



# FLORENCE IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE RIGHTS PROJECT

30TH ANNIVERSARY NEWSLETTER | FALL 2019



## 2019 marks 30 years of the Florence Project!

These 30 years have brought change, growth, and no shortage of challenges. As we have expanded as an organization and the challenges have changed, one thing has remained the same: the Florence Project's unwavering dedication to providing free legal and social services to detained immigrants in Arizona.

The past months have brought mounting attacks on migrants, particularly on the rights of asylum seekers. The recently re-implemented third country asylum ban came on the heels of the implementation of "Remain in Mexico," two policies that violate the human rights and safety of asylum seekers by restricting them from seeking asylum in the United States. Our clients, and immigrants across the country, are consistently under attack.

When the Florence Project started in 1989, as the Florence Asylum Project, we served many Central Americans fleeing violence and persecution in their home countries. In the ensuing years, the Florence Project pioneered a pro se representation model empowering individuals to represent themselves in court, since there is no public defender system in immigration court. We began representing unaccompanied immigrant children, as we started to see children detained in Arizona, and were one of the first legal organizations to have social workers on staff, which allows us to holistically serve clients' needs and better advocate for their rights. Today, the Florence Project serves clients of all ages from all over the world, building upon our pioneering, trailblazing models, all with your support.

As we look ahead, we envision a future where every immigrant has the right to an attorney, and we are working to build a Florence Project that provides full legal representation for even more detained individuals. We are striving to grow our social services program and our advocacy and appellate work.

As we honor our 30 years of work, we celebrate our board and staff members over our history and our clients, who continue to inspire us. We could not face today's challenges or provide dedicated, robust legal and social services without our past and present partners and our loyal supporters. Thank you for standing with the Florence Project and our clients for the last 30 years! You make our important work possible.



# JORGE



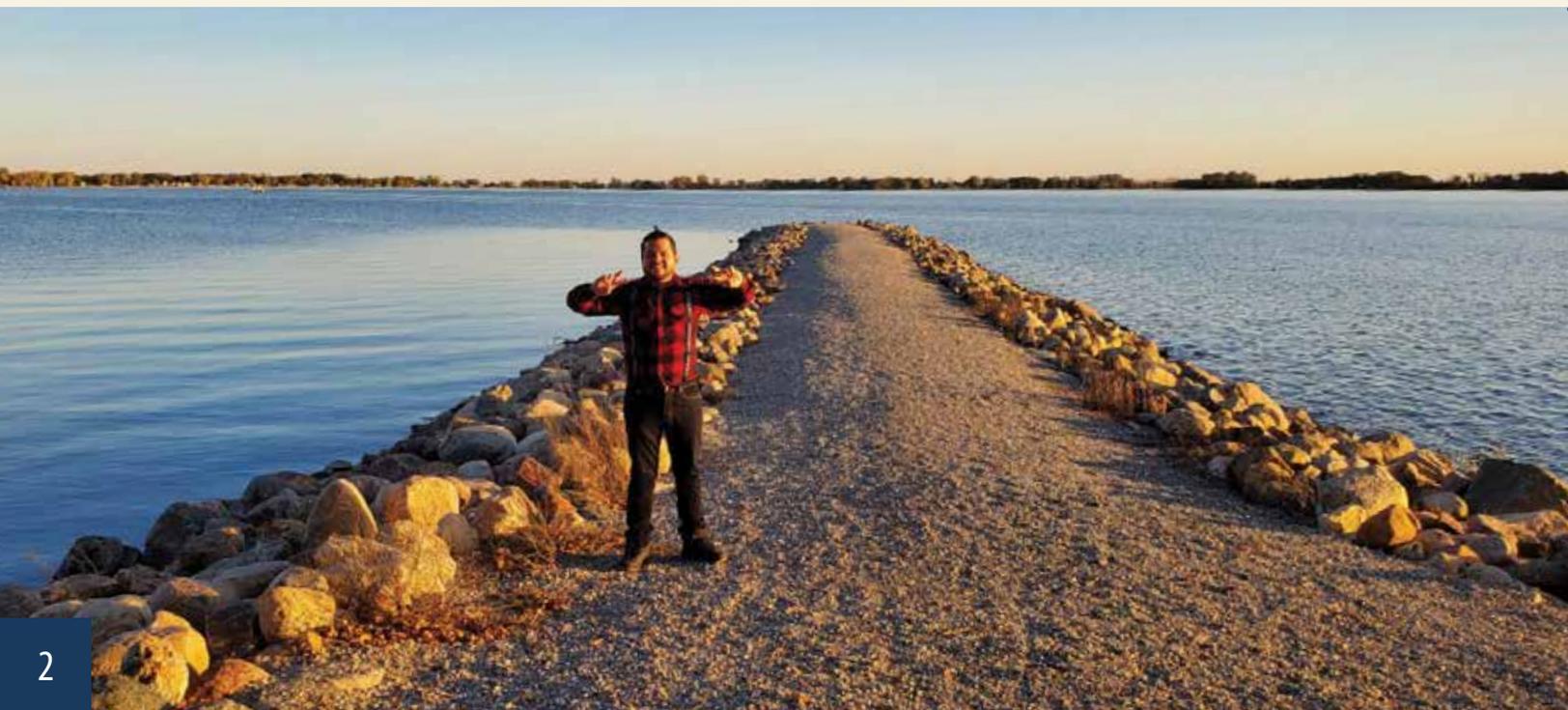
***One night last year, three masked men arrived at Jorge's home in Venezuela, seized him, and threw him into a makeshift cell with six other political prisoners. The cell had no electricity, no running water, and no toilet. Jorge was starved, beaten, and psychologically abused. Five days into his detention, Jorge learned that he was going to be transferred to the intelligence agency's headquarters, a political prison colloquially known as "The Grave." Fearing for their lives, Jorge and his cellmates broke out through a window. From there, Jorge fled the country.***

