

ANNUAL REPORT

2019



**Americans for
Immigrant Justice**



MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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

Yet in 2019 immigrants' basic rights were further eroded and the number of ICE deportations skyrocketed, upending the lives of countless immigrants who have lived in this country for years, even decades. Arbitrary deportations have left thousands of United States citizens without mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, and siblings upon whom they depended for emotional and financial support.

Meanwhile, children fleeing horrific gang violence in Central America were perceived as threats to our national security and the cruel family separation policy continued to traumatize our child clients. Even Dreamers and TPS recipients who have lived here legally for years fear return to countries they may not remember.

With anti-immigrant rhetoric at fever pitch, when the color of one's skin or a foreign accent can too easily subject someone to abuse and discrimination, our work is more important than ever. We are immensely grateful to all who contributed their time and resources in the past year. Your invaluable support has made all the difference and, with your help, we will continue working to save lives and to promote immigration laws that reflect America's most cherished values.

Gratefully,



CHERYL LITTLE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR





MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

The past several years have been breathtakingly challenging for the immigration community. An already unnecessarily complicated, outdated legal system was rendered wholly unworkable through chaos created by numerous Executive Orders and Attorney General legal opinions.

Many protections were stripped away altogether, while others become even more difficult to obtain. The policy was clear: to deter immigration and shut our country's borders to the most vulnerable populations. Working in immigration has long been analogized to riding a roller-coaster, navigating minefields, or trying to build something on quicksand, but now really it is a combination of all three – and then some.

During this same time, we saw our country rally in response to attacks on immigrants. People flooded airports and other ports of entry to protest travel bans. Mothers united across the country to demonstrate at ICE offices and detention facilities, as families were torn apart at the border and children huddled together in cages. And in every big city and small town, people began to realize that immigrants were an integral part of the fabric of their community, as local business owners, popular parents at weekend sports matches, and the generation of Dreamers were revealed as undocumented and sometimes detained or even deported.

Through it all, the AI Justice staff and lawyers have been at it, riding alternating waves of fear and desperation, of support and solidarity, while providing best-of-class legal services and fighting for system-wide change through impact litigation and policy work. They have shown resilience, determination, creativity, and compassion. Despite all the challenges, they embrace every new day as an opportunity to make a critical change in someone's life through the work they do.

That work would be impossible without the support of so many generous individuals and organizations. Whatever the size or nature of your contribution, it has made this incredible work possible, and it has made a difference. The Board of Directors and the entire staff of AI Justice are very grateful for you and your support. We hope you will continue with us in this fight, as we seek to provide equal access to justice and a fair shot to those seeking a safer, better life in our country.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johanna Oliver Rousseau". The signature is fluid and cursive.

JOHANNA OLIVER ROUSSEAU
PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Get to Know Us



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.

OUR 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.

"[AI Justice] is a nonprofit organization that truly provides unconditional help to all people that need meaningful support to resolve their immigration issues."

-Carlos, AI Justice client and Venezuelan asylum seeker

OUR WORK

Americans for Immigrant Justice (AI Justice) is an award-winning non-profit law firm that fights for justice for immigrants through a combination of direct representation, impact litigation, advocacy, and outreach.

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; fight to keep families informed, empowered, and together; and pursue redress on behalf of immigrant groups with particular and compelling claims to justice.

Recognizing that assistance must be comprehensive to have lasting impact, staff assist clients in a holistic manner, where partnerships and collaborations are crucial. Additionally, AI Justice provides extensive consultation and technical assistance to other organizations, both locally and nationally. Since it's founding in 1996, AI Justice has served over 140,000 immigrants.



AI Justice attorney Andrea (third from left) celebrates a success with her client and his family.

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2019 ACHIEVEMENTS

12,129 individuals served

—

58 Know Your Rights presentations

—

439 volunteers





FAMILY SEPARATION

BROKEN SYSTEMS, BROKEN FAMILIES

JANUARY 2019 | WWW.AIJUSTICE.ORG

Over the course of our nearly 20 years representing immigrant children, we have borne witness to unspeakable trauma and human rights abuses. Yet nothing could have prepared us for the widespread and lasting harm that the family separation crisis has caused and continues to cause. Since separated children first began to arrive in South Florida in the summer of 2017, AI Justice attorneys and advocates have helped reunite hundreds of children with their families.

