

Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights 2022 Annual Overview



Table of Contents

3 A Message from Our ED	4 About the Young Center	8 Child Advocate Program
16 Technical Assistance Program	20 Policy Program	23 Elizabeth Frankel Fellowship Program
24 Our Partners Our People	25 Financials	28 Waymakers

A Message from the Executive Director



For the last three years, I have witnessed the undeniable sense of despair and fear children and families face along the U.S.-Mexico border. Since my last visit to the border in November 2022, Title 42—a policy used by the former administration to rapidly expel families and adult asylum-seekers to Mexico—has been expanded. The administration has also introduced a host of border enforcement measures that have kept children and families in danger, fueled family separation, and denied people their right to seek safety in the U.S. Policies and practices that separate families have never been—and never will be—acceptable. They were unacceptable in 2018 at the height of the past administration’s cruel and inhumane family separation policy, which resulted in over 5,000 separations, and they remain unacceptable now.

As an immigrant children’s rights organization, the Young Center fights on behalf of every child and every family harmed by policies and practices that deny their rights, fuel family separation, and jeopardize their safety. Today, as nearly 1,000 children remain separated because of the 2018 Zero Tolerance policy, and new border enforcement measures put the lives of children in danger, I ask myself: When will our government take full responsibility for past violations of human rights and end policies that continue these violations today? When are we finally going to say, “Never again!”?

It is often challenging to measure progress when you’re working towards transforming our country’s broken immigration system. However, despite continued attacks against immigrant communities, 2022 was also a year when we took meaningful steps in protecting the rights, safety, and well-being of all children.

Over the course of the year, the Young Center celebrated the introduction of a landmark congressional bill—the Children’s Safe Welcome Act. This bill aims to expand the protections for unaccompanied children and reflects years of advocacy by the Young Center to influence members of Congress to accept our organization’s recommendations and expertise.

In the fall of 2022, we launched a new program. The Technical Assistance Program offers culturally sensitive and trauma-informed case consultations and training to professionals and court advocates who serve the growing number of immigrant children caught between the federal immigration system and state court systems. Additionally, in June 2022, we formally welcomed the very first cohort of Elizabeth Frankel Fellows. All of this progress took place alongside the critical work of our Child Advocate Program, through which we served more than 1,600 unaccompanied children from 45 different countries with the support of nearly 400 volunteers.

The fight for justice on behalf of immigrant children and youth is far from over. At the Young Center, we will not waver in our commitment to defend and advocate for their rights and best interests. All children belong with their families and deserve to live safe and thriving lives. That is the world for which we stand. With you in our corner, we can continue to carry forward this urgent work.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gema".

Gladis E. Molina Alt
Executive Director

About the Young Center

Our Mission

The Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights protects and advances the rights and best interests of immigrant children according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and state and federal law.

Our Work

We are a human rights organization that advocates for the rights and best interests of immigrant children. Our goal is to change both immigration policy and practice, so immigrant children are recognized first as children and their best interests are considered in every decision. We do this through three programs:

Child Advocate Program (CAP)

Provides independent Child Advocates to vulnerable children in federal immigration detention. Our attorneys and social workers, along with trained bilingual volunteers, are appointed to identify and advocate for the best interests of individual children—about their custody, placement, reunification with family, legal relief, and repatriation—to ensure that all decision-makers take into consideration the children's best interests.

Technical Assistance Program (TAP)

Works to ensure immigrant children involved in state child welfare and juvenile justice systems have equitable access to legal relief, critical support for their well-being, and connection to family, language, and culture. To do so, TAP seeks to build the capacity of state court attorneys, caseworkers, and government officials to navigate the complexities that arise when immigrant children become involved in state court systems and to support them in providing more holistic services for immigrant children.

Policy Program

Advocates for systemic changes to the laws, policies, and practices immigrant children face which are not child-centered and fail to prioritize children's best interests. Through advocacy with Congress, federal agencies, and courts, we fight for policies that protect children's right to family, ensure their safety in custody, provide access to fair proceedings, and change the narrative about immigrant youth.

"As a proud daughter of immigrants, it is my privilege to momentarily partake in the lives of immigrant children and be inspired by their resilience. It has been a life-changing experience to advocate for those strong-willed children as they seek safety and better lives." -Wendy, Young Center-Houston Child Advocate Volunteer

Our Values

We are committed to supporting and serving immigrant children in every facet of our work. From our external mission to our internal culture, policies, and priorities, we are guided by our core values at every level:

Child-Centered

We amplify the voices of the children and youth we serve and seek to uphold their right to self-determination. We center their wishes and well-being, along with their own vision for their family and future. We demand decision-makers see each child and youth for the unique individual they are and work to identify opportunities for them to assert their voice in decisions impacting their lives.



Courage

We dare to fight for a just and humane immigration system through innovative advocacy grounded in interdisciplinary practice. As an organization, we demand accountability from systems and people in positions of power for the decisions they make and the harm they inflict on the children and families we serve. As individuals, we strive to face hard truths, learn from our mistakes, and commit to growth.

Accompaniment

We partner with others with compassion and strive to dismantle power dynamics inherent in our relationships. Our collaboration is grounded in mutual trust, connection, and respect. As we accompany children and families, we seek to de-center ourselves. As we accompany one another, we share in both the joys and the sorrows of the work advancing our mission.



Community

We empower others to show up and participate as their authentic selves, and in doing so, cultivate a sense of community grounded in belonging. We derive strength from the uniqueness of our staff, our volunteers, our supporters, and especially the children and families whom we fight alongside. We respond to the needs of our community and the communities we serve.

Equity and Justice

We honor the diverse array of experiences, perspectives, and identities every person holds—especially the children for whom we advocate. We stand in defense of the fundamental humanity of immigrant children and join in the fight for the rights, liberation, and dignity of all communities especially those that have been historically harmed and marginalized. Along with our allies, we strive for a world where all children are valued and treated as children, and are never subjected to the harms of detention, deportation, or separation from their loved ones.



Highlights from 2022

JANUARY

The Society for American Law Teachers honored our former Associate Director, Elizabeth Frankel, with the M. Shanara Gilbert Human Rights Award. We also hired our first Chief Operations Officer.

MARCH

We announced the inaugural cohort of fellows for the Elizabeth Frankel Fellowship Program, made up of law students from diverse backgrounds across the country.



MAY

Our Executive Director, Gladis Molina Alt, was featured as one of the American Bar Association's 2022's Fearless Children's Lawyers.



JUNE

Our "Reimagine" annual benefit event featured Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Maria Hinojosa and honored global icon Isabel Allende with the Waymaker Award.

