



ROCKY
MOUNTAIN
IMMIGRANT
ADVOCACY
NETWORK

2021

Annual

Report

**ENSURE JUSTICE.
REPRESENTATION FOR ALL.**

Pictured on cover: RMIAN clients Cris (right) and Syd (middle). Read their story on page 5!



About Us

The **Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN)** works to ensure justice for adults in immigration detention and for immigrant children who have suffered from abuse, neglect, or violence.

Our Mission

RMIAN is a nonprofit organization that serves low-income adults and children in immigration proceedings. RMIAN promotes knowledge of legal rights, provides effective representation to ensure due process, works to improve detention conditions, and promotes a more humane immigration system, including alternatives to detention.

Our Values

We believe that justice for immigrants means justice for all. We respect the needs and celebrate the contributions of the individuals and communities that we serve. We believe our clients are equal partners in accessing justice. We value respect for all human beings, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or legal status. We believe in valuing and respecting the contributions of our board, staff, and volunteers. We believe in a working environment that fosters personal and professional growth and strives for excellence.

Children's

A YEAR IN REVIEW

Children's Program

* **RMIAN's Children's Program fights to help individuals maintain family unity and achieve safety, permanency, and stability in the United States.**

Program

In 2021, RMIAN's Children's Program represented 584 youth and families in various immigration matters, including Special Immigrant Juvenile Status for abused, abandoned, and neglected youth, U visas for immigrant survivors of crime, T visas for those who have experienced human trafficking, among other protections.

The services of RMIAN's Children's Program were far-reaching and impacted immigrant youth and families throughout Colorado. One such youth lived in a rural mountain town in Colorado. At just 14 years old, she became the victim of human trafficking. She bravely came forward and worked together with her parents and the FBI to prosecute her traffickers. Despite the nearly 200 miles between RMIAN's office and the client's home, RMIAN was able to help the client and her family obtain T visas, for survivors of human trafficking. Having lived without documentation in the United States for over two decades, the family now has work authorization, social security numbers, and is in the process of becoming lawful permanent residents, and the client is now working and saving to go to college. RMIAN is proud to have been a part of this family's journey and so many others.

In May of 2021, RMIAN's Children's Program was confronted by the "Dedicated Docket" for recent arrival asylum-seeking families. The "Dedicated Docket" railroads families appearing before the Denver Immigration Court, rushing them through the court system so quickly that they are unable to secure counsel or present a meaningful defense against deportation. Families struggle to have their stories heard due to non-functioning technology and lack of equitable language services. Those with young children must simultaneously care for their children while attempting to navigate complicated court proceedings that could result in deportation

back to the conditions from which they have fled. RMIAN's Children's Program has a presence at the initial court hearings for those appearing on the docket. RMIAN program staff support as many families as possible through the provision of information, consultations, referrals, resources, and other legal assistance. In response to the injustices faced by these families, RMIAN continues to lift its voice in protest against the docket and the fight to ensure due process and fairness for families in these legal proceedings.

RMIAN's Children's Program staff also supports unaccompanied youth detained in Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) facilities. Throughout 2021, the Children's Program provided trauma-informed legal services to unaccompanied minors detained at the ORR facility in Westminster. For example, the Children's Program helped one youth report human trafficking abuses and assisted him in filing a request for release, preventing him from being immediately transferred to an ICE detention center for adults upon turning 18. Towards the end of the year, the Children's Program began preparations for the opening of a second ORR facility in Colorado for youth in need of additional services and care. These preparations enabled Children's Program staff to immediately assist these youth upon the opening of the facility in January 2022.

In 2021, RMIAN's Children's Program celebrated victories with hundreds of clients and applauded the reversal of many harmful Trump-era policies, regulations, and laws impacting immigrant children and families. However, many detrimental policies continue to create barriers and obstacles for the individuals and communities we serve. We remain steadfast in the fight for justice for immigrant children and families.

