MISSION
WE DEFEND THE RIGHTS OF IMMIGRANTS & REFUGEES
EMPOWER INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, & COMMUNITIES
& ADVOCATE FOR LIBERTY & JUSTICE.

VISION
We envision a society where all people have the right to migrate, & human rights are guaranteed.
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No immigrant story is the same, but one thing remains unchanged. Our entire organization is resolved to helping all immigrants, building solidarity throughout our communities until we can ensure that everyone — no matter their identity — has the right to migrate with dignity and safety.

JONATHAN D. RYAN, JD
CEO and President
RAICES
Reflecting on my past 12 years at RAICES, 2019 stands out as a year of transformation. Facing constant challenges from an administration hell-bent on attacking immigrants, we expanded our legal work at the border, within detention centers, and in courts across Texas and the nation. We established a litigation team to bring suit against the government for its human rights abuses and violations of domestic and international law, and took our first case to the Supreme Court. Our advocacy team directly challenged anti-immigration policies with campaigns that resonated from the streets of New York and California to the El Paso border, garnering international attention and galvanizing support for our calls to action. This year has changed every one of us at RAICES.

Though we’ve expanded nationally, our Texas roots ground us in a state that is at the center of the immigration enforcement system. Our lawyers represent clients detained throughout Texas — advising families jailed with children, helping them navigate asylum, and winning their release. Our case managers are in 10 offices across the state, working directly to help our constituents with education, job placement, housing, and much more. Our video crews and advocates work along the border, telling the first-hand stories of those suffering under the administration’s latest policies.

In 2018, RAICES received donations from around the world to free those detained by the administration and push back against racist immigration policies like family separation. In 2019, we spent $9.6 million in bonds to secure the release of 884 people, freeing more immigrants from detention than ever before. 2019 also saw a rapidly worsening immigration terrain, and the cruelty inflicted on immigrants was unprecedented. Nevertheless, I’m proud to say we fought back at every turn, leading to some of the most important work in RAICES history.

When the Trump administration expanded child concentration camps, housing thousands of kids in large tents many miles from any city or services, our experienced legal teams set up field operations and stopped ICE from railroading children through the deportation process. When the largest immigration raid in our country’s history resulted in the arrest of hundreds of workers whose families wept as they watched their loved ones shackled and bussed away, our lawyers and bond teams helped to keep families together and free.

And when the Trump administration established its “Migrant Protection Protocols” — a barrier that has been arguably more effective at keeping out asylum seekers than the president’s promised concrete-and-steel border wall — we brought our services to México because the defense of refugees and human rights laws are most critical when our own government threatens to undermine, erode and erase them for generations to come.

Our work is made possible each time someone takes action in response to the inhumane treatment in detention centers and at the border. We use that support to provide immediate relief and impact — ensuring that lawyers, advocates, bond teams, and community members gather in direct support of the clients and constituencies we serve.

We know this struggle will take time; all struggles for freedom do. But we also know we are ready for it. Our staff is uniquely positioned to provide community and resources to those who arrive here to build a new home. We’re present with these individuals and families — when they cross the border, throughout their detention, and after their release.

I invite you to join as we support our community through their immigration journey. No immigrant story is the same, but one thing remains unchanged. Our entire organization is resolved to helping all immigrants, building solidarity throughout our communities until we can ensure that everyone — no matter their identity — has the right to migrate with dignity and safety.
The border is not the first or the last barrier that immigrants face when coming to the United States. Nevertheless, the conversation on immigration revolves around the idea of the border. It represents the end of a long journey and the start of another. It connects. It separates. Meanwhile, it is one of the least understood parts of the United States. This is where we begin.

No one makes the decision to leave their home forever lightly. While some families pack snacks and pillows, others must pay smugglers, sleep on the streets, or survive long expanses of desert. People seeking asylum often depart without firm plans or arrangements, and sometimes not even with time to pack a bag.

Each year, hundreds of thousands of lives are risked in pursuit of safety and security — human rights that were made even more elusive when the Trump administration further militarized the southern border in 2019.

In the early morning hours of January 1, immigration officials fired tear gas at families seeking asylum near Tijuana, repeating an attack that had occurred only a few months earlier at the same location. A few weeks later, the United States announced the Remain in México policy, a patently illegal practice that keeps asylum seekers waiting in México for the entirety of their immigration proceedings. Within weeks, an unprecedented number of refugee camps sprang up along the border. Thousands of people were forced to sleep on the streets and rely on charity for food, healthcare, and basic aid.

At RAICES, we could not ignore this erosion of human rights and asylum law — a core part of American history that is guaranteed by domestic and international legal protections. We expanded our legal support to the southern border, prepared to respond to the violence, poverty, and bureaucracy being used to deter refugees and to withhold due process from those who apply at the border for asylum.
BROWNSVILLE
MATAMOROS
PIEDRAS NEGRAS
EL PASO
CIUDAD JUAREZ
TEXAS
MEXICO
His rhetoric painted this group as a dangerous mass of criminals traveling north to wreak havoc on the entire country. He implied that it was only a matter of time until they arrived at the border and threatened the American quality of life. It was important for us to combat the president’s narrative and provide support for this unjustly targeted population.

When we went to México City to meet the caravan, we did not find the monolith that the president had grossly misrepresented. We saw great diversity in nationality, culture, language, and identity, brought together by an urgent need for help from the United States.

We worked closely with a group of more than 80 LGBTQ+ individuals who called themselves La Comunidad — The Community. They were fleeing extreme and targeted violence in their home countries. Even on their journey north, they continued to be singled out for mistreatment, victims of entrenched cultural biases that have existed toward non-binary conforming individuals. We helped organize shelter, transportation, food, and legal aid for members of the group and were humbled to accompany them across the border.

Unfortunately, threats against La Comunidad did not end once they arrived in the United States. In the early days of 2019, community members were divided and sent to various detention centers where immigration agents and fellow detainees openly harassed them with impunity. The 60 trans women within the group were subjected to the most extreme attacks—a reflection of the sobering statistic that LGBTQ+ migrants are 97 times more likely to face sexual assault in detention than the general population. They were denied adequate healthcare, exposed to severe mental anguish, and sequestered for months.

