

A WAY THROUGH WALLS

ARKANSAS IMMIGRANT DEFENSE

ANNUAL REPORT 2019



ARKANSAS
IMMIGRANT
DEFENSE



DEFENSA DE
INMIGRANTES DE
ARKANSAS

ATTORNEYS AT LAW ABOGADOS

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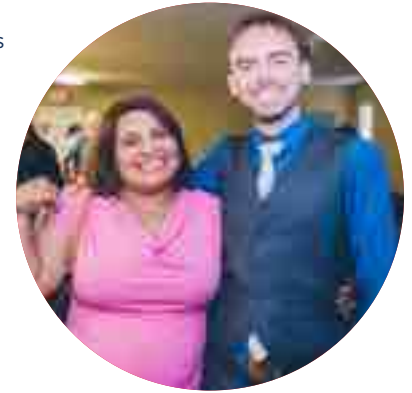
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WORDS OF WELCOME

We have a lot of exciting news for you, even inspirational news, despite the undeniable challenges of this moment in our country's history. Through it all, AID fights to protect vulnerable immigrants and refugees from trafficking, particularly children and youth, women, indigenous people and LGBT+ people. We provide our legal services pro bono to youth and to survivors of violence of all ages. We fight against their deportation and walk with them toward the security of legal status and work authorization.

And, we remain committed to connecting children and youth with healthcare by helping them quickly become eligible for Medicaid. Please dive into this report and wrap yourself in it, the horror and the hope, of our work Arkansas Immigrant Defense. To begin, a story from late 2019, one that is representative of the trust that tends to grow in our office between AID staff and our clients. I hope you find it informative, both of our technique and our clients' resilience. It takes place in our new office building on Wagon Wheel Road in Springdale.



It was a golden fall. Starched leaves were curling and changing color on the wide-stretching tree outside our building. The soft afternoon sunlight poured in through the slats of Michel's window blinds. Natural light is such a boon, especially in this line of work, where our eyes get so much screen time. Sunlight is easier on the eyes, and we need any ease we can find these days.

Inside, golden hour lit the desk, the walls, our client. At 13, Elizabeth¹ had already suffered a variety of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)². She was just beginning to untangle her story for us, and at about the same rate that she began to trust Michel Rangel, her legal representative at Arkansas Immigrant Defense.

When I first walked into Michel's office to take a seat alongside her and her client, Elizabeth's body language said closed: closed to questions and closed to answers, closed to trust, closed to vulnerability. As we visited, almost despite her best efforts—or perhaps more accurately—without her noticing, she began to untie herself. Arms uncrossed, a slouch began to roll into a straightened spine, and her tightly clasped hands found space and rest at her knees. The questions we asked and—I should hope—*how* we asked them, seemed to create a welcoming place for her story. The appropriate amounts of eye contact and eye aversion, the tone of our voices, and the delicate pace of our words—all of these things, time and again, have proven to be useful keys.

¹ Certain details of our clients' lives, including their names, have been changed to protect their anonymity.

² You can learn more about ACEs at the [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention's website](#).

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Elizabeth had reason to doubt us. She had reason to doubt the world. She had been abandoned by the person responsible for her, and then found herself paying rent to sleep on the floor of a restaurant's kitchen. She had not attended school, opting instead to work to pay her rent and her parents' debts.

Soon, Elizabeth, Michel and I arrived at a tentative plan. Elizabeth would access her resources, her nascent social networks; and, with our help, she would find a way toward immigration relief and access to Medicaid, a way out of the kitchen, a way out of a dangerous corner of DeQueen, and—if Elizabeth was willing—a path to therapy, education and healing. Together, we would find her a way through walls. We walked Elizabeth outside; the horizon was swallowing the sun, and the sky was lit like a marble peach. She smiled for the first time and gave Michel a hug before driving back to DeQueen.

Please read on to learn more about Elizabeth's story, about our new partnerships with domestic violence shelters across the state, and a new referral system with Arkansas Children's Hospital. We will not sugarcoat it; 2019 was a challenging year for immigrants, refugees, and their advocates, but, AID has done great, creative work helping our clients find a way to a stable, healthy life in the USA.

I hope you enjoy reading this, our 2019 annual report, A Way Through Walls.

Stephen Coger



Erik Smith, Director of Exhibits & Facilities at the Scott Family Amazeum, designed and built for our clients this custom magnetic ball wall. We very intentionally wanted something that could vary in its levels of complexity for people of all ages to find it a source of distraction and enjoyment.

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WHAT ARE ACEs AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT FOR AID?

In June of 2019, AID director Stephen Coger presented to a group of attorneys at a Continuing Legal Education event. At that event, attorney Tabitha Lee presented on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Her presentation was intense and inspiring, and it had a lasting impact on Stephen and AID.

At any given time, approximately 65-85% of AID clients are children or youth. Most of them have experienced multiple ACEs, and these experiences inform how they handle stress and uncertainty. This is very important for our clients' cases. For one, to win an asylum claim one must seem credible. But, ACEs often impact memory. Similarly, left untreated, ACEs can manifest as self harm, increased risk seeking, and early sexual activity and pregnancy³.

ACEs = EXPERIENCED
MULTIPLE ADVERSE
CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

An understanding of ACEs has informed how we navigate our client interviews and how we collaborate with other organizations and individuals to meet our clients' legal and non-legal needs. For example, for some people with ACEs, it is hard to find a healthy normal. Our clients have often fled familial or gang-related violence before arriving at the US/ Mexico border, and accrued a number of ACEs through these tribulations. Upon turning themselves in to Customs and Border Protection and being held by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, they may have acquired even more ACEs before being released to adults across Arkansas.

It's important to remember though that this stress can be overcome with the right support from a loving caregiver⁴. None of AID's full-time staff can carry that caregiver torch, but, we can connect people to resources. Through a new grant, we are also able to pay a social worker to provide therapy for certain of our clients as well.



For the holidays, Craig McSherry and Chris Ellen McSherry gifted AID's team delicious chocolates and a fantastic book, *Standing Up After Saigon: The Triumphant Story of Hope, Determination, and Reinvention* by Thuhang Tran. Thuhang Tran is a resilient and brilliant immigrant woman living with a disability. She overcame multiple ACEs and has worked tirelessly to improve the world in countless ways.

³Research shows that multiple, prolonged stressors without adequate support can have long-term effects. MRIs of people with ACEs show visible signs and measurable changes to the brain from ACEs. ACEs can even lead to a hormonal imbalance that can impact hormones for growth, reproduction, the thyroid, and insulin.

⁴ The Deepest Well: Healing The Long-term Effects of Childhood Adversity by Nadine Burke Harris, M.D.

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WHAT IS AID, AND WHY DO WE NEED IT?

Frank Head, Bertha Gutierrez and Stephen Coger founded AID in 2015. Arkansas Immigrant Defense is the only nonprofit in Arkansas providing both affirmative and defensive immigration legal services to immigrants and refugees all across Arkansas. AID is also Arkansas' only nonprofit representing children and youth as they pursue Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, and AID is proud to do so pro bono thanks to our generous funders.

Defensive legal services refer to services for people in deportation proceedings. Our youngest client in proceedings is just under 2 years old. She is a Nicaraguan refugee applying for asylum with her mother. AID is also helping the child with her special immigrant juvenile status application. Her stepbrother is, however, not in proceedings and so we have filed for his SIJS affirmatively. He has already received his green card and his work permit.

Defensive cases require far more resources because the immigration court with jurisdiction over Arkansas is in Memphis. This means that clients and staff often have to drive 10 hours roundtrip for a 10-15 minute hearing. To give you an idea of how hostile the Memphis Court can be, Immigration Judges in Kansas City, routinely allow advocates and clients to appear telephonically. Since the current administration took power, Memphis has become a more hostile court: immigration judges have begun denying motions for telephonic and government attorneys are attempting to push for the deportation of children even when they appear to qualify for paths to legal status.



AID Director Stephen Coger speaks to a crowded room at the AID office opening celebration

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A NOTE FROM OUR BOARD PRESIDENT

Arkansas Immigrant Defense owes its primary existence to the genius and humble dedication of its Director, Stephen Coger, an Arkansas attorney who with good cheer and focused intelligence has devoted his career to helping others. Equally deserving of praise are the brilliant, hard-working women and men who have made this non-profit possible by working so hard for many years to study and practice immigration law, community organizing and so much more.

“WHEN WE DEFEND THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS, WE PROTECT THOSE RIGHTS FOR OURSELVES AND OUR LOVED ONES”

Why another immigration law office, and why is it focused on *defense* of immigrants? Northwest Arkansas is blessed with many excellent immigration attorneys and non-profits, many of which helped AID to come into existence, both by direct training and by collaborating with our team members. We owe a great debt of gratitude to many immigration legal minds for the support and intellectual nourishment that fed the compassionate movement now working as Arkansas Immigrant Defense.

