

ProBAR's Legal Department Staff

stepped into a new role as Delphi Defenders to provide Know Your Rights services to children at local Emergency Intake Site.

Laptop, folders, mask, coffee, keys.

Paralegal Norma Garza went through her checklist as she left the house on a rainy Wednesday morning in May. After picking up Legal Assistant Reyna Nevarez, the two women arrived and joined Senior Staff Attorney Yasmin Colon at the new Delphi Emergency Intake Site - a large grouping of white, soft-sided structures - for the first time. Once inside, they were escorted to a designated space for their presentation, surrounded by a kinetic energy and the constant movement of children, facility staff, medical personnel, and now, three ProBAR staff. It was loud, difficult to hear one another over the sounds of the nearby air conditioning units and temporary restroom facilities. They looked at the group of wary children sitting in a semi-circle in front of them and began the Know Your Rights (KYR) presentation.

Norma Garza, ProBAR Paralegal, recalled, "it was our job to provide KYRs - to give them information that they will need for next steps after detention, once they leave the shelter." By the time they arrived at Delphi, the children had been in contact with many adults from different agencies. At first the role of ProBAR staff was new and unclear, and the children had big questions about what would happen next. Norma told the children that ProBAR staff were there to answer questions and "to listen to them and listen to their concerns," reminding the children that "somebody is looking out for them."



When high numbers of children began crossing the U.S.-Mexico border in late March and April of this year, the demand for shelters and legal services in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas intensified, and new Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) emergency intake sites sprang up in various cities, primarily in Texas and other border states. The children, designated as unaccompanied by the Department of Homeland Security because they did not have a parent or guardian available to care for them when they were detained, needed to be housed and cared for until they could be released to sponsors or transferred to a standard shelter operated by an ORR contractor. The emergency intake sites created an alternative to prolonged detention in Customs and Border Protection Custody - where, by statute, unaccompanied children should not be held for more than 72 hours - when expeditious placement in a standard ORR shelter was not possible.

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-Norma Garza

Since 2003, ProBAR has provided legal education, representation, and release support services tailored to unaccompanied children detained in ORR shelters. Know Your Rights (KYR) presentations, a right of all immigrant children as stated in Section 235 of the TVPRA ([TVPRA § 235](#)) have long been a core component of ProBAR's services for unaccompanied children. These presentations are critical as they provide children with important information about their rights and the immigration court process, as well as the opportunity to ask questions and be heard. Through the years, ProBAR staff have found creative ways to engage children of various ages and have developed child-friendly presentations that convey valuable information about the complex immigration legal system which they must navigate, often without legal representation. Perhaps most importantly, the Know Your Rights presentation prepares children for future client-attorney relationships and empowers them to engage as respondents before immigration authorities.

When an emergency intake site opened in the Rio Grande Valley, ProBAR was approached to temporarily extend our services to the children at the new Delphi facility. Kimi Jackson, ProBAR Director, and Carly Salazar, Legal Director, approached staff members in the Legal Department and asked for volunteers to visit the facility and help meet this urgent demand for a crucial service. When Reyna, a ProBAR Legal Assistant, received the email from Carly, she immediately thought "I have to go. I recognized this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to help."

A team of volunteers from ProBAR's Legal Department stepped up and answered this call in the hopes of making a difference. Over a two-month period, about 25 staff members visited the Delphi facility to provide KYR presentations. This special group of staff members came to be known as the "Delphi Defenders".

**"I recognized this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to help."
-Reyna Nevarez**

In teams of two, Delphi Defenders travelled to the facility and stood in front of groups of about 20 children with a laptop and KYR presentation with information tailored to children. The participants sat in a semi-circle, and while one Defender presented, the other would manage the visual aids, passing around copies of sample forms or switching the presentation slides. Reyna remembered, "I would walk the laptop around so the kids could see the visuals as Norma was speaking." When the presenter's voice would start to crack and fade under the strain of speaking over the noise in the facility, the partner Defender would take over the presentation. In addition to the logistical advantage of working as a team, Norma says, if two people are presenting, your partner may offer a new perspective you have missed and want to incorporate into your own presentation.

Luisa Villareal, Legal Assistant, used questions during the KYR presentation to check for children's understanding and recalled, "they were interested...they know why they are there for the presentation," she said, "and they know why it is important." When you ask the children questions, Norma said, "you see the lightbulb go off... you see it in their face - they know the answer." When the children's attention would be pulled away by passing foot traffic or noise in the facility, Kasandra Lartigue, Legal Assistant, would poll them to draw them back in. "I knew I couldn't lose them."

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In addition to asking the children questions, Defenders like Staff Attorney Ramon Roque would use hypotheticals and “what if” scenarios to ensure the children understood their rights and would retain the information. “We try talking through scenarios they can run into on the outside and the best responses ... we give them tools so they are not so afraid and teach them how to protect themselves, how to problem-solve with documents, and how to use resources like lawyers to help,” Ramon said.

