



HUMAN RIGHTS INITIATIVE

TWO THOUSAND FIFTEEN ANNUAL REPORT

“WHERE LIBERTY DWELLS, **THERE IS MY COUNTRY.**

— Benjamin Franklin

Dear friends,

A year ago President Obama called the mass exodus of children fleeing widespread violence in Central American countries an “imminent humanitarian crisis.” The flow of immigrant children from these countries was not new, but the rise in number was overwhelming.

The immigration courts responded to the crisis with “rocket-dockets,” setting court dates for immigrant children within weeks of their arrival. This was designed to process and deport them as quickly as possible. Who would represent these children in front of the immigration judges? How would children be able to articulate their case for relief? Who was protecting their rights?

Human Rights Initiative’s volunteers, staff and donors answered the call with compassion and love.

I begin my term as board chair of the Human Rights Initiative just one year after the “surge.” Since then, HRI has raised money for our Immigrant Children’s Project. Our staff trained over 850 volunteer attorneys. With their help, we represented nearly 500 individuals, 150 of them children. Throughout it all, we continued to have victories for clients seeking asylum because of religious, racial, ethnic, social, and political persecution, as well as victims of domestic violence and violent crime. As our clients’ legal cases moved forward, we secured much needed medical and psychological services. We’ve had a huge year and we could not have done it without you.

In October, we celebrated our 15th year since our founding. I am most proud of the dignity our volunteer attorneys offer to our clients - a reflection of our board and staff culture of respect and gratitude. Under the capable leadership of our executive director, Bill Holston, we will rise to the significant challenges facing our clients. In the next year, we will also work with imagination and ingenuity as we set the stage for the future of HRI.

This annual report is a good reminder that HRI does incredible work. Your donations of resources and energy bring us closer towards realizing a community where the rights of every human are valued. Thank you your dedication and support. Sincerely,


Asher Knight
Board Chair, HRI

Since its founding, the United States of America has been synonymous with three basic tenets: freedom, justice, and opportunity.

Human Rights Initiative of North Texas serves clients every day with those same three values. HRI offers free legal representation to those victims who are most vulnerable and often completely invisible to the current justice system. We have come to recognize the work we do as forging a path to safety, liberty, and opportunity for immigrant victims of violence. All of HRI’s clients are immigrant survivors of human rights abuses either internationally or domestically. Their stories vary and their circumstances differ, but in the end each is faced with a decision to flee the violent situation or stay and face almost certain death. If they choose to flee, often they leave with little to nothing to help them start a new life and are faced with financial, cultural, lingual, transportation, and legal barriers. Through professional legal services, HRI is able to help these individuals overcome at least one of these hurdles: immigration status. HRI assists our clients in gaining access to protections made available through the U.S. Immigration System. Read on to learn more about these protections and all of our programs including social services provided to our clients.

OUR MISSION

Human Rights Initiative of North Texas provides legal and support services to refugees and immigrants who have suffered human rights abuses; advocates for justice; and promotes international human rights. Our work with this immigrant population fills a crucial gap in services and offers survivors a way out of their traumatic and violent pasts.

OUR VISION

To see a world in which abuse, torture, assault, or other forms of violence are no longer used as tools to overpower and control any human being.

OUR MODEL

Human Rights Initiative is proud of our innovative and efficient model to provide the maximum amount of services with the lowest cost to donors. Our legal services are always 100% free to the client. We are able to do this through a large, award-winning network of volunteer professionals who donate their time to help our cause. In turn, HRI offers free training and support to the professionals as they work on each legal case.

EL SALVADOR



After his mom's death, Isiah's dad became abusive and stopped providing for Isiah or his siblings. Trying to escape his father's beatings with sticks, belts, and fists, Isiah came to the United States to live with his aunt. HRI helped Isiah get Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), allowing him to remain with his aunt and apply for permanent residency. He plans to use the permit to earn enough money to help support his siblings still in El Salvador.

HONDURAS



When Ana's mother mentioned leaving her husband, he tried to shoot her mother and attacked two of her mother's frnds, killing one. Ana and her mother fled, only to be kidnapped by the father and forced to return. Ana's father went to jail but sent people to attack Ana and her mother so they came to the US, where HRI helped Ana get SIJS.

MEXICO



After Paula's mother left for work one morning, she was sexually assaulted by her father before he took her to school. Paula made an outcry at school and her mother helped with the police investigation. HRI was able to help Paula and her mother receive and benefit from a U-Visa, allowing them to live and work legally in the United States.

