Unaccompanied Immigrant and Refugee Children: Reform for the Most Vulnerable Detainees

By Christopher Nugent

Over the last several years, the plight of more than 5,000 unaccompanied immigrant and refugee children in federal custody pending deportation proceedings has garnered significant attention from Congress, the legal community, the media, and the public. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was criticized for its poor track record in caring for these children, given the perceived conflicts of interest inherent in it acting as their jailer, prosecutor, and guardian all in one. In November 2002, Congress acted to redress the children’s plight in the Homeland Security Act (HSA) of 2002, transferring basic care, custody, and placement functions from the INS to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the Department of Health and Human Services.

Acting in loco parentis, ORR is charged with ensuring the best interests of the daily population of approximately 500 unaccompanied children concerning their care, custody, and placement. ORR has created a special program for the children, suitably called the Department of Unaccompanied Children’s Services (DUCS), and for FY 2004, Congress appropriated $54 million to ensure the effectiveness of the program (a significant increase over the amount INS had originally transferred to ORR). DUCS is now making dramatic improvements in policies and procedures to benefit unaccompanied immigrant and refugee children, including:

• Reviewing and phasing out contracts with secure detention facilities (juvenile jails)—routinely used by the INS due to lack of bed space or for disciplinary purposes—which commingled innocent children with delinquent offenders.
• Increasing the use of refugee foster care for unaccompanied children pending their removal proceedings, coordinated by the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) and the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB), two not-for-profit legal services and guardian ad litem services for the children, both while they are in detention and after they have been released to family members.

The provisions of the Homeland Security Act were crafted quickly, however, leaving the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and ORR (a division of the Department of Health and Human Services) without clearly distinguished mandates and responsibilities in some key areas, including legal custody and release decisions, age determination procedures, and state court dependency proceedings. While ORR has custodial and placement responsibilities for the children, DHS reportedly considers itself to have legal custody over the children—and therefore the authority to impose bonds and/or bar the release of a child from a facility.

DHS also considers itself responsible for determining an individual’s age in cases of age disputes, even though this crucial determination impacts whether the youth is routed to ORR care, custody, and placement services—or is detained for removal protracted on page 4 ...

UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) delegation visits FIRRP as part of a tour of Phoenix and Florence detention facilities

(UNHCR: John Fredricksson (left), Elizabeth Dallam (3rd from left), Angelina Jolie (center), Joung-ah Ghedini (front left))

- Photo courtesy of UNHCR

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Three years and one month ago, I was hired by Doctors of the World to establish a field office in Arizona for its Human Rights Clinic (HRC) project. The HRC provides survivors of torture and other human rights abuses with expert medical and psychological documentation of their injuries for use in immigration court. Because volunteer clinicians provide the examinations, the service is entirely free of charge.

From the outset, our partnership with the Florence Project (FIRRP) has been integral to the successful startup and growth of the HRC. Fully 65% of clients served to date are FIRRP referrals. Most of the remaining clients are not detained and are referred by private attorneys, legal service agencies, and former FIRRP interns who now work in these offices.

I have met very few clients over the years, but I have read all of their stories in their own words, and also in the words of the volunteers’ affidavits. Including my clients from the HRC in Colorado (established a year and a half ago), there are hundreds of stories about thousands of beatings, whippings, rapes, imprisonments, broken bones and teeth, brandings, electrical shocks, near-asphyxiations, mutilations, and many, many other tortures. Volunteers have often asked how I tolerate exposure to these terrible stories. My answer is that, thanks to them and other dedicated colleagues, I also have daily exposure to noble stories of kindness, generosity, compassion, and self-sacrifice. In my experience, good acts have power to negate even the most terrible ones.

