As a supporter of the Florence Project, you know our mission already: the Florence Project provides free legal and social services to detained adults and unaccompanied children facing immigration removal proceedings in Arizona. For over 25 years now, the Florence Project has been serving some of the most vulnerable immigrant populations in detention. However, you may not know that the Florence Project has represented unaccompanied children detained in Arizona for the past 15 years. In the early 2000s, the Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR) approached the Florence Project to create a model of advocacy for unaccompanied children who were detained in Globe and Coolidge, AZ. With beds in local jails, our attorneys began to represent these children in their removal proceedings. Impacted by what they saw day in and day out, our attorneys provided testimony to Congress in support of the Trafficking Victims Protection and Reauthorization Act (TVTPRA), a statute that once passed ultimately reshaped the way in which children were detained and treated under immigration law.

Children entering the United States came into the media spotlight as numbers dramatically increased in 2014. This trend continued in 2015 when nearly 40,000 unaccompanied children were detained in the U.S., according to a recent report by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The Florence Project provided legal services to nearly 20% of those children in 2015.

Recently I learned that this trend will continue into the summer of 2016, and perhaps beyond. Recent government reports show that apprehensions of children by U.S. Border Patrol agents have been on the rise. In the Southwest Sector, the number of unaccompanied children apprehended at the border has increased by more than 100% in the past year, with some regions, including Big Bend and Yuma, reporting increases of more than 500%. The broader context that frames these statistics is an important one. Violence in several Central American countries including El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala is ongoing and even intensifying. Migrants represented by the Florence Project have shared harrowing experiences that reflect insecurity for all, but also illustrate the particular risks faced by children and youth. For example, Florence Project attorneys report that children as young as 10 are forced to join gangs through active recruitment in presumably safe spaces such as schools. The violence that migrants flee from is also often gendered, as young girls are specifically targeted, subjected to rape and kidnappings, and forced into long-term relationships with male gang members.

...continued on page 3
In 2011, Oscar started using drugs to cope with the break up with his daughter’s mother. That same year, he was arrested and convicted for possession of drug paraphernalia. It is his one and only criminal conviction. After his arrest, Oscar immediately got clean, and has been clean and sober ever since. Nevertheless, he was placed in immigration removal proceedings. In 2012, the immigration judge decided he was ineligible to apply for cancellation of removal and had no way to obtain legal status in the United States, even though his deportation would separate a caring father from his disabled daughter. This decision was based solely on his one criminal conviction. Therefore, in 2012, Oscar accepted a voluntary departure and returned to Mexico.

Oscar hated being away from his family, especially his daughter, so in 2013, Oscar re-entered the United States. Unfortunately, in 2015, Oscar was picked up by immigration in a routine traffic stop and placed in immigration detention at the Eloy Detention Center. He was worried that like last time he would be deported and separated once again from his daughter.

However, since the last time Oscar was in immigration proceedings, the law had changed. Specifically, on June 1, 2015, the Supreme Court decided Mellouli v. Lynch, which states that a drug paraphernalia conviction does not necessarily bar someone like Oscar from cancellation of removal. Based on this change in case law, the Florence Project assisted Oscar to move to reopen his 2012 case, arguing that his conviction no longer disqualifies him from cancellation of removal. On September 24, 2015, the Immigration Judge granted his motion to reopen and shortly thereafter he was released on a bond.

Oscar is now once again with family (pictured) and is pursuing his application for cancellation of removal before the Phoenix Immigration Court with the help of Florence Project pro bono attorneys, Jorge and Oscar Castañeda from the Castañeda Law Office. We hope this time around he gets the second chance he deserves to stay in the United States and be a present and engaged father, brother, son, and resident. And, as always, this work is not possible without donors like you. Thank you for helping fathers like Oscar reunite with their children!

**REGULATION CHANGE RESULTS IN REPRESENTATION FOR MORE DETAINED**  
**By Rekha Nair, Esq., Florence Project Managing Attorney for the Florence Office**

On any given day there are approximately 2,500 adults detained in immigration detention in Florence and Eloy. Numerous studies have explained how such remote immigration detention locations, like the Florence and Eloy facilities, result in a lack of access to counsel. While the Florence Project works diligently to fill this gap, we simply do not have the capacity to represent the more than 80% of individuals in detention who do not have an attorney.

December 7, 2015, an attorney now can represent an individual solely to request release on bond.

This change allowing for limited representation is great news for clients of the Florence Project because with our own limited resources, our attorneys can now step in and represent clients just in their bond hearings. Securing a release on bond can work and provide for their families while fighting their immigration case. And in some instances, our attorneys can apply for employment authorization so they can work and provide for their families while fighting their immigration case.

