

Alone at the Border: Unaccompanied Children in Ohio



Latino Affairs
Commission

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Andrea Magaña Lewis, Public Policy Officer
Sandra Carrillo, Contractor

The composers put forth best efforts in gathering and providing accurate and current information. This report contains data from the latest research available. Upon request, OCHLA will provide any additional information or data available. The cover photo was taken by the © Associated Press.

For more information, please contact:

Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs
77 South High Street, 18th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215
(614) 466-8333
<http://ochla.ohio.gov>



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I. Introduction

Imagine that you are a 15-year-old boy living in a country with a high poverty rate, little or no educational opportunities, where violence is an everyday occurrence. You fear for your safety and do not want to become another victim of crime. You certainly do not want to die, but there is no one to rely on or turn to. Not parents. Not schoolteachers. Not the police. Not the government. You decide to grab what little money you have, a few necessary belongings, and head north, by yourself, on a long and treacherous journey to the U.S. The risks are many. The odds are against you. This is Geovany's story. One of the many stories of unaccompanied children that journey to the United States in hopes of escaping a life of poverty and violence.

Despite the widespread media coverage about the unprecedented number of unaccompanied children arriving to the Southwest border of the United States in 2014, there has been a lack of reporting on the context of the history and background of unaccompanied children, and the struggles they face in arriving and resettling here in the United States. While Ohio is a far removed Midwestern state, unaccompanied children have many implications for our state as well.

This report aims to explore the factual background of unaccompanied children arriving from Central American countries who are placed within the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement, the government's role in addressing this unprecedented influx, the risks unaccompanied children face and the implications for Ohio. This report features qualitative data that provides a firsthand account of Geovany, an unaccompanied child that arrived to Ohio in 2011, as well as interviews with professionals in Ohio who work with unaccompanied children.



Geovany Itzep-Santiago

II. Background of Unaccompanied Children

In the spring and summer of 2014, there was a historically high number of unaccompanied children journeying to the United States to seek asylum. While the issue was labeled as a “humanitarian crisis” by President Barack Obama, many questions remain about the cause of unaccompanied children coming to the U.S.

In the U.S., an unaccompanied child is designated an Unaccompanied Alien Child (“UAC”). The law defines a UAC as a child who:

- has no lawful immigration status in the United States;
- has not attained 18 years of age; and
- with respect to whom –
 - there is no parent or legal guardian in the United States; or
 - no parent or legal guardian in the United States is available to provide care and physical custody.¹

Unaccompanied children are in a unique situation. Unlike undocumented children, unaccompanied children arrive without parents or a legal guardian. Additionally, many unaccompanied children do not qualify for legal status under any of the existing immigration visa categories.²

Recent information available indicates that the predominant profile of an unaccompanied child in the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (“ORR”) is a young adolescent boy from Guatemala between 15 and 16 years of age.³ However, unaccompanied children seeking asylum in the United States are from a variety of Latin American countries, including El Salvador and Honduras.⁴ 31 percent of unaccompanied children are 14 years of age or younger, and girls comprise approximately 29 percent of all unaccompanied children in any given year.⁵

While it is often assumed that unaccompanied children speak Spanish, many unaccompanied children – especially those from Guatemala -- are from indigenous Maya communities, where the predominant language is one of 20 Mayan dialects.⁶ Around 40 percent of Guatemalans identify as indigenous.⁷ Additionally, of the top 25 languages used in U.S. immigration courts, at least three Mayan dialects – Mam, Quiche and Konjobal – make the list.⁸

¹ Homeland Security Act of 2002, 6 U.S.C § 279(g)(2)

² [“A Humanitarian Call to Action: Unaccompanied Children in Removal Proceedings.”](#) American Bar Association: Commission on Immigration. 3 June 2015.

³ [“Facts and Data.”](#) Office of Refugee Resettlement. 2016

⁴ [“United States Border Patrol Southwest Family Unit Subject and Unaccompanied Alien Children Apprehensions Fiscal Year 2016.”](#) U.S. Customs and Border Protection. 2016

⁵ Ibid. “Facts and Data.”

