

Young Refugees



Tacoma, WA - Antonio grew up in El Salvador. His father abandoned him, his mom and his baby sister shortly after his sister was born. When Antonio was 16 years old, the “Maras” (gangs) began threatening him. One day as he was leaving school, members of the gang cornered

him and took his phone. They called his mother and demanded an extortion payment of \$1,000 or they said they would kill Antonio. They said, “Do you want to celebrate your son’s next birthday or his funeral?” Antonio’s mother was very frightened for his safety and paid the money. Later, another gang started threatening Antonio. He was very fearful for his life and stopped going to school. His mother decided it would be safer for him to go to live with his uncle in the United States. Antonio agreed because he was afraid the gangs were going to kill him.

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Antonio's mother agreed to pay a "coyote" \$6,000.00 to help him get to the United States. She paid \$2,500 up front and the remainder when he arrived safely. He traveled with a group of 30 other migrants, primarily from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. After crossing the river in a raft, the group walked for several days, but was eventually detained by immigration officials. Antonio was deemed eligible for a Special Immigrant Juvenile Visa and is now a legal permanent resident. With support from Catholic Community Services International Foster Care program, he is a junior in high school, passes in all classes, participates on the swim team and is taking piano lessons.

~Susan Wells, SNJM

Reflection: How can I support youth who have fled violence in their home country and are now transitioning to life in foster care?

Resource: <http://www.usccb.org/about/children-and-migration/unaccompanied-refugee-minor-program/>

Action: Contact a local agency working with unaccompanied minors detained at the border and offer to provide tutoring or mentoring support to one youth in foster care.

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