

# ACACIA CENTER FOR JUSTICE

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YEAR IN REVIEW  
2023



**ACACIA**  
CENTER FOR JUSTICE



# SHAINA'S VIEW

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In 2023, The Acacia Center for Justice embarked on a groundbreaking mission, nurturing and expanding a strong network of legal organizations dedicated to serving immigrant communities. This visionary endeavor is dedicated to safeguarding the rights of immigrants facing detention and deportation, emphasizing a trauma-informed framework.

Two years after announcing Acacia's formation, our relatively new but mighty organization has made tremendous strides in strengthening our internal capabilities. Simultaneously, we have managed our slate of field building programs designed to secure meaningful legal access and defense for unaccompanied children, families, and adults.

Grounded in a commitment to equitable access to justice, inclusiveness, person-centeredness, and freedom for all, we envision and are actively working toward building a society in which nobody has to go through our outdated, punitive immigration system alone or unsupported by quality legal assistance.

The challenges facing our communities are complex, and the road ahead to a more just future is difficult. Yet, as we wrap up our second year, we stand resilient, charged with renewed energy for the battles ahead. Your support means the world to us - thank you for being part of this journey.



**SHAINA ABER**

Executive Director



# EXPANDING MEANINGFUL LEGAL ACCESS AND DEFENSE

In partnership with a national community of legal services providers, Acacia oversees the provision of robust legal services, including representation and orientation services for tens of thousands of people either in immigration detention or facing deportation.

Effective Dec. 1, 2023, Acacia formally moved into the role of primary contractor for the Unaccompanied Children Program (UCP). This streamlining of program management under Acacia aims to focus resources on the deliberate expansion of UCP's long-standing work to ensure children in and released from Office of Refugee Resettlement custody have high-quality, zealous, and trauma-informed legal services and defense.

## How We Work



8 federally & state funded programs



100+ legal services provider organizations



a nationwide network

## Program Overview

### Legal Orientation

Acacia's programming provided orientation services to nearly **250,000 individuals**

**5 unique programs** servings kids, adults, and families

### Legal Representation

**24 thousand individuals** received representation through Acacia's programs

**9,000 new cases** initiated

Acacia's Unaccompanied Children Program provided nearly **20,000 kids** with representation

### Training & Education

In February, **45 attendees** joined Acacia's first in-person Onsite Training Program in Miami

April's Austin-based training had **100 in-person attendees and 200 virtual attendees**

# THE ACACIA DIFFERENCE



## PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT



### Children's Holistic Immigration Representation Project

Every year, more than 10,000 unaccompanied immigrant children are placed with sponsors in California.

Recognizing that an unaccompanied child's needs extend beyond the courtroom, CHIRP pairs kids with both legal representation and social services.

This innovative approach to representation provides youth with trauma-informed care that supports their whole personhood and development beyond their immigration case.

Since the program's inception, CHIRP has served close to 600 children and youths.

Acacia has been vocal in speaking out against draconian policies that harm immigrants and separate families. Our work is also grounded in advocating for a robust overhaul of the U.S. immigration enforcement machine that is responsible for the arrest, detention, or deportation of more than 2 million people in FY2023 alone.

As political threats to the U.S. asylum system continue, Acacia and our dedicated community partners, service providers, and advocates have worked tirelessly to equip people seeking asylum and their family members with the resources and information necessary to understand and defend their legal rights in the complex US immigration system.

In September 2022, Acacia staff initiated the Children's Holistic Immigration Representation Project (CHIRP), funded by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS). This innovative initiative integrates social and legal services to cater to the comprehensive needs of unaccompanied children across California. Recognizing that children flourish when their holistic needs are addressed within their communities of settlement, Acacia's field-building approach in CHIRP reflects our commitment to pioneering solutions in immigration representation. Learn more about [CHIRP here](#).

# LEVERAGING RESEARCH, EVALUATION, AND DATA ANALYTICS

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2023 was a year of growth and innovation for the Acacia Research, Evaluation, and Data Analytics (REDA) team. Over the course of the year, REDA tripled in size, growing from a team of 7 to 23 members. Our contract reporting responsibilities expanded, from a suite of six EOIR Legal Access and Representation programs, to include the Unaccompanied Children Program, the Attorney Recruitment Program and the Children’s Holistic Immigration Representation Project (CHIRP). The teams for these projects made great strides rolling out new Key Performance Indicators, Impact and Program Evaluation plans, and other metrics.

With the hiring of REDA’s Director of Data Systems and Analytics early in the year, the team further strengthened in-house expertise, ensuring the maintenance of the most rigorous and secure data management and validation processes.

## Looking Ahead

The REDA leadership team also launched an ambitious public facing agenda and capacity building activities intended to benefit the REDA team and the wider Acacia community. The team embarked on planning for a public data hub to increase transparency of US government’s immigration data, an internal guest speaker series, and several collaborations with allied organizations geared towards the production of co-branded public-facing publications and public events.

# LAYING A STRONG FOUNDATION



50 new staff hired

90

Attendees at  
Acacia's  
inaugural "Day  
Away"

Acacia secured  
its first ever  
office space for  
staff to convene  
and collaborate



Over the course of 2023, the organization prioritized filling key staff vacancies within our programmatic, operational, and newly formed external affairs teams to bolster capacity and better serve our partners in the immigration legal services field. Leadership and staff worked in concert to develop sustainable infrastructure and policies that ensure staff are supported and will allow Acacia to tackle the work that lies ahead.

The executive team, with input from staff and Acacia's board, also embarked on a Long-Range Planning process to better distill Acacia's values, vision, and mission. These core components will be vital to shaping Acacia's role in the ecosystem of organizations focused on improving the lives and livelihoods of immigrants who seek safety, refuge, and opportunities in the U.S.





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