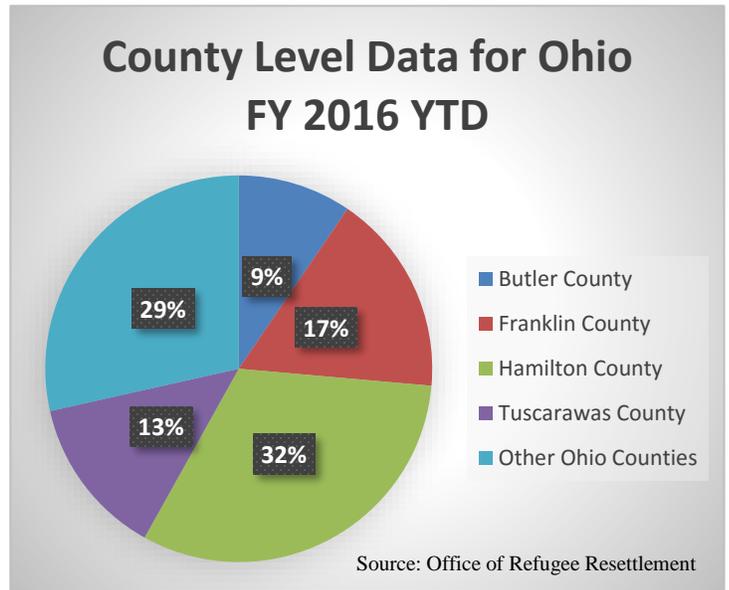
⁶ [“Language Barriers Pose Challenges for Mayan Migrant Children.”](#) National Public Radio. 2014.

⁷ [“Caracterización estadística, República de Guatemala 2012.”](#) Gobierno de Guatemala. 2012.

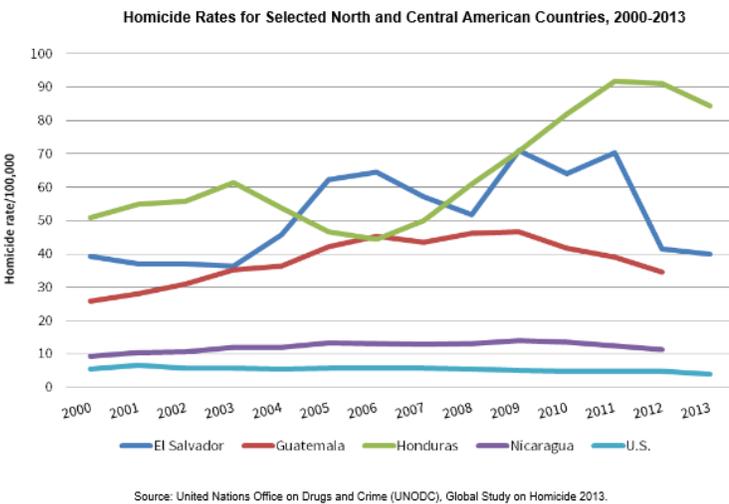
⁸ [“FY 2014: Statistics Yearbook”.](#) U.S. Department of Justice, Executive Office for Immigration Review. 2014.

In the current fiscal year, running from October 1, 2015 to August 31, 2016, U.S. Customs and Border Protection has encountered 54,052 unaccompanied children.⁹

Of the unaccompanied children entering the United States since October of 2013, ORR has placed 1,686 unaccompanied children with sponsors (typically family members) in Ohio. In the current fiscal year, ORR has placed approximately 568 children in Ohio.¹⁰ While ORR places a majority of unaccompanied children in a wide variety of counties in Ohio, the counties of Hamilton, Franklin, Tuscarawas and Butler receive the most unaccompanied children.¹¹ Tuscarawas County, in particular, is home to a number of egg farms and meat processing plants that have attracted a large and fast-growing indigenous Guatemalan population.



It was widely speculated in 2014 that the unprecedented surge of unaccompanied children arriving at the Southwest border may have been an unanticipated consequence of President Barack Obama’s Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (“DACA”), but the reality is UAC numbers have been steadily increasing for years¹², and children are journeying to the U.S. for a multitude of reasons unrelated to DACA.



