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## Impact of Immigration Enforcement Raids on Children and Families: Roles for Foundations

BY RANDY CAPPS, AJAY CHAUDRY, AND RUBY TAKANISHI

Over the past year, high-profile raids on worksites and other locations have resulted in the arrest and deportation of tens of thousands of immigrants. These raids have further highlighted the distinction between “legal” and “illegal” immigrants, and are having widespread impacts on families and communities.

Immigration enforcement has compromised the well-being of American children and placed enormous burdens on states and local communities to respond to humanitarian crises that have followed these raids. It has also undermined one of America’s fundamental principles: That the future of children should not be determined solely by the circumstances of their birth. Our universal public education system, child welfare system, and federal and state assistance programs to help needy families are based on the principle that the public sector should step in where necessary to ensure the safety, health, economic well-being, and educational opportunities of children living within our borders.

A large number of children, however, increasingly lack the basic rights and protections that other American children receive as a matter of course. An estimated five million children—two-thirds of whom are U.S. citizens—have unauthorized parents.<sup>1</sup> These children live in precarious circumstances because their unauthorized or “illegal” parents, lacking basic rights within our society, can be picked up, detained, and deported at any moment. Unsympathetic to the plight of these families, the American public often blames unauthorized parents for the consequences of immigration enforcement on their children.

As U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) continues to conduct immigration enforcement in workplaces, homes, and public spaces, a growing number of immigrant families are being torn apart. Worksite raids have increased tenfold over the course of the past five years.<sup>2</sup> In 2007 alone, the U.S. government deported 319,000 unauthorized immigrants.<sup>3</sup> More than 60 state and local law enforcement agencies have signed agreements with ICE to enforce immigration laws,<sup>4</sup> increasing the climate of fear.

### Worksite raids have increased tenfold over the course of the past five years.

In response to an increase in immigration enforcement activities, a number of foundations pooled resources to fund The Urban Institute to conduct a study, which resulted in the report, *Paying the Price: The Impact of Immigration Raids on America’s Children*. In this report, published in October 2007, The Urban Institute described the experiences of families with children, as well as community responses following three major worksite raids in New Bedford, Massachusetts; Grand Island, Nebraska; and Greeley, Colorado.<sup>5</sup> Across these three sites, more than 900 adults were arrested, including parents of more than 500 children. Research on the impact of raids on children and families is ongoing and includes: Postville, Iowa and Van Nuys, California.

### Impacts on Children

The 2007 report and ongoing research highlight the impact of immigration raids on children whose parents are arrested:

**Family Separation.** After the arrest of one parent, the majority of children went from having two parents in the home (formerly a major strength of these families) to living with a single parent. Some of the children had both parents or their single parent arrested, leaving them in the care of relatives, babysitters, or neighbors. None of the children with arrested parents were placed in the custody of child welfare agencies, although a handful of adolescent, underage workers were arrested and taken into the custody of the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement following the Postville raid. No entire families in the raids studied were arrested and sent to family detention centers, though this might have taken place elsewhere.

At all the sites studied, ICE released a few people on the day of the raid for “humanitarian” reasons—mostly because they were single parents or parents of very young or sick children. In November 2007, just after the report’s release, ICE put its humanitarian release policy in writing. At the 2008 sites studied—Van Nuys and Postville—ICE appears to have followed that policy, in most cases releasing single parents with ankle-monitoring bracelets.

**Economic Hardship.** Because many families lost the adult with the better job, household incomes plunged. For instance, the meat-packing jobs in Greeley and Grand Island paid more than \$10 per hour, were full-time unionized jobs, offered opportunities to earn overtime pay, and provided full benefits. With the arrest of a working parent, families fell back on informal jobs, savings, and assistance from social service agencies and friends and family members in the community.

Initially, friends and extended families helped provide child care and economic support, keeping the majority of children from living alone without supervision or becoming homeless. But over time, the additional burdens proved too great, and families increasingly needed assistance from public or other private sources.