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-Luisa Villarreal

Know Your Rights presentations are designed to ensure that children understand their rights during their legal process and for the way they are treated - the right to food, the right to shelter, the right to access medical care and an education, both while the children remain in federal custody and after they are released to the care of their sponsor. Norma reminded the children, “you have rights, and if those aren’t being met, you can call 911.” And for additional legal support, children were encouraged to call ProBAR. The children were left with a packet of information and resources designed to help them remember information about their rights and communicate this to their sponsors after release and reunification.

While the children received basic services at Delphi, there was no replacement for the people that care for them and love them. Ramon asked, “Where do you come from? What do you miss about there?” And many children said they miss their family. “Their main priority was that they just wanted to be with their family,” Reyna said. Ramon says, “they are missing connection here”, and he tried to bring warmth to his conversations with the children “and make connections.” For Ramon, inviting the children to show him how they play soccer encouraged them to open up and begin a dialogue. For Kasandra, sharing stories from her own childhood and moving with her father created connection points. By asking questions and expressing interest in the children the Defenders connected with them, learned their stories, and earned their trust.

It was also because of these moments of connection that children would remember the Defender they spoke to. Reyna recalls walking through the facility and hearing children call out to her, “Hey, Miss! You gave me a presentation. Thank you!” “Every time I went, every kid was grateful. You could see it in their eyes and in their face,” she says.



After a few weeks of ProBAR providing KYR presentations, word spread throughout the facility and children would arrive for a presentation ready and eager to learn. Kasandra recalls a child saying, “I’m so excited. I heard about you all, and I’m so happy to have my turn,” and another child telling her “I’ve waited so long to see you.” It became customary that at the end of every presentation, the children would clap. “Those moments at the end, when the kids are clapping, makes you really feel like it was worth it,” Senior Staff Attorney Yasmin Colon recalled. As children reunified and left the facility, ProBAR’s point of contact at Delphi let Kasandra know that many of the children held on to their folders from the KYR presentation and took the information with them when they left.

“It is hard not to personalize it all and ask yourself questions about the kids you see - what happened to them? Will they reunify?” Norma reflected. Luisa relayed, “you hear things that are surprising and humbling. It can be emotionally draining.” It is because of the genuine care and real investment from the ProBAR team that many children received the information they needed to better navigate future uncertainty and the immigration system.

“It was a team effort,” Yasmin said, one that extended beyond the Delphi Defenders at the facility to include “ProBAR Release Support team members, helping kids to connect to services after they reunify, and our Data team, recording our data and intakes...No matter what department you are in, you know ‘my job helps the person on the other team.’ We are all one ProBAR.”

“ I try to empower them by giving them the base knowledge and tools they need to not be afraid. -Ramon Roque ”

Emergency Intake Sites were meant to be temporary shelters, designed for the children to leave the facilities and reunify with family or friends in the United States. The goal of the KYR presentation is to prepare them for what comes next. When the children left Delphi, their cases would still be pending in immigration court, they would still need to be prepared to appear before the Immigration Judge, and they would need to find an attorney in the region they will be living with their sponsor, often outside of ProBAR’s reach. They will also need to be vigilant with their case and communicate this to their sponsors. Ramon said, “I tell them ‘This is your life’ and I try to empower them by giving them the base knowledge and tools they need to not be afraid.” Norma emphasized that the education and information packets they received during their KYR have a rippling effect: “It is then on the child to educate their family and their sponsors. We are teaching them to be advocates for their families.”

One day, as Kasandra entered the facility, she heard loud, thunderous clapping. “I thought, ‘why are they all clapping?’” It was when she turned the corner she realized. “I saw a single file line of boys with black duffel bags in their left hands. There were all these other kids clapping and cheering....because they were leaving . They were going to reunify with their families, their sponsors. I got chills as I watched everyone stop and clap - medical staff, facility staff, caretakers working on the facility - everyone stopped and clapped. So, we stopped too and waved to them:

"Bye gentlemen, we wish you the best!"

In July 2021, the Delphi Emergency Intake Site ceased operations. ProBAR staff continue to serve children in ORR shelters in the Rio Grande Valley and to provide legal education and representation that empower children as they prepare for court appearances and await reunification with sponsors.

If you are interested in this work, we invite you to [apply to join our team](#). ProBAR is actively hiring for Staff Attorney positions and Unaccompanied Children Legal Service Specialists, as well as other roles essential in supporting legal education, representation, and connections to services.

ProBAR is grateful for all of the staff that volunteered to be a part of this effort, including those recognized below, and each of our team members who continue to educate, empower, and connect.

Audrey Archer	Gladys Hernandez	Claudia Moreno	Roberto Reyes	Ramon Roque	Alison Sheets
Yasmin Colon	Kasandra Lartique	Reyna Nevarez	Fernando Rodriguez	Brenda Santiago	Pedro Spivakovsky-Gonzalez
Norma Garza	Denisse Molina-Castro	Priscilla Orta	Shakira Rodriguez	Lindsey Schenk	Maria Luisa Villarreal



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