Greetings from the Arizona desert, where the monsoons have wound down, and we are recovering from a busy summer. As you saw in the news, record numbers of children crossed the border over the summer, seeking protection in the U.S. As a result, the government has doubled the number of shelter beds in Arizona, which house unaccompanied immigrant children, thus doubling the need for legal and social services. The Florence Project has worked with unaccompanied children for the past 14 years, each year responding to the growing need. We can’t deny that this year has been extraordinary in terms of numbers and scope. To meet this pressing need, we expanded our Children’s Initiative staff in Phoenix, and we opened an office in Tucson! Our small satellite office in Tucson officially opened in early September, to serve the children housed in new shelters in the area, and our office in Phoenix has moved to a larger location to accommodate more staff. It has been a challenge, but our staff is handling it with grace. We are committed to being there for this vulnerable population for the long haul, not just when it is a hot topic in the news.

We have been just as busy in Florence, serving detained immigrant men and women. We continue to increase our work with individuals with severe mental health issues, as Ben Harville, Eloy Staff Attorney, explains in his article featured in this newsletter. We are also responding to an increase of asylum seekers from all over the world, trying to offer more asylum workshops to help those who have to represent themselves through this arduous, confusing process. Our social services program remains strong, assisting individuals obtain release from detention by locating housing and rehabilitative programs, with the valuable help of our community partners. In conjunction with these community partners, we are organizing workshops in Arizona communities about how immigrant families can be prepared in case of contact with ICE, so that they have a family plan to protect custody of their children.

This is just a snippet of our staff’s innovative, inspiring work this summer. As the (slightly) chilly air rolls in over our part of the Sonoran desert, we reflect on how we couldn’t do this work without your support. We take a deep breath after these busy summer months, and head into fall with renewed commitment to this work, with our clients at the front of our minds.

In April of 2013, the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California issued a decision that has greatly affected our work at the Florence Project. In *Franco-Gonzalez v. Holder*, the court ordered that the government provide a qualified legal representative to people who suffer from a severe mental illness during their immigration “removal” proceedings in Arizona. This is an historic decision; people in removal proceedings traditionally are not afforded the same constitutional protections that criminal defendants enjoy, as removal proceedings are considered to be civil in nature. However, the District Court’s decision recognizes that, at least for some vulnerable populations, it is unjust to require them to represent themselves. As a result, for the first time in history, some people in removal proceedings are now provided attorneys at government expense. The *Franco-Gonzalez* decision brings hope of a new era of increased protections for people facing deportation.

The *Franco-Gonzalez* case was the culmination of years of advocacy efforts by the immigrant rights community and civil rights organizations. The decision was especially gratifying for the Florence Project, as mental health has long been a priority of ours. Laura Belous, currently the Supervising Attorney for our Tucson office, participated in a two-year mental health fellowship with the Florence Project, during which she represented dozens of detainees with mental health disorders. Additionally, the Florence Project’s commitment to this issue led to Arizona being the first state in the country to have an immigration attorney on the state’s Protection and Advocacy Council. Laura was a member for three years, ...

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2
and Florence Project’s Pro Bono Program Director, Tally Kingsnorth, has been a member for five. And now that the court order has been implemented, Florence Project attorneys and staff have undertaken the challenging assignment of representing detainees identified as suffering from a severe mental illness in their removal proceedings.

Representing a person with a severe mental illness often presents unique challenges, and lawyers are not instructed on psychology in law school. Eliciting basic information like a date of birth or names of family members may require days of interviewing; you can imagine the difficulties involved in gathering details of past torture in a foreign country, to provide one example. Furthermore, these clients are sometimes distrustful of the attorneys assigned to help them. Florence Project attorneys and legal staff have been educating themselves in the field of psychology, including a three-day seminar in Los Angeles in July of 2014 in which we learned strategies for communicating with clients who suffer from a mental illness. As we gain knowledge and experience, these cases become easier and more rewarding.

Undocumented people with severe mental illnesses have been described as “triply rejected” by society. They suffer from the stigma of mental illness, the stigma of being undocumented, and, if their mental illness has led them to be arrested and/or charged with a crime, they carry the stigma of being a criminal as well. By the time we meet them, they are often accustomed to being treated with suspicion and resentment. However, the Florence Project has never shied away from providing assistance and care to vulnerable and stigmatized populations in our society, and this commitment continues with these clients. The recognition of the right to counsel for people with severe mental illnesses is a historic move towards greater constitutional protections for people in removal proceedings, and the Florence Project is delighted to play an important role in this effort.
STAFF PROFILE: CHRISTIAN AND MARIANA

Let’s welcome CHRISTIAN AVILA, our new Office Coordinator, and MARIANA DEL HIERRO, our new Development and Outreach Coordinator, to the Florence Project team by asking them “WHY DO YOU LOVE BEING A PART OF OUR TEAM?”

CHRISTIAN: I like being a part of the Florence Project because it lets me be part of something that truly matters. I get to wake up every morning and support those around me, so that we can make a difference in our community.

MARIANA: “In addition to having the opportunity to work for an organization with such an amazing mission, I work with an amazing team of individuals who love what they do and are always willing to help.”