A Glimpse into Children's Program's Work

1 *** Sisters Cris* and Syd* (pictured on the cover with their younger sister Patricia*) came to the United States from Thailand with their family when they were four and two. RMIAN began working with their family in 2016 to apply for a U visa, a protection for immigrant survivors of crime, and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) for both sisters. In 2021, Cris, Syd, and their parents were all granted conditional U visa approval, giving them the opportunity to pursue employment and education and live their lives fully without fear of deportation and family separation.**

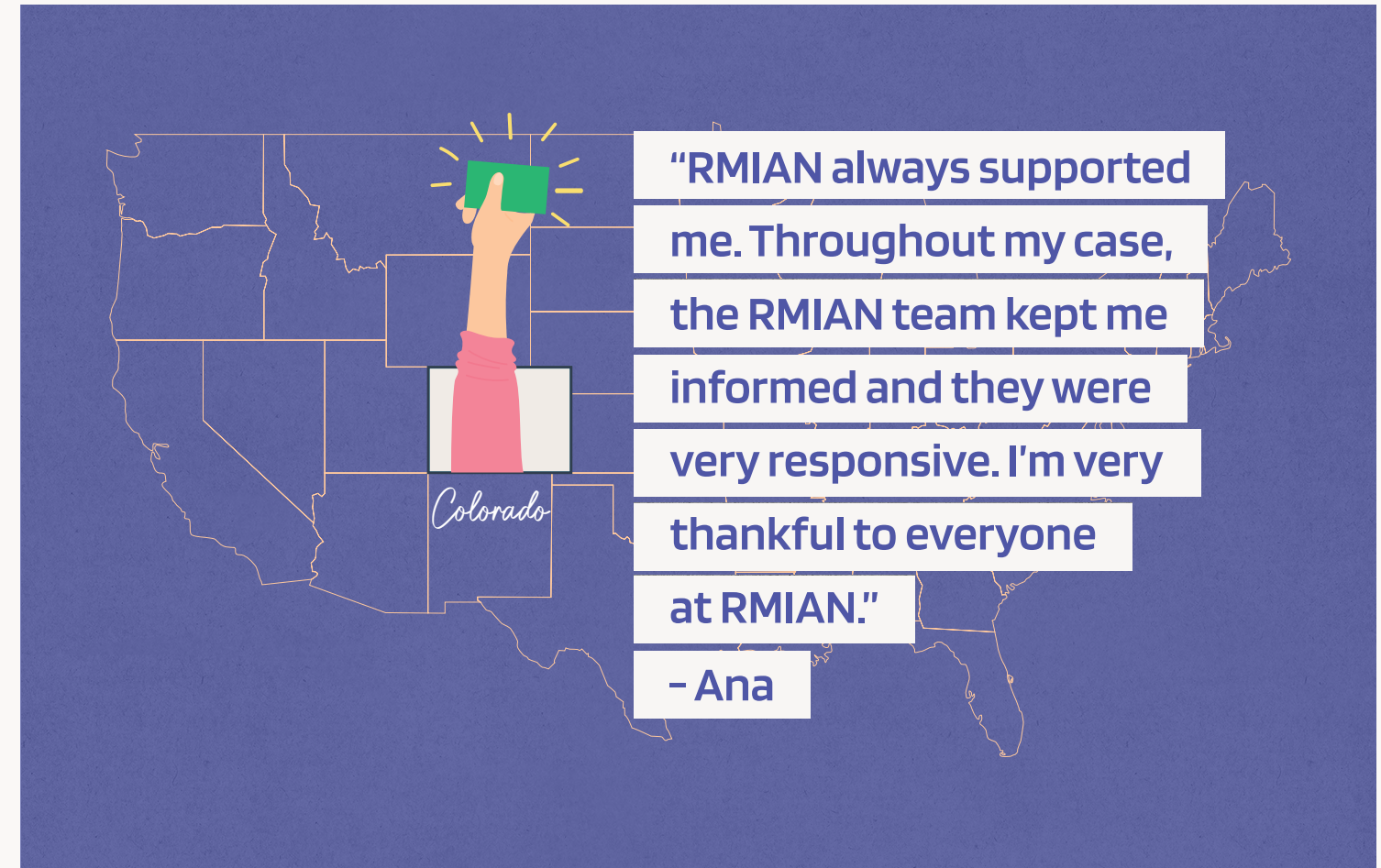
"I am happy because I wanted to be able to legally work and experience life in America without fear of be taken away from my friends and family. I was granted a wonderful opportunity that only some teenagers my age can experience. This is a once in a lifetime event that I am able to be a part of, providing me many opportunities, and work towards my dreams of the future."
- Syd

