

YOUNG CENTER FOR IMMIGRANT CHILDREN'S RIGHTS



Annual Report 2021

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A Message from the Executive Director



About a year ago, I stepped into the Executive Director role at the Young Center. The journey since has been challenging, full of learning, and inspiring. Growing up in El Salvador without my parents, who'd fled to seek refuge in the U.S., and then reuniting with them at the age of ten, I'd have never imagined that one day I would be leading one of the foremost organizations serving immigrant children. To have been an undocumented child in this country and then become a leader in service of children in whose shoes I once walked is surreal to me. To give back to the vibrant and brilliant immigrant community I come from—resilient change-makers from all over the world who are not only building their own lives again, but also strengthening our country with their stories, skills, and voices—is an honor and a journey of growth for me.

We started 2021 with hope that the Biden-Harris administration would turn the tide on anti-immigrant policies and restore our asylum system. A year later, we find ourselves grappling with the same Trump-era policies of immigration deterrence. Families and asylum-seekers are still turned away at our border without an opportunity to seek protection. More than a million people seeking refuge have been turned away under the pretense that they pose a public health risk that business travelers or tourists don't. Families are still separated and traumatized by these unlawful policies that deny people their legal and human right to seek legal protection from violence and persecution.

In the face of inhumane immigration policies, the Young Center community has banded together to say, "This is not what we want our country to be. We can be better than this." Last year, hundreds of you volunteered as Child Advocates, making sure children who are separated from their families have someone by their side as they navigate our complex immigration system. You baked cookies, ran marathons, and held dance classes to raise funds for the Young Center. You created spaces for Young Center staff to share the mission of our organization with your classrooms, book groups, and communities. You donated to help continue our work and strengthen our staff. You helped raise more than \$1 million during our end of year and Giving Tuesday fundraising campaigns!

Your solidarity is inspiring, especially given how difficult 2021 was for all of us. From losing loved ones and community members to COVID to the continued isolation, we all experienced forms of grief. We had to juggle new responsibilities and adjust to new, painful realities. What has helped me get through the year is our Young Center community and standing for humane reception policies and processes for immigrants in a space of no fear. Thank you for continuing to be a part of our push for change. As we continue the fight for immigrant children seeking safety, for families separated by our government's policies, for a more humane immigration system, we will continue to need you at our side.

With Gratitude,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Gema".

Gladis E. Molina Alt
Executive Director

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About the Young Center

Mission


The Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights protects and advances the rights and best interests of immigrant children according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and state and federal law.

Our Work

The Young Center is a human rights organization that advocates for the rights and best interests of immigrant children. Young Center attorneys and social workers, along with bilingual and bicultural volunteers, are appointed as Child Advocate by the Department of Health and Human Services. Our role is to advocate for their best interests—from custody and release to the ultimate decision about whether the child will be allowed to remain in the United States. Our goal is to change both immigration policy and practice so that immigrant children are recognized first as children and their best interests are considered in every decision.

Highlights from 2021

FEBRUARY
The Biden administration launched the Taskforce for the Reunification of Families. The Young Center is among the nonprofits advising the Taskforce.



MARCH
We secured a contract with the Office of Refugee and Resettlement (ORR) to be appointed as independent Child Advocate to more than 1,000 children in federal custody over 12 months.




MAY
Hundreds of Young Center supporters gathered virtually for the organization's annual benefit and to celebrate Young Center Founder Maria Woltjen before her retirement.

JUNE
Gladis Molina Alt stepped into the role of Executive Director at the Young Center.



OCTOBER
We premiered Young Zheng, a short film telling the story of one of the first children we served and after whom the Young Center is named.



NOVEMBER
We visited Reynosa, Mexico, to meet with asylum-seekers trapped across the border and answer their questions.