While in detention, members of La Comunidad were in constant contact with RAICES lawyers and advocates to ensure access to legal resources and healthcare. During their long intern-
ments in remote detention centers, we were often amongst their only contacts with the outside world. Once they were eligible for release, we paid their bonds, and the newly-freed were granted access to food and housing security programs made possible through RAICES social services.

It took until April 2020 for the government to release the last four trans women of La Comunidad. Most are now with friends and family, as they wait for their asylum cases to proceed. Fifteen of the 60 trans women in the group have been granted asylum to date with the support of RAICES legal representation.

“Even when everything is stacked against them, my clients are still fighting for their lives,” said Cristian Sánchez, a RAICES lawyer who has worked closely with La Comunidad. “They are still brave enough to tell their story in court, to fight for a life in a place where they won’t be prosecuted. They are vibrant and resilient, and that is what strikes me. They have the will to keep going, even when every single person in their life, in society, has rejected them. They still continue to push for a way forward, and because of that, I admire them all deeply.”
We have received help from [RAICES] since we first arrived in México City. Thank you, RAICES, for all the support. Thank you to my attorney, Flor. Thank you for always guiding me.

**I HAVE THREE DREAMS.**

The main one was to win asylum. The second one is to publish a book. I want people to know through my book that we don’t leave our country because we want to. Sadly, a day comes when we have had enough, and we have no choice but to leave. [My third dream] … is to open a coffee shop, a coffee shop that offers support instead of discrimination.

**NOW I CAN SAY I MADE IT.**

I am where I wanted to be.

I have to continue forward.

There’s more to it.

This is not the end.

**CATALEYA**

* A member of La Comunidad and asylee from Honduras
In 2019, the Trump administration launched a new assault on children, families, and refugees seeking asylum at the border when he unveiled his so-called Remain in México policy, an extraordinarily immoral measure known formally as the Migrant Protection Protocols.

By forcing all non-Mexican asylum seekers to wait in México throughout the asylum process, Remain in México has done more to potentially end access to asylum than any government order in recent memory. It goes against every norm of domestic and international refugee law, which guarantees that those fleeing danger are welcomed into and protected by our country. It goes against the promises that the United States made after World War II to never again return refugees to their deaths, recognizing our nation’s complicity in the genocide of thousands of Jewish refugees who were rejected by the United States government only to be murdered in Nazi concentration camps. It is a historic abdication of our national values that the people we now call the Greatest Generation vowed never to repeat.

Perhaps the most insidious part of Remain in México is that it flew under the public radar. The border wall was one of President Trump’s signature, and more controversial, campaign promises. In 2019, he fulfilled his promise with a sheet of paper and a signature. In one year alone, the policy has stopped more than 57,000 refugees — 16,000 of them children — from properly seeking asylum. Hundreds who were returned were later murdered, kidnapped, or subjected to extreme violence, including sexual assault. In the San Diego region, less than three percent of those trapped on the other side of the border had access to a lawyer. Without counsel, there is little hope.
We first went to Piedras Negras, directly across the border from Eagle Pass, Texas. Remain in México was still being introduced city-by-city and had yet to be instituted in this small town, but we learned that it would give us a first glimpse of what the policy may look like in practice.

From the moment it was silently imposed, Remain in México has plunged thousands of lives at the border into desperation and darkness. However, it was overshadowed by stories about the border wall at the outset of 2019. At RAICES, we bring the light of public attention to stories that represent the most significant threats to immigrants and core American values—and inspire a collective call for change.

In February 2019, Mexican authorities corralled hundreds of refugees behind chain-link fences inside an abandoned body bag factory. In our estimation, it was an attempt by the Mexican government to curry favor with the Trump administration.

Refugees inside the factory contacted RAICES, sending audio recordings begging for hats, gloves, bedding, and scarves to shield against the cold. They described squalid living conditions for the 1,600 jailed inside. All had been baited by Mexican officials who initially promised bus rides to the border but instead detained them at the factory and surrounded them with the military. We flew down immediately.

Mexican soldiers equipped with riot shields and automatic weapons lined the complex to prevent people from getting food or basic supplies. No one was allowed to leave and apply for asylum at the border that was a mere few miles away. Authorities kept on the lights throughout the night and often denied medical care to those inside, inflicting significant distress upon adults and children alike.

Those inside were desperate to apply for asylum, yet no official had explained the process. We tried to train the detained individuals on their rights but were denied access day after day.
We knew that the stakes were too high to walk away. We called on reporters to reveal the conditions inside and the unwillingness of Mexican authorities to guide migrants through the legally-protected asylum process. Dozens of stories were written. The world was watching Piedras Negras.

Within a week, public outrage forced the Mexican government to close the shelter. But given the extremely opaque process and complicity from Mexican authorities we witnessed, we understood immediately that the policy would be devastating. We showed the world that México was wholly unprepared for the humanitarian needs along the border.

We were right.

“Everybody wanted to leave, but they stopped us from doing that. People were recording, and they were smacking phones away and hitting people with their shields.”

ALEX

A 20-something who had lived in the United States since he was a child until the government deported him
After we went to Piedras Negras, the Remain in México policy was soon instituted in cities across the border. Those presenting themselves for asylum in Tijuana, Mexicali, Ciudad Juárez, Nuevo Laredo, San Luis Río Colorado, and other border cities were given a hearing date and told to wait — often for months.

In Matamoros, adjacent to the border like Piedras Negras, a refugee camp was growing rapidly, as hundreds were forced to wait for their asylum hearing. They slept in tents and under tarps, relying on charities on both sides of the border for food and aid. Steps away, Americans were living comfortably in Brownsville, Texas, largely unaware of the camp initially established in 2018. The Mexican government provided little aid. The American government provided none.

Matamoros is in the state of Tamaulipas, which has the same “do not travel” advisory warning as Syria and Iraq. Yet the United States was actively turning away those in search of asylum, telling them to wait in Matamoros even when they expressed substantiated fears that they would be subject to violence if forced to stay in México.

