



Catholic
Charities
Archdiocese of Dubuque



Immigration Legal Services

Keeping Families Together

November 2020

Immigration Legal Services in the Time of COVID-19

By Yer Vang, Catholic Charities' Director of Immigration Legal Services

As the year begins to wind down, we reflect on how the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically impacted how we delivered immigration legal services. The pandemic prompted us to alter how we provide continuity of care and services to our most vulnerable communities. Our mission remains the same but our strategies have shifted to leverage technology so that we continue to reach outward and help those in need. In our Immigration Legal Services (ILS) program, the pandemic pushed us to adopt technology-focused practices that increased our community accessibility. We did so by conducting consultations and legal services to anyone in our archdiocese with the ability to access the internet. Virtual meetings and consultations have allowed our clients more flexibility in their schedules and taken away the need to find transportation to our office. Although these advancements likely would have eventually come at a slower pace without the pandemic, the need to protect ourselves and our clients from COVID-19 by social distancing required our ILS program to develop into a cutting-edge legal practice, which will benefit the community we serve long after restrictions are lifted and we can finally put our masks away.



During these months of uncertainty and transition, however, our ILS team and our clients were still blessed to receive good news of protection of the vulnerable, the furtherance of family reunifications, and the gift of seeing our clients become United States citizens. It gives us great joy to include in this edition of the Keeping Families Together the stories of some clients and the ministry our offices provides to help those in need.

As Pope Francis instructed us to do in his Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2014, *"We ourselves need to see, and then to enable others to see, that migrants and refugees do not only represent a problem to be solved, but are brothers and sisters to be welcomed, respected and loved. They are an occasion that Providence gives us to help build a more just society, a more perfect democracy, a more united country, a more fraternal world and a more open and evangelical Christian community."* We hope you will join us in opening our arms and hearts to welcome our new brothers and sisters.

Legal Updates

The pandemic has not slowed down the rapid pace of changes in immigration law. There have been many changes to immigration rules, law and policies in the past year. Though it often feels like laws and rules change daily (and sometimes they do), our ILS team works hard to keep up to date with the current status of immigration law and procedure. We invite anyone potentially affected by immigration law changes to call us at 319-356-7121 to schedule a consultation if they have a question about the effect these changes may have on them or their families.

[Click HERE to read detailed reports of legal updates](#)

Note: This information is current as of publication date and subject to change. Please consult an immigration attorney or the [United States Citizenship & Immigration Services \(USCIS\) website](#) for the most current immigration information.



Gaytan Brothers Thankful for DACA

By Marco, Oscar, & Jairo Gaytan

To be completely honest, Catholic Charities helped us in ways that most people would never understand. We went from feeling like we lived under a rock our entire lives, to finally being able to do things that other people took for granted. The fear of not being able to live a normal life everyday was exhausting. The fear of being

pulled over, questioned, or even getting into any type of trouble was always in the back of our minds, because we knew that we weren't protected from deportation.

Catholic Charities did all the behind-the-scenes work. They introduced us to immigration lawyers, taught us our rights, and explained to us the process, which was Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). All we personally had to do was gather documents, recommendations, and other forms of proof that they asked of us. We understood that paying lawyers and going through this whole process was expensive, but they were very generous about the cost that we had to pay personally. After we signed on to DACA for the first time and got approved, we all felt like a huge weight was lifted off our shoulders. Just knowing that we were going to be able to do simple things such as drive safely, get a job, and, most importantly it opened up new doors for our futures and allowed us to attend college. Nobody in our family had ever had the opportunity to do that, we didn't want to take it for granted.

Our parents made the decision to come to America because it is the land of opportunity and they wanted a better life for us. They invested their whole lives on us and worked day in and day out. They weren't thinking about a retirement plan, they weren't thinking about buying a home, they were just trying to give us a better life than they had. Once we were approved for DACA, we all knew that we were THEIR retirement, we three are their future. They never once told us this, but as we got older we realized we were their investment, because all they cared about was that we had a better chance at a successful life.

DACA is not only important to us, but it is also important to the 750,000+ cases just like us. Why should children who decided whether or not to live here, be punished? Not only is it an opportunity for us, but it is also an opportunity for America to show that everyone should get a chance at the American Dream that we all chase.

Did You Know?

- As of 2019 Iowa is home to 2,460 DACA recipients.
- Since 2012 DACA has been granted to 9,348 people living in the State of Iowa.
- Iowa DACA recipients and DACA-eligible individuals paid an estimated \$6.3 million in state and local taxes in 2018.
- In 2017, the Center for American Progress estimated that ending DACA would cost Iowa \$188.5 million in annual GDP losses.

[Please click here to see Immigration and DACA updates](#)

Staff Spotlights

Jim Jacobson, Immigration Attorney, is the most recent addition to the Immigration Legal Services team. He was most recently General Counsel for Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Local 199 in Iowa. He also served as an Assistant General Counsel for a national environmental organization headquartered in Massachusetts. Jim has a bachelor's degree from Northwestern University as well as a master's degree and juris doctorate from the University of Iowa.



Catherine Clark, Immigration Legal Assistant, joined the Immigration Legal services team in the Cedar Rapids office in August 2018. Catherine graduated from the University of Iowa in 2017 with B.A. degrees in Spanish and Psychology. Catherine has lived and traveled in Honduras and Argentina for service work and to to build her Spanish fluency.

Shannon Schuster, Immigration Legal Assistant, joined Catholic Charities in November of 2019. She graduated from Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa, with B.A. degrees in International Studies and Spanish. Shannon became bilingual while studying abroad in Argentina and Spain and while volunteering at an elementary school in Mexico.



[Visit our Immigration Legal Services website](#)

Another Success Story - Abraham Samba

"Although COVID-19 precautions may mask our beaming smiles, there is no hiding the shared joy of Abraham's naturalization. Abraham was my very first consultation and client when I began practicing immigration law at Catholic Charities in 2018, so seeing him sworn in as a United States citizen nearly two years after we began working together holds a special place in my heart. I could not be happier or more proud to welcome Abraham as a fellow citizen, and I hope his story will inspire others to work toward their dreams. Being a United States citizen comes with many rights and responsibilities, and I can't wait to see how Abraham chooses to go

forward as an American and one of the newest members of our vibrant immigrant nation."

- Dee Patters, Immigration Attorney



In 2020, Catholic Charities has distributed more than \$80,000 in emergency funding to 105 immigrant households for rent, utility, or medical bills.

Emergency Funding for Immigrants

Many immigrant families in the Archdiocese of Dubuque have been doubly challenged in 2020. Due to the losing employment from the pandemic and not being eligible for government assistance, such as unemployment and stimulus funding, these families have had difficulty meeting their family's basic needs. In addition, many were significantly impacted by damages to their home as a result of the Derecho storm. Catholic Charities has been on the forefront of responding to these disasters and helping these most poor and vulnerable families.

"We were both out of work when everything was shut down, and with no income, we didn't know how we were going to make ends meet. We were so scared that we were going to be kicked out of our apartment. Once we went back to work, my husband tested positive for COVID and we had to stay home and then we were again behind on bills. Thank you Catholic Charities for helping our family through this tough time."

A BIG THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS AND DONORS!

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