A client described this effect well when he wrote:

“I was very helpless and hopeless because of my case. I have grave fears to be returned to tortures again. I have seen death very closely several times. You really made me cry. I am not flattering to you, I am honest. You sent me the angels for my help. [Your doctors] interviewed and examined, they really touched my heart and soul, gave me the hope of life.”
If I ever had the slightest doubt about practicing immigration law once I graduate from ASU, those doubts completely vanished after I finished my internship as a Bacon & Dear Fellow with the Florence Project last summer.

During my internship, I worked directly with indigent immigrants at the Eloy Detention Center, helping them fill out applications for relief from removal, gathering documents, and preparing them for pro se representation at their individual hearings. On occasion, in the mornings, I also gave rights presentations to the detainees in the library. I also wrote dozens of motions, wrote a brief for the Board of Immigration Appeals in Virginia, and did research for a detainee whose case is pending before the Ninth Circuit.

Hearing some of the most moving stories from detainees at Eloy made the internship an emotionally exhausting challenge, but at the end of the day, I was gratified by the notion that the Project helped change the lives of many of the detainees. The most fulfilling part of my internship was representing a gentleman from Mexico City at his individual hearing. I spent almost two months interviewing him, gathering documents, contacting potential witnesses, and writing motions for him. His case was terminated at his court hearing and he is now in Ukiah, California with his family.

I can truly say that at the Florence Project, I worked with some of the most talented, passionate, and professional individuals I’ve ever met – especially my two supervising attorneys Virge Carstens and Holly Cooper, from whom I gained an immeasurable wealth of knowledge about immigration and criminal law. My experience this summer helped me gain a new perspective on the law and helped me appreciate many of the small things I took for granted. I only hope that I’m lucky enough to work for a wonderful organization like the Florence Project once I graduate from ASU.
Immigrant Children From Ecuador

A client letter

Fernando Rodriguez (not his real name) is a sixteen-year-old Ecuadorian boy who traveled to the United States to financially help his family. During his detention at the Southwest Key shelter in Phoenix, Arizona, he wrote the following letter to share his thoughts and experiences of his journey to the US. He has since been deported and returned to Ecuador since he did not have any legal means of remaining in the U.S.

It has been a pleasure to take this pen in my hands in order to tell you about the life of immigrants from Ecuador.

All of us Ecuadorians travel to other countries enclosed in a boat, some in a plane, but what I want to tell you is that the journey is not as though it were a vacation or an outing, but that it is the ugliest time in our lives. Some people die in the desert, or lose the group or the way. All of us who immigrate to other countries to achieve our dream come risking all our lives. In the case of my journey, while traveling through the desert many people did not have food or water; they were sad and sick, but thanks to God I was able to bear all that was to happen to me.

The desert is very difficult for all children, because not all of them survive, but what gives me the most pain is that there are parents who send their children of only 10 years, and these barely make it. I know that with older persons it’s very different because we can bear a few days without eating or drinking water, but for them to go a day without eating or drinking is very difficult. Also, children are afraid to cross the border, because they are the youngest of the group.

I have much to write, but I can’t any longer because it makes me very sad to write these words. It doesn’t matter that I write so little, but that you don’t think that to immigrate is a game or an outing or a walk. Rather, for me and my family, it is to risk our lives.

Unaccompanied Children

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ceedings in a detention center or jail with adults and criminal convicts. As its age-determination methodology of choice, DHS uses dental and wrist bone forensics, which have been widely criticized by experts as scientifically fallible with margins of error of several years. Finally, even though ORR has responsibility for the best interests of the children, DHS claims that it—not ORR—retains the exclusive authority to consent to detained children’s placement in state juvenile dependency proceedings and foster care as abused, neglected, or abandoned children, which gives them access to green cards under the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status program. According to advocates, most abused, abandoned, and neglected children in ORR care still do not receive DHS consent to access the state dependency process.

To address these problems and further improve the fair and humane treatment of unaccompanied immigrant and refugee children, it is imperative that Congress pass the Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act of 2003. This legislation was introduced in the U.S. Senate as S.1129 by Senators Diane Feinstein (D-CA) and Sam Brownback (R-KS) and in the House of Representatives as H.R. 3361 by Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) and Chris Cannon (R-UT).