We collected the stories of those at highest risk, of pregnant women and children who were denied entry by American border officials despite legitimate claims. The rule of law did not matter. Everyone was systematically sent to the camp, where they have largely remained for months under harsh conditions as they await their day in court.

Several lawsuits have sought to challenge Remain in México and end this suffering. While there have been qualified judicial successes, the Supreme Court granted permission in March 2020 for the Trump administration to continue enforcing the program while it appealed a California federal district court ruling that has been upheld by the 9th United States Circuit Court of Appeals. In October 2020, the Supreme Court stated its formal intention to review the case.
When she was 15, Nilda suffered attempted rape by a family member. A few years later, the man that she was seeing beat her so severely upon learning of her pregnancy that she needed dental surgery. After her son Keyden was born, gang members broke into her home while fleeing from the police, threatening to kill her if she did not keep her baby boy quiet. When the gang members escaped, they told her to leave Honduras or be killed.

Nilda did what any parent would do. She took her child and fled. Crossing into Guatemala and then Mexico, Nilda wrapped Keyden, then two years old, around her waist. Together, they hung onto the side of a speeding train for 17 hours before arriving at the southern border, where they faced further violence after crossing.

Border agents arrested the pair under a bridge, forcing them both to sit on the ground for over an hour before taking them to a detention center in Eagle Pass, Texas. They spent the night in a cold holding room until Nilda was taken away without Keyden. She cried and pleaded for her son, not knowing if she would see him again.

While tearing mother and child apart, an immigration agent uttered, “This is what happens when you come to my country.” Nilda was transferred amongst facilities across Texas over the next month, always unaware of Keyden’s location. Then, she was flown to New York City under the pretense of seeing him. Instead, she was transferred to a detention center upstate for two weeks until boarding a bus back to the city — where mother and son were finally reunited.

Musicians benny blanco, Miguel, and Calvin Harris were outraged by the treatment of those who reflected blanco’s own family history. They decided to share it with the world as a warning of atrocities within our own borders, as well as a reminder of the strength and resolve of the human spirit.

Their video and song “I Found You” has now been seen over nine million times, raising awareness of the 4,368 children — at minimum — who were separated from their parents by the Trump administration.

To support families like Nilda’s who are waiting to hear about their asylum decision, we came together with the public defense organization Brooklyn Defender Services to launch the “While They Wait” fund alongside the release of “I Found You.” To date, over $40,000 has been raised for direct emergency financial assistance.
Like thousands of other Q’eqchi-speaking indigenous women from Guatemala who are detained by DHS each year, Sara struggled through her preliminary asylum interview. Despite making it clear that she only spoke Q’eqchi, it was conducted in Spanish — a language she does not understand.

She could barely make out the officer’s questions and was even less able to answer them. Moreover, she was traumatized and could not ask the only question that mattered to her at that moment: what had the government done with her five-year-old daughter?

When Sara later asked for an immigration judge to review the negative decision from her interview and tried to explain that she did not understand the questions, the judge, appearing by televideo, tore up her interview, threw it in the trash, and told her that she was lying.

Once her five-year-old daughter Alida, from whom she had been separated, had been released to live with her father, Sara lost all protections afforded to separated parents under the “Ms. L” class action lawsuit. This meant that she was no longer eligible to be reunified with her daughter and would not receive a second credible fear interview.

Having fled for her and her daughter’s lives, and after having been separated from her only child and denied the chance to apply for asylum, Sara lost all hope. This all changed the moment that Sara met Kathrine “Kat” Russell — a RAICES attorney and the head of our deportation defense unit. She and her team visit and represent adults in detention centers across Texas — and many, like Sara, have been separated from their children.

Kat listened to Sara explain that, before making the long journey to the United States border, she had been brutally attacked in Guatemala on account of being an indigenous woman. Alida witnessed everything that happened to her mom.

As an immigration attorney with years of experience in asylum cases, Kat knew that Sara’s case deserved to be heard and that she had been denied due process and harmed by DHS. Kat brought a Q’eqchi-English interpreter from Mississippi to work inside the detention center to help Sara talk about everything she had survived. Our team of attorneys pressed DHS to hear Sara’s full case. After nine months of fighting, Sara won her release.

Kat drove Sara from the detention center to the airport, and RAICES accompanied Sara’s husband — and a very happy Alida — to welcome Sara to her new home, together and free in Houston. RAICES continues to represent Sara and Alida pro bono in their asylum case.
IMMIGRATION AND THE ARTS

LETTING PEOPLE GO

This is not the first and only time that the United States has used family separation as a tool of harm against marginalized, targeted immigrant communities.

In the 1970s, Diamanté Anthony Blackmon’s family fled Nicaragua under duress at the height of revolution. After they crossed into the United States without documentation, border patrol found them in Texas. They separated the family by gender. His uncle, four or five years old, was held alone for 18 hours. His grandmother wept in despair.

“He was crying, and my grandma was going crazy,” Diamanté Anthony Blackmon later said of the ordeal. “They were treated like dogs.”

Decades later, Diamanté Anthony Blackmon became Carnage, a DJ and music producer. In his song “Letting People Go,” he traces his family’s own journey through Central America, first on vans and eventually on foot through the desert.

The music video depicts their long nights in the desert before border patrol finds them, arrests them, and separates them.

Carnage has become a vocal RAICES champion — amplifying our continued calls against family detention and separation practices, donating clothing for our asylum-seeking service recipients, and speaking about his experience of the immigration system. “Letting People Go,” which we helped elevate, has been viewed nearly four million times on YouTube.
In 2019, an average of more than 50,000 immigrants were jailed in detention centers nationwide on any given day. In May, a new record for the number detained in a single day was set: 52,398. At RAICES, we fight to free them all, providing direct legal services and national advocacy that seeks to dismantle prejudiced systems intended to intimidate.

Under the Trump administration, more immigrants are being jailed for longer periods of time than ever before — a trend that is likely to continue. The 2021 federal budget includes increased spending to reach an average of 60,000 beds in detention centers available daily.