2 *** At 16, Jaime* (pictured above) made the courageous decision to flee Guatemala and come to the United States on his own.** Forced to work from a young age and subjected to severe child abuse by his mother, Jaime came to the United States to reunite with his father. Upon arriving at the



With lawful permanent residency, Jaime is safe from deportation. He is able to work in the United States and build a better life for himself alongside his father and younger siblings.

border, Jaime was detained in an Office of Refugee Resettlement facility for unaccompanied minors before moving to Colorado to be with his dad. With legal representation from his RMIAN attorney, Jaime obtained Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and lawful permanent residency in the United States. Jaime has built a life in Colorado over the five years he has been here. He has graduated from high school and is now working to support his younger siblings, who have also fled their mother's abuse in Guatemala, to join him and his father in Colorado.



3 *** When Ana* first came to the United States, she was just thirteen years old.** She mainly spoke Mam, an indigenous Mayan language, and was all alone. Ana was placed in the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor foster care program and was moved from state to state before coming to Colorado.

Through RMIAN, Ana applied for and received Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and recently received permanent residency. Now, seven years after arriving in the United States, Ana speaks three languages (Mam, English, and Spanish), is the mother of two beautiful and healthy baby boys, and is providing them with a safe and stable home.



Ana, pictured above with her two sons, no longer has to worry about deportation or family separation. Instead, she can focus on building a life with her sons.

**Client names have been changed to protect their anonymity.*

A YEAR IN REVIEW

Detention Program

* The strengths of RMIAN's Detention Program are shaped by the challenges faced by the people we serve, with a focus on upholding due process and fundamental fairness in immigration court proceedings.

RMIAN's Detention Program fights against the miscarriages of justice that frequently befall detained people due to systemic racism and discrimination within the U.S. immigration system. Among those served in 2021 were asylum seekers unjustly incarcerated and people previously enmeshed in our communities who were abruptly stolen away and taken into ICE custody.

Despite countless logistical barriers, the COVID-19 pandemic did not hamper RMIAN's Detention Program's efficacy. The Detention Program represented an unprecedented number of clients in their immigration matters, pairing hundreds of people with in-house and volunteer attorneys, securing interpretation and translation services for clients speaking over 45 different languages, and offering robust pro se support to individuals unable to secure counsel.

RMIAN further mobilized against unjust policies such as the continuation of Title 42, a policy created under the auspices of the COVID-19 public health emergency. In reality, the implementation of Title 42 has been used to prevent Black, indigenous, and people of color from seeking asylum in the United States, instead forcing them to remain at the southern border where they have suffered increased rates of violent crime. Despite the Biden Administration's named intent to abolish Title 42, the policy continues and Congress is contemplating its indefinite extension as of the publishing of this annual report.

In the face of these injustices, RMIAN continues to serve asylum seekers unjustly detained in our community. For example, a RMIAN attorney represented an asylum seeker from Nicaragua who fled after being beaten by government officials and having his life threatened on account of his political views. Both the asylum office and the immigration

court erroneously found his asylum claim was not viable under the law. Knowing that deportation would be tantamount to a death sentence, the client's RMIAN attorney filed a motion to reopen with the court and three requests for reconsideration before the asylum office. Thanks to these efforts, the final request was granted and soon thereafter his RMIAN attorney secured the his release, and he reunited with his loved ones.

RMIAN strives for a universal representation system in immigration proceedings. Until that day, RMIAN provides robust pro se support to clients who we are unable to pair with counsel. One such asylum seeker feared returning to Lao because of his sexual orientation, political opinion, and Hmong ethnicity. Although he faced many obstacles, including contracting COVID-19 while detained, support from RMIAN helped him successfully prepare his own application for relief from removal. After months in detention, he won his case and reunited with his family.

