



**Americans for
Immigrant Justice**

Formerly Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center (FIAC)



2014 ANNUAL REPORT

“WE ARE INSPIRED BY
AI JUSTICE’S HARD-FOUGHT
LEGAL VICTORIES AND
SUCCESSFUL POLICY BATTLES
OVER THE YEARS AS THE
NATIONAL EFFORT TO REFORM
OUR BROKEN IMMIGRATION
SYSTEM CONTINUES.”

– Ali Noorani, Executive Director,
National Immigration Forum



Established in 1996, Americans for Immigrant Justice (AI Justice), a 501(c)(3) organization, is an award-winning non-profit law and advocacy firm that protects and promotes the basic human rights of immigrants. 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 compelling claims to justice. Grounded in real-world, real-people experience, AI Justice’s direct work with immigrant clients informs its broader policy work.

AI Justice has served over 90,000 immigrants from all over the world since its founding. In 2014 alone, AI Justice served over 2,700 unaccompanied children; 300 survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking and their children; nearly 300 people in immigration custody; and approximately 600 low-income immigrants seeking asylum or assistance with work permits, legal permanent residence and citizenship. AI Justice is also leading a campaign through legislation, litigation, and education to ensure humane treatment of people detained by Customs and Border Protection.

*Front cover image:
AI Justice former clients and board members
at the 2014 Annual Awards Dinner.*



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.

There is no right to free counsel in immigration court proceedings. Without representation, young children, survivors of domestic violence or human trafficking, and asylum seekers are forced to navigate our complex immigration system alone.

In 2014 we faced particularly daunting challenges, as Central American children crossing the border alone arrived in South Florida in unprecedented numbers. Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras are among the most dangerous countries in the world, and many of our child clients were ordered to join brutal gangs or pay with their lives. AI Justice is the only agency authorized by the federal government to assist unaccompanied children in local shelters. On any given day in 2014, our legal staff were seeing upwards of 250 children in government custody, facing deportation. We were awarded a million dollar, one-year government grant to represent hundreds of these children in court.

Your support is critical to everything we do. With your help, AI Justice will continue to work tirelessly to save lives and to promote laws that reflect America's most cherished values.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cheryl Little".

Cheryl Little, Esq.
Executive Director and Co-Founder



Rosie Perez visits AI Justice.



Reflections from the “Rocket Docket”

“Tatiana (AI Justice staff) and I went to Judge Dowell’s courtroom where there were 29 unaccompanied minor cases scheduled to be heard between 1:00 and 3:00 pm. The kids carried folders of official paperwork—often in plastic grocery bags, since it had been raining all day. In the space of a few minutes, each child (through a Spanish-language court interpreter) confirmed their contact information, answered the judge’s questions, and got a continuance. Adding to the confusion, several of the kids spoke indigenous languages and had no access to interpretation.

After the hearings I met with each child for a screening. My hastily scribbled notes from the interviews included things like ‘Quit school b/c multiple gang death threats,’ ‘Abandoned by dad, mom sick, minor supporting family,’ ‘Fears return, dad murdered by mara, held for ransom by narcos, two U.S. citizen siblings.’ There was the Honduran girl who wants to be a lawyer when she grows up. The fourteen-year-old Guatemalan girl who asserted she wasn’t afraid when she rode La Bestia (the freight train through Mexico) because of her faith in God.

Driving back to our office from Court, I commented, ‘This process is the legal equivalent of triage in an emergency room!’”

Rhonda Miska, Sisters of the Humility of Mary volunteer, following a day in Immigration Court with child clients, September 2014

AI Justice Champions the Rights of Unaccompanied Immigrant Children

The Children’s Program was launched in 1999, and today we are the lead agency in a holistic partnership dedicated to serving unaccompanied minors, a partnership described by the Office of Refugee Resettlement as “a model program for care providers throughout the country.” AI Justice also advocates nationally for unaccompanied children to have the right to government-provided counsel in immigration proceedings. AI Justice has influenced national policy and laws affecting immigrant children and is widely recognized as an expert in immigrant children’s issues.

Children undertake the perilous journey to the U.S. alone as a last resort because they lack protection in their home country. Once here, they encounter a system that is complex, bewildering, and frightening. Without an attorney to navigate the convoluted worlds of State Juvenile and Family courts, Immigration courts, and the Asylum Office they will almost certainly lose their case in court.

