



HOPE

at the

SOUTHERN BORDER

THOUSANDS OF KIDS ARE ARRIVING
LIRS NEEDS YOUR HELP



Lutheran Immigration
and Refugee Service

HOPE AT THE BORDER

In recent months, thousands of unaccompanied migrant children have arrived at our southern border seeking protection from the violence, climate disaster, and extreme poverty that have ravaged Central America. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service is urgently working with our network of service partners, community groups, and volunteers to address the critical needs of these children and work to reunite them with a family member here in the United States.

As a person of good will, we know you are here to learn more about how you can partner with LIRS, answer the call to serve, and join LIRS's long legacy of providing protection and welcome to unaccompanied migrant children at the border and beyond.

The situation may seem overwhelming, but this toolkit outlines tangible ways for you, your friends and family, and your community to lend a hand at this critical time.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY

Act: Sign up to be a foster parent or learn how you can support the needs of foster parents and kids.

Donate: Help LIRS address the most pressing needs of unaccompanied kids at the border.

Advocate: Support the US Citizenship Act of 2021 to help improve the family reunification process, among other essential provisions for migrants.

Pray: Lift your voice on behalf of thousands of kids making the harrowing journey to the United States to seek safety.

Teach: Learn more about what is happening at the southern border.



ACT

BECOME A FOSTER PARENT:

Foster families are urgently needed to support the increase of unaccompanied migrant children coming to the United States. We ask that you and your family consider this opportunity for you to serve. Please read the following section carefully if you would like to consider becoming a foster parent.

LIRS and our network of community-based partners provide both Long-Term Foster Care (LTFC) and Transitional Foster Care (TFC). At this time, we are specifically in need of TFC families who, with the full support of our partners, provide a safe and welcoming home **until** the unaccompanied child can be united with their sponsors here in the United States. Please reference the Teach section for more details on TFC.

About Foster Parenting through TFC:

- Becoming a foster parent is not for everyone! There are other opportunities to show your support. Check out the next section for more ways to help.
- Children remain in the foster home for a short period of time. TFC really is about safety and welcome for a transitional time!
- Transitional foster parents do not have to be bilingual. Children are quick to learn English and easily become fully immersed in the American culture.
- Foster families form lasting bonds with teenagers who often enjoy sharing about their culture and traditions.
- Becoming a foster parent is not an easy job, BUT all of our foster families are trained and given ongoing support from LIRS and our partners. You will have everything you need to welcome children into your home, including free training and a monthly stipend.

- In order to have access to the necessary support from our partners, foster families **must be within 50 miles** of one of our five TFC offices. If you are not within the region, please see below for more ways to help. TFC partners are located in:
 - ▣ Columbia, SC
 - ▣ Grand Rapids, MI
 - ▣ Lansing, MI
 - ▣ Crofton, MD
 - ▣ Havertown, PA
- The process to become a licensed foster parent is extensive and requires a home study and training that is specific to working with unaccompanied children. We take the care and protection of kids very seriously.

About Our Kids:

- While children of all ages seek safety in the U.S., the majority of the youth are between the ages of 14 and 17. Most often, we are in need of foster families who can accept teenage boys into their homes.
- Many unaccompanied children arrive with their siblings and we always work to keep families together.
- Our network is equipped to serve the most vulnerable children including pregnant and parenting youth, children with specialized developmental, mental health, and medical needs, among other unique circumstances.

If you are interested in becoming a foster parent to support unaccompanied migrant children and want to get more information on next steps:

VISIT: lirs.org/foster-care/become-a-foster-parent

Support Unaccompanied Children and Their Foster Parents:

If becoming a foster parent is not the right fit for you at this time, the **best way** you can support LIRS is through your financial donations. Find out more information on how your donation provides critical support to these children and their families in the Donate section below.

Another essential way to support unaccompanied children is through spreading the word! Share the website and the video on your social media, through text or email, or just by word of mouth! The more people who are equipped to help, the bigger impact we can make.

