



# **Our Mission**

To ensure that every child in New York who is eligible for substantive immigration relief receives high quality legal representation.

#### Dear Supporters,

In the 5 years since Safe Passage Project's founding, we have seen extraordinary efforts to flout standard protections for child refugees. Yet nothing could have prepared us for what we experienced over the course of the past year. 2018 has shown us the darkest depths of what our government is capable of - but it has also demonstrated what we as a community are capable of when we stand together.



Safe Passage Project was founded on the principle that young people deserve an advocate standing by their side, protecting them from deportation back to dangerous situations. Also ingrained in our founding is the power of community. From its humble beginnings as a student-run law clinic, Safe Passage Project has thrived with the steadfast support of volunteers and donors like you who have chosen action over silence when it comes to protecting young immigrants. Time and time again, we have seen our community of supporters rise up with us in the midst of crisis, and your support in 2018 only reaffirmed this.

Thank you to our volunteers, our donors, our partners, and our supporters for the ways in which you lift up our work. We are proud to forge ahead standing taller and stronger with you by our side.

Your support truly has an indelible impact on the children Safe Passage Project serves. In these challenging times, we are grateful to each and every one of you for continuing to support our work - it truly makes all the difference for a child seeking safety.

Pam Foster, esq.
Chair, Board of Directors

#### Dear Friends,

2018 was a year of tremendous highs and lows for immigrant children in our country. Disgusting national policy changes led to children being taken from their parents' arms and sent to detention centers hundreds of miles away. Yet the strength and resilience of those families - along with immediate and significant efforts of activists, lawyers, and ordinary citizens - forced rapid policy change.



In New York, new and illegal interpretations of immigration law threatened Safe Passage Project's young clients. But our team grew to meet these challenges - taking on new clients, hiring additional staff, litigating in creative ways, and raising much-needed funds to continue the fight. The partnership, support, and strength of our clients, staff, volunteers, and donors means so much.

- Our incredible staff stand directly between deportation authorities and our clients. Staff
  are not untiring they get tired! But they come to work at all hours to get the job done
  anyway.
- Hundreds of new pro bono attorneys signed up with us to join the fight and our existing pro bonos are learning creative new legal arguments, taking on new cases, and more.
- Friends and supporters put together emergency funding over the summer to support our
   62 urgent cases of Separated Children and then made multi-year funding
   commitments, because sadly this is not a short-term problem.
- Our young clients continue to keep us motivated and grounded. They go to school, work jobs, share their stories all while being active partners in our work toward justice.

In between crises, Safe Passage Project reached some major milestones in 2018. We hired 10 new staff and took on 244 new cases - bringing our total caseload to 810 by the end of the year. We celebrated our 5th anniversary as a nonprofit. We redesigned our logo and launched a new website. And we kicked off the first year of our 2020 Strategic Plan - aiming to provide free lawyers to 2,000 child refugees by 2020.

With all this in mind, I'm thrilled to share this this annual report with you.

Thank you for standing with us.

Richt Lenke

**Executive Director** 



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"Four years after my first interview with Safe Passage, I received a call from them telling me that immigration had accepted my application for permanent residency. I felt very happy because there I realized that all of my efforts to come here were worth it...When I received that call, I remember that I cried from the happiness."

- Axel

## 2018 by the Numbers



244

new cases taken on by our team - meaning 244 fewer young people facing the immigration process alone.



810

total number of young people actively being served by our team at the end of the year.



222

successful social service referrals made for youth connecting children to services such as housing, health care, and education.



961

total number of young people provided with free, competent legal representation throughout 2018.



406

pro bono attorneys mentored in providing free legal representation to immigrant youth.



1619

legal professionals trained at 33 events at top law firms, schools, and more.



\$4,498,152

leveraged in legal services provided to youth by our network of 400+ pro bono attorneys.



35,985

hours donated by Safe Passage Project's pro bono attorneys.

