
PROGRAM POLICY



CHILDREN FOUNDATION

June 8, 2019

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I. Introduction

The best environment for girls and boys to grow up and develop is their own families. This is established by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which mentions in its preamble “... *that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children... that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.*” (OHCHR, 1990).

These fundamental humanitarian premises are established in our genesis as the Nora Sandigo Children Foundation (NSCF), adding the specialized approach to defending these rights in the context of complex immigration regulations that often constitute risks to the family unit.

Since 1989, we have been raising our voice for those who do not have one, or those whose voices have been silenced by the fear of immigration “irregularity”. Based on networks consisting of hundreds of volunteers and other community-based organizations, we have accumulated thirty years of invaluable insight and expertise on the family, political and cultural scopes of immigration to the United States.

The time, experiences and constantly changing political and legal framework of immigration furthered our dynamic approach and ways of helping migrant families as an organization. Thus, for many years, the program structure was mainly defined around the political scope of the situation, investing our resources mainly in advocacy, legal representation and political incidence in favor of the legalization of Latin American migrants in general.

Starting in 2009, our involvement as NSCF includes direct humanitarian aid to migrant families. Within this target group, our priority is the care and protection of more than 1,500 children currently participating in our program, whose parents are at risk of deportation. Our interventions aim to promote the full development of children either within their biological family or under the legal guardianship of our foundation, so that they become self-sufficient and well-integrated members of society.

II. Background of the problem

As in the rest of the world, immigration has been expanding in volume, dynamism and complexity over the past decades in Latin America and the Caribbean and is closely linked to the labor world and the search for decent employment, income, and job opportunities. Today, few countries in the region are not involved in migratory movements, whether as countries of origin, transit or destination. (Organización Internacional del Trabajo, 2016, pág. 14)

The United States is the main destination for migrants from the region and other parts of the world. The immigrant population in that country was 45 million people in 2015, which is approximately 13.9 percent of the country's population. (Organización Internacional del Trabajo, 2016, pág. 58). According to the most recent official statistics, updated up to the end of 2017, this percentage has slightly increased by 1.4 percentage points. In other words, until that time, there was an estimated immigrant population of 49.8 million people residing in the United States, representing 15.3% of the population. (Migration Data Portal, 2019).

Since 2008, a large number of immigration laws have been passed across the United States. The law enacted on Arizona on April 23, 2010, is the toughest law against illegal immigration in U.S. territory. This law is aimed at identifying, prosecuting and deporting illegal immigrants. (Organización Internacional del Trabajo, 2016, pág. 58). These laws do not respect the right of children to grow up and live with their own biological family, resulting in millions of children of immigrants born in the United States — and thus American citizens — being at risk of being separated from their parents and referred to Foster Care or adoption, which eventually also risks the loss of their cultural and family identity.

Moreover, these laws do not consider the humanitarian crisis that drives many of these families to leave their own countries and cultures to seek an uncertain future away from home. A crisis that has triggered migratory movements and asylum seeking in the last decade, as presented by Dr. **Margarita Rodríguez (2014)** below.

Asylum applications from Central American migrants grew at an accelerated rate between 2008 and 2013. **According to UNHCR data, the number of asylum applications from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala in Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Belize increased by 712% between 2008 and 2013.**¹ It has been extensively documented in hearings and the media that well-founded fears related to the physical or general integrity of migrants have pushed them out of Central America across borders. The current situation of escalating Central American immigration cannot be considered in isolation from the expansion of violence in many areas of the region, a situation that is added to other political, economic, and social problems. In the report entitled *Countering Criminal Violence in Central America*, Michael Shifter, President of the Inter-American Dialogue, points out the dramatic situation faced by Central American countries, particularly Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador regarding the increasing number of violent crimes:

Violent crimes in Central America — particularly in the “Northern Triangle” encompassing Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador — are reaching alarming levels. Homicide rates in the region are among the highest in the world. To some extent, Central America’s predicament is caused by geographical reasons — as it is located between some of the largest drug producers in South America, and the world’s largest illegal drug user, the United States. The region (Central America) is flooded with weapons and hitmen, and high poverty rates guarantee a significant number of recruits willing to join organized crime syndicates. (Rodríguez, 2014)

The problem becomes more complex when families, once settled in the United States, begin to expand and their children who were born in the country immediately obtain all the rights and guarantees awarded to American citizens, but their parents, who entered the country illegally, do not have them. It turns out to be even more complex because the options for regularization

¹ More updated figures show that asylum applications in the same countries increased by 675% between 2014 and 2017, going from 1,094 in 2014 up to 8,480 in 2017 (Department of Homeland Security, 2019).

of family-based immigration have been in a process of elimination within the changing legal framework of immigration.

