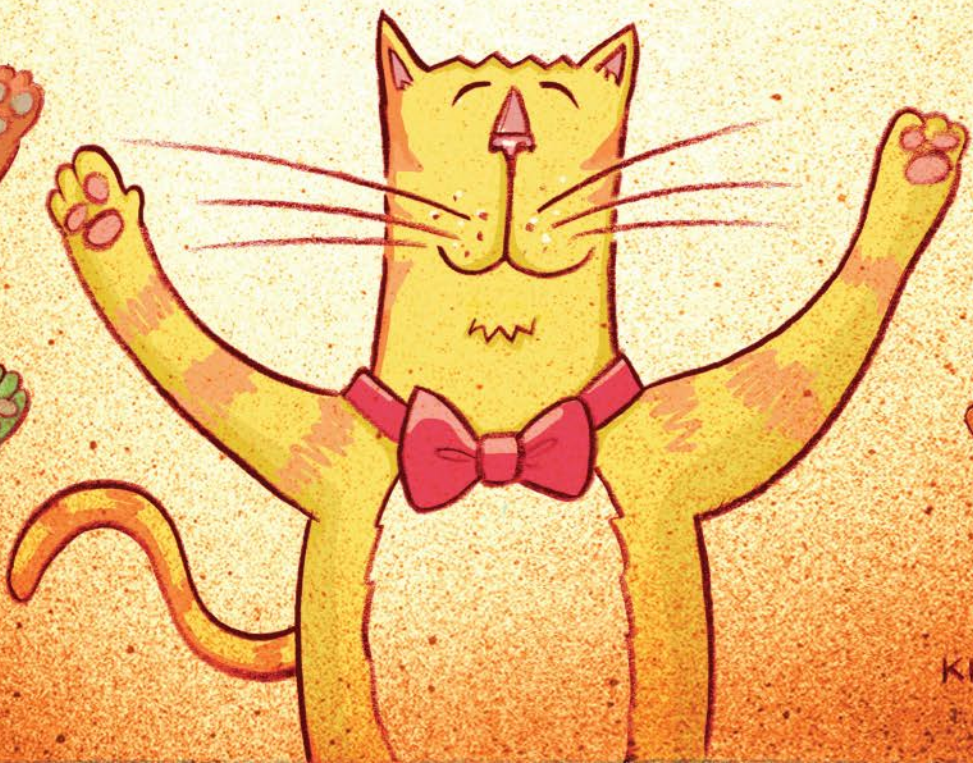
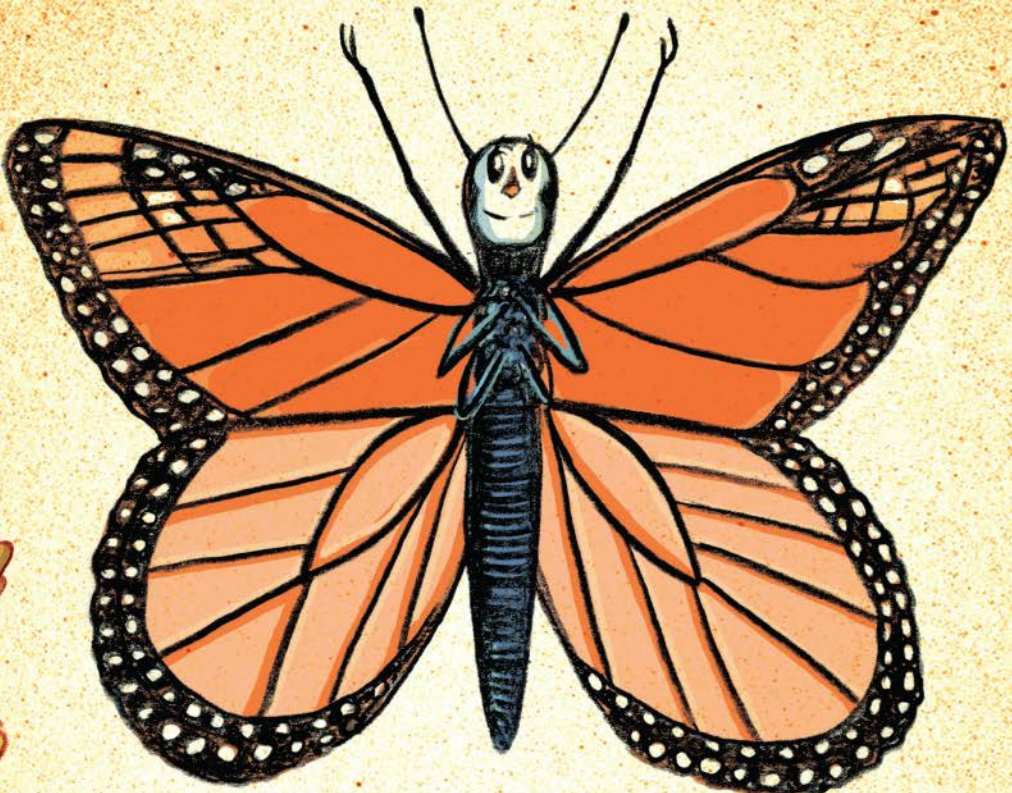




