



CASA CORNELIA LAW CENTER  
2020 ANNUAL REPORT





## JUSTICE WITH COMPASSION

Casa Cornelia's Mission and Spirit are rooted in the tradition of service of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, which founded and sponsored the Law Center in 1993 to provide free legal services to indigent victims of human and civil rights violations.

Although U.S. immigration law and policy offer safe haven for persons in perilous circumstances, eligibility for protection under the law is no guarantee of securing protection. Further, while there is a right to legal counsel in these matters, the government does not provide attorneys, so the non-citizen must find their own attorney or proceed without an attorney. Victims unfamiliar with the legal system, language, and culture rarely navigate the intricacies of the legal system successfully on their own. Indigent persons fleeing persecution in their homelands, abused women and men, abandoned and neglected children, and victims of human trafficking are especially vulnerable.

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### LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It gives me joy to share with you Casa Cornelia's Annual Report. Your support was key for us to persevere through the tumultuous year that was 2020. A year like no other, when we faced many obstacles, particularly for the clients and communities we serve. Throughout the year, our life-saving legal services continued.

Apart from the challenges faced due to the pandemic and the corresponding emotional, economic, and health impacts on our clients, we also faced challenges stemming from the intense policy and administrative hurdles placed on many of our cases.

Your support made all the difference this year, by strengthening our resolve and our ability to adapt to the ever-changing health and legal environments without sacrificing the highest quality services possible to our clients in these difficult circumstances. Despite it all, our staff and volunteers responded to 1,329 individuals in need last year.

Knowing we cannot fulfill our noble mission alone, we rely on the goodwill of our hundreds of volunteers who remained steadfast by our side. We are especially grateful to these volunteers for forging ahead with us in this work despite the difficulties of the past year.

Looking into 2021, we have a renewed sense of hope that victims of human and civil rights violations will be treated justly, fairly, and compassionately. We are seeing both a reinstatement and/or reaffirmation of certain protections, like DACA, and we are keeping a close eye on new policy developments that will affect those we serve.

As children begin to be regularly processed again into the U.S., we remain committed to providing legal services to every single unaccompanied child detained in San Diego County needing our assistance.

While there is optimism, there is unfortunately also a higher likelihood of confusion in the community about what the changes are or how they will impact their circumstances. To address this confusion and concern, we are focused on our communication efforts this year to ensure that the children, women, and men who seek humanitarian immigration protection have the most accurate information.

Lastly, at the end of 2020 Casa Cornelia experienced a new chapter as we bid farewell to our extraordinary and long-serving former Board Chair, Deacon Jim Vargas, OFS, and we welcomed our amazing new Board Chair Gloria Bader, Ed.D. We thank them both for their deep commitment to Justice with Compassion.

I am in gratitude to each of you for your support of this mission of hope. Together, we persevere. With every best wish and blessing, I am

CARMEN M. CHAVEZ, ESQ.  
Executive Director

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Casa Cornelia Law Center is a 501(c)(3) public interest non-profit law firm providing quality pro bono legal services to victims of human and civil rights violations within the immigrant community in Southern California. The Law Center also seeks to educate others on the impact of immigration law and policy on the community and the public good.

Since 1993, thousands of children, women, and men have turned to Casa Cornelia for critical legal assistance and humanitarian protection. Today, Casa Cornelia employs 28 staff members and benefits from a network of hundreds of volunteer attorneys, interpreters, translators, law students, and community volunteers. In 2020, Casa Cornelia responded to 1,329 persons seeking legal services through the Asylum, Children's, and Victims of Crime Programs.

## ASYLUM PROGRAM

Since its foundation, Casa Cornelia has represented individuals who seek asylum in the United States because of the serious harm they escaped in their countries. In 2020, the Law Center responded to **412 requests for assistance from persons fleeing violence and persecution in their homelands**. The asylum seekers served came from across the globe, including individuals fleeing persecution in Africa, Asia, Europe, and throughout the Americas and Caribbean.

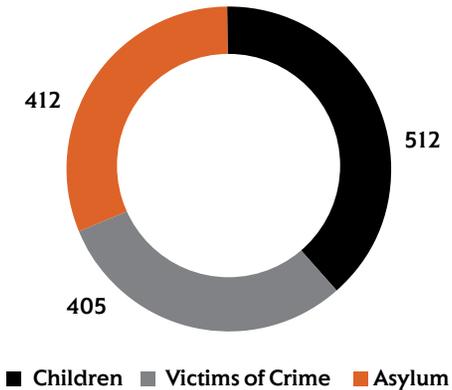
## CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

The long-standing tradition of serving migrant children detained or resident in our community also continued. Casa Cornelia provided services to **512 immigrant children** ranging from infancy through age 17 (and into young adulthood) in 2020. The majority of these children were recent arrivals, but others were residents of Southern California communities. Many suffered physical abuse, parental abandonment, or traumatic separations from families.

## VICTIMS OF CRIME PROGRAM

Immigrant survivors of serious crimes also continued to find support and a pathway to safety and new opportunities with Casa Cornelia's assistance. During 2020, **405 individuals** sought the assistance of the Law Center through the Victims of Crime Program. **Seventy-seven percent of these applicants were women** between the ages of 26–45 years old, many of whom are responsible for children both in the United States and abroad. These survivors have often lived in the shadows of society isolated by trauma, language, poverty, and fear, but have had new doors opened to them through this work.