When Jorge recounts his reasons for coming to the United States, it reads like a timeline of atrocities. March 2015: A fleet of men on motorcycles follow Jorge home from a political organizing meeting. They encircle his car, pound on it with their fists, and scream death threats. August 2015: Jorge finds a funeral bouquet on his front step, addressed to him. September 2015: Jorge learns his name is on a list of militia targets. He goes into hiding. January 2017: 20 masked men open fire on Jorge's father's house, where he is known to visit often. Thankfully, no one is home. Jorge files a police report, but he never hears any follow up.

These are just a few examples of the persecution that Jorge faced in his home country. For six years, Jorge has been stalked, targeted, and threatened because of his political organizing. Fleeing imprisonment, Jorge hoped for protection from the United States. Instead, he found himself incarcerated in immigration detention.

***"[When] I sought asylum, I called to the official, 'Help, I'm running for my life,'" Jorge remembers. "And the official told me, in a very kind manner, 'It's okay, come in. You're in the United States. Nobody is going to hurt you.' Then they put cuffs on my hands and shackles on my feet."***

Jorge spent nine months in immigration detention. Despite having a strong asylum case, Jorge's legal process was difficult.



***“They gave me the [asylum] document, and it was in English. Everything [I wrote] had to be translated into English. Can you imagine how hard it is to be detained in a country where you’ve just arrived...?” Jorge drifts off. “But then the Florence Project arrived, an organization to which I am eternally grateful.”***

With the support of Florence Project staff, Jorge prepared his asylum case. He collected evidence of his persecution, wrote a declaration of what had happened to him, and submitted country conditions detailing the human rights violations. For Jorge, fighting an asylum case was about more than protecting his own life. He saw the process as an opportunity to advocate for the human rights and freedom of all people.



When Jorge testified at his final hearing, the judge immediately granted him asylum. Though he has obtained his own freedom, he keeps fighting. When we invited him to tell his story, he enthusiastically accepted.

***“For me, it’s liberating to talk about what happened to me... I was imprisoned by a physical barrier. But in reality, in my heart and in my soul, I was free the whole time. The soul cannot be incarcerated. For that reason, I told myself, I’m going to get through this. Now, here I am.”***

***“Can you imagine how hard it is to be detained in a country where you’ve just arrived...?”***

# 30 YEARS LATER

## A TIMELINE OF THE FLORENCE PROJECT

Since 1989

**1991**

The organization changed its name to the Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project to reflect the wide range of legal issues facing detained immigrants.

**2000**

The Florence Project expanded to provide legal services to unaccompanied immigrant minors detained in Arizona.

**2013**

Franco decision mandates legal representation for people deemed to have serious mental illness. Staff reaches 22 people.

**2016**

Staff reaches 45 people. Support allows increase of legal representation for adults and children.

