



Guatemalan Child Return and Reintegration Project (GCRRP)

Who are the unaccompanied children?



Each year, thousands of unaccompanied children entered the United States. Many are fleeing abuse or persecution; others are victims of trafficking, abandonment, or severe economic deprivation. Ranging in age from toddlers to teens, approximately 85% of these children come from Central America with Guatemala serving as the top country of origin. In FY2012, almost 14,000 children were apprehended at the border, taken into US custody and placed in deportation proceedings. The majority of these children will appear in immigration court alone, without the benefit of a lawyer, because US immigration law does not provide appointed counsel to individuals in deportation proceedings despite the life altering—and in some cases, life saving, consequences of the decisions that are made. Almost half of children are sent home, without access to formal support services or protection, to face the same dangers and pressures that caused them to undertake the perilous journey in the first place.

What is the GCRRP?

The Guatemalan Child Return and Reintegration Project (GCRRP) is a unique initiative that ensures that unaccompanied Guatemalan children, who leave the United States because they are voluntarily returning home or because they have been ordered deported, are sent back to a safe place where they can access vital services. Launched in 2010 as an innovative partnership between Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), the Global Fund for Children (GFC) and four local nonprofit organizations¹ in Guatemala, the GCRRP provides comprehensive support to child returnees, through the development of a case management plan, delivery of family reunification services, education and employment assistance, and facilitation of health care, psychosocial and other critical services.

In a very short period of time, this unique pilot program has demonstrated the power of a collaborative effort among multiple stakeholders to address the needs of a vulnerable, and often invisible, population of children. Since the first unaccompanied child was referred to KIND in October 2010, GCRRP has received 126 case referrals and helped over 102 Guatemalan boys and girls return home safely.

¹ Refugio de la Ninez (Refugio), Fundacion Castillo de Amor para la Ninez (Castillo), Desarrollo Sostenible para Guatemala (DESGUA), Asociacion Pop No'j (Pop No'j)

How does GCRRP work?



Guatemalan children who have agreed to voluntary departure or who have been ordered deported are eligible to participate. Children are identified and referred to GCRRP through KIND's network of pro bono legal service providers and 15 shelters operated by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, primarily in Texas and Arizona. When a child chooses to participate, KIND's social worker conducts an interview to identify their needs, establishes a service plan that focuses on their best

interests and links them to a Guatemalan NGO partner to receive support and ongoing assistance. The services available for returning children and their families include: arrival assistance at the airport, temporary shelter, family reunification, referrals to medical and psychological services, help with education, job and life skills training, and reconnecting children with their communities through youth groups and workshops.

KIND monitors each case, providing ongoing technical and case management assistance to ensure each child a safe and successful transition home. GFC provides capacity building support to the local partners to strengthen their ability to assist vulnerable children.

What have we achieved?

In a very short period of time, GCRRP has successfully piloted a model that demonstrates clear and positive impacts for unaccompanied children returning to Guatemala. It brings multiple actors -- US Government officials, Guatemalan government officials, international and local NGOs, and families -- together in a collaborative effort and has raised the visibility of a complex regional issue.

A number of innovative practices contributed to the project's success. First, GCRRP offers a diversity of services, including psychosocial support, tailored to meet children's needs. The local partners work with the entire family unit in culturally appropriate ways. Significant focus is placed on connecting children with scholarship and vocational options. Close working relationships between KIND, GFC and local partners, as well as US and Guatemalan government officials, are a priority.

Challenges remain. We must build institutional capacity on the ground to serve the growing numbers of returning children, and regional capacity to combat the many protection challenges that children who migrate face both before their departure, while in transit, and upon return. These include economic insecurity, drug and gang --related violence, abuses of their rights as children, a lack of education and employment opportunities, and endemic poverty.

What next?

The numbers are rising. A record number of unaccompanied children are entering the United States in search of protection and thousands are being sent home with no safety net in place. For every child assisted by GCRRP, many more receive no services to assist in their return and reintegration. Solutions to the problems of child migration, repatriation and remigration require the engagement and cooperation of multiple players.

KIND's programmatic objectives are threefold:

- Sustain and grow GCRRP capacity in Guatemala to serve 350 children;
- Pilot a similar model in El Salvador to serve 120 children; and
- Conduct systematic public education and advocacy to increase the number of stakeholders involved in finding and implementing appropriate child return and reintegration solutions.

A concerted effort of international, national and local players will enable these resilient young people to return home safely and become assets to their communities and countries.

Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)

Founded in 2008 by Microsoft Corporation and actress/humanitarian Angelina Jolie, KIND believes that no child should face immigration court alone. KIND finds pro bono lawyers to represent unaccompanied children and has partnered with over 130 law firms, corporations and law schools. KIND hosts trainings to teach volunteer attorneys about the immigration process and legal remedies available for children, and provides comprehensive mentoring and assistance to those lawyers who take on cases. At the same time, KIND advocates for changes in US law, policies and procedures to protect the rights of unaccompanied children and ensure that they receive fair and humane treatment. Finally, recognizing that many children will be unable to find immigration relief in the US and must return to their countries of origin, KIND launched GCRRP to help in return and reintegration.