

## **Central American Minor (CAM) Program Success Stories**

### **How CAM has offered life-saving protection to children in Central America**

Yanira\* and Lucia\* are two sisters from El Salvador. Gang members in their country took an interest in them, and began pressuring them to become their girlfriends. The sisters knew that dating a gang member would make them sex slaves of the gang. Neither girl was friends with gang members. Both were terrified of being forced to date a gang member. When their father intervened to protect them, gang members murdered him in retribution. The girls fled to another family member's house, but continued to receive death threats as gang members hunted for their location. Four months later, gang members threatened a cousin of the girls – demanding that the cousin disclose their location or be killed. He refused to reveal their whereabouts, and the next day he was found dead, killed by gang members making good on their threat.

The girls were on the run again. They applied for refugee status through the Central American Minors program. As a result of the mounting threats and danger against them, their case was expedited. Yanira and Lucia were granted refugee status and have safely resettled in the United States in the care of their mother. They, and their mother, are deeply relieved and grateful that they escaped alive.

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Evelyn's children were just one and three years old when Evelyn fled to the United States to escape an abusive husband in El Salvador. When Evelyn's son Melvin was 15 years old a gang tried to recruit him and persecuted him for resisting. Melvin was forced to flee to the United States because he feared for his life. Melvin is now a lawful permanent resident and a student.

Evelyn's daughter, Yanci, remained in El Salvador with her grandmother. While caring for Yanci, Yanci's grandmother received death threats because of her political beliefs and affiliation. She was warned: change political parties or be killed. Evelyn filed a CAM application for Yanci and worried about her safety until Yanci was approved for parole. She arrived in the United States in November 2016. Evelyn is deeply thankful that the United States protected her daughter from danger and expressed her sadness and concern for other Central American families when the CAM program ends.

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Alejandra's mother fled their native Honduras to escape a domestic violence relationship. At first Alejandra's grandparents cared for her, but when they died Alejandra's life was turned upside-down and she entered a cycle of violence she was never able to escape until she arrived in the U.S. as a refugee and reunified with her mother.

Placed with a series of family members who resented being saddled with her care, Alejandra suffered extreme mistreatment and abuse. A family member sexually abused her. A string of aunts beat and emotionally abused her. Alejandra had nowhere to turn and so she did the only thing she could think of – entered a relationship with a man 20 years her senior who she thought would protect her. Though he did not physically abuse her, he coerced her into sexual relations and manipulated her, isolated her from society, and controlled her every move. Alejandra is now safe and free from violence and fear for the first time in many years.

*\*All children's names have been changed to protect their identity*