**1989**

The Florence Project is founded as the Florence Asylum Project with two volunteers and much community support.

**1998**

The Florence Project began receiving calls from detained immigrants at the Eloy Detention Center. In response, the Florence Project pioneered the pro se empowerment model to help individuals represent themselves, because there is no public defender in immigration court.

**2001**

The Florence Project established the Integrated Social Services Program to provide social services support to clients who require it outside of their legal cases.

**2014**

A rise in the number of unaccompanied children crossing the border leads to growing need for legal representation of children. Florence Project begins representing children who are released from detention and settle in Arizona.

**2018**

The Florence Project establishes formal collaborations with Kino Border Initiative in Nogales, Sonora, MX and Phoenix Legal Action Network to serve individuals released in Phoenix, broadening impact.

**2018**

Zero tolerance family separation crisis happens and the Florence Project serves hundreds of children and parents forcibly separated. Florence Project support grows exponentially.

**2018**

Matter of A-B- decision revokes asylum eligibility for victims of crimes by private actors, including victims of domestic and gang violence, making it even more challenging for asylum seekers to win protection.

**2018**

Administration announces "Remain in Mexico" plan, which requires asylum seekers to wait in Mexico while their claims are adjudicated. Awaiting planned implementation in Arizona.

**2019**

Adult detention in Arizona doubles, with the opening of a new large detention center in Eloy, AZ.

**2019**

Resurgence of internal immigration enforcement tears families apart.

**2019**

Supreme Court allows the third-country transit asylum ban to be implemented while it is fought in courts; Florence Project staff strategizes internally and with other organizations to respond.

**2019**

The Florence Project has grown from one office with a staff of two people to three offices with over 100 staff. With your support, we have increased our free legal and social services and serve thousands of immigrant children and adults detained in Arizona. We remain a national leader in creating innovative service models and legal strategies to increase access to justice. Thank you for your partnership!



## DOUBLE YOUR CONTRIBUTION TODAY

People come to this country because they want safety and a life free from harm.  
They deserve:

**Just and humane treatment**  
**Due process and protection of their rights**  
**Their fair day in court and freedom from detention**

In the past year, the number of people in detention has doubled. Join us as we redouble our efforts to respond. This fall, your gift will be matched by the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, dollar-for-dollar, up to \$1 million. Make a gift online by visiting [www.firrp.org/donate](http://www.firrp.org/donate), by phone at (520) 367-5611, or by mailing a check made out to the Florence Project to:

**Florence Project**  
**ATTN: Development Office**  
**P.O. Box 86299**  
**Tucson, AZ 85754**

*Gifts from corporations and foundations do not qualify. Gifts via donor advised funds are eligible.*

# ART SHOW

*This fall, the Florence Project collaborated with Practical Art in Phoenix and the YWCA in Tucson to host **Survive, Resist, Create: Art by Immigrants Facing Deportation**. For many of our clients, art is a form of survival. It is a way to process their experiences. It is a means of self-expression in a system that silences their stories.*

For Alan\*, who came to the United States when he was 17 and was suffering from severe depression, drawing became an outlet. Because he didn't have any relatives in the United States to be released to, he moved between shelters for unaccompanied immigrant children. When Alan arrived in Arizona, he was just months from turning 18 and would have gone to adult detention without legal advocacy.

Instead, the Florence Project advocated for Alan, and he celebrated his birthday with cake and singing. At this impromptu birthday party, Alan gave a speech about his gratitude to the Florence Project and presented his attorney with a painting he'd made for her.

Now, Alan lives with his girlfriend in Texas. He still draws, and he hopes to one day become a tattoo artist.

Much of the art in the show, like Alan's painting, was gifted to attorneys and social workers by their clients. Art is one way that our clients share their gratitude. It is an honor to share that gratitude with our generous supporters.

For us, art is inspiration. Our clients' art is a symbol of their resilience. Art allows their individual stories to accompany us in our daily lives, even while they remain incarcerated. Art allows the outside world to see our clients' strength, creativity, and beauty. Detention is isolating, and we are proud to showcase our clients' art and talent. They are not forgotten.

\* Client name changed to protect confidentiality



Artwork provided by a Florence Project client



The painting Alan gave his attorney



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*The mission of the Florence Project is to provide free legal and social services to detained adults and unaccompanied children facing immigration removal proceedings in Arizona.*