tell the story as well, is that at least in the Boyle Heights Rapid Response Network, and I think in a lot of rapid response networks, a lot of the people doing the responding are

immigrants themselves, either from immigrant heritage or immigrant backgrounds. So how, you know, it's the people that are being most directly impacted that are also part of the solution and doing what they can to protect their communities.

And that's not to say — I think there's a lot of allies that are also been involved in efforts at the Home Depots and rapid response as well. But I think often the people that are most directly impacted are most aware of what's going on and what needs to be done.

Quincy: Yeah and I want to build on that, like what does it mean for you to cover the way that they are looking out for each other and helping each other?

Sophia: Yeah, I think it's really important to show that 'cause it's part of the humanizing, right? Like it shows that we are all people, and we all deserve care and to take care of each other, I think, is one of our only ways out of yeah, our current situation.

Yeah I just see a lot of beauty in that. And I think that's something I witnessed a lot when I worked at Proyecto.

Quincy: I think all those things are so great, and I think you did a great job centering these voices anyhow. But I totally understand you're like, I wish I could have included even more. I think that's a good instinct to have.

At Feet in 2 Worlds, we really try to frame immigrants as the subjects of our stories. That is to say, like they're the ones that have agency. They're the ones who are doing stuff, even as stuff is happening. We don't try to frame them as the object of a sentence, the object of the story, which just means like they're the victims of someone else's actions, of someone else's political situations or motives or, you know, harm, right?

And it doesn't mean that folks don't experience hardship or tragedy, but we really just try to make the story about who is the ones doing the experiencing and doing the action, as opposed to being having action be done to be done to them.

What do you think about that in context of your reporting process, both for this story, and maybe what you'll carry forward into the future, having learned from your experiences here?

Sophia: Yeah, I think I've definitely gravitated towards stories that tell or show the agency that people have. Especially right now, in terms of, you know, actions that we can take that maybe feel more empowering than reading about all the terrible things that are happening, more like solutions based journalism. So showing that, yeah, we have agency, even though it might feel like we don't to support our own communities.

Quincy: What do you hope the listeners take away from your piece?

Sophia: I would hope that what people take away from the piece is that there's groups of people across the city that are out there doing everything they can to take care of our neighbors.

Quincy: Thank you so much for sharing the story with us and for joining me, Sophia.

Sophia: Thank you. I really enjoyed it, and I'm so glad that you're going to be airing the story.

Quincy: Today's story was reported by Sophia Slep, and was produced as part of the Los Angeles Reporting Collective Fellowship.

It was produced and edited by Ari Saperstein and Alejandra Salazar, with additional support from Isabella Kulkarni, Annie Nguyen, Emma Lehmann and Molly Peterson.

Special thanks to Ben Adair at Western Sound for helping us record my conversation with Sophia.

This episode was hosted and produced by me, Quincy Surasmith, for Feet in 2 Worlds. Our Managing Director is Mia Warren. Our Managing Editor is Quincy Surasmith. Our Development Coordinator is Alejandro Salazar Dyer. Feet in 2 Worlds' original theme music is by Gautam Srikishan.

You can learn more about the Los Angeles Reporting Collective at Los Angeles Reporting Collective dot com.

Visit our website at Fi2W.org to listen to more stories of today's immigrants. I'm Quincy Surasmith. Thank you for listening.

Feet in 2 Worlds is supported by The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, The Ford Foundation, The Fernandez Pave the Way Foundation, an anonymous donor, contributors to our annual NewsMatch campaign, and listeners like you. Make a tax deductible contribution today at fi2w.org. That's F I the number 2 W dot org.

CITATION

Slep, Sophia. Reporter. "The People Who Show Up: Inside a Community's Effort to Respond to ICE Raids," Feet in 2 Worlds. December 12, 2025.

<https://www.fi2w.org/the-people-who-show-up-inside-a-communitys-effort-to-respond-to-ice-raids/>

