

# CRAIN'S

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## Samaritas prepares to receive immigrant children for transitional care

By [SHERRI WELCH](#)

- Office of Refugee Resettlement requested Detroit nonprofit relaunch foster care programs for immigrant children
- Samaritas awaits word on federal funding to place 54-60 children into foster care
- President's order to halt separations not expected to impact children already taken from parents



Detroit-based Samaritas is continuing to prepare to receive immigrant children and place them into transitional foster care, despite the executive order President Donald Trump signed Wednesday.

The order, which ends the administration's policy of separating migrant children from their parents who were detained as they attempted to enter the U.S. illegally, did not say what would happen with the more than 2,300 immigrant children who have already been separated

from their parents. But late Thursday, a senior Trump administration official said about 500 of the children have been reunited with family since May when the "zero tolerance" policy took effect.

The executive order could also have limited shelf life.

Per the 1993 Flores v. Reno Supreme Court case, detained children from other countries cannot be held in government detention facilities for more than 20 days. That means that after 20 days, children could once again be separated from their parents.

For now, Samaritas is proceeding with the understanding that it could take custody of 54-60 of the children separated from their parents at the border.

"We have received no indication that things will change," President and CEO Vickie Thompson-Sandy said late Thursday. "Kids that have been separated won't be grandfathered in."

"We will still need to respond to the needs of those kids" and attempt to place them with family members already living in the U.S., she said.

At the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement's request, Samaritas is preparing to relaunch two transitional foster care programs for immigrant children coming to the U.S. One would place very young children in private foster homes while their relatives living in the U.S. are sought.

It's talking with Flint-based Wellspring Lutheran Services about serving as a subcontractee on another transitional program for older youth, a program they operated jointly in 2014-15 when large numbers of children were coming to the southern border of the U.S. from Central America. When the numbers dwindled, the program ended.

In May, when the "zero tolerance" immigration policy was launched, the ORR asked Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, the national affiliate of Samaritas, to have its affiliates around the country prepare to take children into their transitional foster care programs, Thompson-Sandy said.

Under the joint program, Samaritas would hold the contract, providing case management and communicating with immigration officials and working to find family members in the U.S. if possible or to transition them to a less restrictive placement like a foster family. Wellspring would house those children in group homes on its Farmington Hills campus, providing care and support.

Samaritas is looking for bilingual teachers, tutors, social workers and therapists who can speak Spanish to work with the children while they are in transitional foster care.

Samaritas applied to take up to 60 of the children who have been separated from their parents or guardians by the U.S. government. Thompson-Sandy said it expects to hear if it's been approved for the contracts in the next week or so.

When Samaritas managed the transitional foster program in 2014-15, it was able to place 100 percent of the kids in its custody with family members on average, in less than 30 days. It remains to be seen if it will be as successful this time, Thompson-Sandy said.

"In 2014, our experience was that families readily stepped forward. It's going to be a question today, I think, about how willing family members are to step forward, if they, too, are undocumented, given our climate."

Samaritas, which operates on an annual budget of about \$100 million funding a range of services including senior living facilities, affordable housing, adoption and long-term foster care for 123 unaccompanied refugee children who came to the U.S. with prior authorization.

It also provides resettlement services for refugees and immigrants, but much of that program **has been idled** with the policy shifts under the Trump administration. On Michigan's west side, Bethany Christian Services, which provides foster care, adoption, resettlement and other services from its Grand Rapids location, is already placing foreign children who have been separated from their parents into transitional foster care.