#### Victories in 2018

We achieved the following milestones on behalf of the young people we serve over the course of the year:

13 Asylum Applications Granted

38 Green Cards Approved

**81** Employment Authorizations **Approved** 

**165** Custody Petitions **Approved** 

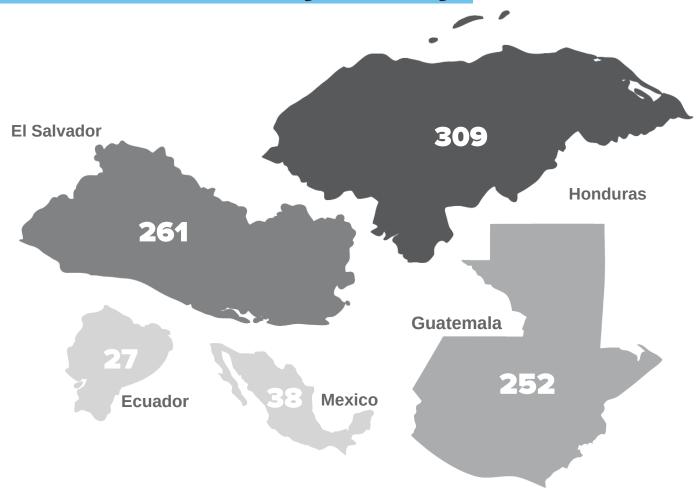
170 Special Findings Orders Granted

## **Donor Spotlight**

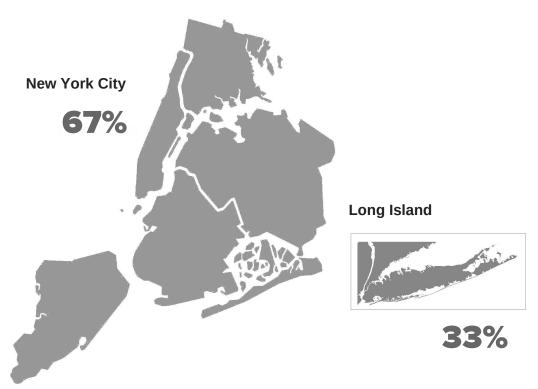
"We are delighted to continue our support for Safe Passage Project, not only because we are touched by the powerful stories of your wonderful clients, but also because your work screams efficacy and money well spent."

- Jennifer Allan Soros and Jonathan Soros

## **Open Cases in 2018 by Country**



# Open Cases in 2018: NYC and Long Island



## **Pro Bono Spotlight**



"There are few things more fulfilling than helping kids who have been through so much in their life be able to remain in the United States and call it home.

My client, J, stands out in my mind as an unbelievably kind, mature, respectful and driven young man who I am confident will do amazing things in his life. His experience with Safe Passage actually motivated his own career aspirations. J most recently told me that he hopes to attend law school and become an immigration lawyer so he can in turn help kids facing similar challenges."

**Asha Natarajan** Associate, DLA Piper "Working with Safe Passage Project has been a tremendously rewarding experience for me. The organization has supported me each step of the way as I have represented three Guatemalan children, all from the same family and under the age of 10, in Family Court and Immigration Court. At a time when the federal government is doing everything it can to return immigrant children to their countries of origin regardless of their personal circumstances, organizations like Safe Passage are playing a crucial role in helping pro bono attorneys like myself successfully advocate on behalf of the best interests of our immigrant children clients."

# **Carlos Ball**Professor of Law, Rutgers University



## **Fighting Family Separation**

In 2018 we witnessed the horrifying mass separation of thousands of families at the border as a result of the administration's "zero tolerance" policy. The crisis caught the public's attention through heart-wrenching stories and footage of children being forcibly taken from their parents' arms. New atrocities related to these separations have continued to unfold long after the news of these separations first broke. We now know that the administration severely underreported the number of families separated, failed to keep track of family connections, held children in inhumane conditions contrary to the Flores Settlement Agreement, and continued to separate families despite mass public outcry - and in possible violation of court orders.