JULY

Congress introduced the Children's Safe Welcome Act (CSWA), a landmark bill that would ensure the federal government prioritizes the safety and well-being of each child navigating our country's immigration system.



SEPTEMBER

We released the report Punishing Trauma: Incident Reporting and Immigrant Children in Government Custody, while our staff, volunteers, donors and supporters participated in another successful Waymakers Run/Walk/Roll fundraiser across the country.



OCTOBER

We launched the Technical Assistance Program with a digital event for funders and partners.



NOVEMBER

We traveled to Matamoros, Mexico to assess the impact of Title 42 on the lives of migrant children and families at the border.



DECEMBER

We received the Frances R. Hesselbein Award from Mutual of America's 2022 Community Partnership Awards for our Child Advocate Program.



Our Child Advocate Program

Our Child Advocate Program (CAP) provides independent Child Advocates—similar to guardians ad litem in state courts—to unaccompanied immigrant children in federal detention. We serve survivors of persecution, trafficking, abuse, and other crimes; particularly young children; pregnant and parenting youth; children and youth with complex medical conditions or disabilities; children at risk of turning 18 while in government custody; and other particularly vulnerable youth. Our Child Advocates accompany children while they remain in detention, separated from their families, and as they face immigration proceedings.

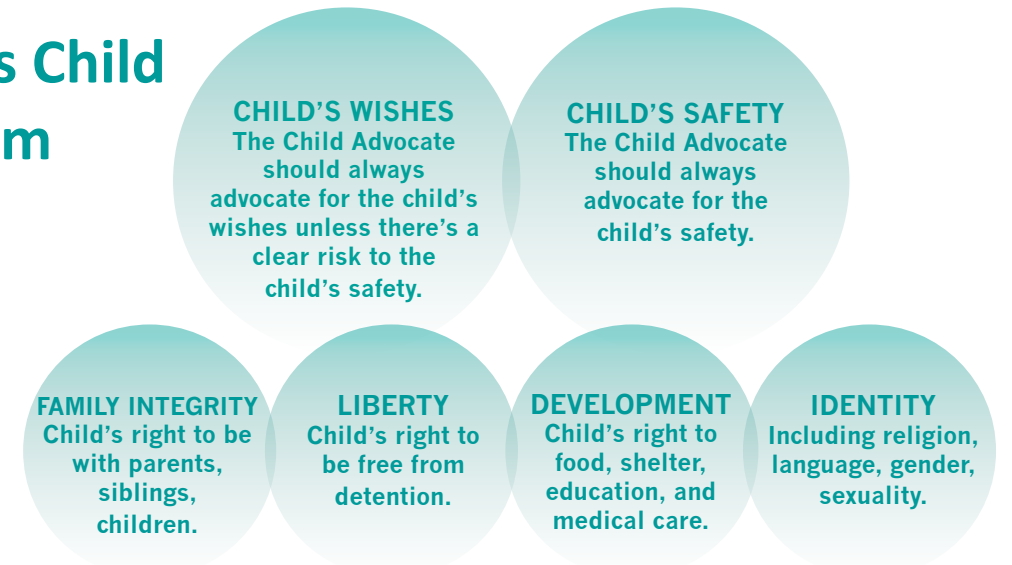
Young Center staff advocate for children’s best interests by submitting written and oral Best Interests Determinations (BIDs) to immigration judges, asylum officers, government officials, facility staff, lawyers, and other service providers. Our BIDs are based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, federal and state law, and evolving social science. We advocate for immigrant children in federal detention to be quickly placed with family, or in family-like settings in the community and have access to the support and services they need and deserve while detained and after their release.

We also ensure their individual identities, culture, language, trauma history, and wishes are respected by stakeholders making decisions on their behalf. Our Child Advocates provide child-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive services using a rights-based paradigm to minimize the risk that bias, stereotypes, paternalism, and subjective values influence Best Interests Determinations.

This paradigm takes into account widely accepted best interests’ principles for protecting a child’s safety, and expressed interests, as well as the child’s rights to family, integrity, liberty, healthy development, and identity.



Young Center’s Child Rights Paradigm



Aziz*(*denotes pseudonym)

After being evacuated from a war zone, Aziz stepped off a plane and onto U.S. soil with no birth certificate or government-issued identification and no belongings, asking: “Where am I? What country is this? Where is my family?”

But no one in the entire U.S. immigration system knew what to do with Aziz when he and other unaccompanied children from Afghanistan first arrived. As a result, Aziz was sent to a government facility for unaccompanied children where facility staff didn’t speak his language or understand his religious, dietary, or health needs. Aziz stopped attempting to communicate. When he eventually learned that his entire immediate family had been killed while waiting to evacuate, he suffered tremendously and required increased support.

When the federal government reached out for help with Afghan children, CAP immediately recruited and trained more than fifty volunteers who speak Dari, Pashto, and Farsi. Not long after his arrival, we appointed a Child Advocate to Aziz. At first, he refused to meet with them. But our Child Advocate continued to show up, week after week, month after month, just in case Aziz changed his mind.

When Aziz finally determined that his Child Advocate was truly there to help him, he began to share his story. CAP found a specialized treatment center and an interpreter to help Aziz begin addressing his trauma and advocated for him to be enrolled in a local school. After a long search, CAP also discovered Aziz had an aunt in Afghanistan who was still trying to emigrate.

We won’t quit until we reunite Aziz with his sole, remaining family member. With only one flight per week out of Afghanistan and no mechanism in the U.S. to approve his aunt’s arrival, we continue to support Aziz until he can be reunited with her.



“I realized it’s important to have someone in your corner listening to you and supporting you through a difficult process. I wanted to be able to do that for someone.” -Miguel Conne, Young Center - Houston Child Advocate Volunteer

Continued Services to Afghan Children

Throughout 2022, CAP staff worked to address the gaps in services for Afghan children in federal detention. More than one year after Afghan children arrived in the U.S., many remain in restrictive settings and face challenges that have taken a significant toll on their health and well-being, such as an inability to communicate with family and limited access to linguistically and culturally responsive services. We worked extensively to educate stakeholders and policymakers about the unmet needs of detained Afghan youth. Some Afghan children do not have an adult in the U.S. to sponsor them, and it remains unclear when (if ever) the children's families will arrive in the U.S. These Afghan children have experienced longer lengths of stay in detention, along with increased transfers to more restricted settings. To reduce disruptions and isolation, we fought against transfers and fought for placements that keep Afghan children together. Accordingly, most of our advocacy in 2022 focused on helping the children with their legal case, extraction of family members, and reunification. Simultaneously, we worked with government facilities to ensure Afghan children receive culturally and linguistically appropriate care and services, including on-site interpreters, language-appropriate clinicians, and psychosocial support services. Our advocacy for these children continues.



