



Annual Report 2021

The Power of Persistence

Dear Friends,

Thank you for standing with us in 2021, a year of unprecedented need, to provide immigrant children with legal representation. Between September 2020 and October 2021, 8,534 young people were released to the care of sponsors in New York State — more than any year on record. Your support allowed us to provide a dedicated lawyer, and referrals to critical social work services, to many of these children.

Over this past year, you helped us:

- Successfully secure legal stability for 106 clients who obtained legal permanent residence and asylee status;
- Make 530 referrals to social service providers;
- Open 175 new cases for full legal representation;
- Ensure that none of our clients were ordered deported.



We achieved these goals in large part thanks to the robust network of volunteers who fight alongside these young people every day. We actively work with over 40 interpreters and more than 565 *pro bono* attorneys collectively donating over 67,000+ hours throughout the course of the year. These efforts translate directly into higher quality child-centered and trauma-informed lawyering for unaccompanied youth seeking safe harbor.

We began 2021 expecting a year of stabilization, but instead found ourselves constantly changing to accommodate unique challenges. The switch to remote operations became an opportunity to pilot new initiatives, such as increasing interpreter placement and launching North Star, a portal for Safe Passage Project *pro bono* attorneys to find litigation documents and training videos. We also discovered unexpected benefits to these adaptations: our transition to virtual intake sessions has increased our efficiency.

Looking ahead, we have ambitious plans for 2022. In addition to welcoming a new Executive Director, we are ramping up our efforts to meet the needs of a growing population of unrepresented youth on Long Island. Thank you again for continuing to support the legal rights of immigrant children and for taking action to ensure that no child faces the immigration process alone.

Sincerely,



Desiree C. Hernández Sánchez

Desiree C. Hernández Sánchez
Interim Executive Director



Pam Foster, Esq.

Pam Foster, Esq.
Chair, Board of Directors



The Outsized Impact of Legal Victories

This year, we are celebrating the completion of an ongoing fight to protect the legal right of immigrant children. In 2017, Safe Passage Project's young client A.H. was arrested without notice outside his home on Long Island, New York, and transferred in the dead of night to a detention center in California. Working in partnership with the ACLU and others, Safe Passage Project secured A.H.'s release back to his mother. His case became the nationally significant *Saravia v. Barr* class action lawsuit which has provided important protections to an entire group of young immigrants.

In early 2021, the government agreed to a final settlement that updates their own internal policy manual to make these protections permanent. The settlement protects young people from arbitrary arrest, ensures access to a lawyer, requires special judicial hearings, and prevents the federal government from using false accusations against this vulnerable population. Immigrants and attorneys nationwide now regularly refer to "Saravia Rights" the same way criminal defendants can refer to "Miranda Rights."



2021 Triumphs

1,289 children provided with free lawyers

90%+ success rate

168 cases closed and protections secured

These wins are the result of a year of tireless supportive actions, such as:

133 green card applications were filed

110 custody/guardianship claims filed

152 work authorizations filed

19 asylum applications filed

67,000+ hours of legal work





Our Long Island Initiative

In response to a growing and urgent need, Safe Passage Project has increased its legal services on Long Island. In fact, we have become the largest provider to unaccompanied minors there, but we have a long way to go to close the gap. In the 1980s, refugees fled political unrest, violence, and civil war in Central America, and thousands eventually settled on Long Island. When unaccompanied minors cross the border today, as many as 15% find themselves released into the care of these relatives.

Unfortunately, the children placed in Suffolk and Nassau counties have fewer opportunities to access free lawyers than their peers. Only about 25% of Long Island child refugees are getting legal representation, compared to about half of immigrant kids in New York.

To ensure permanent and stable immigration status for as many of these young people as possible, Safe Passage Project started a new initiative in 2021 to amplify our efficacy on Long Island. In partnership with multiple local organizations and institutions, we are serving 318 clients on Long Island, and to date, 97% of our completed Nassau and Suffolk county cases have resulted in a successful outcome. We are looking forward to finding new ways to reach this underserved population in 2022.



