

Chester County Community Foundation: Grant Proposal from Project Libertad

Mission and Vision:

Project Libertad is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that empowers newcomer immigrant youth and their families in the Greater Philadelphia Area by providing essential, youth-led, and youth-centered legal and social services. Project Libertad envisions a world where all newcomer immigrant youth have access to the legal services, social services, academic support, and leadership opportunities needed to thrive.

Learn more about [Project Libertad's mission](#) through the [short documentary](#) that HBO Max produced as part of the 2022 L'Oréal Paris Women of Worth program.

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Who We Serve:

Project Libertad serves newcomer immigrant youth in the Greater Philadelphia Area. While 95% of the youth served by Project Libertad are Central American refugees from the Northern Triangle Countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, Project Libertad has a global footprint, welcoming youth from across the globe, including Angola, the DRC, Haiti, Brazil, Vietnam, China, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Bangladesh, and more. Project Libertad provides social services primarily in Chester, Bucks, and Montgomery counties, and legal services to youth across PA. Community strengths that further Project Libertad's work with immigrant youth include resiliency, perseverance, optimism, adaptability, tenacity, and gratitude.

Current Programs and Services:

Immigrant Youth Advisory Team: Project Libertad alumni and current program participants who direct programmatic decisions for the organization. Project Libertad is the only agency in the area to utilize this unique leadership model.

Immigrant Children's Defense Project: Provides legal representation to immigrant children who are undocumented or facing deportation.

Know Your Rights Project: Educates immigrant youth and families about their legal rights.

Legal-Mental Health Partnership: Partnership with Immigrant Psychology Network that educates youth about mental health and wellness. Increases access to mental health care for immigrant youth.

Conexiones: Provides free, bilingual individual therapy sessions to immigrant youth.

Juntos para Jóvenes: United for Youth: Provides direct case management services to newcomer immigrant youth and their families who are experiencing barriers to their self-sufficiency, in order to meet a variety of their basic needs.

Jóvenes Fuertes: Strong Youth: A culturally-responsive social-emotional learning (SEL) program created by a Latinx immigrant psychologist to support the mental health of Latinx newcomers in schools. Offered in collaboration with partner school districts.

Newcomer Support Programs: Weekly, in-school programs that provide a safe space for newcomer immigrant youth to create community and achieve a sense of safety as they adjust to life in the United States.

Mentoring Program: Provides one-on-one mentorship to middle and high school students in order to promote academic success and improve postsecondary outcomes for newcomer youth.

RISE: Refugee and Immigrant Students Excelling: Girls' empowerment program that provides high school refugee and immigrant girls with leadership skills, academic support, college preparation, and other life skills.

Educator Training Program: Trains educators and other professionals on best practices for supporting immigrant youth.

Scholarship Fund: Benefits a graduating Project Libertad senior annually.

Funding Request

General Operating Support Requested to Support and Expand Legal and Social Services for Recently Arrived Immigrant Youth in Greater Philadelphia

Project Libertad requests \$20,000 in general operating funds to support and expand its work with newcomer immigrant youth in the Greater Philadelphia Area.

Lia, a 12-year-old asylum seeker, was raped by her father in Honduras. She fled to the US seeking safety with her aunt in the Philadelphia region, only to find herself in deportation proceedings without

a lawyer and without needed social services. Lia suffered from undiagnosed, untreated PTSD and was suspended from school due to trauma-related behavioral problems. In immigration court, Lia struggled to articulate her case to the judge, who determined she was not credible and looked negatively at her school disciplinary record. Lia was deported back to her abuser. Without a lawyer and without access to critical social services, Lia's voice went unheard.

Lia's story is typical for immigrant children in the region. An estimated 24,000 children have deportation proceedings pending against them before the Philadelphia Immigration Court. 75% of those children have no lawyer and must represent themselves in an arcane system in a language they do not speak. Representation matters: 75% of represented kids win the right to stay in the US legally, while 90% of unrepresented children like Lia are deported to dangerous situations.

