

AJ Albinak: Welcome, everyone. I'm AJ Albinak, the Development Director of the Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights. We are grateful you're able to join us for this webinar about the Young Center's safe repatriation program, how we've changed our safe repatriation work to facilitate children's safe return during a global pandemic, and why it is more important than ever that our government consider each child's best interests in every decision.

One quick note: On the bottom of your screen, you should have a chat box where you can submit your questions throughout the presentation. We are reserving plenty of time for questions at the end. We will, however, end the webinar promptly at 1pm Central. We also recommend switching to Speaker View for best viewing.

Our conversation today is especially important now, as DHS deports children with no regard for their safety and well-being. As we speak, the government continues to hold children in hotels with ICE contractors while they await deportation flights. Many of these children have never had a chance to seek protection. They have not been given the chance to tell their stories and they are getting deported with no questions asked. We don't know if they are going back to safe homes or abusive ones and if they have someone to receive them and care for them or not. DHS is also taking children out of ORR custody and deporting them hastily without meeting the standards of safe repatriation. Some of these children's cases were previously decided in the sham courts at the border, where children lack Child Advocates and legal representation. Instead of giving them a true chance to seek protection- as they are afforded under our own anti-trafficking laws- the government is sending them back to their abusers and persecutors. We are proud at the Young Center to have joined litigation challenging this treatment of children by the government, but beyond that, our staff work daily to support and advocate for individual children.

Today, for the first 30 minutes or so, you are going to meet two of those staff members and learn about some of the successes your support has made possible, as well as some of the challenges we continue to face on the front lines of our work with immigrant children in custody and seeking safety during the coronavirus. You'll also hear from a partner organization about how we are building cross-border efforts to fight for immigrant children.

So, the Young Center staff you are about to hear from include our New York office Managing Social Worker Shaina Simenas, who consults on cases nationally across Young Center offices and is a lead collaborator on the Young Center's work on international home studies. You'll hear from Estrellita Alvarado, the lead Social Worker for the Young Center's Safe Repatriation project. Estrellita works out of our Phoenix office and brings her background as a clinician providing trauma-informed mental health services for unaccompanied immigrant children to the project. And Glykeria Tsiokanou, a Child Detention Fellow with Justice in Motion, who are one of our key partners on the ground in Central America for our safe repatriation work. And we'll start with Shaina Simenas, who is going to give you an introduction to the Young Center's best interests advocacy in the context of safe repatriation work. Shaina.

Shaina Simenas: Thank you all so much, AJ. And Thank you, everyone, for joining us today. I am grateful to be joined by colleagues and collaborators to discuss the Young Center's safe repatriation program. For those of you who aren't familiar with our work, at the Young Center, we advocate for the rights and best interests of unaccompanied and separated immigrant children in federal immigration custody. It's important to note that the US immigration system does not take into consideration the best interests of the child, a standard that is universally used in our domestic system when a child's custody is at stake.

The role of the Child Advocate is to advocate for the best interests – safety and well-being – of the child and we do this by making recommendations about children's care and custody, detention, their release from detention, legal representation, deportation, and safe repatriation. It is important to note that as Child Advocates, we make best interests recommendations, we are not the decision makers on the children's cases. We meet with the children we are appointed to once a week, develop a relationship of trust, learn their stories over time and learn what the child wants, all of which contributes to and informs our recommendations.

Through the Young Center's safe repatriation work, we collaborate with partners to gather information about children's safety in their country of origin. We have developed relationships with non-governmental organizations, and independent social workers and psychologists to conduct international home studies in countries all over the world, including but not limited to El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Haiti, Mexico, Brazil, Angola, and Canada. We use this information to develop our best interests recommendations about a child's safety and best interests. We submit these recommendations to decision makers—immigration officers, asylum officers, immigration judges and other decision makers— in advance of a decision about a child's repatriation.

At the Young Center we ground our advocacy in best interests, and it's important to take a step back and discuss the factors we consider when developing best interests recommendations. Our Best Interests Paradigm is grounded in principles from the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As you can see our Best Interests Paradigm is behind me. First and foremost, we consider a child's wishes, we also look to a child's safety to inform a recommendation, and any clear threats to a child's safety in obtaining those expressed wishes. Additionally, our best interests paradigm directs us to consider children's right to liberty, the right to family unity, development, and identity.