In conjunction with RMIAN's direct services, the Detention Program spearheaded nationwide advocacy efforts. RMIAN authored letters to government officials seeking a halt to mass transfers of people in immigration custody given the higher risk of contracting COVID-19 while detained; demanding access to vaccinations for everyone held in ICE custody; and requesting more robust due process protections for clients with mental disabilities who are appointed counsel through the National Qualified Representative Program.

Despite the ongoing challenges faced by the people RMIAN's Detention Program serves, we never cease to be amazed by the bravery and resiliency they model for us each and every day. They drive our work and inspire us to pursue change toward a more just and humane immigration system.

The Power of Community

The power of RMIAN's work lies both in our ability to help clients with their legal cases and to give them the opportunities and resources to form strong community connections that support their long-term success.

Stepping outside the Aurora, Colorado detention facility, Ms. JS, was greeted by her RMIAN attorney and her long-time pen pal and supporter, Kim. Ms. JS had been detained inside the walls of the GEO/ICE facility for over a year. Thanks to her resilience and the strength of the community around her, she was finally out.

Ms. JS arrived in the United States as a child, having fled parental abuse and neglect in Mexico.

She made her way to the United States hoping for a better life in which she would be free to be herself as a transgender woman. However, after contact with the criminal legal system as a young adult, she was detained and transferred to ICE custody in Colorado.

Far from home and without her support system, Ms. JS felt lonely and depressed in detention. That's when she met RMIAN. RMIAN's Legal Orientation Program team screened her case and connected her with a RMIAN attorney and social worker. Through RMIAN's unique blend of legal and social services, Ms. JS and her RMIAN team fought for her release from detention and protection against deportation. Recognizing the need for holistic support for detained immigrants, Ms. JS' team at RMIAN coordinated connections with community organizations that helped advocate for her access to due process, medical care, and mental health services.

Once released, the community support that Ms. JS found through RMIAN continued to grow. RMIAN connected Ms. JS with an organization focused on supporting the needs of transgender Latin@ immigrants. Through this connection, Ms. JS has been able to integrate more fully into her community. She has had opportunities to give back as a volunteer receptionist's assistant and food deliverer.

Reflecting on her experiences with her newfound community, Ms. JS says, *"I had never imagined that I would be able to do it. I felt very happy and emotional. I have the desire to help other people in the same way that I have received help."*

Empowered by the stability RMIAN has provided her and the opportunities she has had to engage

with her community, Ms. JS plans to enroll in school to become a medical assistant so she can continue helping the people around her. Ms. JS and her RMIAN team celebrate her release from detention and her opportunities for community engagement. We continue to fight for her safety from the dangers she faced in Mexico because of her gender identity and to give her a chance to build a life in the United States.

**Client names have been changed to protect their anonymity.*

In 2021, RMIAN released a mission video detailing our work and amplifying the voices of our clients. This video was a long time in the making, and we encourage you to visit our website to view it and learn more about the impact of RMIAN's work.

Our Mission

RMIAN is a nonprofit organization that serves low-income men, women, and children in immigration proceedings. RMIAN promotes knowledge of legal rights, provides effective representation to ensure due process, works to improve detention conditions, and promotes a more humane immigration system, including alternatives to detention.



www.rmian.org/impact



"There are rough times, but progress can be made if the individual truly wants it and if the organizations that are involved provide the support."

- Ms. JS

Ms. JS has been released from detention and has been able to connect more deeply with her community thanks to the support she received from RMIAN.

Social Service

A YEAR IN REVIEW

Social Service Project



* **For RMIAN's Social Service Project, 2021 was a year of expansion, wide-ranging work, and ventures into new territory.**

One RMIAN social worker worked closely with a Detention Program attorney to help their shared client, who had been deported to her home country, safely return to the United States after her appeal was granted. This involved painstaking efforts to find funding for the client's travel (since the government would not cover it), coordination with airlines, and communication with the client and her family across two continents.