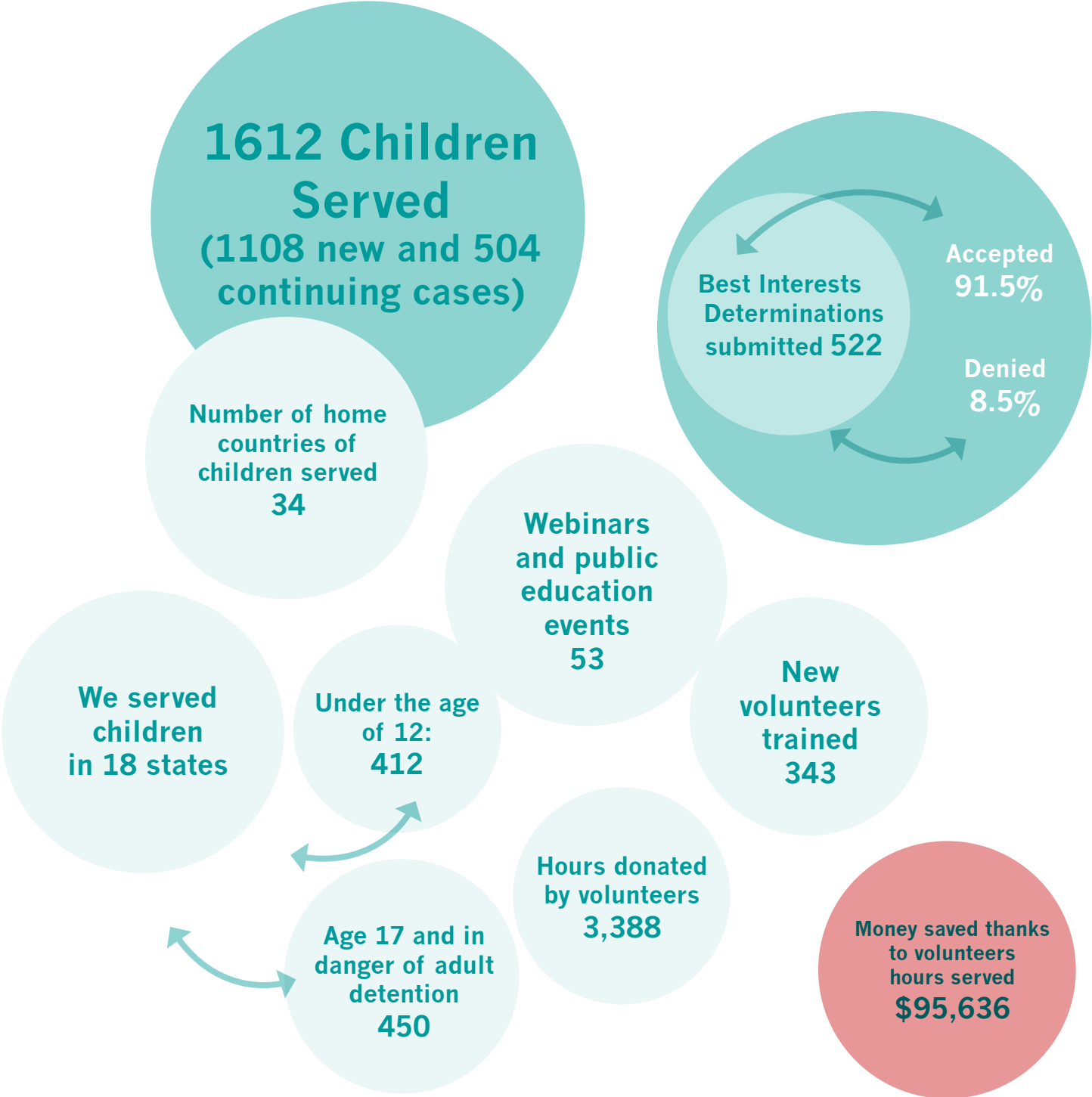
SEPTEMBER
Young Center supporters in nine cities joined the inaugural Walk with Waymakers to raise funds for and awareness about the organization.



DECEMBER
We announced the Elizabeth Frankel Fellowship Program to honor our late Associate Director and child's rights advocate and help train the next generation of advocates for children.



2021 By the Numbers



Carlos, who grew up in an Indigenous community in Central America, arrived at our border with his older brother to seek safety from violence in their community. Immigration officials separated the brothers, placing Carlos in a children’s facility and his adult brother in immigration jail. According to our immigration laws, the government separates children who arrive at the border with a non-parent or non-guardian family member. Carlos was devastated by this unexpected separation and was placed at a treatment facility where they attempted to provide him with psychosocial support. The attempts did not bear fruit because the facility could not find a provider who would be able to communicate in Carlos’s language. Meanwhile, the government released his brother to their older sister, who lives in the United States. Young Center Child Advocates quickly went to work. We advocated that because the facility he was at could not provide Carlos with the appropriate mental health services he needed, he would be safer and healthier with his family and community. Our advocacy resulted in the government approving his release from custody and reunification with family where he could begin to recover from multiple traumas.

*Child’s name changed to protect his privacy.



“Every child has the right to feel safe, supported, and heard. As a Latina educator, my heart was overwhelmed with sadness about how unaccompanied and separated children are treated. I turned that sadness into action by becoming a Child Advocate. It is a privilege to be part of a support system for immigrant children.”
Andrea, Young Center-Houston Volunteer



“My dream for every immigrant child we work with is that they will have the love, care, and opportunities they need to grow into their own dreams.”
Meg, Young Center-Harlingen Volunteer

Behind the Numbers

States where children were served:

• Arizona-California-Colorado-Florida-Illinois-Indian-Maryland-Michigan-New Jersey
New York-Pennsylvania-South Carolina-Texas-Tennessee-Washington-Washington, D.C.
West Virginia-Virginia

Best Interests Determinations (BIDs)

- We submit oral and written BIDs to government agencies, staff at government facilities where children are placed, immigration judges and asylum officers, and other stakeholders who make decisions about children in immigration proceedings.
- BIDs are child-centered and rooted in state child welfare law, federal immigration law, international human rights instruments, and the evolving science of child and adolescent development.
- We advocate on issues such as children's physical/mental health, detention conditions, placement, release, reunification with family, access to support services, permanency, safe repatriation, and more.
- To finalize a BID, our staff may take between 20 to 60 hours, including time to meaningfully involve children and ensure we authentically represent their wishes and needs.