## INDIVIDUALS RESPONDED TO BY PROGRAM IN 2020



The work of Casa Cornelia depends upon the contributed services of volunteers and partners in the community, including those who dedicate their time and skills as part of the **Pro Bono Program for Volunteer Attorneys** and the **Volunteer Interpreter and Translator Program**. In 2020, **429 volunteers donated 15,102 hours of service** to support Casa Cornelia's mission, including 211 volunteer attorneys who donated 9,016 hours, 132 volunteer interpreters and translators who donated 2,854 hours, and 82 other volunteers (including board members, committee members, legal clerks, and interns) who donated 3,232 hours of service.

"THE LONG-STANDING TRADITION OF SERVING MIGRANT CHILDREN DETAINED OR RESIDENT IN OUR COMMUNITY ALSO CONTINUED [...] THE MAJORITY OF THESE CHILDREN WERE RECENT ARRIVALS, BUT OTHERS WERE RESIDENTS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA COMMUNITIES. MANY SUFFERED PHYSICAL ABUSE, PARENTAL ABANDONMENT, OR TRAUMATIC SEPARATIONS FROM FAMILIES."

The Law Center also continued its efforts **to remove barriers to accessing justice by referring clients to necessary social service resources**, including food and housing assistance, counseling and mental health services, non-immigration legal needs, and many others.

In addition to providing direct legal services, Casa Cornelia commits itself to educate on the impact of immigration law and policy on the public good. Law Center staff are frequently invited to share their expertise in the San Diego community and beyond.

## MEETING THE NEEDS

The combination of worldwide social and political strife, harsh immigration policies, and the Covid-19 pandemic has shaken our shared reality. As in previous years, 2020 saw an increase in the number of people forcibly displaced around the globe: there was a 12% increase in the number last year, for a total of 79.5 million individuals. Yet again, an exorbitant percentage of this total is comprised of children under the age of 18<sup>1</sup>. This crisis experienced by so many directly impacts the work of Casa Cornelia. Simultaneously, national immigration policies in 2020—including severe restrictions on immigration and the closing of the international ports of entry along the U.S./ Mexico border to asylum seekers and others—profoundly affected the Law Center’s practice. Although the root causes of forced migration did not change, the unduly severe treatment of those seeking safe haven was more pronounced this year.

In short, it was a difficult year. **In March 2020, the organization made a sharp pivot to allow all work to be conducted remotely.** As the pandemic unfolded, detained court cases continued, and attorneys worked to secure the release of detained asylum seekers, recognizing that unnecessary detention of these vulnerable individuals greatly increased the likelihood of infection and death.

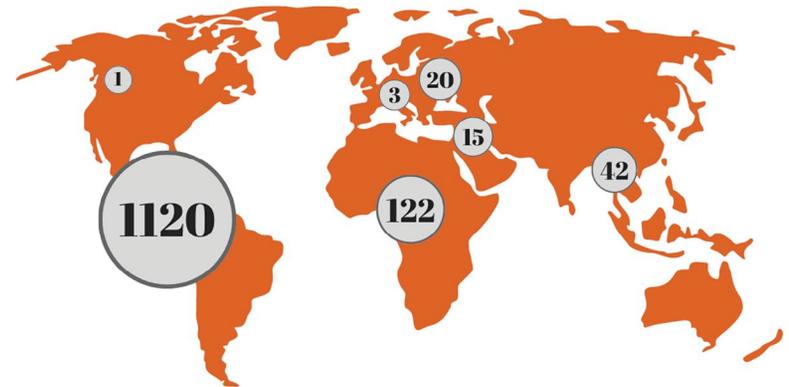
Despite the increasing migrant flow to the region, the operational challenges brought by Covid-19, and the constant changes in immigration policy during 2020, Casa Cornelia remained agile and effective. While access to legal protections for vulnerable immigrants was severely curtailed by the United States government, and requests by the government for further evidence on cases seemingly reached an all-time high, those served by the organization continued to receive zealous and skilled representation. **Last year, Casa Cornelia Law Center responded to over 1,320 individuals seeking legal services through its Asylum, Children’s, and Victims of Crime Programs.** Depending on eligibility under the law and the Law Center’s programs, these individuals received specific legal information or referrals for additional resources. The majority of these individuals had the opportunity to speak confidentially with an attorney and receive specific information about immigration law. Many of them were accepted for representation, which ranges from brief advocacy to full representation in an affirmative immigration application with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services or defense against deportation before an immigration judge. Most importantly, each individual was treated with the dignity they deserve, as Casa Cornelia continued its tradition of seeking justice with compassion.

## ASYLUM PROGRAM

Asylum—protection for individuals fleeing persecution because of their race, religion, or other identifying characteristics—has been a hallmark of United States humanitarian immigration law for generations. A non-citizen granted asylum in the United States is not only given safe haven but also the opportunity to become a permanent member of the community. Seeking asylum has always been difficult; asylum seekers who fled horrific violence and torture with only the clothes on their backs are given no assistance from the government in processing their claim. Instead, they may have to seek asylum while defending against deportation and may have to do so while in a detention facility. The entire case is processed in English, even if this is a language that they do not understand. No lawyers are provided to asylum seekers by the government to fight their cases.