“AI Justice is awesome. They have been since we first started working with them. They’re very proactive with the kids. Our wish for them is just that they have more support staff to do the work. They go over and above all the time.”

– His House (Miami Shelter) Program Director

“AI Justice is a well-oiled machine. They always get here early. There’s consistency in their positive demeanor and approach, which makes this thing work. They are highly professional. I give them credit. I know they need to be in so many places at one time – here, the shelters, USCIS.”

– Hon. J. Daniel Dowell, Miami Immigration Judge

AI JUSTICE IN ACTION:

- Served 2,700 children who arrived with no parent or guardian.
- Trained dozens of pro bono attorneys to represent children before Immigration, Juvenile, and Family Courts.
- Acted as “Friend of Court” daily for one of the children’s dockets at Miami Immigration Court.

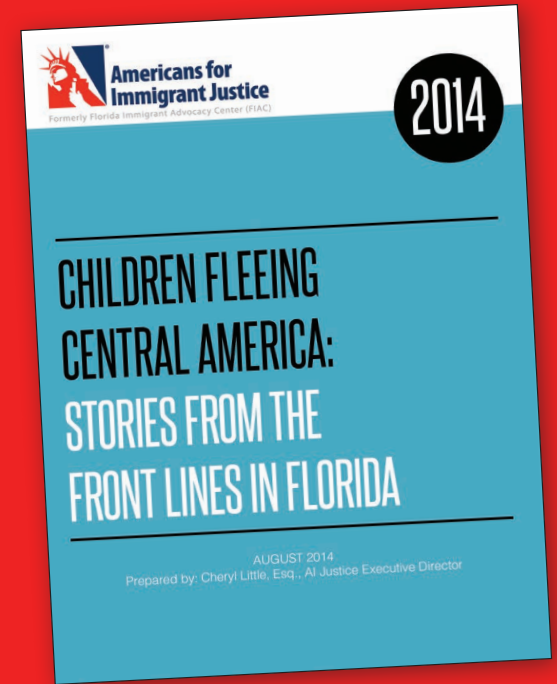
Amy and Carlos's Story –Targeted by Gangs



Twelve-year-old “Carlos” and his seventeen-year-old-sister “Amy” fled Honduras in early 2014. Their mother died during her own attempt to reach the United States years earlier, and the two children were then abandoned by their caretaker. Both became targets of vicious gangs, who routinely threatened their lives because they refused to be recruited. AI Justice attorneys helped Carlos and Amy obtain Lawful Permanent Residency. They are now happily living with their grandmother while attending school and learning English. Amy hopes to be a lawyer and Carlos dreams of becoming a pilot.

“We left because we had no choice. The drug traffickers would always call me, threaten me, and say that when they saw me, they’d have their way with me. And I was even robbed at gunpoint by the traffickers. I knew I had to do as they said or they’d kill me and my little brother. Then one night they shot up the wall of our home when we were sleeping—there were seven shots fired. And we had no one to protect us, we were all alone. We thought of all the horrible things that have happened when you leave to try to get to America, including knowing our mother died, but we knew we had to risk it because we had to survive, so we prayed the whole time and we went on.”

— Amy



AI Justice Releases Ground-Breaking Report:

“The 44-page report prepared by the Miami-based immigrant rights group Americans for Immigrant Justice is a detailed account of the harrowing stories of many children who undertook the perilous journey from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala — largely to escape intensified gang violence. [The report] opens a window into a largely overlooked dimension of the problem — a dangerous voyage that did not end in welcoming refuge, but in hostile detention, threats of expulsion, and an uncertain future.”

— Al Chardy, “Harrowing stories from Central American children now living in Florida.”
The Miami Herald, October 4, 2014



"We have our T visas (trafficking visa) thanks to Americans for Immigrant Justice and the amazing job that the lawyers did"

–Alicia

Initially given a bedroom in a Miami house in return for light housekeeping and maintenance, Alicia and her husband were soon forced to work at all hours, seven days a week, and were never paid for their months of back-breaking labor. When Alicia requested to be paid, the owner told her that their payment was their closet-sized room and that he decided how much work was necessary to "rent" the room. Alicia and her husband endured months of psychological abuse, including multiple threats from the owner to call Immigration if they complained or tried to leave. When the owner attempted to hit Alicia, her husband fought off the attack and they dared to flee.