Safe Repatriation

The Young Center's Safe Repatriation Program provides decision-makers with fact-based information about the child's safety, culture, and family before a decision is made about repatriation. Our Child Advocates incorporate information from international home studies, safety assessments, and external consultants into our oral and written Best Interests Determinations (BIDs), which are grounded in our Child's Rights Paradigm. We submit BIDs to stakeholders who make decisions, including about placement and repatriation, that directly impact the child's safety and well-being. Our work supports children who wish to return to their home countries and those at risk of deportation to dangerous conditions. The Safe Repatriation Program's vision is for children to be safe outside of government detention and able to return to their home country if and when they want to, ensuring safeguards are put in place for when it's deemed safe.

"My dream for immigrant children is that they are able to be in a society that understands their problems, needs, and feelings. A society that takes action and advocates for their rights and believes in equality no matter where they come from." - Maria Angélica Paniagua Núñez, Young Center - Houston Child Advocate Volunteer

Carlos*

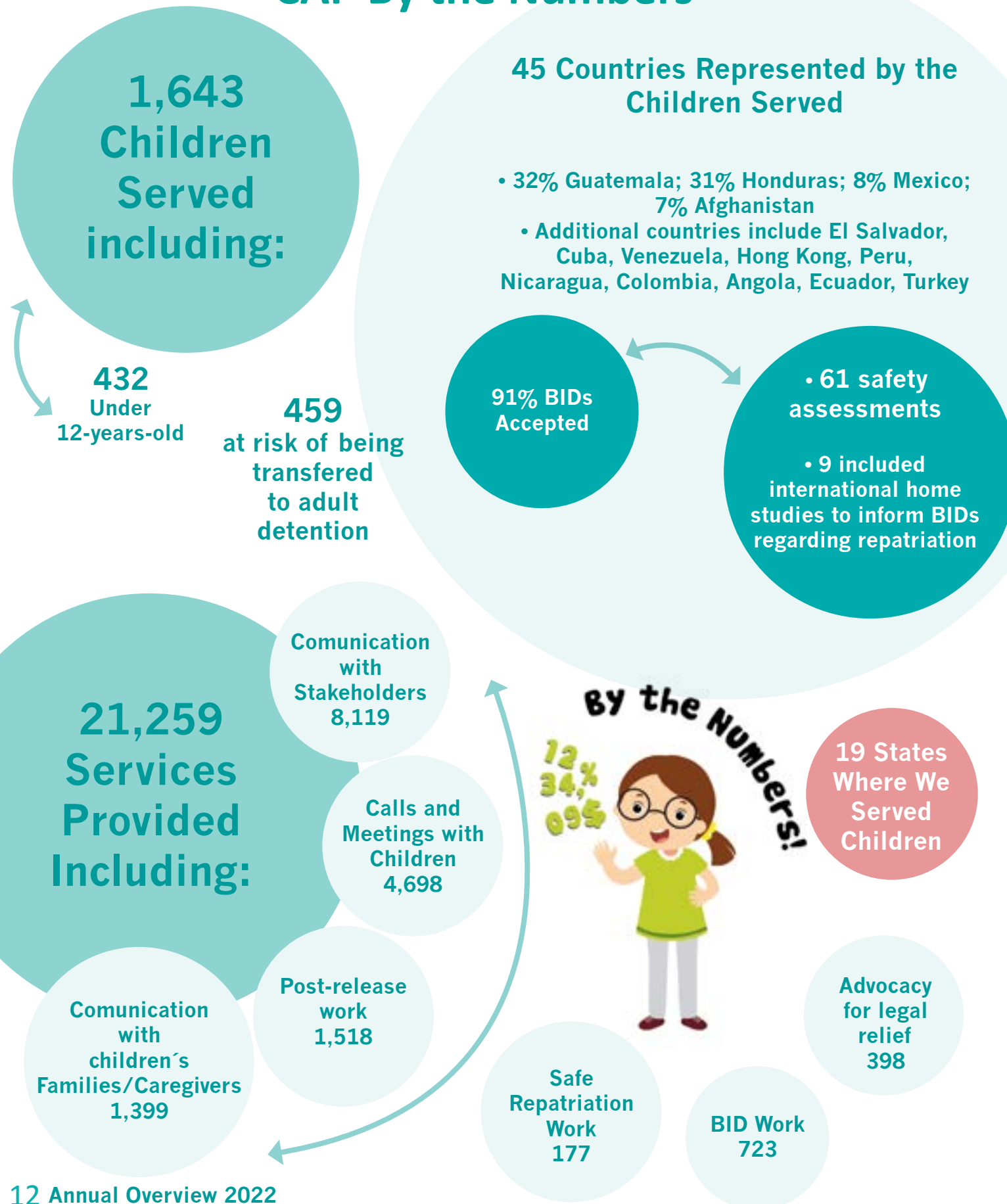
CAP commissioned an international home study for Carlos, a five-year-old boy from Guatemala who was in custody in the U.S. Based on information gathered from the home study, we recommended it was in Carlos' best interests to be reunited with his father in Guatemala. The home visit provided insight into his family's culture and captured the father's connection to his community and the support system he planned to engage upon his son's return. CAP submitted a BID in support of repatriation to Guatemala and reunification with his father and recommended safeguards as required by law.

As part of our ongoing best-interests advocacy, Carlos' Child Advocate Supervisor referred the case to Guatemala-based Justice in Motion advocates, who appointed a local defender to support the family on the ground. When the government failed to inform the family of the child's arrival, we were able to confirm Carlos' location and ensure he and his father were reunited. Justice in Motion supported the father with transportation, food, and boarding for their seven-hour journey.

After a year of separation, Carlos was reunited with his father. The international home study provider conducted a follow-up visit with the family and found Carlos has reconnected and strengthened his relationship with his family; he is also more sociable and expressive with his words and affection towards his family. He is doing well, happy to be reunited with his family, and is ready to start school in the fall. His father shared his gratitude for all the support required to have his son back with him.



CAP By the Numbers



Our Child Advocate Volunteers

CAP recruits, screens, trains, and supports culturally sensitive bilingual volunteers, including teachers, college students, retired attorneys, and community members to serve as Child Advocates. Volunteers meet weekly with the children to build trusting relationships and learn their stories and wishes. Our work is possible because of the generous support of volunteer Child Advocates around the country who donate thousands of hours to accompanying children as they face immigration proceedings. We are grateful to each and every volunteer.