**WORKING
WITH FREE
LEGAL
SERVICES**



KUPER

The United States government does not provide immigrants with free legal counsel. As a result, more than half of immigrant children must go through immigration proceedings without the aid of a lawyer. This is a problem because without a lawyer the odds of winning a case in New York are around 17%. The odds of winning a case in New York with a lawyer are around 85%.

That's where we come in.

We stand up for children by standing with them in immigration court. Safe Passage Project is a highly-focused nonprofit immigration legal services organization. We provide free lawyers to refugee and immigrant children in the New York City area who face deportation back to life-threatening situations, despite their strong legal claim to stay in the United States.

All the stories in this book are true and are written as told by the lawyers and social workers at Safe Passage Project.



Credits

Words: Tracy White

Pictures: Peter Kuper

Not For Profit and Pro Bono



When it's free, it's like 'what's the catch?'

I am here because the system is unjust.



Safe Passage also works with other pro bono attorneys.

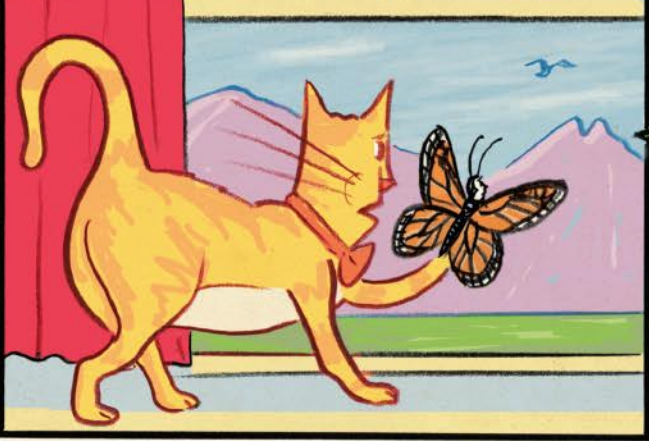


We teach these volunteer lawyers about immigration law. I supervise their work to make sure each case receives the best support possible.



Perhaps in your home country there are no free lawyers and you have to pay incredibly high fees to have access to justice. How can you be assured that we are good at what we do?

It's your choice who you want to represent you. These lawyers are truly excellent because they have years of experience and care so much about you.

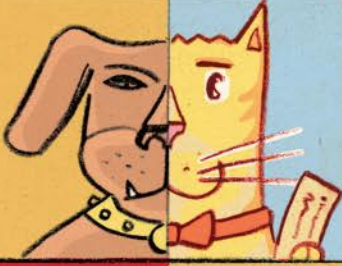


We work with you to try and make sure you receive a green card.



Notario/Attorney

Notario in America are not lawyers.



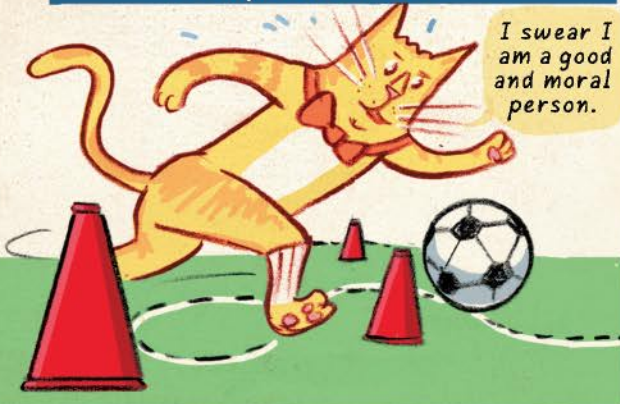
Paid \$25.00 to take a short test and get a license. Can ONLY do things like verify signatures. Cannot appear in court or practice law.