So how does our safe repatriation program tie into our role as Child Advocate or best interests advocate? As Child Advocate we gather information to inform our recommendations. We often gather that information through our work with children as well as their families or communities in their country of origin. We rely heavily on partners in children's country of origin for consultation and international home studies, to help us have a better understanding and a

holistic view of children's individual needs. Our safe repatriation work informs recommendations in many areas of a child's case, when working with children who are unable to share their stories, it gives us the opportunity to connect with others who can speak to the child's experience and help us learn what they are unable to share with us. Working with partners in other countries can inform us about common practices or systems children may have engaged with, and conversations with experts in those countries ensure we view the information we gather from a culturally informed lens. This work has helped us find contact information for family members of children who thought they had lost a relative, gather identity documents for children who had none, develop safety plans for children who wish to return to their country of origin, enhance safety in the reception and repatriation process itself, and support requests for immigration relief from the United States. Understanding children's lived experiences supports and informs the recommendations we develop through the course of our work with a young person.

To illustrate our safe repatriation program, I wanted to share the story of a young girl who we've worked with. I also wanted to let you all know that we have modified all case examples used today to protect the confidential information of children.

The Young Center was appointed to the case of a four-year-old girl from Honduras. We'll call her Hilda. Hilda fled to the US with her father and was then forcibly separated from him by immigration officials upon apprehension. Hilda was designated an unaccompanied child and placed in custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement, which I'll refer to as ORR. Meanwhile her father was detained in immigration custody, in another state across the country. Throughout her placement in custody, Hilda consistently expressed her desire to be with her father. After being appointed as Child Advocate, the Young Center case supervisor gathered information about Hilda's life in home country through conversations over the phone with her father in immigration detention and with her mother who remained in Honduras, to understand potential risks if Hilda were to be repatriated. Through the phone calls, we learned that Hilda traveled to U.S. with her father escaping threats from a gang.

We then conducted an international home study, the goal of which was to gather information about Hilda's life in Honduras and any potential threats to her if she were to return. Through the home study we were able to learn why her father brought her to the U.S., what her mother's wishes were for her daughter, and any remaining safety concerns that would impact her ability to repatriate to Honduras safely. The international home study provider visited Hilda's home, assessed the community, and spoke with several members of her family about targeted threats of physical harm against Hilda's family by gang members. Through the home study we learned that Hilda's mother and sister had fled their home and were living in hiding with extended family in fear for their lives. They also feared harm from the same gang members Hilda and her father had fled and were afraid to go to the police, fearing retaliation if they did. While her mother missed Hilda terribly, she expressed her wish for her daughter was that she be reunited with her father and remain in safety in the United States.

Simultaneously, Hilda's father was granted bond by an immigration judge in the United States. We coordinated with a partner organization that works to reunite separated families free from detention to help support dad's bond and subsequent release from detention. We then used the information gathered from the international home study to advocate with decision-makers for Hilda's immediate release and reunification with her father in the United States. Our recommendation was granted, and Hilda was reunited with her father. We have since followed up with Hilda and her father. He shared with us that his daughter initially struggled to adjust after their initial separation but was improving and happy. The Young Center referred the father and child to a local community center specialized in treating early childhood trauma, to address some of Hilda's father's concerns about the initial separation and the impact on her development.

In Hilda's case, our home study helped us understand the danger she would face if she returned to Honduras, however, in other cases we learn information that assists us in advocating for a child's safe repatriation and reunification in home country when that aligns with their wishes.

I'm now going to hand it over to my colleague Estrellita, who is the Safe Repatriation Social Worker and coordinates the safe repatriation work for all Young Center offices. Thank you.

Estrellita Alvarado: Thank you, Shaina. I'm happy to share the work that...how COVID-19 has impacted our safe repatriation work. In the past several months, the Young Center has faced many hurdles with regard to our safe repatriation work. Limitations due to COVID-19 pandemic have impacted and shifted the way we advocate for a child's safe return home.

Within days of the first case, the Guatemalan government took measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by implementing travel restrictions. By March 16, 2020, the non-profit agencies and independent home study providers with whom we partner with in Guatemala communicated that international home studies were suspended until restrictions were lifted.

In the following weeks that followed, we received notice from additional home study providers in Honduras, El Salvador, and Mexico that their governments placed travel and shelter-in-place restrictions. These restrictions consistently changed, and we been unable to conduct home studies in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico since mid-March.