Also featured is Nieve, our new First Response Security System. Nieve’s human is Thalassa Kingsnorth, Florence Project’s Pro Bono Program Director.

THANK YOU FROM THE FLORENCE PROJECT

The Florence Project is enormously grateful for the able and expert assistance of Patricia Mejia and Selma Taljanovic from the Law Office of Patricia G. Mejia, P.C. Patricia is a former Florence Project Staff Attorney and Equal Justice Works fellow, now in private practice in Tucson. She and Selma volunteered to provide Know Your Rights presentations to unaccompanied minors in the newly opened Tucson shelters during August and September. “We couldn’t have done it without them!” says Florence Project Supervising Attorney Laura Belous. “Patricia and Selma did an amazing job with their presentations. They are full of enthusiasm, good humor, and dedication to these clients.” Thank you again, Patricia and Selma!

We also want to thank Jason Feldman of Arizona Commercial Real Estate in Phoenix for finding us a larger office space in Phoenix. Jason volunteered his time to comb through listings and find us something that was just right for our needs. Thank you Jason!

Art from a client at Florence Detention Center
He was an undocumented minor from Honduras. He was living in a group home facility for children in DHS custody. His name was Leivis and he had lived through a nightmare. While in Honduras, gang members in his neighborhood held him down and forced him to watch as they killed his older brother. His brother was pummeled with bricks. This was all because his brother asked a gang member to return a bike that they stole from Leivis. Leivis managed to escape from the gang before they tried to kill him as well. While he hid, the gang proceeded to threaten and harass his family. Not wanting to put his family in further danger, he left home. He travelled from Honduras to the United States by himself, in the hopes of finding safety and a better life. Leivis qualified to receive Special Immigrant Juvenile Status — which would allow him to stay in the country. It was now my job to help him get it.

This was my first case through the Florence Project. A week prior, I had contacted the Florence Project to get more information about Special Immigrant Juvenile Status visas. A Florence Project attorney was gracious enough to appear at my office with a huge binder of information. In exchange for walking me through the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status process, I agreed to take a pro bono case. That day I learned of the prevalence of abuse among immigrant children. It was not uncommon for children to be on their own at the ages of 12 or 13. Many children had to decide between abuse at the hands of their parents, or abuse by strangers if they left home.

I had my first meeting with Leivis, and he was incredibly shy and understandably wary of speaking with me. I was, after all, going to be probing into the worst experiences of his life. We took things slow, gradually working our way up to the events of his brother’s murder. It was heartbreaking to hear him tell the story, and I could see him fighting back the tears. When things got too overwhelming, I would interject with questions such as “What is your favorite sport?” or “What’s your favorite subject in school?” He would look puzzled, but relieved, and it was a successful way to reset emotions. We would then slowly work our way back through his inner hell. I then learned of his harrowing journey from Honduras to the United States. Although he wouldn’t go into details, I suspected that Leivis experienced more trauma on his way here than in his home country. Before I left, I spoke with his caseworker about counseling. I was relieved to hear that he just started sessions with a therapist.

Over the next few months, Leivis and I appeared at several court proceedings and met for a handful of meetings. Leivis was required to recount his trauma to strangers more than any abused child should be required. Fortunately Leivis was granted Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, which allowed him to “adjust” to a permanent resident. When he turned eighteen, he voluntarily entered a program that will help him learn English and prepare him for life on his own in the United States. Before he entered that program, he turned and gave me a big hug. To me, that hug was worth its weight in gold. Leivis is just one of many children that need assistance. I have volunteered with the Florence Project for nearly five years. And with each case, I still manage to be shocked at what the child in front of me has lived through. If there was ever a purpose for going to law school, helping these kids is it.
This past summer brought many changes for our Florence Project family! Thalassa (Tally) Kingsnorth welcomed baby Damian into our world in May. Dorién Ediger-Soto said goodbye to the Florence Project in July to attend CUNY Law School. Originally starting as a Legal Assistant, Dorién helped put out many Florence Project flames and went on to perfect the Development and Outreach position, all while continuing to serve those detained in both Florence and Eloy. A special thank you to Dorién for her many years at the Florence Project, she will be missed!

We had a couple of more goodbyes in the Florence office this past summer. Luis Mancheno on the Florence Team moved to New York City to join The Bronx Defenders, and Erik Morrison on the Eloy Team has joined the UNHCR. In other news, Melissa Rivera was admitted into the Washington Bar this summer. Nathan Regenold, former intern, returned from a summer learning Spanish in Guatemala to join us as the Florence Team’s Legal Assistant. Stephanie Quintana side-stepped into her new role as Eloy Legal Assistant, previously working on the Florence Team.

Jessica Castellanos moved from California to join us as Florence Staff Attorney. We also welcome Penn Law Legal Fellow Rekha Nair to our team, who will be with us for a year, focusing on U visa, T visa, and asylum cases.