#### **Our Response**

As the nation watched the family separation crisis unfold, our team responded with swift action. Hundreds of separated children were sent to detention facilities in New York State, and Safe Passage Project took on representation of 62 of these young people in New York City, Kingston, NY, and on Long Island. Our team worked tirelessly to ensure that these children were released from detention centers and reunited with their families. In August 2018, a 7-year-old client who had been recently reunited with his father was forcibly re-separated. Within 24 hours, our pressure and collaboration with our allies meant we were able to reunify this child with his father, again.

In addition to directly providing free legal representation to 62 young people who were separated from their parents, Safe Passage Project intervened in the federal class action lawsuit *Ms. L.; et al., v. ICE*, which deals with the administration's policy on a national level. Our intervention, along with a small cohort of legal services providers in New York City who represented separated children, is intended to highlight issues specific to children that we felt were not being addressed in the settlement negotiations between the government and the *Ms. L* parties. We succeeded in getting the judge to add certain key safeguards we felt were needed, based on our experiences representing separated kids. As the parties continue to file status reports in the case, Safe Passage Project continues to weigh in and to advise on issues of importance that are specific to the affected children.



# **Donor Spotlight**

Pictured: Drawings by Safe Passage Project clients.

The Pinkerton Foundation is honored to support Safe Passage Project. We recognize the essential role Safe Passage plays in the lives of unaccompanied immigrant children in NYC. Its stellar attorneys and caring social work staff help ensure that young clients have the support they need to build safe and healthy lives in NYC.

- April Glad, Senior Program Officer The Pinkerton Foundation

# Safe Passage Client Testifies before New York City Council

In December of 2018, our young client Axel stood before New York City Council to provide testimony on the importance of providing lawyers to immigrant youth in deportation proceedings. Axel spoke bravely about his own experience and the impact that legal representation has had on his own life. Portions of his testimony are included below.

"My name is Axel Rolando Harry Herrera. I am 19 years old. I am from Honduras, from La Lima Cortes. In June, I graduated from Harlem Renaissance High School. Now I study in Guttman Community College. I study human services to be able to continue my goal of becoming a social worker.

I came to the United States in 2013. I decided to emigrate from my country, Honduras, because there is a lot of delinquency there and less chance of getting ahead. Also, I had my mother here in the US. I wanted to reunite with her because it had been 7 years since I last saw her. When I came, I was 14 years old. It wasn't easy to separate from my grandparents and make the decision to leave, because I knew that the trip was dangerous. But my biggest motivation was to get ahead and see my mom.

My first dream was to be an actor and have the opportunity to be in the theater and to be in a movie where I could act, sing, and dance at the same time. Then with time, I discovered other motivations to be a social worker because I like to communicate with and help people. Just like they helped me!

In August of 2014, my mom and I contacted Safe Passage Project. We went to the office and they interviewed me. Afterwards, they called me to tell me that they found a lawyer who was interested in my case. I felt happy. But I also felt nervous, because I knew that I was going to have to tell my story. There were moments that were really hard to express myself because a lot of hurtful things had happened in my childhood. But with time, I established a trustful relationship with my lawyer and she made me feel comfortable. More than giving me a lawyer, Safe Passage gave me other opportunities to know more youth like me who immigrated to the US and know their stories.

Four years after my first interview with Safe Passage, I received a call from them telling me that immigration had accepted my application for permanent residency. I felt very happy because there I realized that all of my efforts to come here were worth it.

Being an immigrant without documents is not easy. One doesn't feel part of the United States. Sometimes I walked in fear that I could be returned to my country. But more than anything, I thought about my grandma and the possibility of never being able to go back and see her.

