

Still Waters Aspire Program – Providing Services for Child Victims of Trafficking

Submitted by Jean Stockdale, Program Director

One limb on RCHP-AHC's life-giving tree of housing and services is Still Waters Anti-Trafficking. As the tree continues growing upwards and outwards, that limb now has three branches: Housing Assistance for Victims of Trafficking (funded by the US Department of Justice, Office on Victims of Crime), the Trafficking Victims Assistance Program (TVAP) serving foreign national adult victims of labor trafficking and sex trafficking, **and the Aspire program serving child victims**. TVAP and Aspire operate in partnership with the US Committee on Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), through a cooperative agreement with the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office on Trafficking in Persons.

The Aspire program began in 2022 after USCRI enlisted government officials and agencies to address the complex needs of trafficked children, including family breakdown, safety from traffickers after escaping, child welfare, custody, placement and foster care, immigration status, educational deficits, school enrollment, ESL, basic household and personal necessities, and medical, dental, and mental health concerns.



Still Waters' staff -- four full-time and two part-time -- provide trauma-informed care across all three programs and offer comprehensive case management to Aspire clients and their sponsors. Aspire is time-limited; the enrollment term is six months, with a possibility of extension if additional needs emerge. **Staff work fast to establish rapport with the child and their caregiver**, advance their progress on all fronts, and connect them with pro bono human rights attorneys to secure their right to remain in the US to recover from the crimes that were committed against them. Some of our work includes assisting them to obtain identification documents from their home country such as birth certificates and school records, getting them enrolled into school, obtaining needed furniture such as a bed and a mattress, applying for SNAP benefits to increase food security, applying for NJ Family Care so that they can obtain medical and dental appointments, setting up those appointments for the caregiver to bring the child to healthcare facilities, and arranging transportation.

The Still Waters team serves foreign national child victims of human trafficking throughout the state of New Jersey. Although most of our Aspire clients are in their early, middle, or late teens, we have had clients as young as five years old. The work is very demanding and very fulfilling. As one of three branches on the Still Waters limb of the RCHP-AHC tree of supportive services, **what we achieve through the Aspire program brings to mind the parable in which the kingdom of heaven is compared to a tiny mustard seed**, which grew into a garden plant so big that birds come and perch in its branches. Every day we get to see the birds of hope, peace, and joy building nests and taking up residence in the lives of those children we serve.