MALI



Seydou was pursuing a master's degree in the U.S. in math when he met his wife. When he wasn't sure about the marriage, she threatened him and began to physically abuse him while also neglecting their child. HRI helped Seydou get relief by filing a Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) petition, allowing him to live and work legally in the United States.

OUR CLIENTS COME TO US

SRI LANKA



HRI represented Roshan, a Sri Lankan of Tamil descent after he was arrested and brutally tortured for more than a year by the Sri Lankan government, who falsely claimed his association with a terrorist group. His torturers threatened his life and threatened to try to kill all Sri Lankans of Tamil descent. HRI helped Roshan win his Asylum appeal with the Board of Immigration Appeals.

THAILAND



Eve came to the United States to study and fell in love with another student. She got married and had a child, but he soon became aggressive, drank heavily, and harmed both Eve and her child. She and the child moved out, and HRI was able to help her get relief through a VAWA petition, which allows her to raise her child safely and legally remain in the country.

SUDAN



HRI represented Joyce and her four children in their Asylum case. Joyce was brutally subjected to Female Genital Mutilation at a young age, as was custom in her tribe, and still suffers from medical complications related to the procedure. Her worst nightmare was to have the same happen to her daughters, so she resisted her family's attempts to do so. When the family took a trip to the United States, she informed her husband she had no intention of letting them return to Sudan to undergo this procedure. He left angrily, returning to Sudan without his family. HRI helped Joyce and her children win their asylum case, allowing them to stay and live safely in the United States.

FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD

DELAYS IN THE ASYLUM SYSTEM

Our Asylum clients are struggling with widespread government delays. Currently, most asylum-seekers who apply to the Houston Asylum Office experience a delay of over a year for an interview and decision (as opposed to 4-8 weeks in the past). In Immigration Court, our asylum clients regularly must wait 12-18 months for a hearing and often have hearings cancelled or rescheduled. Even appeals typically take 18-24 months. These delays have a huge impact on our clients, who are already suffering from the trauma of their persecution, as they worry about when and how their cases will be resolved and agonize about family members still in danger in their home countries. They often cannot work through some or all of the delay, preventing them from supporting themselves while their cases are in limbo.

These problems are partly due to the increase of unaccompanied children coming to the United States over the past few years. Officers from the Houston Asylum Office have been reassigned to conduct credible fear interviews with children and families crossing the border, leaving a shortage of officers to interview other asylum-seekers. The backlogs extend to Immigration Court, which has prioritized the claims of recent border crossers. Because of this, many of HRI's Asylum clients have had their hearings postponed so that these "higher priority" cases can be heard.

Also at the heart of the problem is a lack of government resources directed to these cases. Funding to immigration courts has not kept pace with money spent on border patrol and enforcement, and there is a shortage of immigration judges and support staff. Both Immigration Court and the Asylum Office are increasing hiring, but this has yet to make an impact on the delays.

Christine Cooney Mansour
HRI Legal Director



“ I will never forget what you have done for me; thank you for saving me and my kids, thank you for everything.
People like you make me never lose hope.”



Since 2000, HRI has helped over 200 asylum seekers find safety and opportunity in the United States. Asylum-seekers, like refugees, are unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a social group. Unlike refugees, asylum-seekers come to United States without refugee status and must then fight for their right to government protection. Our clients possess immeasurable strength and resilience.

Our work this year:

100%

of HRI's asylum clients whose cases were decided in FY2015 were able to remain in the United States with legal immigration status. When cases are denied, HRI will represent the client on appeal.

FY2015
Casework

67

Primary Asylum Cases

51

Supporting Relief Cases



The average processing time for legal relief is 392 days in Dallas Immigration Court*

HRI won

3

Asylum Appeals to the Board of Immigration Appeals

WOMEN AND CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

The Women & Children's Program exists to help survivors of violence and abuse who qualify for immigration relief. In this program, we help clients access four major forms of relief: Violence Against Women Act Self-Petition, U-Visas, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and DACA. In addition to these, HRI attorneys do their best to help clients access other forms of relief that will help them stay safe and stable.

Immigrant survivors of domestic abuse, sexual assault, abuse or abandonment by a parent, or other violent crime may have the opportunity to apply for immigration relief. The following are examples of the various forms of relief available to them.

THE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT (VAWA) protects victims of domestic abuse who are married to a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident.