**Casa Cornelia responded to 412 adult asylum seekers (either single adults or members of family groups) and received 170 new applications for services in 2020.** Of those responded to last year, 189 were detained. The majority of asylum seekers were from Latin American and Caribbean countries, mainly Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Venezuela, and Haiti, followed by persons from African nations, such as Cameroon, Ghana, and Nigeria. We also responded to 13 individuals from Russia.

### REGIONAL ORIGIN OF APPLICANTS IN 2020



*In 2020, Casa Cornelia responded to the legal needs of 1,329 individuals from around the world. Of those, 1,120 are originally from Latin America and the Caribbean, 122 from Africa, 42 from Asia, 20 from Eastern Europe, 15 from the Middle East, 3 from Western Europe, and 1 from Canada.*

<sup>1</sup>(UNHCR/18 June 2020).

The diversity of those seeking asylum in our region continues to be evidenced by the many languages and dialects spoken. Last year, Casa Cornelia's asylum clients or applicants for services spoke 38 non-English languages. Apart from Spanish, the languages most represented included Arabic, Creole, French, Mam, Pular, and Russian. On December 31, 2020, 218 of the individuals who sought and/or received services from Casa Cornelia still had open matters with Casa Cornelia.

The Asylum Program continues to see a significant number of detained asylum seekers (46% of the clients in our Asylum Program this year). These individuals are primarily detained at San Diego's Otay Mesa Detention Center, but the Law Center is now also representing clients detained at the Imperial Regional Detention Facility in the underserved Imperial Valley region (specifically, Calexico, California). Because of the pandemic, staff and volunteers had to rely mostly on mail and phone to communicate with current and prospective clients; in large part, they were unable to access the facility for face-to-face meetings. Additionally, the situation was worsened given that access to detained clients by video conferencing was denied due to logistical restrictions at the detention facility. Given the realities of the danger posed by Covid-19, our detained clients were at great risk. Earnest effort was invested to request their release from detention, especially those with preexisting health conditions.



## MARCEL'S STORY: TRAPPED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CAMEROONIAN CONFLICT



Marcel\* was born into the conflict between the English- and French-speaking regions of Cameroon. After his parents divorced, he grew up in his mother's Anglophone culture, and years later he moved to a Francophone region with his uncle to be raised Muslim.

At his new community, Marcel felt alienated from others due to cultural differences. Despite the challenges, Marcel worked with diligence to get closer to his goal of becoming a doctor.

Unfortunately, these dreams were dashed when he went to take his entrance exams. The school officials told him that although he had received the same education as his peers, those with Anglophone origins would not be allowed in.

Having experienced the unfair discriminatory system in his country, Marcel focused his studies on sociopolitical issues. He began by participating in peaceful protests, but eventually joined a group protecting the rights and interests of Anglophones.

One day, Marcel was at a group meeting when suddenly, military officers stormed the venue. They violently arrested many members, including Marcel. He was detained for eight days in inhumane conditions. "We were flogged with machetes or a cable before each meal—at least three times a day," Marcel says. Noticing Marcel's French accent, the officers presented Marcel with the opportunity to be freed if he denounced his actions with the protesters. After Marcel refused, the officers tortured him violently. He was released the next day and was rushed to the hospital to recover.

Despite his increased fear and physical injuries, Marcel continued his social justice work with renewed determination. The next time he was

arrested, Marcel was detained for two full weeks. He was held in an unsanitary, disease-ridden, dilapidated cell. Five of his cellmates died while in detention.

One day, Marcel was blindfolded and taken out to the surrounding field, where he was told to begin digging his own grave. The officers ordered him to lay in the hole and shoveled dirt back in. It was only when Marcel saw nothing but darkness that they dug him back out, flinging insults and asserting their power over him.

After this incident, he was finally released. Later on, he participated in a march declaring Southern Cameroon's independence but the crowd was met with violence from military officers. Marcel was captured but he eventually managed to escape. His family pleaded with him to flee the country so Marcel heeded their warnings and began planning his escape.

Marcel travelled and made it to Ecuador, where he and some other migrants crossed the jungle up into Central America, and ultimately reached the United States border at the Calexico Port of Entry where he claimed asylum. With no money left and nowhere else to go, Marcel contacted Casa Cornelia to help him with his case. Associate Attorney Zohaile Kakavand argued for Marcel's claim to asylum in court, and it was granted. Now, when he says he wants, "Another chance and a new home here," there is more hope than ever for that to be true. This was Casa Cornelia's first successful case in the Imperial Valley. We are incredibly grateful to our supporters who have ensured a new future for Marcel. ■

## CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

In 2020, Casa Cornelia remained the sole provider of legal services for detained and locally released unaccompanied children in San Diego County. **In 2020, Casa Cornelia's Children's Program provided services to 512 children.** Of these children, 303 (59%) were detained and 208 were non-detained. On December 31, 2020, cases for 193 children remained open. The number of these cases was greatly reduced (by half) from the previous year due to border closures, irregular and unlawful treatment of arriving unaccompanied children by government officials, and the pandemic. Staff remained focused and attentive to the many changes within the legal landscape and the circumstances of the children themselves.



*Casa Cornelia attorneys relied on videoconferencing tools to counsel and assist their clients during the Covid-19 pandemic.*

Given the special vulnerability of the children, especially detained children, extra attention is routinely given to the handling of cases and the training of staff and volunteers. The services provided include a legal orientation and Know Your Rights (KYR) presentation followed by a question-and-answer session, immigration court orientation in preparation for court appearances, and case preparation. Casa Cornelia, in its pivot to remote work, adapted its legal orientation to be presented via videoconferencing instead of in-person.

