



la línea

the newsletter of
THE FLORENCE IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS PROJECT



FREEDOM CANNOT BE DETAINED

Eduard's Story

Fleeing family violence in Guatemala, Eduard endures repeated legal setbacks, bureaucratic wrangling, and long delays to obtain Special Immigrant Juvenile Status in the U.S.

During the years he spent in his mother's house, Eduard suffered both verbal and physical abuse at the hands of his stepfather. **"He used to tell me, 'You're not my son, and you don't deserve to live here.'"** When he was 17 years old, fleeing abuse, he made the perilous journey alone from Guatemala to the U.S.

Upon arrival, Eduard was apprehended and lost the sense of hope that had propelled him all the way from Guatemala to the U.S. border. **"I thought it was all over, that they would just deport me,"** Eduard said. Fortunately, Florence Project staff members met Eduard soon after he was transferred to a children's shelter in Phoenix. They explained to Eduard that he may qualify for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), a form of legal relief for children who are abused, abandoned, or neglected in their home country.

In June 2015, Florence Project staff secured an order from an immigration judge who allowed him to apply for the juvenile visa and secure his release from detention. At first Eduard lived with an uncle who resided in Arizona, but the uncle later moved out of state, making it difficult for Eduard to find stability. With the help of Florence Project social worker Anna Marie Smith, he eventually found housing at the Dream Center, offering housing to homeless youth in Phoenix.

Florence Project attorney Patrick Helling prepared Eduard for his adjustment hearing, which he thought would be the final step to getting his green card. After a series of delays, Eduard had his hearing and, as Patrick expected, the judge granted him status as a legal permanent resident. Eduard was delighted by the news that he would get the opportunity to stay in the U.S.



"He used to tell me, 'You're not my son, and you don't deserve to live here.'"

However, a mere two hours after the judge granted Eduard's application, Patrick received news that the State Department had "run out" of Special Immigrant Juvenile visas for the year. Since there were no visas currently available, Eduard's victory was suddenly put on hold. Eduard remembered feeling paralyzed with anxiety at the thought of losing his status. **"I was confused," he said, "Because the judge told me that I was a resident and now they were telling me there were no more visas left."**

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Finally, after waiting for over a year for more visas to become available, Patrick and Eduard returned to court last fall to finish what felt like an interminable battle. The judge again granted Eduard status as a permanent resident, and this time the victory felt real. **Thanks to your generous support, Eduard is now working and thriving in a safe environment in the U.S.**

Serving unaccompanied minors for over 17 years

The **Florence Project Children's Program** has been serving unaccompanied minors like Eduard for over 17 years, providing support to thousands of children every year. In light of recent delays for visas for abused, abandoned, or neglected children, children like Eduard are even more vulnerable; even though they have approved immigration cases, they must wait until visas become "available," which may take years. This also means that it is difficult to obtain government identification while we wait for visas to become available, which can make enrolling in school and accessing health care difficult.

Our Children's Program Director, Golden McCarthy, and our staff have participated in several outreach and education opportunities in light of changing political rhetoric, on various forms of relief for children. While Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals are both forms of relief available to children, we are encouraging the legal community to screen young immigrant clients for other potential forms of relief such as asylum and T visas, so that all of Arizona's young people are fully protected. Thanks to you, we have increased our reach, educating legal professionals in Arizona and providing legal assessments to minors who would have otherwise been without access to justice.



THANKS

TO DONORS LIKE YOU

In 2016, 12,838 children participated in legal orientation presentations.

Over 500 cases were opened for direct representation, of which 103 were identified to qualify for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status.

13 trainings and panels were held in collaboration with community partners and legal professionals that discussed services for unaccompanied minors were provided to over 250 total participants.

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“What if I’m Picked up by ICE in Arizona?” Making a Family Plan

The Florence Project Responds to Increased Fear of Deportation

A guardian of two of our young clients has a scheduled meeting with ICE (U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement), and wonders if she will be deported, leaving her children without anyone to care for them. Like many immigrants in Arizona, she is on high alert due to the rhetoric and executive orders coming out of Washington.

How do we respond?

It is our mission to ensure that all immigrants facing removal proceedings understand their rights under the law and have the information they need to keep their families together. To that end, we are:

Updating our bilingual manual, “What if I’m Picked up by ICE in Arizona?: Making a Family Plan.” Initially created in 2014, the manual offers information for immigrant parents about the immigration and child welfare systems and assists them in creating a plan, so they can exercise their parental rights in case of detention or deportation. The updated manual is now online at www.firrp.org, available for immigrant communities all over the state. The manual is also being adapted by partner organizations all over the country.

