



2026 Fall Impact Report

Dear Young Center Champion,

For over twenty years, the Young Center has ensured that every child we accompany has at least one trusted adult focused on asking one simple question: **What is in this child's best interests?**

Yet today, immigrant children and families are being subjected to decisions in the immigration and child welfare systems that continually fail to consider the integrity of their loving homes, their humanity, and the sanctity of their childhood.

Over the past year, and with increasing intensity over the last several months, we have witnessed a profound shift in the landscape facing children and families. The federal government is detaining children for longer periods in custody, and immigration judges are moving deportation proceedings at a dangerously fast pace. More children have been left to navigate a system designed for adults without an attorney or family by their side. New waves of family separation are rippling across communities in the United States, with aggressive immigration enforcement raids forcing detained parents to leave their children in the care of others or in government custody.

Through all of this, children still need what they have always needed: an immigration system that sees and treats them as a child first.

When reckless immigration policies strip away children and families' protections this quickly, they threaten the safety of childhood itself. Thousands of children have been separated from parents and caregivers, destabilizing their sense of safety, belonging, and freedom to simply be a child.

Our **accompaniment** and advocacy are their last line of defense.

Our vision has always been an immigration system where every decision affecting a child is grounded in their rights, dignity, and best interests. Until that day comes, we will continue to accompany children through some of the most difficult moments of their lives and work to transform the systems that have failed them.

Here is what it looks like to be children's last line of defense.



We stand beside children.

Child Advocate Program

As the federal government accelerates removal proceedings while cutting funding for experienced children's attorneys, more children are facing deportation without a chance to tell their story and ask for legal protection.

Our Child Advocates continue to provide what no government agency can: an independent adult whose only responsibility is protecting a child's best interests. In today's immigration system, our accompaniment and advocacy are **more critical than ever before**.

- ★ **Child Advocates are fighting for children's release and reunification with family**, submitting an unprecedented number of best interests determinations to federal agencies and courts that hold decision-making power over children's cases.
- ★ **The federal government is rushing children through immigration cases at a dangerous pace.** Our advocates are meeting more frequently with children, gathering information from their families, and making every possible argument for children to have a fair chance to tell their story before a judge orders them to leave the U.S.
- ★ **Child Advocates continue meeting with more than 1,400 newly referred children each year**, ensuring children are not alone in custody and have someone focused solely on their best interests.

"Gracias por quitar mi soledad, si solo por unos momentos."

"Thank you for taking away my loneliness, even if only for a little while."

– Child to Volunteer Child Advocate,
Gavin Stockton

Read Gavin's blog on theyoungcenter.org,
"A Volunteer Child Advocate's Purpose"

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We defend children and families' rights by holding systems accountable.

Litigation Program

When children's rights are threatened, litigation becomes another form of child advocacy. Our Litigation program uses the courts to demand transparency, challenge harmful government practices, and protect longstanding safeguards that exist for immigrant children. Every case builds on the reality facing children and families, including these recent efforts:

- ★ **Demanding government records** that shed light on why immigration judges are expediting the scheduling and processing of children's cases, known as "rocket dockets."
- ★ **Filing suit in federal court to uncover the truth behind so-called "wellness checks"** – unannounced visits by federal immigration enforcement agents to the homes and schools of immigrant children after their release to vetted caregivers – that have led to re-detention, deportation, and family separation.
- ★ **Continuing to defend legal protections enshrined in the Flores Settlement Agreement**, which sets national minimum standards for the humane treatment, placement, and release of detained children, including children in family detention.

We advocate to re-imagine the systems around them.

Policy Program

Rooted in children's stories and experiences, our Policy program fights for the rights and best interests of immigrant children, youth, and families by influencing key policymakers to drive local and national policy change.

Over this past summer, our Policy program:



Launched the All Children Belong campaign with the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) to shift attitudes among “movable middle” audiences in key states on immigration policies affecting children, amplify children's stories, advance policy wins, and strengthen federal advocacy to ensure every child can thrive.



Elevated the needs of pregnant and parenting youth in detention, documenting how prolonged detention and inadequate policies place the mental and physical health of young parents and their children at greater risk.



Celebrated the introduction of the Children's Safe Welcome Act in Congress – a bill that re-envision how children are treated in government custody by centering child welfare principles, safety, and well-being at every step of the process.

We fight for family unity.

Technical Assistance Program

Family separation has not slowed, it has evolved. Parents continue to be detained in neighborhoods across the country, most often without the opportunity to make plans for their children's care in the short time before they face deportation.

Through consultations, training, and connection to resources, our Technical Assistance Program equips detained parents, attorneys, child welfare professionals, and community partners to protect children, preserve family unity, and support reunification whenever possible. This year we have:



Consulted with over 90 detained parents to help them make plans for the care and custody of their children.



Collaborated with state child welfare stakeholders to support the reunification of children whose parents have been deported.



Supported the reunification of families who have endured the trauma of multiple separations through immigration enforcement, including families like Mirsy's – a mother separated from her son Ederson in 2018 and separated from her children again in 2025.



“Little by little we are healing the wounds, and putting everything back in its place again.”

– Mirsy Alva López

Click below for the full story published by Mother Jones in July 2026, “Separated at the Border, Torn Apart Again.”

Photo: Mirsy Alva López (left) with son Ederson and daughter Briseidy in San Martín Cuchumatán, Guatemala. Moises Castillo/AP

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None of this is possible without you. Because of your support, the children we accompany are not left to face these moments alone.

Together, we ensure that even when other safeguards fall away, there is still someone standing beside children. Someone who sees them not as a case to process, but who takes the care to know the foods that remind children of home, the people they miss and trust, what makes them laugh, and what they hope for the future.

These details matter. They remind us, and the decision-makers determining a child's future, that behind every case is a unique child whose life will be shaped by decisions made within a system that was never designed for them.

Thank you for making sure children are seen, heard, and never left alone.

With gratitude and determination,

Gladis Molina Alt
Executive Director

As advocates for children's safety & freedom, the time to act is now.

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