



BECAUSE WE ARE CATHOLIC

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CALIFORNIA SERVES AND ADVOCATES FOR THE POOR, VULNERABLE AND THOSE IN NEED NOT BECAUSE THEY ARE CATHOLIC, BUT *because we are Catholic.*



“Above all I ask leaders and legislators and the entire international community above all to confront the reality of those who have been displaced by force, with effective projects and new approaches in order to protect their dignity, to improve the quality of their life and to face the challenges that are emerging from modern forms of persecution, oppression and slavery.”

— Pope Francis

Hope Where None Existed

Catholic Agencies Provide Assistance to Unaccompanied Minors

Hope was non-existent for a girl in Guatemala, just into her teens, when gang members identified her as a key witness to the horrific kidnapping and murder of a 12-year-old friend. The friend’s mutilated body was dumped as a message to people not to interfere. When the gang demanded extortion money from the witness’ family, threatening to kill her, the girl fled to Los Angeles, seeking refuge.

That is where Esperanza (Spanish for “hope”) Immigration Rights Project came to her aid. Strongly supported by Los Angeles Archbishop José H. Gomez and Catholic Charities of Los Angeles, Esperanza provides legal education and representation to migrant children who are in detention or recently released.

Esperanza is the largest provider of legal education and assistance in California to unaccompanied children.

Migrant children “do not really understand what the process is, as well as their rights,” explains Caitlin Williams Sanderson, Esperanza’s program director.

The refugee aid organization has 16 attorneys plus support staff. It is entirely focused on helping migrant



Consultant with client.

children and their families understand the law and their rights, in federal immigration courts, in local jails and youth detention centers.

Much of its work is educational—workshops and other forms of education. It seeks to help migrant children understand their rights under U.S. law, since all of the refugee children must eventually appear in federal immigration court.

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Esperanza Immigration Project (continued)



For a limited number of refugee children Esperanza also provides free representation in the legal system. It is able to represent up to 270 children at a time.

But that is less than 10 percent of the migrant children in the system who need help, according to Sanderson.

Esperanza has been helping migrant children for more than 10 years. It was established by CLINIC (Catholic Legal Immigration Network Inc.), a national effort by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to help immigrants navigate the legal structure. CLINIC today works in 250 immigration programs in 46 states plus D.C. and Puerto Rico and has helped more than 100,000 people.

In 2008 Catholic Charities of LA assumed responsibility for the effort. It was renamed Esperanza and has been energetically supported by the Catholic church in Los Angeles County. Since 2008, its staff of attorneys has nearly quadrupled, reflecting in part Archbishop Gomez' strong support.

While based in Los Angeles, Esperanza helps migrants in much of Southern California who are in the jurisdiction of the federal Los Angeles Immigration Court, the largest in the country, with more than 20,000 cases each year.

Esperanza's hard-working staff is energized by the thousands of children who need help to avoid being sent back to terror in their home countries. The staff knows well of the young Honduran girl turned into a sex slave by a gang, raped for three weeks before she escaped and made her way to the U.S., or the young Salvadoran boy, a talented soccer player, who escaped when six of his teammates were killed by gang members seeking extortion payments.

The Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project is only one of many similar programs operated by Catholic Charities in California including San Bernardino/Riverside, San Diego, Los Angeles, Santa Clara County, San Francisco and Oakland/East Bay. (See links.)



For more information, go to:

cacatholic.org

Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project
www.esperanza-la.org/en/

Find local Catholic Charities agencies
catholiccharitiesca.org/wp/who-we-are/local-agencies/