AI Justice Advocates for Survivors of Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence

AI Justice pioneered work on behalf of immigrant survivors of human trafficking and domestic violence in 1997 with the creation of *Lucha* ("The Struggle"). AI Justice's clients include those forced into sexual slavery and indentured servitude in the fields of South Florida. Most of these clients are referred to AI Justice by domestic violence shelters and law enforcement. Attorneys maintain close, ongoing relationships with law enforcement to ensure abusers are jailed.

Undocumented victims confront an increasingly hostile climate and a complex immigration system which is nearly impossible to navigate alone. Many victims remain hidden in the shadows – afraid to report violence to law enforcement or seek assistance for themselves and their children. Abusers exploit their victims' vulnerabilities, isolating them with threats that they will "call Immigration."

Recognized nationally and internationally, *Lucha* is committed to addressing the needs of immigrant survivors in a holistic manner, recognizing that assistance must be comprehensive in order to have long-term impact.

"I was in a rural county in North Central Florida, providing a training to advocates from a domestic violence shelter and numerous deputy sheriffs talking about protections and benefits for immigrant survivors of domestic violence.

*A deputy sheriff raised his hand, with tears in his eyes and he said,
'I don't understand, you mean I can help these people
when they call 911 and I respond?'*

It was shocking that he didn't know that they could help immigrant victims of crime, but I was touched by his tearful response when he realized that he could now help survivors."

–Michelle Ortiz, Director, AI Justice Lucha Program

AI Justice Advocates for Survivors of Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence

With access to competent legal counsel, and the assistance of long-standing community partners, survivors will have more opportunities for employment and education, higher wages, better health and reduced rates of poverty. The immediate impact of legal assistance is that the victim can receive a work permit to support his or her family, which enhances independence and the ability to permanently leave the abuser. The community is safer when families know they will not be penalized for seeking help. *Lucha* helps break the cycle of poverty, violence and exploitation by making a brighter future possible for survivors and their children.

"I will never ever forget AI Justice, who has done everything to help me for over five years. They gave me hope. They gave me my life back."

-Maria, Survivor of Trafficking

AI JUSTICE IN ACTION:

- Represented over 300 survivors, obtaining work permits, visas, lawful permanent residence status, or other relief that allows them to support themselves and provide their families a safer, more secure life.
- Represented more than 50 children of survivors, reuniting them with their mothers.
- Trained dozens of local law enforcement officials, prosecutors and victim advocates on legal relief available to immigrant survivors.
- Lucha's Program Director participated in a panel on "Human Trafficking in Latino Communities" at the 2014 National Latin@ Policy Summit.
- Lucha's Program Director is co-chair of the Miami-Dade Coalition Against Human Trafficking, as well as serving on the Executive Committee of Greater Miami's Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Council; the Steering Committee of Freedom Network (coalition of national experts in human trafficking); and the Policy Advisory Council of the National Latin@Network.



Rebecca was trapped in a physically and emotionally abusive marriage; whenever she tried to flee, her spouse threatened to have her deported and retain full custody of their U.S. citizen daughter, Samantha. Rebecca was concerned that if she were forced to leave Samantha behind with her father, Samantha would become the target of his abuse.

AI Justice was successful in obtaining legal status for Rebecca, and she now can work legally and support herself and Samantha, free from the terror of living with an abusive husband. After years of being subjected to abuse at the hands of her spouse, Rebecca has regained her confidence, knowing that she has a fresh start and can provide a safe, loving, and stable environment for her daughter.



“Secure Communities” Enforcement Program

AI Justice played a critical role in convincing Miami-Dade County Commissioners to end their support of Secure Communities (S Comm), a federal enforcement program partnering ICE agents with local police. AI Justice and Florida International University released a report, False Promises: The Failure of Secure Communities in Miami-Dade County, which analyzed one year’s worth of S Comm arrests in Miami Dade County. The program’s stated goal of targeting serious criminals fell far short of the mark and instead led to the deportation of an unprecedented number of immigrants with no criminal history or only minor traffic violations. Miami was one of the first cities to end its participation in S Comm, and in late 2014 the Administration ended the program, acknowledging that it wasn’t working.