Volunteers By the Numbers



Thank You to Our Volunteers

We could not do this work without our incredible community of volunteers. Thank you, volunteers, for all your time, dedication, and efforts you committed to the children we served in 2022. Below is a list of some of our incredible volunteers who consented to share their names in this report:

Aisha A Ghorl Ozaki, Alexandra (Sasha) Frye, Alondra Vasquez, Andrea Cordero, Angel Diaz, Anika Kazi, Ariela Rosenstein, Ayah Hamza, Becky Teiwes, Brittany Gilroy, Caitlyn A. Roxbury, Carrie Scott, Catherine Ortiz, Cecilia Najera, Chirlie Y Felix, Corinne Kentor, Debbie Goldberg, Denise Ramirez, Dhara Bhakta, Dulce Romero, Elisa Sipols, Elyssa Sapia, Emily A. Hunsberger, Emily Rosen, Emma Kemler, Erica Sagrans, Farnoush Tooma-Morvarid, Fulya Degirmenci, Gabriela Arellano, Gabriela Atkinson, Gabriela Villalobos, Georgina Valverde, Gina Hansen, Harlinah Katz Lopez, Hoomai Sayed, Isyemille Lara, Itzel Morales, Jacqueline Alcántara, Jaime Garcia Alba, Jennifer Baquedano, Jennifer Torres, Jessica Logan, Joe Pearson, Johanna Afshani, Judy Gordon, Kaitlin Decker, Karen Linares, Karen Michelle Zapata Herrera, Kathy Medina, Keith Armstrong, Kelly Chicoma, Kimya Forouzan, Laura Amortegui, Laura Lehman, Liuska Rincon, Lorna Solis, Magda Rodriguez, Marcelo Cueva, Margot Stueber, Maria Carolina Tovar, Maria Conroy, Maria Teresa Garreton, Marina Quintanilla, Maritza M Pozo, Mary Beth Davis, Maryam Zand, Mayra Cardenas, Meghan Marx, Melissa Ludington, Michelle Duffy, Michelle Veliz Vargas, Mindy Martinez, Mohammad Hooshmand, Naddia Garcia Wiklund, Nancy Hirschhorn, Nathalie Pierroz, Nina Friedman, Noorjahan Akbar, Oghay Kherzai, Parto Jalili, Paulina Leon Trevino, Penny Fearon, Rachel Miller, Rachel Thune Real, Raj Chetty, Robin Subar, Roger Ted Johnson, S. Shane Snelson, Sandra T. Chang, Sapna Advani, Sara Ajamian, Sara Poursafar, Sarah Nelson, Shahira Asadi-Popal, Shiva Sobhani, Sonia Fragoso, Stephanie Peña, Stephanie Ruiz Morales, Talía González, Tatiana Scripnic, Taylor Lifka, Thomas P. Valenti, Tom Sanchez, Valentina Elena Bonciu, Vanessa Garcia, Vatsala Kumar, Vincent Corbett, Wanda Baker, Yessenia Cardona, Zoe Coucaud.

Volunteer Reflection: Uplifting the Voices of Unaccompanied and Separated Immigrant Children

My name is Isyemille. I am a poet and musician. My family migrated to the United States from Mexico in 1985 so that my brother, who lives with Down's Syndrome, could have access to sufficient resources. My brothers and I grew up in a bilingual household, and we moved constantly. We would visit Mexico as often as possible. My parents, particularly my father, never fully assimilated to life in the United States. I think immigration includes a strange feeling of displacement and melancholy. A foggy "otherness" accompanies one their whole life, it feels like.

That being said, my immigration story is one of privilege in many respects, as both my parents were formally educated, and my mother was already bilingual when we arrived. My parents always made sure we went to "good" schools and "fit in" as much as possible, thinking this was the best way to support our well-being as we grew. We were not fleeing violence or persecution. While we weren't wealthy, we were safe. My immigrant story is not a horror show, as so often is the case.

I've been living in Chicago since 2003 and I am now a parent myself, of an eleven-year-old who has grown up in one city his whole life. I had been wanting to volunteer for a long time. But, between raising a child while working full-time and going to school, it wasn't possible. That all changed in 2020 when I finished my degree. I had heard about the Young Center purely by chance, but immediately knew that I wanted to be a part of this organization. Children are extremely powerful beings. Most cultures and religions around the world claim that children are sacred and that we must protect and cherish them. At the same time, children all over the world go through horrifying experiences because of how immigration systems are set up, because of the evils of capitalism and conquest, because of the egos of adults.

Our world is undeniably plagued by many ills, and it can be paralyzing to think about how one could ever change anything for the better. But there are ways one can make a difference in immigrant children's lives and their possibilities to survive and thrive.

That's why signing up to be a volunteer Child Advocate for the Young Center felt so natural and fulfilling to me. It's an intensive process that connects you to a child who is going through the immigration system in the United States alone. Throughout, you listen to them, talk to them, laugh with them, and show them a sliver of safety in a very unsafe world.

During my time with the Young Center, I've had the privilege of advocating on behalf of several children. I am always inspired by my time spent with them. They share a common spirit, one of tenacity blended with an appreciation for life. As I advocated for their rights, I also connected with them through activities and common themes like cute animals, and art.

"I am a Child Advocate because I believe investing in the lives of children and youth is necessary for a more equitable world. Although immigrant children are incredibly resilient, having adults who care about them, believe in them, and advocate for them can make all the difference in a world that tends to forget or deny that children have feelings, volition, and agency." - Katie, Young Center-San Antonio Volunteer Child Advocate



One of my fondest memories includes working with a child from Honduras who was hoping to experience autumn and winter for the first time. This experience showed me that children carry wonder inside them. Being a Child Advocate necessitates patience and being able to access wonder as an adult. By supporting children through a traumatic, sometimes violent process, we help to create a more sustainable foundation for them to grow into adulthood. We all remember small connections in our lives that impacted us in ways we did not expect. It is powerful to be able to offer that to someone.

Ideally, we would live in a world that did not divide countries with dangerous borders, one that did not have famine and femicide and wars over oil and gods. In this world, all children would have a sense of safety and freedom to be themselves, to create, to wonder. But the presence of a single person can have an enormous impact on a child's life. Children are so generous with their imagination, humor, and love. Adults can learn a lot from spending time with children, just as we are tasked to help teach them the ways of humanity. I can only hope that as many immigrant children as possible are eventually provided safety, comfort, and love that they all deserve to experience.

