



## 2012 ANNUAL REPORT

U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services



**CELEBRATING DREAMS!**



Established in 1996, Americans for Immigrant Justice, a 501(c)(3) organization, is one of the nation's largest non-profit immigration and advocacy law firms. In Florida and on a national level, we champion the rights of unaccompanied immigrant children; advocate for survivors of trafficking and domestic violence; serve as a watchdog on immigration detention practices and policies; and speak for immigrant groups who have particular and compelling claims to justice.

## **OUR MISSION**

To protect and promote the basic human rights of immigrants through a unique combination of free direct services, impact litigation, policy reform, and public education at local, state, and national levels.

## **VISION**

To bring about an American society where immigrants are not subjected to abuse or injustice, are not afraid to seek help, have a fair opportunity to make their case in the system that governs them, and have their contributions valued and encouraged.

A Miami-based law firm, AI Justice is the rare organization that works both nationwide and on the front lines of human rights in Florida. In 2011, seeing hardening attitudes towards immigrants nationwide, AI Justice stepped up its advocacy for sensible immigration policies and reform. A renewed determination to expand its policy influence prompted the opening of a Washington, D.C. office in May 2012 and a name change to Americans for Immigrant Justice (AI Justice) from Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center.



## DEAR AI JUSTICE SUPPORTERS AND FRIENDS,

We believe that American immigrants, regardless of their legal status, deserve to be treated fairly and to have their basic human rights respected. That is what makes America exceptional. It is also what shapes AI Justice.

When we opened our doors in January 1996 with a \$400,000 budget, 10 over-worked staffers quickly jumped into the breach left by funding cuts to Legal Services Corporation agencies at a time of sweeping changes in immigration law. We quickly grew with dozens of committed, young attorneys willing to pass on lucrative legal careers in order to fight the civil rights struggle of our time.

Since then, AI Justice has established a track record for effective immigration advocacy. Our multilingual, multinational staff has also provided free legal services to more than 80,000 immigrants who dream of safety and a better life. Prominent persons of both political parties support our work and serve on our Board.

In 2012, we were thrilled as a group of U.S. Senators began working on a common sense immigration reform bill. This was the dream I had when I co-founded AI Justice 17 years ago. We support legalization for hard-working immigrants who have contributed to this country for years. We can and should dare to dream that America can achieve meaningful and lasting comprehensive immigration reform that benefits ALL of America.

Today, however, we are challenged as never before. The Florida Bar Foundation, formerly our largest source of funds, has cut back funding for all its grantees due to losses of interest-based income. Consequently, The Florida Bar Foundation funding to our agency has been reduced by more than \$1 million in the last three years, and we expect more cuts in the coming years despite increased demand for services. Your support is more important than ever. With your help, AI Justice will work tirelessly to save lives and promote immigration laws that reflect our American ideals.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cheryl Little'.

Cheryl Little, Esq.  
*Co-Founder & Executive Director*

**Celebrating Dreams!** A leader in nationwide efforts to pass the DREAM Act, AI Justice was instrumental in the Obama Administration's adoption in June 2012 of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, **which allows undocumented immigrants who arrived as children to work and reside, at least temporarily, without fear of deportation.** In April, Cheryl Little published an Op-Ed in The Miami Herald, *Rubio proposal offers way toward Dream Act*, arguing that the Executive branch had the authority to provide relief from deportation for the Dreamers. Shortly thereafter, she wrote a legal memorandum on the topic. She was among a small group that met with White House officials to explain their existing power to act just three weeks before DACA was announced. America's Voice noted that "Little was one of the first to point out that the [Marco] Rubio idea was strikingly similar to the forms of Administrative relief that President Obama has at his disposal."

AI Justice staff collaborated with immigrant students, Florida International University's Immigration Law Clinic, and other groups to create a model legal clinic for DACA applicants to get pro bono help completing their application. Nearly 1,000 Dreamers received assistance, completing their applications and compiling documentation over the course of five DACA clinics led by FIU and AI Justice.

