

# G.L.O.B.A.L. JUSTICE

## *CHILDREN CAUGHT IN CRISES:*



## *PATHWAYS OF ADVOCACY FOR UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED MIGRANT CHILDREN*

**By Sarah Bond**  
**Fellow, Children's Advocacy**  
**G.L.O.B.A.L. Justice**  
**June 2020**  
**[www.globaljusticeonline.org](http://www.globaljusticeonline.org)**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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G.L.O.B.A.L. Justice launched its Fellows Program in Fall 2019 to provide opportunities for post-graduate and seasoned academics and professionals to partner with us on timely and significant research projects addressing justice issues worldwide.

Sarah Bond served as a G.L.O.B.A.L. Fellow in Children's Advocacy from January to June 2020. Sarah is a certified life, leadership, and home organization coach and holds a Bachelor's degree in Psychology from Simpson University and a Master's in Urban Community Development from Eastern University.

As a mother and advocate, Sarah has been passionate about issues that impact children. She has been especially concerned about the humanitarian situation of unaccompanied minors at the U.S. border. The project stems from her interest and provides a call to action for advocates in various sectors.

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## *Table of Contents*

<b>Abstract</b> .....	1
I. Introduction.....	2
A. Population of focus.....	3
B. Overview.....	3
C. Research Questions.....	7
II. Key Terms.....	9
III. Call to Action.....	10
A. The Need for Intervention.....	10
B. Call to Biblical Justice.....	12
IV. Layers of Trauma.....	13
V. Where are Unaccompanied Minors Found Nationally?.....	16
A. At the Border.....	16
B. In Health and Human Services Shelters.....	17
C. In the Community: With Sponsors or Foster Placements.....	19
VI. Findings.....	20
A. Intentional Steps to Reduce Trauma During Throughout Care.....	22
B. Protection from Abuse in Border Facilities.....	24
C. Access to Child Advocates and Legal Support.....	25
D. Safe Placements.....	27
E. Appropriate Mental Health & Medical Services.....	28
F. Linguistically and Culturally Relevant Staffing.....	30
G. Protection from Trafficking and Exploitation.....	31
VII. Key Service Providers.....	32
A. Figure 1: Access Points to Serve Unaccompanied Minors.....	33
B. Limited Access to Children in ORR Care.....	34
C. Wider Access to Children at the Community Level.....	35
VIII. Current Policy and Societal Factors.....	36
IX. Agency Spotlights.....	38
A. Kids in Need of Defense (KIND).....	38
B. Young Center for Immigrant Children’s Rights.....	39
C. Public Law Center of Santa Ana, CA.....	41
D. Immigrant Families Together.....	42
E. Casa Cornelia’s Legal Aid for Children in Detention.....	43
F. Churches at the Border.....	44
G. Friendships No Fronteras.....	45
X. Remaining Gaps in Services.....	46

## *Table of Contents*

XI. Recommendations for Action.....	48
A. Seek to Listen and Empower.....	48
B. Build on Children and Youth’s Strengths.....	49
C. Practice Radical Hospitality.....	50
D. Find a Practical Way to Help.....	51
i. Ways to Help Children in Government Care.....	52
ii. Ways to Help Children in the Community.....	53
E. Spread the Word.....	55
XII. For Further Research and Action.....	56
A. Relief, Justice Work, and Community Development.....	56
B. Legal Advocacy for Families Waiting in Mexico.....	57
C. Post-Release Tracking and Resources.....	57
XIII. Conclusion	59
References.....	61
Appendix A.....	70
Appendix B.....	71
Table 1.....	72
Table 2.....	73
Table 3.....	74
Table 4.....	75
Table 6.....	78

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## ***CHILDREN CAUGHT IN CRISES: PATHWAYS OF ADVOCACY FOR UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED MIGRANT CHILDREN***

### **ABSTRACT**

For the past eight years, the United States has experienced a significant change in the portrait of immigrants arriving in our nation. While the percentage of individual adult immigrants has dropped recently to merely 28% of all U.S. immigrant arrivals as of April 2019, the percentage of families and unaccompanied minors who are apprehended at a port of entry or detained throughout the country continues to rise (Ramon, 2019). This is notable because care for the growing number of unaccompanied and separated migrant children, 92% of which migrate from Central America, requires thoughtful planning and action to address children’s developmental needs, vulnerabilities, dependence on qualified caregivers, and traumatic histories. For the past two years, community advocates and government officials have voiced their mounting concerns with the Office of Refugee Resettlement’s (ORR) restrictive, neglectful, and coercive systems of care for unaccompanied and separated migrant children under the Unaccompanied Alien Children Program (Harris, 2020). [1] The complaints raised against ORR are compounded by gaps in reporting, a lack of accountability within facilities, and the absence of a system for tracking what children experience in care, where they are found in the community, and what resources they need for resilience long-term (Becerra et al., 2019; M. Silva, personal communication, March 3, 2020).

[1] The term alien is used by the U.S. Government to indicate foreign-born or alternatively documented individuals. This term does not reflect the opinion of the author. Migrant children who take part in ORR’s Unaccompanied Alien Children Program will be referred to as unaccompanied migrant children for the remainder of this paper, except when referring to this program.

The purpose of this study is to capture the reality of migrant children's experiences and needs, to document the best practices of service providers who are responding to the crisis, and to share the recommendations of advocacy experts who can speak to the mobilization of advocacy efforts that can best meet the outstanding needs of unaccompanied and separated children in the decade to come.

*Keywords:* Unaccompanied, children, separated, migrants, foreign-born, minors, immigration, advocacy, Central America.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Population of Focus

The scope of this research includes children of Central America, in particular, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, who make up 92%, of all unaccompanied child arrivals to the United States, as well as some children from Mexico who were reported as clients by service providers who took part in this study. Though children from Mexico make up a much smaller percentage of unaccompanied minor arrivals or children separated at the border and placed in ORR's care, the way in which they journey to, arrive in, and require support from the United States appears to be very similar to children of Central America (Kids in Need of Defense [KIND], 2020c). This project focused on the vulnerabilities and opportunities to empower unaccompanied minors, including those who travel to the U.S. border alone, those who arrive and are forcibly separated, as happened regularly during the 2018 zero tolerance pilot policy, and children who enter without inspection, for example through the desert rather than an official port of entry. All of these children share similar life experiences of instability, trauma, and loss, and all require the partnership and support of community agencies, individuals, and families across the United States (D. Menendez, personal communication, March 18, 2020).

### B. Overview

The issues of political, environmental, and social unrest in Mexico and Central America, particularly in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, are driving a growing number of families and unaccompanied children seeking refuge to the United States border (KIND, 2020). The total number of immigrants being apprehended by Customs and Border



Protection in the United States is not as high as it was in the 1980s, 90s, or early 2000s. However, what has changed dramatically in the last eight years is the growing number of families and unaccompanied children who are fast replacing single Mexican men as the most common populations to migrate to the United States (Lee, 2019). According to a report published in *World Magazine* in the fall of 2019, “The number of asylum applications from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras spiked 800 percent, from 3,523 in 2012 to 31,066 in 2017—and more than half of those requests came from unaccompanied children” (Lee, 2019).

One of the largest reasons children and families are fleeing Central America is pronounced gang and drug cartel activity, which poses many dangers for young people, including pressure on boys to join gangs and on young girls to become gang members’ “girlfriends” (Gonzales, 2019). Simultaneously, these countries are some of the most vulnerable to environmental disasters. In recent years, extreme drought has limited the food supply and further halted the economy in the Northern Triangle of Central America. This combination of factors has forced many families and children to seek a new life further north (Holland & Silvers, 2015-present). Widespread social, political, and economic unrest have also led to severe child endangerment in many homes, and many unaccompanied migrant children have arrived in the United States in search of protection from domestic abuse and neglect within their families of origin (D. Menendez, personal communication, March 18, 2020).

In 2019, 68,631 unaccompanied children arrived in the United States, the highest number on record to enter in a single fiscal year (Gonzales, 2019; HHS, 2019). Some families send their children on the harrowing journey across multiple countries to reach the United States alone because they believe it is the child’s best chance at a safer life (R. Ruiz, personal communication, February 10, 2020).

Other parents stand at the U.S. border and send their children through an official port of entry, where they can immediately enter foster care and, the parents hope, be spared of further exploitation and trauma (Alvarez, 2020; J. Zwiers, personal communication, March 13, 2020). If the Department of Homeland Security apprehends a child apart from a family member or other adult, he or she must be processed by border patrol and placed in one of ORR's 170 foster care homes for unaccompanied foreign-born children within 72 hours (Health and Human Services [HHS], 2019).

Children also enter ORR shelters if they are separated from a parent or guardian as they cross the border. In October 2019, the American Civil Liberties Union reported 5,400 children had been separated from their parents between July 2017 and October 2019 (Associated Press, 2019). A big contributor to the rate of separations was the zero tolerance pilot program, which was instituted by the Trump Administration and ran from April to June 2018. In just three months, 4,500 children had been taken from their parents, many without documentation or a tracking system to know a child's identity or parent's location (Lee, 2019). In the span of 90 days, our government misplaced 2,000 unaccompanied children.

Due to a public outcry against large-scale family separation and the ensuing trauma and endangerment of children in overcrowded detention facilities, policies have been modified to keep families together and to limit the length of family detainment (Johnson, 2019). While the end of the zero tolerance policy has kept families together in most cases, it has unfortunately placed children at additional risk for human trafficking when traffickers pose as parents and cross the border with children who are not their own (Johnson, 2019). If the adults acting as guardians for children are quickly assessed at the border within the 20-day limit for family detainment and are believed to be legitimate parents or legal

guardians, children may remain in the care of potential traffickers. This increases the risk of further exploitation without accountability once the child enters the United States (Johnson, 2019). Our present administration claims to seek a balance between protection of our borders and protection of children from exploitation. However, reports of child endangerment, trauma, mental and physical health risks, and inadequate access to legal representation for children both within ORR shelters and in the community persist. These findings highlight the need for further public action through education, advocacy, and policy change (Schweikart, 2019).

This child welfare crisis calls citizens of the United States to offer their wealth, power, voice, and compassion for our Latin American neighbors, who often have been stripped of viable ways to pursue a safe and sustainable future for their families. Moreover, a fully-developed theology of biblical justice provides a compelling foundation for Christ-followers to discern and act with God's heart on behalf of vulnerable children and foreigners (G.L.O.B.A.L. Justice, 2020). Indeed, we see throughout church history the powerful role Christians can play in advocacy for immigrants, as in the case of Protestant resistance of Nazi power during World War II or in early church accounts of believers rescuing children who were left to die outside the city gates (Early Church History, 2020; Zaretsky, 2018).[2]

[2] During the Occupation of France during WWII, the Protestant church was actively engaged in the protection of Jews and in the subversive work to end the war and resist the Nazis. The Catholic church was not active in this in France and, in the 1990's, issued a formal apology for its failure to rise to the occasion and defend the rights of those in danger. Now, we are seeing a similar silence across Evangelical churches in response to the present immigration crisis (Zaretsky, 2018). What if we match the courageous, biblically-inspired action of the French resistance, emulating those who so beautifully reflected God's heart for the vulnerable. In that era, French Christ-followers declared, "We cannot remain silent in the face of the suffering of thousands of human beings seeking asylum in our country. The Gospel commands us to consider all men and women as our brethren" (Zaretsky, 2018). The parallels of this call to action to our present migrant crisis are striking.

The church, in these important eras of the past, changed the course of history, established revolutionary norms concerning the view and treatment of children, and affirmed the dignity and protection deserved by marginalized people groups. This era, like WWII, is one in which we need to affirm God's heart for the vulnerable, especially children, through our words and actions. In this season of pronounced global unrest and migrant desperation, we have the opportunity to see where Jesus is already at work in our nation among government leaders and programs, in non-profits, and within the church. Let us study the work of others across these contexts to learn how we can join in God's compassionate, redemptive work at a practical level. As we do so, our love in action can highlight how God's love can radically transform human history (G.L.O.B.A.L. Justice, 2020; Zaretsky, 2018).

The purpose of this research, therefore, is to map the journey of experiences, government systems, and community services that interface with unaccompanied foreign-born minors and to equip concerned people in the United States with the background, stories, service providers and recommendations that enable each of us to act on behalf of the welfare of migrant children.

### **C. Research Questions**

The current research questions were designed to uncover the compound vulnerabilities and systemic factors unaccompanied and separated migrant minors experience in the United States and to inform community-level engagement in advocacy work:

1. What are the legal processes and stages of government transfers unaccompanied minors experience as they cross the border, process through HHS facilities, and receive placements in the community?
2. What are foreign-born unaccompanied minors and separated children's greatest needs, both in government care and in communities across the U.S.?
3. How can the U.S. Government and service providers best care for, represent, and place unaccompanied migrant children?
4. How are legal advocates, social service providers, and advocacy groups at the community level providing children with comprehensive support?
5. How can volunteers best advocate for and assist children who are in ORR's care or in family placements across the country?
6. What gaps in services inform future research, community development, and advocacy efforts?

To answer these questions, this study employed a methodology of interviews with immigration advocates from the border and across the nation. During interviews, advocates were asked to identify what services are most in demand; where families and children are being served; what unaccompanied children need most, both nationally and locally; and what volunteers can do to support and empowered unaccompanied minors. The narratives and experiences shared by service providers who participated in this study can inform advocacy efforts across the United States. These recommendations can increase our nation's compassionate representation of and care for undocumented children at a local level.

## II. KEY TERMS

A. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) – The agency responsible for the separation of migrant children from their parents at the border. CBP is the parent agency for Border Patrol, which inspects and controls movement of people at the U.S.-Mexico border (Nixon & Qiu, 2018).

B. Entry Without Inspection (EWI) – When a migrant enters the United States by means other than an official port of entry, such as across the desert, and does so without being apprehended (D. Menendez, personal communication, March 18, 2020).

C. Health and Human Services (HHS) – The national department that includes the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), which receives unaccompanied minors once they are apprehended by Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) or Border Patrol (ORR, 2019).