How then will AID *defend* immigrants and why? The concept agreed upon by all the founding staff is that immigrants coming to Arkansas today, especially juveniles arriving under the cloud of intense anti-immigrant government policies, need a holistic approach to services including legal defense and educational monitoring, as well as assistance with mental and physical health. Arkansas Immigrant Defense therefore not only offers both affirmative and defensive legal support through the collective 50 years of legal experience its staff possesses, but will provide mental health counseling and social needs support as well.

I hope you will join me in supporting AID, this wonderful collection of young, dedicated individuals. The organization has lofty goals and honorable intentions, but achieving them will be impossible without community support. AID is very grateful to our benefactors: the Walton Family Foundation, the Walmart Foundation, the Beacon Fund, the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, the Arkansas Community Foundation and so many individuals across the country for the essential grant support we have received.

“WE ARE CURRENTLY LIVING THROUGH THE MOST CONCERTED ATTACK ON OUR BASIC CIVIL RIGHTS AND OUR UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS THAT AMERICA HAS EVER SEEN”

I wish I could say that support in itself was enough to achieve our goal but it is not. We need each of you to join us in whatever capacity you see fit. When we defend immigrants, when we defend refugees, when we defend children torn from their parents or survivors fleeing their abusers, we also defend *ourselves*. Let me put it

another way: when we defend the rights of others, we protect those rights for ourselves and our loved ones. We are currently living through the most concerted attack on our basic civil rights and our universal human rights that America has ever seen.

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The essential idea of the American revolution was that democracy could only survive if it continued to expand and protect the rights of all. So when we protect the rights of an El Salvadoran child to stay with his mother or when we protect the right of a Syrian journalist to avoid persecution and death in her home country, we protect our own right to fair and equal treatment in America. These deeds ripple across the globe.

“THE ESSENTIAL IDEA OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION WAS THAT DEMOCRACY COULD ONLY SURVIVE IF IT CONTINUED TO EXPAND AND PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF ALL”

Arkansas Immigrant Defense invites you to share in the development of this exciting Arkansas non-profit. Our grants do not provide us with much funding for overhead, and our new home office, while beautiful, is quite expensive to rent. Your support could also be directed toward our endowment with the Arkansas Communities Foundation. We hope to use this fund to buy our own building, eventually, and then continue to grow the endowment for a long-term, interest-based revenue stream. Please note that thanks to this endowment we can also receive more complex gifts, like investments in companies, crops or land. All of these gifts can help us serve immigrants and refugees today, and help ensure that we are able to serve immigrants and refugees as long as the need exists.

As Board President, I am honored to be a part of this group effort to defend the human rights of those fellow human beings who find themselves tossed on our Arkansas shores by the turbulent seas of the modern world. Please join us.

Frank Head

Arkansas Immigrant Defense, Board President



Frank Head with Arkansas Immigrant Defense Director Stephen Coger

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MISSION: Arkansas Immigrant Defense promotes justice by defending and advancing the rights of immigrants and refugees through direct legal services, community education, and community advocacy.

VISION: Arkansas Immigrant Defense envisions a society where immigrants and refugees are welcomed and valued as neighbors, and where these neighbors are ensured access to resources like medical care and education.

WHAT CHANGED IN 2019?

This report covers the activities of Arkansas Immigrants Defense for 2019.

Since our last annual report, *Singing Through the Storm*, published in December of 2018, there have been many changes on the global, national, state, and organizational fronts.

With the increasingly tense political and legal violence targeting immigrants and refugees, we must provide legal services and legal education to ensure the protection of our neighbors who are most vulnerable and marginalized.

FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL

On the global stage, Nicaragua's dictatorial violence only increased and we have begun to serve more and more Nicaraguan children and families. Nationally, the administration has continued to invent creative, cruel ways of restricting access to asylum for immigrants and refugees. Tellingly, most of this harm has disparately hurt women and children. For example, the administration's Remain in Mexico policy⁵ is blocking immigrants and refugees from awaiting their asylum hearings in the USA and so they are exposed to trafficking, violence and a lack of healthcare as they await hearings in Mexico. These harms have posed a particular danger to women. The administration has also done everything it can to ensure that survivors of domestic violence are not eligible for asylum due to their status as survivors of DV. On the state level, we have seen both beautiful developments and painful ones. Our state congress passed a bill that allows DACA-mented individuals to become licensed nurses. Latinx organizers and NWA representatives made this dream a reality. Sadly, we saw cases of racial profiling and discrimination continue across the state, particularly in Washington County.

“THE ADMINISTRATION HAS CONTINUED TO INVENT CREATIVE, CRUEL WAYS OF RESTRICTING ACCESS TO ASYLUM FOR IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES”

⁵ Pursuant to directives from the president, U.S. Customs and Border Protection has been shutting its doors to asylum seekers who present themselves at ports of entry along the U.S.-Mexico border. These directives have resulted in thousands of individuals seeking asylum under U.S. law stranded on the Mexican side of the border.

⁶ Six stories of people who have experienced this particular administrative violence are available on [CLINIC Legal's website at this link](#).

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ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES

Organizationally, we made great strides forward in 2019. We grew into our own building, after years of working out of another nonprofit, Catholic Immigration Services (CIS). We also began to work under the name Arkansas Immigrant Defense to make clear our mission for the people who would benefit from our services.

“PERHAPS THE MOST EXCITING CHANGE FOR US THIS YEAR: WE ARE NOW A DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE ACCREDITED ORGANIZATION.”

Another change that grew out of getting our own building: whereas before, we did not accept certain cases to avoid being in competition with CIS, we are now providing every immigration service under the sun, *except* employment-based work.

AID also earned a spot on the list of legal service providers that the Office of Refugee Resettlement gives to immigrants and refugees when they are released to our region of the country. This has helped many refugees and immigrants in need to locate us well ahead of their hearings with EOIR (the Executive Office for Immigration Review, commonly referred to as immigration court).

Perhaps the most exciting change for us this year: we are now a Department of Justice Accredited Organization. The Recognition & Accreditation Program “increases the availability of competent immigration legal representation for low-income and indigent persons by allowing for non-attorneys to represent people before US Citizenship and Immigration Services and the immigration courts.”⁷ Michel Rangel is our first accredited representative, and we hope to add more team members to the list in 2020.



The new Arkansas Immigrant Defense headquarters

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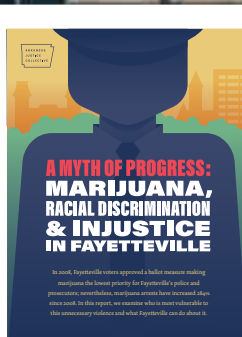
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OTHER ADVOCACY

As our new name makes clear, our primary focus will remain serving immigrants and refugees. However, our team will continue to offer the Relationship Skills Class, and engage in advocacy work that serves vulnerable populations in Arkansas.

One example of advocacy that was not strictly immigration-related was our detailed report, [A Myth of Progress](#), which analyzed data given to us by the Fayetteville Police Department. We were actually alerted to the problem by a concerned prosecutor and then prompted to action by members of Fayetteville's Black community. We found a pattern and practice of discriminatory policing and prosecution by the City of Fayetteville, and we are proud to say that the report led to a major drop in arrests for mere possession of marijuana, and a 50% drop in prosecutions of the same.⁸ AID team members and volunteers were excited to collaborate with leaders in Fayetteville's Black and immigrant communities to make this change happen.



◀ A Myth of Progress: Marijuana, Racial Discrimination & Injustice in Fayetteville

▲ A Myth of Progress Press Conference

⁸ A Myth of Progress: Marijuana, Racial Discrimination & Injustice in Fayetteville, showed that Black and Latinx people were disproportionately criminalized through marijuana possession. For example, while only 6% of Fayetteville is Black, 48% of arrests by the members of Fayetteville's Drug Task Force were of Black people. The mayor and city took this report to heart, but, sadly, the city attorney continues to deny the report's findings. The report is located at www.arkansaslaw.org/fayetteville

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NEW COLLABORATIONS

Given this increase in clients who need representation, we were thankful to team up with even more fantastic individuals and organizations across the state. Maria Bynum in Batesville, Arkansas, is a long-time organizer and has facilitated our team's outreach in her beloved Batesville community. Thanks to her, several young people from Mexico have gone from being completely undocumented to having a green card in under a year.

“WE [ARE] THANKFUL TO TEAM UP WITH EVEN MORE FANTASTIC INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS ACROSS THE STATE”

In terms of organizational collaboration, Disability Rights Arkansas helped AID serve young clients with disabilities. One such case is highlighted below in our stories. We also joined the New Americans Campaign and in 2019 organized two free citizenship workshops. We received NAC funding to promote these events on Facebook and Instagram, and they also awarded us a grant to raffle off prizes for participants and volunteers. AID team members announced the winners in a sweet and entertaining Facebook Live broadcast.