**Children are affected emotionally and mentally by the stress of their uncertain circumstances** and their fears stemming from the pandemic and the possibility of becoming ill. The number of detained children ebbed and flowed, which also created additional stressors for staff as they constantly recalibrated their efforts and work arrangements.

The majority of children are still coming from Northern Triangle Central American countries (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras) and Mexico, but children also arrived from farther away, including Bangladesh, Guinea, India, Vietnam, and China. The circumstances causing the children to flee their home country have not changed: widespread violence, domestic violence or abuse, and now also the pandemic and climate crises. Minors remain the most vulnerable migrants regardless of the situation they are fleeing.

## HECTOR'S STORY: FINDING SOMEWHERE TO BELONG



When Hector\* was 12, his father suffered a sudden stroke and passed away. Four years later, his mother also passed away after dealing with an unexpected illness. After these tragic events, Hector began to feel like a stranger in his own life. He could not shake the feeling that he was a burden: “I just felt like I didn’t belong.”

Shortly after turning 16, he attempted to live with his older siblings in their hometown in Guatemala. His siblings were young, struggled to take care of their own families, and were unable to care for Hector. He soon found himself homeless, on his own without any adult supervision. With limited resources available, and the threat of gang violence constantly looming, Hector was left hopeless.

Looking for a new beginning, Hector fled North. After pooling his and his siblings’ resources, Hector was able to gain passage all the way to the U.S. border, where authorities detained him for over a month. Through Casa Cornelia’s Children’s Program, he applied successfully for a Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), a form of humanitarian immigration relief for children who have been abused, abandoned, or neglected. Today, Hector lives in San Diego and is able to provide for himself through his own hard work and dedication. ■

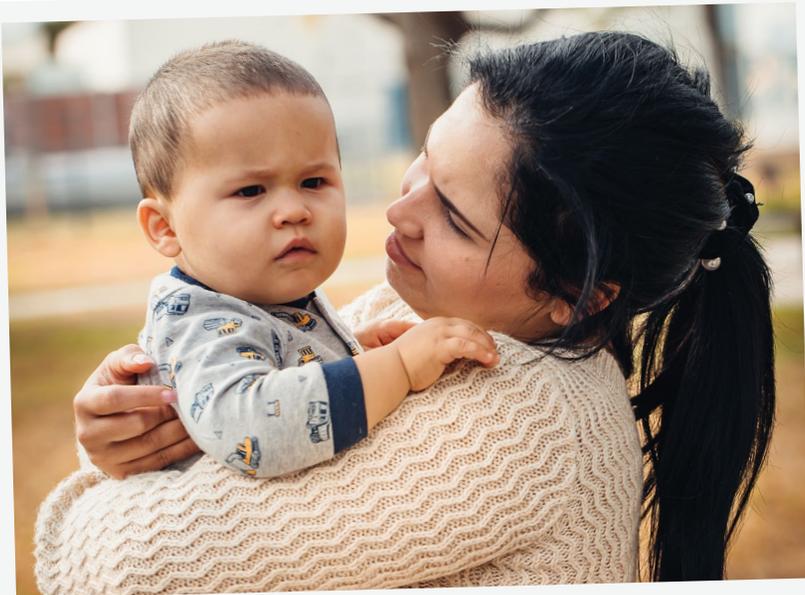
## VICTIMS OF CRIME PROGRAM

Among the most marginalized in the immigrant population are undocumented victims of crime, including survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking. Many victims are long-term residents of San Diego County and members of the community as doting parents, dedicated employees, and active members of the faith community. However, they live with trauma and fear due to their victimization, and their lack of immigration status and indigence keeps them in the shadows and vulnerable to abuse.

During 2020, **405 individuals, including undocumented victims of domestic violence, assault, and human trafficking, sought and/or received services through our Victims of Crime (VOC) Program.** Eighty-four individuals were new to Casa Cornelia. As of December 31, 2020, there were 291 open cases, which represents a 15% decrease in the number of open cases since the end of 2019.

The VOC Program assists victims in regularizing their immigrant status under various forms of humanitarian immigration relief. A vast majority of the clients in the program continue to be women—310 of them in 2020. **Most of them are between 26 and 45 years old and are responsible for children.** Work permits, which they eventually receive in connection with their immigration applications, allow them to have an official identity document and provide for themselves and their families.

Although the VOC Program was the least impacted by the reduction in numbers caused by border closures, it was significantly impacted in other ways. The process of securing legal status is long, and the average waiting time continues to increase as the backlog at United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) grows. Currently, **one of these cases can last anywhere from two to seven years,**



*A vast majority of the clients in the Victims of Crime Program continue to be women—310 of them in 2020. Most of them are between 26 and 45 years old and are responsible for children.*

so most applicants will often have to file more than one Employment Authorization Document (EAD, or work permit) application while their case is pending.

**Given that the VOC clientele is largely non-detained and residing in our community, life took over for them and their families.** The pandemic, in addition to housing, financial, food, medical, and mental health resource problems, at-home child learning, and concerns over losing their jobs and/or not having a work permit, shifted their attention to survival versus working on their immigration case. Staff committed significant time to ensure they effectively communicated information, listened to clients' concerns, and assisted them in connecting to needed support and social services at a time when they found many closed doors.

