



Immigration Legal Services



Keeping Families Together Edition1 March 2019

Expansion of Legal Services to Immigrants



A need and a dream. That is how the Catholic Charities' ministry to immigrants began.

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Dubuque has a long history of welcoming the strangers since our inception in 1931. Our faith guides us to the most vulnerable, and in 2007 we started an immigrant drop-in center to offer assistance such as interpretation, translation, and helping refugees and immigrants navigate different social service systems. Very quickly it was recognized that

the priority need was legal assistance to help immigrants reunite with their families. Many immigrants specifically needed assistance in completing sound, quality immigration paperwork and getting correct legal advice. In response, Catholic Charities became recognized by the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) which allowed us to hire an accredited BIA legal representative to provide limited immigration legal services. For the next eight years, two different BIA legal representatives provided legal assistance in Dubuque. In 2015, the services expanded into additional communities including Cedar Rapids and New Hampton.

Navigating immigration law has become increasingly complex and we had extensive wait-lists for immigrants needing legal assistance. In 2014, we launched a fundraising campaign to hire our first Immigration Attorney the following year, which allowed us to serve an additional 195 new immigrants that year.

Thanks to many generous donors and strategic partnerships, we are thrilled to share that our drop in center has transformed into a full service Immigration Legal Services program. Now, more than a decade later, we have four Immigration Attorneys and two legal assistants (pictured above) located in Cedar Rapids, Dubuque and Waterloo that allowed us to serve over 420 clients in 2018 throughout the Archdiocese of Dubuque. This rapid expansion has allowed us to be available in additional communities such as Decorah, Dubuque, Hampton and Waterloo.

We are the only non-profit organization in the Archdiocese of Dubuque providing this unique ministry, and have therefore, become a leader in Iowa providing the highest quality, affordable legal services to immigrants. We are thankful for the strategic and financial partnerships that have made the expansion of legal services to immigrants available and we look forward to a very bright future.

Sincerely,
Tracy Morrison, Executive Director

In 2018, Immigration Legal Services successfully served 420 clients with their immigration petitions.



Mung Family celebrates Citizenship

"Catholic Charities helped me, my family and my community. Without them, it would have been very difficult for me to navigate the citizenship process. With their help, I have become a citizen of the United States. I am so proud and I finally feel like an equal to everyone who was born here."

-Nang Sian Mung



Harmful immigration policies and what you can do to help

By Miryam Antúnez De Mayolo,
Catholic Charities' Immigration Attorney

Under the current administration, immigration rules and policies are changing at a dizzying pace. Unfortunately, these changes are mostly detrimental to immigrants and their families. Two memoranda issued by USCIS (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services) in the past few months can have catastrophic consequences for anyone applying for an immigration benefit. A Policy Memorandum from July 13, 2018, which became effective on Sept. 11, 2018, grants discretion to USCIS adjudicators to deny applications, petitions or requests without first issuing a Request for Evidence (RFE) or Notice of Intent to Deny (NOID). This is a dramatic departure from the prior "no possibility" policy, which required that the adjudicator issue an RFE unless there was "no possibility" that the deficiency could be cured by submission of additional evidence. Under the old policy, the applicant had a chance to supplement or expand his/her initial petition. Under the new policy, a denial can be issued if the adjudicator deems that the evidence submitted is not strong enough, depriving applicants from the opportunity to contest the adjudicator's findings. Immigration applications can be very expensive, and blank denials without an opportunity to contest USCIS' findings could end up costing applicants hundreds to thousands of dollars.

[To read full article, please click here](#)

Who Are Our Clients?

- The student who has lived in Iowa since

he was 6 months old, has never spoken any language except English, and found out that he was undocumented for the first time when he tried to apply for college.

- The U. S. citizen who wants to bring his wife or child to join him after years spent separated by thousands of miles.
- The woman whose abusive U.S. citizen husband has been promising to “apply for her papers” for over a decade.
- The person who fled a violent war in their home country that destroyed their home and scattered everyone they know across the world.



- The religious worker who is persecuted for her beliefs.
- In Iowa alone, the US Census Bureau's Community Survey reports an estimated 47,992 undocumented residents. The Archdiocese of Dubuque's estimated number of those undocumented residents is 13,847.
- Of those undocumented residents, 91 are under the age of 5, while 1,511 are between the ages of 5 and 17. The number jumps to 6,728 in the 18-34 range and 5,517 residents in the 35-64 year age range.

Our clients are people from all over the world. The top countries our clients come from are Guatemala, Burma, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Mexico. Our clients speak Spanish, French (Congolese), Burmese, and English as well as many regional dialects.

All that matters to us is that our clients are people.



Educating Communities

There is a natural fear among the immigrant communities to seek out help, and therefore, providing education to the general community as well as partnering with community based organizations, has been a crucial step in reducing fear for immigrants and being able to provide them with affordable, quality immigration legal services.

In 2018, the Catholic Charities' Immigration Legal Services team provided education to over 1,600 people at informational workshops on immigration issues.

Did You Know?

