

Nonprofit: No ICE arrests for now, but Immokalee residents still wary

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After 9/11, the U.S. enforced stricter control on immigration. This enforcement led to the birth of Homeland Security and ICE, but what is ICE exactly? We explain. Just the FAQs, USA TODAY

When Immigration and Customs Enforcement came to the door, Immokalee residents didn't answer.

Social services organizations say that as of Thursday, they have heard of no residents of the migrant community being arrested during publicized operations planned in major cities across the United States last weekend. The roundups were to be aimed at migrants with final deportation orders.

Immigration agents were reportedly knocking on doors in Immokalee on July 12, but it is unclear whether their presence was related to the larger operations.

More: [ICE reported Friday in Immokalee, stoking fears of deportation](#)

More: [SW Florida residents join Lights for Liberty protest of border detention facilities](#)

While the results of the nationwide roundups are yet to be seen, some Immokalee residents are still wary of leaving their homes, driving or dropping their kids off at summer programs.

"That's no way to live," said Lourdes Villanueva, director of farmworker advocacy for the Redlands Christian Migrant Association. The statewide organization, also known as RCMA, provides early childhood education to the children of migrant farmworkers and social services to migrant families.

During a teleconference Thursday, immigration advocates and health professionals in Immokalee said that while the community is accustomed to periodic ICE enforcement, the threat of arrests and separation continually places stress on families.

When news of the roundups started to spread, some families called RCMA and members of their immigration team for help and advice. Norelia Sanchez, an immigration family support worker, has their trust. She helps them with immigration paperwork, offers support and reminds them of their rights in the meantime.

RCMA, like several other agencies in Immokalee, told their families: If ICE comes to the door, don't answer unless agents have a warrant signed by a judge; remain silent and calm; don't sign any documents. Many of Immokalee's nonprofits and social services agencies work together to meet a variety of needs.

The agency helps families obtain powers of attorney, make plans for temporary guardianship for children and do other emergency planning in the event of arrest or deportation. If parents are hiding out and fear leaving their homes to take their kids to RCMA's education centers, staff will transport students.

Gloria Luna Moorman, RCMA's director of development, said this work is ongoing and not connected to the recent immigration actions, but the organization's staff mobilizes to help their kids and families when threats of arrests loom.

"Everything has been so tender," Villanueva said. "So heightened."

More: [Immigration advocates brace for ICE roundups across country: 'The goal is to terrorize'](#)

More: [Did ICE raids happen? Trump says yes, but time frame is unclear](#)

Juana Brown, director of charter schools at RCMA, said there are many mixed-status families in Immokalee. Families may have U.S.-born children with one or both parents who are not citizens, or extended family members living together who are undocumented. In some cases, several generations, or several families, live together in the same house, apartment or trailer.

If a child's undocumented parent is arrested, that would be catastrophic, she said. The arrests of uncles, grandparents, cousins and neighbors can be just as devastating in this small, tight-knit community.

"In a community such as ours, everyone is touched by this," Brown said. "When one hurts, everyone hurts."

Dr. Javier Rosado, a psychologist and director of clinical research for the Florida State University Center for Child Stress and Health in Immokalee, said the stress and fear of arrests and worrying about family separation impacts children's abilities to learn and succeed.

RCMA has referred students and parents to Rosado's center when their lives have been impacted by immigration enforcement.

Rosado said he worries about the psychological and physical toll separation and fear of separation can have on children and how those stressors can manifest later in life.

Villanueva, the farmworker advocacy director, said teachers and parents used to be able to better protect children from the "outside world."

Now, with smartphones and social media, all kinds of information is available to them, and children are exposed to things they can't process, like family separation.

"The impact is amplified," said Brown, the director of RCMA charter schools. "It's difficult to protect students from that. That awareness is there all the time."