*"Cheryl Little was the visionary who pushed the Administration to grant deferred action to childhood arrivals when no one else thought it possible. Her op-ed in the Miami Herald in April 2012, which generated attention from The White House and DHS officials, prompted me to call her to see how I could help."*

*~ Hon Manny Diaz, former City of Miami Mayor, Member DHS Advisory Council*

CELEBRATING DREAMS!



## AI Justice Engages in Policy/Advocacy Work and Litigation

AI Justice provides “boots on the ground” experience that informs smart immigration policy solutions. Our advocacy work includes high-impact litigation; educating the public and policymakers; media outreach; and promoting constructive reform of our broken U.S. immigration system. We publish groundbreaking reports that document real-life stories and provide evidence of destructive anti-immigrant measures that are an assault on the fundamental civil liberties of all. AI Justice also served as an incubator for the Florida Immigrant Coalition, which remains a close ally and has multiplied efforts to protect the rights of immigrants and to advocate for sensible immigration reform.

AI Justice testifies before Congress; the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights; the Organization of American States; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights; and the National Prison Rape Elimination Commission. Numerous AI Justice clients, including asylum seekers, human trafficking survivors, and unaccompanied minors in immigration custody also have testified before Congress. Four former AI Justice attorneys work in key positions on the Hill and at the Department of Homeland Security.

**AI Justice played a significant role in the defeat of proposed changes to the Violence Against Women Act in 2012, which would have decimated decades of protection for immigrant victims, submitting case stories used by Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) during House Judiciary Committee hearings on the bill and publishing an Op-Ed in the Huffington Post on the flawed bill.**

“[AI Justice] is in a unique position having been in the trenches for so long to advocate for our community in need, and I believe that they’ll be a very viable resource in achieving immigration reform in the weeks and months ahead.”

*--AI Justice Honorary Board Member Al Cardenas, former Chair of Florida’s Republican Party and Chair of the American Conservative Union*

“[AI Justice] has made a tremendous difference in the lives of immigrants throughout Florida and the country through [its] victories both large and small. I am confident that ... it will continue to achieve even greater and more meaningful victories for decades to come.”

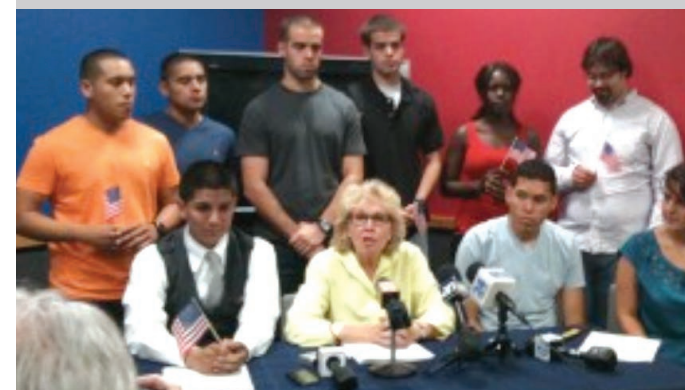
*--Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV), Senate Majority Leader*



Photo Credit: Ashley Lopez, WLRN

### **News Conference at Miami-Dade College on August 15, 2012, the first day DACA applications could be filed.**

(from left) Miami Dade College President, Dr. Eduardo Padron  
AI Justice Executive Director, Cheryl Little  
AI Justice client Felipe Sousa-Rodriguez, Frida Ulloa  
AI Justice clients Monica Lazaro and (not shown) Carlos Roa



Cheryl Little and DREAM Act students at a press conference at Miami Dade College’s Wolfson Campus on June 15, 2012.

**“Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) did not happen because some genius came up with it. AI Justice submitted an op-ed that ran in the Miami Herald, making the case, and Cheryl drafted a legal memo that I gave to the White House. And then Cheryl and I and a few others met with White House officials three weeks before the DACA announcement.”**

*–Gaby Pacheco, Ecuador, Former Political Director, United We Dream Network; one of the four Trail of Dream Students.*



## Oscar's Story Targeted by Gangs

When he was a boy, Oscar's parents operated a small restaurant and computer repair shop in Honduras. Unfortunately, members of the infamous MS-13 Gang started dropping by in order to extort "protection" money from his parents. What they paid was never enough. Gang members killed his father. Months later they gunned down Oscar's brother in front of him and his mother. Oscar continued to receive death threats from one of the country's most dangerous gangs.