Crime and violence are important factors in the unprecedented flow of unaccompanied children seeking asylum in the United States.¹³ In fact, Honduras has been recognized as the murder capital of the world for many years.¹⁴ Studies have shown that individuals victimized by crime are more likely to consider migration as a viable option than are their non-victim counterparts.¹⁵

⁹ “United States Border Patrol Southwest Family Unit Subject and Unaccompanied Alien Children Apprehensions Fiscal Year 2016.” U.S. Customs and Border Protection. 2016

¹⁰ “Unaccompanied Children Released to Sponsors by State.” Office of Refugee Resettlement. 2016.

¹¹ “Unaccompanied Children Released to Sponsors by County.” Office of Refugee Resettlement. 2016

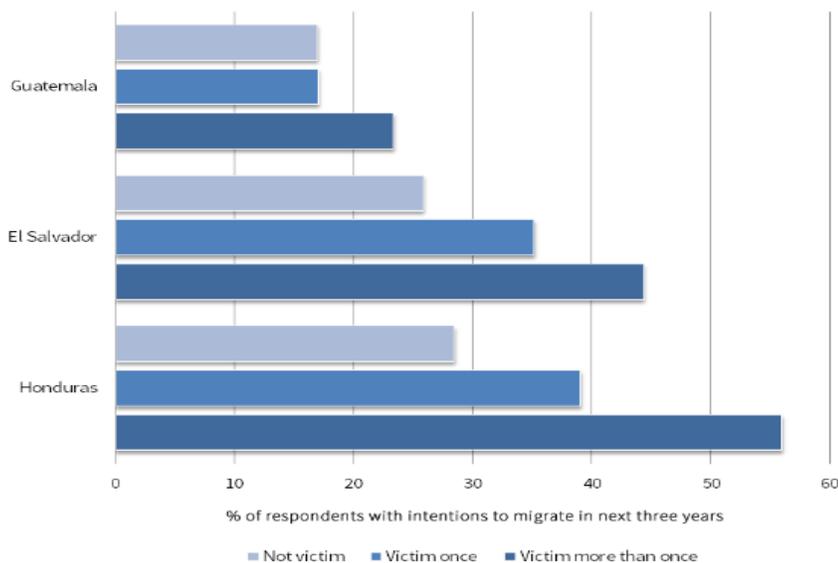
¹² Ibid. “United States Border Patrol Southwest Family Unit Subject and Unaccompanied Alien Children Apprehensions Fiscal Year 2016.”

¹³ Kennedy, Elizabeth. “No Childhood Here: Why Central American Children are Fleeing their Homes.” American Immigration Council. 2014.

¹⁴ “Intentional homicide, counts and rates per 100,000 population.” United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 2014.

¹⁵ Hiskey, Jonathan; Cordova, Abby; Orces, Diana; Malone, Mary. “Understanding the Central American Refugee Crisis.” American Immigration Council. 2016

Crime Victimization and Migration Intentions, 2014



Source: LAPOP, AmericasBarometer 2014.

Advocates for Basic Legal Equality (ABLE), a non-profit organization of regional law firms, represents a large portion of UACs before the immigration court and at any kind of related proceedings that could be involved with their case. Attorney Jessica A. Ramos has represented over 300 children since she began working on these cases in 2009, and says that virtually all of her current UAC clients have come to the U.S. to escape violence. “In years past, a lot of the children we saw were older and coming to the U.S. to seek work opportunities. We have seen that shift over the last two years to a

younger population, where these kids are fleeing violence in their hometowns where they are facing gang recruitment. And I hate to call them gangs because that diminishes the power and capacity of those criminal enterprises as they are actually very strong and advanced organizations.”