D. Immigrants – Also known as permanent resident aliens, immigrants are foreign-born residents who have been granted permanent legal status to live in the United States. If an immigrant is here illegally, they are an immigrant, but not a permanent resident alien, according to U.S. law (DHS, 2020).

E. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) – An agency within the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of three offices. Enforcement and Removal Operations is the largest and most well-known office and is responsible for detaining and deporting immigrants who are already in the United States (Nixon & Qiu, 2018). The Office of Refugee Resettlement must notify ICE 24 hours before and 24 hours after a child is placed with his or her sponsor (ORR, 2019).

F. Refugees – According to U.S. law, a refugee is a person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of origin due to credible fear of persecution based on race, gender, religion, national origin, political opinion, or membership in a social group (American Immigration Council, 2020).[3]

G. Sponsor – Someone who is deemed a worthy placement for the child upon their release from ORR’s care. They are ideally a parent or relative, and if no relative is available, the child is placed with a sponsor who has gone through a background check and home study to protect the child from risk of trafficking, maltreatment, or exploitation (ORR, 2019).

H. Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC) – A term used by ORR to identify minors from other countries who arrive to the United States unaccompanied by an adult or are separated from the adults they have traveled with when they cross the border (HHS, 2019).

### **III. CALL TO ACTION**

#### **A. The Need for Intervention**

It is clear from the outset of this study that the number of vulnerable unaccompanied and separated children arriving in the United States in the last eight years has overwhelmed the system we have in place to care for them (D. Menendez, personal communication, March 18, 2020).[4]

[3] Refugees are referred to the United States by a third party country who deems that they already qualify for refugee status. Currently, refugees face the challenge of the administration’s limitations on the number of refugees permitted in the United States, and this is a concern (Holland & Silvers, 2015-present), however, the current project on unaccompanied migrant minors does not include refugee children who come to the United States on their own. They are handled according to separate laws, programs and funding, also under the Office of Refugee Resettlement (D. Menendez, personal communication, March 18, 2020).

[4] See Appendix A for a graph from Southwest Key Programs (2019) of the numbers of unaccompanied minors who entered the United States between 2012-2019. The highest rate of entry occurred between 2014 and the present.

Family separation and inhumane shelter practices used by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) have stirred a major outcry among U.S. citizens, churches, reporters, and even the lawmakers we have put in place to safeguard our nation: our senators. In a March 2020 letter to Health and Human Services, Senators Harris, Feinstein, and 21 of their senator colleagues, charged HHS with two major downfalls in the care of unaccompanied minors that demand immediate attention. First, HHS is charged with sharing private information from children’s therapy sessions with ICE who is using the information to make a case for deportation. This is a clear infringement on the ethical boundaries of therapy, which the American Psychological Association calls the “weaponizing” of therapy sessions (Harris, 2020). Second, the senators condemned the fear-based practice of keeping children in high-security facilities. This practice directly disregards the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA), which requires that children be assessed for serious risk factors and then placed in the least restrictive setting possible in the best interest of each child (Harris, 2020). In this recent report, the senators found ORR is regularly disregarding this protective policy, and children with disabilities are especially at risk, as they are held in more restrictive facilities and for a greater length of time than is necessary or advantageous.

This most recent letter from the Senate is just the tip of the iceberg when considering many examples of unethical treatment of unaccompanied foreign-born children in the United States. In response to these humanitarian concerns, this current study outlines the most pressing needs and vulnerabilities this population faces, as well as the ways average citizens and professionals can intervene to improve services and outcomes for unaccompanied children. While the top leaders of our nation issue pressure and accountability to change policies and systems of care for children at a government level, let us simultaneously do our part to come



to a basic understanding of what unaccompanied foreign-born children need most and how each of us at a grassroots level can come to their aid.

## **B. Call to Biblical Justice**

For people of faith, this project also calls us to greater awareness and informed action for vulnerable children in alignment with God’s nature as a God of love; his call to imitate him not just in word, but in action; and his command to pursue a life of justice and radical hospitality, even for strangers (1 John 4:7; 1 John 3:18; Hebrews 13:2). As believers, we look to align not with one political party or faith tradition but with the heart of God for the vulnerable, the foreigner, and the orphan. This path will always remain true, coinciding at times with particular leaders or faith communities and diverging at other times, as we are called to stand for justice, truth, and above all, love, even when it is unpopular and incredibly challenging to do so (Golden, 2020).[5]

Jesus calls us not only to righteousness in belief, but to a holy life in action, for “faith apart from works is dead” (James 2:14-26, ESV). Similarly, in 1 John 3:18, John expresses God’s heart for us in this: “Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth” (ESV). The purpose of this project is to equip believers to love vulnerable children and their families not just in word but in action and with sincerity. The work of love is not easy and at times requires us to challenge injustices and devote time and resources to “a long obedience in the same direction” (Fadling & Fadling, 2018).[6] This is the model of persistent justice work we see in key leaders, such as

[5] According to justice leader and theologian, Don Golden, who appeared on VOX Podcast with Mike Erre on February 25, 2020, a good barometer for how the kingdom of God is doing in the world or in our nation is to look at the welfare of the vulnerable populations in our society. What is the church doing for the most vulnerable? The needs of the marginalized should inform the way we vote.

[6] This familiar quote was first spoken by Friedrich Nietzsche, who highlighted the importance of not just a burst of effort towards a cause but the virtue of sustained, focused attention on an area of necessary intervention, faithfulness, and diligence over a long period, perhaps a lifetime (Fadling & Fadling, 2018).

International Justice Mission in the area of human trafficking. The needs among unaccompanied migrant minors entering our country with complex histories of trauma and vulnerability demand we similarly invest our sincere and diligent love-inspired action on their behalf.

When Jesus is asked to name the greatest commandment, he summarized the heart of the Old Testament teachings with two commands: first, to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind” and, second, to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27, NIV). An expert of the law, when hearing these two commands, presses Jesus to clarify, imploring, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29, ESV). In response, Jesus tells the famous story of the Good Samaritan, who, though he is from a neighboring religious group seen as the “other” by the Jews, is the only one to stop and act with compassion to care for a Jewish man who is beaten by robbers and left for dead (Luke 10:25-37).

Like the Good Samaritan, we have neighbors who share our humanity, though they may be born under a different flag and may carry alternative documentation. They are knocking at the gates of our nation, pleading for protection and compassion. Many of them are defenseless, including those who come to us as children. To us, Jesus says: “This is your neighbor.” How can we love our neighbors as we love ourselves? What kind of loving action from Christ-followers will demonstrate to the world that we know and love God as we care for unaccompanied minors?

#### **IV. LAYERS OF TRAUMA**

As we seek to intervene in the welfare of unaccompanied minors, it is important that we approach their stories with awareness of all they have experienced. This includes at least three major layers of trauma. The first layer includes the factors that cause families or children to flee their home countries in the first place.

Heightened gang activity, drug trafficking, political persecution, and domestic violence are a few of the common reasons children leave their countries with or without a loved one (Associated Press [AP], 2018; Ruiz, 2020a). Children also experience trauma as they travel to the United States, often through the help of dangerous but necessary human smugglers, enduring as much as a full month of inhumane conditions to make the long journey from Central America to the United States (AP, 2018). Children are, at all stages of their journey, likely to be exposed to harsh conditions, extreme fatigue, and other sources of violence and exploitation (AP, 2018).

Once children enter the United States, the circumstances they face often add to the trauma. While the rate of family separation has slowed since policy changes in June 2018, more than 200 children separated from their families before that date were deemed ineligible for reunification or release and remain in the care of the Office of Refugee Resettlement as of early 2020. Simultaneously, tens of thousands of unaccompanied children make the trek to our country alone, resulting in a combined number of 5,000 children under the care of ORR as of September 2019 (AP, 2018; ORR, 2019). According to current research on the psychological health of migrant children, “children traumatically separated from their parents are more likely to suffer from emotional problems throughout their lives,” and recent studies reveal separation can permanently alter a child’s memory as well (AP, 2018). Indeed, cases of young children who are reunited with biological parents after a period of separation demonstrate emotional confusion, despondency, anger, and fear directed at the family they once knew and loved (Weixel, 2020).

A third layer of trauma and uncertainty for these children involves the question of who gets to decide where children will go or what will happen to them once they are transitioned from the care of ORR into long-term placements. These placements can include foster families, foster care group

homes, or adult detention facilities if no suitable sponsor or next of kin can be found (International Christian Adoptions, 2020). While some children may be reunited with their family (KIND, 2020), many will never reconnect with their family of origin or be placed with a next of kin sponsor in the United States if no such relative can be located (R. Ruiz, personal communication, February 10, 2020). Therefore, after as much as two years in ORR's care, children may finally be placed on a list that makes them available for foster care in private homes through organizations like International Christian Adoptions (R. Ruiz, personal communication, February 10, 2020).

Children who have no sponsor and are in the years-long process of immigration proceedings also may age out of the care of ORR and enter an adult detention facility. Those who are still minors when their court case is closed but do not have a sponsor may face long-term foster care, whether in a foster family or group home (K. Green, personal communication, February 7, 2020). According to the Department of Health and Human Services, the number of children released to sponsors across the country ranges in the tens of thousands per year.[7] However, there is a significant gap in organizations who track the children once they are released into the care of sponsors, so the children's exact locations are often unknown, at least by community service providers (M. Silva, personal communication, March 3, 2020). Questions of who monitors the well-being of children once they are in sponsors' care, what resources they need long term to address the trauma, and how communities around the U.S. can wrap around these families and previously detained children remain unanswered (M. Silva, personal communication, March 3, 2020).

[7] The most common states to have children placed with sponsors are New York, Texas, California, North Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, and Tennessee. For a full listing of placements by state, see: [www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/resource/unaccompanied-alien-children-released-to-sponsors-by-state](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/resource/unaccompanied-alien-children-released-to-sponsors-by-state)

## V. WHERE ARE UNACCOMPANIED MINORS FOUND NATIONALLY?

### A. At the Border

When unaccompanied minors first reach the United States border, they may enter the country in one of two ways. First, some children enter the U.S. by crossing the desert into Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, or California, and, at times, by fording the treacherous Rio Grande. Second, children may enter the United States directly through official ports of entry, along the U.S.-Mexico border. When they enter an official port, they are immediately taken into the custody of Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Here, unaccompanied minors are supposed to be processed promptly and released to Health and Human Services to be placed in ORR shelters within 72 hours.[8] Children who travel with parents, on the other hand, should remain with their family. However, in July 2019, research by the Associated Press found[9] children who traveled to the border with family members are sometimes separated and treated as unaccompanied minors, especially if parents or guardians appear to have a criminal history (Galvan, 2019).

Since 2018, asylum-seeking families have been forced to wait at the Mexico border in a metering system, which allows only a small number of families or individuals to enter border patrol to apply for asylum each day. The Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP) also requires that asylum-seekers wait in Mexico while their asylum applications are processed (Lee, 2019). Since January 2019, this has resulted in 60,000 immigrants waiting in squalid tent

[8] Southwest Key Programs (2020) is contracted by HHS to house children who have been processed by CBP and are awaiting placement with screened next of kin sponsors. Three of Southwest Key's shelters are found in California. They report that unaccompanied minors, by policy, should be transferred to the care of HHS shelter providers within 72 hours of detainment by Border Patrol.

[9] Galvan (2019) of the Associated Press addresses continuous issues of dangerous border crossing and the ways children are processed at the border which still often leads to family separation, even for those who arrive with family members.

cities or, at best, overcrowded emergency shelters along the border (Dwyer, 2020; J. Zwiers, personal communication, March 13, 2020). While waiting at the border, some parents have died or gone missing, and dangerous drug cartels have moved into the area to exploit those waiting for their number to be called or their case to be processed (Alvarez, 2020; Fry, 2020). At times, family members or other adults have decided conditions are too dangerous for children to remain in the camps, and children have been sent into the United States unaccompanied. Between October 1, 2019 and January 13, 2020, more than 350 children have been sent across the border unaccompanied through a port of entry (Alvarez, 2020). In late February 2020, the American Civil Liberties Union and other advocates raised a case for the inexcusable ethical compromise of this “remain in Mexico” policy, and the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco ruled against the Trump Administration to end this policy in California and Arizona (Dickerson, 2020). On March 11, 2020, however, the Supreme Court overruled this decision, and, as of May 2020, the cruel MPP policy remains in effect (J. Zwiers, personal communication, March 13, 2020; Narea, 2020).

## **B. In Health and Human Services (HHS) Shelters**

In 2002, the government charged the Office of Refugee Resettlement, an office within the Department of Health and Human Services, with the task of creating a program to house, care for, and place unaccompanied minors. This was an intentional shift away from the previously used adult detention model for children (HHS, 2019). Since this date, ORR has cared for 407,000 unaccompanied foreign-born children (HHS, 2019). From 2012 until the present, as of early 2020, the number of children referred to ORR each fiscal year has spiked dramatically, from 13,625 in 2012 to 24,668 in 2013 to, most recently, 67,631 children under ORR’s care in late 2019 (HHS, 2019).

In their latest report, updated in September 2019, ORR reported they are currently caring for 5,000 unaccompanied migrant children (HHS, 2019). Depending on which ORR shelter has a bed available, a child is sent across the country and may find him or herself in a wide variety of facilities.

If needed, ORR may place children in a foster home, group home, staff secure or secure facilities, therapeutic group homes, a residential treatment facility, or a special needs care facility (ORR, 2019). At best, as of early 2020, children spend an average of 50 days in these facilities until their placement with a sponsor. The Department of Health and Human Services contracts with 170 facilities in 23 states (HHS, 2019). California contains at least nine shelters that house unaccompanied or separated minors, at least three of which are in Northern California. The exact locations of these homes are confidential in order to protect children and to blend into the surrounding communities (Bogado & Michels, 2019).

In accordance with the Flores Agreement of 1997 and the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, ORR provides case management, classroom education, access to legal services, family reunification, mental health services, vocational training, socialization, recreation, and health care for children during their time in government-funded shelters (ORR, 2019). According to Southwest Key Programs, who oversees three California shelters for minors and an additional 23 across Arizona and Texas, about 90% of the children they care for arrived to the U.S. unaccompanied. Whether children are placed in these shelters as unaccompanied minors or as children separated from family members once in the United States, they are treated the same within ORR's Unaccompanied Alien Children Program (Sanchez & Sulek, 2018).