Oscar fled to the United States because he didn't want his mother to lose another child. AI Justice met him while he was in an immigration detention center for unaccompanied minors in Miami. In a precedent-setting decision, he was granted political asylum. His case was featured in a story on Univision/ABC that focused on gang violence confronting children in Central America.

*"The help I received [from AI Justice] was magnificent. I tell Aidil [AI Justice attorney], I don't know how to thank her... I think a thank you from me is very small. It's such a great help, what they do."  
-- Oscar, AI Justice client*

## AI Justice Champions the Rights of Unaccompanied Immigrant Children

AI Justice has influenced national policy and laws affecting immigrant children and is widely recognized as an expert in immigrant children's issues. The Children's Legal Program was launched in 2001 following the case of "Baby Margaret," who was abandoned after she was smuggled into the United States. Today, we are the lead agency in a holistic partnership dedicated to serving these unaccompanied minors. This partnership has been recognized by the federal government's Office of Refugee Resettlement as a "model program for care providers throughout the country." We have influenced national policy and laws affecting immigrant children and continue to advocate nationally for unaccompanied children to have the right to government-provided counsel in immigration proceedings. From 2008 to 2012, this population tripled as children, who were increasingly faced with gang violence and even death, fled from their homes in Central America.

**"I didn't think I had any hope to stay in the United States after I was returned from New York to the shelter. But AI Justice kept fighting for me; they never gave up. Now I can go live with a family and one day become a citizen. God loves you guys. I love you, too." ~AI Justice Client**

### AI JUSTICE IN ACTION:

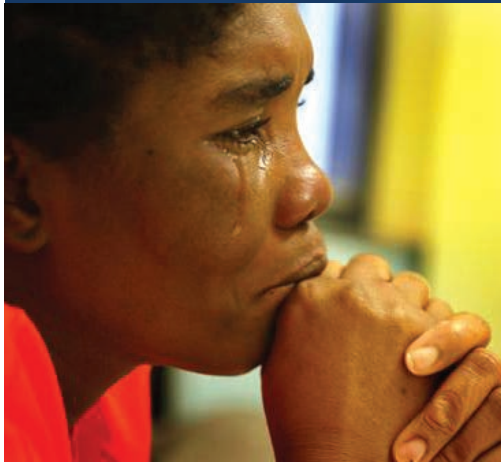
- AI Justice is the sole provider of free legal services to unaccompanied children in Miami-Dade County and in 2012 served 511 children who arrived with no parent or guardian in this country.
- Ninety-nine percent of unaccompanied children served by AI Justice obtained the relief requested.
- AI Justice trained dozens of pro bono attorneys to represent children before Immigration, Juvenile, and Family Courts.
- AI Justice trained immigration judges at their annual conference and provided technical legal assistance to state welfare officials and community-based organizations.
- AI Justice co-authored "The ABC's of Representing Unaccompanied Children" for publication in the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) Immigration Practice Pointers (2011-12 Edition).

## AI Justice Advocates for Survivors of Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence

Our award-winning Lucha (“the struggle”): A Women’s Legal Program, began in 1997 as the first program of its kind in South Florida. Now Lucha is recognized nationally and internationally. Working closely with federal law enforcement officials, staff has successfully represented numerous clients forced into sexual slavery by smugglers in high-profile cases.

AI Justice played a significant role in the defeat of proposed changes to the Violence Against Women Act in 2012, which would have decimated decades of protection for immigrant victims. Lucha Directing Attorney Michelle M. Ortiz published an Op-Ed in the Huffington Post about the flawed bill, *HR 4970 Empowers Abusers, Not Victims*, in May. During a 2012 House Judiciary Committee hearing on reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren read the stories of two AI Justice clients to demonstrate the devastating effects that a proposed bill would have on immigrant victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

### AI JUSTICE IN ACTION:



- AI Justice represented 622 survivors of human trafficking, sexual assault, and domestic violence in 2012, securing their legal status and/or release from detention.
- AI Justice represented more than 90 children of survivors, reuniting them with their mothers.
- Staff and clients testified before Congress on the international trafficking of women and children.