VISIT: lirs.org/help-migrant-children-at-the-border





DONATE

In recent months, thousands of families and unaccompanied migrant children have been arriving at our southern border seeking protection from the violence and persecution that has ravaged Central America and beyond.

Your donation is an act of service. Your support directly helps LIRS and our partners as we work quickly to unite children with their families and ensure that they have what they need to begin their lives in the U.S. Your support helps us to protect and welcome these children as we provide access to critical services including educational opportunities, medical and mental healthcare services, and access to legal service providers.



To give a gift and support the thousands of unaccompanied migrant children seeking safety in the United States:

VISIT: lirs.org/sendhelp



ADVOCATE

Your advocacy communicates to our nation's leaders that the communities they represent stand with migrants and refugees. Recently, Senator Menendez (D-NJ) and Rep. Sanchez (D-CA) introduced the US Citizenship Act of 2021, President Biden's groundbreaking immigration reform proposal. The plan addresses key areas of immigration law that have not been addressed in decades.

Among its many provisions, it improves the family reunification process by reducing visa backlogs and creates a pathway to earned citizenship for approximately 11 million immigrants in the country without legal status.

The passing of this act would assist and protect unaccompanied children who are coming to the United States seeking safety by re-starting the Central American Minors (CAM) program. This program allows children in Central America to apply from their home country for re-unification with their parent or relative with legal status in the U.S. and avoid the long, dangerous journey to the border.

For more on CAM go to:

immigrationforum.org/article/fact-sheet-central-american-minors-cam-program.

To find your representative and access sample messages in support of the US Citizenship Act of 2021:

VISIT: lirs.org/help-migrant-children-at-the-border

As the situation continues to develop, you can find more ways to engage in advocacy at:

VISIT: lirsconnect.org/get_involved/advocacy





PRAY

PRAYER FOR HOPE AT THE SOUTHERN BORDER

LIRS is a Christian faith-based organization. Regardless of your faith background, we invite you to join us as we lift our voices on behalf of the unaccompanied children coming to the United States. We've included two prayers, one based in the Christian faith and one for our Interfaith partners.

A PRAYER OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

God of Life,

We come to you knowing that every human being is formed beautiful in your image. You call us to uphold the dignity of the people that you have created regardless of their circumstance in life or where they were born.

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

—Jeremiah 1:5

We affirm that all human beings, including our brothers and sisters on the southern border, are each a gift to the world. We come to you today hearing the call to serve and show mercy.

Lord, it may seem easier to turn away from struggle of the families and the children on the Southern Border. However, we know as disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to turn towards our suffering brothers and sisters with outstretched hands to ease their pain.

God, we ask that those that seek to bring hope might offer hearts, minds, and hands to bring about your welcome, and justice.

Amen

AN INTERFAITH PRAYER

In the spirit of compassion, let us pray.

Spirit of love, you are the source of all welcome and life. In truth and peace, we thank you for providing resilience to those who are suffering, presence for those experiencing loneliness, and comfort to those gripped by the fear that comes from fleeing into the unknown.

We recognize that we are one human family, and as we see our siblings struggle, we must stretch our hands out – in service and solidarity to those who are most vulnerable, especially children, on the southern border.

You, who are closer to us than our own breathing, stir in us a new abiding transformation of heart that we might be bearers of mercy, healing, and the love of a family and community for all people.

Strengthen our resolve to stand together and witness with those who seek safety, family, and hope.





TEACH

THE SITUATION AT THE SOUTHERN BORDER

Since April 2020, we have seen steady increases of families and children arriving at our southern border seeking protection from violence and environmental disasters that have ravaged Central America and beyond. Most acutely, there has been a significant increase in the number of children arriving without a parent or guardian. While current policy generally does not permit migrants from entering the U.S. through the southern border, there is an exception for “unaccompanied children” and they are supposed to receive certain protections and care under the law. The influx of children has resulted in hundreds of children arriving in the U.S. per day, and thousands being held in Customs and Border Protection custody.