THE U-VISA offers immigration relief for victims of qualifying crimes who cooperate with the investigation and/or prosecution of the crime. Many of the clients we see are victims of sexual assault, rape, domestic violence, and molestation.

SPECIAL IMMIGRANT JUVENILE STATUS (SIJS) allows a child who has been abused, abandoned, or neglected by one or both parents to stay in the United States and obtain legal permanent residency.

DEFERRED ACTION FOR CHILDHOOD ARRIVALS (DACA) was announced on June 15, 2012 for certain minors who came to the U.S. as children and meet several guidelines about education and continuous presence as well as good moral character. HRI applies for DACA for clients who have been victims of violence but do not qualify for other relief.

UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

In addition to our work representing immigrant children, HRI has also been working with Catholic Charities Ft. Worth to serve unaccompanied immigrant minors housed in their shelter. HRI attorneys and staff provided children in the shelter with legal screenings and information on understanding their rights in court. These services help to ensure that children are connected to attorneys wherever they are eventually reunited with family. HRI represents children from this shelter who are reunified in Dallas County in their immigration cases.

During FY2015 the Women and Children's Program had

100%

SIJS GRANT RATE • U-VISA GRANT RATE • DACA GRANT RATE



“I cannot find the words to give enough thanks to Human Rights Initiative for all the support that you gave me... My daughter and I area extremely thankful for you all. Without your support, we would not have this success. **I believe and I continue believing that there are laws to protect us and that we abused women are not alone.**”

SOCIAL SERVICES PROGRAM

Our clients often have a difficult time accessing community services on their own due to language, transportation, and cultural barriers. In addition, many times service providers are unfamiliar with the immigration status or protections our clients hold and sometimes deny services due to this misunderstanding. The Social Services Director provides culturally sensitive and comprehensive case management with referrals, advocacy, and access to medical, dental, psychological, housing, food, and clothing services. The Social Services Director collaborates with more than 140 nonprofits to secure services for our clients who rarely qualify for other social assistance.

SUPPORT PROGRAMS





Holiday Wish Program – Generous donors adopt clients and their families and provide them with gifts for the holiday season.
113 Holiday Wish Participants in FY2015

Job Assistance Program – We offer free workshops with partner agencies on resume writing, job hunting, interviewing, and employment law as well as one-on-one assistance with resumes, interview skills, and job searches.
82 Education, Housing, Financial, and Job Assistance Referrals in FY2015

Health Referrals – We provide medical and psychological referrals to clients.
146 Medical and Psychological Referrals in FY2015

Essentials for Life Program – Provides clients with personal hygiene items, grocery cards, bus passes, and other essentials. Clients are also referred to food pantries, clothing closets and given limited monetary emergency funds when necessary.

in FY2015

-  ... **105 Food Referrals**
-  ... **72 Clothing/Household Goods Referrals**
-  ... **353 DART bus passes distributed**
-  ... **\$11,400 in direct social services cash assistance**

CLIENT STORIES

Juana: Granted relief after tragedy

When Juana was seven years old, her mother left her in the care of her father and grandmother in Honduras. Juana's parents were separating and her mother moved to the United States. When Juana turned 15, her father passed away and her maternal grandmother was too sick to take care of her. Juana began to receive threats from the local gangs. Honduras had become much more dangerous with the growth of the Maras (gangs). Juana's mother knew that Honduras would not be

safe for Juana as a child with no parental protection so she arranged to have Juana come to the U.S. HRI helped Juana secure Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) and now she is now waiting for her Legal Permanent Residency (green card) to be approved. Juana has been in the United States continuously for the past two years, and was living a safe and secure life with her mother and stepfather, until very recently. On a recent trip back to El Salvador, Juana's mother was killed, another terrible loss



for the teenager. Juana is now living with her aunt and uncle in North Texas and is grateful for the safety her immigrant status has offered her.

Aadab: Persecuted for her convictions



Aadab, a young Muslim woman from the Maldives, fled to the United States after years of physical and sexual abuse. Since the age of 11, Aadab was raped and harassed by teachers at her school. Though the teachers had sexually harassed other girls over the years, Aadab stood out because she refused to cover her hair. As she grew older, Aadab also became politically active, fighting for the rights of women in her country. Aadab's newfound passion for democracy and

justice drove a wedge between her and her parents, and within one year, her parents

decided to send her to a boarding school in a different country with the hopes to "reform" her.