Nationally, as of September 2019, ORR reported they were currently caring for 5,000 children in Health and Human Services shelters. The average length of time they spent in shelters was 50 days by September 2019, down from a high of 93 days in November 2018 (HHS, 2019). The majority of these minors are from Guatemala (54%), Honduras (26%), and El Salvador (12%). Of these, 73% are 14 years of age and older and 71% are boys (HHS, 2019).

### **C. In the Community: With Sponsors or Foster Placements**

According to Rose Ruiz (personal communication, February 10, 2020) of International Christian Adoptions (ICA) in Citrus Heights, CA, unaccompanied children are not available for adoption. However, foster families can play an important role in journeying with children through their childhood and teenage years, until they are ready to live on their own and have been granted legal status in the United States. Many children are placed on long waiting lists for foster homes, if the government has exhausted every lead for potential next of kin sponsors. Even after turning 18, many children who are a part of ICA see the adoption agency as their family and stay connected with their foster family for years to come. Other families can serve as host homes for teenagers who have turned 18 or 19 but are not ready to live on their own due to all they have experienced and the significant challenge for any child of establishing full independence at 18 (R. Ruiz, personal communication, February 10, 2020). Diego Menendez (personal communication, March 18, 2020), a legal fellow with Public Law Center near Los Angeles, CA, reports that all of the unaccompanied minors they work with are now with foster families, a reunited parent, or sponsors in the community. Although many of these teens have made their way into a home, they require long-term legal assistance in order to be granted permanent legal status in the United States. Some of these children never passed through ORR's care because they entered illegally without inspection, and others



entered the country through a port of entry and passed through ORR's system before being placed with a sponsor or foster family (D. Menendez, personal communication, March 18, 2020).

## VI. FINDINGS

In the findings that follow, this study highlights the greatest categories of needs and risk factors unaccompanied minors face once they are in the United States, the key services of organizations that advocate for and defend the rights and interests of unaccompanied migrant children, and the recommendations of organizations that serve this population for community volunteering and collaborative partnership opportunities.

This study identified the most pressing needs and risk factors experienced by unaccompanied migrant children and youth through analysis of ORR program inspection reports, a summary of key journalistic investigations, and direct interviews with service providers across California. The community service providers most studied were those in San Diego and the greater Los Angeles area, as these communities are at the frontline of border concerns and serve unaccompanied migrant children and youth intentionally and directly. This study also included intersections with the highlighted needs of immigrant families and children as reported by service providers in Sacramento, CA, as a capital city that is powerful and well-resourced in non-profit efforts towards immigrant rights, Latino/Latina leadership resources, and child welfare concerns. The purpose of these two primary target locations was to understand what are the stories and biggest needs of unaccompanied children crossing the U.S.-Mexico border and how members of the Sacramento community can best help these children, despite our distance from the border, through local efforts and long-distance partnerships.

Under the Flores Agreement and the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA), minors in ORR detention facilities are granted certain rights and protections. These require that children be released as promptly as possible, without unnecessary delay; placed in the least restrictive licensed environment possible with consideration of age and special needs; and provided with wrap-around care that meets the standards of case management required for children in immigration detention (Becerra et al., 2019). The actual conditions and rights of children in detention in California, however, differ greatly from these standards of care. In response to known gaps in the management of and accurate reporting on conditions within detention facilities, the Department of Justice conducted a review of California immigration detention facilities in February 2019 (Becerra et al., 2019).

According to the Department of Justice, these major issues were discovered in California facilities:

1. Restricted mobility—some children and adults are confined to their cells for 22 hours per day
2. Language barriers—no single California facility had staff who speak all languages spoken by detainees
3. Medical record and practice concerns—inspection revealed inconsistent medical record keeping, unsafe suicide watch, and insufficient solitary confinement practices
4. Limited access to family contact and other support networks—it is difficult for detainees to make the expensive phone calls they are legally allowed to place, and they experience very few visits due to inflexible schedules
5. Inadequate access to legal representation—detainees are not granted confidential phone lines to talk with legal counsel, often do not have current legal pamphlets provided in their spoken language, and do not have the right to legal counsel

6. Poor match of criminal incarceration system for immigrants—placements for detainees are not customized to individual mental health, language, cultural, and legal needs (Becerra et al., 2019)

Based on current literature, as well as the testimonies of advocacy groups interviewed throughout this project, unaccompanied and separated migrant children present many specific vulnerabilities and needs once they are in the United States due to our system of care and because of all they experienced before and during their migration.[10]

The primary themes of needs of unaccompanied and separated children in the United States include the following:

- Intentional Steps to Reduce Trauma Throughout Care
- Protection from Abuse in Border Facilities
- Access to Child Advocates and Legal Support
- Safe Placements
- Appropriate Mental Health & Medical Services
- Linguistically and Culturally Relevant Staffing
- Protection from Trafficking and Exploitation

### **A. Intentional Steps to Reduce Trauma During Throughout Care**

The journey, the conditions they have fled, mostly in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, their age, all they have experienced, their

[10] Valeria Ruiz-Griego, Director of Casa YMCA, runs a Tijuana emergency shelter for unaccompanied youth who have attempted to migrate into the United States. She shares that children have a great deal of trauma from what they have seen and endured in their daring journey across Mexico and into the United States. Ruiz-Griego says Casa YMCA aims to provide a safe place for youth who arrive shell-shocked. These young people, she explains, are often unable to verbalize what they have experienced (Fry, 2020). A few of the known risk factors on the journey to the United States include human smugglers, who care little for the safety of their passengers; drug cartels; gangs; traffickers; and the dangers of the journey across international borders, deserts, and rivers. These children and youth often make the journey without basic necessities, such as adequate food, water, hygiene, and first aid provisions (Alvarez, 2020; G. Clifford, personal communication, February 22, 2020).

separation from family, the trauma, and all that is involved in traveling to the U.S., make these children a very vulnerable population to abuse, exploitation, and human trafficking (HHS, 2019). In early 2020, a lawsuit was brought against the DOJ by two fathers whose children were separated from them at the border and were subsequently abused in foster placements by other foster children. The parents report that limited information was granted to them regarding their children's whereabouts or the timeline for reunification, and the children are reported to have post-traumatic stress disorder even after being returned to their parents (Weixel, 2020). Very young children do not understand why their parents seemingly abandoned them when they were separated, and the long-term effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are severe in many of the children who travel from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala due to the journey alone (Sanchez & Sulek, 2018). Children are also likely to suffer from additional trauma during their stay in ORR shelters as they are often left in the dark about their current circumstances, the state of their legal prospects, and what future arrangements are being made on their behalf (D. Menendez, personal communication, March 18, 2020; G. Saavedra, personal communication, March 20, 2020).

At times, service providers, shelters and immigrant rights groups can also add to trauma for children at the community level, even as they attempt to provide for or defend the rights of unaccompanied children or protest immigration policies on either side of the issue. According to the Executive Director of the Latino Leadership Council in Placer County, CA, and the Volunteer Coordinator for the Young Center in Chicago, IL, the kinds of militant approaches taken by some activist groups in Sacramento and across the nation can be quite scary and may even deepen the trauma for migrant children who are facing such an uncertain future and living with a great deal of PTSD already (K. Green, personal communication, February 7, 2020; E. Herrera, personal communication, February 7, 2020).

This includes practices like protests, which can be frightening for young children and compound their existing trauma related to their legal status, community, and future. The long-term consequences of such trauma are very concerning to the American Pediatric Society for children and our society at large (Associated Press, 2018). Valeria Ruiz-Griego, executive director of Casa YMCA, one of the few Tijuana shelters for unaccompanied minors, reports that children are hesitant to share and must be assured they are in a safe, loving environment before they will begin to describe why they made the journey to the U.S. border and what they have seen and experienced (Fry, 2020). It is this type of trauma-informed approach that is needed for children at every juncture of their care in our country. From border patrol to child advocates, lawyers to foster parents, every department, organization, and individual responding to the needs of UAC should be equipped with best practices of trauma-informed care.

## **B. Protection from Abuse in Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Facilities**

Many UAC, especially from Mexico, do not have the opportunity to be considered for permanent legal status and protection within the United States (D. Menendez, personal communication, March 18, 2020). Mexican children, who are not seeking asylum but are fearful of violence, driven by poverty, and desiring to find work and a safer life, are frequently deported back to Mexico without a credible fear interview (Fry, 2020). According to the Global Detention Project (2016), 99.5% of unaccompanied children from Mexico who cross the U.S. border are immediately deported without the chance to make a case regarding their need for protection. Many of these minors end up wandering the streets of Tijuana, which has a huge population of homeless youth and only a few shelters for minors (V. Ruiz-Griego, personal communication, February 27, 2020).

Former border patrol officers also tell stories of the horrendous forcible family separations they have been required to enact. While these separations are traumatic for the border patrol officers themselves, even more importantly, these family separations leave lasting traumatic imprints on children, who have a difficult time bonding again with their parents even after reunification (Taddonio, 2020). In addition to emotional devastation at the border for unaccompanied and separated children, migrant children have been particularly susceptible to health conditions associated with the deplorable conditions in border patrol facilities. At least seven cases of minor death were documented in the 2018-2019 fiscal year after decades of no deaths at the border (Acevedo, 2019). One of the reasons children are dying is because of lack of access to basic hygiene products, warmth, or safe food (J. Zwiers, personal communication, March 13, 2020). Also, the medical community explains that children can become sick more easily than adults, and when they become sick, their condition can deteriorate more rapidly than adults (Acevedo, 2019).

### **C. Access to Child Advocates and Legal Support**

Ideally, every child should have access to a child advocate to provide reassurance and stability and to provide the child's lawyer with vital information about the child's best interests (Young Center, 2020). A child advocate multiplies the time and attention of social workers and attorneys and provides children with consistent representation during custody and after release, while they are still navigating legal proceedings (Young Center, 2020). With enough child advocates, children will get better support from their lawyers who can represent more children more thoroughly, and children who have legal representation are five times more likely to be granted protection in the United States (KIND, 2020c).

According to NorCal Resist of Sacramento, CA, legal representation is the biggest need for asylum-seeking families in the Sacramento Region. Given the high number of UAC placed with sponsors in California each year,[11] many of these families are likely caring for unaccompanied children as next of kin sponsors (R. Ibarra, personal communication, February 4, 2020).

The current load of clients is unmanageable for nonprofits and others who have donated their time as pro bono or low cost legal representatives. Legal representation, however, is vital for keeping families together and helping youth establish a fresh start. If an unaccompanied child is with immediate or extended family members who are emotionally and physically safe for a child, then legal representation can play an important role in securing the future and permanency of that home for a child. However, when it is not possible to keep a child with relatives, he or she may need a legal representative who can help secure medical care, counseling services, or arrange other foster home options. Alternately, as in the case of a few children in San Diego, CA, a child may enter the home of a trusted leader from their local church or community, and this home can provide safety, stable access to necessities, and a supportive environment to attend school and receive job training. These resources promote social capital and resilience without the child needing to enter foster care or being completely cut off from social ties with their biological family (G. Clifford, personal communication, February 22, 2020). This is yet another way migrant children can be spared from entering or reentering ORR's care once they are in the states.

In addition, while children are guaranteed the right to a lawyer while in ORR's care, they need continued assistance from legal representatives in their new local community while living with guardians, sponsors, or foster

[11] For exact number of children released to California sponsors each fiscal year, including the 8,477 children in 2019, see [www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/resource/unaccompanied-alien-children-released-to-sponsors-by-state](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/resource/unaccompanied-alien-children-released-to-sponsors-by-state)

parents, so they can achieve permanent legal status in the United States (D. Menendez, personal communication, March 18, 2020). Especially when unaccompanied minors are close to becoming adults, they are most focused on making their own way in the United States by obtaining legal status and finding work to become self-sufficient (J. Serrano, personal communication, March 11, 2020).[12] Two of the most common paths for children to obtain permanent legal status is as a survivor of trafficking, which requires an interview with an officer of the court and may result in granting of a T Visa, or by pursuing a Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) Visa (D. Menendez, personal communication, March 18, 2020). Children may also find themselves in need of advocacy if they are separated from their family or sponsors once in the United States. This may occur when the parents or relatives who are responsible for their care are either deported or deemed unfit to care for the children. In this case, children enter the child welfare system, or they may be placed with a legal guardian, if such a person has been appointed in a legal plan by parents prior to deportation (E. Herrera, personal communication, February 7, 2020).

## **D. Safe Placements**

Policy changes in May 2018 now require HHS to fingerprint a sponsor and their entire household before a child can be placed in the sponsor's care. This creates a serious problem because HHS shares background check information with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), who is responsible for deportation of illegal residents. This information-sharing policy led to the immediate detention of 170 prospective sponsors, a dramatic drop in

[12] Jose Serrano (personal communication, March 11, 2020) of World Relief Southern California explains unaccompanied youth, especially if they are close to 18, are often not focused on making their placement work or on their goals, dreams, or a career path. They most want to achieve self-sufficiency by making money and obtaining permanent status to remain in the U.S. By their late teens, these young adults have already learned to make their own way in the world and have a hard time depending on anyone else, and legal status is essential if they plan to make a new life for themselves here.



sponsorship claims, and a steady increase in the number of children without viable, next of kin sponsors (Sands, 2018; Malina, 2019). As a result, children's stays in ORR care have grown even more lengthy, with an average stay of 89 days in HHS facilities in early 2019. Additionally, this fingerprinting policy has led to legal trouble for viable sponsors, who are alternatively documented and were forced to provide ICE with their legal status information in order to help a family member in need. Diego Menendez (personal communication, March 18, 2020), a fellow at Public Law Center near L.A., recalls the story of one such sponsor, a woman from Guatemala. This woman had lived and worked in California for 20 years without incident until she had to be fingerprinted by ORR, and, therefore, by ICE, to sponsor her son and nephew. This raised trouble, not only for this woman, but for the minors who needed her care, as their sponsorship with their mother and aunt was delayed during the woman's legal battle.