We have been representing people in detention for over three decades, helping them navigate legally their requests for asylum. Historically, less than half of those immigrating to the United States have access to a lawyer because the human right of representation is not in fact a constitutional right in immigration proceedings. People are often arrested, detained, charged, and deported without speaking to a single lawyer. The impact is stark. Those who have access to counsel are twice as likely to get some form of relief from deportation than those who do not.

We work directly in detention centers to forge trust with each individual and build the strongest case possible for their right to protection that we then present in courtrooms throughout Texas. We fight for their release so that they may have the familial, legal, and social services support that can statistically enhance their chances of securing asylum.

The stakes have always been high, but the Trump administration escalated its assaults in 2019. Procedural barriers were routinely erected to stop our clients from winning their cases, making the immigration labyrinth even more complicated and further ensuring that those without lawyers have little chance of success — including children.
RELEASE
In January, children that we were representing at the Tornillo detention camp told us about a judge in El Paso, Texas who was denying due process in an attempt to accelerate the deportation of unaccompanied minors.

We were outraged by the brazen display of systemic abuse within our immigration system and knew that this exemplified the nativist discrimination perpetrated in immigration courts nationwide. We filled the courtroom with reporters, applying a level of scrutiny that pressured the judge to consider cases more carefully and without immediate prejudicial denial of asylum.

But even in moments of fleeting victory, we know that our work is only just beginning. The government is ruthlessly committed to deportation for both new arrivals and decades-long residents alike, as evidenced by 2019’s most expansive immigration raids in history — activating RAICES to pay millions of dollars in bonds so that those who have been living in this country for years could be released from detention.

The nation’s leaders have shown that they are tireless when flaunting the law in their anti-immigrant crackdown.

At RAICES, we too are tireless — in defense of humanity.

Migrants detained by United States Customs and Border Protection are pictured in a makeshift holding facility beneath Paso Del Norte bridge, between downtown El Paso and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, as seen from El Paso, Texas, on April 19, 2019. Inundated with family unit apprehensions, border crossing wait times increased over the last few days, but received relief April 19, 2019, afternoon. (PAUL RATJE/AFP via Getty Images)
At the Karnes County Residential Center in Texas, one of three family detention facilities in the United States, we were confronted with unimaginable cruelty — the possibility of a baby dying. Our legal team heard from a concerned father whose son was seriously ill. His child had experienced life-threatening dysentery for 21 days, but immigration officials were refusing to release them to receive medical attention.

“My son cannot eat the food here. He neither receives a special, age-appropriate diet nor a diet specific for his health condition,” the distraught father told RAICES. “The medical staff has on more than one occasion told me that I need to force-feed my one-year-old son if he doesn’t want to drink milk or eat. When I do this, he vomits and gets sick — I’ve told them this repeatedly. As his father, I feel helpless knowing that his condition could become more complicated at any moment. How much longer can a one-year-old baby not eat and suffer from painful, dehydrating diarrhea before something is done?”

We could not sit by idly. We mounted a public pressure campaign, calling on elected officials to push for the family’s freedom. Thousands of supporters called the local immigration office, flooding phone lines with pleas for the baby’s release. It took three days for officials to relent. Thanks in part to our legislative and civilian supporters who rallied in response to our outcry, the family was able to get to a doctor in time to save their son.

This family’s story is one of thousands. When released, the father told us, “There are a lot more children still left in the cages.” The government held nearly 70,000 migrant children in custody in 2019 — yet another new record. Without intervention like ours, cruel treatment would continue unabated, and the stories of those inside would be forever lost.
I’ve worked with RAICES for 18 years. I am a legal assistant with the Children’s Program in charge of transition to foster care. These are tender-aged kids. Most of them come straight from the border. A lot of them are transferred from other shelters. And we provide our services to them.

We teach the kids their rights, like the right to have an attorney, the right of family to be reunified with families, the right to talk to their families, the right to have education, the right to have food. It feels special to help these minors. It’s not an easy thing to do. They’re coming from so far away. They have all this sadness in their faces. Most of these kids have suffered a lot of abandonment and physical abuse.

When they arrive at the shelter, I try to make them feel at home and that they are going to be loved. I try to make them feel that we are there for them and will help them the most that we can. We also explain to them that even if they get reunited with their families, we’re going to continue helping them, like trying to find an attorney wherever they go. It is important that they understand we’re going to be there for them.

NELLY CASTILLO
Legal Assistant at RAICES
At South by Southwest® (SXSW®), a mother learned for the first time the full horror of her daughter’s experience in immigration custody. RAICES was in Austin to debut an exhibit on the hielera.

Also known as the “ice box,” a hielera is the first holding facility for immigrants when they are arrested after crossing the border. Thousands consistently describe the same thing when asked about their experiences: a freezing, overcrowded cell. They are given plastic emergency blankets for warmth and little else. Guards keep temperatures intentionally low, and sometimes lower temperatures further when children complain about the cold.

We sought to bring a first-hand experience of the hielera to people who had no idea that they existed. Though the hielera is emblematic of the government’s treatment of immigrants — needlessly cruel and known to generations of immigrant families — it had been kept out of sight to the broader public.

We changed that.

One of our clients had been placed in a hielera as a child after being chased down by a border patrol canine unit. With her permission, we featured her story in a recreation of a hielera. Conceived with local artists Yocelyn Riojas and Jerry Silguero, the experience blasted cold air through an eight-by-twenty-foot shipping container and played audio from our client describing the conditions inside.

When her mother visited the exhibit, she was shocked and outraged by the lack of food and water, as well as the tortuously cold temperatures. It was the first time that she was made fully aware of what her daughter had experienced when coming to the country. Hundreds of others in Austin joined in her outrage. Few know what awaits children and families picked up by border patrol. By bringing a hielera directly to one of the world’s most well-attended conferences, we shined a light on a devastating constant of the American immigration experience.
On June 12, 2019, New Yorkers woke up to chain-link cages across their city. When they looked inside, they saw children covered in thin metallic emergency blankets and crying. The children were mannequins — life-sized foam models placed in 20 locations across New York City overnight. RAICES, in collaboration with the creative agency Badgers & Winters, installed the guerrilla #NoKidsInCages campaign to demand the release of the thousands of children kept in similar conditions across the country — shivering on floors and locked in cages with only a mylar blanket for warmth.