"I partnered with Safe Passage Project because I am dedicated to ensuring no child in Long Island faces the immigration process alone. The situation there, in Nassau and Suffolk counties in particular, has become dire for unaccompanied youth. Thanks to Safe Passage Project and our community of immigration organizations, I am proud to say we are making important strides toward reaching that goal."

- Mark Sillcox

Farewell, Rich Leimsider



Executive Director Rich Leimsider stepped down from his role in the summer of 2021. Under his leadership, Safe Passage Project has grown significantly, from a \$1M organization to a \$5M enterprise with a staff of 40 professionals. Since Rich became the Executive Director in 2016, Safe Passage Project has increased its reach from serving just over 540 to 1,289 young people in New York and on Long Island today.

We are grateful for Rich's dedication to our clients, his advocacy on behalf of immigrant rights, and his leadership during challenging times which contributed to making Safe Passage Project a stronger organization.



Asylum Granted: Jonathan's Story

Safe Passage Project is honored to recognize our client Jonathan (whose name has been changed to protect his privacy) who was recently granted asylum. He is a young member of a Mayan indigenous tribe whose community and family have been systematically subjected to harassment and violence.

These threats of violence ultimately forced his mother to flee Guatemala with her son when he was 15 years old. Instead of reaching safety at the end of their harrowing journey, Jonathan and his mother were thrust into another nightmare when they were separated at the U.S. border.

It would be over two years and endless litigation before they would see each other again. With the tremendous effort of sponsors and legal service providers located throughout the United States, Jonathan was able to move to New York and reunite with his mother. Together, they have been rebuilding their lives.

His case was transferred to Safe Passage after his move to New York. Jonathan's asylum claim was filed based on his race and indigenous identity, as well as the violence he faced from local gangs. The New York Asylum Office granted his asylum claim. This case is a major win for Jonathan, Safe Passage, and other asylum advocates who have worked for decades on these issues.

The case is even more significant because he is one of over 5,500 children who were separated from their families under the Zero Tolerance policy enacted in 2018. Now, he is finally able to start planning for his future here in the United States. He is currently going to school and working part-time as he pursues his dream of becoming a movie producer. Safe Passage applauds Jonathan's bravery, and pledges to continue to support him on the next step of his journey.



Kate Todrys: All-Star Volunteer



Kate Todrys first discovered Safe Passage Project in 2018 as a member of Brooklyn Branches Giving Circle. A human rights lawyer and mother of two, she was immediately drawn to our mission. "I was appalled by the treatment of children entering the country to apply for asylum and I wanted to do something about it," Kate said. Safe Passage Project provided an avenue for action.

Through our *pro bono* attorney program, Kate quickly learned to apply her legal skills to another area of the law. She has since taken on consecutive cases of two brothers who came to the United States from Honduras. Members of the Garifuna ethnic group, they fled the gang violence that killed their father. While their mother remains in the country, their aunt - who lives in the Bronx - took them in and became the younger brother's legal guardian.

Alongside her Safe Passage Project mentor attorney, Kate has advanced her cases through a complex immigration process, made even more challenging by the pandemic. "I started from scratch, but through the excellent trainings and my mentor's guidance, I became capable of fully advocating for my client's needs."

After a long process, she finally secured legal protection for her first client and hopes to do the same for his brother. "I am in awe of what my clients have gone through and the resilience they demonstrate," Kate says. "Part of my role requires that I ask someone to live and relive the absolute hardest parts of their life - and they have done it with such grace."

Beyond giving her time and expertise as a *pro bono* attorney, Kate and her husband Eric also give as donors. "Something my parents instilled in me is the importance of doing whatever you can to make other people's lives better." We salute their dedication to making sure no child faces the immigration process alone.