AI Justice Challenges Harmful Detention and Enforcement Practices

AI Justice is the only non-profit organization in Florida that assists Immigration & Custom Enforcement (ICE) detainees throughout the state. Our attorneys advise detainees about their basic rights, helping them obtain release and fight deportation. AI Justice also fosters systemic change by shining a light on abusive conditions. AI Justice has documented alarming concerns such as overcrowding, inadequate medical care, lack of access to attorneys, frequent transfers to remote facilities, and improper use of force or segregation.

AI Justice also challenges heavy-handed and misguided enforcement practices that impact immigrants of all ages, including U.S. citizens. Our ground-breaking reports and testimony before Congress have brought about much-needed change.

“I have no previous arrest record because I have never done anything wrong. I have been in this country for 11 years. I have businesses here that have been providing jobs that support families. I have even been paying taxes! I was not even driving improperly.”

—Chel, arrested and detained by ICE for driving without a license

AI JUSTICE IN ACTION:

- Advised hundreds of detained immigrants about their legal rights, helping many obtain release and fight their deportation.
- Testified before the U.S. Committee on the Judiciary’s Subcommittee on Immigration Policy and Enforcement.
- Met with detainees held in county jails and in privately run facilities to assess conditions of confinement, pressing for immediate improvements both locally and nationally.
- Helped end ICE’s failed enforcement program, “Secure Communities,” in Miami-Dade County.

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

Following the earthquake in Haiti in January 2010, AI Justice advocated for the implementation of a Haitian Family Reunification Program. This would accelerate the reunification of eligible family members of US citizens and lawful permanent residents living in Haiti whose family-based immigrant visas have already been approved. In November 2014, the Obama Administration announced that the program would be implemented in 2015, a long-awaited victory for the Haitian community.



"For some Haitian families, this is going to mean the world to them but for Haitian family members who aren't covered...they're going to continue to suffer in Haiti and my concern is that desperate Haitians are going to risk their lives on the high seas trying to get here to join loved ones after waiting years and years to come legally."

*—Cheryl Little, "Haitian Reunification Fight to Continue, Activists Say,"
The Miami Herald, October 21, 2014*



War Veteran Granted Citizenship

A veteran of tours in Iraq and Guantanamo, Elisha spent seven years as a U.S. soldier and war photographer. He risked his life to chronicle the experiences of his fellow soldiers and was humbled by the bravery he witnessed and the fact that he made it home safely when others did not. His skills as a documentation specialist were recognized and respected. Elisha spent most of his childhood in Miami unaware that he was born in the Bahamas and not actually a United States citizen. He had been brought to the U.S. as a young child by his mother and often lived with various relatives. His citizenship was never questioned by the Armed Forces and he even had "secret" security clearance while serving at Guantanamo.

In 2011, Elisha was arrested and detained for almost three months. He was charged with a felony for lying about his citizenship on a U.S. passport application. Now in jeopardy of being deported from the country he loved, called home, and had faithfully served, Elisha contacted AI Justice. After three tumultuous years, AI Justice finally succeeded in June of 2014 in getting Elisha citizenship through a special provision for armed-services members.

Elisha is a registered nurse who plans to return to college to earn a Bachelor's degree and continue his work in health services. He also hopes to begin volunteering with the prison ministry of his local church, as well as with groups that help immigrants and the LGBTQ community.

"My wish for this next stage in life is to be a positive role model and [to offer] encouragement to people who are struggling in whatever areas in their lives."

*—Elisha, "Miami War Vet is New Citizen and our Kind of Hero,"
Fabiola Santiago, Columnist, The Miami Herald, July 1, 2014*



AI Justice was one of five national groups that filed an administrative complaint with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) on behalf of more than 100 children who reported experiencing abuse and mistreatment while in CBP custody.

"I was held in three different hieleras in Texas in January 2014. I spent my time in the first hielera trying to sleep on the cold, hard floor between bouts of extreme hunger. In the second hielera, I was separated from my 16-year-old cousin and was scared because I didn't know if we'd see each other again. There were no clocks in the room and the lights were always on. I lost track of time and felt like I was in jail. Any time I moved, I felt like the guards would punish us for no reason. We were handcuffed by our hands and feet before finally being taken out of the cell in Texas. The handcuffs on my hands were very tight and were connected to a chain around my stomach.

