



Together. Resolute.

Annual Report 2020



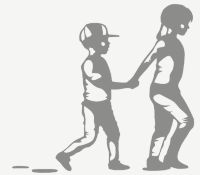
No child should face the immigration process alone.



Dear Friends,

We must start with an emphatic thank you for your generous support in 2020 and for defending the legal rights of immigrant children. With your help, Safe Passage Project forged ahead in the face of a global pandemic. While other agencies were placed on pause, we continued to advocate for the rights of our over 1,000 clients facing deportation in New York. This year, we successfully:

- Opened 311 new cases;
- Trained over 600 legal professionals;
- Made 500+ referrals to an array of medical, food, and shelter resources;
- Distributed nearly \$40,000 in assistance to 130 households; and
- Ensured that none of our clients were ordered removed.



Our clients have endured many hardships over the past year. The Trump administration's response during the COVID-19 crisis left many immigrants with few options for economic relief. It also increased restrictions at the border that resulted in dangerous conditions for migrants.

Meanwhile, undocumented immigrants were placed in an extremely vulnerable situation: most lacked job security, were less likely to have health insurance, and were often hesitant to seek emergency medical treatment. We responded by providing substantial legal representation and additional essential resources.

Our rapid response to an ever-changing set of obstacles was made possible by the creativity and dedication of our staff, the resilience and leadership of our clients, and the support from our partners, volunteers, and donors. We would not be able to continue advocating for our clients without our supporters by our side.

As our thoughts turn to 2021 and to the record numbers of young people crossing the border, we want to thank you again for helping to ensure that no child faces the immigration process alone.

Sincerely,



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink.

Rich Leimsider
Executive Director



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink.

Pam Foster, Esq.
Chair, Board of Directors

A Year of Tenacity

2020 was a year of hardship. The Trump administration's response to the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted every arm of the U.S. immigration system: heightened restrictions at the border; severe delays in visa and immigration benefit processing; and an expansion of expedited removal. Agencies closed one day were on Twitter demanding electronic filings the next. Our attorneys continually adjusted to these abrupt policy changes with creativity. In 2020, Safe Passage Project closed 57 cases in which our clients received legal relief through a green card, asylum grant, DACA status, U-Visa, or prosecutorial discretion. **No clients were ordered removed.**



500+

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



While our legal team focused on defending our clients' legal rights, our small-but-mighty social work team adapted with alacrity to the urgent needs of New York's immigrant community. In addition to making nearly 500 referrals to an array of resources, including mental health, medical health, health insurance, food assistance, and shelters, Safe Passage Project launched an emergency response cash assistance program in April, **distributing \$40,000 in assistance to 130 households.** Many young people reported to us they used the money to purchase basic goods such as food, toiletries, clothing, and rent.

The country's deportation machine has not paused with the pandemic, and neither will Safe Passage Project and our passionate *pro bono* attorneys. Right now, thousands of refugee children are facing removal in New York Immigration Court without a lawyer to represent them. With your support, we are closer to bringing that number down to zero.



1,401

— young people served with full legal representation during 2020.



311

— new cases taken on by our staff and *pro bono* attorneys.



426

— in-depth screenings of prospective clients.



605

— legal professionals trained at 12 in-person & virtual events.



527

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



40,000+

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

Leaders in Law

In 2020, we made new strides in providing rapid assistance to non-citizens facing imminent deportation or detention with the victory of *Joshua M. v. Barr*. With our help, Joshua had filed for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status ("SIJS"), an immigration classification available to certain undocumented immigrants under the age of 21 who have been abused, neglected, or abandoned by a parent. While his claim was still pending, he was pulled over for a speeding ticket and transferred to ICE custody.

Despite not having a criminal record, he was denied bond after an immigration judge deemed him a "danger to the community." The judge then denied his asylum claim in a rushed trial.

In partnership with Greenberg Traurig, LLP and the Rapid Defense Network, we filed a motion to reopen his removal case, which the same immigration judge promptly denied. We appealed to the Board of Immigration Appeals, and simultaneously filed a *habeas* petition in federal court, arguing that Joshua has a constitutional right to due process and that removing him from the country when he's been designated a Special Immigrant Juvenile would violate those rights. In February 2020, in a strongly-worded decision, the federal district court found that it had jurisdiction over the case and denied the government's Motion to Dismiss. Safe Passage Project celebrated as Joshua was released after more than a year of detention.

Since Joshua's release, his ongoing case has had wide-reaching effects on immigration law. Federal judges in Michigan and Maryland found, relying on *Joshua M. v. Barr*, that two different people were being unlawfully detained. They were released. We continue to fight Joshua's case on two fronts: we are appealing the immigration judge's decision to the circuit court, while the case about due process and the meaning of SIJS continues at the district court.