Before 1996, when Congress reformed immigration priorities, the parents of children born in the United States were entitled to permanent residence if they were not legal immigrants in the United States, provided that those parents had demonstrated good moral character and lived in the country for at least seven years. However, Congress was concerned that politics had created its own form of amnesty, encouraging immigrants to come and have children in order to become legal immigrants. "Anchor babies," as they were called, required Congress to make a change: immigrant offenders would no longer be guaranteed protection for having children born in the United States. (The Washington Post, 2014)

III. Answer to the problem: historical background of the Nora Sandigo Children Foundation.

The current situation of the Nora Sandigo Children Foundation results from the previous existence of two organizations: **Fraternidad Nicaragüense** and American Fraternity. The background and historical development of the organization is explained below.

American Fraternity is a civic organization and an immigrant organization, especially considering it was founded by immigrants. Since its foundation in 1989 (as *Fraternidad Nicaragüense*), the organization has focused on assisting immigrant families in the United States. It has successfully furthered specific goals that many groups of advocates and policymakers can relate to, either through their own personal experiences as immigrants, or by their experience representing immigrants as lawyers or community advocates. The autonomy of American Fraternity as a civic organization has led them to face the federal government in court when government actions were perceived as abusive, discriminatory or illegal for any reason. For many immigrant families and minors, civic organizations such as American Fraternity are their only hope in their daily struggle against misguided policies implemented by two or more governments.

American Fraternity is an example of the role of non-governmental organizations in assisting unaccompanied children. Even though it is not a nationwide organization, it is involved in debates

and advocacy at various levels: regional, state and national. However, at a general level, it is a community-based organization in Miami, with a strong presence in Washington.

American Fraternity was originally created (by Nora Sandigo) as *Fraternidad Nicaragüense* in 1989 aimed at assisting Nicaraguan refugees who were escaping from violence. Over the years, both Sandigo and the organization progressed side by side in the mission of aiding immigrants. *Fraternidad Nicaragüense* expanded its role and became more inclusive and diversified by assisting immigrants from different backgrounds, provided there was a real need for shelter, food, access to health care, and other services, as well as family reunification and unity, and the critical urgency to avoid deportation.

The scars and memories of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States and the political implications of migration issues, combined with other factors, including the deep economic recession that began in 2007, have led to a strong wave of anti-immigrant activism and lobbies in favor of an increased border control. In an interview with Nora Sandigo in 2009, she explained that, in this new context, American Fraternity has focused on promoting the immigration reform, stopping deportations, and aiding families whose members are at imminent risk of deportation, with an emphasis on children whose close relatives have been deported, are held in detention centers, or may be deported at any time.

The transition from *Fraternidad Nicaragüense* to American Fraternity was made possible due to the in-depth knowledge of its leader and collaborators about the immigrant community and community issues in general. They were able to work in networks and to connect individuals and institutions with resources for families and people in need, as well as building relationships with politicians advocating similar issues, such as delaying deportations.

Since its inception, the organization has relied on volunteers committed to civic advocacy, networking and building alliances with other organizations to achieve their common goals.

Some of the goals and achievements of the organization include:

1989-1997: Nora Sandigo and members of her organization lobby on legislation at the state level, the United States Congress and the White House to manage to pass a relief law for Central America. The efforts of *Fraternidad Nicaragüense*, along with the efforts of other social actors

such as advocates and representatives in Congress, who worked from Miami and other areas of the United States, were an essential part of the forces that led to the enactment of NACARA².

1996-1997: American Fraternity and other community-based organizations in Miami advocate changes to immigration law, focusing on protecting thousands of Nicaraguans and other Central Americans facing deportation. The *Nora Sandigo v. William Clinton* case is prepared and filed in court. The suit was eventually withdrawn because NACARA was passed in 1997.

1997-1998: American Fraternity engages in actively seeking the grant of the Temporary Protection Status (TPS) in favor of Hondurans and Nicaraguans. The joint efforts of various influential actors and groups, including government representatives, had an impact, and the TPS was eventually granted.