As of February 2020, many unaccompanied migrant children are reportedly on a waitlist for foster families, as the government has exhausted every option of sponsorship. For children like these, the best case scenario is that they will be placed with a loving, long-term foster family who will care for them until they reach adulthood and support them as they transition into independent living (R. Ruiz, personal communication, February 10, 2020). International Christian Adoptions also supports unaccompanied children who are aging out of foster care and have obtained legal status by matching them with host families or placing them in transitional housing apartment complexes, where they have support to make the transition into adulthood (R. Ruiz, personal communication, February 10, 2020).

### **E. Appropriate Medical and Psychiatric Care**

A study conducted by the American Medical Association on children in ORR

care revealed concerning psychiatric and medical practices. In this study, doctors documented ORR staff's routine misadministration of psychotropic medications, which has led to weight gain, sluggishness, and the inability of UAC to communicate or advocate for their case to be completed. This contributes to longer than necessary stays in HHS shelters (Schweikart, 2019). Coercive medical practices are also a concern. For example, this study found that if children refuse medication, they are written up with a significant incident report, which can slow down their family reunification as a result (Malina, 2019).[13]

Moreover, a watchdog report created by the HHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) indicates all 45 shelters for unaccompanied minors they researched, including three in California, were ill-equipped to deal with the mental health needs of the children in their care (OIG, 2019). This report included about half of all U.S. shelters for unaccompanied minors in operation at the time of the study and concluded the following:

- 1.Children have longer than recommended lengths of stay as well as interruptions or gaps in mental health care
- 2.Children are not able to be moved easily to other care facilities, even when deemed necessary by their condition
- 3.Therapists caseloads are too large, resulting in inadequate care for children
- 4.Noticed facilities have great difficulty hiring and retaining an adequate number of therapists and mental health providers

Almost all children have experienced significant trauma during their journey to the U.S., as well as throughout the process of separation from adults or parents once in the country. Nearly all children demonstrated signs of constant stress (OIG, 2019).

[13] Research published by American Medical Association's (2019) Journal of Ethics raises questions about standards of care and coercive methods used with unaccompanied minors. They are written up if they don't take the medication they are prescribed.

## **F. Linguistically and Culturally Relevant Staffing and Information**

According to service coordinators for Central American and Mexican families in Sacramento and Placer County, counties should hire those who speak and look like their clients, in order to overcome cultural and linguistic barriers to assisting asylum-seeking families who are largely Spanish-speaking. When social workers speak the language and understand the cultural norms that guide interactions, they can earn the trust of families, engage in effective communication, and inform the way social services are developed and adapted to better serve the families they intend to support (E. Herrera, personal communication, February 7, 2020). The barrier of language can add to confusion, stress, and trauma for UAC and their sponsors as they proceed through the U.S. immigration system and learn to integrate into their local community. As social science research has shown over the last 20 years, building social capital—relationships and participation across diverse parts of the community—is related to resilience and health for adults and children alike (Putnam, 2000). Spanish-speaking employees and volunteers are a key part of building social capital for families and children who have come from Central America. Therefore, we should keep the most vulnerable and underrepresented in our communities in mind as we form and monitor our hiring practices.

The linguistic and cultural gap continues to be a barrier in the Sacramento Region. Social services and child welfare workers often only speak English, while they serve a large population of Spanish-speaking families (E. Herrera, personal communication, February 7, 2020). The Latino Leadership Council of Placer County has appealed to their local social service agencies to hire Spanish-speaking social workers for the CalVoices program to assist in family welfare cases involving children of Spanish-speakers (E. Herrera, personal communication, February 7, 2020). They have seen a positive shift due to their advocacy work over the last 12 years, during which Placer

County went from only one staff member who spoke Spanish to now 13 staff members who are culturally and linguistically able to relate to asylum-seeking families from Mexico and Central America. Through their ability to speak the language of their clients, Latino/Latina service providers are best equipped to bridge resource gaps between the community and vulnerable families, who often lack the social capital and access English-speakers in the community already enjoy (E. Herrera, personal communication, February 7, 2020).

### **G. Protection from Trafficking and Exploitation**

Finally, UAC need protection from human trafficking as they wait at the U.S.-Mexico border, cross the border with adults that pose as parents, and navigate homelessness or unaccompanied travel across our nation. First, there is an undefined risk of traffickers promising desperate parents in Central America, Mexico, and other countries to provide work for their children if parents will pay them to transport their children to the United States (Child Welfare League of America, 2016). This risk must be carefully identified, when possible, as children cross the U.S.-Mexico border or any border where children are crossing with adults who may not be legitimate or safe caregivers for the children.

Children are also at risk due to President Trump's wait in Mexico policy, which has forced families to live in overcrowded shelters at best or in unprotected tent cities at worst. In tent cities in Mexico at the Texas border, drug cartels and traffickers are targeting vulnerable migrants. Children who arrive at tent shelters with their parents are becoming separated when parents go missing or when adults deem the conditions too dangerous for children to stay and choose to send children across the border through a port of entry alone (Alvarez, 2020). UAC also become vulnerable to traffickers when they cross the border without inspection because they may rely on human

smugglers to travel across Mexico and into the United States (Child Welfare League of America, 2016; D. Menendez, personal communication, March 18, 2020). Additionally, as homeless youth, UAC are vulnerable to be picked up by sex or labor traffickers. According to human trafficking prevention research in the United States, if a child is not identified and assisted by a safe adult or service provider within 72 hours of entering the streets, he or she has an 80% chance of being recruited or abducted by a human trafficker (3Strands Global, 2017).

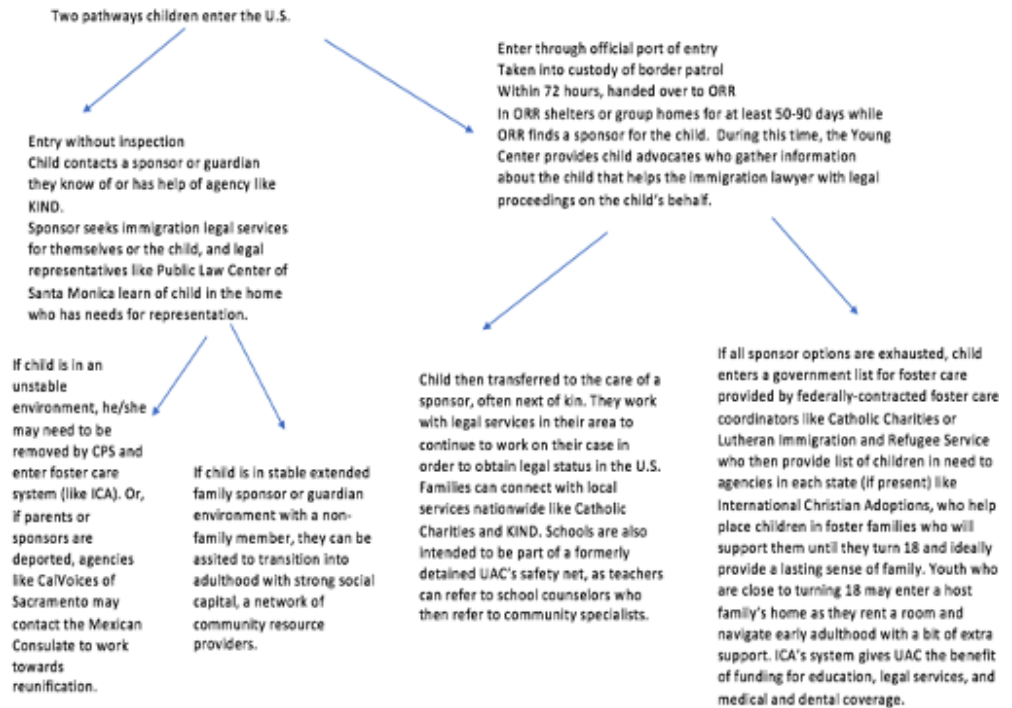
## **VII. KEY SERVICE PROVIDERS**

In response to the needs and risk factors unaccompanied minors face in route to and within the United States, many incredible agencies are providing aid. As anticipated, this study revealed that a great deal of the advocacy work happening for unaccompanied minor children and separated families takes place in communities near the border, including Los Angeles and San Diego, CA. What was not anticipated at the outset is the difficulty of finding community-based ways to work with the majority of unaccompanied migrant children, even if service providers or interested volunteers are located near ORR shelters. This is due to the fact that, first, children are highly sheltered from community support for their safety and because of the complex policies created by the Trump administration. Second, it is difficult to work with children under ORR's care directly because there is no publicly-shared tracking system that helps community agencies follow up with unaccompanied children and their sponsors once they are placed in communities across the nation (D. Menendez, personal communication, March 18, 2020; M. Silva, personal communication, March 3, 2020).

As shown in Figure 1 below, unaccompanied children come into contact with service providers most often after an adult in the household reaches out to lawyers for assistance with personal immigration legal services and the legal team discovers there is an UAC in the family's care

(D. Menendez, personal communication, March 18, 2020). Legal teams like Public Law Center of Santa Ana, CA, work with children at this level of the community.

Figure 1: Access Points to Serve Unaccompanied Minors in the United States



## **A. Limited Access to Children in ORR Care**

When children enter the country through an official port of entry and are placed in ORR care, there are not many informal opportunities to provide mentorship, programs, or other services for children until they are released from the government's care. Community members who desire to help cannot work directly with UAC unless they are trained and screened as child advocates through the Young Center or have a long-term existing relationship with a government-contracted foster care group home for UAC (K. Green, personal communication, February 7, 2020). An example of this kind of partnership is University of San Diego's community engagement program, which screens and trains student volunteers to facilitate art and justice workshops and field trips for UAC from a Southwest Key Programs shelter in San Diego (M. Silva, personal communication, March 3, 2020).

## **B. Wider Access to Children at the Community Level**

Once unaccompanied minors are placed with next of kin sponsors or foster families through ORR's sponsorship program or a federally-funded foster care agency, community advocates have the greatest opportunity to assist children and their hosts, sponsors, and foster families. At this stage, volunteers can also work to reduce undocumented sponsor families' isolation and fear and to serve as bridge between these families and the resources they need to provide healthy and stable homes. This family-level support can interrupt the cycle of poverty, vulnerability, and trauma for children who have already endured so much in the process of fleeing their country of origin and arriving in our communities.

For examples of community agencies that are providing for the tangible needs of undocumented families, formerly-detained minors, or children who entered without inspection and are living in the Sacramento Region, please

see Table 1 in Appendix B. For other specific resources in the San Francisco Bay Area, Southern California, or the nation at large, see Tables 2, 3, and 4. For online databases and other websites that connect advocates and volunteers with immigration advocacy agencies and services in most major cities in the United States, see the resources in Table 6. Some of these agencies are uniquely equipped to provide aid to children while they are in the government's care, while others are focused on community-based services provided once children are placed with a foster family or next of kin sponsor. The distinction between resources provided for children while they



## **VIII. CURRENT POLICY AND SOCIETAL FACTORS: THIRD COUNTRY TRANSIT, METERING, AND CORONAVIRUS**

Through conversations and site visits at the San Diego-Tijuana border, this study revealed the ways policies are rapidly changing, which impacts where children move as they flee violence and instability and how they are detained or allowed to apply for asylum. For example, under U.S. third country transit regulations, families from Central America are not considered for asylum unless they first seek asylum in at least one country they pass through on the way to the United States, oftentimes Mexico. They can only proceed to the U.S. and seek asylum here if they have already done so and have been denied or if they are a victim of a severe form of human trafficking. The same applies for children (Clinical Legal, 2019).

Another policy, a metering requirement, makes families stay in Mexico while they wait in a metered line to be interrogated by border patrol and held three to five days in the “ice box,” a cold, underground interrogation room, where many adults and children become ill (Garcia-Lawler, 2018; J. Zwiers, personal communication, March 13, 2020). Migrants have created their own cue system and they assign each newly arriving migrant at a port of entry a number. Volunteers in Tijuana keep track of the numbers as they are called and update them on a website. This allows migrants, who wait anywhere from six months to more than a year, to know when their number is about to be called and to travel to El Chaparral Plaza at the Tijuana border. Here, they wait with their children and belongings to enter interviews with border patrol and make their asylum request.

If families or individuals miss their numbers, they face the cruel consequence of starting over in a line of thousands, or they may attempt to pay off the next

in line to allow them to go before those whose numbers are now active (Fry, 2020; J. Zwiers, personal communication, March 13, 2020). Added to the barrier of this metering system are additional access limiting factors. For example, as of March 2020, the Mexican military is guarding the border at Guatemala, not allowing migrants and asylum-seekers to enter Mexico. This is also preventing the migration of children desperate for protection from reaching our border (J. Serrano, personal communication, March 11, 2020). COVID-19, also known as Coronavirus, adds an additional humanitarian concern for those waiting at the border, as asylum-seekers are thickly congregated in small shelters during the rainy season and are dependent on a steady flow of support and food deliveries they receive from a handful of emergency relief agencies and compassionate volunteers. Medical access is limited for these migrants, and deliveries of food, first aid supplies, and other necessary goods have slowed as people grow afraid to travel or to enter such populated spaces (J. Zwiers, personal communication, March 13, 2020). Moreover, the government has talked of installing a policy of not processing asylum-seekers during this period, which will only add to the already overcrowded conditions within shelters across the border (Woodruff Swan, 2020).

Social distancing is not an option when 170 people are crammed into a small set of rooms with dozens of bunk beds inside. Families share small quarters to make room for everyone. In some shelters in Tijuana, Mexico, more than 200 asylum-seekers huddle close together in a small set of buildings and in one 800 square-foot covered patio where they cook and share meals with one another (J. Zwiers, personal communication, March 13, 2020). The provisions are simple in these shelters, but the generosity, creativity, resilience, and care indigenous Mexican shelter directors and migrants themselves provide for one another is incredible.