We remain in weekly communication with a network of home study providers in all receiving countries, to gather up-to-date information about the repatriation process and country restrictions. This information has been critical to our advocacy as we learn about the conditions to which children return. Although COVID-19 has halted many activities in countries across the world, this has not been the case of the repatriation of unaccompanied children.

Unaccompanied children still face the risk of deportation; however, it is important to note that some children want to and choose to return.

The Young Center's advocacy and best interests paradigm aims to ensure safety and minimize the stress of a child's return home. We do so by responding to each child's immediate physical and emotional needs during repatriation.

With the increase of COVID-19 cases, each country has its own set of restrictions. For example, the Guatemalan government placed the country in lockdown, suspended public transportation, and prohibited inter-departmental travel. In Honduras, the suspension of all flights, including repatriation flights, has been suspended for months. The government placed a national curfew and shelter-in-place restrictions. Individuals are only allowed to travel or leave their homes every 15 days. In El Salvador, the country was placed in national quarantine, suspended public and commercial transportation, and permitted only one individual per household to leave to purchase necessities. Upon entry, people returning from the U.S. were placed at the quarantine centers for up to 30 days.

The types of cases and experiences across Young Center offices varied significantly during COVID-19. We observed the reception and repatriation processes were inconsistent, and information varied across stakeholders. Since April, we have collaborated with our policy team to provide weekly updates to program staff about restrictions and quarantine protocols in countries of origin, the reception process, conditions of repatriation, and suggestions for advocacy planning.

Before discussing the impact of COVID on the repatriation process, let's talk about before a child makes a decision for voluntary departure.

Children in ORR custody can request voluntary departure. This allows the child to leave the U.S. without triggering certain blocks to their return to the United States in the future.

After a child is granted voluntary departure, the child's consulate processes their travel document and informs the child's family of their return, and the United States government is responsible for coordinating and transporting a child's repatriation. Upon arrival, their caregivers travel, often hours, to the reception center in the receiving country to reunify with their children.

Upon receiving voluntary departure, a child has a time-limited window to repatriate. In some cases, up to 120 days as directed by the immigration judge's order. Now with the repatriation delays, if the child stays beyond the date the immigration judge gives in the voluntary departure order, the VD order automatically turns into an order of deportation. Having an order of deportation means the child has been expelled and is barred from returning to the United States.

Our advocacy focus: if a child already has a voluntary order and is reaching the limit specified in the order, we advocate for an extension with ICE, directly or through the child's attorney, to ensure that the voluntary order does not turn into an order of deportation.

Normally, under the age of 13, children travel on commercial flights; however, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras closed their airports and cancelled commercial flights. We learned that children under the age of 13 travelled on ICE charter flights. In these cases, children were discharged from ORR custody but waited days in hotels before boarding return flights.

Our advocacy focused with DHS and the facility to ensure social distancing practices are enforced during charter flights. For example, the child is provided a mask and gloves and given the opportunity to practice how to utilize them. We also advocated for children to board last and exit the plane first and be seated child at the front of the plane.

In the past, a child reunified with their family within a day of repatriation. Under COVID, the reunification of children and families is prolonged. Families are not able to travel to the reception centers. Children face quarantine restrictions upon arrival, and some must wait for the child welfare agency to arrange transportation.

Our advocacy focused on clarifying what health screening and quarantine procedures the children's home country implemented. Who is informing the family if and where the child is quarantined? Does the child have access to communication with their families upon their return and while they are in quarantine?

We also saw that families receive little notice of the child's return. Children were often picked up during very early hours of the day, during the dark causing confusion.

We advocated for children to travel during appropriate daytime hours, for families to be informed 24 hours before their arrival.

Logistics for safe repatriation required additional advocacy and advance planning across stakeholders. I will share the story of Julia.

We served as a Child Advocate for Julia, a five-year-old girl from Guatemala who immigration officials separated from her older brother upon apprehension, even though there was no safety concerns. In fact, for several months her brother had been her primary caregiver after their mother passed away. He was placed in ICE detention center and Julia in ORR custody. The brother was deported back to Guatemala, while Julia remained in a foster home in the United States. In the beginning, Julia expressed a desire to stay in the US. She had grown attached to her foster mom, but her family in Guatemala wished for her return. The Child Advocate met with Julia weekly to understand her wishes. Simultaneously, the Young Center conducted safe repatriation assessments through a series of calls with the family and found that Julia was deeply cared for and loved by her family. The safety assessment determined there were no safety concerns and showed the family was anxious for Julia's return and were worried about her well-being. We used this information along with Julia's consistent expressed wishes to return with her family to advocate with decision-makers to support Julia's request for voluntary departure.