Inside each cage, we played real audio of children crying inside a detention center, making the exhibit impossible to ignore. Within hours, #NoKidsInCages was trending nationally, and news outlets across the world reported our action, sending our message to millions. While the Trump administration said it was no longer separating families, we reminded the public that children were still being taken from their parents, that young kids were still imprisoned nationwide for the crime of seeking safety in the United States.

Our participation in this action was rooted in our service to families and children in detention. Our lawyers understood the trauma that children in detention were facing because they consult with families daily at the Karnes detention center where parents are held with their children in remote, for-profit prisons. RAICES lawyers and social workers have listened to children speak of mistreatment inside DHS holding cells where they are held for days or weeks in cold, squalid conditions.

The situation had grown out of control. Legal representation alone could not release the thousands of children jailed by DHS. It was time to appeal to the public directly, confronting them with the horrors being enacted in their name.

We captured national attention, left an indelible impression on thousands, and transformed everyone who saw the cages into witnesses of the cramped and unsanitary conditions that children faced inside of DHS detention centers. The atrocities could no longer be ignored.
In Spring 2018, before the nation was enraged that DHS was separating families at the border, RAICES launched the Legal, Advocacy, and Education Fund (LEAF) for children in response to the growing needs of all children that go through DHS custody.

Every year, DHS detains children arriving mostly from the Central American nations of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador who request asylum in the United States. Children who arrive alone, and many who are separated from their families, are held by DHS in facilities managed by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Other children are kept in DHS custody and brought together with their parents to jails managed by for-profit prison companies like Core Civic and GEO Group.

Whether children are being held by DHS in for-profit prisons or at HHS-managed facilities, RAICES is working inside to provide legal services and representation to defend these children from deportation and to help win their release from custody to live with their family or guardian. We work in one of only three DHS family jails. Each year, we provide legal services to approximately 10% of all children held in HHS facilities.

During times of high need along the border, the government sometimes contracts with the United States Department of Defense (DOD) to house children on military bases. Since 2012, this has occurred five times. Each time, RAICES has gained access to these facilities to provide critical legal information and services to thousands of children held inside.

RAICES attorneys began 2019 fighting against the deportations of children held in a tent city in the desert near El Paso, Texas. By the end of the year, we were pushing back against the opening of a new camp in Carrizo Springs, close to San Antonio. In both cases, our attorneys worked inside the centers to provide children with information about their legal rights, while our advocates organized with local communities to shut the facilities down.

RAICES will not stop until all children in detention have access to legal representation. This need, however, is just as great after each child is released. RAICES also provides direct legal representation to children who have been released from DHS or HHS custody, and LEAF makes this crucial work possible.
In 2019, we established the organization’s first litigation team to file suits directly challenging the government when it infringes upon the human rights of immigrants. Litigation, with the process of discovery that it entails, is the means by which we are able to uncover the truth and expose the stories that our government shrouds in secrecy. We serve thousands of people in detention centers every year and thereby have a view that few organizations can claim. When we learn of grave, coordinated, pervasive abuses of power that violate the legal rights of our clients, we take action. In this case, we filed a lawsuit.

In Rios v. GEO Group, filed alongside our co-counsel ALDEA — The People’s Justice Center and Arent Fox LLP, we argued that the country’s second-largest private prison forcibly separated at least 13 fathers from their sons just two months after the “zero tolerance” family separation policy was struck down by the courts in 2018.

GEO Group had knowingly violated the law by separating families, refusing to tell the fathers where their children were and when, or even if, they might see them again. Fathers held at Karnes described being forcibly taken from their sons by armed guards, screaming and sometimes shaking uncontrollably. Some vomited blood. One attempted suicide after guards told him that he would never see his son again.

Our suit is still pending. In 2020, a judge denied GEO Group’s attempt to dismiss our lawsuit, meaning our clients in turn will not be denied a ruling on whether or not their rights were violated — a victory in and of itself.

GEO intentionally traumatized families who came to the United States seeking refuge. These brave families seek justice and accountability for the atrocious actions conducted by The GEO Group, Inc.

MANOJ GOVINDAIAH
Director of Litigation at RAICES
In April 2019, the United States conducted the largest immigration raid in a decade, arresting 280 people en masse over a single day. Four months later, it happened again in Morton, Mississippi. Over a single day, immigration agents arrested 680 people — the largest immigration raid in all of American history.

WORKPLACE RAIDS
RAPID RESPONSE

“At that moment, I thought my world was falling apart,” said a client’s daughter of the Dallas raid. “We didn’t know if they were going to take [my mom] away. We thought we would not see her.”

Immigration raids are traumatic events. Without advance warning, armed officials storm a factory, office, or other workplace with guns drawn, arresting people in droves. They scour the site for anyone without proper documentation, often tackling anyone who attempts to flee. Many who may have lived in the country for years or decades are shackled and bussed away to a detention center.

“We heard them yelling: ‘It’s ICE! It’s ICE!’,” said our client Graciela, whose first reaction during a Dallas raid was terror. “I work first of all because my kids are in school, and I have to pay rent. I have bills to pay, and I have a daughter in México.”

Our local organizers immediately went to the factory that had been targeted, speaking to families and gathering information of those who had been taken. Our legal team provided critical legal rights information to families who arrived frantic with questions. Then, we began paying
bonds, ensuring that those in detention like Graciela could be with their families while they fought their pending deportations in court.

When we heard about the Morton raids, we acted just as quickly. Officials had chosen the first day of school for many to launch the raid, meaning some kids returned to homes that would remain empty for months. Some saw their parents forcibly removed and sent to a detention center with no notion of when they might be reunited. To ensure that as many families stayed together as possible, we paid $318,000 in bonds to free 31 people who had been detained.
RAICES paid $9.6 million in bonds to secure the release of 884 people from detention in 2019.