## LILIANA'S STORY: BREAKING FREE FROM CYCLES OF ABUSE



Liliana\* was only 17 when she met Ricardo\* and fell in love. Having grown up in Mexico, in a household with an abusive mother, Liliana found what she needed in Ricardo's company: love, autonomy, and respect. Nevertheless, he began abusing her shortly after she became pregnant. She wanted to leave him,

but felt bound to him as the father of her child. They got married at the courthouse a few months later, but the violence only escalated. After a few years of worsening conditions, now with two children together, she finally called the police and he was arrested. Fearing his release, Liliana fled to the U.S. with her two kids.

A year later, Ricardo contacted them and seemed to be remorseful so she gave him a second chance. However, the abuse started again. In a new country and without documents, she would not call the police, as she was afraid to be deported.

The violence continued and eventually Liliana called the authorities. After her call, social workers assisted her and placed her in a shelter. At this time, she filed to gain full custody of her children. After learning about Casa Cornelia, Liliana contacted the Law Center asking for help to apply for U visas for her and her babies—this special humanitarian visa would enable them to get documentation and remain in the U.S. without threat of deportation.

With the help of Associate Attorney Evelyn Lopez, Liliana and her two children successfully obtained their U visas. Now with five children, ranging from toddler to a teenager, this is a new chapter in her journey in the U.S., and she knows this is the best opportunity for her family: "My two oldest sons have expressed interest in joining the army or becoming police officers and one of my younger sons wants to be a firefighter. Our lives are here in the U.S. and I know that my kids have the best chance to succeed." ■

# VOLUNTEER COLLABORATORS IN THE MISSION

As in decades past, volunteers have allowed the mission of Casa Cornelia to flourish and expand. The effects of the pandemic and immigration policy restrictions impacted the programs; however, the ongoing legal work did not impede the participation of volunteers or even the interest of new attorneys from the private bar or community volunteers assisting with language access. The recruitment, training, and mentorship of volunteers may have slowed, but it still continued throughout the year. Staff committed significant time and attention to the proper management of all volunteers. In 2020, **429 volunteers donated 15,102 hours** to support Casa Cornelia's mission.

## THE PRO BONO PROGRAM FOR VOLUNTEER ATTORNEYS

The Pro Bono (PB) Program provides support for the core legal work by recruiting and training attorneys to take on matters across all programs. These volunteers represent large, medium, and small law firms, corporate counsel, or solo practice. **In 2020, there were an astounding 375 cases handled by volunteer attorneys (VAs), all at various stages.** Specifically, these cases included 146 in the Asylum Program, 65 in the Children's Program, and 164 in the Victims of Crime Program.

Last year Casa Cornelia trained **50 volunteer attorneys** for service in all three core legal programs. Regardless of the external factors, the PB Program remained robust, with enough VAs to meet the need. Painstaking effort was invested in securing and cultivating positive relationships with private law firms, which resulted in the placement of 48 new cases with VAs in 2020. Casa Cornelia is fortunate to have such a dedicated volunteer corps that has stayed by the clients' sides even in the face of multiple hearings, detention challenges, and appeals. Lastly, attorneys from the private bar provided quality legal consultation to Casa Cornelia's leadership on a variety of administrative topics, especially relating to Covid-19 policies.

Between new cases that began last year and cases that continued from prior years, **211 VAs donated 9,016 hours** in screening, counseling, preparing materials, and litigating on behalf of Casa Cornelia's clients in 2020. These donated hours of legal services were equivalent to the work of four full-time staff attorneys. This model, which has been developed and honed for years, allows the Law Center's staff to greatly expand its reach to clients in need.

## THE VOLUNTEER INTERPRETER AND TRANSLATOR PROGRAM

Ensuring an effective language bridge between client and attorney is the Volunteer Interpreter and Translator (VIT) Program, which recruits, trains, and mentors members of the community who donate their skills and time to assist in verbal and written communications. While there is internal capacity for Spanish, there was still need at times for VIT support in this language for both interpretations and translations.



*Volunteer Attorney Paul Najjar, Esq. (right) and his Casa Cornelia client celebrate a successful outcome on her case. Photo was taken prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions.*



In 2020, across all programs, Casa Cornelia responded to clients and potential clients from **54 different countries speaking 51 languages, including Arabic, Creole, Farsi, French, French/Arabic, Lingala, Mandarin, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Swahili.** Beyond the verbal interpretation and document translation, which can be very lengthy and time consuming, the VITs help cement the attorney/client relationship and the trust critical in any case. The Law Center relies on the generosity of volunteer interpreters and translators to bridge the language gap between clients and their attorneys, and their participation is crucial for attorneys to be able to competently represent their clients. Last year alone, **132 Volunteer Interpreters and Translators donated 2,854 hours of service.**

In addition to the attorneys, interpreters, and translators who donated their time, energy, and skills, **82 other volunteers**—including board members, committee members, legal clerks, and interns— **donated 3,232 hours of service.**

## ADRIANA'S STORY: A DOCTOR RUNNING FROM POLITICAL CORRUPTION



In a small town in Cuba, a young girl named Adriana\* had a dream of becoming a doctor. After persevering, she graduated from medical school and began working at a local clinic. One day, members of the Communist Party approached her, pressuring her to join the party and attend political meetings. Adriana refused while showing her disapproval of the party and

the government. As time went by, the pressure increased. Suddenly, the government asked her to participate in an international medical mission, but Adriana refused as she felt this request was a form of punishment for her political views. She also did not want leave her family for long. After declining the request, Adriana was demoted at work.