## IX. AGENCY SPOTLIGHTS

In the face of these challenges and needs, there are a host of organizations doing incredible work throughout California and across the nation, agencies that are bringing hope and onramps to resilience for unaccompanied minors. The following pages include a few highlights of agencies doing meaningful work on behalf of these children. For a full listing of agencies engaged in meeting a wide variety of needs for unaccompanied children across the U.S. and vulnerable families at the border who are at risk for separation, see Tables 1-6 in Appendix B.

### A. Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)

KIND has a team of staff and interns stationed in Juarez, Mexico, and El Paso, TX, that help unaccompanied children passing through or living in Mexico understand their rights, be screened for vulnerabilities, and be referred to NGO's and other agencies, while KIND pursues protection strategies according to each child's needs. Their team builds relationships with community-based agencies on both sides of the border and identifies gaps that can be filled by KIND (Internships, 2020).

In their 2019 Annual Report, KIND highlighted the story of a boy named Sam (KIND, 2020c). His photo and name were changed to protect his identity, but the details share a similarity with stories of many other youth helped by agencies like KIND.[14] Sam fled El Salvador to escape gang members and police officers who were threatening and extorting him. KIND supplied him with a pro bono attorney, and he gained legal status in the United States. As a high school student, he dedicated himself to his education, and KIND referred him to Year Up, a program where he could earn college credits and complete a 6-month internship.

[14] See KIND's website as well as Casa Cornelia's for many additional inspiring stories of unaccompanied children helped through legal assistance and community partnerships: <https://supportkind.org/blog/> and <https://casacornelia.org/featured-news/>

He served with the Federal Reserve of Boston and was chosen to speak at Year Up’s graduation in July of 2019, where he shared “There was no future in El Salvador. I was only just trying to get by and to protect myself from the gang. But now, I have people supporting me, helping me earn an education, and set long-term goals” (KIND, 2020c). This story of hope is one of many KIND has to share of their clients, as they had a 93% success rate of obtaining favorable outcomes for the undocumented clients whose cases closed in 2019 (KIND, 2020c).

KIND is also making some amazing things happen for parents who have long been separated from their children. In February 2020, the first set of parents from Guatemala were flown to the United States to be reunited with the children taken from them during President Trump’s zero-tolerance policy program of 2018 (KIND, 2020b). KIND lawyers are representing some of the parents involved in this government-issued reunification process and will assist parents as they go through a process of parole and reunification with their children here in the United States (KIND, 2020b).

## **B. Young Center for Immigrant Children’s Rights**

The Young Center was selected by Health and Human Services as the government’s official Child Advocate Program for children in ORR’s care. This agency welcomes teachers, bilingual volunteers, retired attorneys, students, and other members of the community to become part of their Child Advocate Program (Young Center, 2020). Volunteer child advocates provide best interest reports based on pertinent details about the child’s situation and needs and offer recommendations for the best interests of the child. This program serves the most vulnerable children while they are in custody of HHS and after they are released. Children served by the Young Center include those who are part of international custody disputes, children who have been abused or neglected, and young girls and boys who are survivors

of trafficking (Young Center, 2020). It is important for children, both in ORR's care and after they are released, to have the same child advocate gathering and reporting information on the child's best interests. For this reason, flexible, dedicated, long-term volunteers are preferred.

The Young Center also conducts international home studies to investigate if children may safely repatriate if they wish to return home (Young Center, 2020). Their program is expanding, with new offices across the country over the last few years, but they are still not present in Northern California (K. Green, personal communication, February 7, 2020). Members of the community or referral agencies can contact the Young Center if they know of a child who does not have a child advocate or legal representative. The Young Center will receive referrals and do its best to make sure every child is represented.

As part of this study, Grecia Saavedra (personal communication, March 20, 2020) of Miami shared her experience with serving as a child advocate for an eight-year-old boy in the Young Center's program. While living near L.A., Grecia trained to become a child advocate with the Young Center. The training provided her with an extensive foundation of understanding what happens to UAC in the government's care and ways child advocates can help protect children from unlawful deportation. She began meeting weekly with a boy, an eight-year-old unaccompanied child, who was living with great uncertainty about his future and confusion regarding the stage of the process he was in with his immigration attorney. Grecia helped provide friendship for him and welcomed him to share whatever he felt he wanted to express through art, a process which had been outlined for her during her training. While she only worked with this program for a short time before the boy was transferred out of the area, Grecia noted the benefit of emotional support, trust, and consistency she could provide to a child during a stressful season of his or her life by serving as a child advocate.

She also affirmed the way child advocates can strengthen the child's case to remain in the United States, since advocates share reports on each child's story and best interests with the child's attorney (G. Saavedra, personal communication, March 20, 2020).

### **C. Public Law Center of Santa Ana, CA**

During a telephone interview, legal fellow Diego Menendez (personal communication, March 18, 2020) shared how their team of pro bono lawyers at Public Law Center in Southern California are able to assist unaccompanied children who live in the community with guardians or sponsors. Guardians, he explained, are non-relative caregivers who are matched with an UAC when a sponsor cannot be found. When a next of kin sponsor is available, children are often rapidly removed from ORR foster care to live with that sponsor. However, children seeking a match with guardians can face a very long legal process, which can take anywhere from months to a year to complete. According to Menendez, older children are especially in need of support and placement options as their attorneys seek to help them find the most expedient solution. This is called finding a child's "efficient interests," instead of their "best interests," the latter of which being what other traditional family law groups aim to achieve. Because the needs of UAC for legal assistance and family placements are great, caseloads are high, and placement options are few, legal teams in the U.S. must work to achieve the quickest solution for a child, and sometimes the only option is not ideal. For example, Menendez tells the case of a sixteen-year-old boy from Central America who had escaped severe neglect by his mother, leading to paralysis of his face and extensive trauma. When he arrived in the U.S., the only next of kin sponsors available were maternal relatives, so he opted to stay in foster care until he emancipated from ORR's care at 18.

Clearly, children need home placement options with loving families, which will give them an alternative to placements with relatives of their abusers or remaining within institutional care settings.

A major part of the Public Law Center's work for unaccompanied minor clients is helping youth navigate their placements, referring families and children to community mental health services, and helping minors complete the process of obtaining legal status in the United States. The two most common pathways to achieve legal status as a minor are to make a case as a victim of trafficking to receive a T (trafficking) visa or to apply for a Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) visa (D. Menendez, personal communication, March 18, 2020).

The major outstanding needs for these youth include access to long-term mental health services, transportation to these appointments, and stable foster and host families who will work with children, especially older youth, to establish equitable expectations for behavior and contributions in the home. Instability in guardianship and sponsor relationships is a major stressor for older unaccompanied migrant children, one which adds additional hardship as youth transition into adulthood.

#### **D. Immigrant Families Together**

Started in 2018 by a group of volunteers in response to President Trump's zero-tolerance policy, Immigrant Families Together is a non-profit that has funded over 114 bonds to release parents from detention and reunite parents with their children. A book is releasing June 2020 that captures the story of one of their earliest clients, a mom named Rosy, who fled violence in Central America and was separated from her two children once she arrived in the United States. The woman who founded Immigrant Families Together was instrumental in assisting Rosy and helping her reunite with her children.

This organization continues to help educate the public on the needs of separated children and their parents, and they provide ways to convert private donations into bail bonds and legal fees to bring families back together.

### **E. Casa Cornelia's Legal Aid for Children in Detention**

Casa Cornelia is the only pro bono law firm in San Diego County that serves unaccompanied children. All unaccompanied children have the right to legal representation, according to government policy (Casa Cornelia, 2020). If a six to seventeen-year-old UAC is detained, Casa Cornelia represents their case and investigates whether the child's experiences in their countries of origin warrant their asylum and protection under the UN Convention Against Torture or within the limitations of the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) Visa. They also represent children who are not detained but have suffered neglect or abuse and are eligible for legal protection (Casa Cornelia, 2020).

### **F. Churches at the Border**

In some cities near the California-Mexico border, church members are intentionally living in neighborhoods where they can be active neighbors and supporters of undocumented families. One church that participated in this study, the Church of Christ in La Mesa, is planted just outside of San Diego and has a missionary-style youth minister who is fluent in Spanish and able to build relationships with her neighbors. Her name is Ellen Banks, and she helps connect church families with youth who cannot remain in their homes due to risk factors. Banks also helps youth apply for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) (E. Banks, personal communication, March 12, 2020).



Some of the children Ellen and her sister, Julie, have helped in neighboring Escondido have been unaccompanied minors (E. Banks, personal communication, March 12, 2020). In one case, Julie met two sisters who had recently arrived from Mexico. The younger sister was only 16 and she was living with her sister and sister's family. There were more people than the older sister could provide for, and the husband had shown signs of domestic violence, putting the younger sister at further risk.

The church leaders, Julie and Manuel, knew this young sister was in need of safe housing. So, Julie and her husband, Manuel, took this girl in and helped care for her as she finished school and transitioned into adulthood. Julie and Manuel helped this girl file her application for asylum and to gain access to a professional school. She is now a permanent part of her family and is living a stable, independent life in the community (E. Banks, personal communication, March 12, 2020).

Many small congregations in San Diego County are doing a beautiful job of facing outward towards the needs of the underserved and marginalized families in their community. As they began to connect and build relationships with undocumented and migrant families around their churches, they started developing programs to welcome and meet tangible needs of this population. For example, Church of Christ in La Mesa now hosts one Parents' Night Out a month, which includes free child care, so parents can enjoy a night of respite. This resource provides families from every socioeconomic status with connection and relationships built on common ground, overcoming race and class divides in their community (G. Clifford, personal communication, February 22, 2020). Similarly, by hosting ESL classes, these churches are showing love in action and building relationships that provide the foundation for the church to continue to provide relevant assistance as they get to know the stories and pressing needs of each family.

## **G. Friendships No Fronteras**

Jill Zwiers, founder of Friendships No Fronteras, is a resident of San Diego and has been active with migrant caravans arriving in waves to Tijuana after the initial largest wave of 10,000 families arrived in the winter of 2018 (personal communication, March 13, 2020). Since this time, volunteers from both sides of the border constructed a system of 30 shelters across Tijuana that operate locally and independently to meet the needs of asylum-seeking families. The UN deemed the number of migrants who are homeless and vulnerable too small to set up an official system of aid, so the UN only created an office in Tijuana. Local leaders have filled the gap.

For this project, I arranged a site visit with Jill Zwiers to see the strengths and needs of asylum-seekers and the shelters. These shelters care for families and unaccompanied minors and keep them safe as they wait in Mexico (Alvarez, 2020). During this site visit in early March 2020, the families and site leaders expressed relief when Jill arrived with a load of food and promised additional deliveries from visiting volunteers from San Francisco later in the weekend. As COVID-19's spread forced the governor of California to issue the order to remain at home, many humanitarian relief agencies had halted deliveries to these shelters. It is important to note how global crises affect the most vulnerable populations, such as those in these shelters, who are without food in the absence of donation deliveries.

These food deliveries are an important lifeline to keep families from needing to panhandle for food or to place themselves in danger to roam the city for their next meal. In a tent city in Mexico at the border near Texas, a set of Honduran brothers, ages four and ten, became separated from their mother when she had left their tent to look for a chicken for their dinner. After several days, during which the mother had not returned, a friend in the tent

city led the boys to a port of entry at the Texas/Mexico border. The boys' maternal aunt, who lives in the U.S., indicated the mother was likely being trafficked or extorted (Alvarez, 2020).

Without shelter walls, volunteer guards, and the deliveries of provisions brought to these families in Tijuana, higher rates of exhausted, economically depleted parents and their young children would likely fall prey to the same circumstances as this Honduran mother. During the site visit, Zwiers drove a newly arrived party of women and children from a house near El Chaparral Plaza to the shelter that would be their new home for the next few months. El Chaparral Plaza is the first place migrants go upon arriving to Tijuana. Here, they put their name on a migrant-created list of those waiting for a chance to meet with border officials to plead their case for asylum.

During the drive across the city, we got to talk with two young mothers, barely in their 20s, and their three young children. This party of five had left everything behind in order to escape from the credible fear of rape and kidnap, which has become a prevalent threat in their hometown in Southwestern Mexico. Our destination was one of the nicer shelters in Tijuana, and it had just enough room among 200 other occupants to squeeze in our five new friends. Efforts like those of Zwiers and the network she has partnered with are providing young families with hope, safety, and the resources to buy them time until they can seek assistance from the U.S. Government. Without this kind of loving, supportive, and safe network, these families may fall prey to the trafficking and exploitation that is prevalent across all routes of migration (J. Zwiers, personal communication, March 13, 2020).

## X. REMAINING GAPS IN SERVICE

Immigration legal services are in high demand everywhere, and challenges to providing adequate representation for all unaccompanied migrant children are growing as numbers of immigrant cases increase and those lawyers who have given so much for the last six years face burnout (Casa Cornelia, 2020; R. Ibarra, personal communication, February 4, 2020). Additionally, there is a need for churches across the state, especially near the border in San Diego, to work together in a coordinated effort to support immigrant families and children in their community and to join to address border needs (E. Banks, personal communication, March 12, 2020). Jose Serrano (personal communication, March 11, 2020) of World Relief Southern California and Jill Zwiers (personal communication, March 13, 2020) of Friendships No Fronteras also warn against pastors and church teams who have an agenda to save souls or spread the Gospel instead of helping meet tangible needs for shelter, food, and legal assistance with true compassion, an empowering approach, and with no strings attached. Even for advocates who feel strongly about sharing the hope they have found in their faith to those enduring hardships, the call is for churches, pastors, and people of faith to simply love and serve and to let Jesus meet people along the way through the love that is demonstrated by his people (J. Serrano, personal communication, March 11, 2020). Mixed agendas or an offering of assistance with a requirement to participate in religious activities can burn bridges with fellow advocates, creating mistrust, and cause anger and hurt for people living in desperation. Let us not follow that course of action.

This is, however, a vital time for bilingual church pastors to model true integration and teamwork. If churches with pastors who hold Spanish and English services will integrate as one church and model mutual honor for each other and consideration for the voices with the least power or protection, churches can help overcome the segregation in our society that perpetuates racism.