The Medical Legal Partnership between Legal Aid of Arkansas and Arkansas Children's Hospital began referring clients to Arkansas Immigrant Defense any time they express a concern about immigration status. The first referral was of an infant, Yessica, with a severe heart condition; you will read more about her uplifting story later in this report. This collaboration with Arkansas Children's Hospital has enabled us to reach and represent many more children and youth with disabilities or serious and ongoing medical issues, and we are so grateful to ACH and Legal Aid for this opportunity.



Stephen Coger with Client Family

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BOARD MEMBERS



Board President, long-time director of Catholic Immigration Services' Springdale office, **Frank Head** continues to provide guidance and support with regard to development at AID. He also helps with direct representation and our free naturalization workshops.



Bertha Gutierrez is an artist. She also worked for years at a nonprofit as a financial advisor to many people in the NW Arkansas immigrant community. Bertha provides AID with guidance and support, generally, as well as with development and graphics design specifically. Her bilingual fliers have helped minors around the state identify themselves as qualifying for immigration relief.



Stephen Cogger is an attorney and director at AID. Stephen is a Fulbright Scholar and Gates Scholar, and worked at Legal Aid of Arkansas for years before attending law school at UW Law in Seattle and then returning to Arkansas to start Arkansas Immigrant Defense in 2015.



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WORKING AT AID: BALANCING THE BENEFITS & BURDENS

We recognize that this service work is dangerous. And, by that we mean that we are servants in danger of being too deeply absorbed into our work, to such a degree that we begin to neglect our own needs and our own sacred relationships. We believe that it is possible to work at a nonprofit organization that does life-saving work while at once preserving and promoting our own well being. In fact, we believe that we can be the best servants to our clients when we are healthy ourselves.

Toward that end, for our full-time staff, AID pays 100% of health insurance premiums, including vision and dental. We provide short- and long-term disability insurance, and a 401k match of up to 10%. Each member of our team receives 3 weeks paid vacation each year. We also reimburse staff mileage at the IRS rate of \$0.58 per mile. We believe that this work is so important that it requires our full attention, and that we can only provide our full care and presence by being healthy. By nurturing our well being, we are less likely to suffer from burnout and turnover, and more likely to correctly draft motions for court and prepare forms for review by US Citizenship and Immigration Services.

“FOR OUR FULL-TIME STAFF, AID PAYS 100% OF HEALTH INSURANCE PREMIUMS, INCLUDING VISION AND DENTAL. WE PROVIDE SHORT- AND LONG-TERM DISABILITY INSURANCE, AND A 401K MATCH OF UP TO 10%”

In the summer of 2019, AID staff spent a paid day in retreat at the Mt. Sequoyah Retreat Center with Dreama Phoenix. There, we shared parts of our stories with one another. We mourned and celebrated parts of our stories and those of our clients', and we added to our emotional toolkit so that we can remain of service through the crises facing our communities here and around the globe.⁹



Arkansas Immigrant Defense Staff

⁹We are very grateful to art therapist Dreama Phoenix, MA, ATR-BC, and to her guidance as we studied and practiced Joanna Macy's "Spiral of the Work That Reconnects."

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MEET THE TEAM



IRIS AQUINO

Iris Aquino, also known as Citlaly by her family, is from Chiapas, Mexico. In 2009, after her parents separated, she immigrated to Fort Smith, Arkansas, to live with her mother. In 2015, she graduated from Northwest Arkansas Community College with her Associates of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Initially, she aspired to become a medical doctor, but that changed when she started volunteering for a non-profit in 2015. Her passion had become helping her community members through legal services and advocating for immigrant rights. She attended DACA & TPS marches in Washington D.C., and was part of a 4-day hunger strike for DACA & TPS.

Iris is now working towards finishing her Bachelor of Arts in Biology and preparing for the law school admission test. You can catch her leading worship at her church on Friday nights and Sunday afternoons. She loves to travel, go on hikes, try out new restaurants with her family, buy candles, listen to crime podcasts, and find amazing deals in stores across NWA.



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SKYE AUSTIN

Skye Austin is the Humanitarian Specialist at AID. Skye graduated with her Juris Doctor in May 2019 and will be sitting for the Arkansas Bar in February 2020. Prior to law school, Skye received her Bachelor's Degree in Political Science with a double minor in Spanish and Philosophy from Henderson State University. Skye is from Monticello, Arkansas, where she graduated High School. She joined AID as an extern in her final semester of law school.

Skye now focuses on running AID's humanitarian division and prepares filings for clients who have been the victim of human trafficking and violent crimes. When asked why she cares about this work Skye stated, "I went to law school so that I could help people. That's all I've ever wanted to do in life. While in law school, I gained a passion for working with immigrants and learned how to interact with clients in their most vulnerable state. After building that rapport, I knew that there was no place I would rather be. So long as there is a need, this is where I will be."

Skye says that "the best thing about working at AID is the supportive community we have created. It is not often that you find individuals who feel as strongly as you do about an important cause. I consider myself truly blessed to have found them and can only thank God that they feel the same way about me."



SHARRI BELL

Sharri is a 2L at the University of Arkansas School of Law. Prior to attending law school, she graduated with a Master's Degree in Organization Development with an emphasis in Human Resources Management from Avila University. She also has a Bachelor's in Business Management with Minors in Global Studies and Entrepreneurship from Drury University. Sharri is originally from Rowlett, TX.



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STEPHEN COGER

Growing up among a very diverse population in Danville, a small town in Arkansas, Stephen always knew their path would lead to a career in public service dedicated to humanitarian issues. They were accepted into the University of Arkansas Honors College, and, in 2008, graduated with honors. While in college Stephen worked for Legal Aid of Arkansas, was awarded Wal-Mart's *Heroes de Corazon* medal for advocacy work against harmful collaborations between local governments and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and founded OMNI at the University of Arkansas for Peace, Justice and Ecology, a group dedicated to connecting historically disparate communities within the university population for cohesive advocacy.

Stephen first began working with survivors of violence at Legal Aid of Arkansas as a bilingual paralegal. Soon, along with dear friend Melisa Laelan, Stephen was appointed to spearhead outreach to the community of people from the Republic of the Marshall Islands.¹⁰ Stephen chose to attend law school after serving abroad as a Fulbright Scholar. After graduating from UW Law in Seattle, Stephen served as a Clinton Fellow doing human rights work in Tamil Nadu, India, before returning to Arkansas to start Arkansas Immigrant Defense.

Stephen lives with a loving partner, revels in creating music and poetry for an LGBT+ liberation art project, and frolics with their dog, Frelly.



MAYRA ESQUIVEL

Mayra Esquivel is native of Mexico. She was brought to the USA at the age of 3 and raised in Fort Smith where she lived until 2016 when she and her husband, Irvin, married. After that, Mayra moved to Northwest Arkansas to start their life together. She is a Cum Laude Graduate from the University of Arkansas-Fort Smith with a Bachelors of Arts in Psychology. In 2017, Mayra was awarded the Human Rights Award by Church Women United. She works as a bilingual paralegal and advocate at Arkansas Immigrant Defense. Mayra's second passion is advocating for mental health. She is a member of the UAMS Translational Research Institute (TRI) Community Advisory Board which advises on the health issues in the Latinx community. Through this, she also assists in prioritizing research initiatives and increasing TRI's visibility at the community level. For her, being able to witness the merging of her two passions and interests on a daily basis is something Mayra truly cherishes. Mayra strongly believes that the purpose behind one's innate and acquired skills is to utilize them for the greater good. Working at AID allows her to do just that. She enjoys working with the immigrant community and getting to improve the quality of life and well-being of children and their families.

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DUSTIN GASTON

Dustin studied psychology at the University of Arkansas-Fort Smith before receiving his Juris Doctorate at the University of Arkansas School of Law. After law school he studied Spanish at Montañita Spanish School in Ecuador. Since receiving his license to practice, he has embarked on a career in public service through immigration law. Dustin has offered his legal services in Dilley, TX, at the largest immigration detention facility in the U.S., through representing detained refugees seeking asylum. Dustin was inspired to practice immigration law through a desire to promote full freedom and rights for all persons that call the U.S. home.

Dustin is licensed to practice in Missouri and Arkansas and has prepared guardianship petitions for AID clients living in Missouri; as well as represented clients in asylum interviews. He will continue to assist in expanding AID's services and reach. Additionally, Dustin has registered as an attorney with the Department of Justice and assists AID in representing clients in removal proceedings. In his free time Dustin enjoys traveling, playing tennis, attending Razorback sporting events and spending time with family and friends.



CRAIG MCSHERRY

As the retired Chief Information Officer (CIO) of MDVIP, a P&G medical services subsidiary, Craig's career is defined by the creation of sustainable long-term value. This value is achieved by leveraging exceptional strategic vision and building diverse high-performance organizations. His extensive global experiences are in executive management, strategy development, technology leadership, supplier diversity, and procurement. These experiences with both privately owned and Fortune 25 companies provide critical global business insights into strategy development and delivering meaningful change.