Asylum seekers often arrive in this country without assets or access to income. Our government routinely sets their bonds at thousands of dollars, effectively preventing them from fighting their cases outside the confines of a detention center. In 2019, the median bond nationwide was $8,000 — an impossible cost for the vast majority of those detained. That impossibility is purposeful.

Outside of detention, asylum seekers have access to a range of legal aid, as well as wraparound social services, allowing them to proactively and comprehensively prepare their immigration cases.

As the price of the median immigrant bond has skyrocketed, so has our bond work. Some are as low as $1,500, while others are as high as $250,000 — an insurmountable obstacle for all but the wealthiest individuals.

Even within such overarching injustice lies jarring racial inequity. Data encompassing the period between June 2018 and June 2020 indicates that Haitian immigrants served by RAICES pay far higher bond rates than the average immigrant — $16,170 compared to $10,500, a 54% difference.

The result is predictable: Black immigrants are detained longer and are more likely to be deported.

I say to people who are still detained not to give up hope because there are good people like RAICES who are there for us.

GRACIELA
Client of RAICES
Asylum seekers often arrive in this country without assets or access to income. Our government routinely sets their bonds at thousands of dollars, effectively preventing them from fighting their cases outside the confines of a detention center.
Nelson Achiri Geh was imprisoned in the United States for over 800 days.

Seeking political asylum from Cameroon, Nelson had been involved in peaceful protests in his country for years, eventually attracting the attention of police and soldiers who stalked his house and monitored him online. In 2015, he was arrested and tortured, forced to tell authorities that he would stop protesting.

Nelson fled soon after. In 2017, he took a car to Nigeria and bought a plane ticket to Ecuador, where he started the 2,400 mile trek to the Mexican border by bus, boat, and foot. When he was arrested by border agents, he was thrown into a hielera for three days, the first stretch in what would become a years-long imprisonment in the United States.

What happened next seems to defy reason but is all too commonplace. Despite ample evidence of his past torture and likely re-imprisonment if he returned to Cameroon, a judge denied his request for asylum.

First, the judge thought Nelson was lying when he said that he had studied in Georgia. There was no record of him having previously lived in the United States. Nelson had indeed studied in Georgia — the country.

Then, the judge questioned the exact injuries that Nelson received from torture, since Nelson alternately said he was beaten on the backs of his legs and the soles of his feet. Nelson had not been inconsistent. He had injuries across his entire body — legs, eyelid, left arm, toe, and knee — and still suffers post-traumatic stress disorder from the ordeal.

The judge, his lawyer said, was cherry-picking facts.

Each of Nelson’s appeals were denied, meaning that he was forced to spend months moving between detention centers while arguing his asylum case. At one point, he was transferred to Etowah in Alabama, a center with no yard, no library, no large common areas, and no recreational facilities. During one six-month stretch, he said he did not feel the sun at all, since he was forced to exercise and walk in an interior courtyard.

In Etowah, Nelson was 2,000 miles away from his attorney and growing desperate. His bond had been set at $50,000. When we tried to pay it, immigration officials revoked it.

Nelson finally prevailed after a year and a half. He won a credible fear ruling that allowed for his release. His bond had been inexplicably raised to $75,000, an exorbitant price for his freedom. Still, we tried to pay it repeatedly in collaboration with others, but his bond had again been revoked. This went on for weeks until he was confirmed eligible for release at $50,000.

Nelson was freed in Summer 2019. Although he must wear an ankle monitor, he is beginning life anew in Hayward, California. As of August 2020, Nelson is supporting a food sustainability project through a grassroots organization in the Bay Area.
Nelson's journey spanned 11 countries and 12,016 miles.

CAMEROON IN CONTEXT

3,000+ dead in Cameroon crisis since 2016

10,000+ have fled to United States seeking asylum

$50,000 bond over 6 times the cost of median bond

679,000+ displaced
On November 20, 2019, we paid over $2 million in bonds to release more than 200 people from detention centers across 20 states in one of the largest coordinated efforts to pay bonds in history.

In what became known as Fall Freedom Day, more than 25,000 supporters across the country donated time, money, and air miles to ensure released immigrants could travel safely to their family and friends following release.

Coordinated, concentrated, and large-scale days like Fall Freedom Day achieve more than just freedom for those released. They raise awareness about the issues that face detained immigrants and draw media attention to the criminalization of asylum seekers.

The attention RAICES brought to immigration bonds through this action helped inform members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) who demanded in March 2020 that DHS open the online bond payment portal so family and community organizations can pay bonds for immigrants in detention without interruption in the midst of COVID-19.

Not only do immigrants face squalid conditions and increasing health risks within detention, they are also less likely to win their asylum case while detained. We have seen a 100% increase in asylum cases won when individuals have access to lawyers and can fight their case while free on bond—not a jail cell.
L.M.-M. v. CUCCINELLI

In 2019, we challenged those at the head of the immigration system directly. In a suit, we argued that Ken Cuccinelli’s appointment as acting director of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) was illegal. Rather than comply with its legal obligations to obtain Senate confirmation of high-ranking officials, the Trump administration did an end-run on federal law by creating new positions within USCIS, knowing that the Senate would never confirm Cuccinelli.

We sued, arguing that Cuccinelli’s appointment violated the Federal Vacancies Reform Act. The court agreed, finding that Cuccinelli should have never been given authority over USCIS and that any of the policies he enacted as acting director — including harsher screening standards at the border and punishment for immigrants — should be struck down.

The case was a significant victory for our clients suffering from Cuccinelli’s policies and for our co-counsel Democracy Forward, CLINIC, and Debevoise & Plimpton LLP.

While the broken immigration system can confound, strategic litigation can help mitigate permanent harm and stop the Trump administration from appointing “acting” officials to circumvent Senate confirmation.

We can — and will continue to — hold this and any administration accountable for such evasions.
Even within the physical boundaries of the United States, immigrants face walls and isolation while settling into a new country with a new culture and, often, a new language.

Instead of providing resources for support, our government actively erects barriers to immigrant success, making it harder for people seeking asylum to access work visas. Without a source of income, immigrants struggle to access food, housing, and healthcare for themselves and their families. Some people have loved ones in the United States who can help. Others do not.

