

*Justice With  
Compassion*

SAN DIEGO, CA

August 2017

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# Casa Cornelia Law Center

## Summer Newsletter



*Volunteer Attorney Roxanne Story Parks successfully won asylum for two sisters, pictured above with their mother on the day their cases were closed!*

## Volunteers Changing Lives

### **Flor de Maria Levandoski – Qualcomm Incorporated // Nancy Stagg – Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton LLP**

Two unaccompanied boys, who fled persecution in their home country of Guatemala, were recently granted asylum in children's asylum cases. Danny, 17, was a victim of threats and violent attacks by local gang members because of his faith. Asylum was also granted to Fernando, 16, who was abused and abandoned by his family and forced to work long hours doing hard manual labor. Volunteer Attorneys, Flor de Maria Levandoski of Qualcomm Incorporated and Nancy Stagg of Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton, worked closely with the staff at Casa Cornelia to prepare these young clients' applications, respectively. Danny and Fernando each received asylee status in the United States in May. These asylum decisions mean that each of the boys will be able to go to school safely in the United States, and start new lives here.

### **Allen Rowe, Briana McNeilly Cornelius, and Marlene Gutierrez with Ann Buckingham – Latham & Watkins LLP**

Volunteer Attorneys from Latham & Watkins were successful in obtaining asylum for their young client from Mexico. Margarita fled the rampant violence perpetrated by criminal cartels in her country. Cartel members followed Margarita to and from school, which terrified her because she was afraid that she would be abducted or

Jerry Trippitelli, Esq.

## Casa Cornelia's Mission

Casa Cornelia Law Center is a public interest law firm providing quality *pro bono* legal services to victims of human and civil rights violations. The Center has a primary commitment to the indigent within the immigrant community in southern California. Casa Cornelia strives to educate others regarding the impact of immigration law and policy on society and the public good.

To ensure that we at Casa Cornelia can continue to provide access to justice with compassion, please consider [donating here](#).

killed like her father. Thanks to Allen, Briana, Marlene, and Ann's hard work, Margarita was granted asylum and safety in the United States. Marlene Gutierrez was also essential in providing translation and coordination expertise. She was able to put Margarita at ease at the asylum interview in Anaheim.

### Shawn Huston – Huston McCaffrey LLP

Beatriz, a transgender client from El Salvador, faced lifelong physical, emotional and psychological harm because of her gender identity. Beatriz's abuse began as a child at 11 years old, when she was raped by a friend of her father. These hardships continued after she left her family's abusive environment, where she encountered similar treatment at the hands of police and local gangs. These gangs targeted her for being transgender and threatened her by telling her that she had 12 hours to leave the country. She fled to Guatemala and Mexico but decided to go on to the United States as she continued to face dangers. After arriving in the United States, Beatriz was detained at Otay Mesa Detention Center in San Diego, where she came into contact with Casa Cornelia Law Center and was able to get legal representation. With the help of volunteer attorney Shawn Huston from Huston McCaffrey, Beatriz was granted asylum and, by extension, safety and justice in the United States.



## Asylum for Ritza and Kamal

Ritza is a 14-year-old girl from Honduras. When she was a baby, her aunt and uncle were killed by gang members in front of her whole family. Later, half of her family was also murdered by gang members. When Ritza's mother went to report the crime to the police, she noticed that one of the police officers was one of the killers. He remained in the area, hoping to intimidate Ritza's mother, and ultimately prevented her from filing charges. For years, Ritza's mother moved the family to different areas in Honduras and even to Mexico trying to escape the gangs, but she was unsuccessful. The family's persecutors followed Ritza's mother to an immigrant shelter, an open market, and the streets of Tijuana, Mexico. When Ritza's mother was followed in Tijuana, she decided that they needed to come to the United States. Once in the U.S.,

Casa Cornelia's justice AmeriCorps attorney Luis Gonzalez helped Ritza to gain asylum. Now, Ritza is living in a country where she is better protected and no longer feels threatened by gang members. She is able to go to school and build a new life here. Ritza was one of several children's asylum cases won this summer.

Kamal, a young teacher from Sudan, fled severe persecution by the government, especially its national intelligence agency. He was detained on two separate occasions for over a month because the Sudanese government believed he was inciting his students against it. During his imprisonment, he was tortured by officials who put cigarettes out on his body, fractured his arm, administered electric shocks through his body, and forced him to crawl on gravel for hours. He finally fled the country after intelligence officials made two unsuccessful attempts on his life, narrowly missing him while he was driving home from work. Like many of our clients, Kamal travelled through several countries before arriving at the United States border, where he asked for protection. Casa Cornelia attorney Arwa Zakir Kakavand provided representation. His case was so strong that during his hearing, the Immigration Judge interrupted questioning from opposing counsel to grant him asylum! Kamal was overwhelmed with this good news, and started to cry. He will now be able to start a new life in the U.S., and have his wife and children join him to be a family again.

## **Achraf Farraj, Donor Spotlight**



Achraf has been one of Casa Cornelia's most devoted Volunteer Attorneys. He specializes in U Visas and VAWA self-petitions, helping women who have been victims of domestic violence and serious crimes. He already received one U Visa approval for his client, helped another attorney at his firm with a second U Visa case that was also approved, and currently has three other U Visa cases and one VAWA case pending. Achraf is a member of the

Pro Bono Committee at Latham & Watkins LLP, and he actively encourages his colleagues to do pro bono cases as well.