Craig's career stops include key global leadership roles with General Motors, LexisNexis/Reed Elsevier, The Iams Company, The Procter & Gamble Company and Walmart. His education includes a degree in Chemistry with extensive graduate work in Metallurgical Engineering, Materials Engineering, Computer Science, and Strategy at schools like Ohio Northern University, University of Dayton, University of Cincinnati and Sloan School of Management at MIT.

Key recognitions of Craig's strategic vision came as:

- Keynote Speaker on Global Strategic Sourcing Vision at the Costa Rican government-sponsored "Outsourcing Conference for The Americas"
- Session leader for The Research Board's forum on Offshore Technology Strategy Development and Best Practices, held for 30 Fortune 100 CIOs in New York City
- Professional consultancy (courtesy of P&G's CIO) to CIOs at Pfizer, Cargill, Kroger, Wachovia, and General Mills on supplier diversity, global sourcing strategies, and offshore managed services
- P&G Advocate Award, Supplier Diversity Development "In Recognition of Your Contribution to Minority Business Development"

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MICHEL RANGEL

Michel Rangel was born in Irapuato, Guanajuato, Mexico.

She was raised in Fort Smith, Arkansas, after immigrating to the US with her parents in the early 90s. As the oldest of five, she is a trained nurturer and knew at a young age that her ultimate career aspiration would involve helping others. In 2012, she began to take part in the training, planning, coordination, and execution of advocacy events for Immigrant

Rights in Arkansas. She graduated from the University of Arkansas with a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science and International Studies in 2016 and received the Outstanding Student Award from the Latino Alumni Society for her on-campus civic engagement and advocacy. She now travels across Arkansas and the US supporting non-partisan social justice campaigns as well as compassionate candidates. Across professions and travels, Michel has always valued the opportunity to make genuine connections with the people she serves and has found a home for that quality at AID. She is our first DOJ-Accredited staff member and enjoys being the friendly face she wishes her family had while navigating the complexities of the US immigration system. In her free time, Michel enjoys being an amateur yogi, playing soccer, attending concerts, listening to true crime podcasts, and watching movies with her loved ones.



LAURA VILLEGAS

Laura Villegas holds a B.A. in Linguistics from the University of Texas and an M.A. in Teaching English to Students of Other Languages from Arkansas Technical University, and happily considers herself to be a lifelong learner. After teaching Spanish, English and ESL for 29 years in Arkansas' K-12 public schools, she retired and immediately began volunteering with Arkansas Immigrant Defense. She is a passionate advocate for

immigrants and describes her work at AID as "most definitely a win-win: I am so fortunate to have the opportunity to be able to learn immigration law and help people at the same time! And working with such a wonderful group of people here at AID is an added blessing!"

Laura is an inveterate traveler, having lived in or visited countries throughout Central and South America and Europe. She loves to read and hike and is most proud of having walked both the Camino Santiago in Spain and the Migrant Walk in Arizona twice. She is "allowed" to share a house with her two cats and frequently visits her two children in Colorado.

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TRACEY WREN

As a Licensed Certified Social Worker and a Registered Play Therapist, Tracey has over 15 years of experience working with children, adolescents, adults and families in therapy settings. She is trained in EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) with a specific emphasis on its application to children and adolescents. Play therapy and EMDR interventions allow for the opportunity to use all parts of the brain, leading to improved understanding and healing. Having spent several years living in Central America and the Caribbean, Tracey is bilingual and offers services in both English and Spanish.

"I am passionate about working with children, teens, adults and families. Self-exploration is brave and important work, and I am committed to supporting individuals and families in that work, while strengthening bonds within the family. A strong partnership with parents and caregivers is key to developing long-lasting success, so together I work with children and families to overcome traumatic experiences, emotional distress, behavioral concerns, and relational difficulties."

LAW STUDENT EXTERNS

Law student externs help us research complicated immigration legal issues. Externs help our staff prepare filings before the Executive Office for Immigration Review (also known as Immigration Court) and the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS); and, on occasion, certain externs have handled guardianship hearings for our clients under attorney supervision.

AID extern **TONY JONES** is handling guardianship hearings across Arkansas, helping young immigrant and refugee children access medical help and a stable homelife.

In summer 2019 AID extern Nicole Shaum traveled alongside director, Stephen Coger, to meet a gay asylum applicant who was in removal proceedings and placed in detention in Louisiana. She later attended the individual merits hearing to assist Stephen and the client, and was there in the courtroom when the Immigration Judge approved the asylum.



Extern Tony Jones

ATTORNEYS:

Other volunteer attorneys have supported AID through filing Freedom of Information Act requests, co-litigating complex asylum cases, and handling hearings for immigrant and refugee children and youth in remote parts of Arkansas. We are always excited to partner with detail-oriented, passionate attorneys who want to serve immigrants and refugees.

VOLUNTEERS:

AID volunteers help prepare applications for mailing to USCIS under our legal staff's supervision. Some volunteers participate in our weekly peer-to-peer technical review of each application before we ship it off. Volunteers represent AID at community networking events, and occasionally conduct research for our team members. Each volunteer's work is different, and contoured to their needs and interests.

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HIRING PRACTICES & CULTURE

AID team members are vital service providers for immigrants and refugees across the region. Given the emotionally intense nature of their service, AID works to ensure our team members have a safe, productive, and comfortable working environment, along with competitive salaries and benefits.

As part of our hiring practices, our current team helps to formulate relevant questions for potential new team members. The goal of these questions are to both provide the applicant with a context of the organization's work, the available position, and the team structure at AID. We also get to know the applicant's aspirations, values, and relevant experience.

Finding new team members is a delicate endeavor because our work culture is so important to us. Our team members understand that immigration laws and policies are always changing and that this can bring a degree of uncertainty to immigrant and refugee communities. That is why we strive to work as a team, support each other, and empower each other in difficult times. We have created a work environment where everyone has an open door policy and each team member's voice, thoughts, and ideas are encouraged. With this sort of atmosphere it is easy to own our mistakes, and always take the initiative to learn more so that we can improve and best support the individuals and families that come to our office.

SERVICES AND MECHANISMS OF WORK

Our commitment to providing accessible legal services to those who are most in need guides the way we work.

For example, initially, when we received referrals from children's shelters or legal service providers across the country, we simply authorized the referring organization to give our contact information to the client. In most of these situations, amid all the hubbub of being released from the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement to family in Arkansas, those clients often were unable to contact us for whatever reason. We have since learned we must receive the client's contact information, and that of their family members, to increase the probability of actually connecting with the potential client. Then we can provide them with much-needed legal representation.



Stephen Coger meets with a law student supporting AID

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COLLABORATIONS

We approach our cases in a holistic manner because we understand that as legal service providers we have a responsibility to work with our clients to ensure that we meet not only their legal needs, but also that we support them as they seek safety and access to opportunities like physical and mental health services. At the same time, we are aware that the non-legal needs of our clients are outside our wheelhouse as legal representatives. We are excited to have working relationships with Licensed Professional Counselor Martha Gonzalez and Licensed Clinical Social Worker Tracey Wren. We also refer many clients to the Community Clinics across NW Arkansas, and to WelcomeHealth in Fayetteville.

“AS LEGAL SERVICE PROVIDERS WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO WORK WITH OUR CLIENTS TO ENSURE THEIR SAFETY, TO SUPPORT THEM IN GAINING ACCESS TO PSYCHOSOCIAL AND MEDICAL SUPPORT SERVICES”

When working with our child clients, when possible, we serve their families by offering their caretakers free legal screenings as well. This often reveals that the adults have some pathway to immigration relief, often in the form of a 601A Waiver of Unlawful Presence.¹¹



Licensed Professional Counselor Martha Gonzalez

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SERVICES

AID offers the following services, among many others:

AFFIRMATIVE ASYLUM FOR MINORS AND FAMILIES

Filing affirmatively is great because it gives our clients two bites at the apple; that is, two chances to win. If we lose at the administrative level, at USCIS, we get to fight the case again in front of an immigration judge.

BOND HEARINGS

With increased immigration enforcement, AID had to expand its services to include bond hearings. When immigrants and refugees in Arkansas are taken by ICE, they are often transported to Louisiana. AID then works with friends and family members to gather evidence to show that the detained individual deserves to be released. We show that they are good people, not a flight risk, and have some chance at winning a case for immigration relief in the immigration court. Like most immigration law work, bond hearings take a lot of preparation. It is worth it though because not only does our client win their freedom, it is far easier to fight one's case outside of detention, rather than trying to meet with attorneys and therapists and other advocates from a jail deep inside Louisiana.

DEFENSE-BASED ASYLUM FOR MINORS AND FAMILIES

Defensive asylum cases are more difficult on the client and their advocates because it involves the immigration court room, which is a far more hostile place than a USCIS interview room, and much further away. In 2019, AID began co-litigating more complex family asylum cases in partnership with private bar attorney Nathan Bogart, and other cases with the director of the immigration clinic at the University of Arkansas, Beth Zilberman.



Steve and Beth Coger, and an extra special young client.