Our Technical Assistance Program

In 2022, we formally launched our third and newest program – the Technical Assistance Program (TAP). With the creation of TAP, the Young Center expanded the reach of its mission into new systems immigrant children may encounter, such as the state child welfare and juvenile justice systems. These systems, while flawed across the board, especially fail immigrant children and their families. The immigrant child taken into foster care when a parent is deported or when a caregiver harms them. The adolescent youth whose minor run-in with the law could now have lasting consequences for their ability to stay in the United States. These children, and their families, face uniquely complex circumstances that require intersectional and creative advocacy.

TAP was created to address these complexities by offering culturally sensitive and trauma informed consultations, mentorship, trainings, and resources directly to the professionals working with immigrant children in state court systems. We have seen how gaps in understanding and limited resources create barriers in immigrant children’s equitable access to family unity, cultural connection and language, well-being, and permanency. By bridging these gaps and supporting connections to resources, TAP’s collaboration with state court stakeholders can have a profound and lasting impact on a child’s well-being.



TAP’s Goal: to increase the capacity of advocates and service providers working directly with immigrant children to identify challenges they face and to know how to address them or whom to ask for help in addressing them. In doing so, we strive:

- to amplify the voices of immigrant children and youth,
- to support their placement in community-based settings outside of government custody,
- to preserve their familial bonds and cultural ties, and
- to advocate for their long-term safety and well-being.



We are extremely grateful for our partnership with King & Spaulding LLP and for their zealous advocacy in support of immigrant family integrity. We are always looking for new pro-bono partners to support the children and families we serve. Please reach out if your law firm is open to partnering with TAP.

TAP is grateful to partner with Seneca Family of Agencies, a non-profit mental health organization that provides behavioral health case management services to immigrant families separated under the last administration who are reunifying under process a created by the government’s Family Reunification Task Force.

Paola* and Maria’s* Story,

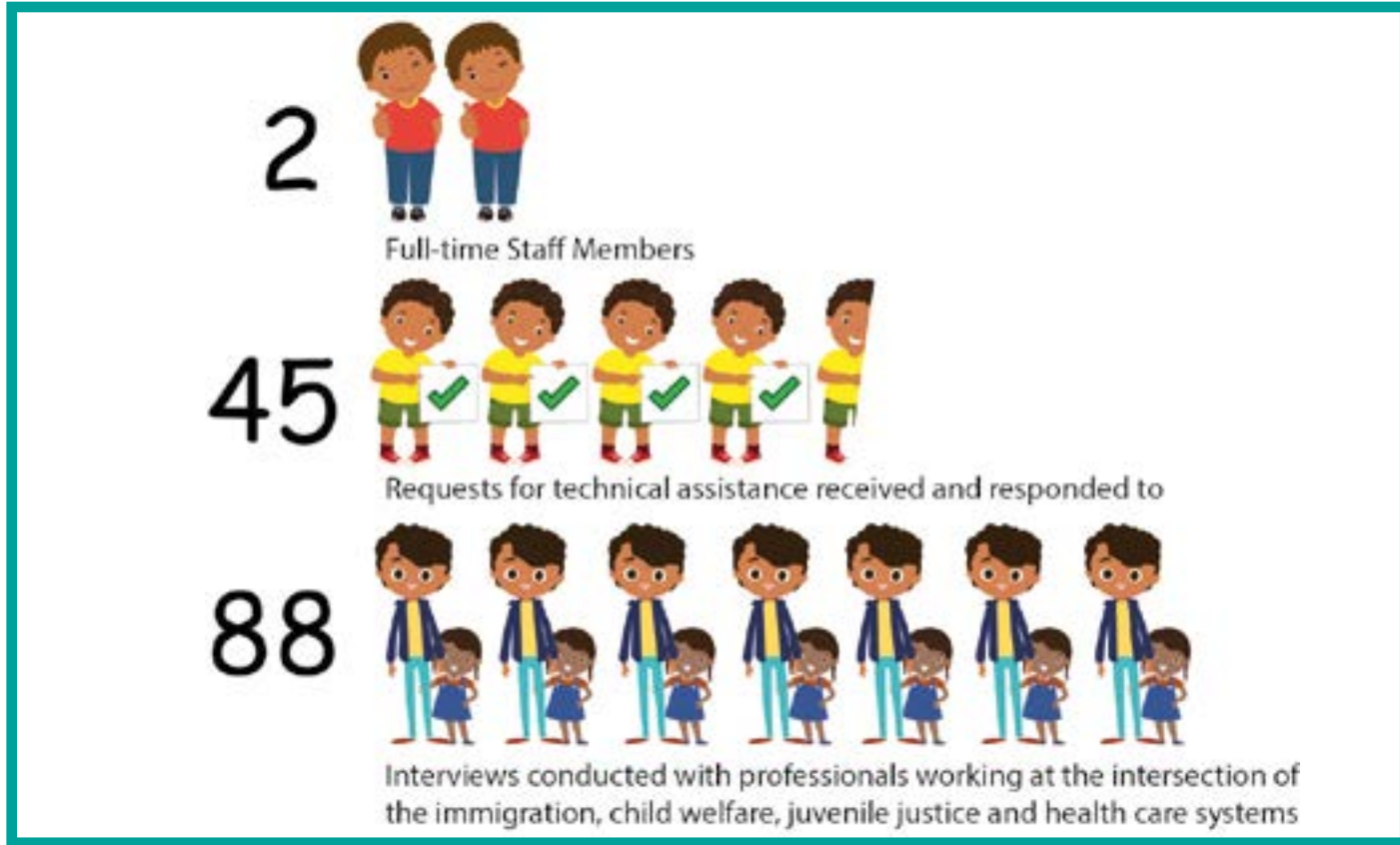
Maria was nine years old when she and her sister Ana were separated from their mother pursuant to the Trump Administration’s family separation policy. Despite fleeing violence in their home country, their mother was deported, and the sisters were placed in a federal foster care program.



With the creation of the Family Reunification Task Force and its efforts to reunify separated families, Paola was able to return to the U.S. to reunify with her children in the summer of 2022. She quickly reunited with her eldest daughter, Ana, but she has been unable to reunify with Maria, who remains in the custody of the foster care program, apart from the rest of her family.

Through its partnership with Seneca Family of Agencies, TAP has collaborated on efforts to support this family’s reunification. After learning about the delays in reunification stemming from complex state court proceedings, TAP identified counsel at King & Spaulding LLP, who were eager to support the family and provide pro bono legal representation to Paola in her fight to reunify with her daughter. TAP collaborated with the King & Spaulding attorneys as they worked to reunite Maria and Paola, and just recently, they were successful in persuading the state court to order the reunification of the mother and daughter—more than five years after their initial separation.