The government also forces many immigrants to wear electric ankle bracelets, so immigration officials can monitor them after release from detention. This is a stigmatizing and dehumanizing experience.

At RAICES, we bridge some of this void through support services for families that resettle in our home state of Texas and referrals to service providers elsewhere in the country. Our team of social workers helps families find safe housing, access healthcare coverage, secure vaccinations, enroll children in school, and apply for work permits.

Our holistic approach seeks to establish long-term, empowering relationships so that immigrants not only survive but thrive in their new country.
PUTTING DOWN ROOTS
Imagine — after a long journey on foot, and after being jailed in cold cells for the crime of seeking safety — being dropped off at a bus station in an unfamiliar city, in a country where you do not speak the language, forced to navigate an archaic, often expensive, public transportation system in order to reach family that you may have met only once before in your life.

**THE BUS STATION**

Thousands of people face this reality every year in San Antonio, Texas, alone. At a downtown bus station, dozens of mothers and young children are dropped off daily after being released from detention centers throughout the state and expected to travel alone to family or sponsors across the country.

Many people are missing the shoelaces that were taken from them in detention. Others arrive using the thin mylar blankets that they received from immigration agents as hair ties or replacement shoe laces. Some children arrive barefoot because their shoes were taken.

We give people shoelaces. We explain the stack of tickets they’ve received and how a change in ticket numbers at a stop means they will have to change buses. We try to offer useful information and the first signs of respect that these individuals are shown in the United States. We take our responsibility seriously.

Since 2018, more than 9,000 families have filled out intake forms with us, likely representing a fraction of the total that we have helped find their way. Our Bus Station Project team speaks with everyone at the station on an individual basis, giving people backpacks filled with snacks and necessary supplies for their multi-day trip. We show people how to register their children for school and how to identify free and low-cost legal services in the cities where they will live. And we proactively provide information and resources for domestic violence survivors.

No one at the bus station has to justify to us why they have come to the United States. They have all suffered trauma during their journeys and at the hands of our government. We provide some aid and extend a welcoming hand.
We met a man that had been separated from his family at the border. He’s from Angola and his family had been released long ago and was in Austin. He could not stop smiling because he’d been in detention for more than a year and he was finally on his way to reunite with his family. Finding people’s children is the most rewarding thing that we do. When we’re able to track kids or kids that are 18 and have been treated like an adult that is so gratifying.

SPENCER BALDACCI
Community Volunteer Coordinator at RAICES
In 2019, RAICES resettled more refugees than we had before, receiving and placing 222 parents and children.

Resettling refugees is one of our country’s core responsibilities under international law. Today, those commitments are under threat. In 2019, the Trump administration capped refugee admittance at just 30,000 — down significantly from the 110,000 cap in 2016, the final year of the Obama administration. In 2020, the administration is on track to accept just 18,000 refugees — sixteen percent of our 2016 total.

Despite the administration’s relentless attacks, our refugee resettlement work more than tripled during 2019.

Those we support often arrive from countries including Iraq, Afghanistan, and Eritrea, having fled war, poverty, famine, genocide, and other violence. Many receive help with job placement, cash assistance, and aid with school enrollment, as they establish a new life in this country. In 2019, approximately eighty-five percent of the adults in our program received successful job placement within the first six months of arrival, helping to establish a secure foundation for future success.

Self-sustainability is crucial to successful matriculation in American society. Often our government either actively prevents people from success by denying the work permits necessary to generate income for their families, or passively through the gaping holes in our social safety net. Our Refugee Resettlement Program equips these individuals with the tools that they need to succeed on their own.

79.5 million + forcibly displaced globally

0.5% of world’s refugee population resettled globally

222 refugees resettled by RAICES
In September 2019, over 1,200 people from 40 cities across Texas gathered together in El Paso for an all-day music festival. The concert was not only a day of celebration. Held just steps from the Mexican-American border, it was a memorial and mass mobilization response to a white supremacist attack.

A month prior, a young white man gunned down dozens of people at a Walmart, killing 22 and injuring 24 others, motivated by a self-expressed, white nationalist fear of a “great replacement” of white people. He warned of a “Hispanic invasion of Texas.”

This brutal act of domestic terrorism happened in our backyard, and it devastated El Paso.

We looked to our grassroots partners for guidance and ultimately organized our first mass mobilization, the day-long concert El Paso Firme alongside the Border Network for Human Rights and the National Day Laborer Organizing Network. World class musicians like La Santa Cecilia from Los Angeles, Chilean-French hip-hop star Ana Tijoux, and Mexican-American singer-songwriter Cuco joined, and local and national media took notice.

We organized transportation for hundreds of people to show the solidarity between our immigrant communities across Texas. At one point, survivors of the shooting came on stage, urging attendees to embrace their Latinx culture and community and take up the fight against white supremacy. Through RAICES, they found a platform to share their harrowing lived experience and speak truth to power.

For us, it was important to put something together that could call our community into action. We called on people from across the state and the country to come together and say ¡Ya basta! It’s enough! We are here. We are not going to go anywhere. And we are going to beat white supremacy.

ERIKA ANDIOLA
Chief Advocacy Officer at RAICES
SECTION 03
PUTTING DOWN ROOTS
The people we defend are more than clients. They are our neighbors, our family, our friends — nuestra comunidad.

We received a call from a family who had been stopped by the police on their way to buy a television. The police taunted the distraught husband as his wife was dragged away. He called us, not knowing where she was taken or how to get her back. Across the country, police departments detain over 14,000 people each month at the request of immigration enforcement officials who target these people for deportation — unencumbered by warrants or due process. We were able to find his wife in DHS custody, and successfully negotiated her release within three days.

Since then, the family has become an active part of our convivios, and she has shared her story openly at public hearings, calling for an end to cooperation between police and immigration enforcement. She has become a powerful voice in our fight against the collective oppressions entrenched in our social fabric and perpetuated by premeditated coordination between law enforcement agencies.