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FAMILY-BASED PETITIONS

AID serves a lot of people who are hoping to bring children, siblings, parents or spouses to the USA. Sometimes, this is as easy as filing some paperwork with USCIS and the Department of State, and sometimes it is next to impossible. For example, a client from India who is a US Citizen will have to wait another 20+ years before a visa is available for his sister and brother.

HUMANITARIAN FORMS OF RELIEF¹²

AID receives some of its funding from the STOP Violence Against Women Act to serve certain survivors of domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault and dating violence. Unfortunately, this funding does not allow us to serve children under 11 or survivors of other crimes with the funds.

For that, we rely on our generous funders and donors. The most common forms of humanitarian relief we provide are:

U Visas for survivors of certain violent crimes,

T Visas for survivors of severe human trafficking,

Special Immigrant Juvenile Status for children who have been abandoned, abused or neglected, and

Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Relief for survivors of violence at the hands of certain US Citizen and Legal Permanent Resident relatives.

DEFERRED ACTION FOR CHILDHOOD ARRIVALS (DACA) RENEWALS

The current administration has attempted to end DACA and as of the writing of this report we are waiting on the Supreme Court to hand down a decision as to DACA's future. Currently, because of the president, no one is able to apply for a new, initial DACA application, but USCIS is still accepting renewals, thanks to the litigation of passionate advocates across the country.

LEGAL PERMANENT RESIDENT (LPR) RENEWALS

While we often encourage eligible people to become US citizens, it is important to renew green cards for people that for whatever reason do not want to apply for citizenship. AID is happy to provide this service.

NATURALIZATION

2019 was an exciting year for a lot of reasons, not the least of which was that AID joined the New Americans Campaign as a provider of free citizenship workshops. We provided two such workshops for people in 2019 and will provide many more in the years to come.

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SPECIAL IMMIGRANT JUVENILE STATUS

SIJS is mentioned above in the humanitarian section, but it merits a fuller description because it is a significant portion of our caseload. SIJS makes the young people that apply for it immediately eligible for ARKKids, the Arkansas Medicaid program for children. Prior to the current president, it was enough to keep a child from getting an order of deportation. Nowadays, the Office of Chief Counsel is fighting for the deportation of youth even when they clearly qualify for a path to legal status through SIJS. OCC is partly able to do this because USCIS is taking far, far too long to adjudicate these applications. Furthermore, even upon approval, there is in essence a long line of children and youth from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras and they are having to wait years after an approval before they can request a work permit and a green card (that is, legal permanent resident status). This long wait time exposes them to certain dangers. Given that these children often have a high ACEs rating, they can be more susceptible to poor decision making that can lead to criminal or juvenile justice issues that jeopardize an otherwise uncomplicated case.¹³

WHAT IS SPECIAL IMMIGRANT JUVENILE STATUS (SIJS)

Almost 20 years ago, Congress passed the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000. The law's other, longer name made clear its intent: to "combat trafficking in persons, especially into the sex trade, slavery, and involuntary servitude, to reauthorize certain Federal programs to prevent violence against women, and for other purposes."

The law has changed over time, and thankfully a later iteration made Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) available to children and youth who have experienced abandonment, abuse or neglect by at least one of their parents.

The federal law makes juveniles eligible for a path to green card status (and, later, citizenship). The law first requires that the minor go before a state court with jurisdiction over juveniles to make certain findings related to the child's experience of abuse (or abandonment or neglect) and what is in the child's best interests.

SIJS, like much of immigration law, is an ever-changing interaction of federal law, state law, and USCIS policy.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH SIJS?

SIJS is fantastic, but it is far from perfect. Sadly, youth who receive LPR status based on SIJS are prohibited from ever applying for their parents to receive legal status. When conducting intakes for potential SIJS applicants, we always inform them of other opportunities for relief, if there are any, and of this major pitfall of SIJS. So far no child or their parent has hesitated. They have always chosen to move ahead with their SIJS application. We hope that someday soon our country will pass Comprehensive Immigration Reform that will allow many more young people and their families to have a path to citizenship.

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Some common ACEs our clients experience, and their repercussions, are listed in these graphics from the Center for Disease Control.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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A BIT ABOUT WORKFLOW

When we are contacted by a potential adult client, we set them up with a consultation. These consultations cost \$40.¹⁴ At their appointment, we screen them for pathways to immigration relief. If there are none, we may advise them as to defensive forms of relief like Cancellation of Removal.

While many immigrants and refugees have no path to legal status, many do. In fact, a 2019 report estimated that over 20% of immigrants and refugees in the country qualify for some type of immigration relief and are either unaware or unable to afford representation to pursue it. Once we determine the client's eligibility for relief, our team of attorneys, paralegals, and specialists help the client navigate the process and paperwork necessary for acquiring legal status.

We offer our legal services based on a sliding fee scale for adult clients. We use the federal poverty guidelines to determine what portion of our fees—if any—a client will pay.

For our clients who are below the age of 18, after the consultation fee, we provide our services completely free of charge. When the minor client's family is able to pay court costs and filing fees, we let them do so. Otherwise, we file In Forma Pauperis to ensure our clients have access to the courts, and thus, access to Medicaid.¹⁵

As mentioned above, part of these consultations involve screening our clients for any other needs like medical or mental health care and connecting them to other resources that can serve them. We do not make referrals to empty rooms or elusive social service agencies. We reach out personally to executive directors and case managers at community clinics or food banks to ensure that someone there can tend to our clients' needs. When the client needs mental health support, we walk them down the hall to the office of licensed professional counselor Martha Gonzalez. Thanks to our STOP VAWA¹⁶ funding we can pay for certain clients to receive mental health services at no cost to them.

Our team at AID remains with our clients through every step of the way in their process. We make sure that our clients are able to reach us via text, phone or email with their concerns.



Skye Austin meets with AID comptroller Karen Byers to discuss the new STOP VAWA grant which funds our services for survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence and stalking.

¹⁴ Survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault are exempt from the consultation fee.

¹⁵ A succinct explanation of In Forma Pauperis is available on the [Arkansas Legal Services website](#).

¹⁶ More information about this grant program is available at [mass.gov/service-details/violence-against-women-act-va-wa-stop-grant-program](#). In short, VAWA Services, Training, Officers Prosecutors (STOP) Formula Grant Program aims to develop and strengthen effective responses to sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence and stalking.

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HOW DO PEOPLE FIND OUT ABOUT US?

Being accessible and visible to the community is a crucial part of our work. Given the current political climate whereby immigrants and refugees are increasingly living with the reality of potential separation from loved ones, we need to make sure people know about us and can reach us safely and easily.



To that end, we maintain an active profile on social media platforms. People can also message us from our Facebook page with questions or information. We use this page to advertise different community events and workshops, as well. In 2019, we learned that “boosting” our free events drastically increases attendance. Whether outreach and screenings in rural Batesville, Arkansas, or

a major citizenship workshop in our home office, most attendees report that they learned of our events via social media. Perhaps our most enthusiastically attended presentation this year was on the administration’s changes to the Public Charge Rule with guest lecturer attorney Laura Ferner. Additionally, live videos on the platform have proven to be effective when engaging and informing the community.

Our new website, arkansasimmigrantdefense.com offers materials in both English and Spanish, including beautiful and educational documents like, “Know Your Rights,” “What To Do When Facing Deportation,” and “Changes to the Public Charge Rule.” We continue to add resources to it, and in 2020 we intend to more actively promote these additions to our website via Facebook Live posts and other more traditional outreach, like television and radio appearances.

We recognize the importance of going out into the community to build trust and rapport. To that end, we maintain active outreach and awareness building efforts around the state. Outreach activities include presenting at local poultry plants, such as Tyson, hospitals and community clinics including Mercy Hospital and Arkansas Children’s Hospital, as well as schools through programs like the Springdale Family Literacy Program. We are also enthusiastic to accept invitations to present on our services, speciality topics and other relevant information for community organizations, community centers, and other institutions. So, please invite us!

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SCREENINGS

We had set an annual goal of 1500 screening sessions, but that was in partnership with Catholic Immigration Services. Now that we are in our own space, we hope to screen 500 potential clients per year. At 41 per month, that sounds like a lot. However, we have a staff of 5 full time employees and one full time volunteer, so we believe this is a realistic goal.

ON CITIZENSHIP DAY IN 2019, AID PROVIDED FREE SCREENINGS FOR 5 POTENTIAL NATURALIZATION APPLICANTS.

In 2019, we were able to provide 1057 screenings, which given our administrative and technical resources and capacity is formidable. Furthermore, while our policy of screening the sponsors of unaccompanied children helped us to move closer to achieving this goal, the increasing resistance from Immigration Courts (also known by the acronym EOIR for Executive Office for Immigration Review) and US Citizenship & Immigration Services meant a loss of bandwidth for outreach and screenings. If USCIS and EOIR were less combative, our staff would have more capacity for outreach and screenings. There are many examples of this needless hostility toward our clients and advocates. For one, USCIS in Fort Smith has been refusing to meet with Arkansas AILA members for over a year, whereas before these meetings were routinely, easily scheduled.¹⁷

REPRESENTATION GOALS

In 2019, AID (previously AJC), in partnership with Catholic Immigration Services (CIS), represented 567 individuals in different processes, including Freedom of Information Act filings, FBI fingerprint checks, work permits, legal permanent residency, and U.S. citizenship.