Went to school for three years to study law and had to pass a multi-day test. Can help with legal issues. Can practice law and help you navigate the legal system.

Sometimes it can be hard to tell the difference between a notario and a lawyer, but you can always ask questions*.



It takes a lot of training to become a lawyer in America.

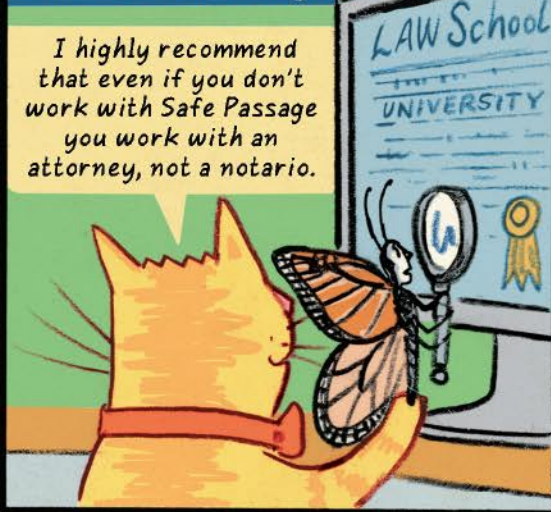


There is a lawyer code of ethics.



It is extremely important in immigration law in particular that you work with someone who has a degree.

I highly recommend that even if you don't work with Safe Passage you work with an attorney, not a notario.

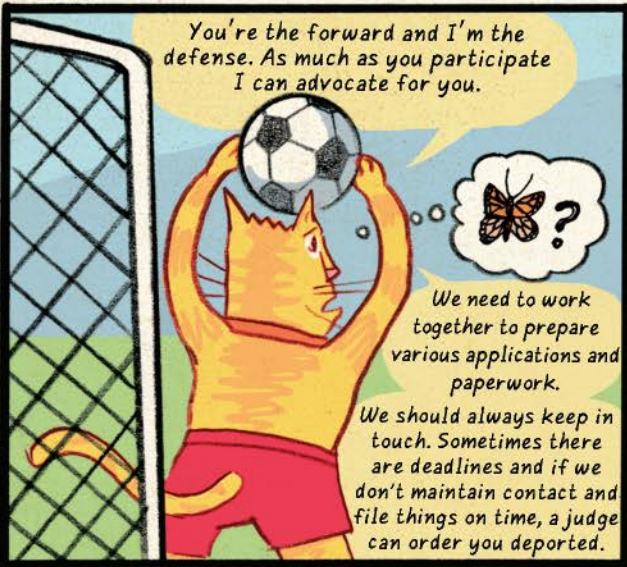
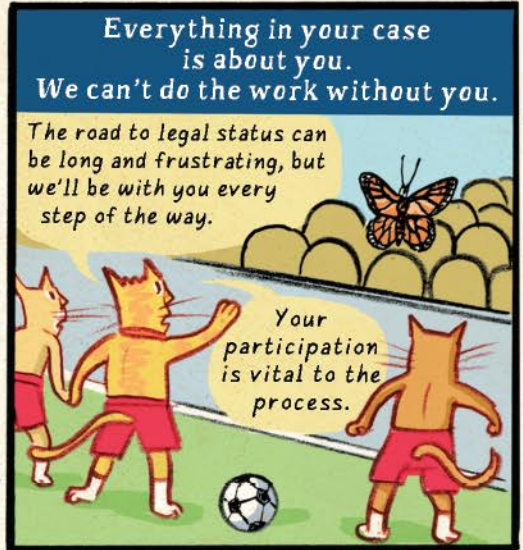


You can easily check if someone is a lawyer.



* <http://iapps.courts.state.ny.us/attorney/captcha>

Teamwork



Truth is Best

Sometimes our clients think they need to come to us with all of the right answers.

Your truth is the winning story.



You are the expert on your life.

You may have heard things from people, but they might not know the law or about your specific case.



If you say this, it will be good.



If you say that it will be bad.

It's important to be honest when telling your story.



Even though you may be embarrassed

or feel ashamed, please tell us. We won't judge you, and it's helpful for us to have all the facts.