In January 2019, AI Justice released "[Family Separation: Broken Systems, Broken Families](#)," delving into the aftermath of the cruel family separation policy. Within the pages of this report, AI Justice clients and staff recount painful memories of separation, detention, as well as long and increasingly difficult court battles.

[Click here to read the report.](#)

PRISON

BY ANY

OTHER

NAME



A REPORT ON SOUTH FLORIDA
DETENTION FACILITIES

In December 2019, AI Justice's Detention Program released a report with the Southern Poverty Law Center on inhumane conditions in South Florida detention facilities, "[Prison By Any Other Name.](#)"

In an effort to better understand the experiences of persons in ICE detention in South Florida, we met with numerous detained individuals held in four South Florida facilities, toured the detention facilities, and requested public records.

The problems in South Florida facilities reflect what is happening in immigration detention nationally - substandard conditions such as over crowding, inadequate medical and mental health care, physical and mental abuse, lack of access to attorneys, and overuse of solitary confinement.

[Click here to read the report.](#)

The 2019 State of Immigration

86%

of detained immigrants
lacked access to an
attorney

510,854

people were detained by ICE
over the course of the year

Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), also known as the "Remain in Mexico" program, was implemented, stranding tens of thousands of migrants in squalid and dangerous conditions while awaiting their asylum hearings.

Florida Legislative Bill, SB 168 passed, requiring every Florida county and municipality to expend local resources to enforce federal immigration law and forbidding "sanctuary cities" in Florida.