However, the Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR) recently made an important change to federal regulations to allow for limited representation. Prior to this change, attorneys who took on a detained immigrant’s case had to sign on for the entire immigration case, meaning both the application for immigration status and the request for release from detention on payment of a bond. Under the new regulation which went into effect

Please join us in this effort by donating today!
THE INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN FLEEING THEIR HOME COUNTRIES CONTINUES

...CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Such violent circumstances in home countries mean that the children served by the Florence Project need both legal and social services. Children and young adults may be unable to talk about the trauma they have witnessed and experienced without ongoing counseling and support from their attorneys and social workers, underscoring the importance of having staff who can attend to children’s overall wellbeing. Social services are a crucial step to ensuring quality legal representation of young people, especially because children themselves need to detail and revisit their experiences in order to build strong legal cases. We have had successes with innovative asylum claims, but the cases can be complex and often require extensive and time-consuming legal strategies. The Florence Project remains committed to meeting these challenges and providing comprehensive support to the young people who have—and will likely continue to—come to the United States in search of safety and security.

Thank you, as a Florence Project donor, for your committed support of legal and social services for detained immigrant children and adults in Arizona. Thank you.

SUPPORT LEGAL INNOVATION FOR THOSE MOST IN NEED

LAURA ST. JOHN, ESQ., FLORENCE PROJECT LEGAL DIRECTOR

The Florence Project can arguably be defined by one common theme throughout its history: legal innovation. Our very beginnings were an act of legal innovation – a response to the legal need of detained immigrants not being met by the nonprofit or governmental sectors.

Soon after its inception, the Florence Project developed the Pro Se Model, a ground-breaking approach to legal assistance and education for immigrant detainees. This model stretched our limited resources to be able to serve more people in detention than through direct representation alone, eventually winning the 2001 Peter F. Drucker Award for Nonprofit Innovation, and serving as the blueprint for the national Legal Orientation Program, funded by the Executive Office of Immigration Review. In 2007, the Florence Project developed and implemented the first social services program of its kind, one that works hand-in-hand with our legal program, providing stability and safety needed by clients to win cases, and to advocate for their basic, mental, and physical needs while in detention. These are just a few examples of our innovative work at the Florence Project.

Of course, innovation and growth at the Florence Project has always been driven by the needs of our clients. In the past two years, the Project has grown to meet the increasing numbers of unaccompanied minors and adult asylum seekers from Central America and elsewhere and begun regularly providing direct representation to the severely mentally ill in detention. From its humble beginnings, the Florence Project has grown to 45 staff members, and in 2015, served a total of 11,906 detained men, women, and children in Arizona. Now, thanks to a generous gift by Perkins Coie, LLP in late 2015, the Florence Project reestablished the Legal Director position, and I was promoted to this role to continue the innovative work of the Florence Project.

The legal director position is a critical investment in the work of legal defense for immigrant detainees. My role is dedicated in large part to high-stakes, appellate cases and national advocacy efforts. It is my vision that through this new position, the Florence Project can serve our clients more completely by advocating for more systemic change through targeted appellate representation and through collaboration with national partners on broad-scale advocacy issues.

First, my goal as Legal Director is to increase the Florence Project’s capacity to represent clients on appeal before the Board of Immigration Appeals and, more importantly, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. The law is shaped and changed through the appellate process, particularly at the Court of Appeals level. Through dedicated funding to my position as Legal Director, the Florence Project is showing its commitment to representing individual clients on appeals addressing complex legal questions with an eye towards creating positive precedent that will benefit all of our detained clients.

In addition, in my role as Legal Director I support our clients more completely by engaging in strategic amicus briefing and other national advocacy efforts that benefit detainees in Arizona and beyond. By partnering with organizations nationwide on amicus efforts and advocacy, the Florence Project can magnify its voice urging for clarity and fair legal interpretations in rapidly changing areas of immigration law. In both appellate and advocacy work, my current focus as Legal Director is on developing innovative legal arguments to apply in some of the most complex and rapidly changing areas of law. This includes issues such as how to define a “particular social group” for purposes of asylum law in a world where government actors are not necessarily the primary perpetrators of mass violence; how to properly assess when criminal cases should, and more importantly, should not, affect immigration proceedings; how to safeguard the due process rights of the severely mentally ill in immigration proceedings; and how to ensure that immigrants who do not have access to representation by an attorney still have their procedural rights to a full and fair hearing respected in a court system that is under immense pressure to rapidly hear and dispense with cases. Thanks to the support of donors like you, the Florence Project will continue to find new and creative ways to fight for a more just and humane system for every immigrant in removal proceedings. Thank you.