Volunteers

- Undergo screening and intensive training
- Meet weekly with a child to support and accompany them
- Receive supervision and support from Young Center staff
- Participate in engagement, appreciation, and educational events
- Access resources to enhance work with children and prevent secondary trauma

Services Provided for Every Child by Our Child Advocate Program

- Depending on the complexity of a child's case, we may serve as their Child Advocate from a few weeks to several years.
- We identify a volunteer Child Advocate who pairs well with each child's needs based on the volunteer's language ability, availability, and background.
- The Child Advocate meets weekly with the child (in person or virtually) to get to know the child through child-led activities, such as play, art, and games, and other child-friendly techniques.
- As the child shares their story, the Child Advocate works with our supervising social workers and attorneys to advocate for their best interests and elevate their voice when stakeholders make decisions on their behalf.

- We connect the majority of children we serve with legal representation at low or no cost, to ensure the best possible outcome for their legal claim.
- We help children make informed decisions and advocate for them to receive trauma-informed, culturally and linguistically sensitive support services while in immigration proceedings.
- We facilitate children's reunification with family and connect released children with supportive services, including educational, medical, and mental health care, in their communities.
- If a child faces deportation or seeks voluntary return to their home country, we coordinate with international providers to conduct safety assessments and international home studies as needed to ensure the child's safety upon return.
- For 17-year-olds with no family and who are soon to age out of government custody, we connect them to community-based housing programs that help them transition into adulthood, preventing their transfer to adult immigration detention.

Additional Services

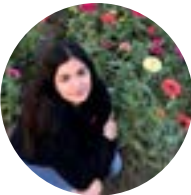
- If a child is at risk of deportation or seeking voluntary return to their home country, we coordinate with international providers to conduct safety assessments and international home studies as needed to ensure the child will be safe upon return.
- For 17-year-olds with no family or sponsors and who are soon to age out of protective custody, we connect them to community-based housing programs that help them transition into adulthood. This prevents children's transfer to adult immigration detention by ICE.
- For medically fragile children, we connect them and their families with transportation to hospital treatment and file applications for free or subsidized medical treatment and medication.
- We coordinate with other non-profits and file applications for additional support services including housing, food, healthcare, toiletries, and other non-food items.
- We connect families to education services in their area.
- We make sure each child has a continued relationship with their legal service provider, to ensure the best possible outcome for their legal claim.



Honoring Young Center Volunteers

Our work is possible because of the generous support of volunteer Child Advocates around the country who donate thousands of hours to accompanying children as they face immigration proceedings. Here are the volunteers who agreed to share their names in this report. We are grateful to each and every volunteer.

Sapna Advani • Karla Agueros • Cristian Alvarez-Martinez • Marilu Andon • Beverly Ann Ortiz • Gabriela Arellano • Keith Armstrong • Shahira Asadi Popal • Gabriela Atkinson • Wendy Auxiliadora Rodriguez • Andres Avila • Laura M. Ayala Reyes • Debborah Bain • Wanda Baker • Irvin Banda • Veronica Bazan • Susanne Beilmann • Ryba Bhullar • Natalya Brown • Sascha Burns • Maria Campillo • Mayra F. Cardenas • Sergio Castellon • Margaret Castro • Erika Chapa • Michelle Connelly • Miguel Conner • Leesandra Contreras • Vincent Corbett • Valeria Coronado • Zoe Couacaud • Lupita Cruz • John Cruz • Megan Danielle Serrano • Kathleen Davin • Tatiana Daza • Ashanty De Luna • Kaitlin Decker • Billie Díaz • Ivanov Díaz • Michelle Duffy • Grecia Elizabeth Rivera Gonzalez • Maria Elosua • Tessa Engel • Maryam Faridani • Brianda Felix • Mary Frances Doyle • Janette Galvez • Fernando Garcia • Martha Garcia Barragan • Estefania Gil • Barbara Goldstein • Oswaldo Gomez • Berenice Gonzalez • Jessica González • Talia González • Andrea González Sotelo • Dulce González-Estévez • Judy Gordon • Jill Gort • Mariah Grant • Elizabeth Grund • Daniel Gutiérrez Mena • Roseangela Hartford • Nicolle Hernandez • Nancy Hirschhorn • Ana Holmback • Víctor Hugo Silva • Golnar Jahanmir • Parto Jalili • (Roger) Ted Johnson • Angela Juister • Harlinah Katz Lopez • Emma Kemler • Jennifer Kevorkian • Oghay Kherzai • Erika Klotz • Isyemille Lara • Laura Lehman • Paulina Leon • Taylor A. Lifka • Karen Linares Quintos • Iran Lisser • Jessica Logan • Erin Mackinney • Pía Madanes • Rosa Maria Salgado Ponce • Yesenia Martinez • Meghan Marx • Carolina Mendoza • Cristina Meza • Lia Mojica • Magali Montes • Mia Moraru • Mary Moreland • Danny Mulé • Cecilia Najera • Izébel Nani Flores • Melissa Negrón • Sarah Nelson • Sara Neuder • Greta Olivares • Fabian Ornelas • Veronica Oro • Jorge Ortiz • Teresa Ortiz • Lynelle Palencia • Pallavi Pandey • Maria Paniagua • Sofia Paola Perez • Joseph Pearson • Maleni Pellegrino • Nadia Perez • Nathalie Pierroz • Nikou Pishevar • Karla Ponce Ghassemi • Ebly Posada • Sara Poursafar • Marina Quintanilla • Alejandra Quiroz • Yolanda M. Ramos • Angela Remus • Reva Resstack • Rosa Reyes • Sydney Ribera • Adisa Rifha • Maria Roció Enriquez • Elizette Rodriguez • Hector Rodriguez • Ximena Rodríguez • Dulce Romero • Erick Romig • Joanna Rosas • Emily Rosen • Maria Roxana Loza • Bernie Salazar • Thania Sanchez • Jorge Sandoval • Carrie Scott • Anthony Sernus • Gabrielle Shaw • Elisa Sipols • Mary Slayton • Jennifer Smith • Lorna Solis • Velia Soto • Sasha Stern • Diane Stockwell • Fatima Talebi • Berenice G. Tapia • Becky Teiwes • Rachel Thune Real • Vanessa Torres • Danielle Turner-Marshall • Windy Vasquez • Carina Vecchi • Gabriela Villalobos • Samantha Villegas • Angela M. Watts • John F. Weeda • Norma Yannet De Leon • Allison Yates • Zohel Zabih • Denisse Zecca • Alice Zhang



