

New Immigrant Case Management: Responding to the Southwest Border Crisis in a New Jersey FQHC

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Background

- Since 2009, the number of Central American children arriving at the U.S. Southwest border unaccompanied by a parent/guardian has significantly increased.
- Zufall Health Center (ZHC) in New Jersey has seen hundreds of Central American child immigrants arrive over the past decade, including a total of 134 thus far in FY2021 (Figure 1¹)

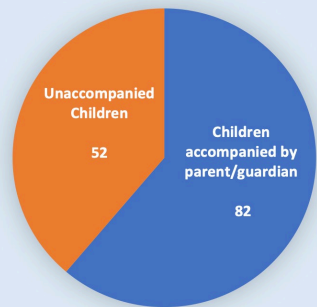


Figure 1. New Central American Pediatric Patients seen at ZHC from Oct 2020-May 2021

- These children are an extremely high-risk cohort, with particular need for assistance with school enrollment and linkage to legal services.
- There is no constitutional right in the U.S. to representation in immigration court, and it has been clearly shown that children who have representation are far more likely to have successful immigration cases.

Description of Innovation

- In response to ongoing and increasing numbers of recently arrived migrant children, Zufall has begun a "New Patient Assistance" (NPA) program to identify new immigrant children within our practices and connect them with legal and social services
- These children are connected with low-cost legal immigration services that can provide representation
- NPA case managers (Americorps volunteers) also assist with school registration, applications for Pandemic Rental Assistance; the Special Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); and hospital charity care, by serving as translators and assisting with technology

Resources Used

- Data mining through electronic medical records were used to identify new immigrant children both in advance of and after their initial visits
- Virtual and in person case management visits were provided to parents and families

Impact of Innovation

- Since the program was initiated in September 2020, NPA case managers have worked with 301 total patients, including 52 unaccompanied children (Table 1)
- This resulted in the connection of 71 patients with immigration attorneys and the registration of 8 children for public school.
- All patients were provided information on local food pantries and social service programs.
- Legal services were reviewed with all families, and referral information was provided if a direct referral connection was not made
- Given the current several-year wait time for resolution of typical immigration cases, it is difficult to assess the current effect of this program on success within the court system.
- Regardless, the NPA referral process continues to wield considerable and measurable effect in breaking down barriers that our newly arrived immigrant children face

Funding

- No funding was received for this work

Table 1. Number of total patients and unaccompanied children worked with by the NPA program, as well connections made and registrations completed

Total Patients worked with	301
Unaccompanied Children worked with	52
Direct Legal Service Connections made	71
School Registrations completed	10
WIC Enrollments completed	6
Referrals to Behavioral Health Services made	10
Rental Assistance Applications completed	6

Challenges and Solutions

- Immigration attorneys and organizations, particularly those offering *pro bono* and subsidized services, have limited capacity for taking on clients, which is well below the demand.
- We have decided to prioritize unaccompanied minors for direct referrals to *pro bono* attorneys as these children are particularly vulnerable

Replicating and Sustaining this Innovation

- Identification of new immigrant children as a HIGH RISK visit type is essential for FQHC providers
- Integrated, Trauma Informed Care and case management offered at FQHCs make them an ideal location for this type of innovation
- Providers should be trained to recognize and address the specific needs of undocumented pediatric patients and understand the complex interplay of social factors that impact immigrant health
- Social history questions, such as from where and when patients immigrated, if they did so unaccompanied, and if they experienced any abuse, should be a routine part of medical interviews for all new patients
- Medical-legal partnerships should be considered as standard enabling services offered at FQHCs
- Zufall plans to continue designating staff members as NPA case managers

Citations

Zak, D. (2020, November 02). Fact sheet: Unaccompanied migrant children (UACs). <https://immigrationforum.org/article/fact-sheet-unaccompanied-migrant-children-uacs/>