Who are the children at the border?

The children are mostly from the Northern Triangle, which includes El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Many come to the United States without a parent or guardian in search of safety and range in age, with some children as young as six or seven years old. A majority of the children (approximately 80 percent) have a parent or guardian in the United States and are seeking refuge and reunification with their families.

Other children are coming to the United States with their families, but they are currently being expelled immediately under Title 42, a Trump administration-era public health directive.

Why are they coming now?

Historically, migration ebbs and flows. Several factors compounded in 2020 and early 2021, creating an emergency situation requiring children to seek safety outside of their home country, including:

- Community violence
- Political unrest and corruption
- Climate crisis, including hurricanes Eta and Iota
- Pandemic-related challenges

They are, in many cases, fleeing for their lives. Under the Trump administration, the children were immediately expelled without due process. Now, their safety is the priority.

What happens when unaccompanied children arrive in the U.S.?

By law, children are supposed to receive certain protection and care. When children arrive on their own, they are first processed by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and transferred as quickly as possible to the Health and Human Service's Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) — an agency with child welfare expertise.

Once in their custody, ORR cares for the children through its network of providers, like Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), until they can be safely united with their vetted sponsor. Typically, this can take a few weeks, because it takes time to vet sponsors and ensure that the home will be a safe environment for children.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement prioritizes environments that consider the best interests of the children — where they have access to case managers, medical care, and legal services providers. At Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, our model recognizes these children are not just in our custody, but in our care, and we train and support foster care parents to care for children in family-like settings until they can be united with their sponsor.

What is different about what's happening now?

Problems can arise when the ORR network is at full capacity, as it currently is due to pandemic constraints and necessary compliance with public health guidelines. When this is the case, children can't be transferred from CBP to ORR custody quickly, and instead spend prolonged periods in CBP facilities, which were never designed to care for children.

Additionally, the past four years under the Trump administration significantly depleted our immigration infrastructure, and specifically the capacity to care for children. It takes time to rebuild. While we are working as quickly as possible, there are certain legal requirements that must be met.

What are the temporary shelters?

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), with support from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the American Red Cross, and faith-based partners have opened temporary influx facilities to move children out of CBP detention. These temporary facilities provide children with a safe place to sleep, eat, tend to personal hygiene, and offer activities and certain supports while ORR builds its licensed bed capacity. Because these facilities are temporary in nature, they are not licensed.

As LIRS has previously *testified to before Congress*, facilities like Homestead present significant risks to the care of children.

TRANSITIONAL FOSTER CARE:

Since 2011, LIRS and its network of community-based partners have placed more than 4,000 unaccompanied migrant children in Transitional Foster Care (TFC). This program specifically addresses the safety, well-being, and social and community needs of these children.

Together with our network of partners and foster parents, we ensure that each child that comes through the TFC program is placed in a safe, loving, and welcoming community while we seek to find a more permanent option for family reunification. As our partners work to identify a safe sponsor, usually a relative, unaccompanied children in TFC receive access to high-quality legal, educational, medical, and mental health services. We help them enroll in educational programming with bilingual teaching staff. They are assessed individually to make sure their socio-cultural needs are being met and to set them up for success as they build their new life in the United States.

Our incredible TFC network and 500+ licensed foster families are specially equipped to provide services to particularly vulnerable children, including minors under the age of 12, pregnant or parenting youth, sibling groups, and minors with specialized developmental, mental health, or medical needs. We make sure our network is equipped to serve every child that comes through our care.

As mentioned above, the LIRS TFC partner network operates in five cities:

- Columbia, SC
- Grand Rapids, MI
- Lansing, MI
- Crofton, MD
- Havertown, PA

We are proud to say that after thorough assessments of potential caregivers, 93 percent of our children in Transitional Foster Care are united with a sponsor.



Thank You

FOR ANSWERING THE CALL TO SERVE.



Lutheran Immigration
and Refugee Service

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