TAP By the Numbers



Our Impact

Cristian

A young boy from Central America, removed from his fathers care and placed in the child welfare system. His mother Sara, was left powerless due to systemic barriers (no translator, no attorney, no support for seeking custody)

Cristian International Impact story

- Connect with translators
- Identity counsel for Sara
- Provide guidance to counsel

Maria

A 9 year old separated from her sister and mother, as a result of the Trump Administration's family separation policy. They sought refuge from violence in their home country

Maria Domestic Impact story

- Connect mother to counsel
- Support for legal counsel
- Manage complexity

Cristian*

Cristian, a young boy from Central America, was placed in a foster home in the child welfare system after having been removed from the care of his father, who brought him to the United States several years earlier. Cristian's mother, Sara, desperately wanted him to return to his home country and her care. Cristian's foster mom, Jenny, was concerned that no one in the child welfare system was talking to Sara or considering her as a placement option for Cristian. Sara spoke an Indigenous language, and while she had calls with her son, she wasn't able to communicate with his case workers and had not received any communication from her court-appointed attorney.

Jenny reached out to TAP with her concerns and connected TAP to the foster agency working with Cristian. TAP helped the foster agency access interpretation services so they could meaningfully communicate with Sara. They also connected the agency to an international home study provider who could conduct the court-required home visit with Sara. TAP also identified culturally sensitive and zealous advocates to represent Sara in the child welfare proceedings and to ensure her a meaningful opportunity to seek custody of her son, Cristian.

Recently, the court ordered Cristian's reunification with his mother in Guatemala. Thereafter, TAP offered guidance to Cristian's guardian ad litem on how to help ensure that Cristian does not return home with a deportation order in his immigration case. TAP continues to provide these child welfare system stakeholders support as they work to return Cristian to his family.



Partner's Testimonial

"The Young Center has been an invaluable partner to us with family separation cases in the child welfare system. From assisting us in locating experts to helping brainstorm ways to remain client-centered in the midst of very difficult circumstances, Shaina and Kelly's expertise and thoughtfulness has helped inform our legal strategy and deepen our relationship with our clients."

Jackie Aranda Osorno, formerly of the Immigrant Justice Project, Southern Poverty Law Center

Our Policy Program

In 2022, Team Policy expanded its advocacy with federal agencies and Congress; engaged extensively with stakeholders in child health, protection, and development; authored reports, proposed regulations, and supported litigation that promotes children's best interests. Each of our projects is intended to advance one of the following goals:



Goal 1: Promoting Family Unity

In 2022, Team Policy expanded its advocacy with federal agencies and Congress; engaged more than four years after the Trump Administration intentionally who have reunified have received few, if any services from the government. We partnered with Indigenous community leaders at Comunidad Maya Pixan Ixim to develop recommendations for providing resources and supportive services to families separated under the Zero Tolerance policy. More than 40 organizations joined our call to fund housing, medical care, language access, and legal, mental health, and social services for families whose rights were violated.

In July 2022, with the first class of Elizabeth Frankel Fellows, we filed a comment condemning the United States' ongoing violation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD). Our comment demonstrated how U.S. immigration policy has a disproportionately harmful impact on children—particularly Black, Indigenous, and Latinx children—and focused on the criminalization of immigrants through policies such as parent-child separation, Title 42, "Remain in Mexico", and the system for detaining unaccompanied children.



Goal 2: Protecting Children in Custody

In July 2022, more than 14 members of Congress including Representative Karen Bass and Senators Jeff Merkley, Dick Durbin, Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, Patty Murray, and Kirsten Gillibrand, introduced the Children's Safe Welcome Act, a landmark bill that would ensure the federal government prioritizes the safety and well-being of each child navigating our country's immigration system. Young Center staff played a critical role in this bill's evolution over the last three years and persuaded its authors to take a comprehensive and child-centered approach to the legislation. As a result, the final bill includes a provision that would allow for the immediate reunification of children with close family members at the border, avoiding separation and prolonged ORR custody. The Young Center was one of only two NGOs to speak at Congressional briefings introducing the bill.

In August 2022, the Young Center issued a new report, "Preserving Family Ties: Ensuring Children's Contact with Family While in Government Custody," which addresses the longstanding issue of the federal government restricting unaccompanied children's contact with their family while in custody. In September 2022, the Young Center and the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) issued a new report demonstrating how ORR's reliance on "Significant Incident Reports" (SIRs) negatively impacts the well-being of children in custody. "Punishing Trauma: Incident Reporting and Immigrant Children in Government Custody" documents how SIRs—a system of writing up kids for their behavior—often lead to children's transfer to more restrictive settings, prolong their stays in custody, adversely impact their immigration cases, and delay family reunification or acceptance into federally-funded foster care. The Executive Summary can be found on our website.

Finally, our policy team spent countless hours to stop legislation that would have made permanent "Title 42"—a policy that has been used since the Covid-19 pandemic emerged to turn asylum seekers away at the border—as well as other limitations on accessing asylum. Our ability to document how these policies cause new family separations and have long-term consequences for children helped ensure the policies did not become law. With the Biden administration now proposing an asylum ban to take Title 42's place in May 2023, we expect our fight to continue—and be even more difficult.



Goal 3: Ensuring Access to Legal Relief

In June 2022, the Young Center submitted comments to the Department of Justice (DOJ) urging the agency to create a child-specific court manual for judges. A court manual grounded in children's rights and best interests, combining the expertise of immigration law, child development, family law, disability law, and juvenile justice systems would be a fundamental change in the nature of children's participation in immigration court hearings.

Goal 4: Uplifting Children's Voices and Changing Harmful Narratives

This year, the Young Center was featured on multiple panels on the intersection of disability and immigration. At an event organized by the Center for American Progress on Understanding the Rights of Disabled Asylum-Seekers, we spoke about the experience of unaccompanied children with disabilities and how disability rights laws protect them. We successfully brought disability rights advocates into ongoing discussions with the Office of Refugee Resettlement about proposed regulations for the standards of care for children in ORR custody. For the first time, ORR is engaging directly with experts in disability rights as well as advocates for immigrant youth, work made possible by our Disability Policy Analyst.

Policy Program By the Numbers



Promoting Family Unity:

50 in-depth meetings with congressional offices to promote children's safety and family unity.

Changing Narrative:

4 convenings of a new disability policy working group.
2 reports: 1 on access to family for children in detention, and 1 on ORR's use of Significant Incident Reports.

Protecting Children:

4 landmark bills introduced.
20 policy recommendations affirmed in Congressional appropriations.