Inspiring Change through Pro Bono Service

Safe Passage Project's extensive capacity to represent hundreds of children comes from our unique *pro bono* service model. We train and mentor hundreds of volunteer lawyers (many of whom have never worked in immigration law) to take on immigration cases. With the brainpower of these volunteers, our staff of only 41 can support over 1,000 clients. This scalable model drives our success rate, and it also facilitates broad-based systematic change by training our peers on best practices in the field.



Keith Haring Foundation

A Partnership that Lasts



Safe Passage Project and the Keith Haring Foundation have fostered a long-standing partnership that works to honor Mr. Haring's philanthropic goal of enriching the lives of underprivileged children.

Our Executive Director, Rich Leimsider had the opportunity to speak with the Foundation's Acting Director, Gil Vazquez, to hear about the important ways in which our work reinforces the core values of the Foundation.

Rich: Why did the Keith Haring Foundation choose to support Safe Passage Project?

Gil: The work that Safe Passage does is so needed. We, here in the United States, enjoy quite a lot of privilege — so much that we cannot even fathom that a family would walk the distances that they walk to get to this country, or allow a child to go on their own. The ultimate reason for the founding of this country has a lot to do with coming here to make a better life and that should not apply to only certain kinds of people. So the work you do is exemplary. Your organization to these families and kids is necessary. It's really as simple as that.



Rich: Can you explain why the Keith Haring Foundation has chosen to embrace a partnership model with us?

Gil: Across the board, we are trying to improve long-term outcomes, and that doesn't happen with single, one-time grants. So Safe Passage falls into this goal; it's not work that is going away. We don't foresee a situation where the work you do is no longer needed.

Rich: Is there anything else you want to say about the approach of the foundation and its leadership?

Gil: We would like to thank you for what you do. When we visited, you took us to court and explained that the court these kids are being processed through is not actually a court, it is an executive process. That was extremely powerful. It would be surprising to a lot of people that the courts and judges are working for the executive branch rather than the judicial.

Thank you. It's just beyond words. I think that our founder [Keith Haring] would absolutely fully support everything that you do. It really is what he was all about.



Together Rising

Collective Action for Immigrant Youth



TOGETHER
RISING

Together Rising seeks to turn collective heartbreak into effective action; they have invested over \$10 million to support separated families and detained and unaccompanied children. Since 2018, Safe Passage has been a fortunate recipient of \$450,000 of that investment. We asked Together Rising to speak about the unique ways in which we help fulfill their vision for improving the lives of immigrant children.

"Your work is unique and incredible for many reasons, one of which is the way you show up to find immigrant and refugee children who need representation. Your team of dedicated advocates will approach a line of children waiting outside of immigration court for their cases to be heard and ask—child by child—if they need representation. If they do, you represent them. The way you tackle the issue of lack of representation so directly is so impressive."

Together Rising's ongoing support has enabled Safe Passage to train and mentor hundreds of lawyers that provide free services for refugee children seeking asylum. This funding was particularly critical during crises like the separated youth debacle and the more recent pandemic. Together Rising has stood behind Safe Passage, and we are entirely grateful.

Rodney L. White Foundation

A Publication with Purpose

Safe Passage Project had the privilege of visiting a New York Immigration Court with representatives from the Rodney L. White Foundation prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. After watching the newly-landed, unaccompanied youth navigate the hallways of these massive buildings with little understanding of the U.S. immigration system, the team came up with an innovative idea.

Why don't we produce a Spanish comic book that maps the immigration court process and explains the role of Safe Passage Project attorneys? The idea took hold almost immediately, resulting in the publication of a graphic pamphlet that our attorneys now use to tell young people about our services.

This invaluable tool, coupled with the annual funding from the foundation, has enabled Safe Passage to creatively expand our reach and our capacity to defend the legal rights of immigrant youth.

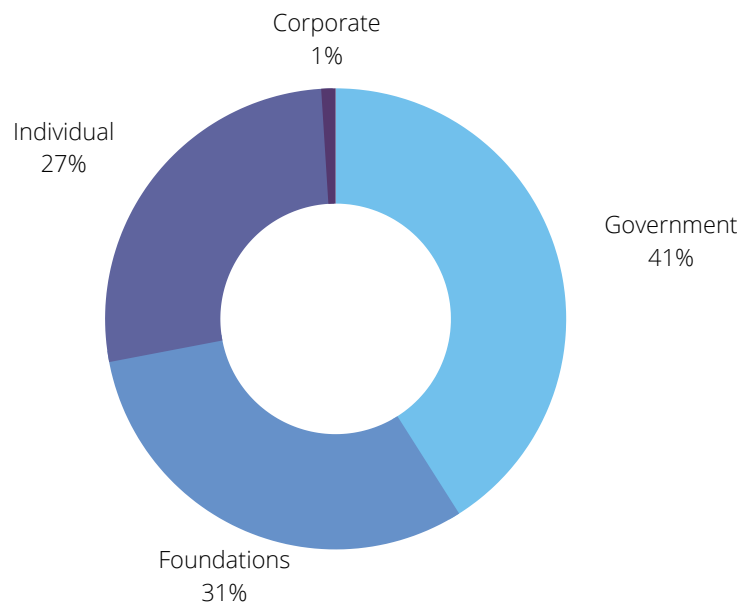
"We appreciate the opportunity to leverage our resources in a way that allows Safe Passage to reach more children, more quickly. We could not be more impressed with their efficient use of capital to help hundreds of immigrant youth in New York year in and year out. The impact of their work is profound."