“I signed up as a Young Center Child Advocate because I know that if I were alone in an unfamiliar country, I would want someone to offer me a sense of safety and hope.”
-Tracy, Young Center-DC Volunteer

Cristina, a 17 year-old transgender teen, lost her mother when she was a small child and was raised by her doting grandmother. After her grandmother’s passing, Cristina lived in an orphanage on the U.S.-Mexico border. She worked several restaurant jobs and earned enough to buy herself clothes and cosmetics that affirmed her gender. Living without a supportive family and community, Cristina was sexually trafficked in exchange for hormonal treatment, shelter, and food. When she realized the trafficking put her life in danger, Cristina fled to the United States. Upon entering the country, she was taken into government custody and appointed a Young Center Child Advocate. During their weekly meetings, Cristina quickly showed how much of an advocate she was for herself. Early on, Cristina shared with her Child Advocate that she was gay and trans. This demonstrated the level of trust our Child Advocate was able to build with Cristina in such a short amount of time; Cristina had not shared this information with anyone else. The Young Center Child Advocate successfully advocated for Cristina’s acceptance in the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) program because she did not have family here in the United States who could sponsor her release from government custody. Through the URM program, she was placed in a home with another trans teen girl and today she is thriving. Through URM, Cristina also has access to support services, including indirect financial support for housing, food, medical care, and other necessities, until her 21st birthday.

*Child’s name changed to protect her privacy.



Child Advocacy Program Report

The Young Center’s Child Advocacy Program is the only program in the United States through which independent Child Advocates are appointed to immigrant children who arrive at our borders alone or are separated from their families by government officials. Independent Child Advocates are tasked with protecting the best interests—safety, wishes, well-being—of children as they face the U.S. immigration system. We work with each individual child to accompany and support them, learn their stories, identify their wishes and best interests, and advocate for them by submitting Best Interests Determinations to government agencies, facilities where children are placed, and all other stakeholders who make decisions about them.

In 2021, we worked with more unaccompanied and separated immigrant children than any prior year. 1 in 4 children we served was under the age of 12, navigating our complex and at times inhumane immigration system in the United States by themselves. 27 percent of the children served were 17 years or older, making them vulnerable to adult immigration detention with ICE upon their 18th birthday. Among the 1,108 children whose cases we were appointed to in 2021, 119 were pregnant or parenting teens, 66 had a disability, and 58 were separated from a family member or caretaker at our borders by immigration officials. As always, in 2021, we took on the hardest cases and fought for children’s every right: the right to their identity, to be with their families, to be free of detention, to access the services they need, to have counsel, and more. Young Center attorneys, social workers, and volunteer Child Advocates left no stone unturned to ensure every child we’re appointed to is heard and their best interests are protected.



“As an immigrant, I decided to work with immigrant children because I felt it was my duty. Although I could hardly understand the hardships they had been through, I had a sense of where they were coming from. Over the past two years, these kids have changed my perspective about what really matters in life and have shown me the true meaning of resilience.” -Ana, Young Center-New York Volunteer

Serving Children from Afghanistan

Amongst the tens of thousands of Afghans evacuated since the end of August, hundreds of unaccompanied Afghan children have passed through federal custody. As of December 2021, the government placed unaccompanied or separated Afghan children in federal custody in Illinois, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, Texas, Arizona, New York, and Los Angeles, with the largest numbers concentrated in facilities in Chicago, New York, and Virginia. The Young Center received referrals for a total of 197 Afghan children and was appointed as independent Child Advocate to 58 of those children by the end of the year. We actively recruited and are screening dozens of interested volunteers who speak Afghan languages (Farsi/Dari, Pashtu, Uzbeki). In 2021, we trained and assigned 35 volunteers who are linguistically and culturally compatible to work with Afghan children.