With a phone call tipping off law enforcement while hidden in the attic of her trafficker’s home, Maria brought down a notorious trafficking ring that held her and others captive over the course of several years. Three of the traffickers are now in prison, thanks to her and the other survivors. AI Justice represented six of them with their immigration cases and worked closely with law enforcement on their behalf as the criminal case unfolded. All six clients now have lawful status in the United States and are moving forward with their lives.

*“[AI Justice] changed my life... Thanks that there are groups like them that are concerned about people like me. Today—I have [legal status] and I can be free.” -- Maria*



## AI Justice is a Watchdog for Immigration Detention Practices and Enforcement

AI Justice is the only non-profit agency in Florida that assists ICE detainees throughout the state. AI Justice advises immigration detainees about their basic rights, helping them to obtain release and fight deportation. AI Justice also shines a light on abusive conditions in immigration detention to bring about systemic change. Staff has successfully challenged heavy-handed and misguided enforcement practices that even impact U.S. citizens. Staff serves on both Immigration and Customs Enforcement's National Advisory Groups. AI Justice also co-chaired Detention Watch Network's Steering Committee in 2012.

Octavio and his family were robbed and assaulted at gunpoint. He cooperated with the police and later testified against his attackers at trial, resulting in their convictions. Unfortunately, when Octavio was headed to the hospital to seek treatment for his family, he was stopped and arrested for driving without a license. He was then transferred to ICE custody even though he had no criminal convictions. Since he was the victim of a serious crime, AI Justice submitted a request for his release noting that he was eligible for a U visa. It took three months, but Octavio was finally released. His detention not only cost taxpayers about \$14,000, but it also exacerbated the stress on his US citizen wife, who suffers from a chronic illness and assault-related PTSD.



"AI Justice saves lives. My mother brought me from Bangladesh when I was 7 years old. When I was 26 I was detained and told I would be deported to Bangladesh, though I had not been there in nearly twenty years and did not speak the language. AI Justice attorneys took my case after my release request had been denied. AI Justice got me released from detention with a work permit, and then the next year filed my DACA application.

In April 2013, I received notice that my deportation had been deferred and I obtained my U.S. work permit. I cannot imagine what would've happened to me if I had been deported."

*~Shamir, Bangladesh,  
DREAM Activist*

### AI JUSTICE IN ACTION:

- AI Justice educated more than 1,600 detained immigrants about their legal rights in 2012.
- AI Justice played a key role in Detention Watch Network's "Expose and Close," a national campaign to identify the 10 worst county jails that contract with Immigration and Custom Enforcement, including Florida's Baker County Jail.



# AI Justice Helps Immigrant Groups with Particular and Compelling Claims to Justice

## Haitians

AI Justice is at the forefront of advocacy for Haitians and the fight for fair treatment. AI Justice filed a federal lawsuit compelling ICE to release documents regarding the swift resumption of deportations after the 2010 earthquake that left the country in shambles. AI Justice, in partnership with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), co-sponsored a day-long national symposium in Washington, DC, on the anniversary of the devastating earthquake, addressing the plight of Haitians. Panelists included senior officials from the US Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security.

## Cubans

AI Justice also represents Cuban immigrants who have fled an oppressive regime. Cheryl Little highlighted the plight of Cuban doctors in a Letter to the Editor published in The Miami Herald in March 2012. The doctors were refused residency on the grounds of youth membership in Cuba's Communist Youth Union. In the case of two AI Justice clients, US Citizenship and Immigration Services granted legal permanent residence status only after intervention by AI Justice with the State Department.