Dedication to this kind of honor, unity, and teamwork can build diverse relationships that inform integrated, relevant action on behalf of marginalized undocumented families (E. Banks, personal communication, March 12, 2020; G. Clifford, personal communication, February 22, 2020).

Service providers and community partners also echo the remaining need for UAC within ORR's care to have access to ongoing mental health services and community support networks after their release. In order to provide these kind of services over the five to ten years following a child's release from ORR shelters, advocacy agencies or social service providers will need to work with the government to create a system of tracking all UAC to identify which services each child needs and to provide support for the child and his or her family or sponsor long term.

## **XI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Through analysis of the current literature, interviews with service providers, and case studies of former unaccompanied minors, the following themes of recommendations emerged for strategic and sustainable advocacy:

### **A. Seek to Listen and Empower**

In light of the practices of empowerment present in non-profit programs for unaccompanied minors and families at risk for separation, all forms of advocacy should seek to be similarly affirming and reinforcing. Whether members of the community and other agencies wish to serve unaccompanied minors in the United States or migrant families waiting in Mexico, the key is an empowerment approach. Empowerment honors and maintains a sacred space for migrants of all ages to exercise and develop their strengths and experience their capacity to contribute, lead, and make a difference for others. The importance of this approach was made abundantly clear during

this study, as two immigration advocates—Jose Serrano and Jill Zwiers from Southern California—shared their experiences and recommendations for working with unaccompanied minors and vulnerable families.

As illustration, Jose Serrano (personal communication, March 11, 2020) of World Relief Southern California stated: “While unaccompanied youth may be economically disadvantaged, they are far from poor. They carry with them incredible strengths, including resilience, adaptability, a knowledge of the English language, and a desire to work hard to provide for themselves.” These children and teens have had to take care of themselves from a young age and have had to grow up fast. Therefore, they are often not of a mindset they can rely on their family of origin or on the extended or fragmented family members they have been placed with in the United States. Instead, they are motivated to find pathways to self-sufficiency, such as stable employment (J. Serrano, personal communication, March 11, 2020).

Similarly, in the words of Jill Zwiers, migrant advocate in San Diego, “Don’t do their work for them. Let them run their own community. Show up and listen. Help redistribute wealth by buying and delivering raw and bulk food, but don’t take their dignity by cooking for them or repairing their shelters. This is their shelter, their community, not ours” (personal communication, March 13, 2020). Partnerships like Jill’s are empowering and honoring to the indigenous leaders in Tijuana, and these leaders, through the help of our donations, are providing emergency shelter, safety, community, food, clothing, and more to the migrant families arriving daily to Tijuana.

## **B. Build on Children and Youth’s Strengths**

Jose Serrano (personal communication, March 11, 2020) of World Relief Southern California urges the community to help unaccompanied youth by creating internships within businesses, churches, and nonprofits in ways that

pair well with a young person's strengths and interests. Community agencies can also hold youth conferences or provide ESL classes for migrants of all ages to make social connections while gaining a linguistic capacity, which empowers youth to navigate the community. Churches and other groups are encouraged to visit the border with World Relief of Southern California to learn about the reality of the immigration system and the brokenness inherent in our policies. During these visits, World Relief introduces visitors to individual asylum-seekers so they can learn first-hand from migrants' stories of the harsh realities and lack of options, which prompt families to flee and seek a better life for their children in the States. Relationships are what can slowly change the minds and hearts of those who most need their prejudices softened and transformed (J. Serrano, personal communication, March 11, 2020).

### **C. Practice Radical Hospitality**

If we open our homes generously, unaccompanied children and youth can experience family and the government's goal of the "least restrictive environment possible" instead of the sterile, institutional environment of government-licensed group homes (R. Ruiz, personal communication, February 10, 2020). We can practice hospitality and keep parents with children out of shelters and detention facilities by serving as sponsor families (J. Zwiers, personal communication, March 13, 2020). Additionally, we can support UAC as foster families for minors or as host families for youth who have emancipated from the government's program at 18 and have been granted legal status to remain in the U.S. but are not ready to live on their own (R. Ruiz, personal communication, February 10, 2020).

This is the same call for safe families, loving environments, and a relational approach to empowerment that our own domestic foster youth need, so we

can apply much of the research on this population when seeking to design trauma-informed care for unaccompanied migrant children and youth. These populations share a need for de-institutionalized options, loving family settings, and protection from human trafficking and other forms of abuse, which are more common when children are placed outside the care of biological families (Bond, 2015; CWLA, 2016). To support children in need of foster or host homes, please contact International Christian Adoptions, which is a federally contracted foster care agency based out of Temecula and Citrus Heights, CA. Moreover, to help asylum-seekers and prevent their separation, follow Jill Zwiers on Facebook and read her blog, Friendships No Fronteras. Zwiers is also an excellent contact for families who wish to become sponsors for asylum-seeking adults and families.

#### **D. Find a Practical Way to Help**

Although the Sacramento Region has a smaller population of unaccompanied minors in shelters, there are likely many formerly-detained unaccompanied minors or unaccompanied minors who entered the country without intervention who are now living with distant relatives in our capital region. We can each have an impact on the welfare of unaccompanied foreign-born children from anywhere in our country or state. We can accomplish this on a local level by partnering with agencies that empower the Latino/Latina community or through long-distance support for advocacy groups and lawyers that serve unaccompanied minors directly. For several key agencies in the Sacramento region that engage and support the Latino/Latina community, likely including unaccompanied minors, see Appendix B, Table 1. For agencies that support unaccompanied minors in the Bay Area, see Table 2. For agencies that are working in Southern California, see Table 3, and for National Agencies, see Table 4.



## 1. Ways to Help Children in Government Care:

A few of the key agencies that are helping children while they are under the care of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) include the Young Center, Immigrant Families Together, Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), University of San Diego, and Casa Cornelia. Here are a few examples of ways you can partner with each of these agencies:

a. *Young Center*—Volunteer and train to become a child advocate for an UAC who is under the care of ORR in a shelter around the state. Young Center advocates gather information to support the child’s best interests and to amplify a lawyer’s insight into a child’s case. A Young Center child advocate can also be an important source of reassurance and stability in a child’s life, when uncertainty, fear, and loneliness are common (G. Saavedra, personal communication, March 20, 2020).

b. *Immigrant Families Together*—Donate money to post bail for parents and to fund legal support to reunify with children in ORR foster care with their families.

c. *Kids in Need of Defense*—Donate money, create a fundraiser, or give time as an intern or volunteer to work with KIND. This non-profit matches unaccompanied minors with legal representatives, leading to a much higher likelihood children will be granted legal status and favorable immigration court outcomes (KIND, 2020c). KIND helps children in the states as well as in their home countries with prevention work. You can give time or money to these agencies to help fund legal representation and prevention education for vulnerable children.

d. *University of San Diego*—Give donations or time, if located near San Diego, to support University of San Diego’s field trip programs for unaccompanied youth, which are provided in partnership with Southwest Keys Program. Look for opportunities to be a field trip coordinator for other ORR group homes and detention facilities for UAC, as this is one required resource the government provides to children in these programs

and a great opportunity for the community to interface with UAC and help them grow in social capital.

e. *Casa Cornelia*—Look for agencies near you, like Casa Cornelia of San Diego, which specialize in providing pro bono immigration attorneys to help unaccompanied minors in detention. Give time as a pro bono attorney or DOJ-accredited legal advocate, or provide donations to support their work. To find similar agencies in other regions, visit the Immigration Advocate Network at [immigrationadvocates.org](http://immigrationadvocates.org) and search by zip code.

## **2. Ways to Help Children in the Community:**

a. *Advocate for Mental Health Services*—If you have training as a mental health service provider and are trained to work with child trauma, contact ORR to be listed in their directory. Also, you can partner with local schools to give counseling and training to families who are caring for UAC and offer in-services to help teachers and school counselors as they provide trauma-informed care to a growing number of UAC found in schools across our country (V. Ruiz, personal communication, March 12, 2020).

b. *Increase Available Legal Representation for Children*—If you are not a lawyer and are interested in being trained as a legal representative to provide immigration legal services to immigrants, contact a branch of World Relief or Catholic Charities near you to find out if you can be sponsored to attend a DOJ training. If you are already a lawyer, contact Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) in San Francisco or L.A. to find out what needs you can meet for UAC and their families at a local level. Unaccompanied minors are often in need of long-term legal representation that extends months or even years beyond their release from the care of ORR (D. Menendez, personal communication, March 18, 2020).

*c. Prevent Separation and Fund Family Reunification*—While it is hard to access UAC while they are in the care of the government, it is relatively easy to become a sponsor, interpreter, support system, or direct resource provider for families at risk for separation in your own community. Organizations across the country, like NorCal Resist, Opening Doors, and the Latino Leadership Council in the Sacramento Region, are positioned to empower undocumented families. Advocates who wish to work in family separation prevention can give their time as volunteers with agencies like this by providing Know Your Rights trainings for undocumented individuals, helping asylum-seekers complete their applications, and giving time to brakelight repair clinics. Volunteers can also serve with immigration rapid response networks, which respond to ICE activity and are located in major cities across the country. These small advocacy efforts can move families towards self-sustainability, prevent unwanted ICE interactions, and install emergency plans in case of family separations to ensure care for minors if parents or guardians are deported (E. Herrera, personal communication, February 7, 2020). At the border, humanitarian workers and agencies like Jill Zwiers and others listed in Table 5 can apply your donations or time to make grocery deliveries to shelters for asylum-seekers. The groceries you fund empower and feed families, who may otherwise grow desperate from lack of resources and send their children across the border unaccompanied (Alvarez, 2020; J. Zwiers, personal communication, March 13, 2020).

*d. Open Your Home*—You can partner with Friendships No Fronteras or International Christian Adoptions to host a young adult, foster a child, or house a family seeking asylum. As expressed under “Radical Hospitality,” this is one of the most important ways individuals and families can support the long-term resilience of an unaccompanied child or young adult. This can look like creative home modification, turning a garage into a living space, or setting up a camper in your yard with a private bathroom for a family in need. Moreover, if just one family in each church served in this way, the rest of the church can help provide meals, labor, and other support to the host family to provide extended care for a child or family in need, while preventing caregiver burnout. For more information, contact International Christian Adoptions or Jill Zwiers, listed in Appendix B, Tables 1 and 5.

## **E. Spread the Word**

Last, as members of the community who want to make a difference in the lives of unaccompanied minors, we can use social media to further the work of agencies that specialize in caring for unaccompanied minors and vulnerable families. Grassroots organizers can take the knowledge they have gained about needs and ways of helping UAC and partner with others in their social network to adopt an agency they may financially support in joint effort. Another way to spread the word is to adopt a community project like selling bracelets asylum-seekers make while waiting at the border to raise proceeds for their family (J. Zwiers, personal communication, March 13, 2020). These are available for purchase and redistribution through on-the-ground advocates like Jill Zwiers. The bracelets, in this example, can be a conversation starter to share with others the individual stories behind the waves of migrant caravans while also financially supporting and empowering the efforts of those who made the bracelets. Agencies like KIND also provide toolkits to create your own fundraiser and opportunities to attend live

fundraising and awareness-raising events (KIND, 2020a). We can each think creatively about target audiences in our network who can be informed and engaged in this work to support vulnerable children.

## **XII. FURTHER RESEARCH AND ACTION**

There are three main areas of further research and action needed to expand services to protect and empower unaccompanied children. These include prevention education and development work in countries of origin, legal support for families waiting in Mexico, and a system of tracking unaccompanied children across the United States, so they can be matched with mental health providers and other community services long after their release.

### **A. Relief, Justice Work, and Community Development**

In order to create holistic solutions and prevent unaccompanied minors' large-scale migration from Central America and Mexico, it is important to address the environmental, economic, political, and social factors present in this region (Holland & Silvers, 2019). The importance of this work is illustrated by statistics like those facing women and children in Mexico. Here, recent reports reveal ten women a day are being murdered across Mexico, most often in their homes (Villegas, 2020). Models of meaningful development work in economically disadvantaged countries include entrepreneurial business training provided by indigenous leaders with Empowering Lives International in Kenya as well as small business micro lending programs like Kiva, which have been effective in other parts of the world and would likely be effective in Central America (ELI, 2020; Kiva, 2020). Moreover, agencies like KIND (2020c) are already providing legal services and gender-based abuse prevention education in Central America. With KIND's present relationships in Central America and their history of advocacy work for unaccompanied minors in the United States, they may be

an excellent agency to spearhead further empowering approaches to community development and social justice in migrant countries of origin.

## **B. Legal Advocacy for Families Waiting in Mexico**

Second, research and advocacy work is needed in order to arrange how lawyers can cover their liability to cross the border and work with migrants awaiting interviews with the Department of Homeland Security. If we can support families at this level, we may be able to mitigate risk factors or lack of options, which encourage parents to send their children into the U.S. foster care system unaccompanied. Legal support can also ensure families receive due process during credible fear interviews with Customs and Border Protection (Alvarez, 2020; J. Zwiers, personal communication, March 13, 2020).

## **C. Post-Release Tracking and Resources**

Third, there is a clear necessity for a tracking system for UAC after they are released to sponsors or identified by service providers in the community.[15] If we can work with the government to release this information to verified community service agencies, we can create ways to meet the needs of children once they are released into the community with sponsors and to manage risks and opportunities for empowerment long term.

[15] Maria Silva (personal communication, March 3, 2020), a professor of immigration and Central American migrant studies at University of San Diego, explains she has not come across a system that allows the government and service providers to track and care for the needs or monitor the long-term outcomes of unaccompanied minors. Silva works directly with a Southwest Key Programs shelter in San Diego and has researched the needs of asylum-seekers and migrant children for many years. Similarly, Diego Menendez (personal communication, March 28, 2020) of Public Law Center reports that of the many families caring for UAC he has worked with across various advocacy agencies in Southern California, none were pursuing counseling services without receiving a referral directly from their advocacy groups, and none of the families had contacted ORR or former shelters for referrals. This indicates ORR's intended system of referrals for families may be limited in impact. It may be more powerful to match released UAC and their families with service providers in each U.S. community where they are placed and to charge with and equip those agencies for the task of long-term service assessments and referrals (ORR, personal communication, March 6, 2020).