These cases of Afghan children and youth are complex and unlike anything we’ve ever seen. First, many children left family behind in Afghanistan and arrived here with no existing family or potential sponsors in the United States, and the federal system has few Afghan or Afghan American approved foster families or other culturally and linguistically appropriate homes to care for children. Other children were separated from family at the airport or at initial landing sites and were transported to different locations from those with whom they fled. Some adult family members are in Europe (Germany, France) or in Doha, Qatar. Second, numerous Afghan children arrived without identifying papers (common for refugees fleeing in a state of emergency), plus many do not have last names (common in Afghanistan) and do not know their Gregorian calendar date of birth.

In some cases, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was assigning last names and dates of birth at random – further complicating children’s cases and chances for reunification. Finally, married girls (under 18) were being separated from their adult husbands, and in some cases even from their infants/young children, because they don’t have civil proof of marriage. However, in Afghanistan—like some states in the United States—the legal age of marriage for girls is 16, and marriages are often conducted by religious officials who may not register them. In other cases, girls were married immediately before the Taliban takeover as protection from forced marriage to Taliban fighters. Regardless of the circumstances, a policy of separating teenagers from their spouses has caused significant trauma and complicated reunifications.

We’ve advocated for children’s reunification with immediate family to be a top priority for the U.S. government. In our work with individual children, we’ve advocated for children to reunite with existing family members or relatives in the United States and fought for culturally responsible placement for children awaiting more long-term housing, such as safe group homes for teens, or foster care. We’ve also advocated for children’s international reunification with their families. We’ve also worked with community organizations to build networks of support for Afghan children, find mental health experts who speak their languages, and connect them to culturally relevant experiences, such as visiting the local mosque and accessing traditional and halal food.



Tamana, a teenage girl from Afghanistan, was evacuated to the United States with her younger siblings in September. Once here, she was sent to an emergency intake center that lacked the cultural services she needed to feel safe and comfortable. A Young Center Child Advocate worked hard to secure Tamana and her young siblings' release to her older sister, who was evacuated separately and was living on a U.S. military base, so they could begin resettling in the United States together.

*Child's name changed to protect her privacy.



Training International Partners in Safe Repatriation

The Young Center's safe repatriation work informs best interests advocacy in many areas of a child's case when they are subject to deportation. We connect with experts in children's home countries to ensure we view the information from a culturally informed lens, and we work with partners in those countries to inform us about common practices or local systems children may have engaged with. The Safe Repatriation Team's work allows staff to connect with family members, gather critical documents for children's cases, develop and enhance repatriation plans for the reception and repatriation process, and support requests for immigration relief.

In 2021, the Young Center's Safe Repatriation Team expanded their network by conducting their first virtual training with local home study providers in El Salvador, Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras. The half-day hybrid training included both live workshops and asynchronous learning modules. Training participants learned about the Young Center's Child Advocate Program, the process unaccompanied immigrant children undergo from the moment we assign a Child Advocate to the completion of the child's safe repatriation, the impact of international home studies and safety assessments, and resources for our providers. The aim of the training was to increase support for and build community among our international providers. The Safe Repatriation Team's training successfully engaged 23 current and new home study providers.



Policy Program Report

The Young Center's policy team worked on a wide range of issues impacting children in 2021. We created a bilingual practice advisory on supporting Afghan children arriving in the United States for Afghan-American communities. We worked with the newly appointed administration to bring about the end of Trump-era policies that closed our borders and regulations that would have ended vital protections for children in government custody. We fought to end the administration's unlawful use of the Title 42 policy in direct advocacy with the White House and filed an amicus (friend of the court) brief in the Supreme Court arguing for an end to the Remain in Mexico policy. We won increasing support from federal agencies to end the practice of separating all children who arrive at the border with trusted family members, and we are now leading a coalition of organizations working with government officials to design a new procedure for reunifying some families at the border. We endorsed the Fair Day in Court for Kids Act of 2021 to ensure all children in immigration proceedings have an attorney. We built alliances on Capitol Hill, in the racial and social justice equity spaces, in the disability rights movements, among children's rights organizations, and with members of the press. Here were some of our key activities in 2021:

Continuing the FIGHT to End Title 42

The expulsion of asylum-seekers under Title 42 is a violation of both U.S. refugee and immigration law and the [United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees](#). Under Title 42, more than a million asylum-seekers have been turned away at our border without any opportunity to seek protection, based on the [false pretense that asylum-seekers pose a special public health threat](#). The policy no longer applies to unaccompanied children but children traveling with parents are still turned away. After this expulsion, families face immense risks, including violence, exploitation, kidnappings, and murder in makeshift border encampments. As a result many parents are forced to choose between staying with their children in dangerous places or separating and sending their children to the border alone to seek protection in the United States.