6 MILLION

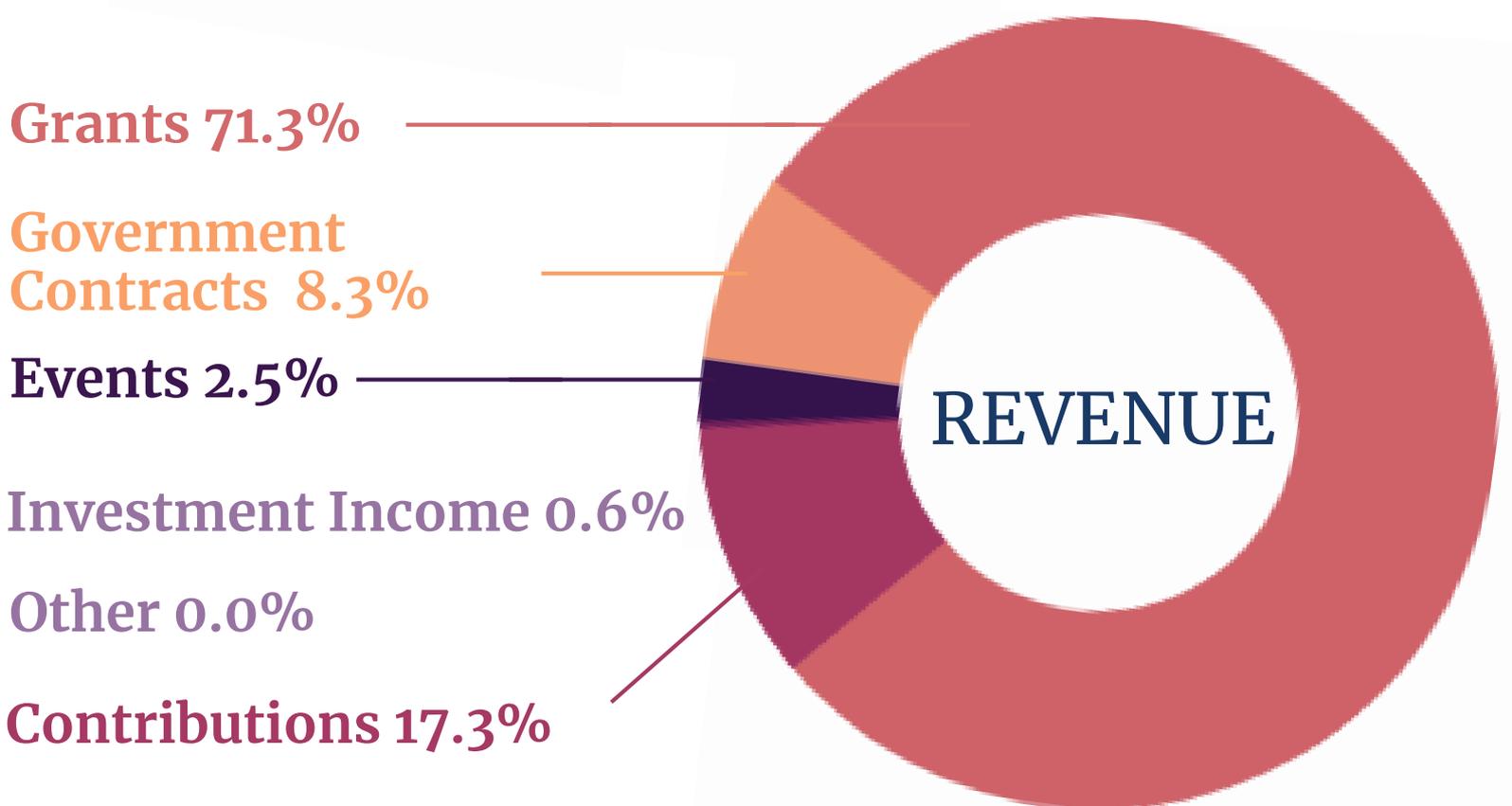
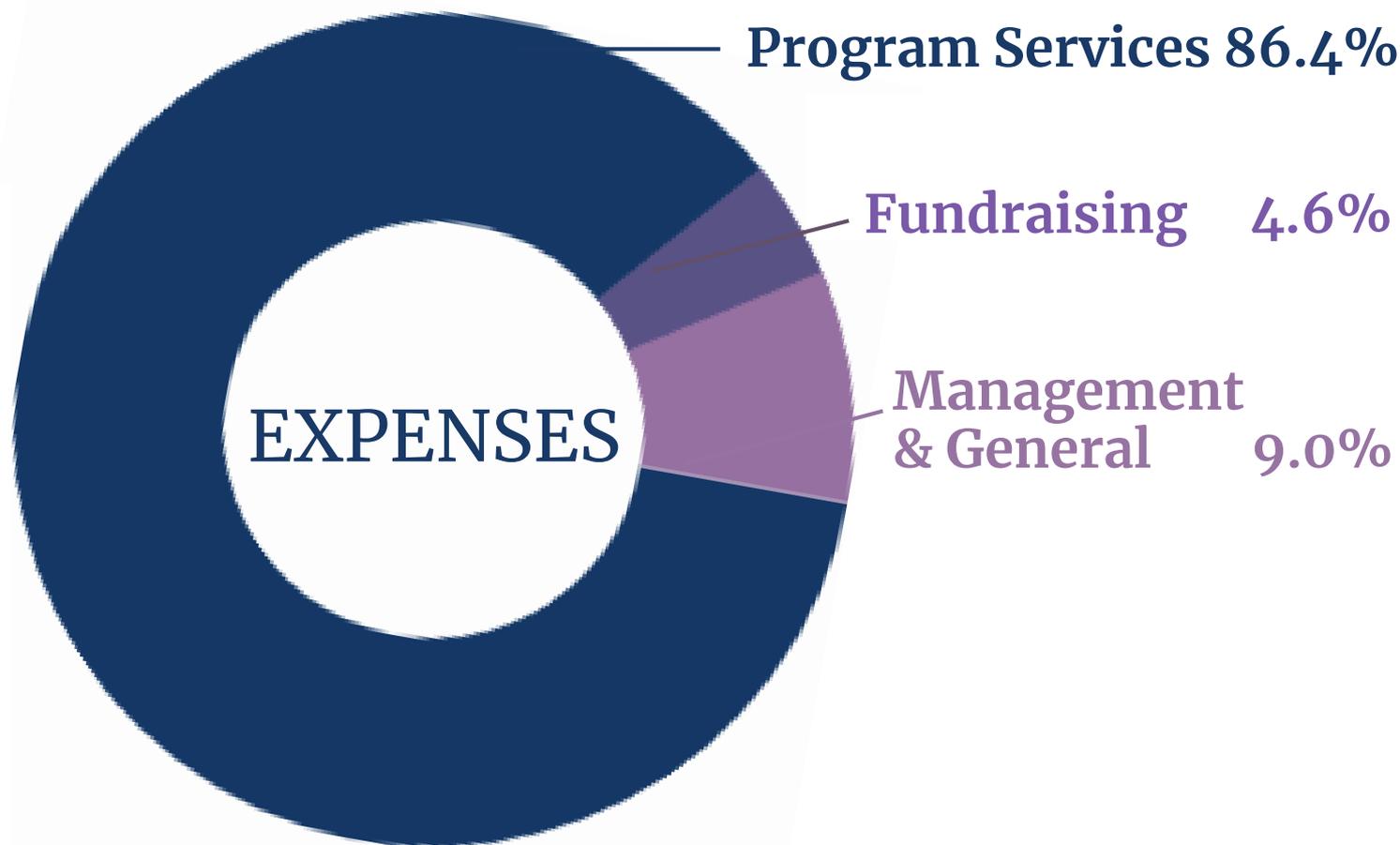
U.S. citizen children lived
with an undocumented
parent or family member

