

A Little Light for Central American Children

“I am professor Benson. I am free lawyer, you don’t pay anything”. That phrase, in a rudimentary but well intention English, is the one that she repeats over and over to every girl or boy she sees on the entrance of the Immigration Court on 26 Federal Plaza, located on Broadway between Worth and Duane.

Every Friday at eight in the morning Lenni Benson approaches these immigrants children from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador and she offers to guide them through a legal process that is a true odyssey for these children.

Every year, they arrive to the U.S. by the thousand and many are detained upon arrival after a grueling journey, sometimes walking alone and barefoot through the mountain areas of Central America and Mexico. "From the detention centers in Texas, Florida and other states, they are then sent to wherever they have family members if they have any, to continue the legal process from there. The outcome of the legal process explains Lenni, may be either deportation or a happy ending, in which the child becomes a permanent resident ". Without a lawyer, deportation is the usual outcome.

Safe Passage Project Safe Passage Project

Willing to fill the gap in the legal system that does not provide free representation for these children, Lenni began in 2006 to recruit lawyers and students among his colleagues and students. With fierce effort and taking time out of her busy schedule she formed a fleet of over 230 people that includes staff and volunteer lawyers, social workers and translators carrying cases from start to finish. John Jay College also joined and many Spanish-speaking students got involved making follow-up calls to homes and ensuring that children and their parents are not afraid and understand each step.

"Our project works because we are all very committed. This is a delicate situation where you cannot look away. These children are here and we must help"

To collaborate: safepassageproject.org