—Sara, age 14

"Security at our borders can be achieved without subjecting women and children to unconscionable, inhumane treatment. Americans condemn such actions in other countries; we need to live up to our own ideals."

—Cheryl Little, Op-Ed, "Securing Border Doesn't Justify Abuse," The Miami Herald, April 4, 2014

AI Justice Engages in Advocacy Work and Litigation

In early 2013 AI Justice attorneys began hearing jarring narratives from detainees transferred from Customs and Border Protection (CBP) custody in the South Texas Rio Grande Valley to facilities in South Florida. The majority of detainees were either unaccompanied minors fleeing Central America or adult survivors of gender-based violence, human trafficking or other horrific crimes in their home countries. The trauma they experienced was exacerbated by their detention in CBP "hold rooms."

Temperatures in these cells are so cold that the CBP officers themselves refer to them as "hieleras" (iceboxes). The crowded rooms have no mattresses, beds, or chairs, and there is a single toilet in view of other detainees and CBP officers. Detainees are not given even basic hygiene supplies like toothbrushes, soap or combs; and are unable to shower or change clothing. Often detainees don't know if it's day or night because there are no windows or clocks. Hearing these disturbing stories time and again prompted AI Justice to launch a campaign to call attention to inhumane conditions in the hieleras in order to bring about change.

AI JUSTICE IN ACTION:

- In 2014, AI Justice collaborated with the Women's Refugee Commission to host a legislative briefing on the Humane Short Term Custody Act, which AI Justice helped draft, in which the Act was introduced by Senator Barbara Boxer.
- Filed Federal Tort Claims Actions (FTCA) administrative actions on behalf of several immigrants who were detained by CBP in Texas under inhumane and unlawful conditions.
- Filed suit in U.S. District Court, to compel Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to respond to our Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request regarding detention conditions in CBP holding stations.
- Co-counseled a lawsuit on behalf of a client whose basic rights were violated in the *hieleras*.
- Co-counseled a lawsuit on behalf of a U.S. citizen who suffered serious civil-rights violations at the hands of CBP officers.
- Met with CBP officials to discuss their proposed new short-term detention standards and to advocate for an increased NGO role regarding the proposed new standards.

Thank you for helping us to celebrate 18 years of “Upholding the American Dream”

Americans for Immigrant Justice held its 18th Annual Awards Dinner with over 550 of South Florida’s business and civic leaders in attendance. Honorary Chairs César Alvarez and the Hon. Cristina Pereyra brought their own magic to the evening. Guests enjoyed the festive event, which featured Academy Award winner Anne Hathaway. AI Justice honored Manuel Medina with the America’s Immigrant Spirit Award and Academy Award winner Jonathan Demme with the Holly Skolnick Human Rights Award. The efforts of Dinner Co-Chairs Keith Askins & Paulina Holguin Askins and David Barbeito & Naïve Pons helped to ensure the evening’s success. A generous matching grant from the TriMix Foundation further inspired guests to support the work of AI Justice.



Event and cover photography by Ralph Ventura

TOP 20 WOMEN IN LAW

Cheryl Little was honored by The Daily Business Review as one of their “Top 20 Women in Law in South Florida.” This recognition program honors a diverse selection of accomplished women who have made a mark in the South Florida legal community.



