



Housed at New York Law School

## Annual Report

2014

## **Who we are.**

Safe Passage Project addresses the unmet needs of immigrant children living in New York by providing legal representation to empower each child to pursue a safe, stable future.

We recruit, train, and mentor volunteer attorneys for unaccompanied minors in immigration court. Without us, many of these children would be unrepresented and unaware of paths to citizenship.

Safe Passage Project is a registered 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation.

## **What we believe.**

- No child should face deportation alone
- All children are our children and each child is our future
- All children deserve a well-trained and committed advocate

## **What we do.**

- Ensure fair and compassionate treatment of children facing deportation
- Prepare and mentor attorneys and other professionals to successfully represent children
- Assist each child toward educational engagement and achievement
- Remain committed throughout the complex process by addressing other basic needs

## **Our hope.**

- Make real the promise of children's domestic and international human rights

\*The names of all children in this report have been changed to protect their identity.



Friends of Safe Passage,

It's been a big year for us. We're growing—increasing not only our staff but also the number of clients we're able to help. We're doing more—taking on social work so we can increase training and expand our influence around New York. We're improving— building a stronger foundation to help more children, more often. We're more motivated than ever—and we've been able to host 25 training sessions for over 2,000 lawyers, and have received support from over 200 volunteer attorneys. Together, they've helped us aid more than 500 children.

Beyond day-to-day legal aid, we've been out in the world fighting for change. This past year, our Director, Lenni Benson, testified before the New York City Council and New York State Assembly, and had the honor of speaking at the White House. The more we're able to educate the public about the human rights issues that drive Safe Passage Project, the more we're able to secure a better future for the clients we work with each and every day.

Others have been noticing the work we do, and we're proud to have been recognized by outlets such as the New York Law Journal, the New York Times, and National Public Radio. As people have been able to learn about who we are and what we do, we've received more financial support to fund the much needed resources that help the rising number of young people we meet. This year we were awarded funds from the New York City Council, The Robinhood Foundation, and the Americorps program. We also began partnerships with Practising Law Institute (PLI) and a Long Island Law Firm. Additionally, New York Law School has generously continued to house and support our project as we grow.

We're grateful and excited to have a chance to work with these transformative organizations, so that together we can drive change. The more support we receive; the more support we ensure to the many children who are looking to find home. Safe Passage Project ensures real change, and every child helped for the better is a big victory for us. We want to thank our countless volunteers for their hard work and persistence.

Every little bit of help from our committed Board of Directors, volunteer attorneys, interpreters, social workers, teachers, high school, college and law students alike, make these big victories possible. Through Safe Passage Project, we want to make real the promise of children's domestic and international human rights. With the continued help of all of the people and groups who make us who we are—we can.

We will. We will ensure that no child faces immigration court alone.

Thank you for being a part of the passage,

Safe Passage Project Team

## No child should face immigration court alone.

Daniel is a 17 year-old young man from Honduras. With the help of his Safe Passage Project pro bono attorney, he was able to receive his Green Card this year.

In Honduras, a local gang threatened Daniel and his family. Daniel felt something no seventeen-year-old should have to feel – the fear of living in his own home. He chose to search for safety and opportunity in New York.

Safe Passage Project first met Daniel in immigration court after he traveled from Honduras to the United States. Daniel and his family did not know how to navigate the court system and they did not have the money to hire an attorney. Without the help of Safe Passage Project, Daniel would



have likely been forced to represent himself throughout the immigration process. But now the future looks brighter for Daniel. In June of 2015, he'll graduate high school and he dreams of becoming a professional actor.

Earlier this year, Daniel met with the First Lady of Honduras (“La Primera Dama”) and appeared on Univision as he shared his story with her. When asked about Safe Passage Daniel said:

*Safe Passage gave me the opportunity to live in this country and make a life for myself. I never thought I would be sharing my story with the first lady of Honduras or appearing on television. I am forever thankful.*

There are thousands of children like Daniel living in New York State. These children and their families are left to navigate the complicated immigration system without legal help.

In 2014, a record number of migrant children arrived in the United States and New York State. Approximately 6,000 unaccompanied children arrived in New York State in 2014.<sup>1</sup> Safe Passage Project stepped up to assist when this “surge” of children arrived in June of 2014. For many months our staff has volunteered in court on a weekly basis with no guarantee of funding.