**A four-year old girl with a father arrested in a raid knows that her dad has been shipped around from jail to jail. In the words of her mother, “Since she was little... even though I try to speak without her knowing or in a low voice, she’s very smart and she knows everything. My husband asked me not to tell them where he is ...But she says, ‘Mom, why does my dad say that he’s at the ranch if he’s in...’ and then she says, ‘the jails.’”**

**Fear and Social Isolation.** The raids created a climate of fear. In Grand Island, for instance, ICE continued to raid people’s homes for over a week. Researchers spoke to families that hid

in their homes for days or weeks; sometimes in closets or basements. Many were fearful of seeking help—even at trusted locations such as churches. Some would not open the doors for people who brought food baskets and other assistance.

**Social Stigma.** Parents and caregivers who were not arrested struggled to explain to children what had happened. One child said his parent was “arrested for working.” In two of the study sites—Van Nuys and Postville—mothers of young children were released but forced to wear ankle bracelets that needed to be plugged in for hours each day to recharge. Their younger children could not understand why their mothers were wearing these bracelets or why they had to plug themselves into the wall.

**In the words of a Grand Island community leader, “Families folded into themselves. People stopped going out in the street. People are living even more in the shadows.”**

**Difficult choices.** Parents also face the difficult choice of what to do with their children when they are deported. Economic and social conditions are often difficult in their Mexican and Central American communities of origin. Most of the children only know life in the United States, and many do not know Spanish well enough to succeed in school in Latin America. Yet remaining in the United States implies long-term separation from one or more parents.

### Community Responses

Charitable foundations, faith-based, advocacy and grassroots community organizations have played important roles in supporting community responses in the aftermath of these raids. United Way networks distributed assistance in Grand Island and Greeley, where Swift and Company—the employer that was raided—also provided initial financial assistance to affected families. Churches and faith-based organizations raised additional funding. In New Bedford, the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA) organized fundraising efforts, with support from the city government. Foundations in the area made grants to provide financial assistance to affected families, and a philanthropist established a bond fund to get arrested parents out of detention. In Postville, a local Catholic church worked with a community-based organization and a network of religious and non-profit sector leaders to organize a national fundraising campaign. The Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) organized the fundraising and distribution of assistance in Van Nuys. At all the sites, churches were central points of assistance distribution because immigrants trusted them.

**A 13-year old, the oldest of three boys with a father arrested in a raid, worries about moving to Mexico. He told his mom, “If we go I won’t be able to study. I won’t be able to do what I wanted to do because you won’t be able to give me what I need in Mexico.”**

In the aftermath of these large-scale raids, several hundred families per site needed assistance with food, clothing, rent or mortgage, utilities, and other basic needs for as long as a year. In New Bedford, some parents were still appealing their deportation more than a year after the initial raid. Since family members who were released on bonds or with monitoring devices could not work, families became highly dependent on private relief.

There were also significant legal costs for many families. Although many immigration attorneys worked *pro bono*, there were not enough lawyers to serve the hundreds of people arrested at the same time. Paying for representation, bonds, and other legal costs was a major financial burden on many families. The National Immigrant Bond Fund, a project of Public Interest Projects, continues to help some families through local 501(c)3 organizations by matching up to 50 percent of the bond money required for release of an immigrant detainee.<sup>6</sup> “But we’ve not had sufficient funds to respond to all the requests that have come our way,” said Margarita Rubalcava Shulman, project manager for the Four Freedoms Fund (FFF). For those families that chose to leave the United States, the costs of return travel and obtaining travel documents were not trivial—especially for people trying to buy plane tickets back to Guatemala and other distant locations.

Philanthropy has stepped in to help in a number of ways. FFF has supported groups such as Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC) and Legal Momentum that work on raids response preparation and legal support for immigrant detainees. In October 2008, FFF convened 50 participants that included the National Immigration Law Center, the American Civil Liberties Union, CLINIC, and other legal networks as well as advocates and community-based organizations with first-hand experience with raids, including CHIRLA and MIRA, to improve coordination of national and local resources to systematically address the challenges presented by raids. Rubalcava Shulman said that participants formed three work groups—legal, humanitarian and communications—and have conducted an initial needs assessment and identified immediate priorities and a set of funding recommendations for each area of raids response.