Providing more Family Unity Trainings. We bring parents, attorneys, advocates, and community non-profits together to teach each other, popular education style, about how we can be prepared for possible family separation due to anti-immigrant raids and enforcement. During the trainings, parents learn about their rights, have time to prepare guardianship documents, and receive written materials including sample legal documents and a copy of our bilingual guide.

Thanks to your support, the Florence Project is once again able to create cutting edge community resources and trainings, to assist immigrant communities in the face of anti-immigrant threats and rhetoric. Thank you for making this work possible!



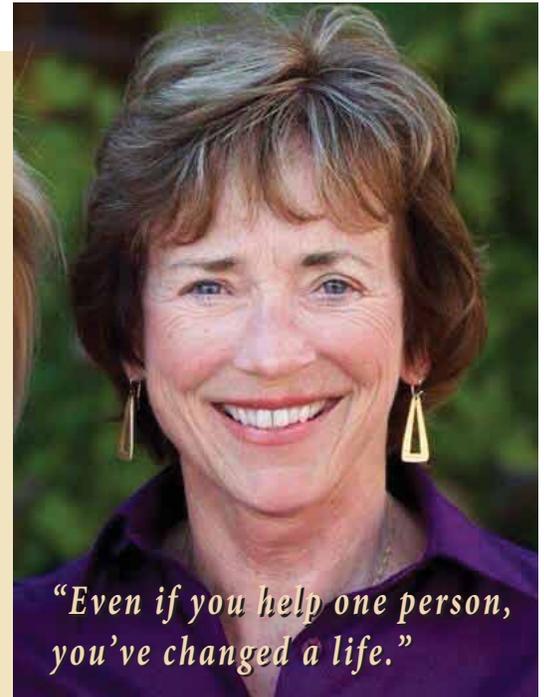
For more information on our bilingual manual or Family Unity Trainings, please contact Carmen Smith-Estrada at csmith@firrp.org

Why I give to the Florence Project: Peggy Kirch

“I think the work of the Florence Project is more important now than ever, in light of what’s going on in Washington.”

Peggy Kirch joined the Florence Project Board of Directors in early 1991 and has since been one of the organization’s most loyal and generous donors.

Peggy’s passion for human rights began when she was a sixteen-year-old exchange student studying in Colombia. She was attending an exclusive Catholic girls’ school, which was located across the street from one of the most impoverished neighborhoods in Bogota. Peggy and her host sister began meeting with a group of Peace Corps workers who were volunteering in the neighborhood. She had never seen such poverty, and her eyes were opened. When she got to college, she decided to focus on Spanish and Latin American studies, and she became a social worker. All of this laid the groundwork for her volunteer work with the Florence Project.



“The Florence Project serves such a vulnerable population, the vast majority of whom have no other recourse. Like many people, I was shocked to learn that immigration court doesn’t provide public defenders. Additionally, it is difficult work in Arizona, where immigration is such a controversial topic. Contributing however I can to such important and difficult work really appeals to me. Simply put, it’s work I’m proud of and it’s an organization with which I’m proud to be associated.

“I often think of my great grandparents, who came to the United States fleeing the Irish Potato Famine, and think, ‘There but for the grace of God go I.’ When you think of your children, you think, ‘What wouldn’t I do to feed my children or keep them out of harm’s way?’ Many of these kids and families are fleeing horrific drug violence and death threats.

“I think the work of the Florence Project is more important now than ever, in light of what’s going

on in Washington. I am fearful of what those policies will mean for our clients. I am continually motivated by the fact that the need continues to grow. Unfortunately, this is not an issue where you work hard for a while and the need lessens. When I started there were 20 detention beds for children, and now there are almost two thousand.

“When we started representing kids, they were literally in shackles in court. I’ll never forget sitting there, in court, next to an eight year old girl, in shackles. Nationally, as part of a coalition, we helped to humanize these children, and got them out of jails and into shelters, a much more appropriate environment for children.

“I feel incredibly fortunate in my life. I never dreamed I’d end up where I am today. Now I feel the obligation to use my resources and enlist like-minded friends and organizations to help raise money in order to make a real difference. I really feel compelled to try to help. Even if you help one person, you’ve changed a life.”

Are you feeling powerless in the face of executive orders and changes to immigration policy and practice? Arm yourself with information. Join us for a FREE Immigration Briefing.

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when individuals are armed with information

Would you like to stay current on the recent executive orders, shifts in immigration policy, and how people are being affected in your community? The situation is changing daily, and it's hard to keep up. To keep you informed and current, starting in June, the Florence Project will host a series of community briefings in Tucson and Phoenix. Florence Project staff experts will present on topics such as recent policy shifts in immigration, asylum law, and what

happens to unaccompanied children who arrive at the border. Briefings are free of charge and refreshments will be provided. Join us!