NATIONAL AWARDS

The former INS, Bar associations, US Senate, the US Department of Justice, The US Commission on Immigration Reform, the American Immigration Lawyers Association, and the National Lawyers Guild have all recognized the Florence Project’s local and national contributions to people in detention and our commitment to creating a more just and efficient judicial system.

The 2001 Peter F. Drucker Award for Nonprofit Innovation, for the service model that became the blueprint for the Executive Office of Immigration Review’s Legal Orientation Program administered by the Vera Institute of Justice at 25 detention centers around the United States.

The John Jay College of Criminal Justice’s 2010 Community Leader for Justice Award.

The 2012 Emil Gumpert Award from the American College of Trial Lawyers
Everyday Stories from The Florence Project

IN PURSUIT OF A BETTER AND SAFER LIFE
By Katie Porter, M.S.W., Florence Project Social Services Coordinator

The Social Services Program, serving both detained adults in Florence and Eloy and children in Phoenix and Tucson, was born in the acknowledgement that people are plucked out of their normal lives and are disconnected from any community they may need for help. Florence Project clients are often on the border or needing our help after having lived in the U.S. and made choices that delayed the positive track they were on. Immigration detention does not stop the clock on their lives; indeed, they are individuals beyond their immigration status. Nevertheless, clients have mental health and medical issues that require attention and support. They have kids in the U.S. who no longer have their parent, and now must decide or defend their custody rights over their kids. They are individuals who are vulnerable because of their ethnicity, gender, and/or sexual orientation — vulnerabilities that do not stop impacting their lives while they are detained.

More so, the Florence Project sees countless individuals who have experienced traumatic events on their journeys and traumatic events that initially caused them to flee their home countries, clients who need support in this new place. And finally, when the joyous moment of being released from detention arrives, we must help these clients plan for their release, so they may successfully return to their lives and communities, or start better and safer lives in a new country.

Social workers focus on both the individual client, and the overarching systems that impact the individual and society, looking to improve quality of life for all vulnerable populations. There are many forces taking place that impact our clients’ well-being. There are the macro-level issues of the violence and instability in their countries of origin that pushed them to pursue safety in the United States to the structural barriers they have met upon arrival. There are also the medical and mental health needs of clients and their respective systems, communities that are more supportive and therefore have more services available can also be an influencing factor, and, family which acts as a powerful motivating factor, something clients desperately try to preserve. Lastly, there are the individual goals and life prospects of clients, and the challenge of meeting those while fighting a legal case while simultaneously meeting the expectations and requirements of an immigration judge.

I think of “Olivia,” a client that needed an array of social services to accompany her legal case. She lived in the U.S. for most of her life, but had a very unstable upbringing where she was placed in multiple foster homes. This resulted in poor coping skills and therefore poor decision-making as an adult. But, Olivia has two children who she loves more than anything, and she does whatever she can to provide for them. Throughout her case we assisted in finding a shelter, education, and counseling services for her release based on her goals and needs. When it was time to plan for her release, we worked with her to determine the pros and cons of her living options, for both her and her family, and we helped make sure she was able to access useful resources on the day she was released. It is a long, hard journey for her and for all our clients, but thanks to the support of Florence Project donors like you, we can continue to be there for them in their times of need.

YOUR SUPPORT PROVIDES SAFETY AND HOPE TO CHILDREN
By Elizabeth Garcia, Florence Project Legal Assistant

During one of our legal clinics, I did an initial case interview with a nine-year-old boy named “George”. As this little boy sat across from me, I asked him the questions necessary to figure out why he had made the dangerous journey to the U.S., and questions to determine if he qualified for any form of legal status to keep him here; I was essentially asking for his life story. Sometimes this is a hard thing to do, but it is my job to dig and get children to share often traumatizing details of their lives with me, a stranger.

George did not live with his dad, and this was my first clue that there was more to his story. He finally shared with me that his father was an alcoholic. One day, he explained, when he got home after riding his bicycle, his mom had a gift for him - a box with holes on it. He opened it and there was a puppy! George was ecstatic to have a pet. Tragically, his dad was not fond of the puppy, and he soon poisoned and killed him. I felt crushed as George shared these details with me. He went on.

George’s mom got him another puppy, so he was happy once again. One day, by accident, the puppy stepped on some paint that was on the floor and then jumped on his dad’s bed and stained it. When his dad saw what the puppy had done, he grabbed the puppy and strangled him in front of George.