UNITED WAY ESSIE SILVA COMMUNITY BUILDER AWARD

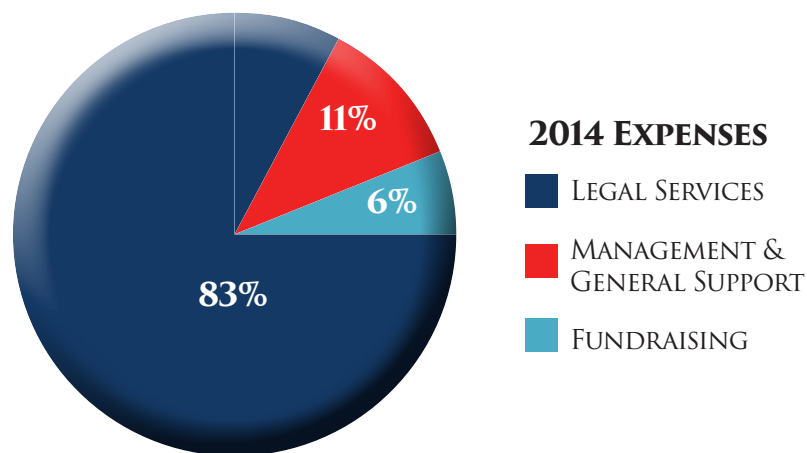
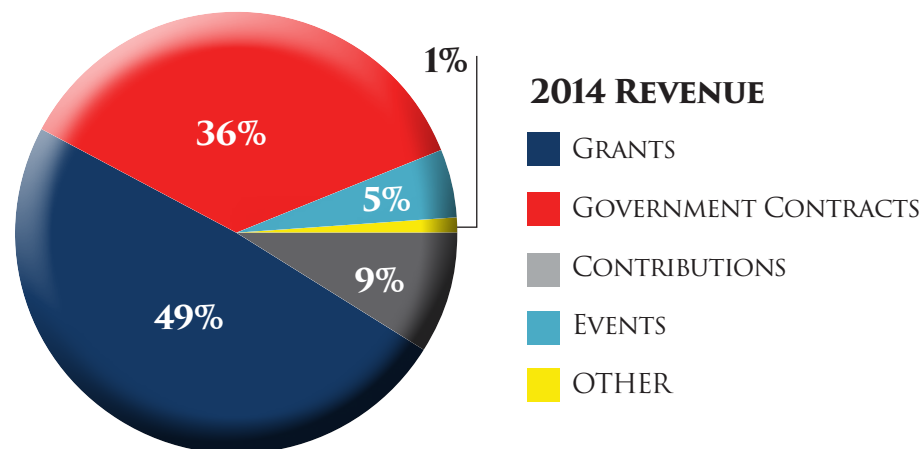
Cheryl Little was presented with The Essie Silva Community Builder Award at the 2014 Annual Meeting of The United Way of Miami Dade. The Award recognizes an individual who has made a difference in addressing particular community problems affecting different cultural or ethnic groups.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2014

Changes in Unrestricted Net Assets	2014
Support and Revenue	
Contributions	250,618
Grants	1,415,500
Government Contracts	1,041,154
Interest Income	897
Events	139,922
Other	17,247
Total Support and Revenue	2,865,338
Expenses	
Legal Services	2,261,692
Management & General Support	286,435
Fundraising	155,883
Total Expenses	2,704,010
Change in Net Assets	161,328
Net Assets at January 1	343,845
Net Assets at December 31	505,173

Clients Served	2014
Number of Cases Closed/Individuals Served (by project):	
Children's Legal Program	2,700
<i>Lucha</i> - Domestic Violence & Human Trafficking Program	350
Detention Program	300
Asylum, Residency and Citizenship Program	600
Total Clients Served	3,950



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“AMERICANS FOR IMMIGRANT JUSTICE HAS AN INCREDIBLE RECORD AS ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE IMMIGRATION LEGAL SERVICES PROVIDERS IN THE COUNTRY.

AI JUSTICE HAS EMERGED AS A POWERFUL ADVOCATE FOR IMMIGRANTS AND HAS BEEN AT THE FOREFRONT IN CHALLENGING DISCRIMINATORY POLICIES THAT AFFECT IMMIGRANTS, PARTICULARLY THE MOST VULNERABLE.

IN MY MANY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN IMMIGRATION, AI JUSTICE STANDS OUT AS AN EXEMPLARY ORGANIZATION THAT HAS CHANGED THE LIVES OF THOUSANDS OF IMMIGRANTS IN SOUTH FLORIDA AND AS A VITAL VOICE ADVOCATING FOR IMMIGRANTS NATIONWIDE.”—

— Wendy Young, Executive Director,
Kids In Need Of Defense (KIND)

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.

“AMERICANS FOR IMMIGRANT JUSTICE NOT ONLY PROVIDES ESSENTIAL LEGAL AND SOCIAL SERVICES FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS AND IMMIGRANTS BUT ALSO SERVES AS THE EYES AND EARS FOR INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE AND HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORS ABOUT IMMIGRANT JUSTICE THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES.”

– Bill Frelick, Refugee Program Director, Human Rights Watch



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