

ACACIA CENTER FOR JUSTICE

YEAR IN REVIEW
2024



ACACIA
CENTER FOR JUSTICE



SHAINA'S VIEW

This year was one of incredible growth, collaboration, and innovation across our entire organization. Fifty-seven new staff members and more than 80 partner organizations joined Acacia in 2024 from across the U.S., bringing their unique perspectives and expertise to a movement poised for change. Over the last year, Acacians have been preparing for this moment — a new presidential administration — by building partnerships, creating resources, and strengthening our collective ability to respond.

As we head into a new administration, Acacia is clear-eyed about the challenges immigrant communities and their loved ones face. We remain committed to working alongside our network to ensure that people have their cases heard, their rights vindicated, and their interests defended.

As we wrap a difficult yet rewarding year, I remain grateful for all the ways Acacians, our partners, and our supporters show up for our communities and each other with commitment, compassion, and determination. Now, more than ever, we stand strong in delivering on the promise of justice and due process for all. We insist on a future where no person — immigrant or born within our borders — faces the vast and too often brutal immigration system without high quality, person-centered, and zealous legal support and counsel.

Thank you for standing with us.




SHAINA ABER

Executive Director



Empowering Communities
Supporting Immigrants

PREPARED TO DEFEND



Amidst a challenging political landscape in an election year, Acacia embarked on a comprehensive scenario-planning process to preserve the organization's financial viability, foster staff retention, support the network of legal service providers, and continue to deliver impactful outcomes through programmatic work - regardless of the outcome of November's presidential election. Building off of decades of expertise and leadership in the legal field, Acacia's experts provided guidance and coordination to strengthen the immigrant justice movement's response to withstand attacks on the horizon.

AT A GLANCE

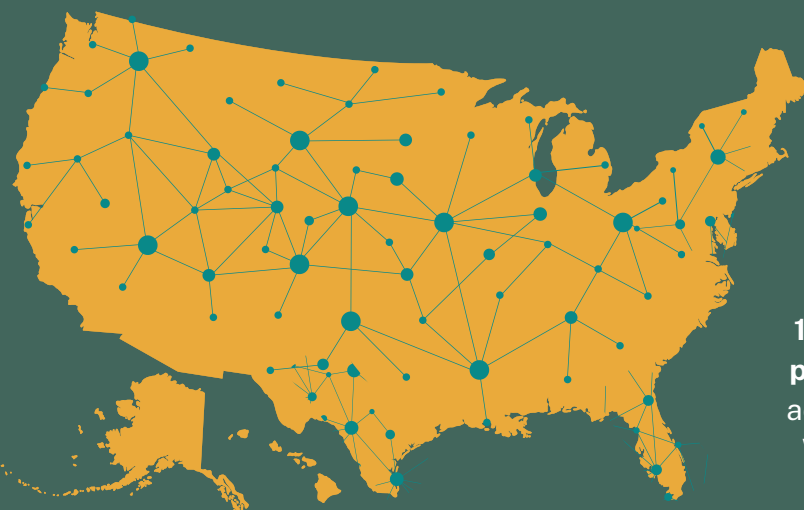
In partnership with a national community of legal services providers, Acacia oversees the provision of robust legal services, including representation and orientation services for tens of thousands of people in immigration proceedings.



166 full-time staff at Acacia



9 federally & state funded programs



158

158 legal service providers operate across 34 states + Washington, DC

27k

more than 27 thousand children with open immigration cases across all programs

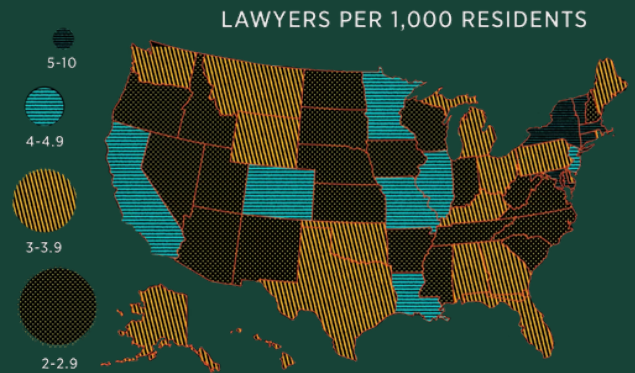
ADVANCING UNIVERSAL REPRESENTATION IN IMMIGRATION COURT

Unlike criminal proceedings, where the 6th Amendment guarantees a defense attorney to those who cannot afford one, there is no government right to a publicly funded attorney in immigration court. Finding and securing a private immigration attorney can be time-consuming and expensive.

As a result, most people — including children — have no legal representation in immigration court and little to no information about what to expect during legal proceedings.

Acacia's representation programs — the [Unaccompanied Children's Program](#), [National Qualified Representative Program](#), [Counsel for Children Initiative](#), and the [Children's Holistic Immigration Representation Project](#) — aim to bridge this gap so that nobody faces deportation alone.

