

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/struggle-for-identity-and-inclusion-unaccompanied-immigrant-youth-in-new-york-city>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

Youth have been arriving at U.S. borders on their own since the early days of Ellis Island, but it was not until the summer of 2014 when the number of unaccompanied immigrant youth arriving to the United States from Central America increased nearly tenfold from recent years that child migrants became the topic of an urgent political debate. While local governments and legislatures across the country have shown interest in supporting unaccompanied immigrant youth through measures that increase their access to lawyers, schools, and healthcare, a lack of knowledge about their circumstances and needs presents an obstacle to policymaking and improving practical responses.

To understand these circumstances and needs, Vera and Fordham Law Schools Feerick Center for Social Justice designed a study to focus on unaccompanied youth living in the New York City metropolitan area. The study further involved these youth as peer researchers, and the results provide a firsthand account of their needs and insights into the challenges of interacting with various U.S. systems.

To improve the life opportunities of these youth, we must recognize that they are resilient and capable; provide community-based services such as legal services, employment and housing assistance, educational scholarships, and health exams that meet their basic needs; and promote their legal and social acceptance in the community.

Promoting the participation of unaccompanied immigrant youth in the development of the policies that affect them is necessary to facilitate successful outcomes.

Two overarching themes of the study were identity and discrimination. Youth often experienced a loss of identity, discrimination, and stereotyping from the adults and peers they interacted with.

Unaccompanied immigrant youth are often forced by circumstances to prioritize finding shelter and work over finding the legal assistance they need.

VIDEO

NEWS

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