9 OUT OF 10

undocumented children
without attorneys were
ordered deported

The Trump administration imposed an 18,000-person cap on refugees, the lowest ceiling since the refugee program was created in 1980.

Financials



SUPPORT AND REVENUES

Contributions	\$1,127,888
Grants	4,660,057
Events	163,407
Investment Income	37,184
Government Contracts	544,333
Other	991

Total Support and Revenues: \$6,533,860

EXPENSES

Direct Services	\$4,346,727
Impact Advocacy	516,053
Total Program Services:	\$4,862,780

Management & General	\$505,455
Fundraising	258,268
Total Supporting Services:	\$763,723

Total Expenses: \$5,626,503

[Click here to view our full 2019 Financial Statement.](#)

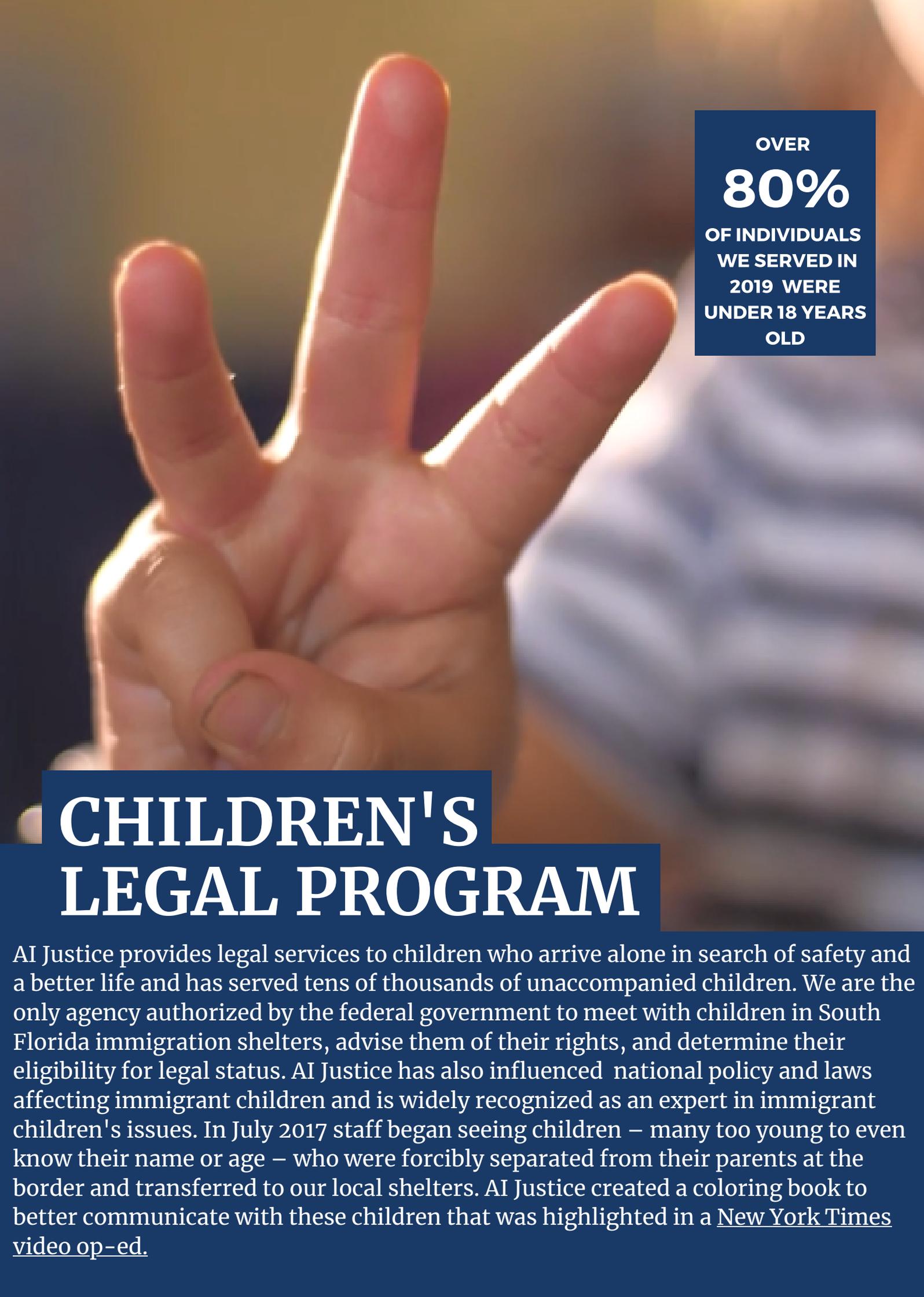
UPHOLDING THE AMERICAN DREAM 23RD ANNUAL AWARDS DINNER



Left to right: Father Frank O'Loughlin, Indira Islas, Michael Bloomberg, and Cheryl Little (AI Justice Executive Director) at the 23rd Annual Awards Dinner.

On February 8, 2019, AI Justice proudly welcomed nearly 650 guests to honor Father Frank O'Loughlin for his decades-long commitment to fighting for human rights and Indira Islas for bravely blazing a trail for DREAMers like herself. Michael Bloomberg, Mayor of New York City (2002-2013), delivered an unforgettable keynote address, reminding us that immigration is the American story.

The 23rd Annual Awards Dinner celebrated the dreams of freedom, justice, and opportunity that call our immigrant friends, family, and neighbors to this country.



OVER
80%
OF INDIVIDUALS
WE SERVED IN
2019 WERE
UNDER 18 YEARS
OLD

CHILDREN'S LEGAL PROGRAM

AI Justice provides legal services to children who arrive alone in search of safety and a better life and has served tens of thousands of unaccompanied children. We are the only agency authorized by the federal government to meet with children in South Florida immigration shelters, advise them of their rights, and determine their eligibility for legal status. AI Justice has also influenced national policy and laws affecting immigrant children and is widely recognized as an expert in immigrant children's issues. In July 2017 staff began seeing children – many too young to even know their name or age – who were forcibly separated from their parents at the border and transferred to our local shelters. AI Justice created a coloring book to better communicate with these children that was highlighted in a [New York Times video op-ed](#).

LUCHA PROGRAM

FOR
SURVIVORS OF
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE &
HUMAN
TRAFFICKING



Lucha staff represent immigrant survivors of human trafficking, sexual assault, and domestic violence often times referred by law enforcement. Attorneys have successfully represented clients forced into modern slavery in high-profile cases, ranging from sexual slavery to indentured servitude in the fields of South Florida, and help to ensure prosecution of the perpetrators. Staff make an impact on national policies affecting survivors and played an important role in the 2013 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA).

MEDIA & ADVOCACY HIGHLIGHT

"Because they've had the bad luck of being a victim in the city of Miami, then they're missing out on humanitarian protections they're entitled to under the law."

-AI Justice Deputy Director Michelle Ortiz, quoted in The U visa is supposed to help protect immigrants and solve crimes. But police are undermining it, by Laura C. Morel for *Reveal News*, Nov. 7, 2019

312
**LUCHA CLIENTS
SERVED IN 2019**

PROTECTING SURVIVORS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Jeanne fled Haiti and began working as a migrant farm worker in South Florida, where she became a victim of human trafficking. After two months of forced labor, Jeanne was rescued by law enforcement and referred to AI Justice. On February 10, 2011, with the help of our attorneys, Jeanne filed an application for a T-visa, a humanitarian immigration benefit for victims of human trafficking, based on her cooperation with the federal investigation against her trafficker.