I felt devastated after George finished his story, and I did not know what to say. I wanted to cheer him up and not make him relive those memories, so I switched to another subject and asked him about cartoons or movies he liked. He named a few and then quickly told me that his baby brother’s favorite is the movie “Cars.” Since I have a little brother myself, I knew this movie quite well, and we shared our favorite scenes with each other. Still, I could tell George was sad, and I was determined to get George’s mind off the puppy story.

At this point, I felt very emotional witnessing a young boy’s pain. I looked at him and smiled. I remembered there were lemon popsicles in our office refrigerator, and I offered George one. He smiled at my offer but then turned me down. I asked him why he did not want one, and he replied he did not want to eat one if his little brother could not get one, too. He was selfless and chose to put his little brother before himself. George’s actions touched my heart, and I explained with a smile, we had enough for him and his brother, and he accepted and happily ate his lemon popsicle.

As he continued to enjoy his popsicle, I explained what the Florence Project would be able to do for him. In the end, we enjoyed a bright moment because the legal team could help change his life through legal representation in immigration court.

George’s story and the stories of countless other minors I hear every day are truly humbling. But knowing that we can help them fight their immigration cases to grant them legal status in the U.S. and be afforded a better future brings me peace. Thanks to the perspective my job at the Florence Project has given me, and thanks to the donors that make this work possible, I have a greater appreciation for life, and a stronger commitment to helping those in need.
Leaving home is always painful. The thought of being home is comforting; knowing that there is a sense of security there demolishes any want of finding a new place to call home. Leaving one’s home country is not only sad, but it breaks this security and it leaves an empty space in one’s heart. I experienced this emptiness through “Cindy.”

Cindy is nine years old and left Honduras where she witnessed a traumatizing event – the murder of her father. In a few seconds her father was gone. For a nine-year-old it is almost impossible to know how to act in this situation. With little time to react, Cindy’s mother made the decision to leave this harm and the danger in their home country behind. They fled to the United States in search of safety. When Cindy and her mother arrived at the United States – Mexico border, Cindy was separated from her mother. Cindy was transferred to a shelter where minors are held while her mother was retained in an adult detention center. I met Cindy in the children’s shelter. Cindy, like all minors the Florence Project serves, attended a “Know Your Rights,” presentation where I explained to her what her rights are as an unaccompanied minor. After the presentation, I interviewed her, and learned about her story.

Though Cindy qualified for legal relief and would be provided representation by the Florence Project, Cindy’s mom did not have the same option. Thus, Cindy’s mom could not remain in the United States to fight her case, forcing her to return to Honduras and the violence she fled. Without her mother, Cindy decided to return to Honduras to fight for their lives together as a family, in a country where they suffered great pain.

Cindy touched my heart and I feel deeply for her pain. Losing a parent is not something that is forgotten easily. Through Cindy I cemented my passion for helping children fleeing pain, anger, or a loss. I have learned through the Florence Project that a loss is not always the death of a family member, but it can also mean losing the chance to fight for a better future, for a young age, these children learn that they cannot progress in life if they do not escape violent or abusive circumstances. Meeting each child that comes through the shelters makes me feel accomplished; I feel complete, proud, and at peace with the work I am doing. Prior to working with the Florence Project, I did not know these feelings could occur simultaneously. I’m very thankful for the work I am given from the Florence Project, and thankful for you, the donors who help children like Cindy every day.

Name changed to protect privacy.

Providing a child with legal defense and social services this summer.

Please give today:

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Florence, AZ 85132

Using enclosed envelope or donate online: www.firrp.org/summerhelp
FLORENCE PROJECT CHAMPIONS

Florence Project donors (you!) and pro bono attorneys bring hope, safety, and justice to children escaping abuse, abandonment, and neglect, and women and men fleeing harm in their home countries.

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Working with the Florence Project has meant so much to me. It has really enriched my life. The Florence Project provides me with the opportunity to help children in need. The possibility that you can help facilitate a positive fresh start for a child who has been traumatized and in need of a champion is what keeps me coming back as a volunteer.

– Shannon Hennessey
Florence Project Pro Bono Attorney

Shannon, long-time Pro Bono Attorney for the Florence Project and client.

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the newsletter of
THE FLORENCE IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS PROJECT

MISSION & VISION
Mission: Our mission is to provide free legal and social services to detained adults and unaccompanied children facing immigration removal proceedings in Arizona.

Vision: Our vision is to ensure that all immigrants facing removal have access to counsel, understand their rights under the law, and are treated fairly and humanely.

ABOUT THE FLORENCE PROJECT
The Florence Project participates in local and national advocacy and outreach initiatives to amplify the voice of immigrant detainees and ensure they are treated fairly and humanely. We also act as a national resource development center for “know your rights” materials for detainees, legal service providers, and community organizations.

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