I know it's hard to share this. Take your time. We're here for you.



You have a case



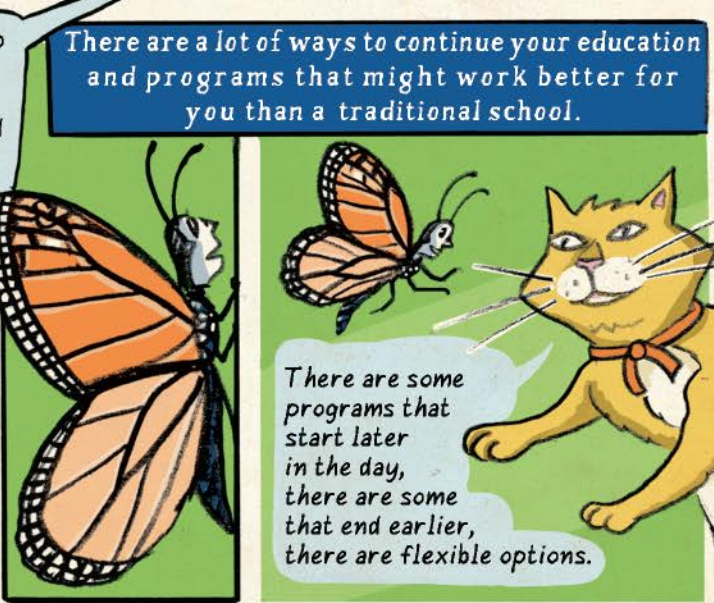
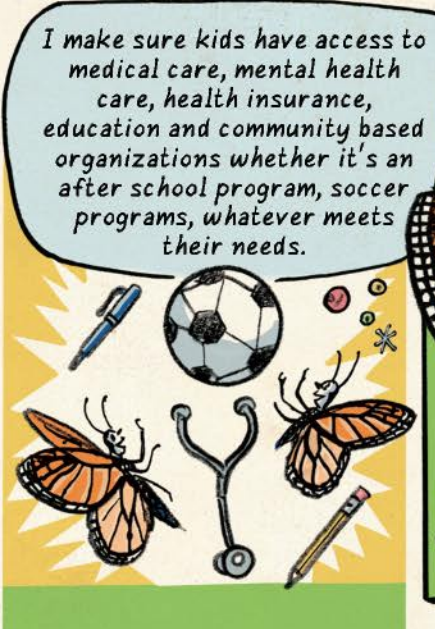
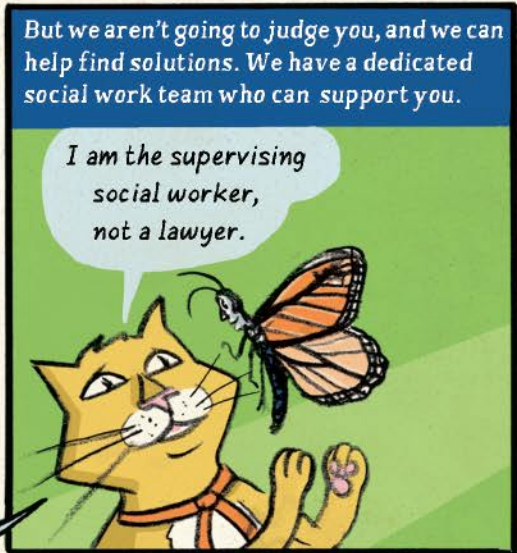
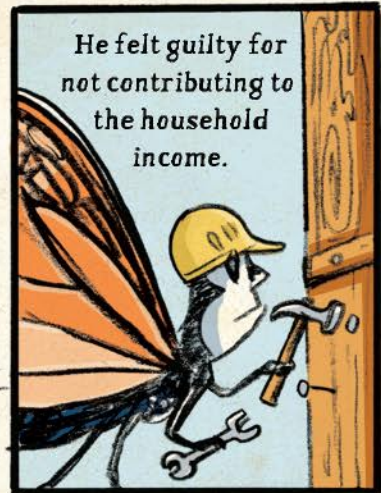
and we will fight for you.

Once we are your lawyers, you can tell us anything. We're on your team.



Kicked out of school, arrested, suspended, bad grades, homeless, disagreement with guardian, feeling uncomfortable at home or anywhere else.