Due to Guatemala's travel restrictions and quarantine procedures, we were concerned about Julia's prolonged separation from her family. We advocated with the Guatemalan consulate to consider necessary safeguards due to COVID-19. For example, we advocated that the family receive a minimum of 24-hour notice before Julia's arrival and recognize the travel restrictions set in place by the Guatemalan government. We also referred the case to our partner organization, Justice in Motion, who Glykeria will explain later in the presentation. Justice in Motion connected with the family on the ground to ensure the family understood the repatriation process and had the documents needed at the reception center.

Two months after Julia's voluntary departure was granted, ICE's transportation contractor picked up Julia. The family was informed of the child's return date to Guatemala and made plans to meet her at the reception site; however, upon arrival at the reception center, Julia was not present. Her brother had traveled five hours from his community to pick up his sister. We immediately reached out to our partner organizations in the US and Guatemala to locate Julia.

We learned that Julia was still in the US because her flight was canceled, and she was waiting in a hotel. No one informed the family; it was through our communication that they would receive updates. It took three days to find and coordinate a phone call with Julia, who shared she was doing well. Once Julia's flight was confirmed, Justice in Motion coordinated the reception process with the family and the child welfare agency. They visited the Guatemalan reception center in-person to confirm Julia's arrival. Julia reunited with her family with the support of our partner, who was crucial in coordinating with Julia's older brother to pick up his sister at the reception center.

During our follow-up call with the family, we found out Julia is doing well, happy to be reunited with her family, and ready to start school in the fall.

In cases like Julia's, like many others, collaboration with partners in the U.S. and internationally is crucial in providing support to children and their families through the reception and repatriation process. During these times, families did not receive timely information or were not informed at all about their child's return. Stakeholders who made decisions about the child's return journey did not consider the child's best interests.

It is critical to have information about what individual children would return to inform our recommendation and ensure safeguards for repatriation. In addition, for children who will return to their home countries, the information is necessary to develop repatriation plans and identify services to help them safely reunify with their families and reintegrate to their communities.

Reintegration services were also impacted during this time. They face challenges.

Over the past three years, we have significantly increased our collaboration with international partners as we aim to ensure safe repatriation planning. We refer the children to reintegration

organizations, many of whom have local non-profit partners on the ground in the child's home country, that provide return and reintegration services.

Pre-COVID, our international partners provided families with in-person support through the reception process as they reunified with their children, in addition to reintegration services that include educational, vocational, medical, and mental health resources.

The impact of COVID: Currently, organizational partners in country of origin are restricted in their ability to provide in-person visits and support. All communication with families is by phone and video.

We also saw an increase that families face food insecurity. Countries shut down so quickly families were not able to purchase resources in bulk, especially families without the financial means. Shelter-in place restrictions have made it difficult for families to work. Families living in rural communities are severely affected. Before COVID19, their access to resources was already limited. Now, due to COVID, with the suspension of public transportation and travel restrictions families don't have access to food, protective equipment and medical treatment, if needed. Partner organizations are not able to travel to where families live.

There's also been an increase of stigma in country of origins for returned migrants due to exposure to COVID-19. Families are worried their communities won't accept their children.

As you can see from these examples, unaccompanied children remain highly vulnerable, and those vulnerabilities increased during the global pandemic. Through our safe repatriation work, we continue to place the safety and well-being of unaccompanied and separated children in the center and ensuring decision-makers have all information before a decision is made.

Now, I will hand it over to Glykeria from Justice in Motion. We've had the opportunity to partner with Justice in Motion in a variety of ways to gather information that helps children in their release from detention and repatriation. Under COVID, the Justice in Motion network has been instrumental in supporting families on the ground.

Thank you.

Glykeria Tsiokanou: Thank you so much, Estrellita, and thank you for inviting... Thank you, to everyone at the Young Center, for inviting us. So as Estrellita mentioned, I'm an immigration attorney. I work at Justice in Motion and today for the next few minutes, I'm going to talk a little bit about who we are, Justice in Motion, our partnership with the Young Center, and the impact of COVID-19 on our work.