When I received that call, I remember that I cried from the happiness. Now with my residency, I have more motivation to get ahead and excel. What I thought was an illusion is now a reality. All of this is thanks to Safe Passage, for having helped me all of this time in my immigration process and helping me achieve my dreams."

R came to Safe Passage Project in 2014. He had recently arrived in the U.S. from Guatemala, and was just 17 years old. After years of working with his attorney at Safe Passage Project, R was finally able to obtain his green card. When he first heard the news that he was granted Legal Permanent Resident status, R said he was speechless. "No lo podía creer, no pude decir nada. Ahora me siento seguro." ("I could not believe it, I could not say anything. Now I feel safe.")

Since receiving his green card, R spends his time working and attending an English class. Recently, R started a paid culinary apprenticeship to get closer to his dream of becoming a chef.

### In the Press

# Attorneys Say About 20 Migrant Children Separated from Parents Remain in New York



"These databases are the work of nonprofit advocates who have scrambled and said it's our moral responsibility to do our best to connect these families that have been separated. This is not the action of the government correcting [its] own wrong. This is nonprofit legal service providers coming together to do our best to rapidly right a very severe wrong."

#### Alexandra Rizio

Managing Attorney, Trainings and Partnerships at Safe Passage Project The Brian Lehrer Show, WNYC, July 2018



#### **People Built This**

"[Children] ...would have to go forward on their own, in front of an immigration judge, across from an ICE attorney who is prosecuting that case, and they would be expected to articulate their request for relief from deportation."

#### **Stephanie Gibbs**

Supervising Attorney at Safe Passage Project Pod Save the People with Deray, March 2018

#### Kids in immigration court: A maze with life and death consequences



"It is a system on paper that looks like it gives opportunity to children to seek protection in the United States, but the reality of that system is daunting even for well-trained lawyers, let alone for the children themselves."

#### Lenni Benson

Director, Founder at Safe Passage Project CNN, July 2018



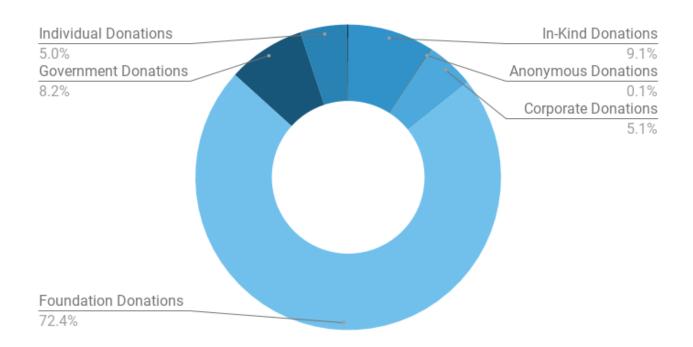
#### Some Schools Help Undocumented Students Get Lawyers. Others Funnel Them To ICE.

"One of her classmates, who had heard of the organization's work, floated the idea of supporting Safe Passage. Deena thought it would be dishonest not to reveal her involvement with the nonprofit. A school leader had referred her to the organization as a client when she was in the seventh grade – a gesture that changed her life."

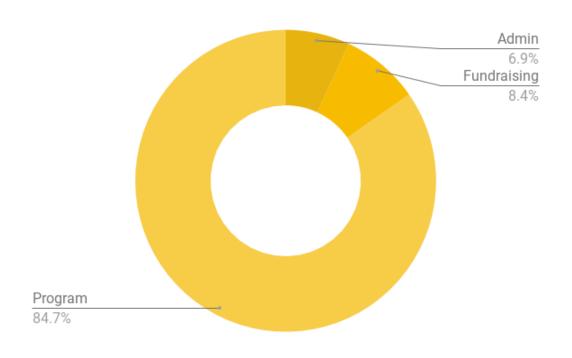
Rebecca Klein for Huffington Post, August 2018

## **2018 Finances**

Revenue \$4,365,728.37



**Expenses** \$2,371,631



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#### No child should face the immigration process alone

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