Since this policy was implemented in March 2020, the Young Center has been at the forefront of the fight to end it. We've worked with allies on the Hill, used social media and the press, and conducted public education efforts to call out the lie behind the policy (health experts agree asylum-seekers do not pose a particular threat to public health) and rally support for welcoming asylum-seekers. In June, we called on the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants to investigate the U.S. government's application of Title 42 and to call for the immediate end of Title 42. In September, our [Executive Director released a statement](#) calling for an immediate end to Title 42, highlighting its specific impact on Haitian families and other Black asylum-seekers. In November, a team of [Young Center staff visited Reynosa, Mexico](#) to meet with and answer questions from asylum-seeking families trapped at the border in collaboration with the Sidewalk School for Asylum Seekers.



Closing Emergency Facilities for Children

In early 2021, with an increasing number of children seeking protection at our border, the government opened emergency influx sites (EIS), so children would not be trapped in unsafe Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) stations for weeks on end. Before long, the government began to rely on EIS sites, which were intended as brief, temporary points of transitions, for long-term custody, with unacceptable standards of care. Children did not have access to critical services, including urgent medical and mental health support, and their basic needs were unmet in large, overcrowded, and insufficiently staffed emergency facilities. We advocated for a quick end to the use of these emergency facilities, many of which have since closed, and continued our fight to persuade the administration and Congress to redirect funding to smaller, community-based, child-centric placements for children awaiting reunification with family or transfer to foster homes.

Fighting the Delicensing of Facilities for Unaccompanied Children

Last summer, Texas stripped state licenses from facilities where ORR places unaccompanied children who are awaiting release to family. State licenses for children’s facilities help to ensure children receive appropriate care, are protected from abuse, and that facilities provide appropriate food, recreational, and educational services in a safe and hygienic environment. Stripping state licenses from facilities for children leaves them at risk of substandard conditions or unreported abuse. We’ve advocated with Texas-based allies, rang the alarm in the press through op-eds and interviews, and raised awareness about this issue at the national level through social media and advocacy with federal agencies, including the Department of Justice.

Advocating for Equitable Treatment for Children with Disabilities


Unaccompanied children with disabilities or medically complex cases need their families—or, when they don’t have family in the United States, access to long-term, home-based care—as much as any child. Yet, they often face much greater barriers to release from custody, especially with limited community-based services. To advance our vision of ending institutionalization and increasing family placements for these children, the Young Center added an experienced disability rights analyst to our policy team. Our advocacy has focused on identifying best practices from the disability rights community and advocating for high quality services upon a child’s reunification to accelerate the release of children with disabilities from federal custody and support to families caring for children. For the first time, disability rights are at the front and center in conversations with senior staff at the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), service providers, and immigration advocates.



Advocating to End the “Remain in Mexico” Policy

For more than two years, the Remain in Mexico policy has trapped more than 71,000 people, including tens of thousands of children in dangerous conditions in northern Mexico. Misnamed the “Migrant Protection Protocols” by the Trump administration, this policy forces people to wait in unsafe environments and with no access to attorneys for hearings on their asylum claims, which eventually take place by video in tent courts along the border. When the Biden administration ended the policy in early 2021, Texas, Missouri, and other states filed a lawsuit to keep it in operation, and a federal judge ordered the administration to reinstate the program. As the legal fight continued, a coalition of immigrant and children’s rights organizations led by the Young Center filed an amicus brief in the appeal before the 5th Circuit and the Supreme Court of the United States, respectively, in support of the government’s decision to terminate the policy. Our brief shared the [stories of individual children](#) whose lives and safety have been endangered by this dangerous policy. Despite these efforts, the policy was reinstated in December and remains the subject of litigation.

Juan is a five-year old boy who enjoys drawing and coloring. He came to the U.S.-Mexico border with his mother, seeking safety from threats to their life in their home country. Without giving them a chance to tell their story, border officials turned Juan and his mother away under the “Remain in Mexico” policy, which forces asylum-seekers to wait for a U.S. court date across the border. They were forced to live in an unsafe refugee encampment near the border indefinitely, hoping someday they would have a chance to pursue asylum in the United States. At the camp, Juan and his mother were kidnapped and held for two months. After that terrifying incident, and with no other option to keep her son safe, Juan’s mother sent him to the border alone to seek protection as an unaccompanied child. Once in government custody, a Young Center Child Advocate fought for Juan to be released to his mother’s fiancé until she was able join him in the United States.



*Child’s name changed to protect his privacy.



