



## Unaccompanied Immigrant Children

An unaccompanied immigrant child(ren) has no lawful immigration status in the U.S., is a minor, and has no parent or legal guardian in the U.S. or has no parent or legal guardian in the U.S. available to provide for their care or custody. Unaccompanied immigrant children come to the U.S. under a variety of circumstances, embarking on a dangerous journey desperate to seek protection from abuse or violence, seek an escape from extreme poverty, or simply hoping to reunify with family. Most unaccompanied immigrant children begin their migration to the United States in Mexico and Central America (Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala). Children apprehended by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) either via Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at the border, or Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in the interior of the United States are placed in removal proceedings. Until their immigration case is decided they are housed in temporary shelters or group homes by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Some children may be eligible for release from an ORR shelter to a relative or family friend until their immigration case is decided.

*A pregnant 17 year old was forced to flee her home country after the father of her unborn child was murdered due to his refusal to join a gang. She then began to receive death threats from the gang. Fearing for her life, and that of her unborn child, she decided to come to the U.S. where she was detained by CBP and placed in a shelter for unaccompanied immigrant children. The girl had an aunt who is a U.S. citizen, who offered to care for the girl and her baby while her immigration case was decided. The girl was released from the shelter to her aunt in Georgia.*

## What Are Post Release Services?

ORR aims to release children to a safe and appropriate placement with a caregiver or “sponsor” in the U.S. The sponsor is usually a parent, aunt/uncle, or sibling. The sponsor cares for the child while his or her immigration case is decided. The potential sponsor is assessed to ensure he or she is able to care for the child and provide a safe and loving home. In some instances, additional assessment and/or home visits are required.

The child is also assessed by a case manager and clinician upon admission to the shelter. Many of these children have suffered from poverty, gang violence, domestic violence or abuse and would benefit from supportive services following release from ORR care; this is known as Post Release Services.

After the child is released to his or her sponsor, he or she is assigned a case manager who will work with him or her for a period of at least six months. The case manager makes referrals to affordable and linguistically/culturally appropriate medical, mental health, educational, legal and other community services. The case manager also works with the family to address any barriers to accessing community resources. They also provide support to the child and family in their transition to the home and community.



## USCRI and Post Release Services

USCRI provides Post Release Services in partnership with agencies in the following states: California, Louisiana, Georgia, South Carolina, Florida, Washington DC and North Carolina (USCRI Field Office). USCRI is unique in that children who receive Post Release Services are also eligible for its **Immigrant Children's Legal Program**, which provides assistance in matching children with a *pro bono* attorney.

*A 14 year old boy came to the U.S. to reunite with his sister when his mother and father both died. The boy did not have relatives to care for him so was forced to live alone for a year, until he came to the U.S. alone and was detained by CBP. The boy and his sister were assigned a post release services case manager. The case manager helped him enroll in school, he was placed in English as a second language classes and enrolled in after school tutoring. Due to the trauma of losing both parents, and being kidnapped, the boy was referred to mental health counseling. He is on the honor roll and made the varsity soccer team at school.*

## Do All Unaccompanied Immigrant Children Receive Post Release Services?

No. Most children do not receive these services. ORR makes a determination about eligibility for Post Release Services based on information provided by the child and sponsor. The following criteria may make a child eligible to receive post release services;

- Child abuse, neglect, or exploitation
- Exposure to community or gang violence
- Rape or sexual assault
- Mental health or medical conditions
- Suicidal ideations or attempts
- Lack of prior relationship with sponsor

## What Happens When Post Release Services Are Complete?

The ultimate goal in providing post release services is to ensure the child and sponsor are well connected to community resources that can provide more long term support than Post Release Services is designed for. It is important to USCRI that the well-being of the child is always a top priority. Despite their past traumatic experiences, these children are resilient and, with the proper support and resources, can overcome them. Some children have learned to read and write, others have become involved in extracurricular activities at their schools, some children continue to go to counseling, and many are matched with a *pro bono* attorney to represent them in their immigration cases.

USCRI takes great pride in advocating and serving these children. If you would like additional information about this program visit our website at <http://www.refugees.org/our-work/child-migrants/about-ncric.html>