Even in this new country, Aadab's old teachers found her and managed to get her alone to sexually assault her again. They brought her back to the Maldives, where soon Aadab was arbitrarily arrested by the police and put in solitary confinement for one week. Aadab was placed under house arrest and remained there until

she was finally able to escape through the help of generous strangers.

Aadab was given the opportunity to participate in a tour to the United States. With a little help and luck, Aadab was able to flee her house and join the tour. Once she was in the U.S., she knew she could not go back. Though she was away from her perpetrators, Aadab's trauma left deep psychological scars. In the U.S. she was able to connect with another Maldivian family here who took her in. Aadab was granted asylum in Spring 2015 and remains safe here in the United States.

OTHER SERVICES

In addition to representing clients for various forms of immigration relief through our Asylum and Women and Children’s Programs, Human Rights Initiative also offers other legal services to our clients and the community:

WORK AUTHORIZATION

After receiving their new immigration status, and sometimes before, clients qualify to hold their Employment Authorization Document (EAD) so that they can work legally in the United States. HRI helps qualified clients apply and renew these documents throughout their cases and sometimes beyond that. Work Authorization is an important step for many of our clients as it can help to move them out of poverty and into their own homes. Clients feel proud that they can provide for their families again, as they did in their home countries.

LEGAL PERMANENT RESIDENCY

Many of the forms of immigration relief that HRI obtains for our clients make them eligible to adjust their status to legal permanent residency. HRI helps all of our qualified clients apply for their green cards, including attending an interview with USCIS when needed. Legal Permanent Residency places a client on the path to citizenship and opens up new opportunities for them including federal financial aid for higher education.

HUMAN RIGHTS CURRICULUM

HRI has an Advocacy Program that includes an innovative and exciting programs is our Human Rights Curriculum, which brings the concept of international human rights to area students. With the help of HRI staff and volunteer attorneys, we have designed and taught class-specific curricula on topics that connect broad concepts of international human rights with our work. The students see how human rights issues play out in the real lives of local people who are seeking asylum or are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, violent crime or trafficking. When possible, past HRI clients also participate and convey their moving stories of courage and survival. In FY2015, we presented our curriculum to over 450 students.

“I dreamed that one day this moment would happen. Having my Green Card not only means that for the first time I could travel outside the US, but also that I would be able to help my parents. **God Bless You.**”



FAST FACTS ON OUR OTHER PROGRAMS:

in FY2015

99% **FOR** **APPROVAL RATE** **FOR** **130 Employment Authorizations** **&** **43 Legal Permanent Residency cases**

Our Attorney CLE program provided Education and Training for over

870
ATTORNEYS



General Outreach to

4700

Dallas/Fort Worth Residents



Human Rights Curriculum & Education to more than **475** students



VOLUNTEER MODEL

Volunteers participate in all aspects of Human Rights Initiative’s operations. In FY2015, volunteers throughout all programs donated over **17,000 hours** of service with a combined value of over **\$4.79 million**. Over the last fifteen years, HRI volunteers have participated in the following programs:

WILLIAM O. HOLSTON JR. PRO BONO PROGRAM

Before he became our Executive Director, Bill Holston was a long-time volunteer attorney for HRI. Our pro bono program was renamed for him due to a generous gift from Charlie and Meredith Stimson, clients of Bill. Over the last decade, HRI has trained more than 3,000 legal professionals, many of whom have gone on to provide pro bono assistance through HRI. In FY2015, nearly 13,000 hours were donated by 350 volunteer attorneys and supporting staff, amounting to a value of \$4.79 million in legal services. Volunteer attorneys are supervised by HRI staff attorneys, offering support and expertise when necessary. This program is the heart of our agency.

INTERPRETERS AND TRANSLATORS

Interpreters and translators help with the conversion of documents from our clients’ native languages into English for their legal cases. Interpreters also offer the invaluable service of translating communications between clients and attorneys for important meetings.

INTERNSHIPS, FELLOWSHIPS, AND SERVICE LEARNING

Every year, HRI offers several internships and public service hour opportunities to law students, undergraduates and graduate students in other fields from across the country. We also accept promising legal fellows on a case-by-case basis. HRI believes in providing our interns with opportunities to see the true nature of practicing law, serving at a non-profit, and working as part of our team.

HEALTH PROFESSIONALS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAM

Through this program, volunteer physicians, psychologists, and psychiatrists provide essential forensic medical exams and psychological evaluations for our clients. These volunteers offer their services for free to clients in our Asylum Program in order to support their claims.