2024 marked Acacia's first full year as the primary contractor for the Unaccompanied Children Program (UCP). The streamlining of program management under Acacia facilitated the deliberate expansion of UCP's longstanding work to ensure children in and released from Office of Refugee Resettlement custody have high-quality, trauma-informed legal defense.



31k

31 thousand individuals received representation through Acacia's programs

>500

more than 500 new pro bono cases initiated through the Unaccompanied Children Program

PRESERVING CHIRP



Since 2022, the trailblazing Children's Holistic Immigration Representation Project (CHIRP) has supported the wellbeing of recently arrived children and youth in California, pairing them with an integrated social and legal support team as they navigate their immigration case. However, in May of this year, it was announced that despite the [project's success](#), funding was in danger of not being renewed.

Acacia quickly mobilized alongside service providers on the ground to push back and fight for CHIRP's inclusion in the California state budget. Powerful advocacy efforts from our partners and media attention, including an [op-ed in the Sacramento Bee](#) by CHIRP-champion Representative Blanca Rubio of California's 48th Assembly District, helped secure a 10-month funding extension for CHIRP in September 2024.

SAFEGUARDING JUSTICE THROUGH LEGAL ACCESS

Legal access programs support a fair and orderly immigration system by helping children, families, and adults better understand their rights and obligations while they are in immigration proceedings. For decades, both Republican and Democratic administrations have recognized the critical importance that access to justice programs play in the ability of our immigration courts to function and for those navigating it to do so justly and humanely.

Legal access services through the [Legal Orientation Program](#) and corresponding hotline reach people detained in **more than 100 ICE facilities** across the country. For families placed on dedicated dockets that expedite their deportation or provide an alternative to detention, the [Family Group Legal Orientation Program](#) explains how families can advocate for themselves in court. This safeguard of due process provided services to **more than 5,000 people** in FY2024.

187k

more than 187,000 individuals received legal access services in 2024

80k

80 thousand children received “**Know Your Rights**” presentations as part of the Unaccompanied Children Program to inform them of their legal obligations and rights

5

5 unique programs serving children, adults, and families

FROM OUR NETWORK

“It was a prison, not a detention center. If I’m free today and here before you, it’s because of the Legal Orientation Program.”



Abdoulaziz Djibril, former Legal Orientation Program participant and Amica Center for Justice Board Member, speaking at an October 2024 Hill Briefing on Legal Access in Washington, DC

“I provided an individual orientation for a woman from China. I helped with contacting people to help her with her asylum application translation. She then needed help with translating her declaration, but the person who helped her with the asylum application was not available, so I proceeded with a virtual interpreter. The woman read me her declaration, the interpreter translated, and I wrote it down. She was granted asylum on November 5, 2024.”

– legal service provider
Legal Orientation Program
El Paso, Texas

SEEDING EXPERTISE

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

The [Legal Access Services for Reunified Families \(LASRF\)](#) program provides legal information and advice to class members and qualifying family members of the *Ms. L* settlement agreement. This agreement mandates that qualifying class members — children and parents who were separated at the southwest border during the first Trump administration — can receive crucial support, including legal consultations and pro bono mentoring.

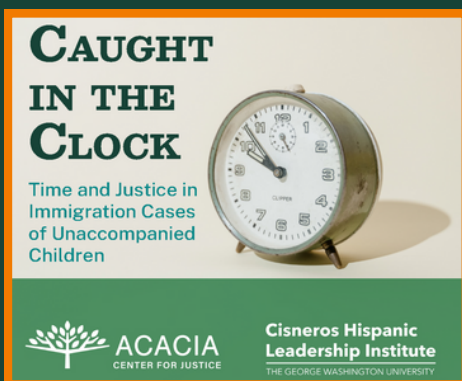
Securing the LASRF contract was a team effort across units at Acacia; staff brought their expertise to the negotiating table to bring significant positive changes to the program, maximizing reach and impact. In 2024, the LASRF program provided services to **more than 600 individuals**.



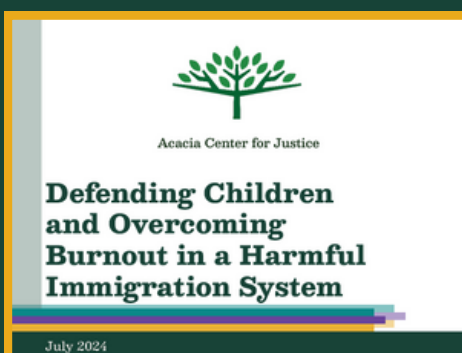
*“Although this program cannot remedy the harm caused to separated families, we hope that the robust implementation of this program in accordance with the *Ms. L* settlement agreement will restore a measure of justice to the families continuing to cope with the traumatic aftermath of separation.”*

-Sara Van Hofwegen, managing director,
Legal Access Programs

PUBLICATIONS



“[Caught in the Clock: Time and Justice in Immigration Cases of Unaccompanied Children](#),” co-authored by the Acacia Center for Justice, the Cisneros Hispanic Leadership Institute, and the Im/migrant Well-Being Scholar Collaborative, explores how the pace of the immigration system complicates the representation of unaccompanied children. The report finds that having enough time is vital to ensure just outcomes in immigration court.



