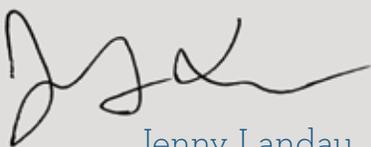


Working to make access to justice affordable for New Mexico's immigrants and promote knowledge of legal rights and the immigration process.

Dear Friends,

The outpouring of support across the county to help the recent wave of Central American mothers and children making the journey to the U.S. has been incredibly inspiring. Thirty years ago many of you may remember a similar exodus of refugees from Central America to our borders. Back then there was a humanitarian disaster when Central Americans were fleeing civil wars that the U.S. helped to create. Now they are fleeing nations that have been taken over by the gangs and cartels that came to power in these shattered post-war societies. At the same time, a seemingly unstoppable wave of violence in Mexico is driving more families to seek refuge in the United States, with New Mexico the refuge of choice for many.

Since we were founded four years ago, NMILC has been representing children and their families from Mexico and Central America who risked their lives to travel to the New Mexico to seek permanent protection from poverty and violence. Our ability to serve these families is enhanced by the dedication of our team of volunteers. Critical to our efforts are legal and medical professionals, such as those who are highlighted in this newsletter. As the number of families seeking refuge increases, we will continue to build strong community partnerships and work to further develop our volunteer and staff capacity.



Jenny Landau  
Executive Director

## Pro Bono Partners Make A Difference

NMILC has been defending Edgar\* and Maria\*, ages 10 and 13, who recently came to the United States from El Salvador and are facing deportation. Edgar and Maria grew up witnessing their father severely abuse their mother, Elena.\* Elena fled to the United States, and she worked hard to save the money to bring her children to join her. When Edgar and Maria came to the United States, they were caught at the border, but then allowed to reunify with Elena in Northern New Mexico.

Elena says, "It was the best day of my life when I was able to see my children again." However, they were facing deportation in immigration court. Elena brought Edgar and Maria to meet with Megan Jordi, NMILC's Legal Director, in Santa Fe. Megan determined that NMILC could help Edgar and Maria to remain in the United States with their mother.

Edgar and Maria have applied for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), which is available to youth who have been abandoned, neglected, or abused by one or both of their parents. To apply for SIJS, children first must make their case before a state court judge, who determines whether they have been abandoned, neglected, or abused under state law. If the state court judge finds their case has merit, SIJS children can then apply for a visa from the federal government's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service and eventually become permanent legal residents. NMILC attorneys seek the assistance of pro bono attorneys in state court to help with these cases.

Debbie Ramirez, a shareholder at Modrall Sperling, agreed to provide Edgar and Maria pro bono assistance in their state court case. Modrall Sperling is one of the largest law firms in New Mexico and has partnered with NMILC to represent a number of NMILC's clients in state court. Debbie successfully represented Elena, Edgar, and Maria in the First Judicial District of New Mexico, providing evidence to the state court judge that the children should be able to apply for SIJS. According to Debbie, "It has been interesting and rewarding to venture into a new area of law to help children and families who desperately need our assistance."

Elena is very grateful for Debbie's representation, and says that Debbie and Megan were amazing attorneys who really helped her family. Edgar and Maria's visa petitions have since been approved. The next step is for NMILC to assist Edgar and Maria in their applications to become permanent residents.

*\*The names in this client story have been changed to protect client confidentiality.*

Changes in the law could lead to a different ending in stories such as that of Edgar and Maria. A bill has been proposed in Congress that would end the practice of allowing unaccompanied children to reunite with family to fight their case in immigration court. Under the new law, children such as Edgar and Maria would quickly be sent back to Central America, often without a meaningful opportunity to consult with an attorney, to see an immigration judge, or have the support of family to figure out if they have a way to remain in the United States lawfully.



Debbie Ramirez, Modrall Sperling

# Artesia Update:

**Contributed By  
Pro Bono Attorney Barbara Ferry**

NMILC staff attorney Jessica Martin, NMILC Public Ally Carissa Aranda and I joined the on-the ground legal effort in Artesia for two days in early October. During my previous visit to Artesia, immigration judges in Arlington, Virginia were setting bonds of \$25,000 or more, which was impossibly high for these families. One big, positive change from my previous visit is that the women's cases are now being heard by immigration judges in Denver, and they are generally setting bonds that are more reasonable and reflect whether the families present a security threat or flight risk. During our visit, Jessica was able to secure a \$3,000 bond for one mother. That means she and her toddler will be able to get out of detention, travel across the country to join family members on the East Coast and pursue her asylum case from there.

Conditions within the detention center remain bleak. Despite an ICE spokeswoman dubiously comparing the facility to "Disneyland" in the press, none of the women and children I spoke to are happy to be there and many children appeared sick or listless. ICE has refused to release on humanitarian parole even women and children who are seriously ill. These are women who have fled horrific events in Central America, survived a harrowing journey through Mexico, and are now being subjected to the further trauma of detention. As the months go by, they grow increasingly desperate.

Getting hundreds of detained women ready for bond hearings and possible release from detention is no easy task. It is inspiring to see how volunteers - both attorneys and non-attorneys - from New Mexico and across the country are rallying behind the effort. Off-site volunteers are doing everything from translating documents from Spanish to English to preparing bond hearing packets and assembling "survival kits" for newly-released women and kids to help them with the next leg of their journey. Mental health professionals who are able to travel to Artesia are needed as are donations to cover volunteer expenses.

Detaining these traumatized refugee women and their children is a terrible policy no matter how the government spins it. It's going to take the continued unflinching work of many to defeat it.

Pictured:

New NMILC legal assistants, Karina Smyth (Jesuit Volunteer) & Carrissa Aranda (Public Ally), provided support in Artesia.



# Dr. Stromberg's Helping Hand

Many of NMILC's clients are survivors of abuse or other forms of violence. In order to fight their deportation, it is critical that they be able to prove that their stories are true and that the trauma they experienced has left them with lasting damage. When a person suffers physical injuries and has a scar, that can be easy to prove. But what about psychological damage?

Dr. Shannon Stromberg, a psychiatrist at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine, conducts pro bono forensic psychiatric evaluations and testifies in immigration court on behalf of our clients who are seeking protection from persecution in their home countries. His evaluations assess whether or not the client's story is believable, evaluate the symptoms of trauma that the client is experiencing, and determine whether or not those symptoms were likely caused by a particular event. These evaluations provide essential information to a judge or other immigration official and may form a key part of the client's case.

Dr. Stromberg has been working with refugees and asylum seekers for over a decade, in Bosnia, Tunisia, and the United States. However, his interest in refugees goes back much further, to his own family story. His mother was born in a labor camp in Poland during World War II, and she and his grandmother came to the United States as refugees. Being able to have lawful immigration status in the United States enabled their descendants to achieve success. Dr. Stromberg explains, "One thing I love about this kind of work is seeing how, when a refugee gets legal status, it doesn't just change his life but it also changes his family history."

**“ One thing I love about this kind of work is seeing how, when a refugee gets legal status, it doesn't just change his life but it also changes his family history.”**

## THANK YOU ALLEGRA!

Mil gracias to Santa Fe attorney, Allegra Love, for her tremendous effort to raise funds to cover the travel costs for New Mexican volunteer attorneys in Artesia. Allegra's online campaign has allowed NMILC staff to volunteer additional time in Artesia.