Gabriela

Immigration Legal Services

Gabriela, a Honduran 14-year-old girl living in Mexico, crossed the U.S. border with her mother, step father, and two half-brothers. They were seeking a better life in America.

During the crossing, the family encountered several violent coyotes—people who smuggle immigrants into America for a fee. The coyotes blackmailed the family for an extensive amount of money, which they did not have, so the step-father gave Gabriela to the coyotes as payment. She was violently raped and left for dead, but the U.S. border patrol ultimately found her and placed Gabriela in custody. A distant family member was located in Georgia and she was placed with them.

Catholic Charities Atlanta Immigration Legal Services became aware of her case and helped Gabriela to remain in the United States legally by helping her apply for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status.* The purpose of the SIJ program is to help foreign children in the United States who have been abused, abandoned, or neglected. It allows children who are unable to be reunited with a parent to get a green card. This green card allows them to live and work permanently in the United States.

Gabriela has now put her horrific experience behind her and has blossomed into a vibrant young woman. She is working toward her high school diploma and has a part-time job.