So, Justice in Motion is a non-profit organization that uses cross-border collaborations to advance migrant rights. We particularly leverage the Justice in Motion Defender Network, comprised of trained attorneys and other professionals in Central America and Mexico, to support advocates in the U.S. and Canada in their litigation or provision of other types of

support, for example, in this case, the case of the Young Center, the support of Best Interest Determinations.

So, the way in which we do our work is through the facilitation of collaborations for on the ground support where U.S. Advocates do not have access to certain documents or information. So Justice in Motion Defenders, who are experts in their respective fields and very knowledgeable in the way systems work in various countries, are actually able to procure documents and information that are otherwise difficult to obtain.

Our Child Detention Crisis initiative is a pilot project that Justice in Motion launched last year. We designed and implemented the project with the support of a grant from Together Rising. And through this project, we actually seek to utilize the same model of cross border collaborations that I just mentioned, to help migrant children get out of detention and be reunited with their families as quickly as possible and as safely as possible. And of course, we try to ensure that support is provided both to the detained children and their families in the countries of origin.

So to that end, we partnered with the Young Center. We had already collaborated with the Young Center in the past but through this project we actually solidified our relationship through extensive work on cases of detained migrant children.

So, before anything else, I'd really like to highlight the importance and added value of the Young Center's work in the field of migrant rights and particularly, the advocacy on the best interests of migrant children. What we think is quite unique about the Young Center's approach to this work is that it developed the only program in the nation that offers the support of an independent Child Advocate, whose job is to advocate for the child's best interests—a part that did not exist before. So, at Justice in Motion we deeply appreciate the Young Center's interdisciplinary and holistic model, through which social workers and attorneys work closely to ensure the safety and well-being of every child. We also appreciate how this approach has now been extended to our work with Justice in Motion Defenders in Central America and Mexico.

Now, as already mentioned, Justice in Motion works closely with the Young Center on several cases supporting the role of Child Advocates through cross border collaborations. And this collaborative effort actually aims to ensure that the Young Center Advocates have accurate and current information to support each child's situation. And that is information and documents that sometimes can only be retrieved from Defenders on the ground due to their experience and expertise and that is a service that's quite valuable to the Child Advocates as they are able to make a best interest determination for each and every case.

Now, COVID-19 has impacted our lives and work severely. So, the way we've seen an effect of COVID-19 in our work is that at Justice in Motion, we noticed a drop in requests for support of

children's original claims—for example asylum claims, right—and at the same time, an increase in referrals for support of cases of repatriation. So why is that? It seems that it was mainly due to the fact that court appearances were either delayed, or canceled, or rescheduled and we received reports from advocates that many children decided not to proceed with their original relief that they were seeking but rather moved for voluntary departure, meaning that they asked, through their courts, the court that they be sent back to their country of origin, because they no longer wished to remain in detention pending immigration proceedings. And this is a particularly tough decision for a child to make, considering that - more often than not - the reasons that led them to flee their in the first place are still present; yet the risk of remaining in detention, under less than optimal circumstances, and being away from family members and their loved ones or familiar surroundings, without any sort of support, becomes ultimately a determining factor in their decision-making process as to whether to pursue their claim or to return to a country where they suffer persecution and/or trauma. So, it's quite tough to be in this field in these times.

Now, following the pandemic of COVID-19, we also receive notification that there was a directive by the Centers by the Center for Disease Control essentially authorizing expulsions at the southern border, both relating to unaccompanied children, but also family units, without them being afforded safeguards that they are in fact entitled to under the law.

So, we, Justice in Motion, continued to support both individual cases and federal litigation on the matter. We signed on to several letters condemning the government's expulsions of migrant children without affording them safeguards; and we also continued to provide on the ground support through investigation of the returned children in the countries of origin as well as actively interviewing them to figure out the conditions and circumstances under which they were expelled.