Tuesday, June 13, 2017 - 5pm
Historic Y Building
738 N 5th Ave, Tucson, AZ 85705

Seating is limited

Stay tuned for dates in August & November

in partnership with



For more information, please contact Carmen Smith-Estrada at csmith@firrp.org

Thank you Florence Project Volunteers!

(Jan 1, 2017 – May 1, 2017)

We could not do our important work without our wonderful volunteers!

Thank you for giving your time to help our clients and staff. We appreciate you!

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We are now recognizing our donors in our annual report. For more information, please visit www.firrp.org. Thank you!

Liliana's Story

A victim of abuse in Bolivia, Liliana flees to the U.S. for the promise of a better life, only to find she is a victim of human trafficking.

In 2014 Liliana received a call from Claudia, an old friend from Bolivia who had resettled in California. Claudia offered Liliana a steady job in the U.S. as a caretaker for the elderly and promised that she would earn at least 20 dollars per hour. When Liliana asked whether she was allowed to work in the U.S. with only a tourist visa, Claudia assured her that she would have a work permit. Trusting her friend's word, Liliana left for the U.S. with dreams of a better life.

Upon arriving in California with a tourist visa, Liliana soon realized that she had walked into a trap. Claudia insisted that since she had paid for Liliana's flight to the U.S., Liliana would have to live with her and work off her debt. Liliana started working as a caretaker for an elderly man who contracted with Claudia. On most days she would take the bus for two hours to arrive at the man's home, where she attended to him, cooked for him, and did housecleaning. Claudia paid Liliana a total of \$100 for her first month of work; in the months that followed, Claudia stopped paying her altogether.

After four months of living with Claudia, Liliana managed to escape and moved to a nearby town, where she started saving to pay for her plane ticket back to Bolivia. A few days before her tourist visa expired, she

asked a friend to take her to the U.S. Mexico border to request an extension, since she still did not have enough money to pay for her flight home. When she presented at the port of entry and explained her story to the immigration authorities, they accused her of trying to enter the U.S. with an expired visa and took her to the Eloy Detention Center, where she was detained.

In February 2015, shortly after she requested to attend a legal orientation with the Florence Project, one of our attorneys explained to Liliana that she may qualify for T Visa, a special visa for victims of human trafficking. **As Liliana recalled, "I didn't know anybody who could help me and I didn't know what to do."** Throughout her time at Eloy, Florence Project staff accompanied her and gave her the tools she needed to represent herself in court. When the immigra-

tion judge denied Liliana's asylum case and ordered her removed, Florence Project attorney Yessenia Medrano helped Liliana appeal the judge's decision to prevent her deportation while she awaited approval for her T Visa.

Liliana spent **two years detained** at the Eloy Detention Center before she was finally able to obtain release. When Liliana's visa was unexpectedly approved earlier this year, Yessenia described it as a testament to Liliana's grit in the face of obstacles. **"It was amazing how persistent she was. She had no criminal history; it was her first time here [in the U.S.] and she had been detained for almost two years."**

Thanks to your generous support, Liliana is living in Tucson, free from labor trafficking, settling into her new community.



"I felt more calm once I had support from the Florence Project, because I knew that I would need a lawyer to tell me what to do, to help me fill out the application, and translate it."

Providing support and access to justice

Our **Florence Project Adult Program** strives to provide access to justice for all indigent men and women detained in Florence and Eloy, Arizona. As part of our legal intake process, we screen for T-visas, a type of visa for victims of human trafficking to remain in the United States, and help them apply for this. Thanks to you, we have continued to serve this population through pro-se materials that assist individuals who have to represent themselves, because there is no government provided representation to immigrants in removal proceedings. This model emphasizes client empowerment, allowing us to use our limited staff resources to reach thousands of detainees through targeted assistance. Thank you for helping us to provide support to those who would otherwise have no access to justice.

THANKS TO DONORS LIKE YOU

In 2016 staff attorneys provided legal orientations to 4,882 men and women detained in Eloy and Florence.

Over 2,300 adults were provided with legal screenings, 150 of whom were identified as victims of a crime or trafficking.

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Join us for a **FREE** Immigration Briefing. See page 5.

With your support, the Florence Project provides
free legal and social services to detained adults
and unaccompanied children facing immigration
removal proceedings in Arizona.

With your support, the Florence Project ensures
that all immigrants facing removal have access to
counsel, understand their rights under the law, and
are treated fairly and humanely.



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