“I came to this country when I was 15 and I remember how lonely it felt as I was separated from my family and friends and did not understand the language. As a Child Advocate, I feel so thankful to have the opportunity to bring some warmth, hope and a smile to any child I get to visit.”
-Ana, Young Center-Phoenix Volunteer

Shining a Global Spotlight on Family Separation

In September, the Young Center in collaboration with the Center for the Human Rights of Children at Loyola University Chicago, submitted a report to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The report addressed the Trump administration’s systematic execution of family separation under the “Zero Tolerance” policy as a form of torture with long-lasting, and in many cases, permanent, impact on separated children’s physical, mental, emotional, and developmental well-being. The Special Rapporteur has stated that “the deprivation of liberty of migrant children based solely on their own or their parents’ migration status is never in the best interests of the child” and “may amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.” Our report argued that despite the universal prohibition against torture and ill treatment, the harm of family separation was, in fact, central to the design of the Trump administration’s “Zero Tolerance” policy to deter migration to the U.S.-Mexico border.

While the Biden administration has created a Task Force to enable the reunification of children separated from their parents four years ago, current policies continue to permit the separation of children from their parents based on spurious and racially charged allegations of criminal history. And more than 1,750 of the originally separated families remain apart, with the government continuing to debate the necessity of comprehensive support for every separated family. Our team is meeting regularly with the President’s Reunification Task force to recommend holistic services—from housing and employment to permanency—for all impacted children and their families, and to end policies that allow new families to be separated.

Moving Forward

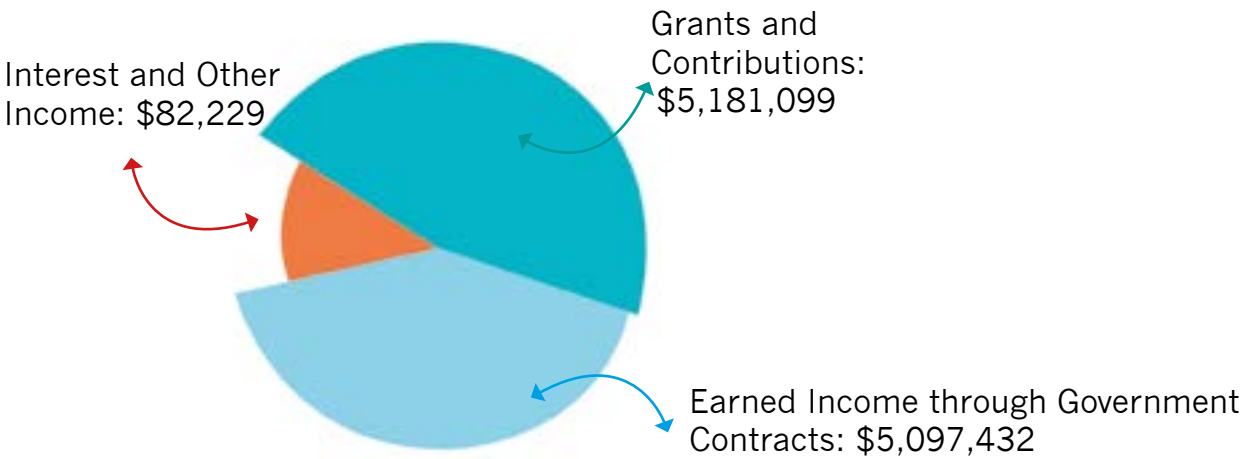
In 2022, we will continue the fight to end the unjust and unlawful policies of Title 42 and Remain in Mexico, and to persuade the government to close emergency sites and end institutional, congregate care settings for all immigrant children. We will continue to pursue accountability for family separations and fight to end any more separations that violate children’s right to family integrity. In meetings at the White House, on the Hill, with our sister organizations, and in collaboration with directly-impacted communities, we will fight to ensure everyone considers the best interests of children in all policy decisions— including children’s rights to safety, family integrity, liberty, development, identity—and critically, the right to be heard.



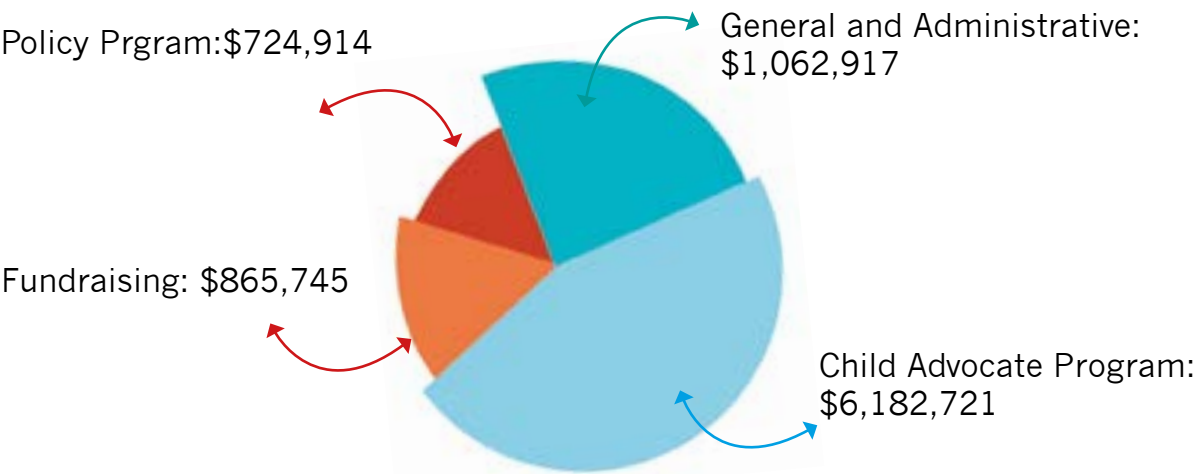
“As a Young Center Child Advocate, I get to be the voice I needed as a child. I hope that I can bring some comfort to the children I work with and emphasize that they are more than their immigration status.” -Jessica, Young Center-San Antonio Volunteer