Attending School



School Suspension

I had a client whose aunt gave him over the counter headache pills.



The teacher found them in his bag.



The teacher didn't believe him that it was just headache medicine.

The client didn't feel like he could advocate for himself



and he didn't ask us for help.

He got suspended for 3 months.



By the time I found out it had already been a month and a half.



I think maybe he didn't tell us because he was scared we would judge him.



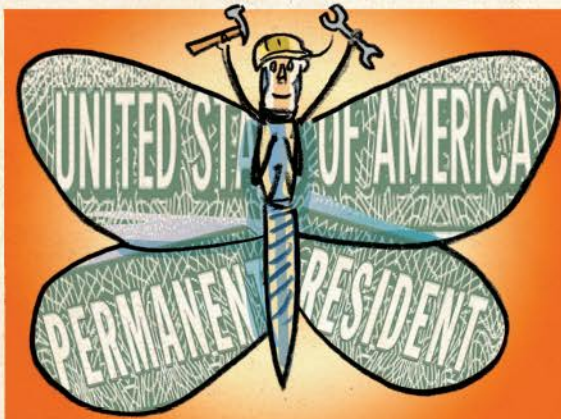
We don't judge.

We can make sure you're not alone, and we can advocate for you if needed. If we can't help, we can refer you to someone who can.



Work Permit

A lot of clients really want a work permit.



How long does it take to get a work permit?
That depends on each client.



Every case is unique

It may be that someone you know got a work permit really quickly. Just because you don't have one yet doesn't mean there's anything wrong in your case.



If someone tells you their lawyer simply applied for a stand-alone work permit, that's not possible.



Each person's case is unique, and will take a different amount of time.



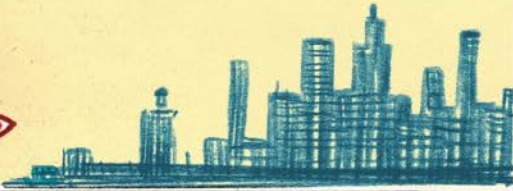
Work permits are attached to applications.



Be careful if a notario tells you he can easily get you a work permit.

Speeding Ticket

We have a client who is now twenty. He received very serious threats from gangs in his home country. He was afraid so he came here.



He had completed the initial part of his case and filed a visa petition when he was arrested for driving without a license and speeding.

He was with his older brother at the time.

We found out right away that he was in detention. We made sure his pro bono lawyer was calling over the weekend to have a public defender* at his arraignment.

I helped him take care of his traffic ticket

he paid a fine so there was no criminal conviction.

* A free lawyer automatically supplied by the criminal court.

But ICE immediately took him into custody because ICE can re-detain you if they allege that you are a danger to the community.

It was a good thing he got in touch with us because his pro bono attorney was able to reduce the amount of time he spent in jail.

She was knocking on doors, showing up at court saying you have to move this case along. That's the only reason they scheduled his hearing so quickly*.

* Hearings can take months

If he hadn't called he would have been in detention longer and we don't know if the public defender would have known enough about immigration law to resolve things in a good way for him.

Something seemingly small such as a speeding ticket can become a big problem. Being in touch with Safe Passage and letting us know as soon as you possibly can, minimizes the impact.

Housing

We're working with a young mother. She was pregnant and homeless at the time and her oldest was only three.



She had lived with various family members and at each and every place there was literally no space.



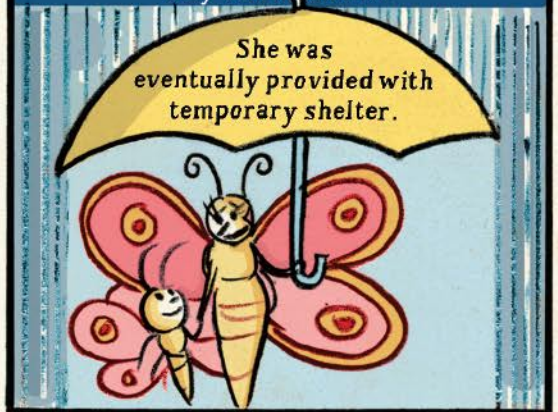
So she came and asked us for assistance.

I referred her to the family shelter intake center in New York City.



She wanted to apply for shelter. Before she went we sat down and talked about the process and I told her what to expect, what they would ask her.