Under the Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act of 2003, age determinations would be conducted by ORR and could not be based solely on forensics. The legislation would also give ORR explicit authority to consent to the children’s placement in state dependency proceedings.

Additionally, children would be appointed pro bono counsel within seven days of their placement in ORR custody, and they would be eligible for guardian ad litem services. The Act would also address remaining deficiencies in the immigration system’s treatment of the children by, among other things, requiring special training for immigration judges, prosecutors, and pro bono attorneys handling children’s cases.

As of March 1, 2004, the bipartisan bills have 22 cosponsors in the Senate (none from Arizona) and 44 cosponsors in the House, including Ed Pastor and Raul Grijalva of Arizona. The bill awaits mark-up this spring in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The thousands of detained immigrant and refugee children for whom the Florence Project zealously advocates deserve the best from our country: they need the Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act of 2003 and its protections to be the law of the land.

Christopher Nugent is senior counsel with the Community Services Team of the international law firm of Holland & Knight LLP. Holland & Knight is pro bono counsel to the Women’s Commission for Refugee Rights and Children on several projects, including legislative advocacy in support of the Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act of 2003. Prior to joining Holland & Knight, Chris was director of the ABA Commission on Immigration Policy, Practice and Pro Bono and executive director of the Florence Project.
Holly Cooper took maternity leave - Hugo Larios filled in

Holly Cooper, Eloy senior staff attorney, took a three-month maternity leave upon the birth of her beautiful son, Oscar Henry Cooper-Stern, on September 9, 2003. Hugo Larios, a former Florence Project intern and a graduate of ASU Law School, worked with the Florence team from September through December to assist in Ms. Cooper’s absence. The timing was perfect: Not only did Mr. Larios conduct rights presentations and represent clients, his presence and Ms. Cooper’s leave created a perfect opportunity for two other Florence Project attorneys to complete a planned-for position exchange between Eloy and Florence (see below). Commenting on his experience, Mr. Larios said, “Working at FIRRP was a wonderful experience. It was truly amazing to spend time with people that work so passionately for ideals they truly believe in: human rights and human dignity. I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work along side the brightest people in the immigration field.” Ms. Cooper has now returned to work in full swing in Eloy, and Mr. Larios has opened an immigration law office in Tempe, Arizona.

New Staff Member
Rose Rivera, Florence Paralegal

On August 15, 2003, Rose Rivera joined FIRRP as the new Florence Paralegal. With a B.A. in Hispanic Studies with a focus in Spanish Literature from Earlham College of Richmond, Indiana, Rose’s prior experience includes working with a pro bono immigration lawyer and a Latino student organization. In addition to assisting immigrants with their applications, Rose also studied abroad for one year in Mexico, and completed her undergraduate thesis on a socioeconomic study of immigration. Rose said she enjoys “working with a bunch of really great women,” and the hands-on experience of working with clients that FIRRP sees on a daily basis. She appreciates that the Florence Project “directly deals with clients and legal issues”.

Welcome aboard Rose!

FIRRP Attorneys Exchange Positions

After working for two years at the Florence Project, staff attorneys Virginia Carstens and Victoria López recently exchanged positions within the organization, with Ms. Carstens moving to Florence and Ms. López to Eloy. Both attorneys have adjusted to their new positions. In fact, when asked about their new roles, Ms. Carstens said, “I’m enjoying the constant courtroom presence in Florence…some of my clients are women, which is a learning experience since they often have different backgrounds and legal issues than the men in Eloy.” Moreover, Ms. López commented that she looks forward to working as an attorney with the Eloy Pro Se Model, an innovative approach to lawyering where individuals are empowered to represent themselves, which attracted her to the Florence Project in the first place. This exchange is an on-going, targeted process for the Florence Project to continue developing its staff’s legal skills, develop stronger collaboration among programs, and encourage long-term employment.