Elizabeth Frankel Fellowship Program

In March 2022, we announced the inaugural cohort of the Elizabeth Frankel Fellowship Program. The Fellowship was created to honor the memory of our former Associate Director, a staunch child rights advocate, and to train a new generation of attorneys to fight for the rights of unaccompanied immigrant children. The Fellows, selected from more than 100 applicants who offered incredible skills and experiences, embody the spirit of Liz's work for unaccompanied immigrant children seeking safety. The three inaugural fellows, Rubí Rodriguez, Mary Ruiz De La O, and Oneida Vargas Molina, were appointed to serve as Child Advocates for ten weeks. In their role as Child Advocate, the fellows met with children in person and fostered meaningful relationships which informed their best interests advocacy. Each fellow engaged in zealous advocacy and drafted written BIDs on behalf of the children they served. Upon completing the fellowship, they chose to extend their commitment to our work and support for children by continuing as the children's volunteer Child Advocates.



"My dream for unaccompanied immigrant children is to always feel a sense of belonging while they are waiting to be reunified with their families. For every child to feel love, respect, wanted and cared for".
-Shahira, Young Center-New York Volunteer Child Advocate

Our Partners

Every one of our Young Center offices has established a network of local legal, medical, mental health, educational, social welfare, and residential housing service providers to ensure the immigrant children we serve are able to receive comprehensive services during and after their release from federal detention. We have built a network of more than 100 partnerships to meet the best interests of children.

Examples of these partnerships include the Ali Forney Center, Angry Tias and Abuelas, Beyond Legal Aid, Catholic Charities, Interfaith Welcome Coalition, ImmSchools, Justice in Motion, Midwest Human Rights Consortium, National Child Traumatic Stress Network, RAICES, Sidewalk Schools, Texas Children’s Hospital Program for Immigrant and Refugee Child Health, Vance Center, Examples of these partnerships include and Viator and Bethany Houses of Hospitality. Many of these partnerships also provide immigrant children and families with non-food items, social support, transportation, hygiene kits, and simply a safe space to seek help, advice, and guidance.

On a national level, we partner with the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, the Children’s Defense Fund, First Focus for Children, Immigrant Legal Resource Center, Kids in Need of Defense, National Immigrant Justice Center, the National Youth Law Center, Save the Children, Vera Institute of Justice, and Women’s Refugee Commission. These partnerships create opportunities for new alliances and advocacy and can address the development and health needs of children regardless of their immigration status.

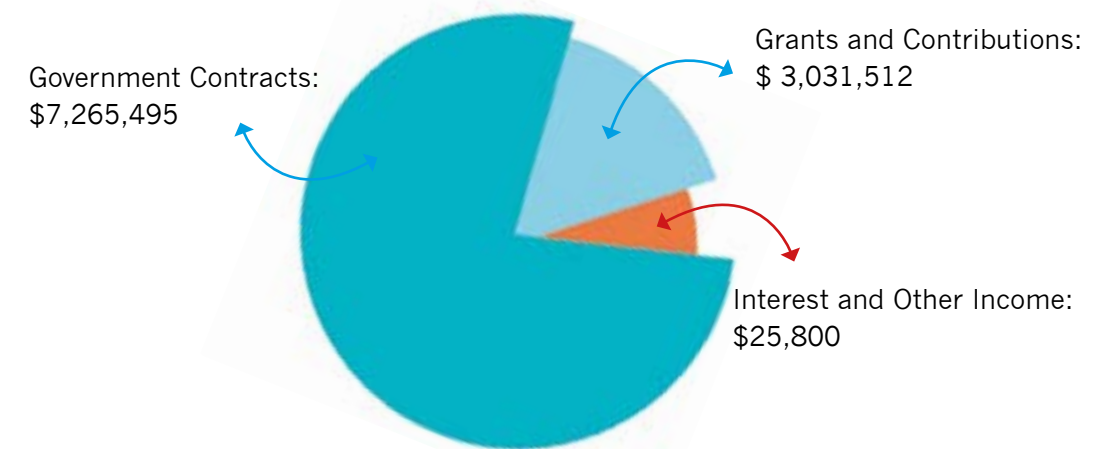
We are incredibly grateful to be in community with all our partners and for the ability to support one another. Thank you!

Our People

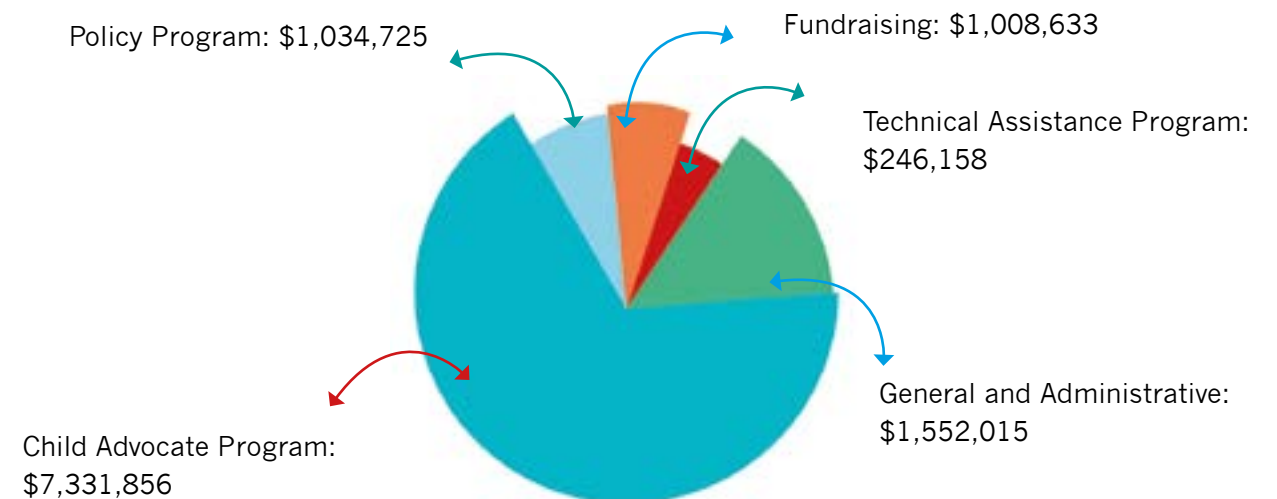
The Young Center is committed to recruiting staff and volunteers who reflect the children we serve in order to ensure both sensitivity towards the cultural and situational contexts of our clients and equitable representation of the communities we serve at all levels within our organization. Fifty-six percent of our staff identify as people of color/Latinx—many are first- or second-generation immigrants, 19% identify as having a disability, and 17% identify as LGBTQIA+. Leadership at the director level is 83% female, 17% non-binary, and 50% people of color/Latinx. Our Executive Director came to the U.S. from El Salvador at age 10 and was granted Lawful Permanent Status in 2001. The experience of being an undocumented child inspired her to become an immigration attorney and advocate on behalf of immigrant children.