Transnational criminal organizations like the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Eighteenth Street Gang (M-18) stretch out over the entire Northern Triangle region of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Studies indicate that there may be as many as 85,000 gang members in these countries engaging in serious criminal activities such as drug trafficking, extortion, murder and other violent felonies.¹⁶

Jose Guadalupe, Director of Casa Alianza in Honduras, says the flow of migration is a combination of causes that occur simultaneously: high levels of poverty, lack of educational and employment opportunities, lack of protection, and the disintegration of the family.¹⁷ However, Mr. Guadalupe states that violence cannot be denied as the main motivation for the many boys and girls who are traveling to the U.S. despite the risks.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ribando Seelke, Clare. “Gangs in Central America.” *Congressional Research Service*. 2016.

¹⁷ Renaud, Brent; Renaud, Craig. “Between Borders: America’s Migrant Crisis.” *New York Times*. 2015.

¹⁸ Ibid. “Between Borders: American’s Migrant Crisis.”

III. Government's Role

Once unaccompanied children are in U.S. custody, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (“ORR”), an Office of the Administration for Children & Families under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (“HHS”), handles the resettlement process, taking into consideration the unique nature of each child’s situation by incorporating child welfare principles when making placement, clinical, case management and release decisions.¹⁹

While unaccompanied children are in the care and custody of ORR, ORR pays for and provides all services for the children including food, clothing, education, medical screening and any needed medical care.²⁰ With an influx of unaccompanied children entering the U.S., as with any influx of foreign individuals, there is often concern about the spread of infectious diseases. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) believe that unaccompanied children arriving from Central America pose little risk of spreading infectious diseases to the public given that childhood vaccination programs exist in many of their home countries.²¹ As a precaution, though, ORR provides vaccinations to all children who do not have documentation of previous vaccines.²²



ORR Shelter Facility, Photo Source: © Reuters



ORR Shelter Facility, Photo Source: © Reuters

ORR operates on a fiscal appropriation, and the appropriation for FY16 is \$948 million.²³ The HHS works with state officials to address concerns regarding the care or impact unaccompanied children have at the state level.²⁴

Because immigration proceedings can be very lengthy, often spanning multiple years, ORR usually places unaccompanied children in the care of a sponsor.²⁵ A sponsor is an adult who is suitable to provide for the child’s physical and mental well-being and ensures the child’s presence at all future immigration proceedings.²⁶ The average length of time unaccompanied children are in ORR custody, before being released to a sponsor, is 34 days.²⁷ Sponsors are not compensated to care for the children, they do not receive legal status if they are undocumented and they are not given legal custody of the child -- unless they have been established as the parent or legal guardian.²⁸

¹⁹ [“Unaccompanied Children’s Services.”](#) Office of Refugee Resettlement.

²⁰ [“Unaccompanied Children Frequently Asked Questions.”](#) Office of Refugee Resettlement.

²¹ [“Unaccompanied Children: Health Information for Public Health Partners.”](#) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

²² Ibid. “Unaccompanied Children Frequently Asked Questions.”

²³ Ibid. “Unaccompanied Children Frequently Asked Questions.”

²⁴ Ibid. “Unaccompanied Children Released to Sponsors by State.”

²⁵ Ibid. “Unaccompanied Children Released to Sponsors by State.”

²⁶ Ibid. “Unaccompanied Children Released to Sponsors by State.”

²⁷ Ibid. “Facts and Data.”

²⁸ [“Letter of Designation for Care of a Minor.”](#) Office of Refugee Resettlement. 04 April 2014.

Unaccompanied Children at the Southwest Border

At the direction of the President, a Unified Coordination Group is leveraging Federal resources to address the humanitarian situation associated with the influx of unaccompanied children entering the U.S. across the southwest border. This chart depicts the general process to enhance capacity resulting from federal coordination.



Once ORR releases an unaccompanied child to a sponsor, the next step for the unaccompanied child is to await immigration proceedings. There is no obligation for the government to provide legal counsel²⁹, regardless of the child's ability to afford an attorney. As a result, many unaccompanied children navigate a complex, immigration court system alone. Current studies show that 95.4 percent of unaccompanied children appear for their court proceedings if an attorney represents them.³⁰ Additionally, the likelihood of success increases with attorney representation. Currently, there are 200,333 juvenile immigration court cases in the United States.³¹ Of those cases, approximately 2,279 are in Ohio, with over half of those cases involving an unaccompanied child from Guatemala.³² Unaccompanied children are not given legal status, although some may qualify for legal relief through asylum, special immigrant juvenile status, U visas for victims of serious crimes, T visas for trafficking victims, and family based petitions for lawful permanent residence.³³

²⁹ "Services Provided." Office of Refugee Resettlement.

