

# Colby



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## Goodworks

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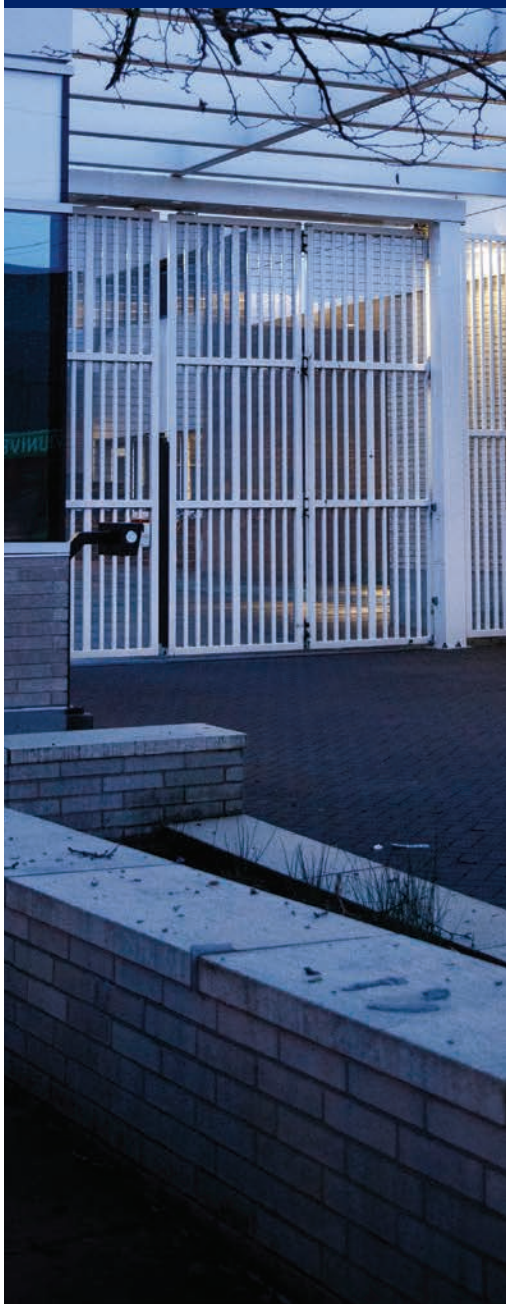
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# GOOD WORKS

**Colby alumni impact the world in many ways every day.**

In our “Good Works” section, we introduce you to alumni who are using their Colby education to make a difference in their communities.



## **CAM COVAL WORKS TO GIVE A VOICE TO IMMIGRANTS IN CUSTODY**

BY CLAIRE SYKES PHOTOGRAPHY BY TONI GREAVES

**F**or more than a year, a father of four was held in custody, terrified that he'd be forced to permanently leave the United States without his wife and young children.

It's a common story for people imprisoned in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facilities. Thanks in large part to Pueblo Unido ([pueblounidopdx.org](http://pueblounidopdx.org)) of Portland, Ore., the man was released and able to return to his family and job, assured that he would never be deported.

Since April 2017, when Cam Coval '16 and Francisco Rodriguez founded Pueblo Unido, the nonprofit organization has helped secure the freedom of five immigrants from the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, Wash., the fourth largest in the country, and another from a detention facility in California. It's done this by connecting them to, and paying for, immigration lawyers. Because immigration court is a civil one, not criminal, there's no free public defender. Defendants without lawyers often languish in jail for months or even years.

“Legal representation is the single most predictive factor in whether someone will avoid deportation,” said Coval, executive director.

He brings to the job his passion for human rights, fondly recalling Assistant Professor of Government Lindsay Mayka and her Challenges to Democracy course and his study abroad in Chile. After graduating with a double major in government and global studies, the metro Atlanta-born-and-raised Coval left for an AmeriCorps hunger-relief post in Portland. At one point, he held several community-service jobs at once: for underserved youth, ESL, and managing a food pantry. Many of these organizations' clients have since sought out Pueblo Unido.

“We work with people who fled the most horrible abuse you could imagine, bringing their kids with them across the desert and trying to make a life for themselves here, only to be treated as subhuman and caged like an animal,” Coval said.



Cam Coval '16, right, and Francisco Rodriguez outside the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention center in Portland, Ore. Coval and Rodriguez founded Pueblo Unido, a nonprofit that assists immigrants detained by authorities.

Detained or not, about 50 more people who have received ICE notices to attend court hearings also have turned to Pueblo Unido. Whether it's giving them \$15 for detention-center phone calls, helping them find housing, or paying \$15,000 for a first-rate lawyer, the organization strives to empower those with vulnerable immigration status.

One of them was Rodriguez. In March 2017, he was taken from his home by ICE agents and shipped 150 miles to Tacoma. The next day, his priest and friends organized a protest outside Portland's ICE office, at which Coval spoke. A few hours later, he was released.

The two began speaking at immigration events. They called nonprofits and attorneys, "and found out who could help and who not to waste time with," Coval said. "We learned by trial and error and luck—and from great mentors. We quickly realized that to really help someone facing deportation, we needed money."

Coval and others started with a crowdfunding site for that father of four. Within the year, donations to Pueblo Unido added up to \$6,000. Some of that came from Power to the Dreamers, a nonprofit cofounded by Vianca Diaz, after volunteering for Pueblo Unido. So far, it's raised \$16,000 for Coval's cause.

Said Diaz, "It's a small, grassroots organization of really motivated and dedicated people, with a lot of direct action and direct results. So many other nonprofits get bogged down with bureaucracy, but Pueblo Unido actually can make a difference."

Last year, Pueblo Unido (named after a Chilean Pinochet-era social-change song) became a 501(c)(3), and has since raised over \$50,000 toward legal defense and organizational development.

Rodriguez serves as board president. Because he's faced some of the same challenges as their clients, "I've been able to help people with things they might have not ever thought about. Most of us are going through the same process. I'm just further along in it, so it's helpful to let them know what to expect."

Certainly, Pueblo Unido makes a positive difference, and not just for clients. "I've learned to withhold

judgment of others' actions, because you don't always see the causes," Coval said. "And to be more understanding and respectful of people—just because they're a human being."

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—Cam Coval '16  
on making a positive difference