On June 28, 2011, Jeanne's T-visa was approved.

AI Justice attorneys successfully petitioned for her two minor daughters to be reunited with their mother in Florida. After more than a year of relentless advocacy, Jeanne and her two young daughters were granted permanent resident status. They now live and work in the U.S. without risk of deportation and without fear of retribution or future exploitation.



FAMILY DEFENSE PROGRAM

When all undocumented immigrants became priorities for removal in January 2017, AI Justice increased its outreach in the community. Our newest program, the Family Defense Program (FDP), provides advice and legal representation to families who fear being torn apart. Thousands of immigrants have been helped, including many who are now eligible to apply for green cards or U.S. citizenship.

FDP informs and empowers mixed-status families and long-time residents whose futures are uncertain due to the erosion of protections for Dreamers, TPS recipients, and immigrants in general.

Even those who are not eligible for immigration relief under current laws receive critical information about how to protect themselves against fraud, better understand their rights, and monitor policy changes that could impact their case for relief.



PROTECTING LONG-TERM RESIDENTS

Our client "Juan" fled Cuba in the early 2000s but, due to a misunderstanding at his entry, he was accused of fraud and for several years he was unable to apply for permanent residency in the U.S. After learning of his case, AI Justice worked to contest the fraud finding and fought to obtain permanent residency for him.

Following numerous setbacks including more than a year of advocacy work with USCIS, "Juan's" application for permanent residency was approved. "Juan" spent nearly two decades living in the U.S. without legal status, and he now no longer lives in fear of deportation.



LITIGATION PROGRAM

Whether challenging the unlawful detention of immigrants or inhumane conditions in ICE detention facilities, suing our government for wrongfully depriving immigrants of citizenship, or compelling our government to disclose key information through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, AI Justice's litigation team is determined to work to uphold the fundamental rights of immigrants.

In recent years, the Litigation Program waged a campaign challenging human rights violations in detention facilities on the border, winning settlement agreements that have longstanding impact, and has filed claims for damages on behalf of families separated at the border.

In 2019, Litigation sounded the alarm bell on the plight of children shackled and transferred by ICE to adult detention facilities on their 18th birthdays rather than releasing them to their families or group homes, in violation of federal law. After AI Justice filed habeas petitions on behalf of these children, they were released within days.



MEDIA & ADVOCACY HIGHLIGHT

"'They should have been released to family members or family friends,' Lehner said. ... She is still working on the release of two 18-year-olds who fled El Salvador."

-Lisa Lehner, Director of the Litigation Program, quoted in Teenagers Incarcerated at Broward Transitional Center Despite Congressional Mandate, in *the Sun Sentinel*, Aug. 26, 2019

DETENTION PROGRAM

Staff attorneys travel to multiple Florida immigration detention centers to advise detained individuals about their basic rights, help them obtain release, and fight their deportation. Detained immigrants include survivors of human trafficking and domestic violence, asylum seekers fleeing persecution, and long-term residents.

Access to counsel is a critical factor in determining a detained person's chances for release or immigration relief. Detained immigrants with legal representation are four times more likely to be released from custody than those without representation. The stakes are extremely high for detained immigrants, since prolonged detention not only impedes their access to equal justice under the law, but also causes lasting damage to their own health and financial security and that of their families.

AI Justice shines a light on abusive conditions in immigration detention to bring about systemic change, monitoring conditions such as overcrowding, inadequate medical care, lack of access to attorneys, frequent transfers to remote facilities, physical and mental abuse, indifference to human suffering, and improper use of force.



