



Immigrant Child & Family Rights Project

Proposed Project. There is an urgent need for advocacy to halt the administration's practice of taking children away from their parents at the border. The Young Center is appointed as Child Advocate to many of these children who are placed in federal custody, separated from their parents. We have an opportunity to make a difference. The Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights is raising funds to develop a new project, the Immigrant Child & Family Rights Project, to: (1) advocate for the reunification of parents and children in individual cases; and (2) advocate for systemic change to end the practice of family separation by the Department of Homeland Security and for policies that better protect the rights of children and families.

The Problem of Parent-Child Separation. Under the current administration, the Department of Homeland Security has been taking children away from their parents in unprecedented numbers. The parents are sent to adult immigration detention facilities. Their children, regardless of age, are taken away and transferred to children's facilities, often in different states. The government's articulated purpose: to deter other families from making the journey to the United States.

Nearly every day we receive referrals for children taken from their parents. Many of these children are being placed in detention facilities for children in the New York area. In some cases, the facility where the child is housed is unable to locate the parent. In other cases, the parents have already been deported and the children are still in federal custody. Many of these children are young: two brothers, ages 3 and 11, were taken from their mother at the border. The Young Center was just appointed as Child Advocate for a 10-month-old girl taken from her father at the border. For months we have been serving as Child Advocate for a 10-year-old boy, who has now been separated from his mother for almost 9 months. These children are severely traumatized after the separation: we've seen a 5-year-old child who stopped speaking, a 6-year-old suffering panic attacks, and many young children who won't eat, can't sleep and suffer from nightmares.

The Young Center proposes to create a new initiative staffed by two full-time attorneys who will take cases and advocate for the reunification of children and parents separated at the border, and conduct policy advocacy with legislators and federal agencies in Washington, D.C. aimed at putting a stop to this unconscionable practice. We plan to raise the funds incrementally, with plans to hire the first attorney as soon as possible.

Goals of this Proposal. The Young Center proposes to create a "Immigrant Child & Family Rights Project", staffed by attorneys responsible for the following:

- Taking cases where children have been separated from a parent at the border and advocating for family reunification.
- Devising strategy on cases in which the Young Center is appointed as Child Advocate.
- Conducting policy advocacy with the White House and key legislative offices.

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- Advocating with key officials in the Department of Homeland Security, Department of State, Department of Justice and the Department of Health & Human Services.
- Gathering and analyzing data from Young Center cases to inform policy briefs and media outreach.
- Participating in coalitions working on family separation issues.

Budget. The anticipated budget for this project is as follows. We will raise funds incrementally and will hire the first attorney as soon as we've raised the first year of funding, approximately \$125,000.

- 12 months for one attorney – \$125,000 (covers salary, benefits, rent and equipment).
- 24 months for one attorney – \$250,000
- 24 months for two attorneys - \$500,000 two attorneys/two years

Young Center's Work. The Young Center is a human rights organization that advocates for the best interests of immigrant children. Young Center staff, attorneys and social workers, are appointed by the federal government to serve as “Child Advocate” (akin to a guardian *ad litem* in our family court system), whose role is to advocate for the best interests of individual children on legal issues including custody, family reunification, legal protection and safe repatriation. We are appointed to the most vulnerable unaccompanied children, including young children and those children separated from their parents at the border. The Young Center conducts advocacy on behalf of a child by issuing best interests recommendations to immigration officials who will be making decisions affecting the child’s safety and well-being. Best interests recommendations lay out a legal assessment of what is in a child’s best interests, relying on international law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, guidelines issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, federal law such as the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act, and state child protection statutes. These best interests recommendations are submitted to government decision makers, including immigration judges, asylum officers and enforcement officials.

Since its inception, the Young Center has conducted policy work advocating for reform of the immigrant justice system to recognize children as children, with rights and protection needs all their own. This work has been supported through individual donors, family foundations and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Our policy work has been successful because we identify systemic issues through serving as Child Advocate for individual children, and because we not only work with policy makers but with decision makers in the field—immigration judges, asylum officers, enforcement officials.

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