



*Working with journalists Natasha Pizzey and James Fredrick, WOLA was able to observe the screening interview of an unaccompanied Mexican minor who was placed at a Mexican government shelter after being deported from the United States. The shelter is operated by Mexico's Integral Family Development agency (Desarrollo Integral de la Familia, DIF). The observations below demonstrate the urgent need for Mexican authorities to take a more active role in screening deported children for protection concerns.*

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On the wall to Alfredo's right is a sign for the disoriented: "We are in DIF-Sonora. Nogales, Sonora, Mexico." DIF is Mexico's child and family services agency. Back in the corner, Alfredo's few belongings sit in a clinical, plastic Department of Homeland Security bag next to the bags of the two other kids deported with him.

Alfredo's boots are torn up and lace-less. He is wearing a thin pair of polyester dress pants. On his right wrist is a blue band, a simple way for Border Patrol to identify minors in their custody.

The interview begins with simple list of questions: age, hometown, place of birth, family situation, date of crossing, date of capture, etcetera.

Answers: 17-years-old. Born and raised in Oaxaca. One of six people living in his home. First time crossing. Left Friday in a small group, with a compass in hand. Didn't hire a *pollero*, or a guide. Heading for his brother in Los Angeles via Phoenix. Apprehended by Border Patrol on Tuesday near Tucson.

On this Wednesday morning, the social worker scribbles and ticks boxes on a two-sided form. Alfredo is reserved, his answers stilted.

As standard practice in DIF, the social worker asks Alfredo for his parents' phone number. He asks if she can call his brother in Los Angeles instead. She insists she has to call his parents. Alfredo is hesitant for her to call his dad, who—to the surprise of the social worker—is already in Sonora state, 1,500 miles from their hometown in Oaxaca.

What might have been going on between Alfredo and his father isn't clear, but his reaction is a red flag. Alfredo's gaze is fixed on his shoes as the phone rings.

Alfredo's father tells the social worker he had not heard from his son in over a week, although Alfredo says he crossed less than a week ago. The dad didn't know which state his son had tried to cross the border from. Alfredo still has a cell phone with him but hadn't tried to call his dad. The dad asks to speak to Alfredo. The conversation is short and Alfredo doesn't say anything other than 'yes' and 'ok.'

While ambiguous, the relationship between Alfredo and his family surely deserved at least a question from the social worker.

The entire interview lasts less than ten minutes. The social worker doesn't ask a single question about possible violence or abuse. (The closest she gets is asking how *la migra*, Border Patrol, treated him. Alfredo responds, "Fine.")

During the interview, the DIF social worker never refers to Alfredo by name, rather calling him 'the minor' when speaking to colleagues. The interview space wasn't exactly private: excluding two WOLA observers, there were three people in the room in addition to Alfredo and the social worker, one of whom was answering phone calls.

After the interview, Alfredo goes back to the room filled with TV noise where the other deported minors wait.