Shortly after the demotion, the police detained and interrogated her:

“When I was detained, I was afraid I would become a political prisoner

or simply disappear.” The last straw was when they started involving Adriana’s kids. For their safety, Adriana decided to take her children and flee the country, leaving her job, family, community, and hometown to find somewhere to live without constant fear.

She traveled to Mexico—spending some time there before deciding to cross the border to the U.S., where a family member lived in San Diego. Now in the U.S., she felt safe for the first time in years. But she was still faced with the threat of being deported back to Cuba.

Even though immigration officers expressed an intent to begin deportation proceedings against her, her case languished for months without action by the government. Nevertheless, Adriana was proactive. After hearing about Casa Cornelia from a friend, Adriana contacted the Law Center for assistance.

Volunteer Attorney Fatima Brizuela took on her case while at the firm Kirby McInerney LLP, and continued with the case at Hartley LLP. With Fatima’s assistance, Adriana applied for asylum even though the U.S. government had not moved forward on her case.

Following months of hard work and multiple government-caused delays, Adriana was finally granted asylum! Adriana now has legal status to remain in the U.S. and can now work and build a life here for herself and her family. Given recent changes in immigration processing, Cubans can no longer count on the preferential status they once had—this asylum case was hard fought by Fatima! ■

\*All names have been changed to protect clients’ identities.

# HUMAN AND SOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Concurrent to all other efforts by Casa Cornelia is the need to stabilize its clients as they go through their legal process. The special social and economic challenges of 2020 created an opportunity for Casa Cornelia to be there for its clients in new ways. The Support Services Program provided essential information, assessments, and qualified referrals to social services agencies throughout the country and across all programs. In 2020, Support Services connected 67 clients with asylee benefits; provided valuable education and language referrals to 4 clients; assisted 33 clients with critical housing, financial, or food services; and referred 5 clients to valuable mental health and victims' services resources.

The challenge of connecting clients with these much-needed services, especially with regards to Covid-19 information, cannot be understated. Additionally, many clients found themselves in dire economic situations during the pandemic, often while still awaiting their work permits. Nevertheless, these resources were found and provided to clients, including one local program providing financial grants directly to immigrants and refugees who had lost their jobs.



Establishing and forging ongoing working relationships with a wide variety of agencies and benefactors made the difference. For example, Casa Cornelia's relationship with philanthropic group This Is About Humanity resulted in the ability to refer 17 client families to a donation distribution drive in October that was tailor-made to meet their needs. One client responded by saying "I feel like I won the lottery! I will never forget this act of kindness. Please know how much you have helped our family." Providing stability to clients greatly improves the likelihood that their legal case will be effectively processed and completed.



*This is About Humanity and the Chicano Federation hosted a drive-through donation drive for 17 Casa Cornelia client families in need in October of 2020.*



*This is About Humanity Co-Founders Elsa Marie Collins and Yolanda Selene Walther-Meade (left) and Chicano Federation CEO Nancy Maldonado (center) speak to volunteers before the drive-through donation event.*

## CORNELIA'S CHILDREN: A GIFT CARD DRIVE

Many clients were severely impacted by Covid-19 and the economic crisis—particularly single mothers awaiting their work permits after escaping domestic abuse. Hence, the Law Center remained committed to share as much joy, comfort, and support to the families and individuals Casa Cornelia serves.

Undaunted by the logistical limitations and safety precautions taken due to the pandemic, the annual Cornelia's Toy Shop was transformed into a Gift Card Drive. With the warm encouragement of Sr. Mary Wayne Gradon, SHCJ, who has always been key to the success of the Toy Shop, staff decided to collect and mail out as many \$25 gift cards to client families in need as possible.

Casa Cornelia was once again fortunate to have the kindness and generosity from the faith community, law firms, and individual donors who donated funds and gift cards towards this effort. In the end, we were able to mail out gift cards to 193 families in need, with extra support going to 23 families experiencing a particularly difficult time.



*Casa Cornelia staff members get ready to safely mail gift cards to 193 Casa Cornelia clients and their families.*

## EDUCATING THE COMMUNITY ON IMMIGRATION POLICY

Pursuant to its mission, Casa Cornelia seeks to educate others regarding the impact of immigration law and policy on the community and the public good. Last year, Casa Cornelia's leadership and staff participated in many virtual community events, speaking at both public gatherings and private events. Formal virtual presentations were made to various groups, including the Anti-Defamation League, places of worship, the Lawyers Club of San Diego, and Price Fellows students. Training sessions were also held for community partners and legal professionals.

Furthermore, Casa Cornelia continued hosting its Mission Mondays sessions virtually. These conversations between community members, supporters and Casa Cornelia's legal staff provided updates on trends and challenges faced by the populations served by the Law Center.



*Casa Cornelia's Board of Directors stayed well-informed and active with the organization by meeting frequently via Zoom (video conference).*

# 13TH ANNUAL LA MANCHA AWARDS



Every year, Casa Cornelia presents the La Mancha Awards to exceptional volunteers who help further access to justice for the vulnerable populations served by the Law Center. Given the gathering risks and restrictions, the 2020 celebration was held virtually. The video program debuted on Thursday, October 15, and featured interviews with award recipients, client testimonies, event sponsors, and current and former staff. Executive Director Carmen Chavez was the mistress of ceremonies.

