



The Migration and Child Welfare National Network (MCWNN) is a FREE membership coalition targeted for individuals and agencies focused on the intersection of immigration and child welfare. If you are interested in sharing information on FYI from MCWNN, please contact co-editors, [Yali Lincroft](#), MBA, Policy & Program Consultant or [Lara Bruce](#), MSW, American Humane Association Child Welfare Specialist. Join MCWNN by filling out this [simple form](#).

### **Fostering Connections Grants – International Family Finding**

[International Family Finding](#) (Children’s Bureau Express) - *This is one of three articles in this issue about agencies that received a Children's Bureau Family Connection grant in 2009 to help children in foster care reconnect with family members.*

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 mandated that agencies engage in intensive efforts to locate children's grandparents and other adult relatives when a child enters foster care. It didn't limit these efforts to the child's State of residence or even to the United States. However, few agencies are prepared to conduct searches in other countries for relatives of children in foster care. International family finding requires a reliable network of social work connections around the world—the kind of network that the Baltimore-based International Social Service-United States branch (ISS-USA) has.

ISS has been engaged in international family finding for over 85 years. In 2009, ISS-USA teamed with the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF) and Rutgers University to win a Family Connection grant. Their project involves training social workers in seven New Jersey counties in intensive international family finding efforts. The knowledge and outcomes of these social workers will be compared with those in seven other counties where workers have not received the specialized training. Findings from the project evaluation will be used to build knowledge in the field about what works in family finding to improve outcomes for children.

The project staff estimated that approximately 1,500 children in the New Jersey foster care system have relatives in other countries. However, when the project got underway, project staff discovered that caseworkers were sometimes reluctant to refer cases to ISS or not sure about how international family finding worked.

During the first year of the project, staff conducted a needs assessment survey of workers to which approximately 1,000 caseworkers responded. The results showed a number of reasons for the low referral rate:

... Some workers didn't understand that making connections with a child's relatives abroad did not necessarily imply placement abroad. It could also mean connecting with a relative who would send birthday cards or provide links to family or cultural identity. It could even mean termination of parental rights so that the child could be adopted.

... Many workers didn't know how to do international family finding or how to start.

... Workers didn't know if there would be support in their office for international family finding or resources for communicating with foreign family members. (In fact, New Jersey offers a "language phone line" with real-time translation.)

... Some workers had a difficult time believing that it could ever be in the best interests of U.S. children to place them in a foreign country.

The project staff set out to address this combination of institutional and personal issues that kept caseworkers from using international family finding. Workers in counties that received intensive training learned how to work with children and their families early in the process to identify all relatives—domestic and international. Workers also learned to connect with a family's neighbors and place of worship to find out if a child had family abroad.

After learning of a possible family connection, the worker would refer the case to ISS, so they could continue the search through ISS social workers in the foreign country. If the decision was eventually made to consider placing the child with the relative abroad, the ISS worker in the other country would arrange for a home study and all services a child might need.

Project staff wrote a curriculum for international family finding and conducted all-day trainings with DCF-DYFS staff, which were completed at the end of 2010. Since then, the number of cases referred for international family finding has shown a remarkable increase—while there were only 82 inquiries about referrals in all of 2010, there were 139 inquiries in just the first quarter of 2011. Another recent boon for the project has been the addition of an International Liaison position at DCF-DYFS. The liaison answers caseworker questions about referrals, helps caseworkers complete forms, and makes the appropriate referrals to ISS.

Project staff members realize that the courts play a big part in whether children can establish connections with relatives in other countries. Staff are currently working on a 2-3 hour training for judicial and legal professionals that will be used in a pilot program in September 2011. The goal is to train the courts to look outside the jurisdiction, including outside the United States for family connections.

According to Project Director Felicity Sackville Northcott, Ph.D., "We want the courts and the caseworkers to treat international family finding like any other family finding that involves another jurisdiction. The decision to connect a child to family in another country may well be in the best interests of that child, and we work to make that a viable option."

The project recently posted a list of Frequently Asked Questions that caseworkers may have about family finding. View the questions and answers here: [www.iss-usa.org/trainingfaq](http://www.iss-usa.org/trainingfaq)

For more information about ISS-USA and the international family finding project, contact Project Director Felicity Sackville Northcott at [fnorthcott@iss-usa.org](mailto:fnorthcott@iss-usa.org). To find out more about the Children's Bureau Family Connection grant program, visit: [www.nrcpfc.org/grantees.html](http://www.nrcpfc.org/grantees.html)

**BRAVO to immigration attorney and MCWNN member Linda Brandmiller:  
Catholic Charities San Antonio Wins Protection for Victim of Human Trafficking**  
Newsletter – LegalFront – State Bar of Texas Newsletter (March 25, 2011)

Last month, after two years of legal struggle, Catholic Charities attorney Linda Brandmiller finally won protection for her client as a victim of human trafficking. "For two years, this case has highlighted the failures in the T-visa system. Now, I use this case as a powerful example of how a victim can overcome all of the governmental hurdles if people are willing to fight hard enough," Brandmiller said. One of those governmental hurdles was an initial denial of the client's trafficking victim certification: Although the captors had sexually abused the client and smuggled her in a locked trunk, authorities denied her

certification because she had previously wanted to come to the US. The denial due to ‘consent’ infuriated Brandmiller. “That is like telling a woman suffering domestic violence that she is not a victim because she ‘wanted’ to get married!” she said. Brandmiller hopes her client’s case will help improve protections for human trafficking victims. “There is a huge disconnect between the intent of the T-visa program and its implementation: To combat a billion dollar trafficking industry, the US granted only 1,200 T-visas in the past ten years.”