Achraf greatly values the opportunity to work with his Casa Cornelia clients face to face and help those in need. He is a treasured volunteer and also a generous monthly donor. Below, Achraf shares why he chooses to contribute both financially and through volunteering his time and expertise:

“Casa Cornelia does critically important work to protect the human rights of the indigent immigrant community in San Diego, and I’m delighted to support Casa Cornelia’s mission as a volunteer attorney and a contributor. I’ve 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 look forward to continuing to support their efforts."

Interested in becoming a monthly donor like Achraf? [Click here.](#)

## Tenth Annual La Mancha Awards

### Join us!

Casa Cornelia's [10th Annual La Mancha Awards](#)

Thursday, October 19, 2017

6pm-8pm

Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice

University of San Diego



In nine weeks, we will be celebrating the accomplishments of our pro bono volunteers and partners. We are grateful for the hard work and dedication of Volunteer Attorneys, Volunteer Interpreters and Translators, students, law firms, and corporate partners who make our work possible. This year, we set an ambitious goal to raise \$200,000 in funds that are necessary, now more than ever, to support our life-saving mission. Please [click here](#) for information about sponsorship opportunities, ranging from \$250 to \$20,000. Tickets are also [available here](#).

We thank you for your support and hope to see you at the [La Mancha Awards](#)! Please contact Director of Philanthropy, Courtney Brown, at [CBrown@CasaCornelia.org](mailto:CBrown@CasaCornelia.org) or by telephone at [\(619\) 231-7788 x 324](tel:(619)231-7788x324) with any questions or for more information.

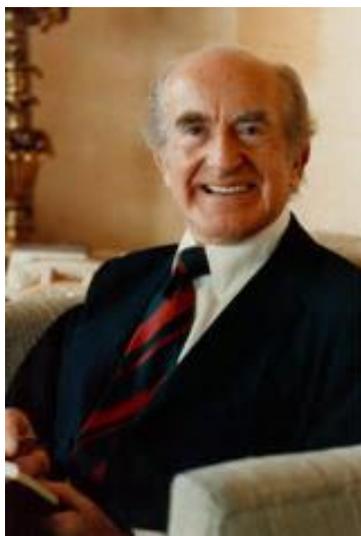
## Life-Changing Documents for Victims of Crime



Since our spring newsletter, Casa Cornelia clients have received a striking twenty-one immigrant visas (twenty U Visas and one T Visa), and nine grants of Legal Permanent Residence status for those who have been victims of serious crimes. Far from being just papers received in the mail, each of these documents signifies that a life, or a family's life, will never be the same. These documents ensure that our clients can work legally, and live safely and securely here in the United States. One of the clients who recently received her U Visa was be a panelist at the 43rd Annual NOVA (National Organization for Victim Assistance) Conference, where she spoke about her survival story and how the U Visa has changed her life. Many event participates came up to her after her remarks to thank her for her bravery. (Pictured above)

We thank the following Volunteer Attorneys, as well as a former staff member and intern, for their help in securing status for their clients: Aaron Arpi, Erwin Cena, Jessica Thompson Duran, Antonio Estrada (former staff member), Ryan Ewin, Melissa Garcia, Sabrina Houston, Patricia Ojeda (former intern) Heather Pollock, Naheed Rasul, and Victor Salazar.

## S. Mark Taper Foundation Support



The S. Mark Taper Foundation was founded in 1989 by the late S. Mark Taper, a real estate developer and philanthropist. The Foundation's giving areas include children and youth services, health care, social services, employment, education, and the environment.

Casa Cornelia has been fortunate to receive funding from the Foundation in years past and is very grateful for their continuing support and belief in our mission amidst a changing policy landscape and increased demand for our services as worldwide conflict evolves. We are very thankful for the S. Mark Taper Foundation's sustained support, which enables Casa Cornelia to strategically respond to and meet the ever changing needs of the clients we serve.

## Volunteer Interpreter and Translator Corner



Our [Volunteer Interpreters and Translators \(VITs\)](#) are a vital part of our success here at Casa Cornelia, as they play a crucial role to all our programs. Indeed, they give the gift of language! This summer, especially, we have had an increase in the number of United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) asylum interviews within our Children's Program. Some of our VITs have gone above and

beyond and traveled to Anaheim to meet with our minor clients and help them with their asylum interviews, which last a minimum of 2 hours. Our other VITs, who also graciously dedicate their time, have participated in numerous meetings in our office to help interpret for our minor clients. We could not do our work without our incredible Volunteer Interpreters and Translators and we want to thank them for their time and service to our mission.

### Asylum Interview Participants:

1. Felicita Maisonave
2. Vanessa Pena
3. Regina Calvario
4. Mary Jewell
5. Abbey Minondo
6. Edna Henriquez
7. Michelle Gonzalez de la Cruz
8. Mersedeh Mehrtash

### Interpreters for In-House Meetings:

1. Ann Gary
2. Alejandra Aldrete
3. Monica Rozen
4. Hallie Smith
5. Sonia Farron
6. Connie Jimenez
7. Sara Feldman
8. Mersedeh Mehrtash



*Thank  
You!*



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