So, as Estrellita mentioned, of course there's been an impact on the individual cases that we've been working on. The case that Estrellita mentioned, the case of Julia, is actually a very impactful case. The main, one of the main concerns in this case was the uncertainty surrounding Julia's return to Guatemala and that's because we didn't know whether she'd be held in government custody upon return. We didn't know if she'd be allowed to be reunited with her family immediately, thus putting her at risk, at further risk, and we're talking here about a five-year-old girl who had already been detained in the U.S. So, the fact that the policies regarding the management of COVID-19 in Guatemala were unknown led advocates to request support in monitoring this situation on the ground and this is how our defender was actually assigned to that case. And as it was already mentioned, we provided, through our defender in Guatemala, we provided up to date information to Julia's family and the Young Center. We also tried to figure out the exact date and time of her return and our defender went the extra mile of actually visiting the government agency where she was held in Guatemala to ensure she was actually there and communicated that to her family until she was ultimately reunified with her family. And this is only one of the dozens of cases that we've supported

through our collaboration with the Young Center and it demonstrates, of course, the significance of this collaboration between Justice in Motion and the Young Center.

So I feel like we could talk about these cases forever, we could give a ton of examples, but I will wrap up here and give the opportunity to everyone to go to the next segment and now we have the Q&A session and so I'd like to thank you everyone for having us here and to again express my appreciation to the Young Center, the Young Center staff whom I've worked with and I feel that they are extremely inspiring. We're very grateful for that collaboration and what I've observed through my work with them is that they do their work with passion and compassion and they are very much committed to this work so thank you so much and I am really looking forward to continuing to work with you. Thank you.

AJ Albinak: Thank you, Glykeria. That was really terrific to hear about your work on the ground. Before we start answering questions, I want to run down a quick list of ways you can learn more and stay engaged in the fight to protect immigrant children in detention. You can find the Young Center on our website at www.theyoungcenter.org, and on social media at the accounts listed here on our slide. On our website, you can subscribe to our newsletter for action alerts, more webinars, and policy updates. You can also find information about hosting fundraisers, joining our social media squad, or becoming a Child Advocate volunteer.

One quick note regarding questions: we do have strict protocols to protect children's privacy, so there are limits to the amounts of information we share about any given child, and we appreciate your understanding on this matter.

Our Senior Policy Analyst for Child Protection Mary Miller Flowers is joining us for the Q&A to address any policy-related questions. And we have received a number of questions already in the chat and Q&A submissions, so we'll go ahead and get started with this first question for Mary. What's happening to the children who arrive at the border today? What happens when they try to seek protection?

May Miller Flowers: Thanks, AJ. Can you hear me? Great. Wonderful. I appreciate the question. And unfortunately, the answer is not a hopeful one. Right now, the border is effectively shut down to people seeking protection and that includes unfortunately unaccompanied children. When they arrive at the border it really depends where they arrive, but most are turned around either back to Mexico. Some are put on flights, mainly back to their home country. Most are being routed to some form of hotels or other kinds of holding places where they may be tested for the coronavirus. Assuming they test negative, they are then scheduled for flights to return to home country, which is really ironic since the whole reason for expelling children in theory during this period, is because they might be bringing the coronavirus to the United States. But actually, most receiving countries are requiring the children to be tested negative first before sending them home. So, we always knew that shutting down the border because of a public health emergency was a pretext for a political move, but now that most children are tested and returned only when tested negative, we now know that is a false premise for the administration taking this dramatic action.

We have very few children who are coming into care which is in violation of their rights under federal law, the TVPRA, the Trafficking Victims and Protection Reauthorization Act. There are some children that are being allowed to enter and it's really unclear who is making decisions about who is admitted and who is not. So, we do have a few new children coming in on a monthly basis, day to day, but again it's sort of a mystery who gets to and who doesn't- but the vast majority of children are simply being returned or expelled, as the word is, back to their country of origin.

AJ Albinak: Thank you, Mary. I have a question I think that we're going to address to Estrellita. What kinds of host country professional groups are doing the home visits to ascertain if returning the child to their home country is safe?

Estrellita: Thank you, AJ. So, we contract with both non-profit and independent psychologists and social workers in the receiving countries. We have long standing relationships with partners in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico but that doesn't mean we're not open to working with other children who are from other countries. So, we go through a process of vetting, having continuous conversations with organizations that align with our mission and our work, and have experience working and completing home visits in the country, receiving countries. And our independent social workers and psychologists are licensed at their, country, country they work with.

AJ: Thank you. I have another question from Stephanie, and I think we're directing this one to Shaina. Out of all the children who could benefit from the help of a Young Center Child Advocate, approximately what percentage are you able to serve?