Additionally, we served juvenile immigrants by applying for 62 SIJS, 72 guardianships (in partnership with private bar volunteers), 32 asylum applications (in partnership with UA Law School & private bar), 3 T-Visas (only 3 individuals qualified), and 7 U-Visas.

For our clients, the ability to secure documentation that would enable them to work legally will have a great impact on their individual income earning potential and their

ability to secure livelihood while remaining safe. While many of our clients are too young to work, those who are old enough and able to get work authorization can earn a higher hourly wage than those who are undocumented.



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In 2019, we were able to exceed our goal and filed 55 work permits while some of those permits have been delayed in arriving, with one exception they have all been approved. Work permits have proven to be life changing for our clients, enabling them to drive and work legally, and importantly, providing them with a photo ID and a social security number.

USCIS is taking longer than their statutorily allowed time to adjudicate SIJS applications and is issuing "Request for Additional Evidence" in many cases. As a result, while all of our SIJS apps have been approved except one, we received less approvals than expected. Fortunately, our Mexico-based SIJS applications have been immediately approved. This is probably because visas are currently available for Mexico-based SIJs and so we file the entire Adjustment of Status (AOS, the process of becoming a Legal Permanent Resident, also known as a green card holder. It is the first path to citizenship) packet with the I-360 application for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status.

SERVICES ACROSS ARKANSAS

It is important that we serve clients all across Arkansas because legal resources become increasingly sparse outside of the northwest corner of the state, and the Office of Refugee Resettlement is relocating children and youth to every corner of Arkansas.

During 2019, our team members Michel and Stephen traveled to Central Arkansas once a month to meet with potential and existing AID clients. Michel meets with clients in person and conducts follow up interviews by phone. She ensures our clients are served with their legal documents by a civil process server ahead of their hearings, and arranges for AID director Stephen Coger to handle their guardianship hearings. More and more Michel is also working with volunteer attorneys to help cover hearings in Batesville, Hot Springs, Lonoke and other cities and towns across the state.



ADVOCACY

AID continues to advocate for change at the local, state and national level. Locally, we have continued to organize, educate and advocate toward an end to the sheriff's collaboration with ICE. In 2020, AID hopes to file suit against the sheriff for his consistent disregard for the basic human and civil rights of immigrants, especially immigrant and refugee women.

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At the state level, AID is moving subtly and with elected officials to ensure that instances of racial profiling are identified and corrected, whether by school officials or law enforcement.

Nationally, AID contributed to the outpour of letters from nonprofits across the legal and educational fields to combat the proposed fee increases by USCIS.¹⁸

EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS

AID facilitated 41 educational workshops and events reaching 3,107 people across very different venues. These outreach events focused on institutions and organizations that would allow us to continue our child-focused and low-income-focused outreach. Key venues for these activities include Springdale Schools' Family Literacy Program, Community Clinics and Child Advocacy Centers, and—with great success—Facebook Live for educational outreach and Know Your Rights work.

OUTREACH

Outreach is a critical component of our work to ensure that we are accessible and able to reach the most vulnerable immigrants and refugees. We utilize different approaches to reach out to very different organizations in order to raise awareness, distribute information, and connect with potential clients.

In 2019, AID connected with 27 school counselors, 3 principals, and a state-wide coalition of social workers in order to arrange for sharing information about paths to citizenship for undocumented youth. We signed 5 new Memorandums of Understanding with domestic violence shelters in Arkansas to set up referral systems by which abused immigrants and refugees are referred to our organization for their legal needs.

REFERRALS

AJC initially set a goal of 450 client referrals to appropriate agencies, for mental health services, HIV-related care, and more, as well as appropriate attorneys for cases we cannot prosecute for whatever reason. However, in 2019, we only made it to 385.

A major source of referrals had a change in their leadership and was therefore unable to accept referrals for an extended period of time. Also, our office relocation impacted our staff bandwidth and we temporarily lost the capacity to make referrals.



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Much of our work would not be possible were it not for our partnerships and networks. We work hard to foster and maintain a strong network of organizations and partners that enable us to extend our outreach, provide referrals, and ultimately better meet the needs of our clients and client communities. In 2019, we were fortunate to build new partnerships while continuing to work with organizations that have been integral to our network.

[The New Americans Campaign](#) is a diverse nonpartisan national network of respected immigration organizations, legal service providers, faith-based organizations, immigrant rights groups, foundations and community leaders that challenges and innovates the way providers help others navigate Naturalization. We are fortunate to count on NAC for our Naturalization screening events, workshops, and collaborations. They have provided AID with resources, training, and connected us with additional partners such as Citizenship Works to make our free citizenship workshops run smoother and more efficiently. The NAC also funded two innovative ideas that AID tested this year: paid Facebook advertising to get the word out, and an in-house raffle. Our partnership with NAC is important to Arkansas because it helps us to take our naturalization work all across the state.

[Canopy NWA](#) is a refugee resettlement agency in Arkansas and also a fellow NAC Partner. This year, we collaborated with CanopyNWA for our first ever Citizenship Workshop in our new building.

[Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.](#), is a network of faith-based institutions, farmworker programs, domestic violence shelters, ethnic community-focused organizations, libraries and other entities that serve immigrants. Today their network includes more than 380 nonprofit organizations in 47 states and we are proud to be one of them. CLINIC Legal has been a key informational and training entity for our team at AID. From webinars to in-person trainings across the country we have come to count on CLINIC's legal support for tough cases.

Our partnership with [Arkansas Children's Hospital \(ACH\)](#) has been a huge game-changer for us at AID. ACH's Medical Legal Partnership with Legal Aid of Arkansas refers to AID any clients that express a concern about immigration issues. After we are able to help our juvenile clients with their legal needs, it is wonderful that we can reconnect them with the team at ACH. ACH social workers then help parents sign their children up for ARKids First (Medicaid) so that their children can begin receiving the healthcare they so deserve.

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We view our work with our clients as long term service work whereby we continue to serve them even after their pressing immigration legal needs have been resolved. While we have taken on many new cases in 2019, we also have some important updates on our previous clients whom we highlighted in the 2018 report. These updates highlight the different processes that our clients have to go through and the importance of staying in touch long-term.

Note: as always, we have changed clients' names, towns, and other information to protect their confidentiality.

UPDATES FROM CLIENTS HIGHLIGHTED IN THE 2018 REPORT

JAVIER

As you may recall from our 2018 report, Jaiver had a very challenging childhood and adolescence that involved trafficking and forced sex work. Fortunately, Javier's asylum application was approved. Like any asylum approval, Jaiver had to wait a year after receiving approval to apply for a green card. We are pleased to report that we have filed for his green card and are now merely waiting on his interview. Javier, meanwhile, is working at a job which he enjoys. He especially likes that he is building skills that he hopes will help him start his own business eventually.



2018 Annual Report

ALICIA

Alicia's story was also highlighted in our 2018 report. Since then, she has received her SIJS approval. However, given how the federal regulations inexplicably relegated SIJS visa availability to an employment-based visa category with an annual limit on it, she is now waiting on a visa to become available so that she can file for legal permanent resident status. We are still waiting to receive word on her asylum interview, years after submitting the application.

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ROSITA

Rosita, a mother of several children with disabilities, received an approval from USCIS for her 601-A Waiver of Unlawful Presence. She has since gone to a consular interview in her home country. AID staff helped prepare her for the interview and she has since returned to Arkansas as a Legal Permanent Resident.

After returning home, Rosita told us, “The biggest relief, the biggest change, is being able to drive legally. I had been given so many tickets for no driver’s license. But, what was I to do? I have these children who all have medical appointments and I have to take them from school to the doctor. Now, I can finally do this and just worry about my children and not worry about getting another expensive ticket or even going to jail.”

“THE BIGGEST RELIEF, THE BIGGEST CHANGE, IS BEING ABLE TO DRIVE LEGALLY. I HAD BEEN GIVEN SO MANY TICKETS FOR NO DRIVER’S LICENSE. BUT, WHAT WAS I TO DO? I HAVE THESE CHILDREN WHO ALL HAVE MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS AND I HAVE TO TAKE THEM FROM SCHOOL TO THE DOCTOR. NOW, I CAN FINALLY DO THIS AND JUST WORRY ABOUT MY CHILDREN AND NOT WORRY ABOUT GETTING ANOTHER EXPENSIVE TICKET OR EVEN GOING TO JAIL.”