Despite the clear need, there are no limited legal services for youth in the region, leaving children like Lia to fend for themselves in immigration court, with the vast majority of those cases ending in needless deportation.

Migrant children like Lia arrive in the United States with extensive prior trauma before facing additional stressors in the US, like the threat of deportation, a lack of legal counsel, difficult family dynamics, and more. These challenges exacerbate existing mental health problems. As a result, newcomer youth are more likely to struggle in isolation with symptoms of PTSD, Anxiety, and Depression, and struggle academically and behaviorally at school. Yet, these children cannot access needed social services due to multiple barriers, including financial barriers, cultural and linguistic barriers, the primacy of resettlement needs, and the stigma attached to mental illness. Social service and mental health resources for newcomers are extremely limited in the region. Newcomer youth without access to social services and mental health care are more likely to experience behavioral challenges and academic difficulties. Such youth can be viewed negatively in the eyes of the immigration courts. A lack of social services and mental health services negatively impacts the child's immigration case, which can have dire consequences, as in Lia's case.

Recognizing these challenges and the dire gap in services for newcomer youth, Project Libertad empowers newcomer immigrant youth like Lia and their families by providing essential, youth-led and youth-centered legal and social services -- the only such services available in the Greater Philadelphia Area. By filling this gap in needed services, Project Libertad furthers its vision of a world where all newcomer immigrant youth have access to the legal services, social services, academic support, and leadership opportunities needed to thrive.

Program Goals for 2024

1. Provide School-Based Newcomer Support Programs as described above to approximately 225 youth across Greater Philadelphia.
2. Provide legal representation to approximately 90 youth across Greater Philadelphia.
3. Provide case management services to approximately 30 youth in Greater Philadelphia.
4. 80% or more of participants will self-report having a trusted adult to confide in.
5. 80% or more of participants will self-report being informed of their legal rights as immigrants.
6. 80% or more of participants will self-report being informed of their post-graduate options.
7. 80% or more of participants will self-report having a sense of safety and community at school.

Financial Information

Amount Requested: \$20,000

2024 Projected Budget: \$385,000

2023 Expenditures: \$244,000

Percentage of Funds Used for Direct Program Expenses in 2023: 85%

Projected Percentage of Funds Used for Direct Program Expenses in 2024: 80 - 85%

Note Regarding Audit: Please note that Project Libertad has not conducted internal audits of financial statements due to its current size and the income of the organization. Under Pennsylvania law, Project Libertad is not required to conduct an annual audit, per 10 Pa. Cons. Stat. §162.5 (f). In view of our increasing annual income, we anticipate annual audits of our financial statements in the future, as financial transparency is one of our core organizational values.

Program Evaluation

Project Libertad's approach to equitable program evaluation is rooted in constructing and implementing evaluations in a way that aligns with the organization's core values of multiculturalism and participant ownership. As a relatively young organization, Project Libertad prioritizes developing equitable practices for program evaluation from the beginning, in order to avoid having to undo negative practices in the future, as older organizations are doing now. Project Libertad also intends to engage in ongoing evaluation and reflection to ensure continued equitable practices and improvements where needed. Project Libertad ensures equitable program evaluation by centering the

voices and feedback of immigrant youth. Project Libertad conducts regular surveys of program participants and uses that feedback to improve upon programming as indicated.

National and International Recognition for Project Libertad

- 2024 Drexel University 40 Under 40 Honor for Executive Director Rachel Rutter for her work with Project Libertad (to be formally announced in Spring of 2024)
- 2023 feature in [Gettysburg College Magazine, *A Steadfast Spirit: Turning Advocacy Into Action*](#)
- 2022 L'Oréal Paris Women of Worth Honoree, with a short [documentary produced by HBO Max](#)
- 2021 Aerie #AerieREAL Changemaker, as featured in [Forbes](#)
- 2021 and 2020 [Sony Music Global Social Justice Fund](#)