

ABA Gives \$10,000 Grant to Foundation Money to Support Detained Immigrant and Refugee Children's Initiative in Arizona

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PHOENIX, Ariz. (September 19, 2002) - Cynthia Zwick, executive director of the Arizona Foundation for Legal Services & Education is pleased to announce that the American Bar Association's Commission on Immigration Policy, Practice and Pro Bono has given a \$10,000 grant to the Arizona Foundation for Legal Services & Education. The grant will be used to fund the Detained Immigrant and Refugee Children's Initiative, a program established by the Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project.

The Detained Immigrant and Refugee Children's Initiative was founded in 2001 to provide assistance and legal representation to children detained by the Immigration and Naturalization Services in Arizona. The program was also designed to help facilitate family reunification and galvanize national advocacy efforts to meet detained children's legal needs.

"Currently, over 400 children a year are detained in Arizona. The need for advocacy for these children is immense," said Andrea Black, executive director of the Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project. "These children have no voice in the system, and no official agency is looking out for their best interests. Many are alone and even those who come with parents are separated from their parents in the detention center. Imagine the isolation and confusion these children face, compounded by their fear and uncertainty for the future. Our goal is to ensure that their legal and personal rights are respected. The ABA grant is a huge help to us in meeting this goal."

Over 80 unaccompanied minors who are detained by the INS in Arizona every month come from countries all over the world – China, Guatemala, El Salvador, Sri Lanka, India, Ethiopia, Ukraine, and Ecuador, to name a few. The majority of the children (90-95%) have come to the United States alone to escape poverty, starvation, child abuse, persecution, civil war or in search of their parents. Most children are adolescents, although some are as young as seven years old.

The Children's Initiative demonstrates an innovative solution to the growing problem of social and economic injustice for detained immigrant children who are not entitled to government-funded legal assistance. The Initiative serves hundreds of children through rights presentations, individual interviews, legal advice, direct legal representation, and coordinated referrals to pro bono attorneys. It also serves as a realistic, sustainable model for groups working nationally with over 4,000 children detained annually.

The Arizona Foundation for Legal Services & Education was created over twenty years ago to support legal aid for the indigent throughout the state and to support democracy education in primary and secondary schools. In 2002, the Foundation will disburse over \$2 million in funding to support 25 legal aid agencies throughout the state. In addition, the Foundation funds comprehensive K-12 education programs, teaches youth about conflict resolution, peace making, public policy making, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. In 2002, the Foundation will reach 40,000 Arizona school children with this curriculum. In addition, the Foundation administers an annual \$300,000 Congressional grant that supports a democracy education program in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

For more information about the Arizona Foundation for Legal Services & Education please contact

Arizona Foundation for Legal Services & Education

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