



International
Institute of
New England

Spotlight

ON THE UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

ISSUE 3 | JANUARY 2023

A message from the CEO



I HAVE THREE CHILDREN. I know they need safety, support, and guidance to thrive. I worry every day about the shockingly large number of very young children fleeing Central America to find safety in the U.S. who do not have these foundational needs met. It keeps me up at night.

For more than a decade, a steadily and rapidly increasing number of children from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras have made the life-threatening journey to the Mexico/U.S. border seeking refuge from crime and violence, extreme poverty, and political instability. The International Institute of New England (IINE) works to reunify hundreds of children each year—some as young as two years old—with their U.S.-based families across New England. IINE's social workers provide clinical assessment and family safety planning, connect children with physical and mental health services, educate parents on the effects of childhood trauma and resources for healing, and help children access food and basic needs, education, and legal support for asylum.

This year, IINE is expanding our work with unaccompanied children in response to the tremendous increase in those who need help. We are introducing a new level of clinical service to meet the needs of traumatized youth and doubling the size of our team to serve up to 600 children each year. This edition of *Spotlight* highlights our Unaccompanied Children's Program and shares stories of some of the incredible youth we have come to know and support.

Jeffrey Thielman
President and CEO
International Institute of New England

Goals of the Unaccompanied Children's Program



Meet the needs of children with targeted support services designed to secure basic needs and encourage healing



Support reunification of children with their U.S.-based families, prioritizing each child's safety and wellness



Enable equitable access to education and resources that benefit children with the goal of facilitating adjustment to U.S. culture



Increase family stabilization and trauma recovery supports

Juana's Story

JUANA WAS ALONE when she arrived in the United States as a young teenager. She left her home in Guatemala and crossed four countries on foot before finally reaching the southern U.S. border in 2019, leaving her mother and the childhood she had known behind. After a long and dangerous journey, she was reunited with relatives, and soon after, Juana was introduced to Erin, an immigrant family support specialist in IINE's Unaccompanied Children's Program.

Juana had endured extreme poverty and violence in Guatemala. Erin worked closely with Juana to understand her needs, her experiences, and her strengths, and set a goal of helping

her and her family build a healthy and supportive relationship. Juana was excited to enroll in school, and Erin connected her with mental health counseling so she could begin the hard work of healing from the complex trauma she had endured.

When Juana needs someone to accompany her to doctors' appointments or help make decisions about her high school career, she calls upon Erin. The bond they have developed is strong, and the two have worked together with Juana's family to set goals for her future, which is looking looking brighter and brighter.

Determined to make a good life, Juana's smile says it all. She feels supported and, for the first time, hopeful.



Juana, pictured here, is described by case worker Erin Hennessy as quick to make friends and to laugh, and having a very hopeful and joyful perspective.

REACHING MORE UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

Erin is one member of a rapidly growing team of case specialists, social workers, and admin-

The Journey



Unaccompanied children fleeing violence cross U.S. border



Unaccompanied children are flagged or detained by law enforcement



A national refugee agency refers children to IINE



Within 48 hours: home visit to ensure a safe environment



Check-ins, family orientation with social workers, referrals for mental health care, support with medical visits, school registration assistance, guidance in setting goals for future success

To meet the rapidly growing need in the region, IINE's Unaccompanied Children's Program is expanding in the coming months from 8 staff members to 29 across three teams, including two in Boston and one in New York.

istrators dedicated to helping children who are forced to cross into the U.S. unaccompanied to achieve safety, stability, and a new beginning in New England. To meet the rapidly growing need in the region, IINE's Unaccompanied Children's Program is expanding in the coming months from 8 staff members to 29 across three teams,

including two in Boston and one in New York. With public and private support, as we increase the number of vulnerable and high-risk children and teenagers in our care, we are also working to deepen services, providing more therapeutic resources to help build strong, healthy families post-trauma.

Carlos' Story

CARLOS WAS FIFTEEN years old when he left Honduras on his own. Fleeing violence and seeking a better education, and medical treatment for an eye condition that had left him partially blind, he was optimistic about a future in the United States.

After crossing the U.S. border just beyond the Rio Grande, he was arrested upon entry and held for the night at a detention facility in Texas before being brought to a shelter for youth in Miami. Carlos remembers exactly how long he was at the shelter: 82 days. He missed his family in Honduras, and was frightened by the uncertainty of his future.

Carlos was in the middle of a soccer game at the detention facility when he was told he would be released to live with his aunt in New Jersey. He had not seen her in person since he was very young and only had pictures to remember her by, but he was very excited; finally, he would be starting his new life.

Sofie, a case specialist in IINE's Unaccompanied Children's Program, began working with Carlos' aunt while he was still in Miami. She conducted a home assessment, interviewing everyone who would be living with him to ensure a safe environment.

Carlos remembers struggling early on as an English language learner in his new high school. "I wanted to cry because I didn't know anything or where to go. I was always scared I wouldn't be able to talk to people or know how to respond to them."

Fortunately, Sofie was there to advocate for Carlos' needs. She helped Carlos with his coursework, encouraged him to join the swim team to



Pictured clockwise from the left; Carlos when he first arrived in NJ; Carlos as a young boy in Honduras; Carlos and his aunt celebrating his high school graduation

make friends, and connected him to a community volunteer program where he was able to help children with special needs. She also helped set up legal appointments and manage medical care.

Now 21 years old, Carlos has graduated high school and supports himself with a manufacturing job. He is cheerful and optimistic, is far more confident in English, and continues to learn. He also continues to dream. "I would like to see myself in five or six years as a nurse or a veterinarian," Carlos says.

What you can do



DONATE FUNDING FOR SUPPORT AND VITAL SUPPLIES:

▶ Family reunification, public benefits enrollment, enrollment in public school, mentorship, connections to mental health support, support for the family, including education on child development and trauma, and legal services.

▶ Backpacks with basic school supplies.

▶ Welcome kits for children, including coloring books and crayons or markers, journals and pens, hot chocolate and tea, a toothbrush and toothpaste, wet wipes, washcloths, soaps and lotions.

Impact Metrics

Program Expansion

2022

- **20%** of unaccompanied children detained at the U.S. border are eligible for **SPECIALIZED FOLLOW-UP CARE**.
- **300 CHILDREN** served by one IINE UCP team of **8 STAFF MEMBERS**.

2023

- **100%** of unaccompanied children detained at the U.S. border are eligible for **SPECIALIZED FOLLOW-UP CARE**.
- **600 CHILDREN** to be served by 3 IINE teams with **29 TOTAL STAFF MEMBERS**.
- **NEW PROGRAM OFFICE** in New York.



Friday, March 10, 2023, 3pm
Boston Park Plaza

Featuring

Dr. Sima Samar
Honoree and Keynote Speaker
Former Minister of Women's
Affairs for Afghanistan

Amaka Ubaka
Emcee
Emmy Award Winning Journalist
and Anchor at 7NEWS



International
Women's
Day *Celebration*

MARCH 10, 2023 | BOSTON PARK PLAZA AT 3:00PM
[PURCHASE A SPONSORSHIP](#) | [REGISTER TO ATTEND](#)



BOSTON
2 Boylston Street 3rd Floor
Boston, MA 02116
617-695-9990

LOWELL
101 Jackson Street 2nd Floor
Lowell, MA 01852
978-459-9031

MANCHESTER
470 Pine Street Lower Level
Manchester, NH 03104
603-647-1500