

Lessons in Rapid Response

What Funders Can Learn from the Unaccompanied Children Humanitarian Situation



GRANTMAKERS
CONCERNED
WITH IMMIGRANTS
AND REFUGEES

MAY 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

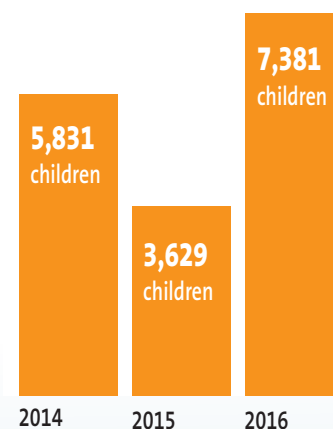
In 2014, as the humanitarian crisis for unaccompanied children unfolded, philanthropic institutions across California mounted a swift and coordinated statewide response. Funders joined forces to create regional and statewide rapid response funds, deepened their understanding of complex immigrant and refugee systems, engaged with public officials, and coordinated grantmaking strategies. They deployed approximately \$5 million and leveraged nearly \$3 million in state and county funding to provide mental health services, education, case management, and legal services to children in need. This brief provides an overview of the philanthropic response and documents best practices and lessons learned that can inform current and future efforts to respond to the plight of immigrants and refugees in California and across the nation.

BACKGROUND

Rise in Unaccompanied Children In the summer of 2014, an unprecedented number of unaccompanied children and families fleeing rampant violence in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras took the perilous journey through Mexico to seek refuge in the United States. Of the 68,541 unaccompanied children who were processed by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol in 2014, 5,831 were transferred from the border area to join family members in communities across California. Another 3,629 unaccompanied children were placed in California with family in 2015, followed by a record-high 7,381 children in 2016. While the infusion of philanthropic and public funding increased service capacity in 2014 and 2015, the spike in the number of children in 2016 strained the underresourced support systems in communities as they tried to respond to the multiple needs of unaccompanied children and their families including: trauma in home countries and/or on the journey to the United States; the emotional complexities of reuniting with parents and family members from whom many had long been separated; interrupted schooling and difficulty catching up; and limited English language proficiency. And for the vast majority of children in removal proceedings, limited or no access to legal advice or representation posed a significant problem.

Causes of Migration Widespread violence in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras has its roots in civil wars and intra-regional conflict that began in the 1970s and continued through the mid-1990s, leading to impunity and corruption and fueling the proliferation of gangs, organized crime, and drug-related violence. In some nations, law enforcement agencies, the judiciary, and child protection systems have been unable to protect their own citizens.¹ El Salvador and Guatemala rank first and second respectively in rates of homicide against children and adolescents globally, and all three Northern Triangle countries rank among the top-five countries with the highest rates of female homicides.² These profound levels of violence have triggered refugee flows into Mexico and the United States. Indeed, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has identified over half a million Central Americans in need of protection,³ with more than 353,000 arriving at the U.S. border in the last three years alone.⁴

U.S. Policy on Unaccompanied Children Under U.S. laws put in place through the Homeland Security Act of 2002 and the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008, unaccompanied children from the Northern Triangle had to be transferred from Border Patrol stations to temporary shelters operated by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR shelters). These laws were passed after decades of advocacy that demonstrated how unaccompanied children placed in prisons suffered human rights abuses and should be placed in children's shelters. At these ORR shelters, case workers assist the unaccompanied child in reuniting with a family member in the United States. In addition, the federal government will typically place the child in a removal proceeding before an immigration judge as a due process



Unaccompanied Children Resettled in California



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right. While the child may assert claims for protection as a defense to deportation, s/he is not entitled to court-appointed counsel but must have access to pro bono assistance to the greatest extent permissible under the law. This policy framework for unaccompanied children is undergoing significant change under the current administration and will likely operate very differently for the foreseeable future.

Philanthropic Response Philanthropic institutions in California have a longstanding commitment to immigrants and refugees, as well as a history of responding to disasters and crises. As the plight of unaccompanied children became widely known in 2014, foundations across the state stepped up to respond. With expertise and support from Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrant Refugees (GCIR), they increased understanding about issues facing unaccompanied children, engaged colleagues in philanthropy and government, and developed a coordinated response. The California Endowment (TCE) catalyzed a statewide collaborative fund; the California Community Foundation created a pooled fund focusing on Los Angeles County; and funders across the state from the San Francisco Bay Area to San Diego and all along the Central Valley made grants to support unaccompanied children, their families, and the communities in which they live.