In October of 2014, Safe Passage Project received a grant from Robin Hood and New York City Council. Along with The Door, Legal Aid, and Catholic Charities – a team known as “ICARE” (Immigrant Children Advocate’s Relief Effort) Safe Passage met with clients and found that approximately 75% of children qualified for some form of immigration relief.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/11/texas-tops-list-of-states-where-this-years-unaccompanied-child-migrants-ended-up/>



At Safe Passage Project, we serve clients living in New York City and around the State. Many of the children placed in removal proceedings are victims of violence and in need of health, educational, and legal services. Safe Passage Project has been providing legal trainings, as well as recruiting and successfully working with Pro Bono Attorneys to provide these children with the legal representation they deserve.

## **How Safe Passage Project Helps.**

Our Safe Passage Project Team has developed many partnerships and programs to help our clients in more ways than ever. Here are some of those endeavors we undertook in 2014.

### **Juvenile Docket**

Safe Passage Project continues to staff the Juvenile docket. Pro bono counsel mentored by Safe Passage currently represent over 100 children in Family and Immigration Courts throughout New York State. Recently a Safe Passage pro bono attorney obtained Special Immigrant juvenile status on behalf of a 19-year-old boy from Mexico, who traveled alone to the United States because his family was being targeted by a local gang.



## Surge Docket

In 2014, the federal government apprehended and placed into removal proceedings, an estimated 57,500 unaccompanied minors under age 18 who crossed the United States southern border fleeing gang violence, sexual abuse, poverty, crime, and conflict. In May of 2014, the number of cases involving indigent children comprised nearly 13% of the Immigration Court's docket – 6,000 cases in New York alone. These young people came mostly from Central American countries.

<u>Country of Origin,</u>	<u>FY2014</u>
Honduras	34%
Guatemala	32%
El Salvador	29%
Mexico	<2%
All other countries	<3%

\*\*\* Cite: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

## U-LAMP Partnership

In 2014 Safe Passage Project partnered with the Unaccompanied Latin American Minors Project (“U-LAMP”), a CUNY Service Corps program spearheaded by Professor Isabel Martinez of John Jay College. The U-Lamp team works with Safe Passage to assist children both inside and outside of Immigration Court. U-LAMP team members serve as a vital social support system for our Safe Passage clients. Safe Passage wishes to thank the U-Lamp team for their hard work and dedication.



Team ULAMP with Professor Isabel Martinez (Left)



ULAMPERS at Amigos de Safe Passage soccer game (Right)

## Arts and Crafts in Immigration Court

We want to spotlight the hard work of Marie Kimmel, Joanne Zach, and dozens of volunteers who shared arts and crafts projects with clients in the court's ceremonial courtroom. Their presence makes Immigration Court a friendlier place, reduces anxiety, and gives the kids a reason to smile.



Safe Passage children drawing at Immigration Court



Halloween at Immigration Court

## Amigos De Safe Passage

Amigos De Safe Passage Project is a mentoring program that provides a network of support for our clients while building a sense of community among not-for-profit organizations, pro bono attorneys, and staff members. Through our monthly activities clients connect with others with shared experiences. This year Amigos de Safe Passage attended their first ever Broadway show, toured Central Park and held soccer games in parks around New York.



## **WHEELS Program**

Safe Passage Project has continued to partner with the Washington Heights school WHEELS throughout the year. We held “Know Your Rights” presentations at the school and provided confidential screenings around immigration issues for interested students. We’re proud to have helped over 40 children to date.

## **A WHEELS Success Story**

Lisa was born in the Dominican Republic where she led a difficult life of poverty, abuse, and education deprivation. In search of a better future and with hopes of one day going to college, Lisa, her sister, and mother moved to New York City when Lisa was 7. Upon arrival in New York City, Lisa spoke no English, but quickly learned after her mother enrolled her in public school in Washington Heights. Watching her mother struggle to provide food for the family, Lisa dedicated herself to her studies and discovered a love of school and learning.

Lisa became a straight A student with the second highest GPA in her school, was



named a National Honors Scholar, and a three sport varsity athlete. When Lisa met with her college advisor she learned that undocumented students could not qualify for federal financial aid. A teacher connected Lisa with Safe Passage.

Thanks to Safe Passage, on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015, Lisa became a Legal

Permanent Resident in time to secure federal financial aid and a college scholarship. Lisa hopes to accept a scholarship to attend Brown, Yale, or Amherst in the fall of 2015.



## **Trainings and Educational Assistance.**

At Safe Passage Project, we have a mission to assist and advocate for children navigating the complex immigration process and to activate professionals to work with and represent unaccompanied minors. We work to ensure members of the legal community, and others working with the children in need, have the knowledge and skills they need to assist our clients facing deportation.

Safe Passage Project worked tirelessly in 2014 to provide many opportunities for legal and other professionals to learn best practices for working with children facing deportation. This year alone we conducted over 30 trainings with more than 2,500 people attending.