2000-to date: Support for the Dream Act initiative, as well as the engagement in advocacy lobbies promoting the signing of free trade agreements with Central America, Colombia, and Peru.

2009-to date: The systematic engagement of American Fraternity in various aspects of community advocacy, along with a focus on families at risk of deportation. The organization engages in direct aid to families, protecting children by becoming the legal guardian of more than 1,500 boys and girls in different states of the U.S. whose families have been deported or are subject to deportation. (Rodríguez, 2014)

IV. Target group and areas of intervention

The main beneficiaries are mainly children born in America whose parents have been deported or are subject to deportation, immigrant children (accompanied and unaccompanied), as well as impoverished immigrant families.

The main areas of intervention are:

Humanitarian services: aimed at providing immediate relief for food, basic needs, school supplies, transportation and housing when needed.

² Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central America Relief Act.

Legal services: aimed at preventing the breakdown of family ties for immigration reasons, advocating — through specific legal actions — the right of immigrant children and those born in the United States with immigrant parents to live with their families.

Advocacy/incidence: aimed at the constant work of educating the community and key political actors about the importance of maintaining family ties over partisan interests.

Development of skills: to help families integrate and adapt to the society, culture and processes of the United States. In addition to supporting volunteering networks in training processes for the continuous improvement of the services provided.

V. Organizational principles

Mission:

We help children with immigrant parents grow up in a family environment, support them in their humanitarian needs, and participate in advocacy and incidence actions in favor of their migration regularization.

Vision:

For children to grow up and develop in their own family environment without fear of being separated due to immigration issues.

Values

- Our **Faith in God** strengthens us to serve
- We practice **Integrity** in everything we do
- We are **supportive** towards families in need.
- We inspire confidence in all the people who come to us
- We feel **gratitude** for what we have received

VI. Expected results: strategic actions for each area of intervention.

Humanitarian services: Through the organization, and with the close collaboration of volunteering networks, funds (individual/corporate donations) are managed to help children and families with basic housing, clothing, food, education (educational materials), and transportation needs. Their physical and emotional needs are also supported (meetings/celebrations every two weeks on the foundation's house are part of the emotional recovery activities.)

Environmental education is also key in this area, which is promoted directly with families in the various joint activities that are performed.

Legal services: Legal guardianship of children born in the United States with parents at risk of deportation. The aim is to preserve or extend the family ties as much as possible while working on more stable solutions through advocacy or incidence actions.

Advocacy/incidence: The aim of advocacy/incidence is to safeguard the rights of children to grow up with their families (biological parents or extended family).

This area of intervention is developed through various actions such as complaints to governmental administrations to delay deportation processes, social advocacy and lobbying with key political actors.

Development of skills: focuses on identifying and enhancing areas to develop in terms of skills, learning processes and child care. Its aim is to improve the quality of the services mentioned above, and to promote the self-sustainability mindset in volunteers and families respectively.

VII. Annex

Strategic actions by areas of intervention

Area of intervention	Activities	Date	Person in charge	Participants	Product
Humanitarian services	Management of individual and corporate donations of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Food• School supplies• Clothing				Basic needs of migrant families satisfied
	Ensure transportation of families.				
	Ensure accommodation and temporary housing for families				
	Distribution of donations of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Food• School supplies• Clothing				

	Management of medical appointments for children and their families.				
	Recreation and emotional recovery.				
Legal services	Monitoring and protecting children under the legal guardianship of the organization.				Children grow up with their relatives without the risk of deportation.
	Follow-up to family reunification and child protection processes.				
Advocacy/incidence	Follow-up to lawsuits to delay deportation proceedings for families with children born in the United States.				An immigration reform that places the right to live as a family over immigration processes is sought after.
	Organizing a march promoting the immigration reform in favor of maintaining the family ties over immigration processes.				
	Management of lobbying meetings with key political actors in favor of the right to live as a family over immigration processes.				
Development of skills	Management of training for families to develop technical skills (computing, plumbing,				Families with greater ability to integrate productively

	electricity, beauty care, English, etc.)				into the American society and volunteers with greater ability to provide quality care to families.
	Management of training for families on civil behavior and citizenship.				
	Management of training for families on child care and protection.				
	Management of training for volunteers to strengthen family care and child protection skills.				

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