To inform others about the abuse that trafficking victims suffer, Brandmiller forwarded this translated account from her client:

*I was nineteen years old when US immigration officials discovered me in the trunk of a car at a random immigration stop in Hidalgo, Texas. And I thank God that they found me because if they had not rescued me, I am sure that I would be dead by now. I had suffered for three long months at the hands of brutal men and women who used me for sex and tortured me for fun.*

*Three months before, at a train station in Mexico, a woman had approached me and said she could make arrangements for me to get a job in the US, so I went with her. After a few weeks, three men came to the house, and I heard the woman say, “I have one for you,” and I saw them give her money for me. I tried to ask who they were and where they were taking me but they hit me and told me to just shut up and do what I was told.*

*They drove me to a house out in the country with nothing else around. They took all my identification documents from me, and they locked me in a room. For the next three months, I was repeatedly sold for sex, beaten, threatened, drugged and starved.*

*One night several of the men took me outside to a car and locked me in the trunk. I was scared and it was difficult to breath. I was in that trunk until the next day driving to Hidalgo. Immigration officials stopped the car in the US, and finally, someone found me in the trunk.*

*They could see I was hurt, bruised and with bite marks all over my body, but they took me to immigration detention. After I had been detained for nearly six months, Sophia, another inmate in Pearsall, called the Catholic Charities Immigration Department in San Antonio. Linda, the Director of Immigration, came to see me.*

*That was two years ago. Last month, Linda called me with the news that the government recognized that I was a trafficking victim. I was so relieved and we both cried. Now, I want to be a voice for other trafficking victims who do not understand this system, who do not find Linda or someone like her who will fight for them, especially when the experts turn them down and do not believe they meet the requirements to be considered a trafficking victim. There are many, many victims like me out there, and they all need help*

### **Dealing with Disappearing Parents (Arizona Public Media, May 11, 2011)**

The University of Arizona [James E. Rogers College of Law](#) was the site of a recent press conference to announce the release of a new report on Immigration and the Child Welfare System titled [Disappearing Parents](#). Nina Rabin is the director of border research at the [UA Southwest Institute for Research on Women](#) (SIROW), as well as the author of the report. Her work focuses on how immigration policy impacts women and children, and she says one of the lesser-known stories about immigration is what happens to children—many of whom are U.S. citizens--when their parents are detained or deported.

*“When (someone) is detained it can be for a period of months or years,” Rabin says, and “a lot can happen with the custody of the kids in that time.” Rabin’s report describes families entangled at the point of contact between two large bureaucracies: the federal immigration enforcement system and the state child welfare system.*

*“People disappear into the immigration system, and the immigration system isn’t really responsive to the concerns raised about family separation and children on the outside,” Rabin says. “And from the child welfare system’s perspective—kind of understandably—if this parent disappears they have to move on, they have to find a permanent home for this child.”*

*That leaves the system to decide children's fates, without their parents present. Rabin says the two bureaucracies are simply “rolling along and not recognizing what’s happening to people.”*

*Patricia Manning is also with SIROW, where she works as an immigrant social services coordinator and advocate. She says in a little over a year she’s seen 110 women, the vast majority of them housed in the privately operated [Eloy Detention Center](#). Drawing made by woman being held at Eloy Detention Center. Most are parents, and they are distraught by their separation from their children, she says. She points out that, once the parents are in detention, there are no mechanisms in place to facilitate contact between them and their children.*

*Isaias Noguez, of the [Mexican Consulate in Tucson](#), says the report on disappearing parents highlights the pervasive problems created at the intersection between [ICE](#) and the [child welfare system](#). He points out his office can help overcome some of the unique problems that result.*

*“Frequently attorneys or judges have problems contacting parents that are in detention here in Arizona or have been deported to Mexico. If they notify the consulate, then we can serve as bridge to allow contact with the parents that are detained or are now in Mexico,” he says.*

*“Similarly, through the Child Protective Services in Mexico, known as [DIF](#), the consulate can, again, act as a liaison so that the appropriate authorities in the U.S. and in Arizona can contact the authorities in Mexico so that we can attain a reunification of the minors.”*

*Noguez says that the biggest problem for his office is that, in most instances, the Mexican Consulate is never notified of cases. He says too many parents face the possibility of termination of their parental rights. He feels the report shows how this is often due to their inability to comply with the juvenile court's timeline for regaining custody because of their detention.*

*Rabin says the report is intended to provide information to the agencies involved, as well as the public. The report makes certain recommendations, including providing enhanced legal assistance to immigrant parents with U.S. citizen children in state custody. It also suggests appointing key liaison positions in ICE and the child welfare system to improve the ability of the two systems to communicate and coordinate with one another.*

*A version of the report will be published later this fall in the [Connecticut Journal of Law](#).*

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