If we know where children are located, we can match children and youth with mental health providers, internships, transportation, and safe housing as they transition into adulthood. Without this kind of tracking system, the government is relying on sponsor families to call ORR's hotline for sponsors of UAC to seek resources, and this is simply not happening on a consistent basis (D. Menendez, personal communication, March 18, 2020; ORR, personal communication, March 6, 2020).

Beyond a tracking system, training for trauma-informed teaching and school counseling may be a good place to deepen long-term mental health support for unaccompanied minors, as all UAC released to sponsors must be enrolled in school. Teach for America already specializes in this kind of teacher training, and agencies like this could be called upon to equip schools to adequately identify and respond to the needs of unaccompanied minors in their care (V. Ruiz, personal communication, March 12, 2020).[1] As tens of thousands of unaccompanied minors are placed in the United States with sponsors and foster parents each year, we must heed the warning of the American Pediatric Society, which predicts unaccompanied minors will suffer long-term effects of the trauma they have endured. In anticipation of this, we should develop a tracking system and more sophisticated mental health resources, which would increase UAC's access to community-based advocates and allow mental health professionals to monitor UAC's safety and needs in the decades to come.

[16] These insights and recommendations were provided through an interview with Vanessa Ruiz (personal communication, March 12, 2020), a first generation Mexican-American teacher with Teach for America in San Diego County, CA. Ruiz is actively involved in the community in San Diego and Tijuana with vulnerable families and helps equip middle school children with leadership development skills and service opportunities through a leadership class she has created for middle schoolers. Many of her students travel for hours daily to cross back and forth from Mexico to school in San Diego County.

### **XIII. CONCLUSION**

Due to the sacrifice, dedication, and creativity of leaders across the United States, many of the needs of unaccompanied minors are already being met. However, the high flow of unaccompanied children and youth into our nation puts pressure on service providers, often beyond their capacity, especially in the areas of mental health, legal resources, and prompt, safe placements. Greater education across the United States could help raise awareness and funds to expand the programs that are doing the most good in providing relief and prevention resources. For example, support can be offered to agencies working to address risk factors in Mexico and Central America and those providing emergency relief for families migrating to the United States. Beyond giving financially, there is also the opportunity to prepare families across the United States to practice radical hospitality by welcoming strangers into their community groups, churches, and homes. This means getting creative with resources we can provide to unaccompanied youth through internships, ESL classes, youth conferences and more. This also looks like partnering with border advocates and federally-licensed foster care agencies to prepare our homes as foster families and host homes for UAC or as sponsor homes for asylum-seeking families. To ensure the long-term well-being of unaccompanied minors, there is a great need to create a system of tracking children once they are placed with sponsors, guardians, hosts, foster homes, or other transitional programs to help UAC achieve resilience throughout childhood and into adulthood. The American Pediatric Society warns the trauma these children have experienced before their arrival and during their time in the United States will have long standing consequences (Associated Press, 2018). The lasting impact of this trauma is significant both for the resilience of each individual child as well as for the health and future of our nation as a whole.



This pressing need for extended follow-up care requires further research of government record keeping, a request for information release, and collaboration among mental health professionals and empowering community advocates at a local level in the years to come. This is a pivotal moment in world history to look into the eyes of unaccompanied minors, consider what we are uniquely equipped to offer, and act with wisdom and compassion.

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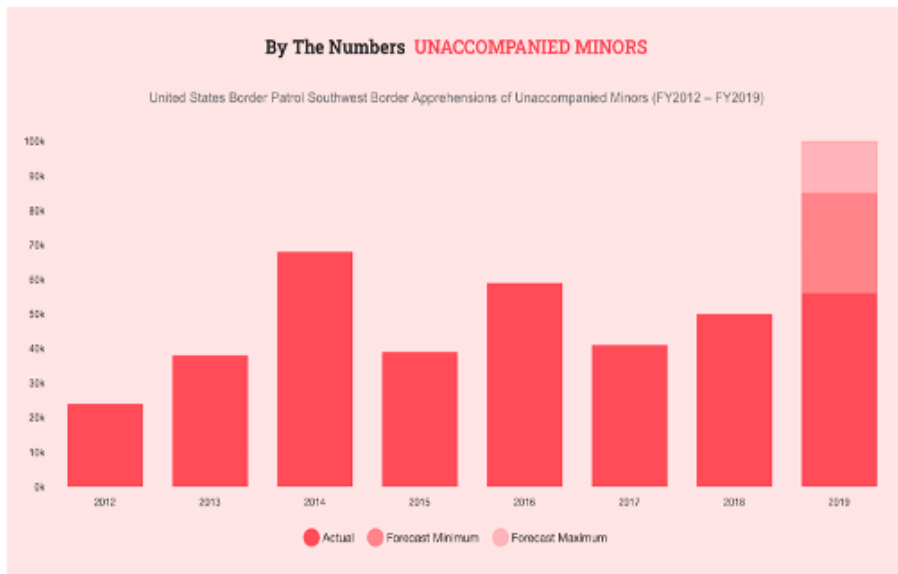
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## Appendix A



## Appendix B

Table 1: Sacramento Region Service Providers for UAC and Their Sponsors - Family, Legal and Placement Services

Table 2: California Bay Area Service Providers

Table 3: Southern California Service Providers

Table 4: National Agencies for UAC and Their Sponsors or Parents

Table 5: International Efforts to Assist UAC at border and Keep Families Together

Table 6: General Research and Policy Education to Create a Plan of Action in Your Community

Table 1: Sacramento Region Service Providers for UAC and Their Sponsors - Family, Legal and Placement Services

Sacramento Agencies That help Children & their families at sponsors or the community level	In government care (G) or in community (C)	Key Services	Biggest needs of children and their families	Ways to partner
<b>Advocacy, Bridges to Services</b>				
<p>Cal Voices A county program. Part of Latino Leadership Council, Indira Infante social worker with them. Helps with Parent Partner Program in Placer County</p> <p><a href="https://www.calvoices.org/children-youth-and-families">https://www.calvoices.org/children-youth-and-families</a></p>	C, G	<p>Child welfare case assistance to help asylum-seeking families (among others) stay together when possible, access resources needed to improve home conditions and family stability, and help move children when necessary</p>	<p>Social workers who speak and look like clients, can help earn trust of parents and advocate for the steps parents should take and resources they should seek to keep their children safe</p>	<p>Contact them when know of families in Placer County who need an advocate who can speak and relate culturally to families from Central America who need someone they can trust</p>
<p>Latino Leadership Council <a href="https://www.latinoleadershipcouncil.org">https://www.latinoleadershipcouncil.org</a></p>	C	<p>Promotores—bridges to community resources, translation They help explain the steps necessary to keep a family together, alert Child Welfare if children need advocacy in a home that is unsafe, and help families navigate services in the community to establish a safe, sustainable life. (Herrera, 2020). LLC is not a service</p> <p>but they provide a bridge between families and resources. In the case of undocumented children, they are a bridge to partner agencies like Child Welfare and CalVoices</p>	<p>Service providers that look and talk like them to build trust and help overcome the fear and isolation of families who need representation in the community.</p>	<p>Advocate in county child welfare and social services to hire people who are linguistically and culturally relevant for those arriving from Central America Spread the word on social media about their work Promote need for promotores and CASAs that are Spanish-speaking and culturally similar to children coming from Central America</p>
<p>Mexican Consulate <a href="https://consulmex.sre.gob.mx/sacramento/index.php/Inicio">https://consulmex.sre.gob.mx/sacramento/index.php/Inicio</a></p>	G	<p>Helps families reunite if parents have been deported and children remain in the U.S.</p>		<p>Contact CalVoices to inquire as to how to contact Mexican Consulate in cases of family separation. <a href="http://www.calvoices.org">www.calvoices.org</a></p>
<p>NorCal Resist <a href="https://www.norcalresist.org">https://www.norcalresist.org</a></p>	C	<p>Family services. Know your rights training Support translating Bike light repair clinics. Bicycle repair meetings. LGBT youth counseling. Assistance with asylum applications: Pre ss asylum workshop.</p>	<p>More lawyers to refer to, as those offering pro-bono work are over capacity</p> <p>Counseling for families who have experienced trauma: La Familia Counseling</p> <p>Counseling and support group for LGBT youth</p>	<p>Be trained as a volunteer to become a sponsor, to educate immigrants to know their rights, and to accompany clients to their appointments, to translate and more. Donate food, goods for people to use while waiting for an asylum application and work visa to be submitted.</p>
<p>Sacramento ACT (Area Congregations Together) <a href="http://www.sacact.org">www.sacact.org</a></p>	C	<p>Church trainings. Know your rights training. ICE record and report hotline</p>	<p>Meeting the community through the congregations, multi-faith bridge building to reach immigrants and support other community organizing needs for vulnerable populations and social issues in Sacramento.</p>	<p>Volunteer. Donate. Share the hotline information. Cards available through Sacramento ACT and Sacramento FUEL Network.</p>
<p>Sacramento FUEL Network <a href="https://www.sacfuelnetwork.org">https://www.sacfuelnetwork.org</a></p>	C, G	<p>Funded by the City of Sacramento in order to represent vulnerabilities of immigrants during the present administration.</p>		<p>Train as a community volunteer to give time in any capacity you can.</p> <p>Volunteer as an attorney to assist with clients taken during raids as part of</p>

		<p>Coordinates Sacramento Rapid Response Network: 24-hour rapid response hotline to report ICE activity Rapid Response Verification team trained to gather and report ICE activity on referred client to legal team Refers families to attorneys Provides Know Your Rights trainings Connects those detained by ICE with legal representation. Provides immigration legal services, community education, and training</p>		<p>Sacramento's Rapid Response System and for affirmative application process, bond hearings, and other refugee and immigration work.</p>
<b>Foster Placements &amp; Advocates</b>				
<p>International Christian Adoptions <a href="https://4achild.org">https://4achild.org</a></p>	<p>Interfaces between G lists of children available and family placements in the C</p>	<p>Children who have been cleared after 1-2 years of ORR investigation for homes become available for adoption. Works with migrant children listed for adoption through Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services. Offer <i>Journey of Hope</i> program for placement of unaccompanied refugee children in homes.</p>	<p>Children need homes, willing foster families or host homes. Need visibility and chance to share in churches, fair trade booth and 4-minute video</p>	<p>Become a foster parent for UAC that have no chance of reunification or sponsorship with a relative. Also, may serve as a host home without needing to provide all the paperwork and background checks to become a foster parent. Host families are for children who are 18 or 19 and need the support of a family to help them transition into adulthood. Families within 60-70 miles of ICA offices may support in this way. Similar organizations around the country are contracted as a federal foster care agency and receive UAC children on a waitlist for foster and host homes.</p>
<p>Sacramento CASA <a href="https://sacramentocasa.org">https://sacramentocasa.org</a></p>	<p>Interfaces between G lists of children available and family placements in the C</p>	<p>Provides court appointed special advocates for children in the domestic foster care system, which does not exist to, but can include unaccompanied minors if they entered the country illegally and have become homeless or separated from family members.</p>		<p>Volunteer to become a CASA, especially if you can speak spanish and can assist unaccompanied minors who have ended up in foster care. It is often a weekly 18-month long commitment at minimum.</p>
<b>Legal Representation</b>				
<p>Opening Doors <a href="https://openingdoorsinc.org">https://openingdoorsinc.org</a></p>	<p>G, C</p>	<p>Recipient of the Unaccompanied Undocumented Minors (UUMs) Legal Services funding from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Immigration Unit</p>	<p>Helps families fill out immigration paperwork, advocates for family's reunification if parents are deported to prevent children from entering the system. Clarissa is a staff member assisting in family reunification.</p>	<p>Volunteer or intern with this organization. Contact them to support their work in ways that are currently a need.</p>
<p>Catholic Charities &amp; Social Concerns: Diocesan Immigrant Support Network <a href="https://www.scd.org/catholic-charities-and-social-concerns/diocesan-immigrant-support-network">https://www.scd.org/catholic-charities-and-social-concerns/diocesan-immigrant-support-network</a></p>	<p>G, C</p>	<p>Sponsors volunteers to be trained to provide immigration legal services through accreditation with the Department of Justice</p>	<p>Refer to legal services of their three partner organizations, to parish-based advocacy services. Know your rights training, workshops, family emergency planning assistance and instructional video links. Resources for parishes to host an immigration information workshop.</p>	

California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation <a href="https://www.crlaf.org">https://www.crlaf.org</a>	G, C	Over 35 years of providing low cost and Spanish-speaking legal aid specifically tailored to rural immigrants. Draft legislation to protect or enforce laws to assist families in the farming community who are being exploited. Educate the community on their rights. Provide training opportunities for law students seeking legal experience in rural immigration law.	They focus most on the low income and migrant Latino community in rural Sacramento which is highly agricultural and likely also intersects with UAC, adults, and families who are survivors of labor or sex trafficking.	Donations, careers for attorneys, or internships for law students.
Sacramento FUEL Network <a href="http://www.sacfuelnetwork.org">www.sacfuelnetwork.org</a>	C	Provides low cost and Spanish-speaking legal aid. Provides know your rights training.	Provides immigration legal services, community education, and training.	Donations. Train as a volunteer
Pacific McGeorge School of Law Legal Clinics for Underserved and Vulnerable Populations <a href="http://www.mcgeorge.edu/students/ocademics/experiential-learning/legal-clinics/">www.mcgeorge.edu/students/ocademics/experiential-learning/legal-clinics/</a>	G, C	Provides low cost and Spanish-speaking legal aid. Going to CA-Mexico border for trips at spring break to help asylum seekers. Provides immigration legal services, community education, and training.		Help asylum seekers at the border with free legal counsel and pro bono representation to prepare them for border interviews in ICE box.  Immigration clinic in Sacramento to assist immigrant families, some of whom are caring for unaccompanied minors as their sponsors.