Letter to the Florence Project
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Dear Staff Members,

Staff members to ensure volunteer access to clients in detention,
• Strong client advocacy on the part of a FIRRP former children’s attorney, who continues to request exams for clients who clearly aren’t survivors and don’t qualify for HRC services, and gets the exams anyway.
• A volunteer who willingly drives hundreds of miles to do a single exam, who has examined up to three clients in the same week, and who has examined more than one client per month for more than two years.
• Many volunteers who “forget” to request reimbursement for mileage, postage, and long distance calls.
• A volunteer “caught” online, literally in the middle of the night, revising an affidavit so that it would be ready for filing the next day.

Though my office and position have been eliminated due to lack of funding, I am pleased and relieved that HRC services will continue in Arizona and Colorado under the guidance of our excellent coordinator in San Diego, California.

My thanks to everyone at FIRRP for all your assistance during the past three years, especially to Brooke Hammond, who has been an outstanding liaison to the HRC. Knowing that HRC volunteers and FIRRP are still at work gives me the hope of life.

Dana Chou is the program coordinator for the Phoenix Human Rights Clinic office of Doctors of the World. Because of funding constraints, her position has been consolidated with that of the program coordinator in San Diego, California.

[Also see “The Florence Project bids farewell to Dana Chou” on page 6]
The Florence Project bids farewell to Dana Chou, Doctors of the World Human Rights Clinic

Founded in 1990, Doctors of the World USA (DOW) is a non-profit organization that works in over 25 countries to bring medical and public health assistance to those in need. In the United States, DOW trains volunteer physicians and psychologists to document evidence of torture endured by asylum-seekers. For the past three years, the Florence Project has had the good fortune to work with Dana Chou, program coordinator at the Phoenix DOW Human Rights Clinic. Over the years, DOW volunteers have provided pro-bono psychological and medical examinations and have written affidavits for Florence Project clients seeking asylum. These testimonies, which document evidence of past persecution and torture, have provided invaluable support in asylum-seekers’ legal cases. Unfortunately, DOW’s Phoenix office is being closed because of lack of funding. The Florence Project will now be working with Marianne Reiner, DOW’s San Diego-based Human Rights Clinic program coordinator, who has the challenging task of coordinating referrals from California, Colorado, and Arizona. The Florence Project staff extends its deepest gratitude to Dana Chou for her outstanding work on behalf of our clients and many others she tirelessly assisted. Dana, you will be greatly missed!

New Board Member: Sam Adair, Esq.

Sam Adair was awarded his J.D. from Arizona State University College of Law in May 2003 and was admitted to the State Bar of Arizona on October 24, 2003. While in law school Sam completed internships at the Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project and on the Senate Judiciary Committee staff in Washington D.C. Sam now practices immigration law with the Phoenix law firm of Littler Mendelson Bacon & Dear in Phoenix, AZ. Sam states, “through a generous grant from the law firm of Bacon & Dear, I was able to spend a summer during law school at FIRRP. The experience was invaluable. As a law student I was able to meet with and advocate for clients on a daily basis. For me it was personally valuable to work with and be mentored by the dedicated and talented staff of the Project. I hope that in working with the board I continue to forge relationships between the Project and the College of Law at ASU so that more law students can have the same career shaping experience that I was able to have.” Welcome Sam to the Florence Project’s Board of Directors.

Chicanos Por La Causa invites the Florence Project to speak in Eloy

Victoria López, Dayna Anderson, and Sabrina Hadden gave a presentation to a group of interested Head Start parents and other residents in Eloy, Arizona, at one of Chicanos Por La Causa’s Arizona Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Program sites. Victoria López spoke about the Florence Project’s services in Florence and Eloy and answered audience questions about immigration. Those in attendance were particularly interested in learning more about U.S. immigration laws, the Dream Act, and immigration options available to them and their family members.