Public agencies have also assisted families, but their roles varied substantially across the study sites. The New Bedford city government was very supportive of families in need, and

Massachusetts state social workers were involved in linking parents with children and distributing relief. Similarly, the State of Iowa sent social workers to a church in Postville where affected families gathered to provide public assistance to many needy families. In California, Colorado, and Nebraska, however, affected families were afraid to approach the state for assistance; use of benefits by families there was very low. Public benefits such as welfare and food stamps were limited to U.S. citizens and legal residents; noncitizen children in these families—usually the older siblings—were ineligible.

In sum, families with arrested parents were highly dependent on assistance—usually private charity—for their day-to-day survival and legal expenses. These large-scale raids created emergency scenarios similar to natural disasters, but without any corresponding aid from the federal government. In fact, these humanitarian emergencies were the direct result of government action, not natural events. As is too often the case, state and local governments along with the private sector were left to clean up the aftermath. Absent any new assistance programs or policy directives from the federal government, this is likely to continue to be the case with future enforcement actions.

**“With stroke of a pen someone can do a lot for families. While there’s something to be said of a humanitarian response in the aftermath, we need to question the overall role of raids in the enforcement of immigration laws.”**

Rubalcava Shulman believes that although workplace raids may decline, enforcement actions against immigrants will continue. There is guarded hope, too, she says that administrative advocacy will create more humane enforcement policies and practices. “With stroke of a pen someone can do a lot for families. While there’s something to be said of a humanitarian response in the aftermath, we need to question the overall role of raids in the enforcement of immigration laws.”

**Recommendations for Funders**

The findings from The Urban Institute research offer a preliminary view of the impacts of immigration raids on children and some tentative lessons for the protection of children and delivery of services to affected families. The research also suggests some public policy recommendations for the philanthropic community to consider:

- Support policy development in Congress and within ICE to ensure that children are protected during and after raids, and that arrested parents can communicate with their lawyers, families, and people who can provide them with needed services.

- Develop national, state, or regional raid response networks that include consulates, lawyers, immigrant advocacy coalitions, community-based organizations, the public sector, non-profit service providers, and churches and other faith-based organizations.
- Help schools, early education providers, public social service agencies, faith-based organizations, community-based organizations, and others develop plans to care for children left behind in future immigration raids.
- Fund humanitarian assistance to affected families until parents are released and their cases are resolved, which may take more than six months.
- Provide support for legal assistance, for instance through funding bonds and hiring immigration lawyers and interpreters.
- Fund further research on the impacts of immigration raids on children, families, and communities, including long-term psychological impacts on children and parents, and the living conditions of families who leave the United States after a family member is deported.
- Explore the impacts of immigration raids on adults without children; under current ICE policies, they may lack some of the protections afforded to arrested parents.
- Generate international interest in defining the rights of the children of migrants and ensuring that those rights are guaranteed in the United States and other large migrant-receiving countries.
- Develop alternatives to worksite raids for the enforcement of immigration laws, for instance the use of electronic verification databases and sanctions against employers—as some states have implemented recently.
- Disseminate research findings about the impacts of immigration enforcement activities on children, families, and communities, and convene forums with elected officials, enforcement agencies, service providers, and immigrant community leaders to discuss these issues.

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### Endnotes

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- 6 Margarita Rubalcava Shulman. Telephone conversation with Frances Caballo, January 19, 2009.

### About GCIR

Founded in 1990, Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR) provides publications, programs, and other resources that foundations need to address the challenges facing newcomers and their host communities and to strengthen society as a whole. Its mission is to influence the philanthropic field to advance the contributions and address the needs of the country's growing and increasingly diverse immigrant and refugee populations.



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