*The following awards were presented:*

## LA MANCHA AWARDS

### DISTINGUISHED PRO BONO ATTORNEY OF THE YEAR

Jeff Sheriff, Esq.  
Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP

### PRO BONO LAW FIRM OF THE YEAR

Latham & Watkins LLP

### PRO BONO PUBLICO AWARDEES\*

Austin Day, Esq., Cooley LLP  
Qiming Deng, Esq., Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati  
Jonathan DeSimone, Esq.  
Jeanne Detch, Esq., Cooley LLP  
Elona Dunchew, Esq., Fragomen, Del Rey, Bernsen & Loewy, LLP  
Jennifer French, Esq., Patterson Law Group  
Zack Kirscher, Esq., DLA Piper  
Justin Leisey, Esq., Cooley LLP  
Paul Najar, Esq., Gafcon, Inc.  
Edward O'Connor, Esq.  
Stephanie Postal, Esq., Latham & Watkins LLP  
Sophia Rios, Esq., Cooley LLP  
Rupa Singh, Esq., Niddrie Addams Fuller Singh LLP

*\*This list represents attorneys' firms at the time of volunteering in 2019.*

### SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARDEES

Katie Abajian	Ian Lutz
Kate Anchondo	Annie Milleret
Holly Araya	Katie Noe
Julie Burelle	Elena Perez
Francesca Egger	Robert Ponce
Natalia Gottschalk	Samuel Wilson
Daniel Krupa	



“When one is blessed with privilege, the question is not whether to give back, but how. Casa Cornelia allows attorneys like me to use our education, training, and experience for the greater good, instead of just our own advancement. With the guidance of a dedicated staff of skilled immigration law

professionals, I have been able to advocate for some of the most vulnerable individuals at a time when they are fleeing persecution and human rights violations. Casa Cornelia has given me that special satisfaction that only comes from lending a helping hand where it is most needed. As a proud naturalized citizen, I can think of no better way to pay it forward than to give my time and our firm’s financial support to an organization committed to those seeking a safe haven in our great country.”

**RUPA G. SINGH, ESQ.**  
Niddrie Addams Fuller Singh LLP  
Volunteer Attorney | Corporate Sponsor | 2020 Pro Bono Publico Awardee



“Getting a green card through DACA has definitely lifted so much weight off my shoulders.”

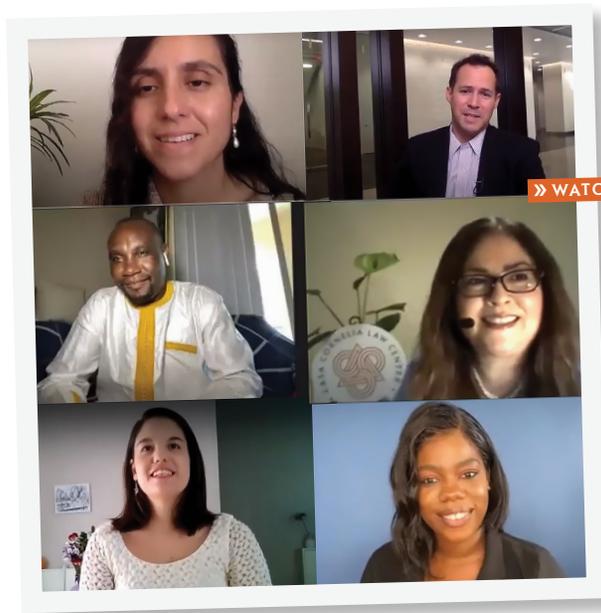
**DANIELA G.**  
Former client of Casa Cornelia,  
Children’s Program



“Casa Cornelia does critically important work to protect the human rights of the indigent immigrant community in San Diego, and I am delighted to support Casa Cornelia’s mission as a volunteer attorney and a contributor. I have had the opportunity to work closely with Casa Cornelia’s attorneys and staff,

and I’ve seen firsthand their tireless efforts in providing quality pro bono representation to people who need it most. Their talent and dedication is an inspiration, and I hope you’ll join me in supporting their efforts.”

**ACHRAF FARRAJ, ESQ.**  
Latham & Watkins LLP  
Volunteer Attorney | Donor | 2014 Pro Bono Publico Awardee



*Casa Cornelia’s 13th Annual La Mancha Awards video program featured several special interviews between staff and former clients of Casa Cornelia.*



"Casa Cornelia has been there for me since day one. It has given me hope. I could not have done it by myself. Working with them has been just a blessing."

**AWICHU A.**

Former client of Casa Cornelia,  
Asylum Program



"On June 23 of 2020, I received my permanent legal residence, which makes me feel very grateful to Casa Cornelia. [...] There are so many emotions surrounding the gratitude I feel for Casa Cornelia. Without you, I would not be able to do anything, and now I see that there are so many opportunities to move forward—and that yes, we can! With the kindness and love of yours, with the incredible support, and love that hugs every person that enters the Law Center seeking help. By embracing a person that feels broken, through moral support and legal assistance, it is more than a blessing."