Florence Project Services

In 2003, the Florence Project provided:

• Legal orientation presentations to 6,396 men, women, and children in detention.
• In-depth case assessment and follow-up services to 3,721 detained people.
• Direct representation for 41 people.
• Representation at bond hearings and release interviews for 114 individuals.
• Pro-se preparation assistance to 727 people.
• Assistance to 149 long-term detainees for supervised release.

Additionally:

• 27 appeals were tackled by Florence Project attorneys and staff.
• 51 cases were referred to, and accepted by, pro bono attorneys.

266 of the Florence Project’s represented and pro-se clients won their cases with our assistance—and avoided removal from the United States!
At our 2nd annual event, The Florence Project recognized and highlighted the work of 120 volunteers in the preceding year - including 58 pro bono attorneys, 19 volunteer doctors, 18 interpreters, 9 interns, and 16 other volunteers. Each volunteer exponentially increased FIRRP’s capacity to serve detained immigrants and left a legacy of tangible, significant work on their clients’ behalf. The evening was a great opportunity to thank our volunteers and hear their experiences of working with detained immigrants.

A special thanks and appreciation goes to Brown & Bain for its generosity in hosting the event at their Phoenix office.

Thank you for your continued support!

Capital Campaign Update

Anyone who visits the Florence Project is always surprised to see the meager conditions in which staff and volunteers work. The Florence Project is still housed in the same office where it began its services 15 years ago, although it has expanded from one room to another to occupy the entire building. The office has many structural and electrical problems, including no heat, hot water or proper air conditioning, and it is overcrowded with added staff and volunteers.

In the last two years, the Florence Project’s committed Board of Directors and dedicated supporters have taken significant strides to find the Florence Project a new home. Board member Saul Diskin, recently retired from commercial real estate, spearheaded the daunting task to find the Florence Project a new home. Board member Saul Diskin, recently retired from commercial real estate, spearheaded the daunting task to find the Florence Project a new home. Board member Saul Diskin, recently retired from commercial real estate, spearheaded the daunting task to find the Florence Project a new home. Board member Saul Diskin, recently retired from commercial real estate, spearheaded the daunting task to find the Florence Project a new home.

In order to raise initial funds to begin, the Florence Project enlisted the help of supporters through a preliminary campaign. At a brainstorming session last fall, key community supporters and friends provided overwhelming encouragement to move forward with the campaign to build a new office building.

A long-time supporter in New York, Neil Barsky, electrified the Board by announcing a $50,000 challenge grant, in addition to making a significant donation to the capital campaign. This challenge grant helped jumpstart the next phase of the campaign. We successfully met the challenge last month thanks to generous supporters! Mr. Barsky’s dedication to our work is outstanding. We really appreciate the opportunity he provided us.

To date, Board members have raised $196,000 of the $500,000 estimated costs. Thanks to the work of board member Peggy Kirch, VP of Commercial Development at SunCor Development Company, we have also received numerous pledges to donate construction labor and materials. (See box below for a list of confirmed contributions)

Mitch Marklewicz of MCH Builders LLC, our contractor, is already hard at work. We will be sure to keep you updated on our fund raising progress.

In addition to financial contributions from businesses and individuals, we received the following in-kind donations so far:

- **Extreme Surveying**, Mike Jennings
- Survey and construction staking
- **Madera Component Systems**
- Roof trusses
- **Metro Plastering**
- Stucco materials and labor
- **Paramount Windows**
- Windows
- **RT Brown Mechanical Inc**
- Materials and labor for heating & a/c
- **Structural I Company**
- Hardware and lumber
- **Tempe Paint & Decorator Center**
- John & Barbara Bebbling
- **Floor Covering**
Erika Garner and Jessica Hately of Fennemore & Craig represented an Iraqi with his asylum case. Unfortunately, his case was denied on appeal to the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA).

Anthony Pelino of Pelino & Ternieden successfully represented a mentally ill Vietnamese man in his refugee adjustment case.