³⁰ "Children in Immigration Court: Over 95 Percent Represented by an Attorney Appear in Court." American Immigration Council. 2016.

³¹ "Juveniles- Immigration Court Deportation Proceedings." Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC): Syracuse University. 20 September 2016.

³² Ibid. "Juveniles- Immigration Court Deportation Proceedings."

³³ Burchette, Maya; Githegi, Marion; Morse, Ann. "Child Migrants to the United States." National Conference of State Legislatures. 23 October 2014.

IV. Risks Unaccompanied Children Face

The risks that unaccompanied children face both on their journey and in the United States are numerous. Their relative youth, lack of adult supervision, language barriers and an unfamiliar territory combine to make unaccompanied children a vulnerable population. As a result, unaccompanied children are easy targets for human trafficking, gangs, bullying, and increased psychological trauma.

An investigation by the Associated Press found that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (“HHS”), through its Office of Refugee Resettlement, placed more than two dozen unaccompanied children in homes across the country where their would-be sponsors subjected the unaccompanied children to sexual assault, starvation or forced labor for little or no pay.³⁴ In Ohio, at least six known unaccompanied children were trafficked directly from HHS to an egg farm in Marion, where multiple human traffickers forced the unaccompanied minors to work 12-hour days, seven days a week and live in squalid conditions.³⁵

The notoriety of unaccompanied children being trafficked sparked U.S. Senator Rob Portman (R-Ohio), Chairman of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, to open an investigation into these shocking revelations.³⁶ The investigation revealed that systemic deficiencies exist in HHS’ UAC placement process, including failures in verifying sponsors, a lack of background checks and weak post-release services, among others.³⁷ U.S. Senator Rob Portman indicated at a hearing in January 2016 that “[t]he horrible trafficking crime that occurred in Marion, Ohio could likely have been prevented if HHS had adopted commonsense measures for screening sponsors and checking in on the well-being of at-risk children – protections that are standard in foster-care systems run by the States, including Ohio.”³⁸

Attorney Jessica A. Ramos agreed that additional protections for minors need to be built into the system, but that the sudden surge of children caused a significant breakdown in the entire procedure. “I think it was the sheer numbers and also that the few rules that were in place at the time weren’t being followed. Assigned representation for the children is critical because we [attorneys] keep track of the kids more than some of their sponsors do. More importantly, there is a lack of follow-up services. They basically kick these kids out and walk away and there is no follow up whatsoever.”

UAC Geovany Iztep-Santiago says that extortion is even more common than trafficking, and can be just as dangerous. “Many times *coyotes** charge a ridiculously high interest amount that you cannot pay back. Sometimes it overlaps the original amount. That is exactly what happened after I came to the United States. My mom and I could not pay back the debt, which put my brothers in danger. That is why they were forced to come here.”

³⁴Burke, Garance. [“AP INVESTIGATION: Feds’ failures imperil migrant children.”](#) *Associated Press*. 24 January 2016.

³⁵ [“Protecting Unaccompanied Alien Children from Trafficking and Other Abuses: The Role of the Office of Refugee Resettlement.”](#) *United States Senate, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, Chairman Rob Portman*. 2016.

³⁶ Senator Rob Portman. [“Portman Opens Hearing on HHS Placing Children with Human Trafficking Ring.”](#) 28 January 2016.

³⁷ *Ibid.* “Protecting Unaccompanied Alien Children from Trafficking and Other Abuses...”

³⁸ [Statement of Chairman Rob Portman U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations Hearing: “Adequacy of HHS’s Efforts to Protect Unaccompanied Alien Children from Human Trafficking.”](#) 28 January 2016.