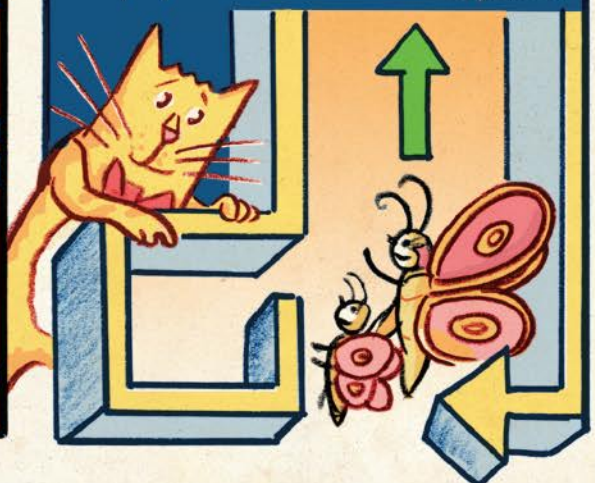
She was eventually provided with temporary shelter.



When a family finds themselves without a place to live, I talk about what the homeless shelter system looks like and what they might be asked, which documents to bring, so they can have an understanding of what to expect and maybe not feel so nervous.



We help young people navigate systems that are otherwise overwhelming. We can help people fill out forms, understand which documents to bring and collect the documents so they feel prepared to ask for what they need.



Health

I developed a good understanding with a client, a young woman and because of that trust she became comfortable talking.



I want to avoid getting pregnant. Can you help out?

Let's call Planned Parenthood together and set up an appointment.



She got very little support from the adults in her life, and didn't want to go on her own, so I accompanied her.

You have a lot of options. We'll tell you about them and you can decide what is right for you.



That same morning she left with her choice of contraception.



What a young person shares with me is between me and them. I'll always ask their permission to share it with their guardian.

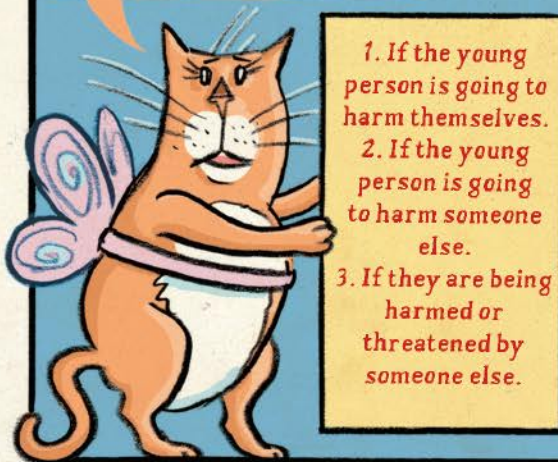


if I think it might be helpful.

I might also share things with a young person's legal team to make sure that they get the support they need, as working together is the Safe Passage model.



There might be times when I have to share things that a young person tells me with other people, to make sure that they get the help and support they need.



1. If the young person is going to harm themselves.
2. If the young person is going to harm someone else.
3. If they are being harmed or threatened by someone else.

Appeals

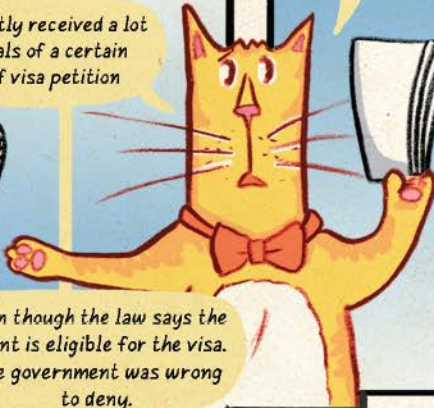
Sometimes the government makes an incorrect decision. An appeal is when the client and their lawyer fight the wrong decision.



We recently received a lot of denials of a certain type of visa petition

even though the law says the client is eligible for the visa. The government was wrong to deny.

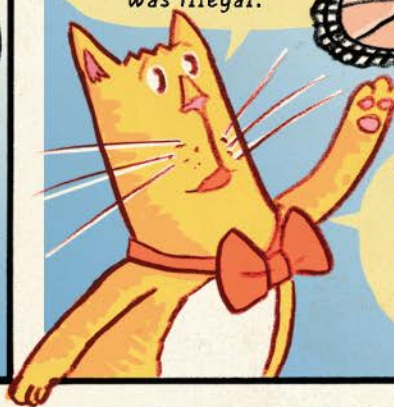
In this case, we kept appealing, even though it's scary for clients to keep getting denial letters.



