For years, the Florence Project has assisted women fleeing gender-based violence, specifically domestic violence (DV). Despite the advocacy of immigration attorneys in seminal cases such as Matter of R-A-, it has been difficult for domestic violence survivors to be recognized as a particular social group for asylum purposes. However, on August 26, 2014, the legal landscape changed with Matter of A-R-C-G-G, 26 I&N Dec. 388 (BIA 2014). For the first time, the Board of Immigration Appeals issued a published, precedential decision recognizing a victim of domestic violence to be a member of a particular social group composed of “married women in Guatemala who are unable to leave their relationship.” We at the Florence Project and advocates around the country hope that this will pave the way for many more DV survivors to win asylum. Although it continues to be difficult to win these cases, we are hopeful that this recent decision will signal the increased recognition of gender based violence for asylum claims.

Here on the ground, the Florence Project remains committed to assisting DV survivors with their legal cases. Our focus continues to include assistance with completing asylum applications, preparation for individual merits hearings, and finding pro bono placements for our clients both before the Immigration Judge and on appeal. However, given the large numbers of women seeking asylum based on DV and more general, gender-based violence, we have started implementing workshops in order to provide assistance to a larger number of women at the same time. The workshop, which currently runs about 3-4 hours, includes general information about the asylum process, but focuses on teaching women to articulate the violence they suffered. For a variety of reasons, including discomfort, shame, and lack of knowledge, women often only mention beatings and other physical harm when questioned about their abuse. Therefore, a key part of the workshop is a discussion and participatory activity, to help women identify the multiple forms of violence they suffered including sexual, physical, emotional, and economic violence as well as the ways in which they were treated like property, to help prepare their testimony. The workshop also discusses gathering...continued on page 3
The increase of immigrant children crossing our border in the summer of 2014 was heavily covered by local, national, and international media. Images of children being apprehended in the desert by Border Patrol and huddled in processing centers are permanently etched in our collective memories. But over six months after this initial crisis, what has happened to these children who crossed our southern border, escaping violence in search of a better life?

The Florence Project has worked with unaccompanied immigrant children for the past 15 years. For years, these children have been coming to our borders, seeking protection from war, increasing gang violence, domestic abuse at home, human trafficking, labor exploitation, extreme poverty, and/or to reunite with family members. At many times, it is not a single factor but a combination of factors that propels children to take the perilous journey north. They leave their homes and risk everything to come to the U.S., where they are put in immigration proceedings. Many of these children qualify for relief from deportation that would allow them to remain in the U.S. lawfully, but fail to obtain relief because of lack of access to legal counsel. Children are not provided with government-appointed attorneys in immigration proceedings, and fighting deportation is not easy. Our Immigration Court system is adversarial and more often than not, even an English-speaking professional will be left perplexed by the complexity and harshness of our laws.

The Florence Project Children’s Program has been providing legal services for unaccompanied minors detained in Arizona for years. However, once released from detention, many children were left to continue fighting their deportation on their own. Even when many private attorneys in Arizona volunteered to take cases pro bono (free of charge), the need greatly surpassed their kind-ness.

Because of the increased need, the Florence Project sought funding to provide services for children released to the Phoenix area. Last fall, due to funding from just-
ASSISTING WOMEN WITH GENDER-BASED CLAIMS

...CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

and submitting supporting documents and includes a mock merits hearing to prepare women for the types of intrusive questions that may arise during the hearing.

Thus far we have held three rounds of workshops with approximately 20-25 women each. We have collected feedback through anonymous evaluations, and the response has been extremely positive. When asked to rate the workshop on a scale of 1, being not useful, to 5, being very useful, women have overwhelming rated the workshop a 5. Women were also asked which part of the workshop was their favorite or the most useful, and which was the least. Again, the commentary was overwhelmingly positive, and we will continue to offer the workshops, as staff capacity allows. The Florence Project is actively seeking funding to ensure that these workshops remain a permanent component of our work, and so that we can increase representation of asylum seekers.

WOMEN WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE WORKSHOPS SAID:

“Los casos de violencia que hay, que hemos pasado, y hay veces que no nos dábamos cuenta, nos explicaron de la mejor manera y me pareció muy útil para mi caso.”

“The types of violence that exist and that we have experienced—there are times when we don’t realize [that it is violence], you explained it to us in the best way and it seemed very useful for my case.”

“La dramatización [fue la parte más útil] porque me guiaron como actuar en el día de mi corte.”

“The dramatization [was the most useful part], because it guided me on how to act on the day of my court.”

“Para mi todas la platicas fueron útil y nos sirvió de mucha formas.”

“For me, all of the discussions were useful and they helped in various ways.”

“La parte más útil para mi fue cuando hablaron como entregar los pruebas para la corte final.”

“The most useful part for me was when we discussed how to submit evidence for the final hearing.”

CELEBRATE WITH US!

Join us for a benefit concert celebrating the Florence Project’s 25th Anniversary!

Clandestino, a Phoenix monthly Latino music event, will host a benefit concert with L.A.-based band Chicano Batman! Not to be missed! The event will be held April 25th at the Pressroom in Phoenix. Please check www.firrp.org for more information.