Iowa has a courageous history of welcoming the stranger. In 1975, Republican Governor Robert Ray was the only governor to answer the call when he and 30 other governors received letters of help from Southeast Asian refugees fleeing persecution because they were allies of the United States during the Vietnam War. Governor Ray set the path for the United States and demonstrated what it meant to honor all humans with dignity

and respect because he could not sit idly by as others suffered. Prior to Governor Ray's act of extending Iowa as a home for Southeast Asian refugees, there was no formal process for accepting refugees into the United States. It was until Iowa began accepting thousands of Southeast Asian refugees that prompted the Department of State to create a uniform process for vetting and allowing refugees into the United States. Governor Ray set the course to what would eventually become the Refugee Act of 1980.



**"I was a stranger and
you welcomed me..."**

The State of Iowa was the first state in the United States to open its doors to refugees fleeing persecution through the Refugee Act of 1980 by accepting thousands of Southeast Asian refugees.



Immigration Attorney Highlight: Yer Vang

Attorney Yer Vang first joined Catholic Charities in February 2016 as an Immigration Attorney, but currently is the Director of Immigration Legal Services. Yer provides overall management, planning and coordination for our immigration legal services including assisting in the exploration of emerging issues and parish engagement. In addition to managing the program, Yer is still an active immigration attorney and carries a full caseload of clients.

Yer's commitment to advocating on behalf of immigrants and refugees is directly related to her own personal journey as a former child refugee from Southeast Asia. Yer's immediate family fled Laos after the Vietnam War ended. Her family along with thousands of other ethnic Hmong and Lao people, who were allies with the United States during the Vietnam War, were being persecuted and killed by the Communist regime. Yer's family was fortunate to escape and make their way to Thailand to try to seek safety. It was in a barbed wire refugee camp, that Yer was born into and lived for four and half years before her family would be able to immigrate to the United States.

In 1979, with the help of the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS) and a local Lutheran Church (Good Shepherd) in Decorah, Iowa, Yer's family immigrated to the United States as refugees. Yer's family was one of the early Southeast Asian refugees who benefited from Governor Ray's courageous act to welcome refugees into the state of Iowa.

Yer's personal experience navigating the immigration system and serving as her family's cultural broker, motivated her to pursue a career that would allow her to help others do the same. Forty years later, Yer has returned back to her home state of Iowa and is now making a full circle to be working with Catholic Charities, another faith based organization who's mission is to help the most vulnerable and needy populations in Northeast Iowa. This time, in a different capacity by fighting for immigrant rights and advocating on their behalf. It is her

deeply rooted immigrant experience that has allowed Yer to serve in this ministry for over 18 years; and to give a voice to those that are not able to speak for themselves.

Yer shares: ***"With the expansion of our immigration legal services we will be able to respond to the increasing needs of the immigrant communities across our Archdiocese. It is critical that we are able to help immigrants navigate the complex immigration legal system. More now than ever, it's important immigrants receive accurate legal information and qualified legal services. In addition to providing direct legal services, we also provide education and advocacy on behalf of immigrants to ensure their voices are heard."***

Myths vs. Facts

MYTH: The process for admitting refugees to the United States is not secure and terrorists can easily enter the country.

FACT: The most difficult way to lawfully enter the United States is as a refugee .

No other category of immigrants to the United States undergoes such a rigorous and detailed screening and vetting process. The screening process takes over year to several years and involves numerous federal intelligence and security agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Department of State (DOS), Department of Defense (DOD), the National Counterterrorism Center, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

Fewer than 1% of all refugees are even considered for resettlement. If referred to the U.S. program, refugees undergo biographic and fingerprint security checks to confirm their identity. They are also extensively interviewed by specially trained officers from DHS' U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). The vetting process is designed to ensure that each incoming refugee is not a public safety or national security risk. In the past year and half, the review process for refugees has intensified and includes additional layers of security vetting. Ultimately, if our government has concerns that an applicant is a threat or safety risk, that refugee will not be admitted to the United States.

(<https://justiceforimmigrants.org/what-we-are-working-on/refugees/dispelling-myths/>)

Community Partner Highlight:



Ethnic Minorities of Burma Advocacy and Resource Center (EMBARC) is a grassroots, community-based nonprofit founded by and for refugees from Burma. As Iowa's first refugee-led service provider, EMBARC understands best the challenges and potential of refugee families. EMBARC is a proud partner of Catholic Charities, working together as advocates with refugees in Iowa and ensuring families have access to services they need.



Per Mallory Petsche, Program Coordinator at EMBARC, ***"EMBARC relies and trusts in the***

Immigration Legal Services program. Catholic Charities has a long history in refugee resettlement and providing immigration services. There is no one better equipped to fill this need in our community. They are currently the only organization providing low cost immigration services in Waterloo, and although limited in resources and capacity, they have gone above and beyond to meet the growing needs of refugee families who need their services."

Interested in learning more?

Please click here to visit our Immigration Legal Services website page or
Click here to donate to Catholic Charities.

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www.CatholicCharitiesDubuque.org