– Rosita, AID Client

OUR 2019 CLIENTS AND THEIR STORIES:

HENRI

Based solely on his sexual orientation and his gender presentation, Henri experienced violence that was so severe he had to leave his childhood home in Honduras. After being abandoned by his family, he suffered two severe attacks by homophobic criminals before additional death threats made him finally decide to join the migrant caravan last year. He languished in jail for 9 months before AID attorney Stephen Coger, with support from the amazing team at AID, secured his release. Stephen and AID extern Nicole Shaum drove to Louisiana to win his asylum hearing, and then drove Henri to the airport in Little Rock. From there he flew to his new host family in Oakland, California.

Casey Bryant at Advocates for Immigrant Rights made AID aware of Henri’s need for representation. The private bar supported AID again and again in this case, including a fabulous attorney on the West Coast named Olga Badilla, who helped not only with legal issues but also in arranging for Henri to find a new family upon his release from incarceration. AID is grateful to RAICES¹⁹ for funding that helped cover the costs of transportation, too.

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LOUISA'S STORY

Luisa came to AID as a referral from Legal Aid of Arkansas. She is a US Citizen and had just turned 18. Her parents needed a guardianship over her because she has a rare condition that will leave her in a life-long need for her parents' care and supervision. LAA could not represent the family because the parents were undocumented. AID accepted the case, and when the family was unable to get their physician to sign a Physician's Affidavit in support of the guardianship, AID respectfully informed the doctor that he would be subpoenaed if he failed to respond to the family's request. The hearing is now scheduled for late January 2020. Once the AID volunteer attorney obtains the guardianship order for the parents, the parents will then enroll Luisa in a life skills program so that she can have a job that will provide her both some joy and income. AID also plans to represent the father with a legal entry-based adjustment of status, and then the mother with a 601-A Waiver.

ELIZABETH'S STORY

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) had released Elizabeth to a family friend. ORR does its very best to ensure that children are released to good people, but sometimes they are released to people who do not care for them appropriately. As we would learn, As we would learn, Elizabeth had been released to someone who—through fraud and coercion—was forcing her to work instead of attend school. As Elizabeth trusted us more and more, Elizabeth had more opportunities for immigration relief. We would apply for a T-Visa, a U-Visa, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and asylum. With all of these applications in process, she has a higher chance than many refugees at remaining in the United States and having access to education and stability for the first time in her young life.

YESSICA'S STORY

Yessica lives in Jonesboro, and has been on her own for over 3 years. Her mother passed away when she was 8, and her father abandoned her in pursuit of his addictions. Yessica lived with extended family until she came out as a lesbian, at which point she was thrown out and experienced homelessness.

Yessica has mental health issues stemming from the neglect and abandonment, and during the school year she was able to get her medication. However, during summer break she had to manage her mental health without that vital resource. Despite all of the obstacles facing her, she dared to reach out to Arkansas Immigrant Defense, and on her summer break no less, when things were hardest.

Yessica coordinated with AID team member Michel Rangel, and they met in Little Rock to prepare the paperwork that would lead to us filing her green card application. In addition to preparing her I-360 (the application for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status), we were able to simultaneously file her I-485 (green card application) and her I-765 (work permit application) because she was applying affirmatively and because she was from Mexico.²⁰

Yessica, through her dynamic ability to connect with people, found a fantastic lesbian couple to take her in, and AID also facilitated the family's guardianship. These caring adults are also ensuring that Yessica has access to resources for her mental healthcare. Yessica and her new guardians have already become quite a team.

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A CONCISE LOOK AT ASYLUM

Most of our asylum work is for children who have traversed danger and adversity to turn themselves in at the border to request asylum. On rare occasions, we represent adults as well. This section of *A Way Through Walls* presents the basics of asylum law, and then you can test your knowledge with two hypotheticals.

WHAT DO I HAVE TO PROVE TO WIN MY ASYLUM CASE?

The current administration has made asylum even more difficult than it already was. In particular, the Department of Justice has done everything it can to make asylum harder to access for survivors of domestic violence. Many of our young clients have survived this type of abuse, among others, and this is what we have to show.

The asylum seeker has to show that they have a:

- 1) WELL-FOUNDED FEAR
- 2) OF PERSECUTION
- 3) PERPETRATED BY THE GOVERNMENT OR AN ENTITY THE GOVERNMENT CANNOT/WILL NOT CONTROL
- 4) ON ACCOUNT OF
- 5) RACE, RELIGION, NATIONALITY, POLITICAL OPINION, OR MEMBERSHIP IN A PARTICULAR SOCIAL GROUP.

WHAT'S CONSIDERED PERSECUTION?²¹

Three types:

- 1) SIGNIFICANT PHYSICAL FORCE AGAINST A PERSON'S BODY,
- 2) THE INFLECTION OF COMPARABLE PHYSICAL HARM WITHOUT DIRECT APPLICATION OF FORCE, OR
- 3) NONPHYSICAL HARM OF EQUAL GRAVITY.

Note that harm constituting "persecution" is a lower bar for children than adults.²²

²¹If you want to know more about what qualifies as "persecution" you can read *Stanojkova v. Holder*, 645 F.3d 943 (7th Cir. 2011)

²²See USCIS Guidelines and 7th Circuit law. Must be considered cumulatively. *Nzeve v. Holder*, 582 F.3d 678 (7th Cir. 2009).

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PERSECUTION



PROTECTED GROUND

- Race
- Religion
- Nationality
- Membership in a PSG
- Political Opinion

HYPOTHETICAL ONE: ERICK

Erick, born in Honduras, was routinely beaten and told, “If you would just stop acting like a girl, your life would be much easier.” Erick came out as bisexual at 14, and was kicked out of his family. Erick spent a year couchsurfing and doing his best to avoid violence from anti-LGBT+ gang members. After one particularly severe beating he went to the police, but they did nothing. When Erick’s 17-year-old cousin decided to make the trek to the USA fleeing gang violence, Erick went, too. Now, Erick lives in SW Springdale with his mother who is barely tolerant of Erick’s sexuality. Erick rarely talks with his dad. Dad lives in Los Angeles and infrequently sends money.

Does Erick qualify for asylum?

Bonus Question: **Does Erick qualify for SIJS?**

HYPOTHETICAL TWO: KAZIM

Kazim is an International Exchange Scholar living in Jonesboro. He is from Mauritania where slavery remains an active institution. He is from the slave caste and through certain affirmative action programs (sometimes called “positive discrimination” in his home country) he gained access to education and even a great job in politics.

Since living in Arkansas, certain anti-slavery activists who are his friends were brutalized at a demonstration challenging the ongoing institution of slavery. They have been jailed indefinitely and it is alleged that they

are being tortured. After all this, Kazim made a Facebook post critical of the government’s brutality and was summarily fired and then ridiculed through the state operated journalism machine. Other similar online activities have landed people in prison indefinitely under charges of blasphemy. **Does Kazim qualify for asylum?**



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ANSWERS TO ERICK'S QUESTIONS

1) DO THEY QUALIFY FOR ASYLUM?

Asylum is very fact specific. We should dig deeper to see if Erick was *perceived* as bisexual, and learn more about the frequency and what types of persecution he faced. And, we must remember--get specific! What insults did Erick's abusers deploy as they beat him?

And there must be a sort of looping nexus between the *persecution* and the protected ground. If they were calling Erick "faggot" during his mistreatment, we need to include that specific term in his application because it goes to show that the persecution he faced was not just because they did not like him, but rather, it was tied to a protected ground, specifically, a particular social group.

Finally, since the police in El Salvador did nothing to protect him, we would want to include this part of his story as well. It goes to meet the prong about the persecution being "perpetrated by the government or *an entity the government cannot/will not control.*"

2) DOES ERICK QUALIFY FOR SIJS?

As you may recall from earlier in the report, Erick has to have been abused, abandoned, or neglected by at least one parent to qualify for SIJS. A court must *additionally* find that Erick cannot be reunited with the abandoning/abusive/neglectful parent. Given Erick's situation, AID would not apply for SIJS status for Erick at this time. There certainly are arguments to be made for abandonment or neglect, but since Dad is still sending money, the facts are not ideal for an SIJS case.

Not qualifying for SIJS is unfortunate because it provides strong protection against human trafficking. This is because there is often a guardianship order predicate to the SIJS application, and so a guardian is given the power to help address the ward's needs.

ANSWERS TO KAZIM'S QUESTION:

1) DOES KAZIM QUALIFY FOR ASYLUM?

You may have noticed that Kazim faced no persecution in his past. In light of the lack of past persecution, we have to consider other issues. Namely, is there a well-founded fear of *future* persecution. To have a chance at winning Kazim's asylum claim, we would need to show:

- That Kazim has a subjectively genuine fear (which goes to the client's credibility),
- That Kazim has an objectively reasonable fear (which we will show with country conditions reports, among other things),
- and finally that there is no safe, reasonable internal relocation option (that is, that there is nowhere in the country that Kazim would be safe).

If you are thinking to yourself, "It should be simpler for someone to live here when they are unsafe in their home country." We agree! We hope that more compassionate laws and policies are generated over the coming years.