Throughout Texas, our team of organizers host convivios — get-togethers — to build community for our current and past clients, process trauma with others who can relate, and organize resonant calls to action, including an end to cooperation between local police and federal immigration agents.
We invite folks from the immigrant community to come join us, eat some food together, get to know one another, and build community. We share resources and educational tools and information on how to protect yourself in this current climate: What are your rights? What resources are out there for you? What initiatives are we going to take as a community to demand change?

ADRIANA QUIROGA
Community Organizer at RAICES
SETTLING IN THE UNITED STATES

Every time someone successfully settles in the United States, we come closer to achieving our vision. The ultimate goal for many people who come to the United States is to find safety. Unfortunately, many asylum seekers are imprisoned for lengthy periods or deported without coming close to realizing that opportunity. That is why we never take for granted any instance in which our team at RAICES is able to help our clients to prevent deportation, gain asylum status, or become American citizens. We recognize the profound possibilities that exist when our services can help transform an entire family’s journey.

Josue Romero is an artist and RAICES client whose talent, hard work, and DACA status enabled him to complete college in San Antonio, Texas and win a scholarship to pursue a Masters in Fine Art in Chicago, Illinois. Originally from Honduras, Josue arrived in the United States as a child with his father. Both lived together from Josue’s youth through college, and his move would be the first time that they would live so far apart.

Like many DACA recipients — and millions more in this country — Josue does not worry solely about his own immigration status. Although DACA protects him, there is no similar process available for his or others’ parents. He must live with the understanding and fear that, on any given day, his father may not return home.

In a cruel turn of fate, Josue’s father was taken by ICE from outside their own home just days before he was supposed to leave for Chicago. After a brief delay, Josue began his studies knowing that RAICES would fight for his father’s release. His father was liberated from detention in time to welcome him back home from school for his winter holiday thanks to the coordinated efforts of RAICES legal and bond teams.
GEOGRAPHY OF DETENTION

This map reflects the expansive immigration landscape in Texas alone. The unnamed detention centers are a small glimpse at the larger network of 200 centers nationwide.
GLOSSARY

ASYLUM SEEKER / ASYLEE
Someone who flees from their home country due to persecution, such as targeting because of their race, political beliefs, or sexual orientation. Asylum seekers request protection from a host country, like the United States.

IMMIGRANT
Anyone who permanently relocates to a country in which they were not born.

MIGRANT
A broad term that applies to anyone who is moving from their home country, whether permanently, temporarily, as a refugee, or for any reason.

REFUGEE
Similarly to an asylum seeker, a refugee flees their home country due to persecution, but has requested protection from a host country, like the United States, while still overseas. If granted protection and given permission to enter, an individual is deemed a refugee.

UNDOCUMENTED INDIVIDUAL
Someone who is living in the United States but has not received any legal status, like asylum, permanent residency, or citizenship.

CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION (CBP)
The country’s border control agency and one of the largest law enforcement agencies in the world, with more than 60,000 employees in 2020. CBP is responsible for border patrol and detention of immigrants as soon as they cross into the country.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (DHS)
The federal department, started in 2003 after the 9/11 attacks, that has the wide-ranging mission of securing the country “from the many threats we face.” Among other responsibilities, DHS oversees immigration enforcement and includes CBP, ICE, and USCIS.

DEPORTATION
Forcible removal of someone from the country in which they are living.

IMMIGRANT DETENTION
The practice of summarily imprisoning immigrants in the United States while they either await a determination of their immigration status or are deported. There are over 200 immigrant detention centers in the country.

IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT (ICE)
The immigration enforcement agency responsible for deportations and detention across the country. The vast majority of detention centers are under ICE’s jurisdiction, although most immigrants are held in centers run by private companies.

UNITED STATES CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES (USCIS)
The agency responsible for processing immigration paperwork, including greencards, citizenship, and other status changes.
FINANCIAL SUMMARY

In 2018 and 2019, RAICES received unprecedented charitable support from hundreds of thousands of individuals and organizations, proving that the American public is demanding a new reality for immigration policy and the services that uplift those seeking safety and security in the United States. RAICES has led this call for migrant justice with a passionate vision for solutions on a grand scale.

In addition to providing the direct legal and social services, as well as community organizing and advocacy, detailed in this report throughout 2019, RAICES simultaneously built the infrastructure necessary to create transformational change. General and Administrative expenses increased in 2019 due to three primary factors: staffing for crucial compliance departments, including Finance, Human Resources, Operations, and IT; indirect costs that enable an expanded scope of work, reach, and impact; and strategic, long-term investments in technology and professional services to ensure sustained innovation and ingenuity.

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**FINANCIAL SUMMARY**

**2019**

**REVENUE**

- **CONTRIBUTION INCOME**: $31,548,007 (74.0%)
- **FUNDRAISING**: $2,445,123 (11.8%)
- **PROGRAMS**: $26,395,420 (80.8%)
- **IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS**: $123,358 (.3%)
- **FEE FOR SERVICE INCOME**: $818,761 (1.9%)
- **INTEREST AND OTHER INCOME**: $499,479 (1.2%)
- **FOUNDATION AND GRANT INCOME**: $9,827,110 (22.6%)

**EXPENSES**

- **GENERAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE**: $3,842,986 (7.5%)
- **FUNDRAISING**: $2,445,123 (80.8%)
- **PROGRAMS**: $26,395,420 (11.8%)
LEADERSHIP

JONATHAN D. RYAN, JD
Chief Executive Officer and President

ERIKA ANDIOLA
Chief Advocacy Officer

BRENDAN COLTHURST
Chief Technology Officer

LIZ DUNN
Chief Development Officer

SARA FAIRLEY
Chief Social Programs Officer

MICHELLE GARZA PAREJA, JD
Chief Legal Programs Officer

NATHAN JOHNSON
Chief Financial Officer

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TONY DAVILA
Treasurer

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JAYCI GIACCONI

DOLORES K. SCHROEDER, JD
FUND THE FIGHT

THIS IS A CRUCIAL TIME IN THE FIGHT FOR IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE RIGHTS.

WE MUST CREATE HUMANE, NON-ENFORCEMENT APPROACHES TO IMMIGRATION.

@RAICESTEXAS

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