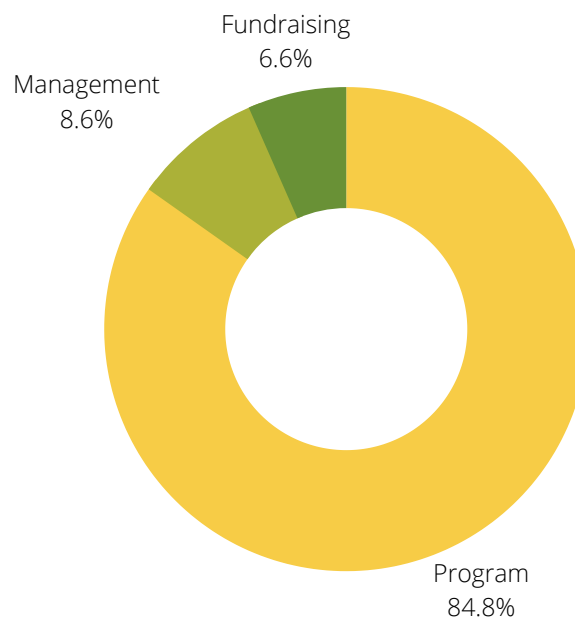
Financials

FY2020: Jan 1 – Dec 31

Revenue:
\$4,810,643



Expenses:
\$4,078,504



Note: These are preliminary financial results and numbers may change prior to filing our final audited financials.

Thank You to Our Staff

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Managing Attorney,
Long Island

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Staff Attorney II

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Alix McCown
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Lourdes Medina
Social Worker

Victoria Metayer
Development Assistant

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Quiñones**
Legal Clerk

Samantha Norris
Supervising Social
Worker

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Senior Staff Attorney

Maria José Padilla
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Elizabeth Rivera
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Partner, Head of Asset Management and CIO
Compass Group

Sam Newbold
Chair, Immigration Law Group
Chiesa Shahnian & Giantomasi PC



116

— green card applications filed
in 2020.



299

— Special Immigrant Juvenile
Status (SIJS) I-360 approvals
received.



37

— asylum applications filed on
behalf of our clients.



71

— custody or guardianship
claims filed.

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163

— employment authorizations
filed in 2020.

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"The support we receive from Safe Passage is far and away the best I've ever seen. Their mentoring is the gold standard for nonprofits collaborating with private firms on pro bono work."

Bill Borenstein
Legal Assistant
Carter Ledyard & Milburn LLP



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Gay Young
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Joseph Zhu
Elayna Ziemer



Amanda Bell

A graduate of Yale and Columbia Law School, Amanda was a union organizer for a decade before becoming a labor-side attorney at the law firm Friedman & Anspach. In her "spare time," Amanda (a fluent Spanish speaker) was a dedicated Safe Passage Project *pro bono* attorney who worked tirelessly on behalf of her young clients. Her efforts won them safety and legal status in the United States. We will remember Amanda's generosity, tenacity, exceptional lawyering skill, and most of all, her kindness. Amanda was an extraordinary person, and we at Safe Passage were lucky to know her. We extend our deepest condolences to her family.



Barbara Mehlsack

A dedicated labor-side employment lawyer, Barbara worked for decades on behalf of unionized employees, including as a partner at Gorlick, Kravitz & Listhaus, P.C. As a Safe Passage *pro bono* attorney, Barbara's sheer determination, persistence, and incredible lawyering skills secured asylum for a young boy in the face of desperate legal odds during the darkest days of the Trump administration's war on Central American asylum seekers. We will never forget her passion and dedication. We lost a light when we lost Barbara; may her memory be a blessing.

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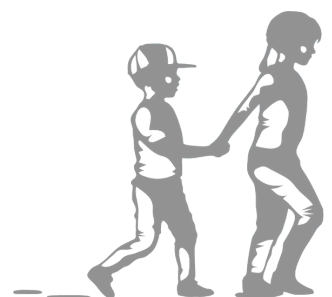
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Did You Know?

Special Juvenile Immigrant Status (SIJS) is an immigration classification available to certain undocumented immigrants under the age of 21 who have been abused, neglected, or abandoned by a parent. SIJS is a way for immigrants to apply for and obtain legal permanent residence in the U.S.

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No child should face the immigration process alone.

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Visit safepassageproject.org for more information.
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