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PROFIT AND LOSS (JANUARY - DECEMBER 2019)

REVENUE		
	Donations	\$247,459.90
	Fees for services	23,714.79
Total Revenue		\$271,174.69

EXPENDITURES		
	Advertising & Marketing	2,949.27
	Business Support Services	8,559.16
	Continuing Education & Training	3,138.40
	Filing Fees	8,821.00
	Meals & Entertainment	139.85
	Office Furniture & Equipment	12,832.35
	Office Supplies & Software	12,541.64
	Postage	2,870.49
	Professional Services & Contract Labor	46,521.14
	Rent	16,978.31
	Salaries & Benefits	182,809.34
	Taxes & Licenses	525.25
	Travel	7,322.01
	Utilities	1,571.20
Total Expenditures		\$307,579.41

NET OPERATING REVENUE (LOSS) \$(36,404.72)

BALANCE SHEET (AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2019)

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ASSETS

Current Assets

Bank Accounts	
Arkansas Justice Collective	\$97,040.47
Arkansas Immigrant Defense	\$6,686.70
Accounts Receivable	
STOP/VAWA Grant	\$30,346.70

Total Current Assets **\$134,073.87**

Long Term Assets

Office Furniture and Equipment	\$15,861.48
--------------------------------	-------------

Total Long Term Assets \$15,861.48

Total Assets **\$284,009.22**

LIABILITIES & EQUITY

Liabilities

Current Liabilities	
Credit Cards	-0-
Total Credit Cards	-0-
Other Current Liabilities	
Wages Payable	\$3,286.16
Benefits Payable	\$149.17
Payroll Tax Payable	\$10,544.67
Total Current Liabilities	\$13,980.00

Total Liabilities **\$13,980.00**

Equity

Retained Earnings	\$303,514.52
Net Income	(\$33,485.30)

Total Equity **\$270,029.22**

TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY

\$284,009.22

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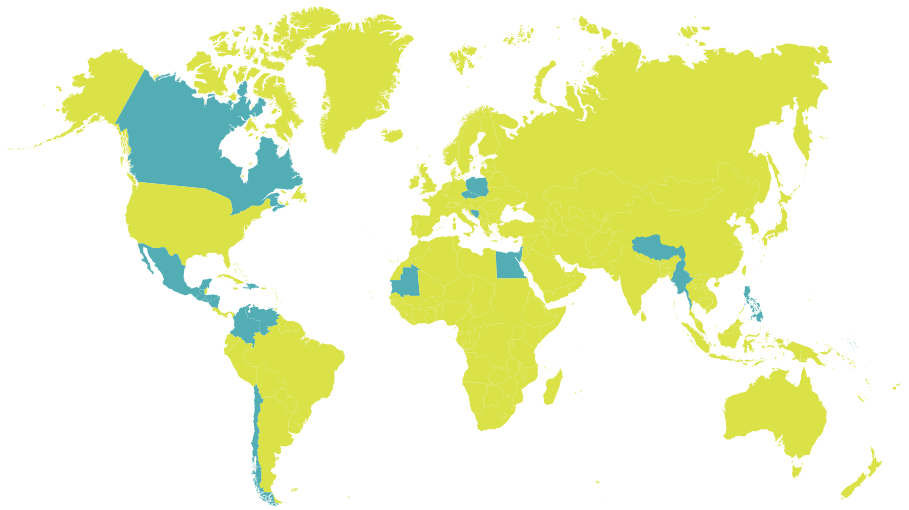
2019 ACTIVITIES IN NUMBERS

- Conducted **1057** screenings to assess eligibility for representation for citizenship or other legal services
- Represented **567** individuals in different processes, including those for work permits, legal residency, and U.S. citizenship.
- Acquired **55** work permits
- Facilitated 41 educational workshops and events reaching **3,107** people
- AID connected with **28** school counselors, **3** principals, **1** Vice Superintendent, and a state-wide coalition of social workers
- We served juvenile immigrants by filing **62** Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, helping **62** young people access medical care and have a legal guardian who can protect them from trafficking and violence
- We secured **72** guardianships (in partnership with private bar volunteers) for children and youth released to Arkansas by the Office of Refugee Resettlement
- We filed **32** asylum applications (2 of these were in partnership with UA Law School & private bar).
- We filed **3** T-Visas for immigrant survivors of severe forms of human trafficking to acquire a path to Legal Permanent Resident status and hopefully, later, citizenship (and we have many more applications in process)
- We prepared **7** U-Visas for survivors of domestic violence to have a chance at a safe, stable life in the USA.

WHERE WE WORK

AID began its work in Northwest Arkansas, and has begun reaching clients all over the state. We are actively working to expand our operations in Arkansas, and have recently established a part-time office in Little Rock. Our clients have come from:

BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA / CANADA / CHILE / COLOMBIA / COSTA RICA / CZECH REPUBLIC
THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC / EGYPT / EL SALVADOR / GUATEMALA / HAITI / HONDURAS / ISRAEL
LEBANON / MAURITANIA / MEXICO / MYANMAR / NICARAGUA / PALESTINE / PHILIPPINES
POLAND / THE REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS / TIBET / VENEZUELA



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We offer a deep bow of gratitude to all our funders for their support -- those that wish to remain in quiet anonymity and all the rest. We have such gratitude for the New Americans Campaign, The Fund for New Citizens in the New York Community Trust, The Arkansas Delivering on the Dream Fund in the Arkansas Community Foundation, The Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, and so many more. All these organizations have helped AID serve immigrants and refugees all over the state and region.

We are also thankful for support from the STOP Violence Against Women Act; this funding that is allowing us to serve survivors of dating violence, sexual assault, domestic violence and stalking, entirely pro bono.

We bow to all our donors not only for their financial gifts but also their logistical support as they have helped coach AID into becoming a sustainable, more efficiently effective organization. The TRUE Uplift Cohort has brought AID together with many fantastic organizations across NW Arkansas and helped us increase our capacity through coaching, quarterly meetings, and telephonic check-ins.

The Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation also funded an independent contractor, the skillful and direct Glenn Nishimura, who helped us prepare a strategic plan to ensure that AID grows and develops for years to come. Retired corporate executive Craig McSherry is volunteering to help us turn that plan into a very thorough Objectives, Goals, Strategies and Measures project. The OGSM work is already improving our outreach and service provision.

AID staff remain indebted to the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc (CLINIC). If not for CLINIC's in-person trainings and webinars, AID would not be filing asylum applications.

Nonprofit immigration legal service providers in Memphis have also helped AID conserve our limited resources by attending Master Calendar Hearings with our clients. Members of the private bar in NW Arkansas and Memphis have continued to also help mentor AID staff in ways that increase our capacity to serve immigrants and refugees. Catholic Immigration Services in Springdale so kindly provided us a space at almost no charge for years, until we moved out this year. For all this, we are unendingly grateful.

Thank you, dear funders and mentors and guides; together, we will continue to serve immigrants and refugees through these very difficult times. Together we will find a way through walls.

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HOW TO SUPPORT ARKANSAS IMMIGRANT DEFENSE

Arkansas Immigrant Defense is the only nonprofit immigration law firm in the state. We are serving the region's immigrant and refugee children and youth *pro bono*, as well as survivors of sexual violence regardless of their age, also at no cost to the survivor. In order to continue to provide these services at no cost to the clients, we need your support. While the remainder of our clients do pay us on a sliding scale according to their income, their contribution is not sufficient to cover our costs.

WE RAISED \$40,000 FOR OUR CENTRAL ARKANSAS PROGRAMS, AND THEN WE DID OVER \$136,000 WORTH OF WORK

To give you an idea of the value of your donation, last year, we raised \$40,000 for our Central Arkansas programs, *and then we did over \$136,000 worth of work*. All through the River Valley, we helped 33 young people with guardianships that protected them from trafficking and facilitated their access to ARKids First (Medicaid for youth). We filed applications, including 24 asylum applications, with US Citizenship & Immigration Services to protect them from deportation, and ensure a path to citizenship. We also provided a lot of education and outreach to community organizations and client communities.

So, please take a moment to soak in the good news that we have offered in this year's annual report. Then, make a moment to peruse our website, and—if you're into social media—follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Please share this report and our website with your friends, too, and let them know that AID needs support to keep offering our services at no cost to children and youth. Please note that a bizarre funding restriction *does not allow us to serve children under 11 with our federal STOP VAWA funding*, and so we need particularized support to fund our services for this very vulnerable demographic.

If you would like to support AID, please donate using our Facebook page or our website. You can also contact us to set up an automatic bank draft, or send us a check through the mail.

Thanks to the Arkansas Community Foundation, supporters can now contribute to our endowment to help us buy our own building. This account can receive everything from money to more complex gifts like land, crops and other investments. So, please keep AID in mind when planning your giving.

Together, we will continue to serve immigrants and refugees across the state and the region. Together, we will find a way through walls.