With growth comes changes, and along with the Children’s Initiative expansion came internal shifts. Gladis Molina became the Children’s Initiative Program Director, Golden McCarthy became the Supervising Attorney for the Phoenix office, Claudia Diaz became the new Office Coordinator for Phoenix, and Laura Belous shifted her role as the Children’s Initiative Pro Bono Coordinator to Supervising Attorney in the new Tucson office. Maria Lalone joined the Children’s Initiative at the beginning of the summer in Phoenix as their Administrative Assistant, and Jenni Varela also joined us in Phoenix as Children’s Legal Assistant, taking over for Angie Canales. We also said goodbye to the wonderful Lindsey DePew, Senior Legal Assistant. Lindsey was with us for many years, and was instrumental in establishing our Phoenix office. She is now with Catholic Charities and continues to work with immigrant youth.

We’ve had a lot of “goodbyes” and “hellos” this summer, quite possibly the most “hellos” in Florence Project history. We are excited for new additions to our talented team, and we know that those who have moved on are always a part of the Florence Project family!!

In addition to all of the day-to-day legal services that we provide to thousands of immigrants each year, we always seek out opportunities to lend the Florence Project’s name and expertise in support of advocacy efforts around the country. In 2013, we signed onto letters asking the legislative and the executive branches to end the use of solitary confinement in immigration detention centers, to eliminate the detention bed mandate, to oppose proposed gang-based deportation grounds of deportability, and to ask for caps on prison phone rates. That same year, we joined eight different amicus curiae briefs on topics such as access to media mail in the Pinal County Jail, termination of parental rights in the state courts, and due process problems with the large group deportation processes used in Eloy and Florence, Arizona. Finally, we joined a Freedom of Information Act request on asylum processing and various LGBT asylum amicus curiae briefs prepared by the National Immigrant Justice Center. We are proud to not only help our clients one at a time navigate the Immigration Courts, but to also do our part to make changes in policy that improve the law and policy for the people that we serve in the future.
THE FLORENCE PROJECT RELIES ON THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF INDIVIDUALS, CORPORATIONS, FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS, FOUNDATIONS, AND LAW FIRMS TO PROVIDE ITS MULTITUDE OF LEGAL AND SOCIAL SERVICES. THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

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- Torch of Justice Society
  - The Florence Project created the Torch of Justice Society to provide individuals with the opportunity to support the Florence Project at higher financial levels. Contributions of all sizes enable us to serve thousands of detained women, men, and children facing removal proceedings each year.

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Art from client at Eloy Detention Center
We have listed contributions received between January 1 and August 31, 2014. Please contact us at firrp@firrp.org if you believe your name has been omitted in error or if you would like to make a change to how you are recognized in our newsletter.

Meet some of the talented staff at our new Children’s Initiative office in Tucson—Maria, Jordan, and Daniela!

CHILDREN’S INITIATIVE EXPANSION
New Tucson Office and Phoenix Office Expansion

It has been a very busy summer for our Children’s Initiative, and as the only legal non-profit in Arizona that provides free legal services to detained women, men, and children, the Florence Project has opened a new office in Tucson and have expanded our Phoenix office to meet the increased need of detained children.

The Florence Project would like to give a warm welcome to our new Children’s Initiative Staff!

TUCSON CHILDREN’S INITIATIVE: TUCSON OFFICE NEW STAFF
(joint Laura Belous, Tucson Supervising Attorney)
Maria Aparicio, Staff Attorney
Beth Lowry, Legal Assistant
Jordan Weiner, Legal Assistant
Daniela Ugaz, Legal Assistant

PHOENIX CHILDREN’S INITIATIVE: PHOENIX OFFICE NEW STAFF
(joint current Phoenix staff)
Kira Aranow, Legal Assistant
Noriana Colon-Mercado, Staff Attorney
Yesenia (Jessi) Ramales, Legal Assistant

TUCSON OFFICE WISH LIST
- 2 workspace tables
- 1 whiteboard
- 2 desks
- 2 office chairs
- 4 file cabinets
- 1 mini-fridge
- 1 microwave
- 1 coffee maker/hot water heater
- artwork for the walls

PHOENIX OFFICE WISH LIST
- 6-12 conference room chairs
- 1 large conference room table
- 4 workspace tables
- 6 desks + 6 office chairs
- 4 comfy chairs
- 10-20 folding chairs
- 4 file cabinets
- 2 whiteboards
- 1 Refrigerator or mini-fridge
- artwork for the walls
ABOUT THE FLORENCE PROJECT
The Florence Project’s work is carried out primarily through five programs: the Florence “Justice and Efficiency” Model, the Eloy Pro Se Model, the Detained Immigrant and Refugee Children’s Initiative, the Defending Immigrants Program, and the Integrated Social Services Program. As part of its direct legal services, the Project has created “Know Your Rights” videos and self-representation packets as an educational resource for non-profit service providers and detained people nationwide. Nationally, the Florence Project advocates for positive change in federal policies and practices towards those detained and it serves as a resource-development and training center for detention program “best practices.”

MISSION & VISION
The Florence Project provides and coordinates free legal services and related social services to indigent men, women, and unaccompanied children detained in Arizona for immigration removal proceedings. The Project strives to ensure that detained individuals have access to counsel, understand their rights under immigration law, and are treated fairly and humanely by our judicial system.

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Florence, AZ 85132
Visit our website and contribute via PayPal:
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