We do this because if you don't appeal you lose your chance at a visa.



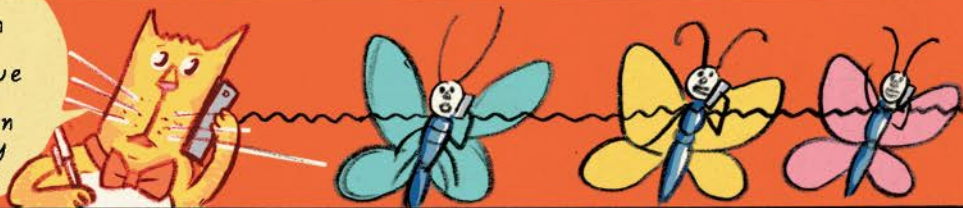
At the same time we worked with another organization that sued the government because the policy of denying the visas was illegal.



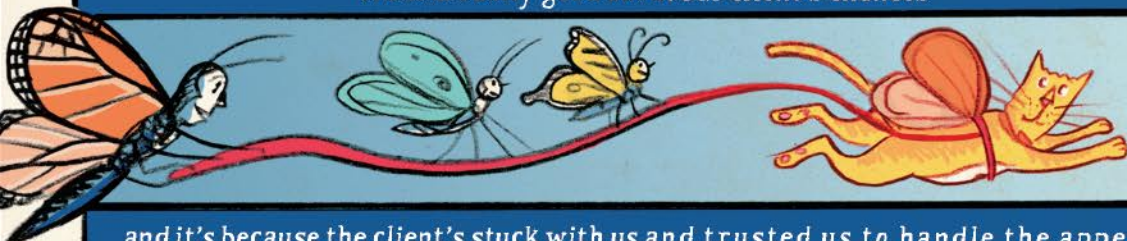
So now we hope all of those cases that were previously denied will ultimately be granted visas.

We mainly work on individual cases.

We need to stay in touch with our clients because if we lose touch at any given point when an appeal is due, they can lose the case.



We feel really good about our client's chances



and it's because the client's stuck with us and trusted us to handle the appeals.

Long

Process

Immigration is slow.

Each case is different. Many cases take a long time, but everyday moves us closer.

There are many kids from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, applying for a certain type of visa.

There are only a certain number they give away each year.

Waiting can be really hard, but we will be there for you the whole time.

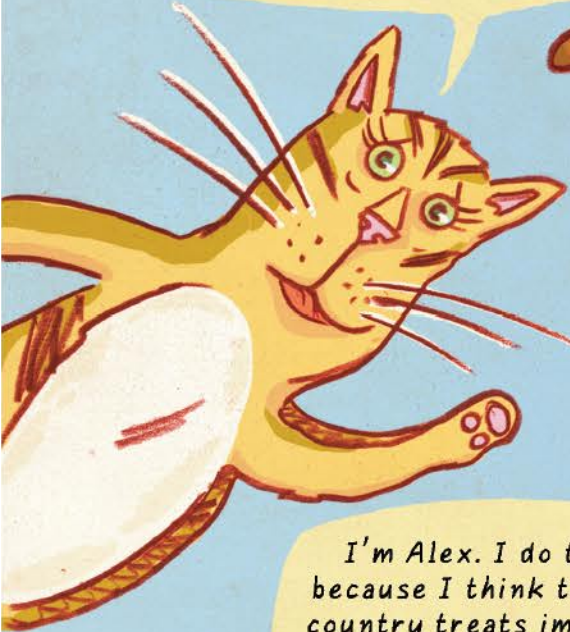


You're in a line back around the building, and other people are in the front of the line ready

to get their green card. They have been in line for years.

Safe Passage Project

My name is Stephanie. I believe everyone should be treated with **dignity** no matter where they are from.



My name is Samantha. I believe that seeking safety is a **human right** and that no human being is illegal.