**Coyotes* are human smugglers who are paid to facilitate the migration of people illegally across the border

Attorney Jessica A. Ramos says that many of her clients face the same dangers as well. Family members back home are often put in danger when an individual cannot pay back a debt. Additionally, the advent of social media has caused extortion to rise to new levels. “A client of mine recently saved up enough money to buy a car. He happened to post a picture on Facebook, and just days later he began receiving messages to sell his car and send the money to Honduras or his mother would be killed. His mother had to move.”

V. Geovany's Journey to Ohio

Born in Acul, Guatemala, Geovany Itzep-Santiago grew up in a small Maya village with a gruesome past. Just two decades earlier, his village was annihilated and its population massacred by the National Army during the Guatemalan Civil War. Countless indigenous populations in the country that were largely considered second-class citizens, suffered similar fates.

Geovany and his six siblings were raised largely by their grandmother, as the lack of economic opportunities and continued discrimination following the civil war forced his parents to find work in the United States. With his parents thousands of miles away, Geovany found himself the target of forced gang recruitment.

“A lot of the gangs come to small Maya towns and target kids like me who are kind of alone out there. My parents were in the United States, so it left me unprotected. The gangs see that and so they take advantage of the fact that you're alone, and they force you to join the gang.”

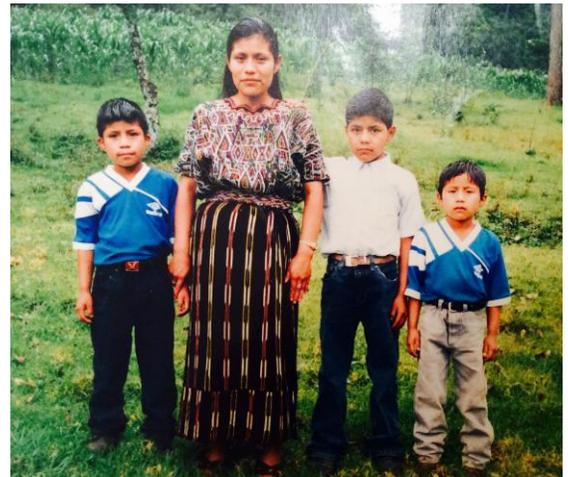
When asked if he had notified authorities of the gang presence in his town, Geovany said he indeed had, but notifying the police comes with its own set of risks. “From our experience, we [Mayas] grew up knowing that police did not help our people. They turn us down when we ask for help, and they are an hour away, so why would they come all the way here. Plus, we know that they are connected with the gangs, and some of them are paid. You could actually have more risk if you talk to the police because they are connected with the gangs.”

With threats against his life and the lives of his siblings, Geovany and his siblings made the dangerous trek to the United States to reunite with their parents. Because of the costs associated with financing the journey, the siblings traveled alone at different times, including his 12-year-old sister.

“The journey was scary. I was only 15 and am from a little town where I had not seen the world in that light. I had to stay in Mexico for a month waiting on the phase of the moon to change. Because we walked in the night, we had to wait for the moon to shine so it could guide us through the desert. I was scared of dying, and there was a lot at risk. When we started our journey there were nine in our group. I was the youngest and there were two women. It was hot and I carried two gallons of water in each hand through the desert. I was weak and it was heavy. There are many things I saw on the journey that I wish to forget.”



The main street of Acul, Guatemala



Geovany (left), two brothers, and their mother before she left for the U.S.

After a week of walking in the desert, Geovany crossed into the United States where he was reunited with his mother and father. With seven children to care for, Geovany's parents decided that he would attend school for two years and then find a job. Geovany said

his first week in school was very difficult.

“I was nervous. It was a new world, a new country. I did not know any English, besides counting. At first, school was not very important to me. In Acul I did not go to school a lot because the gangs would be waiting around and I did not want to see them. I had just finished fifth grade in Guatemala and I did not know how to read or write. About a month before I came to the U.S. I decided I would teach myself to read and write, which started with me memorizing the ABCs. My thoughts on education changed when I met Amy.”



