

Alternatives to Immigration Detention

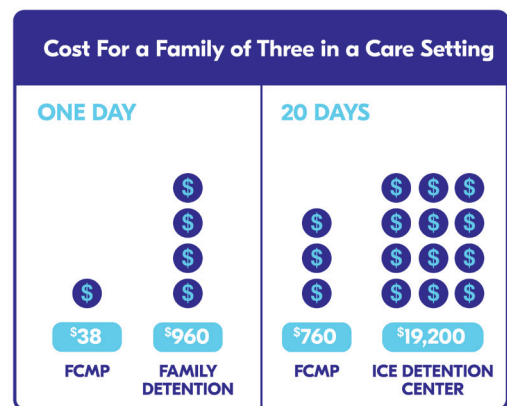
Alternatives to detention, for both unaccompanied children and families, provide opportunities for immigrants to have their needs met by the community while they wait for their cases to process. Detention has a negative impact on immigrants' physical, mental, and behavioral health (see "Family Separation and Detention at the Border—Impacts on Children" fact sheet). The United States has expanded the use of immigration detention since the 1980s. During the late 1980s, Haitian and Cuban asylum seekers were detained at Guantanamo Bay as the United States government sought to control arriving populations of refugees and migrants. Today, the immigration detention system is composed of a network of prisons run by for-profit companies, county jails, and a few processing centers operated by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).¹ Living in the community, as opposed to in a detention center, allows children to live more normally while they wait to be reunited with their families.

COMMUNITY-BASED ALTERNATIVES TO DETENTION

Community-based alternatives to detention are proven to be safer, less expensive, and more effective at ensuring compliance with government requirements and court hearings than detention-based programs. The community-based programs are characterized by several key traits: traditional case management, referrals to community support services, appropriate monitoring to ensure attendance at court dates, and even compliance with deportation orders. Since participants in community-based programs have access to stable support services, such as housing, medical care, and legal support, there is a proven higher likelihood that people will attend their court dates, understand the court processes, and comply with their case ruling. Furthermore, community-based models comply with the government regulations and immigration goals without the traumatic toll of detention—at a lower cost to the government.

FAMILY CASE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM (FCMP)

The Family Case Management Program operated from January 2016 to June 2017 before the program was terminated. FCMP provided a more open alternative to detention centers and operated more as a counseling center than a prison. Through individualized case management services, social workers helped asylum-seekers connect to legal representation and guided them through the legal system as well as helped them find housing, health care, and schooling for their children.² Over 900 families were enrolled in FCMP, primarily Central American women and children. It is estimated the FCMP cost around \$38 per day per family unit, while family detention costs around \$320 per person per day. A family with one parent and two children enrolled in FCMP for 20 days would cost \$760. It would cost \$19,200 to hold that same family in an ICE detention center.³



Bethany provides small-group care and transitional foster care for children who are seeking refuge in the United States without their families. The goal of these programs is to ensure that children who have fled for their lives are cared for, kept safe, and quickly and safely reunited with their families. Essential services are provided to the children in our care, such as a safe, temporary foster home, education, medical care, case management, mental health services, legal screening, and post-release services.