At the state level, the “We Are With The Children/Estamos Con Los Niños” campaign, launched by TCE with \$500,000, brought together funders and new allies to raise nearly \$1.6 million that provided critical assistance to unaccompanied children in California and other key regions with high needs. Other major funders included The James Irvine Foundation (\$300,000), the Benioff Family Foundation (\$500,000), Mi Pueblo market chain (over \$100,000), and the Marguerite Casey Foundation (\$50,000). The campaign partnered with Univision and Save the Children to mount a national campaign, which raised more than \$110,000 from the Univision viewership. GCIR mapped out the needs and gaps for unaccompanied children, and Hispanics in Philanthropy (HIP) supported the grantmaking and reporting processes. HIP also launched a separate fundraising effort through its crowdfunding platform HIPGIVE called “Protégé los Niños/Protect the Children” which raised \$115,000 for 14 organizations.

At the regional level, funders in the Greater San Francisco Bay Area shared information on regular calls, identified funding gaps, funded the field legal services collaborative, and coordinated grants totaling at least \$1 million. In Southern California, the California Community Foundation (CCF) launched a complementary effort called the “Our Children Relief Fund,” with \$1.5 million from foundations and individual donors to support services in Los Angeles County. Working in coordination with GCIR, CCF mapped existing services; made grants for coordination, legal and social services, and case management; and convened community-based organizations and representatives the Office of the Mayor of Los Angeles to evaluate and understand the impact of the “Our Children Relief Fund.”

These coordinated investments across California supported the efforts of approximately 50 non-profit providers serving thousands of unaccompanied children and their families in California and beyond. The grants—together with state, local, and federal funding they leveraged and complemented—made a profound and immediate impact on children’s lives.

Philanthropic Commitments in California

Statewide:

We Are With The Children/ Estamos Con Los Niños
\$1.6 million

Protégé los Niños/ Protect the Children
\$115,000

Funding in Greater San Francisco Bay Area
\$1 million

Our Children Relief Fund
\$1.5 million



BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Best Practices

Gain an in-depth understanding of the issues. Some experienced funders responding to the UAC crisis reached out directly to advocates and providers to understand community needs and identify service gaps. Given the complexity of immigration policies and systems, funders newer to UAC issues commissioned GCIR to conduct a broader assessment of needs and capacity; develop a holistic, coordinated grantmaking strategy; and conduct due diligence. Funders also supported GCIR to provide individualized technical assistance and consultation; organize meetings to provide updates and coordinate funding; and convene strategy meetings between and amongst funders and stakeholders in the field.

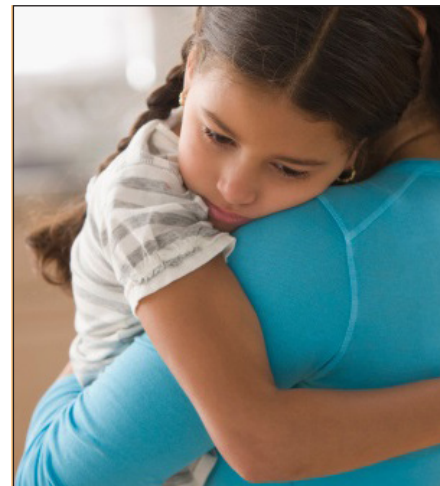
Support systems-based approaches. In the Bay Area, a unique model of public-private collaboration among several funders facilitated the creation of an Unaccompanied Minor Support Service Specialist at the Oakland Unified School District to identify and support newly arriving unaccompanied children. In addition to providing academic support, the Specialist worked closely with providers of legal, health, mental health, and social services to help the children meet a wide range of needs, succeed in school, and facilitate their integration at home and in the community. This model was also supported in the San Francisco and Hayward Unified School Districts. These three school-based programs have been institutionalized and allocated internal funding to support and build upon this innovative work. In Los Angeles, funders sought to support infrastructure to coordinate wrap-around services for unaccompanied children that was inclusive of legal, health, mental health, education, and integration support.

Pool resources to increase impact and leverage. Given the urgent and complex nature of the humanitarian situation, contributing to pooled funds facilitated a swift and coordinated response based on a shared understanding of community needs and gaps. It also reduced the burden on grantees who only had to submit proposals and reports to a single entity. And it allowed funders to track issues and trends in the field, as well as understand the collective impact of their investments. Beyond this specific project, the relationships funders built with one another laid the groundwork for future coordination and collaboration.