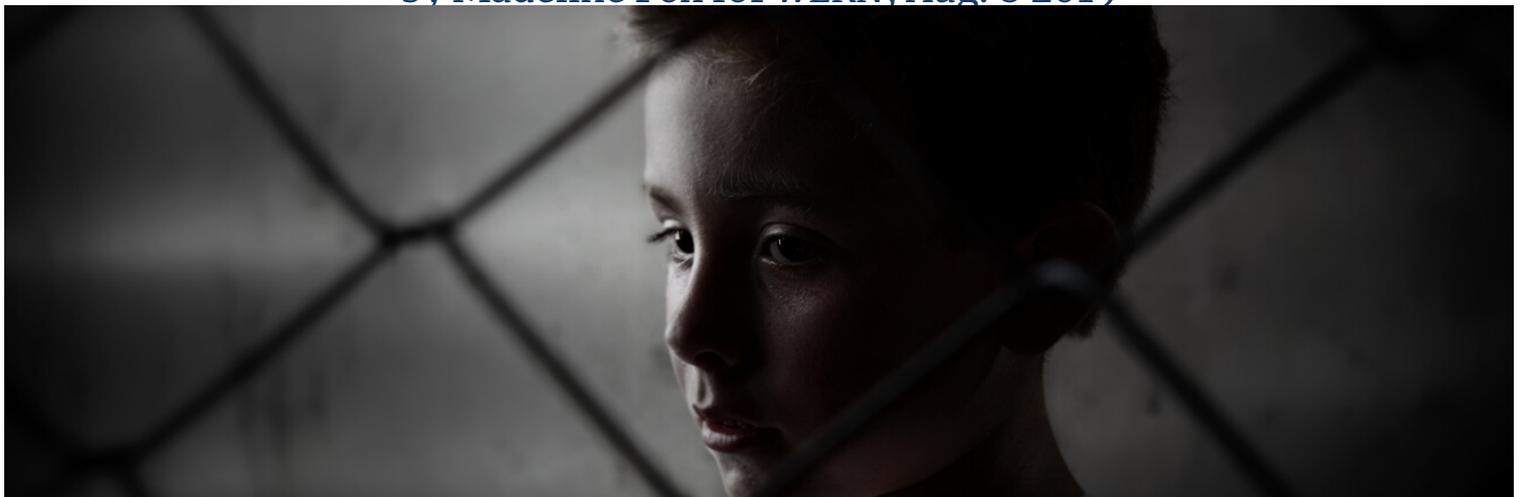
ADVOCACY HIGHLIGHTS

Americans for Immigrant Justice shines a light on the emerging and pervasive issues that impact immigrants and their loved ones. We write groundbreaking reports that give immigrants a voice, shedding light on unlawful and inhumane government practices and policies and calling for systemic change.



"In immigration there is no right to government-funded attorneys, so if the child does not present themselves in court with an attorney, then they are expected to present their case on their own and face the judge on their own. Immigration law is very complex – it's complex for us attorneys – so imagine a child who may not have had the opportunity to go to school, who doesn't know the language, and now is forced to hash out asylum law on their own."

-Children's Legal Program director Jennifer Anzardo Valdes in [South Florida Attorneys Bring Help For Migrant Kids That Have To Face U.S. Courts On Their Own](#), by Madeline Fox for *WLRN*, Aug. 8 2019



"Taking the most vulnerable immigrants among us — children — and needlessly subjecting them to lasting trauma in order to deter families from exercising their basic rights is a gratuitous cruelty. It benefits no one and belies the the American people's real compassion."

-Executive Director Cheryl Little op-ed [Family separations remain an exercise in 'gratuitous cruelty'](#) for *Miami Herald*, Mar. 28, 2019



"The detention center in Glades has been the subject of a number of complaints and lawsuits, alleging everything from misuse of pepper spray and solitary confinement to religious persecution. Lehner argues conditions are worse in rural facilities in part because there are fewer people present to witness what is happening."

-Litigation Program director Lisa Lehner advocates for better conditions in rural detention facilities in [Unequal Outcomes: Most ICE Detainees Held In Rural Areas Where Deportation Risks Soar](#), by Yuki Noguchi for *NPR*, Aug. 15 2019



"The men, all of whom came to the United States as refugees from Somalia, sued the Glades County sheriff and other county employees as well as U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement for denying their ability to freely practice their faith, in violation of the U.S. Constitution and federal and state law. The lawsuit, which has not been previously reported, was brought by Muslim Advocates, a national civil rights group, and Americans for Immigrant Justice, a Florida-based immigrant rights group."

-[Muslim Immigrants Sue ICE for Getting in the Way of Religious Observance](#), by Maryam Saleh, *The Intercept*, Feb. 27, 2019

**“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.”**

NAME WITHHELD, SURVIVOR
OF TRAFFICKING



2019 Funders

AILA South Florida Chapter
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Shepard Broad Foundation
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The Children's Movement of Florida
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PROTECTING AND PROMOTING THE BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS OF IMMIGRANTS

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