

Letter to the Churches

Our Mission:

TO WELCOME IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES BY PROVIDING FREE HIGH QUALITY IMMIGRATION LEGAL SERVICE, EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY.



Community Education Up

In the April 29 staff report, it is notable that 36 presentations were made by staff from February to April to a variety of audiences. Many "Know Your Rights" trainings were made around the state. Staff advocated for DREAMers with Senator Joni Ernst. Ann and Brynne were invited to participate in the UMC Laity Day, as well as meeting with Bishop Laurie Haller, who comes from an annual conference with a JFON as well.

New Appointment Hours

With receipt of the federal VOCA grant, JFON has been able to expand the hours of the day and week when prospective clients can make appointments at the free immigration legal clinics around the state. Now clients can call in from 8:30 to 5 any day of the week. It is important to remember that the legal clinics fill up very quickly at the start of each month. Des Moines and Cedar Rapids fill the most rapidly. Call early in the month for success.

Find a legal clinic:

Immigrants and refugees can make an appointment by calling the office at 515.255.9809 Monday through Fridays from 9 am-5 pm .

FREE immigration legal clinics are monthly except June & December at United Methodist Churches:

*Lovely Lane UMC in Cedar Rapids

*First UMC in Columbus Junction

*Wesley UMC in Ottumwa

*First UMC in Decorah

*First UMC in Storm Lake

*Grace UMC-Des Moines

*First UMC-Marshalls town

www.iaumc.org/jfon

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CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR NEWEST LEGAL CLINIC A MARSHALLTOWN

Exciting news for immigrants and refugees is the opening of the seventh immigration legal clinic here in Iowa. This legal clinic operates out of First UMC in Marshalltown with collaboration by Hope UMC of Marshalltown.

The training of volunteers took place on March 14. Ann Naffier assisted the National JFON staff who came from Virginia. This was followed by the first legal clinic

held on April 11 with Brynne and Ann providing staffing. There were seven clients on hand for this first opportunity.

This is the realization of work by a group of supporters of immigrants and refugees in the area. It is also the result of a grant awarded in July, 2016, by JFON from the VOCA funds out of the Department of Justice, focusing on victims of crime.

CLIENT STORIES SHARED BY OUR STAFF.**April Palma shares this story.**

Leslie is a 15 year old from Mexico. She arrived in the United States to flee abuse and to be reunited with her mother in Des Moines. When Leslie was only a few years old, her father abandoned her and her mother. Shortly after, Leslie's mother came to the U.S. to find work in order to provide for her daughter. Leslie was left in the care of her grandparents. When Leslie was eight, her grandmother died and her grandfather was her sole caregiver. At age ten, he began sexually abusing her. For years Leslie felt like she had no one to turn to and was too afraid to report him to the authorities or even to tell her mother. Eventually, Leslie's depression became obvious to her mother and she hired coyotes to bring her to the U.S.

Since arriving in Iowa, Leslie has received help from an advocate at LUNA, who referred her to JFON. We were able to obtain a predicate order for Leslie in partnership with the Drake Legal Clinic and we have now filed an affirmative SIJS case based on abandonment by father and abuse by caregiver. Her case is currently pending.

Grisell Herrera shares this story

Sang and Yetho are husband and wife and came to the United States as refugees from Bhutan, a small country in southern Asia. They are a loving couple and good and caring parents to their three children. They also both suffer from profound hearing loss. Growing up they were never allowed to attend school and received no special services. Neither of them have learned any formal language skills, such as American Sign Language or International Sign.

Instead, they have a simple sign language that they invented. When Sang and Yetho came to JFON, they were desperate to find a way to apply for citizenship, but did not know how they would be able to pass the citizenship test and survive an interview without the ability to communicate with the immigration officer.

JFON was able to help Sang and Yetho both obtain medical waivers for the usual citizenship test, and were able to negotiate with our local Citizenship and Immigration Service to allow Sang's brother, who could communicate with Sang and Yetho in their own invented sign language, to translate for them in their interviews. Sang and Yetho both had their interviews in the morning and by that same afternoon were successfully sworn in as U.S. citizens.

Wendy is a woman from Central America who first arrived in the United States in 1990, fleeing war and hunger. Twenty-seven years later, she has a husband, five U.S. citizen children, a home she and her husband own and has been employed by the same company for 15 years. In 1998, because of a natural disaster in her country, Wendy was able to obtain a temporary legal status in the U.S. known as "Temporary Protected Status" or TPS. But Wendy has never been able to become a Legal Permanent Resident or U.S. Citizen. Although she had legal status, she never felt stable or secure in the country that had given her refuge for so long. Finally, Wendy's oldest children Melissa turned 21. That is the age when an American citizen can first file for residency for a parent. JFON, which had assisted Wendy for years with her TPS renewals, could now finally help her first application for Legal Permanent Residency. After 27 years, Wendy is finally going to be able to truly feel that the United States is her home.

Emily Rebelsky shares this story.

José came to JFON after he was first diagnosed with cancer. He was unable to pay his private attorney because he was undergoing chemotherapy and unable to work. Due to a misunderstanding with his previous attorney, he had allowed his work authorization to lapse and was at risk of losing his health insurance. Because José's case is time-sensitive, and the great risk to Jose's health, we have taken a multi-pronged approach to his case.

First we filed an application to renew José's work permit. Although we explained the situation to USCIS and requested expedited processing, it appears this request has not been granted. In hopes of speeding up processing before the deadline, we have reached out to Senator Ernst's office for assistance.

In addition, we have filed an emergency motion for a decision in his immigration court case. Because José's immigration case has been pending for so long, he is eligible for an old form of relief known as suspension of deportation, available to people whose deportation proceeding began in 1997 or earlier. However, relief can only be granted to 4,000 people per year. The judge expressed that he was merely waiting for an available number at Jose's last hearing in December, 2015. However, we also filed a motion in Jose's case, informing the judge of changed circumstances and asking for a decision soon. His hearing is now scheduled for the summer. Jose and his wife have lived in the U.S. for 30 years, working hard for their children. Upon receipt of his residency, his wife will become eligible for a waiver that will allow her to apply for permanent residency as well.

To all our donors, whether churches, individuals, or businesses, we thank you for your support of our work. We could not reach out to some many people in so many places around the state if it were not for your belief in what we do for refugees and immigrants. You enable us to continue helping our new neighbors in Iowa.