Engage with public-sector partners. Reaching out to and working with local, county, and state agencies facilitated the development of complementary efforts, resulting in more support for unaccompanied children and their families. While recognizing that these efforts can be political and challenging, funders worked to make the case for this vulnerable population. Funders shared their assessment of needs, gaps, and capacity and their grant commitments with the California Department of Public and Social Services (DPSS). This information deepened DPSS' understanding of community needs and helped the state identify underresourced geographic regions. In San Francisco and Alameda, funders and community-based organizations engaged with partners at the city and county levels to advance holistic models for the care and support for unaccompanied children. In addition to supporting legal services, the State of California facilitated access to health insurance for undocumented children, including unaccompanied children, and the County of Los Angeles helped undocumented children within its jurisdiction access health insurance.

Lessons Learned

Have in place a “backbone” organization for funders and and the field for the life of the project. Doing so facilitates efficient coordination, flow of information, identification of trends and issues, as well as monitoring, documentation, and evaluation. At the funder level, GCIR served in this backbone role and undertook mapping and needs assessment, convened regular informational and strategy discussions, conducted due diligence, and put in place a streamlined grantmaking and reporting



process. GCIR played this role through the completion of grantmaking; in hindsight, having GCIR continue a high level of coordination and support through the life of the project would have strengthened monitoring, tracking, and evaluation efforts. At the field level, no organization was identified or supported to provide the backbone function. Consequently, the field lacked infrastructural support for ongoing information sharing, identifying and addressing emerging trends and issues, and organizing collective responses. A backbone organization could have filled additional roles, such as moving forward collective state and local policy and advocacy objectives, which was a recognized gap for the unaccompanied children’s legal services and health community. Another possible role could have been a collective analysis of pro bono engagement to evaluate pro bono capacity, systems for sharing pro bono resources, support services for engaging more pro bono attorneys effectively, and understanding organizational capacity to oversee pro bono commitments to difficult and long-term cases.

Remain as flexible as possible. Flexibility allows funders to better navigate steep learning curves and address unanticipated challenges for children and their families. While many funders initially viewed the UAC crisis as a one-time, emergency funding need, the crisis warranted—and continues to warrant—a longer-term response given the time required to complete immigration cases, up to two or more years, and to recover from trauma. Through coordination, combined with flexibility among some funders, two-year grants were possible in some regions. In light of the dynamic situation facing unaccompanied children, flexible or general-support grants, rather than project-specific ones, would have been more helpful to the field.

Develop and implement a messaging and communications plan at the outset. In partnership with Univision, the “We Are With The Children/Estamos Con Los Niños” campaign raised awareness about the plight of unaccompanied children and sought to raise funds from Univision’s Spanish-speaking viewership. Due to concerns about child consent and confidentiality, Univision was limited in its use of personal narratives. GCIR worked with legal services providers to create a video campaign highlighting the impact of having legal representation. The campaign featured children telling their own stories and was later updated to indicate the outcomes of their court cases. Funders used the video as an additional tool to educate stakeholders within their foundations, and GCIR used it for ongoing funder education efforts.

CONCLUSION

California funders’ coordinated efforts to support unaccompanied children yielded best practices, lessons, and insights that can inform efforts to address multiple crises facing immigrants and refugees in the current policy environment. Particularly significant is the understanding that what initially manifests as short-term issues often have long-term implications. To be effective, funding strategies must maintain flexibility; recognize the complex and dynamic nature of immigration; and involve and coordinate stakeholders from multiple sectors. Pooling resources and coordinating grantmaking reaps many benefits—from facilitating rapid response to reducing burden for grantees and helping funders understand their impact more fully. Similarly, investing in communications and supporting backbone organizations for funders and the field can add considerable value and extend the impact of the grants. Moreover, the relationships that funders built with one another in this project have reaped broader benefits—they have laid the groundwork for ongoing coordination and collaboration on a wide range of issues that warrant broad-based philanthropic response.

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1 “Violence and Insecurity in the Northern Triangle of Central America: Dangerous Choices for Women and Girls,” A Policy Brief in the 2016-17 U.S. Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace and Security Policy Brief Series by Alexandra Arriaga and Joan Timoney.
 2 Ibid.
 3 UNHCR Appeal, <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/13944>
 4 Office of Refugee Resettlement, Sponsors by State, accessed on 12/12/2016 at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/programs/ucs/state-by-state-uc-placed-sponsors>; <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children/fy-2016>.