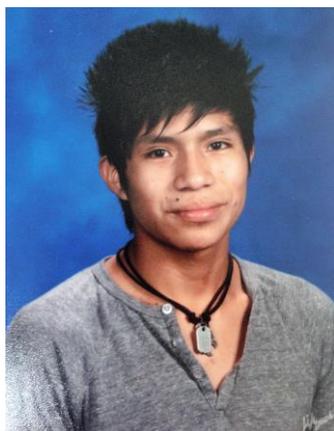
Geovany's school in Guatemala

Amy Harris is a retired ESL teacher at Dover City Schools in Tuscarawas County, and is now Geovany's legal guardian. She obtained guardianship for Geovany so he can continue his education without having to work. Two of Geovany's brothers also live with a teacher so they may focus on their studies as well.

“Amy showed me how important education is and I realized there was something else out there. It can open another world to you. It changes your thinking. I want to go to college and get hired for my education.”

Geovany will be a high school senior this year and he is currently enrolled in the College Credit Plus program at the Kent State University branch in Tuscarawas. Although Geovany is excelling in school, his opportunities are limited because of his immigration status. Geovany's status prevents him from obtaining a work permit, a driver's license, federal financial aid and in-state college tuition.

In spite of his obstacles, Geovany remains optimistic about his future. When asked what he would like people to know about unaccompanied children who are coming to the U.S., he said, “I want people to know that we came to this country looking to escape violence and for the opportunity to live safely. Many children like me feel alone in this world where they are unfamiliar. It would make a big difference if people would make these kids feel like they are welcome and that people care about them, and that they are not strangers. Also, letting us get an education --especially a college degree-- will allow us to help ourselves and improve our lives. We are a part of this state too.”



Geovany Itzep-Santiago, 11th Grade

His guardian, Amy, added, “I think sometimes people have difficulty understanding and they say ‘Why are they here? Go home!’ But truly his community was annihilated in the Guatemalan Civil War. His people had their land taken and they could no longer support themselves, and they were left destitute in that regard. The communities have deteriorated to the point it is worth making a trip no matter how dangerous it is, because you know it is not safe to stay. People are completely unaware of the involvement of the United States in Central America during the civil wars...If you ask Geovany, he would love to go back to Acul, but the issues of violence prevent that. There are so many kids like Geovany who have great potential if given the right supports.”

Geovany says he would like to become a mechanical engineer upon graduating college. He has requested asylum in the United States, but his case has been pending for the past four years.

VI. Implications for Ohio

As a Midwestern state, it may seem that unaccompanied children have little impact on Ohio. However, our state receives a moderate number of unaccompanied children per year, and the implications are many. Unaccompanied children do not have access to federal public benefits such as subsidies under the Affordable Care Act, Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) with the exception of emergency services and public education.³⁹

With 1,686 unaccompanied children residing in Ohio, communities all around the state are feeling the effects of the influx. As ESL teacher Amy Harris puts it, many small towns like the ones in Tuscarawas County are divided on their opinions regarding the recent influx of UACs. “Schools and towns are unprepared at first, for sure. It is almost like there are sides; you’re either on a side that wants to help, or you feel like you’ve been unnecessarily inconvenienced.”

As it relates to education, our research suggests that some school districts create programs that address the needs of unaccompanied children, while others exercise policies that make school enrollment more difficult.⁴⁰ The Associated Press has found that in at least 35 districts in 14 states, including Ohio, hundreds of unaccompanied children have been discouraged from enrolling in schools or pressured into separate but unequal alternative programs.⁴¹ And for those unaccompanied children that are able to enroll in a public school, many face uphill battles with education gaps, difficulty integrating, language barriers and unprepared schools.

“Most teachers genuinely want to help their students, it’s the trait of teachers to want to do that. But there are so many state mandates with regards to teacher evaluation and student performance, and budget cuts. They have a certain amount to cover, they have to go at a certain speed and if they don’t cover it and it appears on a state test, they’re in trouble. Teachers are under an immense amount of pressure,” adds Ms. Harris.