I believe that I am here permanently in the United States thanks to the effort of the Human Rights Initiative, who invested a lot in my case; **getting me 3 pro bono attorneys who prepared a case and went to court with me.**



FINANCIALS

FISCAL YEAR JULY 2014–JUNE 2015



EXPENSES	\$689,638
	cash
REVENUE & SUPPORT.....	\$933,097
	cash
	\$4,790,000
	in-kind legal services
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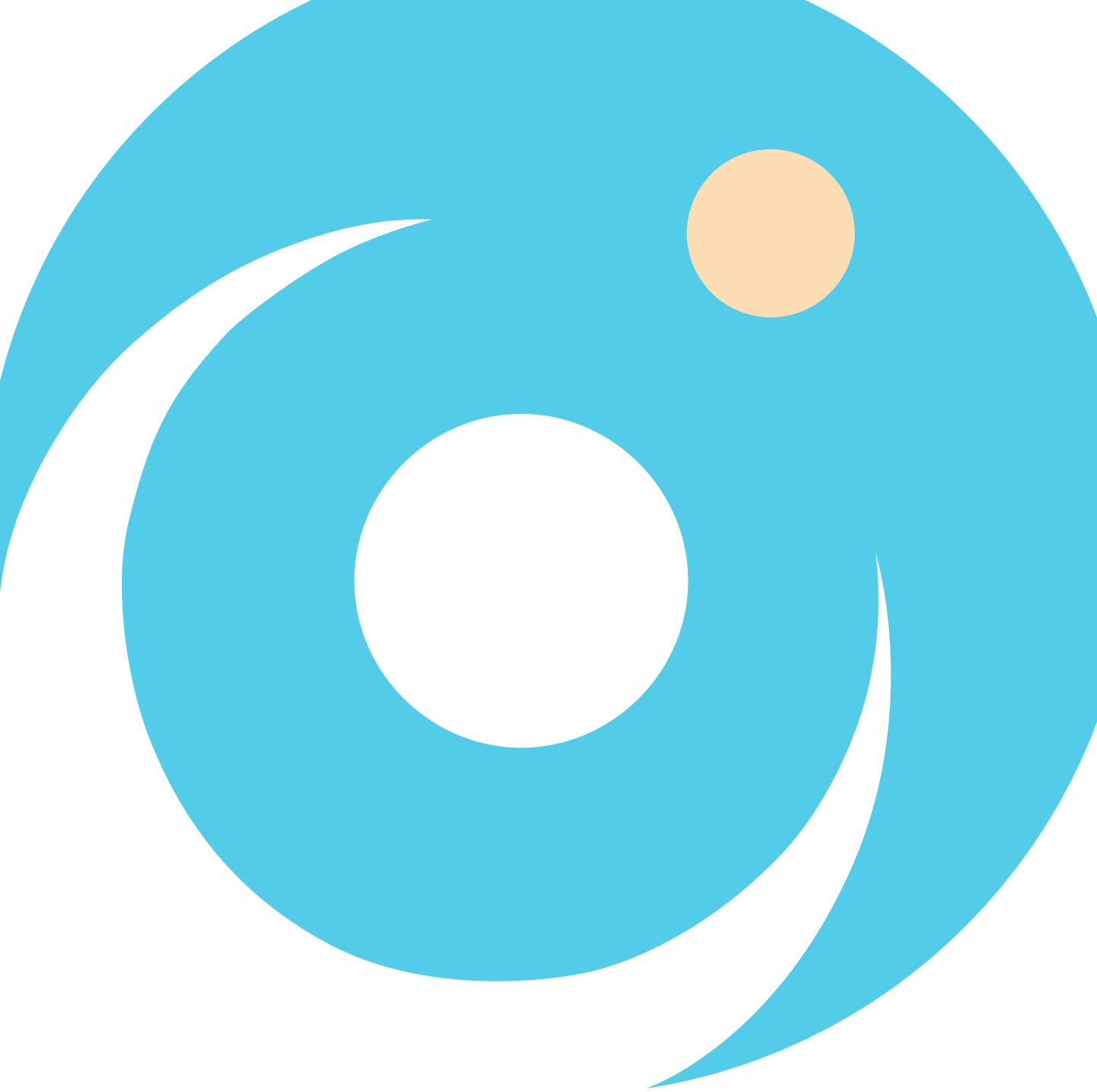
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