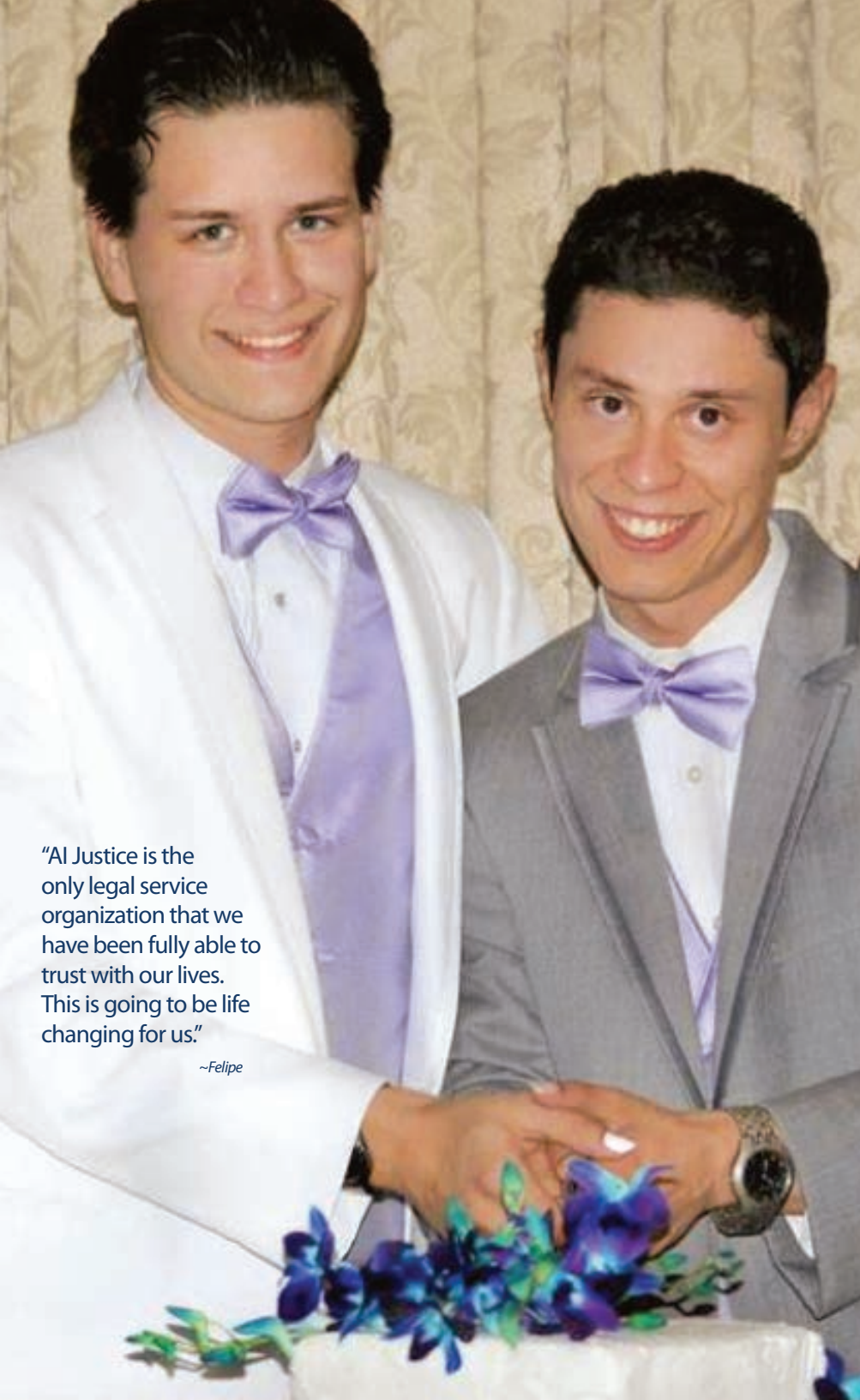
**“USCIS granted green cards only after we contacted the U.S. State Department, which clarified the Cuban youth had little choice but to join the Union to be allowed in medical school.”**

~Cheryl Little  
March 19, 2012 Letters to the Editor, The Miami Herald



Osmil grew up in Cuba dreaming of being a doctor. However, to obtain a medical degree, he was required to join the Communist Youth Union, a situation encountered by almost all Cubans who aspired to become doctors.