Table 2: California Bay Area Service Providers

Bay Area Agencies for Legal Assistance	In government care (G) or in community (C)	Key Services	Biggest needs of children and their families	Ways to partner
Central American Resource Center San Francisco, CA <a href="https://www.carecen-la.org">https://www.carecen-la.org</a>		Recipient of the Unaccompanied Undocumented Minors (UUMs) Legal Services funding from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Immigration Unit	Affordable access to legal help that can interpret and guide families and UAC through the legal process of obtaining permanent status in the U.S.	Funding through donations, giving time as a pro bono attorney.
Vital Immigrant Defense Advocacy and Services (VIDAS) San Jose, CA <a href="https://www.immigrationdsvoicet.org">https://www.immigrationdsvoicet.org</a>		Recipient of the Unaccompanied Undocumented Minors (UUMs) Legal Services funding from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Immigration Unit	Affordable access to legal help that can interpret and guide families and UAC through the legal process of obtaining permanent status in the U.S.	Funding through donations, giving time as a pro bono attorney.

Table 3: Southern California Service Providers

Southern California Agencies (L.A & San Diego)	In government care (G) or in community (C)	Key Services	Biggest needs of children and their families	Ways to partner
Casa Cornelia San Diego County <a href="https://casacornelia.org">https://casacornelia.org</a>	G	They are the only pro-bono law firm in San Diego County that serves unaccompanied youth. All unaccompanied youth have the right to legal representation. If a 6-17 year old UAC is detained, they represent their case and see whether the child's experience warrants their asylum and protection under the UN Convention Against Torture or Special Immigrant Juvenile Status Visa (SIJS). They also represent children who are not detained but have suffered neglect or abuse and are eligible for legal protection.	They have been serving children for many years and they noticed a significant uptick of unaccompanied children needing assistance in 2014, when the U.S. declared a humanitarian crisis, and in 2018, with Trump's zero tolerance policy. There is such pressure on government and non-profit agencies tasked with caring for the rising number of children coming to our nation for help that creative solutions from the community and others are necessary, and Casa Cornelia has felt that pressure and seeks to respond to the need with ongoing creativity.	Volunteer, interpret, give time as a lawyer, give money.  Be educated on children's experiences and need for legal groups like this: Website includes moving case studies about children and youth who escaped violence, gang threats, and slavery in Mexico and Central America and were represented by Casa Cornelia lawyers to make their case for protection within the U.S. and to be granted to stay without fear of future deportation.
Catholic Charities of LA - A) Esperanza Center <a href="https://www.esperanza-la.org">https://www.esperanza-la.org</a>	G, C	A) Provides legal orientation for families caring for UAC	Legal rights training for families caring for UAC. UAC need legal assistance to obtain permanent status in the United States.	Volunteer with Catholic Charities to support needs of UAC met through these programs
B) SIJS Collaborative network		B) Helps unaccompanied minors achieve their special immigration juvenile status.		Become a sponsor for a child in need of a foster home or host home for those turning 18.
A community based rapid response network run by Catholic Charities that connects with UAC and helps connect them with legal resources.				
Public Law Center Santa Ana, CA <a href="https://www.publiclawcenter.org">https://www.publiclawcenter.org</a>	C	Provide legal representation for unaccompanied children who are currently with sponsors or guardians. Work with children who were previously detained by DHS or who entered without intervention.	The biggest need: For children who are close to aging out of the system to have a stable family member sponsor or a guardian. They are rushed through the process of finding a placement if they are from a DHS shelter. Sometimes they have been placed with families who are siblings or close relatives of their abuser, which is not in the best interest of the child but because of the high case load, they must work according to "express interests" rather than "best interests" of the child. Usually they advocate for what the child wants, even if they think some other course of action would be better for the children.	Become a guardian or sponsor for a child.  Help provide the child with transportation to mental health services in the community.  Help connect families caring for UAC with resources in the community to create stability and help with adjustment.
Refer families and children to mental health professionals.				
Help youth obtain legal status through trafficking visa or special immigrant juvenile status application.				



University of San Diego <a href="https://www.sandiego.edu/ceac/cociology/">https://www.sandiego.edu/ceac/cociology/</a>	G, C	<p>Formed relationship with Southwest Key Shelter in San Diego over 7-8 year period and has been able to provide weekly art and justice experiences for UAC in the group home in the past and now provides field trips, pizza parties, and social experiences with students at USD's campus</p>	<p>Children need stable, committed, flexible and long-term advocates in their lives and involved in these kinds of community partnership programs.</p>	<p>Forge community and university relationships with students that build on best practices of University of San Diego's long term and flexible relationship with Southwest Keys Programs.</p> <p>Volunteers involved as advocates through the Young Center (see Young Center above) or through university programs like this need to be committed to years-long relationships.</p>
World Relief Southern California Garden Grove, CA <a href="https://worldreliefsocal.org">https://worldreliefsocal.org</a>	C	<p>World Relief Immigration Legal Services Technical Unit offers the intensive 40-hour immigration law training that is required as a prerequisite for application for accreditation as an immigration legal representative through the DOJ.</p> <p>Provide legal representation to UAC and help youth get connected to other resources and church support, e.g. internships and youth development resources.</p> <p>Partner with churches to train congregations on the reality and stories behind border policies and families and youth in need of protection within the United States.</p>	<p>Unaccompanied youth need career development opportunities and support as they navigate placement with extended family and the intense independence they have developed out of survival. They need coaching and youth services that help them grow in stability and plan for long term education and career goals.</p>	<p>Churches can give according to their capacity and interest in doing so: create ESL classes provided by the church, make a border trip with World Relief LA to help overcome bias through relationships and stories of asylum seekers and UAC.</p> <p>Get creative as churches and volunteers to make space for youth to gain work experience at churches, in local businesses, and more.</p> <p>Design youth development workshops and internships for unaccompanied youth who need to work towards independence and sustainability.</p>

Table 4: National Agencies for UAC and Their Sponsors or Parents

National Agencies that work with UAC while they are in ORR Care	In government care (G) or in community (C)	Key Services	Biggest needs of children and their families	Ways to partner
Immigrant Families Together <a href="http://www.immigrantfamilies.together.com">www.immigrantfamilies.together.com</a>	G, C	<p>Posts bail for parents, leading to their release, and reunification with their children in ORR's care</p>	<p>Parents cannot afford the bail set by the government to get them out of detention. If bail can be paid through donations, parents can be reunited with their children more rapidly and reduce trauma from long separations between parents and children in the United States</p>	<p>Donations to help cover extraordinary bail costs and legal assistance to reunite families.</p>
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) <a href="https://supportkind.org/what-we-do/family-separation-response/">https://supportkind.org/what-we-do/family-separation-response/</a>	G, C	<p>Help unaccompanied children passing through or living in Mexico understand their rights. Screen and refer particularly vulnerable children to NGO's and other agencies while pursuing protection strategies. Advise congressional committees in treatment of children in custody and advocate for policies to keep families together.</p> <p>Provide free legal representation for children and families and holistic services to address trauma, need for belonging, art therapy, and more for children in placements in the United States. Direct prevention work in Central America to address root causes of crisis and migration.</p>	<p>Children need access to services on both sides of the U.S. Mexico border and help represent children in immigration proceedings.</p> <p>Separated parents need help reunifying with children and gaining legal custody through KIND lawyers.</p>	<p>Give money to support their work.</p> <p>Fund petitions for policies that keep families together.</p> <p>Use their site to identify your local representatives and follow their guidance to write letters to appeal for change.</p> <p>Create a fundraiser or attend a KIND event.</p> <p>Donate time as a lawyer.</p> <p>Attend a KIND event</p> <p>Educate yourself using their resource library</p> <p>Share on social media</p>

Office of Refugee Resettlement 24-hour hotline for sponsors of released UAC: (800) 203-7001   information@ORR.NC.com www.acf.hhs.gov/omb/oucs/ contact-info	G, C	Their 24-hour hotline helps relatives and sponsors caring for UAC identify local resources, legal assistance, food, counseling etc.  Parents and kids who have practical needs are referred by an ORR staff member who searches directories of resources catalogued for each area in the United States.	The biggest need they help sponsors identify is long-term legal assistance to help the child achieve permanent legal status.  They most commonly refer families to Catholic Charities.  Local schools are a key resource. Parents and sponsors can call ORR's hotline 24-7 and request services they need for their family and for the UAC in their care. Kids who are struggling to engage with school or have focus or counseling needs can go to the school counselor to receive referrals.	Counselors and mental health professionals and organizations like Teach for America can partner with teacher conventions to equip teachers and school counselors to be trauma informed and practices for screening released UAC on their needs for long term resilience in the face of great loss and frequent cases of PTSD.
Young Center www.theyoungcenter.org	G	The only government-contracted organization allowed to supply detained children with a child advocate to help gather information and provide a constant mentorship presence in a child's life while they are still in ORR foster care and before they are released to a sponsor.	Children need a stable presence in their life and someone who can maximize the court's understanding of the child's best interests. The child advocate helps gather relevant information about the child to provide to the lawyer who is representing the child.	Visit the Young Center's website to search for a local opportunity to serve as an advocate, especially in key cities like L.A., Chicago, New York.

Table 5: International Efforts to Assist UAC at border and Keep Families Together

Family Separation Prevention and Support in Tijuana, Mexico	In government care (G) or in community (C)	Key Services	Biggest needs of children and their families	Ways to partner: volunteering and recommendations for community action
Canyon and Border Nests A program of the Pedagogical Institute of Los Angeles www.thinkwithusa.org/nest-tijuana	C	Two project branches from an LA foundation. They provide a respite program and play therapy for young children Thursday-Monday in a building just across from a large Tijuana shelter for asylum seekers	Provide respite for parents and play therapy for children who face trauma, uncertainty and depression while waiting for their appointment with ICE at the border.	Donations, internships.
Casa YMCA A Tijuana Shelter for UAC from Mexico and Central America www.ymca.org.mx/Desocm_Mi_grantes.html	C	Shelter for UAC who attempted to enter the U.S. through port of entry or illegal means and were deported back into Mexico. Provide shelter for a few days for Mexican UAC while they attempt to find a sponsor to care for the child. Those UAC from Central America remain for months while they find legal representation to help these children apply for asylum or other legal pathways to enter and remain in the United States.	Major needs include shelter and emotional support while processing the trauma they have experienced.  Contacts with next of kin or other sponsors who can help Mexican-born UAC.  Legal representation for UAC from Central America	Give donations. Come to cook meals for their residents or provide other youth development activities according to what is needed by the director, staff, and youth.
Jill Zwiers, Advocate Friendships No Frontiers www.friendshipsnofrontiers.org	G, C (assists families while they are in detention with finding sponsors, but mostly	Coordinates donations of these wanting to help asylum seeker caregivers at the border, which includes adults, families split apart and fleeing dangerous circumstances like rape and	Biggest needs: Safe emergency shelter and basic provisions.	Best way to help: send money for groceries, send practical, good condition shoes for adults and children. Support Jill and help connect others with her who can be sponsors especially in the Bay Area. Send funds to Jill to support her work long

	supports families at the community level in Tijuana)	kidnapping, and youth fleeing abuse, neglect, gang violence, and natural disasters which contribute to poverty. Includes caravans from the Golden Triangle of Central America as well as Mexico.  Provides raw food deliveries through donations sent to Jill in San Diego. Purchase goods each shelter needs. Deliver domestic items like shoes, sewing machines and other goods sent by sponsors to those living in 30 shelters for asylum seekers in Tijuana.	Redistribution of wealth to support local leaders of shelter for asylum seekers.  Dignified work, serving each other, purpose.  Legal services.	term -- like monthly money for groceries and an eventual car replacement fund. It is not helpful to have service trips that cook for or do work for the shelters. They are depressed and feeling powerless. They need the purpose and dignity of running the shelters together, migrants taking care of one another.
Minority Humanitarian Foundation www.minorityhumanitarianfoundation.com	C	In part provide grocery supply to asylum-seeker shelters in Tijuana, but mostly work in San Diego, providing shelter for families that have been released from detention in the middle of the night, dropped on the streets.		Donations, internships, volunteer opportunities.
World Central Kitchen www.wck.org	C	Provide one meal per day at the shelters, provided by professional chefs and also empowering and involving local leaders to cook and serve their community. They are doing meals in D.C. and Tijuana--addressing how poverty and need and the global community has needs on both sides.	Provides incredible food, honors the dignity of asylum seekers, involves them in a communal creation and sharing of meals.	Donations. Donate time as a chef to help provide meals and culinary education for asylum seekers.

Table 6: General Research and Policy Education to Create a Plan of Action in Your Community

National Agency	Support kids in Government (G) care or in Community (C)	Key Services	Ways to partner
ACLU Immigrants' Rights Project www.aclu.org	G, C	Policy appeal and research to fight unjust laws and policies	Donations to help fund work. Sign petitions or volunteer to help further their work in protecting families at risk for separation and exploitation as they wait in Mexico per current administration's policy.
Immigration Advocates www.immigrationadvocates.org	G, C	Helpful directory to search for immigration resources by zip code or detention facility, particularly for other children have been released into the community or are navigating resources with a sponsor or with their family.	
Immigrant Legal Resource Center www.ilrc.org	C	Helpful definitions of all types of immigration options for undocumented immigrant children -- a collection of one-page fact sheets and advantages and allowances of each immigration path involving children, including asylum, DACA, Family-Based, Immigrant Youth, LGBT Removal Defense, U Visa/T Visa/VAWA  Provides fact sheet for parents and those representing parents on the parental rights they should be allowed to maintain with their children during their own immigration legal proceedings	A great website for self-education on the legal system and options for undocumented immigrant children and youth: <a href="https://www.ilrc.org/immigration-options-undocumented-immigrant-children">https://www.ilrc.org/immigration-options-undocumented-immigrant-children</a>  Parent rights fact sheets to help guide attorneys and inform parents: <a href="https://www.ilrc.org/applying-ice-parental-interests-directive-child-welfare-cases">https://www.ilrc.org/applying-ice-parental-interests-directive-child-welfare-cases</a>

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