Some of our most memorable trainings include:

*Best Practices in Representing Children Before the Asylum Office*

*Representing Child Migrants*

*College and Law Students Volunteering with Child Migrants*

*Coordinating Pro Bono and Volunteer Efforts*

*Helping Child Migrants, Learn How to Represent Children Who Need Immigration and Family Court Assistance*

*Getting Started Representing Child Migrants for Private and Public Interest Immigration Lawyers*

*Representing Child Migrants, a Four Part Series*

*Immigration Remedies for Young People – Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and Asylum*

*Learning to Represent Child Migrants*

*Advanced Asylum*

*Unaccompanied Minors*

*Representing Child Migrants in Immigration Court*

*Representing Child Migrants Seeking Asylum*

*Advanced SIJS*

*Immigration Defense: Motions to Terminate and Suppress*

*Understanding and Recognizing Victims of Vicarious Trauma*

*Children Migrating Alone & The Trafficking Victims Protection Act*

*Transforming a Life – Getting Started Representing Children in Deportation Proceedings*

*Volunteering to Help Unaccompanied Children, a Training for Law Students*

*Transform a Life – Volunteer at the Immigration Court*

*Understanding Special Immigrant Juvenile Status*

*Access to Benefits for Unaccompanied Children*

*National Justice AmeriCorps Training*

## **Press.**

Safe Passage Project was recognized in the media over 150 times in this past year.

Recently, Safe Passage Project Staff Attorney Claire Thomas was quoted in the Huffington Post article entitled “Millions of Immigrants Are Asked to Pay Taxes, But Won’t Receive Federal Benefits.” Safe Passage was featured in the *New York Times* article “To Help Unaccompanied Minors, New York City Posts Representatives at Immigration Court.”

In December, the project was noted in a *New York Times* Editorial entitled “On Immigration, A Huge Job Ahead” and was also featured in the BBC article “Child Immigrants Strain New York Courts.”

In November, our Director, Lenni Benson, was featured on PBS and in the *New York Law Journal* in the article “Agencies Gear Up to Help Eligible Immigrants Gain Legal Status.”

Over the summer our team members Guillermo Stampur, Desiree Hernandez, and Juan Chiquillo appeared on Univision and Telemundo and we were featured in the *New York Daily News* “New York Law School's Safe Passage Project helps unaccompanied immigrant children navigate the immigration court system, ” by Albor Ruiz.

We’re thrilled to be recognized so that we can spotlight the immigration issues we fight against, and so we can help expand our reach and advocacy for the needs of the children of Safe Passage Project.

## **Safe Passage Project By the Numbers.**

### Our Clients

Total Number of Children Assisted in 2014 - 613

Total Number of Docket Days - 31

### Pro Bono Attorneys

Number of Pro Bono Attorneys Volunteering in 2014 – 216

Number of Law Schools the Pro Bono Attorneys Attended – 57

Number of Law Firms these Attorneys Work At – 114

Number of Trainings Held - 45

Number of Attorneys Trained - 3000

## **Safe Passage Project Supporters.**

### Board of Directors

Lenni Benson, Director, Safe Passage Project  
Samuel G. Coppersmith, Secretary, Coppersmith Schermer & Brockelman PLC  
Nicole Feit, Legal Services of the Hudson Valley  
Susan B. Henner, Susan Henner, PLC  
Dominic Kong, Claudia Slovinsky and Associates PLC  
Ray Lin, Latham Watkins LLP  
Samuel Newbold, Barst Mukamal & Kleiner  
Federico Reyes, Heineken  
Ruth Uselton, Treasurer, Ballard Spahr LLP.

### Safe Passage Project Staff

Megan Eiss-Proctor, Director of Operations and Development  
Desiree Hernandez, Staff Attorney, Supervisor “Surge Docket”  
Gui Stampur, Staff Attorney  
Claire Thomas, Staff Attorney  
Jennifer Rogers, Staff Attorney  
Bethany Ow, Staff Attorney  
Luisa Lebron, Justice Americorps Fellow  
Astrid Avidessian, Justice Americorps Fellow  
Juan Carlos Chiquillo, Legal Fellow  
Virginia Vasquez, Faculty and Legal Assistant  
Julie Nunez, Legal Assistant  
Molly Jacobs-Meyers, Paralegal, Justice Americorps Fellow  
Carlos Valenzuela, Paralegal, Justice Americorps Fellow

## **Thank you, New York Law School.**

We want to thank New York Law School for continuing to house and support Safe Passage Project. Without the school’s generous support we wouldn’t be able to help such a large number of children every year. Whether it’s through resources, library access, volunteers, or the office space they provide us—we greatly appreciate the support New York Law School provided to Safe Passage Project in 2014.