Kevin Wein of Brown & Bain represented a Guatemalan man in his claim for asylum and Convention against Torture. Unfortunately, he lost in immigration court. However, Kevin continues to represent him on appeal to the BIA.

Steve Yale-Loehr and students in his class at Cornell Law School successfully represented an Iranian man applying for protection under the Convention against Torture in his appeal to the BIA.

Al Arpad of Fennemore Craig co-wrote an appeals brief to the BIA with Project staff on behalf of a Columbian asylum seeker.

Mark Strickland of Brown & Bain petitioned for prosecutorial discretion on behalf of a El Salvador man. After marshalling amazing resources on this man’s behalf, Mark successfully persuaded ICE to grant his petition and not press charges against him.

Anthony Pelino of Pelino & Ternieden assisted a Guatemalan man pass his “reasonable fear” interview before a ICE asylum officer. As a result he is now eligible to apply for asylum in front of an immigration judge. Anthony plans to continue with the case.

Nancy Jo Merritt and Sherida Colvin of Fennemore Craig successfully represented a Sudanese “lost boy” in his refugee adjustment case in immigration court. Bringing in an impressive array of experts on country conditions and post traumatic stress disorder to testify in court, Nancy Jo and Sherida convinced the judge to rule in favor of the client’s application.

Anne Wurth of Raven & Awerkamp PC and Jessica Hately of Fennemore Craig filed a temporary restraining order and motion for reconsideration in Federal District Court for an Ecuadorian girl abandoned by her mother. The District Judge refused to force immigration to allow the girl to enter Dependency Court proceedings, so she returned to Ecuador.

Naomi Schindel of Bryan Cave successfully represented a Guatemalan boy who was granted asylum on appeal to the BIA.

Sandra Sanders of Steptoe & Johnson represented an abused Guatemalan boy in his petition for a SIJ visa. He ultimately decided not to pursue his case and returned to Guatemala.

Maria Salapska of Brown & Bain successfully persuaded ICE to grant prosecutorial discretion for a client from the Philippines, a U.S. army veteran of the Gulf War and Somalia, who was facing deportation for a single conviction for drug possession. This relief is an extraordinary and rare measure which ICE only grants in the most compelling cases.

With the help of his legal assistant Annie Jin, Peter Culp of Squire, Sanders & Dempsey continues his superb work on behalf of individuals who are languishing in longterm detention despite a Supreme Court ruling mandating their release. He has assisted in a number of individual cases and prepared extensive pro se materials for individuals to use on their own in federal court.

Ellen Peters of Fennemore Craig assisted a Guatemalan man with his application for asylum and withholding of removal. The immigration judge granted him relief from removal. However the BIA overturned the decision on appeal.

Emily Chang of Greenberg Traurig worked on the appeal.

Alejandro Perez of Latham & Watkins LLP successfully represented a Guatemalan abused child who was granted asylum on appeal to the BIA. Ultimately, however, the child decided to return home to assist his sick mother.

Solo practioner Michael Franquinha represented a Honduran child in his asylum case which involved a novel legal argument (former gang members as members of a particular social group). Unfortunately, the immigration judge denied his application for relief.

Allon Stabinsky of Latham & Watkins LLP submitted a BIA brief for a Honduran street child who was granted asylum. The BIA affirmed ICE’s appeal and Allon is continuing to represent the child before the 9th circuit.

Dewitt Brown of Latham & Watkins LLP submitted a BIA brief for a Honduran street child who was granted asylum. The BIA affirmed ICE’s appeal and Dewitt is continuing to represent the child before the 9th circuit.

Brian Coolidge of Latham & Watkins LLP successfully assisted a Guatemalan man in the 9th circuit.
represented a Guatemalan street child who had lived on his own since the age of 7. He was granted asylum on appeal to the BIA.

Solo practitioner Rex Leung represented a Chinese child in her asylum proceedings until she was released to family.