Financials

Operating Revenue:



Operating Expenses:



Assets:

Net assets at beginning of year:	\$11,411,881
Increase (decrease) in net assets:	(\$692,705)
Net assets with donor restrictions at year end:	\$1,049,255
Net assets without restrictions at year end:	\$9,669,921
Total net assets at end of year:	\$10,719,176

Board of Directors

Our Board of Directors is focused on improving equity. The current board is increasingly diverse: 53% of Young Center board members are women and 58% are people of color. We have reserved two positions for members who are not expected to meet the get/give requirement (\$3,500 - \$5,000). Several board members are immigrants, including one member who came to the U.S. as an unaccompanied child from Central America.

Frances de Pontes Peebles (Chair)
 Jane Byrne (Co-Vice Chair)
 Julian Dibbell (Co-Vice Chair)
 Lori Wittman (Treasurer)
 Selma de Leon-Yznaga (Secretary)
 Kevin Angeles
 Jimena Catarivas Corbett
 Elvis Garcia Callejas
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 Ahmet Hepdogan
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 Simone Tseng*

***New Board Members in 2022**
****Rolled off the Board in 2022**

Young Center-Houston Advisory Board

Lucy Castaneda
 Judy Le
 Dr. Dawn McCarty
 Dr. Jane Montealegre
 Mary Newsome, PhD
 Amanda Weeks
 Yasmin Yavar
 Young Zheng Sullivan
 Kristin Zipple-Shedd



“As a child of immigrants, I am grateful to have the opportunity to support the work done by the Young Center. It has truly been a privilege to build a bond with a child, help them feel supported in their journey, and to watch them grow to overcome repeated adversity.” - Sara, Young Center-Chicago Volunteer Child Advocate

Young Center Staff

CHICAGO: Amy Jo Albinak, Kelly Albinak Kribs, Tatiana Alonso, Jenifer Briones, Marisa Chumil, Alli Gattari, Lorena Gonzalez, Paulette Jones, Althea Klein, Inés Lagos, Jane Liu, Anabel Mendoza, Dane Olsen, Jes Olvera, Izadora Rabelo, Liz Sanchez, Faruq Schieber, Birdie Soti, Raia Stoicheva, Laura Vargas Quintero, Kimberly Vazquez

HARLINGEN: Miriam Aguayo, Mariana Alvarez, Olga Cantarero, Elizabeth Garcia, Janette Gonzalez, Juan Gonzalez, Rosemary Gonzalez, Gladys Hernandez, Maritsa Leyva Martinez, Lilia Murray, Olivia Peña, Sofia Peña, Tania Torres, Elizabeth Witmer

HOUSTON: Jessica Beecher-Bell, Catherine Bonilla, Amanda del Castillo, Blanca Cisnado, Melody Koch, Deisy Lee, Pamela Nickell, Valeria Olmedo, Amairani Rucoba, Elizabeth Silva, Carrie Vander Hoek, Laura Zelaya

WASHINGTON, D.C.: Maria Barbosa Groszek, Tami Benchoam Rogers, Jackie Diaz, Mina Dixon Davis, Mari Dorn-Lopez, Pamela Duran, Sondra Furcajg, Rob Jackson III, Anne Kelsey, Alex McAnarney, Mary Miller Flowers, Alejandra Miss Ozuna, Jennifer Nagda, Dorothy Neher

NEW YORK: Fahima Ahmed, Jad Bekdach, Catalina Carbonell, Rommie Cardenas, Dani Doucette, Paloma Epp, Leigh Gorman, Abena Hutchful, Constance Moustakas, Pallavi Pandey, Juliana Pinto McKeen, Emely Recinos, Rebecca Rittenhouse, Shaina Simenas, Camila Trefftz, Jasmine Vela, Geoffrey Wood, Kevin Worthington.

SAN ANTONIO: Julia Beck, Elizabeth Farias, Veronica Rodriguez, Erika Salgado, Dulce Segura, Belinda Teye, Jamilah Tigner.

PHOENIX: Estrellita Alvarado, Erika Andiola, Roxanne Bedoya, Isobel Conroy, Maria Dominguez, Fatima Fareed, Priscilla Guadarrama, Jena Gutierrez, Noriana Hermes, Gladis Molina Alt, Sibila Quiroz, Ana Tapi.

LOS ANGELES: Perla Aragon, Natalia De Prado-Hurtado, José Ortiz-Rosales, Gladys Pineda, Jennifer Umberg, Shantel Vachani, Jocelyn Varga.



“My own experience immigrating as a child motivated me to become a Child Advocate. Many of these kids seeking safety in the United States come from difficult backgrounds and being able to be a friend and a guide in their transition to be a better life is something that motivates me to keep volunteering.” -Juan, Young Center- Los Angeles Volunteer Child Advocate

Waymakers

We are deeply thankful to our community of supporters who come together for immigrant children. We're particularly grateful to the Young Center Champions (names italicized below) who sustain our work with recurring donations. We also want to recognize all the donors who give on social media or other platforms, making a difference in the lives of immigrant children seeking safety. We cannot name all of you here, but we are deeply appreciative of your support, no matter the amount. Thank you.

\$100,000 +

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"When I first came to America 23 years ago, I felt very lonely and vulnerable. There were few Afghans and places for community. With recent events in Afghanistan and refugees arriving in our communities, I wanted to be there for them, especially for unaccompanied children." - Oghay, Young Center-Chicago Volunteer Child Advocate

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Credits

“The Return” by Belle Yang. Artist-author Belle Yang makes her home in Carmel, California with her mother Laning. Her father Joseph, who walked out of war-torn China as a young man and is the hero of much of her work, died in 2019. Her website is belleyang.com, and her art is represented by Hawk Fine Arts in Pacific Grove, California (hawkfinearts.com). Amy Tan writes that Belle Yang has “created a world we can lose ourselves in.” Maxine Hong Kingston calls her “our Isaac Bashevis Singer and Marc Chagall.” Gifted as an artist and writer, she has written and illustrated two highly praised literary works, “Baba: A Return to China Upon My Father’s Shoulders” and “The Odyssey of a Manchurian.” She followed with the powerful graphic novel “Forget Sorrow.” She is also the author-artist of a dozen children’s books, including an autobiographical immigrant story told from a child’s point of view, “My Name is Hannah.”



Annual Overview 2022



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