Shaina: Thanks, AJ. That's such a tough question. Obviously, we wish we could serve every child in ORR care. As Estrellita mentioned, we are the only organization providing Child Advocate services to children in ORR care and we only have eight offices across the country. I know that sounds like a lot, but it's significantly less than the amount of states that have placement for children in ORR custody. So how do we select what children we are able to serve? We get significantly more referrals for a Child Advocate than we are able to appoint to, so each of our offices has significant wait lists to appoint children to Child Advocates. But we consider a variety of vulnerabilities when selecting children to appoint to, and most of the children we work with have many vulnerabilities. For example, a child who is a tender aged child, quite young, unable to speak for themselves, that was forcibly separated from their parent upon arrival, perhaps had a traumatic journey to the United States. We have been able to expand our offices over the last several years to appoint to significantly more children as we believe every child in the system is incredibly vulnerable and would benefit from an advocate. Particularly, we've been able to appoint to significantly more children who are forcibly separated from a parent at the border. However, we are unable to appoint to every child in ORR custody due to the sheer amount of children in care and the amount of referrals that we get on a regular basis that we hope to appoint to. Thank you.

AJ: Thank you, Shaina. And actually, I've been asked to answer the next question which is: Is there a country of origin or age range that most children fall into? And we report on the demographics of the children that we serve, pretty much on a monthly basis, to funders of various kinds. The demographics change over time. Currently the vast majority upwards of 80 or 85% of the children to whom we are appointed, are from what we call the Northern Triangle, which is the countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. And the vast majority of children to whom we are appointed are between the ages of 12- 17, 17 and a half. They are mostly unaccompanied children who are making the journey on their own, perhaps with some other children they've met along the way. But in the past two years we have seen significantly higher numbers of young children. It's still mostly the older youth who we see making the journey on their own, but under the current administration we have seen and been appointed to hundreds of children as young as 2 or 3 months old through toddler age 5, 6, 7, 8 years old, who are separated-pardon me- from family members at the border.

Pardon my coughing. We have one more question and I think we are directing this question to Mary – What can people do to help with children getting turned away at the border?

Mary: Thanks, AJ, for directing the question and for the question itself. What can you do to help? The probably number one thing you can do to help is make sure you get out and vote for the election this year. Whatever you choose, make sure you vote and that that ballot is counted. Beyond that, we have been trying to keep these issues on the political agenda. There is a lot on the agenda fighting for attention, even for the Democrats. We need to make sure that people are aware of what is happening. So, you can call your representative, either their district office or their state office in the case of the senate offices. Let them know it's an issue that is important to you. Especially if you live in a place where your voice may be able to be heard. I am sitting in DC wishing I had a representative to call and I don't. But really members of congress respond to constituents so if you can call your local congress person or senate office, that's a great thing to do. Or you can write a letter. Or you can look for opportunities to place any kind of opinion piece or other kinds of ways that you can make sure your concern about these children, your concern about what's happening at the border, is elevated so that people remember amidst all the things, that it is happening. You also have social media if you know people who maybe have a big following and can uplift articles from either the Young Center or other groups that are working with kids. Basically, at this point, bringing this problem to the attention of influencers and decision-makers is a really helpful thing. And of course, you can donate to organizations that support work like Justice in Motion is doing and the Young Center is doing. There are other groups especially groups on the ground that are meeting kids in Mexico, that are meeting kids at the border. Those groups are always on shoe-string budgets and I am sure their support will be appreciated.

I have another question should I go ahead and answer it? Okay. The question is: Given that we have the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act, the TVPRA, how is it that the CDC is expelling children and families? That's a fantastic question. It's not actually the CDC that's

expelling the children and families. The CDC wrote the order which the Department of Homeland Security is using as its fodder as its justification for implementing its own rules and expelling these children. So, we still need to put the blame where it is due which is the Department of Homeland Security. Also, it's quite questionable the CDC order that authorized the border shutdown and the use of this Title 42 public health law from I think the 1940's. It's never been used in this way, to expel children, and we would argue that they are doing it in violation of federal law, and that this is not a permissible action. There are a couple of lawsuits under way. Whenever we can we provide support to those lawsuits. If they need case examples or declarations, we'll do that. We do hope that this will be overturned. The question is about timing and the kinds of relief for all the folks who have been impacted. There's been thousands and thousands of people who have been expelled – the order went in on March 20th, so you can imagine that's five months ago... Not sure what kind of restitution we can find for people who have already been expelled but hoping that's possible and hoping this does get overturned by the courts. We would say it's an illegal action, but that wouldn't be the first illegal action for this administration.