Financials

Operating Revenue:



Operating Expenses:



Assets:

Net assets at beginning of year:	\$9,591,668
Increase in net assets:	\$1,820,213
Net assets with donor restrictions at year end:	\$1,001,087
Net assets without restrictions at year end:	\$10,410,794
Total net assets at end of year:	\$11,411,881

Board of Directors

Our Board of Directors is focused on improving equity. The current board is increasingly diverse: 53% of Young Center board members are women and 47% are people of color. We have reserved two positions for members who are not expected to meet the traditional board donation requirements. Several board members are immigrants, including one member who came to the U.S. as an unaccompanied child from Honduras.

Teresa Sullivan (Chair)
Frances de Pontes Peebles (Vice-Chair)
Julian Dibbell (Co-Vice Chair)
Lori Wittman (Treasurer)
Selma de Leon-Yznaga (Secretary)*
Kevin Angeles
Sandy Black**
Jane Byrne*
Jimena Catarivas Corbett
Linda Dakin Grimm**
Jonathan Frankel*
Elvis Garcia Callejas
Ahmet Hepdogan
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Remembering Elizabeth Frankel

In January 2021, we lost our Associate Director and children’s rights advocate Elizabeth Frankel. She joined the Young Center in late 2009 and not only fought for hundreds of children in immigration proceedings, reuniting separated families and ensuring children landed somewhere safe, but also single-handedly launched the Young Center’s office in Harlingen, Texas. She later expanded the Child Advocate program to six other cities across the country. As we continue our work, we will endeavor to uphold her legacy, her commitment to young people, to the truth, to collaborative but zealous advocacy, and her attention to detail in each case we undertake, in each protocol we develop, in each paper we write. We are so deeply grateful for and honored to have had the opportunity to work at her side.



In December, we launched the Elizabeth Frankel Fellowship Program to honor Liz. Each year, beginning in Summer 2022, the Fellowship will enable three law student Fellows to spend ten weeks training to advocate for children. The Fellows will serve as Child Advocates for individual children, and will also conduct legal research and writing, under the guidance of Young Center staff within the Child Advocate Program. Fellows will be based in New York City and have the opportunity to spend a week of the Fellowship Program in the Young Center’s Harlingen office to understand how immigration patterns, enforcement, and advocacy play out on the ground along the U.S.-Mexico border. We’re thankful to all who have contributed to the fund for this fellowship that honors Liz’s fighting spirit and her dedication to justice for children.

This Fellowship is made possible with the generous support of family members, friends, former students, and colleagues of Liz and honors Liz’s fighting spirit and her unwavering dedication to justice for children. The members of Liz Frankel’s family, Joan and Michael Frankel, Thomas and Katie Kasa, Sarah Frankel and Ben Kroger, Jonathan Frankel and Katherine Hunsberger would like to thank the many donors who have contributed to the Young Center’s Elizabeth Frankel Fellowship fund:

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We are deeply thankful to our community of supporters who come together for immigrant children. We’re particularly grateful to the Young Center Champions (names italicized below) who sustain our work with recurring donations. We also want to recognize all the donors who give on social media or other platforms, making a difference in the lives of immigrant children seeking safety. We cannot name all of you here, but we are deeply appreciative of your support, no matter the amount. Thank you.

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“My own experience immigrating as a child motivated me to become a Child Advocate. Many of these kids seeking safety in the United States come from difficult backgrounds and being able to be a guide in their transition to a better life is something that motivates me to keep volunteering.”
Juan, Young Center-LA Volunteer

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Front and Back Covers: “Always Come Home to Me” by Belle Yang. Artist-author Belle Yang makes her home in Carmel, California with her mother Laning. Her father Joseph, who walked out of war-torn China as a young man and is the hero of much of her work, died in 2019. Her website is belleyang.com, and her art is represented by Hawk Fine Arts in Pacific Grove, California (hawkfinearts.com). Amy Tan writes that Belle Yang has “created a world we can lose ourselves in.” Maxine Hong Kingston calls her “our Isaac Bashevis Singer and Marc Chagall.” Gifted as an artist and writer, she has written and illustrated two highly praised literary works, “Baba: A Return to China Upon My Father’s Shoulders” and “The Odyssey of a Manchurian.” She followed with the powerful graphic novel “Forget Sorrow.” She is also the author-artist of a dozen children’s books, including an autobiographical immigrant story told from a child’s point of view, “My Name Is Hannah.”



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