A second RMIAN social worker counseled her client, in hiding in his home country, about how he could still try accessing critical medication—and endure the wrenching dangers of armed conflict surrounding him. Following tremendous progress in federal litigation waged by the client's pro bono legal team, the social worker and client are now arranging his mental health treatment and other support for him in the United States for when he is—we fervently hope—returned here.

A third RMIAN social worker hopes to finally help her client, whose long-unresolved asylum case is the subject of a very positive published decision by the 10th Circuit, connect to essential public benefits available to asylees.

Meanwhile, the Social Service Project (SSP) helped RMIAN clients and other community members by developing guides on accessing Colorado identification and enrolling in health services. In the hope of improving paths towards more humane treatment and support for others, several transgender and non-binary SSP clients have courageously shared their experiences of immigration detention in a research project led

by Denver Health and the University of Colorado Denver researchers and RMIAN staff.

The expansion of SSP's work into the Children's Program continued during 2021, with children and families constituting more than half of new clients referred. These included seven unaccompanied minors held in the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) custody, whom RMIAN assisted in finding sponsors or other safe places to go after release.

SSP also readied to respond to the special emotional and behavioral needs of girls at a new ORR facility. And social workers accompanied other Children's Program clients through a labyrinth of healthcare, benefits, and other systems, including for clients with developmental and other disabilities.

By the end of the year, SSP was poised to expand its ranks with two new social workers. The addition of these new team members is made possible, in part, by new funding to support the behavioral health needs of youth in Denver city and county.

Other recent funding will place SSP, for the first time, at the Denver Immigration Court to address the questions asylum-seeking families and individuals so often have about how to survive, physically and emotionally, while their cases are pending. SSP looks forward to packing its passion and adapting its acumen to these and other frontiers.

"Through the power of social work, SSP stands with clients as they draw on their strengths and resiliences at a critical crossroads in their lives."

Advocacy and Legislative Victories

RMIAN played a critical role in 2021 in advocacy and legislation, positively impacting the lives of Colorado immigrants, including survivors of crime and immigrants in civil immigration detention.

House Bill 21-1060 U Visa Certification Requirements

In 2021, RMIAN's Children's Program championed Colorado House Bill 21-1060 for improved access to U visa protection, a vital pathway towards lawful permanent residency for immigrant survivors of crime who assist law enforcement in investigating or prosecuting crime.

U visa protection was created to encourage non-citizens who experienced crime to come forward without fear that doing so would result in deportation and family separation. However, Colorado immigrant crime survivors have been subjected to inconsistent policies across the state, unfairly preventing them from applying for U nonimmigrant status even when they have fulfilled the visa's requirements.

"It made absolutely no sense that two people could suffer the same horrific crime, assist law enforcement to the same extent, and one could get a U visa certification and the other could not - solely because of where in Colorado the crime occurred and which agency investigated or prosecuted the crime. HB21-1060 puts an end to arbitrary and unfair policies that deny survivors equal access to protection under our laws."

- Ashley Harrington, Esq.
Children's Program Managing Attorney

House Bill 21-1060 creates uniformity and fairness for U visa certification requests across the state, including a set timeline for certification approval or denial. House Bill 21-1060 further clarifies which factors may or may not be considered by law enforcement in the certification process, prohibits certain disclosures to immigration authorities, and requires law enforcement to provide crime survivors with information about the U visa.

House Bill 21-1060 was sponsored by Representative Serena Gonzales-Gutierrez, Representative Iman Jodeh, and Senator Julie Gonzales, and was supported by many immigrant survivors of crime, victim advocacy groups, and immigrant rights organizations, including RMIAN. Now, Colorado immigrant survivors of crime just like Lucia* (pictured below with her daughters) will be able to access the protections of the U visa. With their U visa, Lucia and her daughters are safe from deportation and are on the pathway towards lawful permanent residency.