Simpson Thacher: Vital Partners

Each year, dozens of Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP *pro bono* attorneys team up with Safe Passage Project to provide legal screenings for an estimated 100 children fleeing violence in their homelands. The lawyers help assess whether the children are eligible for relief from deportation by going through our specially-designed intake process.

Harlene Katzman (*Pro Bono* Counsel & Director), Susan Cordaro (Deputy *Pro Bono* Counsel), and Maria Gonzalez (*Pro Bono* Coordinator) lead this partnership. "Simpson Thacher's team intuitively understands how to help," notes Michelle Lopez, Operations Associate at Safe Passage Project. "They contact us to schedule their screening days. They bring veteran volunteers who hit the ground running. They follow up after each screening event. They invest themselves as genuine, caring partners."

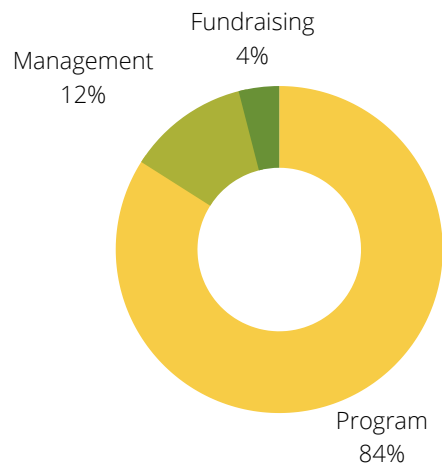
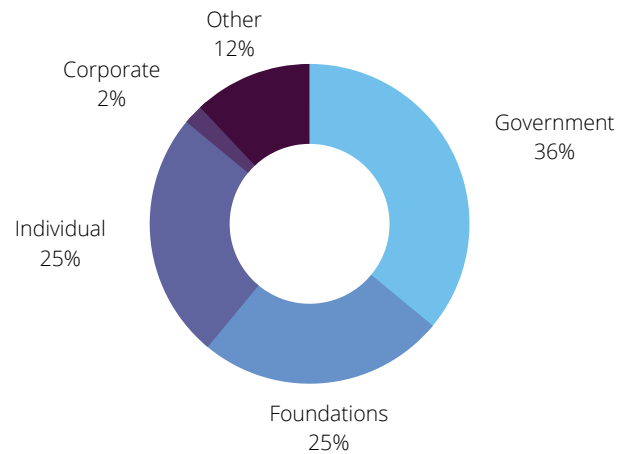
Safe Passage Project's Acting Legal Director Nicole Johnson can attest to the critical role that Simpson Thacher plays. "At the beginning of the pandemic, we had to convert to virtual operations on a dime. Simpson Thacher immediately jumped into action by doing dozens of screenings so we could continue to accept new cases."

According to Katzman, the benefits go in both directions: "We could not ask for a better partnership. Our attorneys find deep meaning in hearing the stories of children forced to cross the southern border alone." Cordaro praises the training and detailed materials provided by Safe Passage prior to the clinic. "This allows us to serve hundreds of young people while only requiring a few hours from each lawyer," she says.

Gonzalez is hopeful for the future: "We are looking forward to our continued partnership and common goal of serving a community in need of better opportunities and of a more stable future in this country." Safe Passage Project is very thankful to Harlene, Susan, and Maria and the terrific team at Simpson Thacher who help us ensure that immigrant children do not face the immigration process alone.



2021 Financials



Revenue

Contributions

Corporate	\$108,000
Foundation	\$1,314,000
Government	\$1,886,000
Individual	\$1,336,000
Subtotal Contribution Support	\$4,644,000

Other Revenue

Investment Income	\$1,000
PPP Loan	\$631,000
Subtotal Other Revenue	\$632,000
Total Revenue	\$5,276,000

Expenses

Fundraising	\$196,000
Management	\$541,000
Program	\$3,745,000
Total Expenses	\$4,482,000

Note: Numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand. These are preliminary financial results and numbers may change prior to filing our final audited financials.



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Samuel Abate
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Our Pro Bono Attorneys

Rita Tobin
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No child should face the immigration process alone.

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