

Social Justice Funders SPOTLIGHT:

Unbound Philanthropy • New York, NY & London, England

by Sandra Dias

As fear and misunderstanding about immigrants and refugees drive people and politics apart around the world, Unbound Philanthropy supports work that brings people together and assists newcomers as they find a sense of belonging in their adopted communities.

Based in New York City and London, the private foundation Unbound Philanthropy takes a holistic and long-term approach to grantmaking in the multi-layered, multi-sector, and always controversial area of world migration. The organizations and movements Unbound Philanthropy funds highlight the contributions of immigrants and benefits of immigration, shape new narratives about immigrants, improve the lived experience of immigrants, fight against exclusionary and punitive policies and practices, and build communities of mutual respect and shared responsibility. The aspiration of removing boundaries to self-determination underlies the organization's social justice strategy.

"The mission is very personal to everyone in our organization," said Taryn Higashi, Unbound Philanthropy's executive director. "Many people at Unbound have said our work has deepened their connection to their own family history. The heart of our commitment is to dignify the treatment of immigrants and refugees and their inclusion and integration into communities."

Unbound Philanthropy lends support to organizers, civil rights and immigration lawyers, and organizations that improve relationships between new Americans and people born in the United States, and between people new to the UK and those born there. Unbound also believes that arts and culture can expand empathy and a broader, more inclusive national identity, in ways that complement organizing, advocacy, and communications strategies.

In the US, Unbound is at the beginning stage of a large-scale cultural strategy that seeks to transform understanding of people of color, immigrants, refugees, Muslims, and other communities affected by harmful portrayals in popular culture.

Several large American foundations have increased funding to immigration-related organizations in recent years. But most

foundations focus on one or perhaps two areas of the work -- say, human rights or ending human trafficking or assisting skilled immigrants. Unbound stands out for its broad and interconnected range of work and for its dedication to supporting immigrant-led organizations and assisting immigrants without authorization to be in the country.



Photo Courtesy of Unbound Philanthropy and Welcoming America-Uniting North Carolina

Unbound Philanthropy was founded in 2003, with an endowment from individual donors. For the first several years, the Board made exploratory grants. By 2008, the foundation brought on its first staff person, the executive director, and grew its portfolio. Over the next several years, Unbound continued to grow, adding staff, opening an office in London and adopting a five-year strategic plan. From 2005 to 2013, Unbound Philanthropy awarded \$35.5 million via nearly 300 grants. In the first two years under its new strategic plan – from 2014 to 2016 – it awarded \$19.8 million via 168 grants.

Unbound Philanthropy partners with other organizations to address immigrant and refugee-related challenges in the long term by supporting leadership development and civic engagement in immigrant communities. Unbound Philanthropy, Higashi explains, seeks to fill "strategic gaps." This includes identifying promising initiatives that are too nascent for most other foundations to support and areas of emerging need. For example, in 2008, Unbound's staff saw an opportunity to invest in immigrant-led advocacy.

"At the time, the immigrant rights field was led mostly by people who were not immigrants and refugees themselves," Higashi noted, including "dedicated and talented

professional advocates, communicators, researchers and lawyers" And, she added, "We felt that this work could be transformed if immigrants began to tell their own stories and could help develop a new narrative and strategies."

One of the immigrant-led organizations that Unbound Philanthropy decided to support is United We Dream (see story on back page), which has since become the largest immigrant youth-led organization in the United States. Higashi met members of UWD as they were first coming together as undocumented immigrant youth hoping to tell their personal stories to policymakers and the public. She also introduced members of UWD to her Board and team at Unbound Philanthropy.

"We learned. . . that United We Dream was clearly going to be a powerhouse and there would be DREAMers forming their own organizations with their own strategies and vision and we wanted to foster that," Higashi said. "They taught us the value of having the impacted community lead the efforts," she said.

Unbound Philanthropy

Funding Areas: Legal rights and protection for immigrant and refugees; integration; and improving public understanding about immigrants and refugees in the U.S. and U.K.

Mission: Working to ensure that immigrants and refugees are treated with respect and are able to engage fully with their new communities.

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Unbound Philanthropy GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT:

United We Dream Network, Washington, DC

As a teenager, Cristina Jiménez lived with the fear of deportation, anxiety about the future and frustration over dreams denied. As an adult, she works to create a society where young immigrants are secure enough in their present lives to nurture big aspirations and realize a self-determined future.

Jiménez, co-founder and now managing director of the Washington, DC-based United We Dream Network, came to the United States from Ecuador in 1998 when she was 13. After her parents lost their jobs in their home country, they had no money for food or rent. Cristina, her brother and parents moved to New York, to join Cristina's aunt and try to build a better life.

Attending school in Queens, Jiménez earned high grades, took part in community service and planned to attend college, but she was devastated after a college counselor told her that she'd be ineligible for government aid and that, without a social security number, she may face other college enrollment barriers.

"It made me feel a deep sense of injustice," Jiménez said. "I wanted to do something about it and that is how I started to organize."

Jiménez began as an organizer and advocate in New York, where she and other young undocumented immigrants advocated for policies that would make it financially feasible and bureaucratically easier for them to attend college. Jiménez went on to graduate cum laude with a B.A. in political science and business from Queens College, CUNY and, later, to earn a master's degree from the School of Public of Affairs at Baruch College, CUNY.

In 2008 she and other undocumented young people entered the national stage when they created the United We Dream Network (UWD), which later became an Unbound Philanthropy grantee. Unbound supports UWD's "C3" effort to engage in youth leadership development, organizing, alliance building, training, and capacity-building, all of which have helped to advance its mission to develop a sustainable, grassroots movement, led by immigrant youth and children of immigrants.

UWD's first campaign advocated for passage of the federal DREAM Act. This legislation would have provided undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. as children a path toward legal status if they attended college or served in the military.

After the DREAM Act passed the House in 2009 but was blocked in the Senate by five votes in 2010, Jiménez and her

undeterred UWD colleagues launched the Right to Dream campaign a year later. United We Dream organized sit-ins, rallies, marches and used legal strategies and a digital, educational and storytelling campaign to demand that President Obama stick to a campaign pledge he made to support immigration reform during his bid for a second term. This helped build momentum for the Deferred Action for

Childhood Arrivals program (DACA), instituted by President Obama by executive order in 2013. DACA allows certain young undocumented immigrants to receive a renewable two-year work permit and exemption from deportation.

"It was one of the most historic and important victories for the immigrant community in the last 25 years," Jiménez said.

UWD then worked with state and federal education officials, local schools, churches, and other institutions to spread the word about the DACA program. The organization offered application clinics

where people could organize their paperwork, meet with pro bono lawyers and submit applications. UWD has helped more than 30,000 young people apply for DACA.

UWD also educates young people about their rights, about racial profiling and the threats of deportation. The organization advocates against deportations that separate families and raises awareness about the harm of deportations on children and other family members who are left behind. UWD's annual conference in June 2016 drew more than 1,000 attendees. At the conference, UWD adopted a "Vision for 2020," committing to a broadened scope of work that addresses challenges faced by all marginalized groups.

"We are focused on extending our reach to address systemic issues of injustice and oppression facing people of color, members of the LGBTQ community and women," Jiménez said. "We are committed to building a multiethnic immigrant youth-led organization to win justice and dignity for all in the United States."



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