House Bill 21-1060 provides critical protections for immigrant crime survivors in Colorado, like RMIAN clients Lucia and her daughters.*

House Bill 21-1194 Immigration Legal Defense Fund

In June 2021, RMIAN celebrated the passage of Colorado House Bill 21-1194 and the creation of the Colorado statewide Immigration Legal Defense Fund. Without court-appointed counsel in immigration deportation proceedings, people unable to afford to hire a private attorney must instead represent themselves before the immigration court. In Colorado alone, nearly 70% of people in immigration detention appear without an attorney due to the lack of court-appointed counsel.

For years RMIAN has fought alongside community advocates, immigrant rights organizations, and elected officials to disrupt systemic injustices preventing access to due process for individuals facing deportation. With sponsorship from Representative Kerry Tipper, Representative Naquetta Ricks, and Senator Dominick Moreno, advocacy from immigrant rights activists, and compelling testimony from RMIAN attorneys and clients regarding the importance and potential impact of the fund, House Bill 21-1194 passed, and the Immigration Legal Defense Fund was created.

Among those who provided testimony was RMIAN client Mr. AA (pictured to the right). Mr. AA, a father and small business owner, spoke about his experience of being unable to afford to hire an attorney and the fear that he would be separated from his wife and children after living nearly twenty years in Colorado. It was only through access to universal representation that Mr. AA was able to receive legal representation.

Thanks to those who supported the bill, including RMIAN staff and clients, the Colorado Statewide

Immigration Legal Defense Fund was allocated \$100,000 for 2021-2022 (an amount that was more than doubled in 2022). As the year came to a close, RMIAN was awarded a contract to provide legal services to immigrants facing deportation under the fund and has been working diligently to pilot this universal representation model.

"We believe that every single person deserves an attorney by their side as they navigate complicated and high-stakes immigration court proceedings. With HB21-1194, Colorado shows itself as a leader in the movement for universal representation. Through the powerful leadership of our immigrant community members, advocates, and elected representatives, Colorado is one step closer to being able to say that every single person ensnared in immigration enforcement proceedings who cannot afford an attorney will have one provided for them and that justice truly is accessible to all."

* Mekela Goehring, Esq., Executive Director, Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN).



Top photo: The team behind HB21-1194 celebrating the bill signing. Thanks to these efforts, Colorado has become one of the first states in the nation to create a statewide fund to support access to legal representation for immigrants.



Left photo: RMIAN staff and client celebrating the signing of HB21-1194. Pictured left to right: RMIAN Senior Program Staff Attorney Sarah Plastino, RMIAN client Mr. AA, RMIAN Universal Representation Attorney Shaleen Morales, RMIAN Executive Director Mekela Goehring, RMIAN Development and Communications Specialist Ryan Torres.

2021

2021 Annual Highlights

Annual Highlights

People reached by "Know Your Rights" presentations

2,337

1,951

Individual legal intakes completed

Clients directly represented by RMIAN attorneys

761

446

Clients referred to RMIAN's network of pro bono attorneys

Community members trained by RMIAN staff

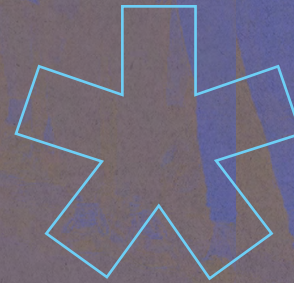
2,140

108

Clients provided holistic support through RMIAN's Social Service Project

Countries represented

81



AT RMIAN, WE BELIEVE THAT
100% OF INDIVIDUALS IN LEGAL
IMMIGRATION PROCEEDINGS
DESERVE REPRESENTATION FROM
AN ATTORNEY. PLEASE VISIT OUR
WEBSITE AT RMIAN.ORG TO LEARN
MORE ABOUT HOW YOU CAN
SUPPORT THIS GOAL.



ROCKY
MOUNTAIN
IMMIGRANT
ADVOCACY
NETWORK

HOTLINE FOR DETAINED INDIVIDUALS & FAMILY MEMBERS: (303) 866-9308 ☎ PHONE: (303) 433-2812

7301 FEDERAL BLVD, SUITE 300
WESTMINSTER, CO 80030