



RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN¹

January 2016

After a record number of unaccompanied children came to the United States in 2014, the U.S. is again preparing for a new influx of children and families from Central America. “Unaccompanied children” are those who are apprehended without a parent or legal guardian, after having made the arduous journey to the United States to seek refuge from violence, gangs, traffickers, intrafamily violence, or other traumas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Legal Services: All unaccompanied minors who have been apprehended by immigration officials and released to caregivers in the community are in removal (deportation) proceedings. There is no right to government-funded representation in removal proceedings, despite the incredibly complex nature of immigration law. Nonetheless, it is crucial that unaccompanied children attend their hearings in immigration court; otherwise they risk being ordered deported in their absence.

- Share the legal orientation information (in [Spanish](#) and [English](#)) created by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Legal Orientation Program for Custodians (LOPC) of unaccompanied children. For children in San Francisco Immigration Court, LOPC services are provided by the [Immigration Center for Women & Children](#).
- Connect children and their caregivers to legal services resource links available through the [Vera Institute of Justice](#) or [Immigration Advocates Network](#). Locally, referrals are coordinated through the Bar Association of San Francisco’s [Lawyer Referral and Information Service](#).
- Advise caregivers and youth that they can obtain up-to-date information about their next hearing in immigration court from the immigration court’s automated hotline (in Spanish and English) by dialing 1-800-898-7180 and entering the child’s A# (listed at the top of all immigration forms).

Educational Services: All children, regardless of immigration status, are entitled to a free public education.

- Ensure that all children and their caregivers have the [U.S. Department of Education’s guidance](#) that outlines how all children must have equal access to enroll in school under federal law.
- Consider developing models similar to the Unaccompanied Minor Coordinator positions in [Oakland Unified School District](#) and [San Francisco Unified School District](#) to provide extra support for unaccompanied children and their caregivers.

Medical Services: Beginning no sooner than May 1, 2016, all children under 19 in California, regardless of immigration status, will be eligible for full-scope Medi-Cal.

- Provide children and their caregivers information about enrolling in Medi-Cal, low-fee medical services in their communities if they are available, and the [Vaccines for Children Program](#) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Faith-Based Networks: Many immigrant communities are deeply rooted in faith-based networks.

- Tap into the local expertise of faith-based networks that are already engaged in supporting children and their caregivers to assist them in accessing services and collecting needed documents.

Trauma & Well-Being: Many unaccompanied minors have experienced high levels of trauma.

- Connect children and their caregivers to psychological support, through school-based wellness centers, such as in [San Francisco Unified School District](#), or through non-profit organizations such as [Survivor’s International](#).
- Access the expertise of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) and U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) partners and resources from the [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) to facilitate training and capacity-building.

¹ The Immigrant Legal Resource Center is a national, nonprofit resource center that provides legal trainings, educational materials, and advocacy to advance immigrant rights. The mission of the ILRC is to work with and educate immigrants, community organizations, and the legal sector to continue to build a democratic society that values diversity and the rights of all people. For the latest version of this document, please visit www.ilrc.org.