Educators often play the role of psychologist, as the vast majority of UACs are coming from crisis situations. Ms. Harris says that throughout the years she has seen an emerging pattern of psychological issues surface. “I’ve seen it both ways, where kids have been left in their home country so their parents can work in the U.S., and when they get here they don’t really know their parents. The girls just cry. They want their grandmas. Then there are other children who come alone and are expected to work and send money back to their parents. In both situations these kids have to go to school because immigration is aware of them, they have to pay a debt back, which is connected to violence, and they have to work. The worst part is there is no help for the psychological issues they face. Many children have PTSD. They face these issues alone.”

³⁹ Ibid. “Child Migrants to the United States.”

⁴⁰ Pierce, Sarah. [“Unaccompanied Child Migrants in U.S. Communities, Immigration Court, and Schools.”](#) *Migration Policy Institute*. October 2015.

⁴¹ Burke, Garance; Sainz, Adrian. [“AP Exclusive: Migrant children kept from enrolling in school.”](#) *Associated Press*. 2 May 2016.



Geovany's grandmother who raised him after his mother left for the U.S.

Geovany Itzep-Santiago said his parents came to the U.S. when their seven children were young, leaving their grandmother to care for them. “Parents feel that the kids should be thankful they are in the U.S. They do not understand that the kids feel abandoned. The kids just understand that they were left in Guatemala and that mom was not there for their birthday. They do not understand why the parents had to go to the U.S. and leave them. My sister is especially having a hard time transitioning to live with our parents.”



Yesica, Geovany's sister

Attorney Jessica A. Ramos says that in addition to the educational and psychological implications, there are many legal implications for the children and attorneys who represent them. “It is difficult because many of these children come here and are without a legal guardian, which can put attorneys in difficult positions because technically children do not have the legal capacity to contract. They cannot even sign a retainer with us technically, but

yet we are representing them. And we are not a guardian ad-litem (GAL), we are not a best interest attorney. I am not supposed to figure out what is in my client’s best interest and act in their best interest. I am a client directed attorney. I have to do what my client wants me to do, within reason of course. If there were a legally appointed GAL who could make the legal decision as to what is in the child’s best interest, that could help clarify some important issues for someone like me who may not be able to get that information from the child.”

VII. Conclusion

With the surge of unaccompanied children entering the U.S., it is important that government officials, community organizations, and Ohioans be aware of the background and risks unaccompanied children face in order to address the situation more appropriately. Not only are unaccompanied children facing risks in their home country and in their journey to the U.S., but also in their resettlement process. As a vulnerable population, unaccompanied children require additional care and guidance, which creates policy tension in the U.S. between protection and prevention.

The future of unaccompanied children is unknown. For example, from the prevention aspect, Senator Jeff Sessions (R-Alabama), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest, and Senator Ron Johnson (R-Wisconsin), Chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, introduced a companion bill in March of this year, that if passed would create the Protection of Children Act (S.2561).⁴² The Act would promptly return all unaccompanied children who cross the border illegally back to their home country, notwithstanding the risks the unaccompanied child faces upon return.⁴³ From the protection aspect, there is a call to streamline the UAC process to prevent abuses by the system, and more appropriately handle the influx of unaccompanied children.⁴⁴

With the existing policy tension at the federal level, it is unknown what type of process will be instituted in the future to deal with unaccompanied children like Geovany. Whatever the case may be, government officials, community organizations, and Ohioans will need a strategy to deal with this issue. The Ohio Latino Affairs Commission is ready to assist and advise by means of our interagency council mandate.

⁴² [“Legislation Sponsored or Cosponsored by Jeff Sessions.”](#) United States Senate.

⁴³ Ibid. “Legislation Sponsored or Cosponsored by Jeff Sessions.”

⁴⁴ Ibid. “Protecting Unaccompanied Alien Children from Trafficking and Other Abuses...”

Ohio Latino Affairs Commission

Riffe Center – 18th Floor
77 South High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Office: (614) 466-8333

Fax: (614) 995-0896

Homepage: <http://ochla.ohio.gov>

Facebook: <http://facebook.com/ochla>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/OCHLA_OH