Hoping to defect to the United States, Osmil joined a program that sent Cuban doctors to work abroad. He knew that US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) allowed Cuban doctors working abroad to legally fly to the United States to request residency. He applied for the program disclosing his past membership in the Union, and his visa was approved. Later, his residency request was denied due to the party membership. AI Justice successfully represented Osmil in overturning the USCIS decision. He is now secure and has legal status.



"AI Justice is the only legal service organization that we have been fully able to trust with our lives. This is going to be life changing for us."

~Felipe

## Felipe's Journey from Aspiring American to Married Green Card Holder

Felipe was born to a single mother in the slums of Brazil. At age 14, his mother sent him to Miami to live with a sister. Although distressed by his mother's decision, the abrupt change did not stop him from excelling.

By 2008, Felipe had served as president of the student government and as student representative for the Board of Trustees at Miami Dade College (MDC), the nation's largest community college. He was one of only 20 students nationwide to receive an All USA Academic Award and was named a New Century Scholar, an award for the state's top community college student. He also was recognized for countless hours of community service, including creating a mentoring program for elementary-school children. In 2007, he met Juan Rodriguez while both were involved in the college student organization, Students Working for Equal Rights (SWER). Eventually, they started dating and then moved into an apartment together. They have shared their lives ever since.

Though accepted to top colleges, Felipe could not afford to go to them due to the bars on financial aid for undocumented students. Ultimately, thanks to a generous scholarship, he graduated Summa Cum Laude from St. Thomas University with a Bachelor of Arts in Business Studies and a minor in Economics.

AI Justice met Felipe and Juan, as well as Gaby Pacheco and Carlos Roa, in 2009. All were active in SWER (Students Working for Equal Rights), but only Juan had legal status. They told us of their plan to walk 1500 miles from Miami to Washington, DC in 2010. AI Justice worried that they could be deported or attacked along the way. The four activists would not budge, so AI Justice monitored their journey, arranging for legal services as needed. The four successfully reached Washington and highlighted in mainstream media the voices of undocumented DREAMers and immigrant families. In the process, they sparked a powerful youth movement for immigration reform.

In May 2012, Felipe and Juan legally married in Boston. Thanks to a recent Supreme Court decision on the Defense of Marriage Act, the federal government now legally recognizes same-sex couples. AI Justice is representing Felipe as the spouse of a citizen so that he can become a naturalized US citizen. Felipe is now Co-Director of GetEQUAL.org and lives with Juan in Tampa.

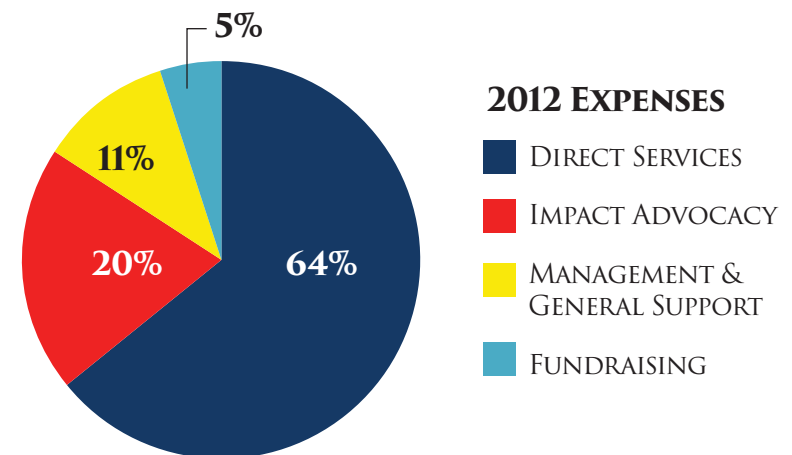
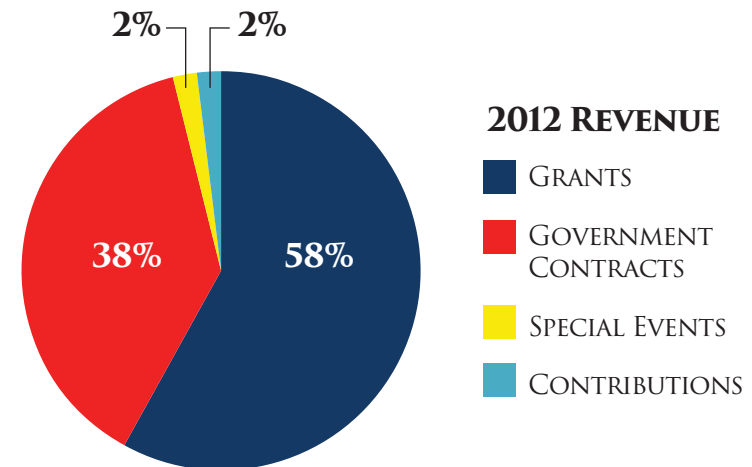
# Financial Overview