David Mascari of Latham & Watkins LLP successfully represented a Guatemalan street child and her baby. They were granted asylum on appeal to the BIA.

Anita Sinha of The Northwest Immigrant Rights Project assisted a Guatemalan street child to apply for a SIJ visa. Ultimately, he won asylum on appeal to the BIA and his SIJ visa application was withdrawn.

Christopher Gatewood of Hunton & Williams LLP is representing a Guatemalan boy severely abused by his father. He was granted consent to enter dependency court proceedings and Chris is representing him in his application for an SIJ visa.

John Henning of Lewis & Roca LLP is representing a Guatemalan girl who was granted asylum with the help of John’s representation. ICE appealed her case and John is continuing to represent her on appeal.

Leonard Aragon of Gammage and Burnham represented an abused Guatemalan boy. Leonard filed a TRO in federal court after ICE denied consent for him to enter dependency court proceedings. Although the boy was not able to win a Special Immigrant Juvenile Visa, he bonded out after his 18th birthday.

Frances Haynes and Alex Oses of Lewis & Roca LLP filed a TRO in Federal District Court for a Guatemalan boy court after ICE denied consent for him to enter dependency court proceedings. Frances and Alex Oses were ultimately successful in getting him released to foster care and winning consent.

Solo practitioner Otilia Diaz and Margarita Silva of Navidad and Leal successfully represented a Liberian man in his refugee adjustment case. He had been admitted as a refugee and never adjusted his status to permanent resident. They were successful in securing his green card and his release from detention.

Barbara Occhiuzzi of Latham & Watkins LLP represented a Guatemalan girl and her baby, who were granted asylum with their appeal to the BIA. The girl returned to Guatemala before the BIA reviewed the Judge’s decision.

Michael Osborne and Alexandra Buckner of Shook Hardy & Bacon are representing a Guatemalan boy severely abused by his father. He was granted asylum and they are representing him on appeal.

Anthony Pelino of Pelino & Ternieden represented a Columbian in his application for asylum and withholding of removal. He lost before the immigration judge.

Cesar Ternieden of Pelino & Ternieden successfully represented a Laotian man in his refugee adjustment application.

Cesar Ternieden of Pelino & Ternieden represented a Philippino man on appeal to the BIA, arguing that his conviction was not a deportable charge under immigration law. He lost at the BIA; Cesar is continuing his representation in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Emily Chang and Al Arpad of Fennemore Craig represented Mr. M, a young man from the Ivory Coast seeking asylum after his family was killed in civil war. Since winning the case, Emily and Al have continued to support him and helped him start his life over in his new country.
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Laura Lobianco – Legal services
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Mission Statement
The Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project, Inc., “The Florence Project,” provides holistic, free legal services to immigrants, refugees, and U.S. citizens detained by the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Arizona for immigration processing. The Project serves men, women, and children, including those with mental health and social service needs. The Project advocates for a more just and efficient judicial system for individuals in immigration detention, and believes that everyone should understand their rights and options under immigration law and have access to legal counsel. Although the government assists indigent criminal defendants and civil litigants through public defenders and legal aid attorneys, it does not provide attorneys for people facing deportation. The Project strives locally and nationally to address this inequity.

About the Florence Project
There are four main programs: the Florence “Justice and Efficiency” Model, the Eloy Pro Se Model, the Detained Immigrant and Refugee Children’s Initiative, and the Integrated Social Services Program. Rooted in its direct legal services, the Project has created “Know Your Rights” videos and self-defense packets on rights and remedies as an educational resource for non-profit service providers and detained people nationwide. Nationally, the Florence Project advocates for positive change in ICE and EOIR policies and practices towards those detained and serves as a resource development and training center for detention program “best practices”. The Florence Project undertakes its national advocacy through its membership in the Detention Watch Network, a coalition of more than 100 nonprofit organizations working with this fastest growing U.S. incarcerated population of 200,000 immigration detainees annually.