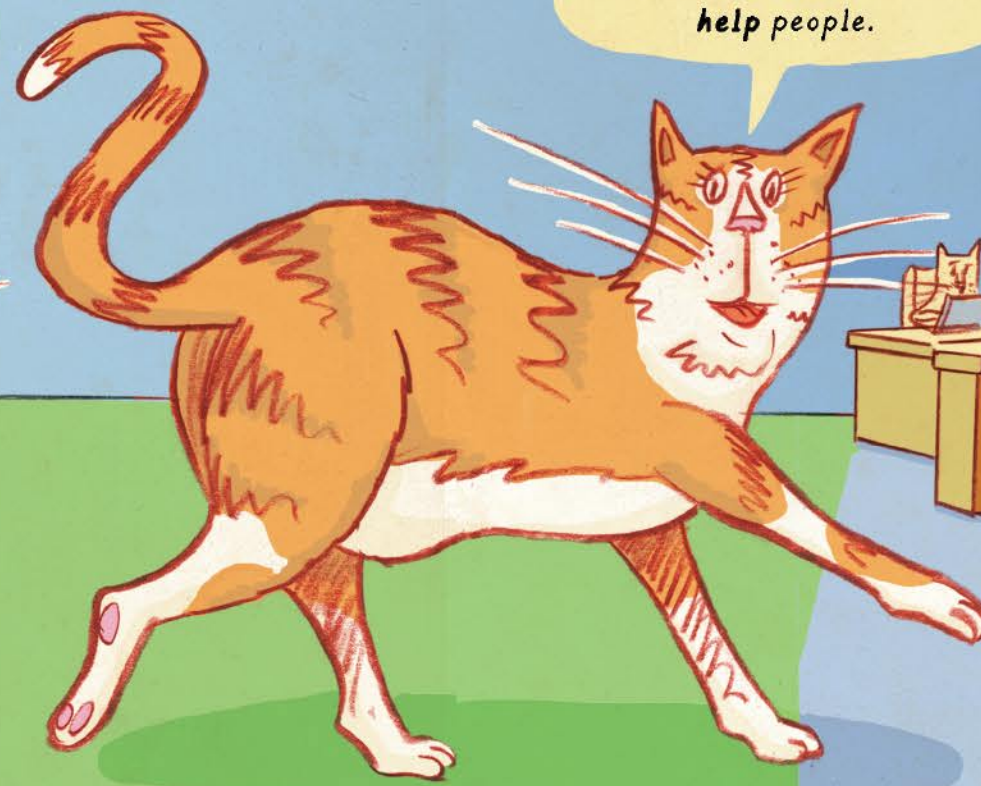
I'm Alex. I do this work because I think the way this country treats immigrants at the moment is **not** a reflection of what we can be.



My name is Jazmin. I came to the US from Peru when I was twelve. That is why this work is close to **my heart**.



My name is Cynthia. My family came here undocumented. I went to law school knowing I wanted to **help** people.

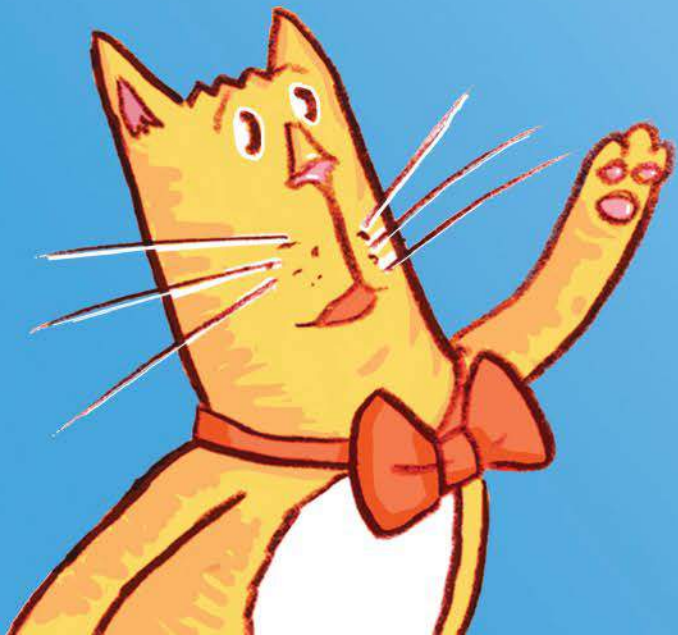


My name is Richard. I work at Safe Passage Project because it is the joy of my life to stand alongside so many wonderful young people, colleagues, and partners in the fight for **justice**.

We have over 400 lawyers helping. **We have helped 1,500 children** since 2013.



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