as of December 31, 2012

Americans for Immigrant Justice is a not-for-profit immigration law firm for which substantial financial resources are essential to protect and promote the basic human rights of immigrants.

Changes in Unrestricted Net Assets		2012
<b>Support and Revenue</b>		
Contributions		63,385
Grants		1,827,251
Government contracts		1,194,083
Interest Income		2,471
Events		66,283
Other		3,075
<b>Total Support and Revenue</b>		<b>3,156,548</b>
<b>Expenses</b>		
Direct Services		2,046,079
Impact Advocacy		624,966
Management & General Support		354,124
Fundraising		172,562
<b>Total Expenses</b>		<b>3,197,731</b>
Change in Net Assets		(41,183)
Net Assets at January 1		646,814
Net Assts at December 31		605,631

Clients Served		2012
<b>Number of Cases Closed/Individuals Served (by project):</b>		
Immigration		399
Detention		156
Lucha/NouKab (Victims of assault, violence, trafficking)		622
Unaccompanied Children		511
<b>Total Clients Served</b>		<b>1,688</b>
<b>Outreach</b>		
Number of "Know Your Rights" presentations detainees		60
Number of individuals attending "Know Your Rights" presentations		1,616



## LEGAL LEGEND

At its 2012 Annual Awards Dinner, History Miami's 11th Judicial Circuit Historical Society recognized AI Justice Executive Director Cheryl Little as a Legal Legend. She was lauded for influencing the legal community for more than 25 years and for reflecting the outstanding legal heritage of Miami and South Florida.

"A pioneer and leading expert on immigration law, Cheryl Little is the essence of a true human rights advocate. Dedicating her entire career, spanning over two decades, to upholding the rights of immigrants, Ms. Little has changed the lives of countless individuals and families, by seeking justice for the voiceless, throughout South Florida and the nation."



## MOST EFFECTIVE LAWYER

Cheryl Little was selected as the 2012 Most Effective Public Interest Lawyer at the Daily Business Review's annual luncheon. Working with former Miami Mayor Manny Diaz, who

received the award with her, Ms. Little was instrumental in the Obama Administration's adoption of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which provides a temporary two-year deferral of deportation for young people brought to this country as children, giving them the opportunity to pursue their dreams in the only country they call home.

"Little was the visionary who pushed the Administration to grant deferred action to childhood arrivals when no one else thought it possible. Her Op-Ed in The Miami Herald in April 2012, which generated attention from the White House and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officials, prompted me to call her to see how I could help," said former Mayor of Miami, Manny Diaz.



## INFLUENCE AND POWER

The December 2011-January 2012 issue of Poder listed **Cheryl Little among "Miami's 100 Most Influential People** – From Decision Takers to Opinion Makers, the Most Successful Creative Men and Women in the Community."

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## MISSION

To protect and promote the basic human rights of immigrants through a unique combination of free direct services, impact litigation, policy reform, and public education at local, state, and national levels.

## VISION

To bring about an American society where immigrants are not subjected to abuse or injustice; are not afraid to seek help; have a fair opportunity to make their case in the system that governs them; and have their contributions valued and encouraged.



# DREAMERS!

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