**LUZ E.**

Former client of Casa Cornelia, Victims of Crime Program

## THE CARMEN CHAVEZ JUSTICE FUND



In 2020, Executive Director Carmen Chavez celebrated her 25th Anniversary with Casa Cornelia. Ms. Chavez started as a volunteer in 1995 and continued her legal path at the Law Center, serving in many different roles as a paralegal, law clerk, attorney, and Associate Director before becoming Casa Cornelia's Executive Director in 2007. In all her roles at Casa Cornelia, Ms. Chavez has combined leadership with warmth, compassion, and determination.

In honor and recognition of Carmen's years of service and contributions to the community, the City of San Diego declared November 17, 2020, the "Carmen M. Chavez, Esq.'s 25th Anniversary at Casa Cornelia Law Center Day."

In addition to internal virtual celebrations commemorating her achievements, the Board of Directors launched a philanthropic initiative called the Carmen Chavez Justice Fund to raise much-needed unrestricted contributions that would help the organization prepare for new legal challenges and opportunities brought in 2021. The campaign was an incredible success, raising over \$150,000 in individual donations.

## REFLECTION FROM NEW BOARD CHAIR DR. GLORIA BADER



I am honored to begin my role as Chair of the remarkable Board of Directors of Casa Cornelia Law Center. The Board's commitment centers on guiding and supporting the Executive Director, Carmen Chavez and the entire staff, the enthusiastic donors, our zealous pro bono attorneys, and trusted multi-lingual volunteer interpreters and translators. The Board's devotion to the mission of Casa Cornelia will impact thousands of children and adults in the years ahead as it has in the past. With a new national leadership in place, we have an opportunity to influence policy,

reimagine immigration reform and broaden our communication. At the same time, the quality legal services that Casa Cornelia offers our clients will continue and grow.

I first learned about Casa Cornelia over 25 years ago when I attended a San Diego luncheon of Rosemont College alumnae. Sister Ann M. Durst, SHCJ, Casa Cornelia's Founder, and a few other former presidents of the college were there. At the close of the meeting, I offered Sr. Ann the services of my accountant at my consulting company, The Bader Group. I intended to pay for the services but my accountant, Tony Applebaum, donated his financial work to Casa Cornelia for the next 10 years.

After that, Sr. Ann asked me to be on the first Board and I provided some staff training in communication and chaired the Executive Director search committee that selected Carmen's predecessor. Later, I chaired the visiting site committee that studied the Law Center's relationship with the Society of The Holy Child Jesus and the legacy of Cornelia Connelly. On the Board again, I served on the Governance Committee and then chaired the Strategic Planning Committee. My goals for the Board include strengthening attention to the mission, broadening impact and outreach through communication, and Board recruitment, inspiring new donors and building our financial security, and becoming a model board and employer.

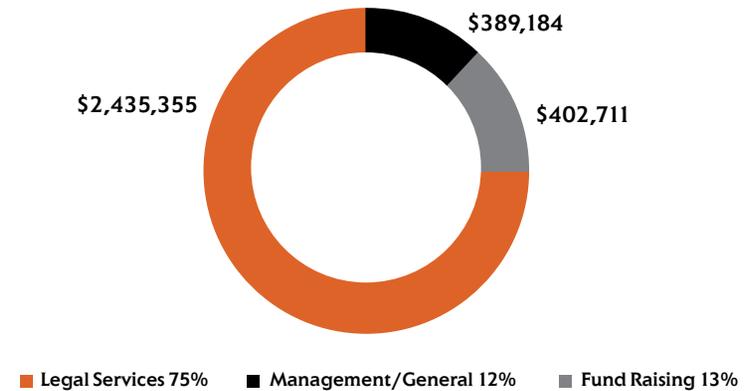
**GLORIA E. BADER, ED.D.**

Founder | The Bader Group

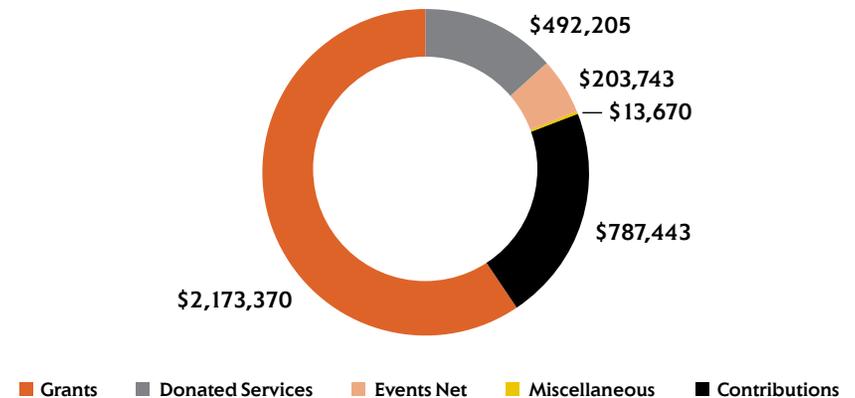
Board Chair | Casa Cornelia Law Center

## 2020 FINANCIALS

### \$3,227,250: Expenditures 2020



### \$3,670,431: Fund Raising Income / Donated Services 2020



In 2020, net assets increased by \$1,267,269. Of this amount, unrestricted net assets increased by \$1,601,581, while restricted net assets decreased (that is, funds were released from being restricted) by \$334,312.

## CASA CORNELIA 2020 DONORS

Casa Cornelia Law Center is grateful for the generous 2020 contributions from the following individuals and partner organizations:

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\*Please accept our apologies if there is an error in this list. We would appreciate it if you would notify our Development Office of any necessary changes. (619) 231-7788, ext. 324.



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