Tickets are $15 in advance, and $20 at the door.

We are also organizing a special 25th anniversary reception to honor our devoted pro bono attorneys and volunteers at Lewis Roca Rothgerber, on June 11, 2015. We hope to bring together volunteer alumni as well as Florence Project staff alumni to commemorate 25 years of their service to the Project. More details for this event will be announced as they become available.
A routine traffic stop can result in an immigrant parent losing custody of their U.S. citizen child. This is a reality faced by many immigrant parents who have been detained by Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) and do not have a family plan in place—a plan that includes an alternate, legally registered guardian for their children, in case of detention or deportation. The increased implementation of local and national anti-immigrant policies and increased police-ICE collaboration, including detaining parents if they cannot produce proof of legal status at routine traffic stops, has motivated the Florence Project to work with community members to create materials that help parents keep custody of their children.

In collaboration with the law firm Steptoe & Johnson, social worker Laurie Melrood, and other volunteer lawyers and advocates in our community, the Florence Project created a bilingual manual titled “What If I’m Picked Up By I.C.E. in Arizona?: Making a Family Plan.” The manual, written as a popular education guide, serves as a practical tool for undocumented immigrant parents, and guides them through creating a family protection plan to preserve their parental rights in the event that they are apprehended by I.C.E. Through partnerships with community groups in Arizona, we have carried out approximately 15 workshops in Tucson and Phoenix, with families developing actual family plans during each workshop. The overall goal is to empower parents to be their own advocates in navigating the child welfare system, emphasizing steps they can take to avoid children entering the state protective services system, run by the Department of Child Safety (DCS).

In collaboration with DCS and community partners, ICE has a best-practices policy to follow when immigrant parents are detained. However, the immigration detention system and child welfare systems each have their own priorities, deadlines, and complexities, and it can be difficult to navigate the different systems. This can result in parents losing custody of their children while they are inside a detention center or deported from the United States. The most crucial moment in deciding the fate of a child happens at the moment of their parent’s apprehension. If a child is present at the scene and there is no one readily available to take care of the child, an ICE agent may use their discretion to call DCS. This can have grave consequences, seeing as how once a child enters DCS, parents are given a very tight window to comply with a strict case plan to regain custody of their children. If a parent is in an immigration detention center, isolated with limited access to phones and family support, it is very difficult for a parent to communicate and comply, which can result in the termination of parental rights.

The practical steps laid out in the manual help parents feel empowered and motivated to stand up to a challenging system, and create a plan to keep families together. By partnering with community based organizations, our goal is to have organizations share these strategies with other members and networks, to widen the reach in the community.

Please contact Jordan Weiner, Children’s Program Legal Assistant, at jweiner@firrp.org if you would like to schedule a training in your community. The manual is available on our website, at http://www.firrp.org/resources/prose/parentalrights/
The fall and spring has brought many changes for our Florence Project family! THALASSA (TALLY) KINGSNORTH said goodbye to the Florence Project in February after 7 years at the Project. A special thank you to Tally for sharing her wisdom and kindness with us for so long! Tally continues to be a resource for the Florence Project.

We had a couple more goodbyes in the Florence office this past fall and spring. JESSICA CASTELLANOS left the Florence Project in February to work with the immigrant & refugee pro bono program as a Practice Attorney at Winston & Strawn in Los Angeles, and MELISSA RIVERA also bid farewell in January to pursue new career options. LAUREN DASSE, Executive Director, tied the knot in October, and NORIANA COLON-MERCADO, Children’s Program Staff Attorney, was married in February. Congratulations to Lauren and Noriana! We’ve also added a couple of new additions to our Florence Project family!

With the expansion of the Children’s Program, we welcomed new legal assistants KIRA ARANOW, ELIZABETH GARCIA, YESENIA RAMALES PEREZ, and MARTIN RUIZ. In addition, we welcomed BRENDA GALVAN AGUIRRE, justice AmeriCorps Fellow, ADRIANA MORENO NEVAREZ and MINDY BUTLER-CHRISTENSEN, Children’s Program Staff Attorneys, and MICHELE RUDY, Released Children’s Specialist, to the Children’s Program. Also, ROCIO CASTAÑEDA became the Supervising Attorney for the Children’s Program Released Team, and VANESSA PINEDA became the Children’s Program Pro Bono Coordinator.

We’ve had a lot of goodbyes, hellos, and reasons to celebrate this past fall and spring. We are excited for the continued expansion of our talented team, and we know that those who have moved on are always a part of the Florence Project family!!
Thank you to the following wonderful people who volunteered their time and talent to the Florence Project and our clients during the 2014 calendar year!

— TO OUR 2014 VOLUNTEERS —

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— AND TO OUR 2014 FLORENCE PROJECT SUPPORTERS —

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The Florence Project’s work is carried out primarily through four programs: the Florence “Justice and Efficiency” Model, the Eloy Pro Se Model, the Immigrant and Refugee Children’s 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.” The Florence Project undertakes its national advocacy through membership in the Detention Watch Network, a coalition of more than 100 nonprofit organizations that work with the 200,000 men, women, and children who are held in the U.S. annually as immigration detainees.

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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