AJ: Thank you, Mary, we received another question and I will take this one also. How is the Young Center funded? The Young Center has a pretty evenly distributed revenue source matrix. We have a contract with the federal government with the Office of Refugee Resettlement. That is how we are allowed to enter detention facilities to visit with the children to whom we are appointed by the federal government. I am sure you've seen clips on the news, most of you, about U.S. representatives and senators attempting to visit the detention facilities and being turned away. These are secure sites and our access is possible because we are federally appointed Child Advocates to these children in detention. So, we have a contract with the Office of Refugee Resettlement, that is about 1/3 of our annual budget. And then the balance of our funding comes from individual donors like folks who are logged into this, special events that we host, online campaigns or benefits, and also another third from institutional funders- from foundations who support our Child Advocate program, our policy program, our general operating costs, or also some small number of corporate sponsors and other major sponsors.

And I think we have another question too... We have a question about becoming a Child Advocate and what the time requirement is for a Child Advocate. Shaina do you want to take that question?

Shaina: I'm happy to answer that. So, we host Child Advocate trainings. Generally, each office hosts them in person twice a year for a weekend. Obviously, we've had to make accommodations under COVID, so I am happy to share that we've been able to host zoom trainings that are also held over the weekend. We do ask that volunteers undergo a pretty extensive training so they can learn more about the children we serve, their experiences, and how to best support them as their advocate. Volunteers must be over the age of 21 and undergo background checks. If you're interested in learning more about the volunteer opportunity our offices have volunteer coordinators. Each office has a volunteer coordinator

that hosts and organizes and recruits our Child Advocate trainings. We also advertise them on social media and on our website. We are often looking for volunteers who are bi-lingual and bi-cultural and available to travel in-person to these facilities, you know once that's a possibility again the future. In the meantime, we have volunteers who will visit an hour a week over phone, so sometimes a phone call sometimes it's a video chat, whatever they are able to do. And we've got some really great resources for our volunteers about how to engage young people over the phone and using technology during these challenging times. I actually joined the Young Center first as a volunteer so I can attest to the experience and I think it's really worth your while if you're interested.

AJ: Thank you, Shaina! I'm going to pause for a moment in case anybody else has any questions you'd like to put into the chat or Q&A boxes, we are happy to address them because we do have a couple of more minutes of time. If you think of questions afterwards that you wish you had asked but didn't think about at the time you can always follow up directly. We are happy to reply to questions that are sent to us via email post-event.... And I don't currently see anything else popping up in the chat so that means it is time for us to say thank you to everyone who took time out of your day today to attend and ask these terrific questions and learn more about our safe repatriation work. Oops – I do see some questions here:

If you are not located in one of the eight cities, can we volunteer as child advocates remotely? I think Shaina unless you want to follow up with more detail, I can just say that we are doing remote work now during the current health conditions. Under more normal circumstances and as things return to normal, we wouldn't have work outside of the eight areas where we operate. So, you can definitely fill out an interest form on the website at theyoungcenter.org/volunteer and ask for more information about that. It is something we are doing now, but it is, we hope- temporary.

And then the other question that came in is: Can you name corporations that support the Young Center? There has only been a couple so far. We have received support from Unilever, we received a grant during parent/child separation from Salesforce, and we have some smaller local organizations in Chicago and Houston that support our annual benefits, but they are tiny local folks. So, we have a limited amount of corporate support. We are always, of course, interested in identifying and connecting with folks at corporations who would like to be more active in immigration issues and would be excited to sponsor our work. So, feel free to follow up with me personally if you have something that you want to discuss further within that area.

And then I think that was the last two questions we had so I would like to say again, thank you to our listeners for your excellent questions, thank you to our panelists for speaking today, Young Center staff Estrellita and Shaina, and especially for Glykeria who has joined us today from Justice in Motion, our partner on the ground. And a recording of this webinar with the slides and a transcription will be available in a few days on our website, shared on social media, and emailed to everyone who RSVP'd to today's event. And finally thank you to all of you for

being on our side in this ongoing fight to conserve immigrant children's rights. We are incredibly grateful for your support. Have a terrific week, everyone, and stay safe!