“[Defending Children and Overcoming Burnout in a Harmful Immigration System](#)” examines how the trauma that children and youth experience can profoundly impact the lives and careers of the attorneys who represent them. Based on interviews with 50 attorneys, this research centers their voices and shows how the violence of the immigration system — most directly experienced by the people facing deportation — extends to the attorneys who defend them.

ACACIA IN THE COMMUNITY

Acacia partnered with the Haitian Bridge Alliance, UndocuBlack Network, Families for Freedom, and Morehouse College for a [forum](#) discussing the hardships experienced by Black migrants and to use these experiences to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges facing all migrants. The forum was held in commemoration of Black History Month and in conjunction with the release of the book, *Modern Migrations, Black Interrogations*, co-edited by Phil Kretsedemas, Acacia's Managing Director of Research and Data Analytics, and Jamella Gow, Professor of Sociology at Bowdoin University.



Since 2023, Acacia has partnered with social impact organization HelpGood to boost the reach of the Attorney Recruitment Project. This year, Acacia's [collaboration](#) with influencer Reb Masel about the crisis of representation for unaccompanied children won a **Shorty Impact Award**, an **Anthem Award**, and a **Webby**. Millions watched these videos, many of whom were inspired to join the groundswell of immigration attorneys and legal professionals standing up to protect the due process rights of unaccompanied kids.

SHAPING THE NEWS

"We urge the Biden administration to lead with courage to move forward bold and just solutions that address the urgent needs of people who migrate. It is imperative that the administration prioritize meaningful protections for people fleeing danger and facilitate the structural conditions and resources to make these protections accessible, including by increasing legal services,"

-Shaina Aber, executive director

[President Biden visits South Texas border](#) | Border Report (Feb. 2024)

"This is not a 'missing kids' problem; it's a 'missing paperwork' problem,"

- Jonathan Beier, associate director of research and evaluation, Unaccompanied Children Program

[FACT FOCUS: Claims that more than 300,000 migrant children are missing, lack context](#) | AP News (Oct. 2024)

"For the last two years, the Children's Holistic Immigration Representation Project has mobilized community support and resources to provide trauma-informed care and legal services to unaccompanied children and youth who call California home."

-Hortencia Rodríguez Sandoval, director of community partnerships and state and local policy

[Newsom's budget plan saves vital programs for immigrants, but kids and hungry seniors may suffer](#) | LA Times (June 2024)

SUSTAINING SUPPORT

ROOTS TO CANOPY | NYC

Acacia hosted its inaugural event, 'Roots to Canopy: A Celebration of Immigrant Rights and Community Empowerment,' in April in Brooklyn, NY. Partners in the legal field, press, and community members gathered to celebrate our shared commitment to justice, freedom, and dignity for every immigrant.



“Today, the challenges immigrant communities face are daunting, but we must remember that throughout history, it has always been the darkest moments that the light of human compassion and service have burned brightest”

-Jojo Annobil, CEO of Immigrant Justice Corps and Acacia board member, delivered inspiring remarks about the importance of legal advocates in challenging injustice.



Joy and community are vital tools to combat the burnout faced by so many advocates working to improve access to legal defense. At the June 2024 on-site training in New Orleans, Louisiana, more than 100 lawyers and advocates joined Acacia staff in a ‘second line’ celebration, honoring immigrants as the fabric of our communities.

[Read more.](#)

LEARNING & GROWING

“I enjoyed everything. It was noticeable that the session topics were chosen carefully and deliberately. It was nice to be around individuals who are knowledgeable in their field and eager to share with others.”

- training participant,
Washington, DC
(April 2024)

Acacia’s Learning & Development teams conducted **11 in-person and 60+ virtual trainings** in 2024, educating network partners and advocates on best practices and updates in immigration law.

450+

450+ participants at
Acacia-hosted in-person
trainings



48

48 trainings hosted on topics relevant to the representation of unaccompanied children

FINANCIALS

Only through partnerships with our network of legal service providers and movement allies can we realize our vision of meaningful legal defense for all immigrants at risk of detention or deportation. As a federal contractor, Acacia ensures funding is distributed equitably throughout our network, allowing programs to respond to rapidly emerging needs in a new political landscape where the legal rights of immigrants are under attack.


OUT OF EVERY \$1 THAT ACACIA SPENDS



Out of every \$1 that Acacia spends, \$0.91 goes directly to legal services providers working within communities across the U.S. (totaling \$274.1M in FY2024).



**2024 figures are unaudited and based on projections*



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January 2025
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