

**2019 ANNUAL REPORT:
NEW YORK STATE OFFICE FOR NEW AMERICANS**

PURSUANT TO SECTION 94-b (5) (n) OF THE EXECUTIVE LAW

FOR SUBMISSION TO:

**TEMPORARY PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, Andrea Stewart-Cousins
SPEAKER OF THE ASSEMBLY, Carl E. Heastie**

June 23, 2020

Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor

Rossana Rosado, Secretary of State

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The New York State Office for New Americans (ONA) is the first state-level immigrant assistance office created by statute in the United States. Since its creation by Governor Cuomo in 2012, ONA has provided assistance to thousands of the 4.4 million immigrants living in New York State through its statewide network of community-based service providers. This annual report details the achievements of ONA and its partners in 2019. Throughout the reporting period, ONA continued to expand upon its efforts to offer all immigrants residing in New York State the tools to participate in the economic and overall wellbeing of their community, irrespective of federal immigration policy, and continued to set the standard that each state in our nation should follow.

ONA's core services are provided through a statewide network of neighborhood-based Opportunity Centers, hosted within existing culturally competent, language-accessible, community-based organizations. ONA's Opportunity Centers provide new Americans with DACA and Citizenship application completion, prepare new Americans for the U.S. citizenship exam, and offer community workshops on a variety of topics that meet the needs of clients they serve. ONA Opportunity Centers are supported by ONA Legal Counsels, each of whom is an expert in immigration law, and provide services including U.S. citizenship application assistance, direct representation, and immigration law consultation days. During 2019, Opportunity Centers and Legal Counsels provided services to over 20,000 new Americans.

Due to changing federal immigration policies and enhanced enforcement, the need for free and expert immigrant legal services has become particularly acute in New York State, and this continued to be the case in 2019. To address the need for urgent deportation defense, Governor Cuomo launched the Liberty Defense Project (LDP) in 2017, to provide legal assistance to any immigrant in New York State. ONA administers the LDP, which supports a variety of programs implemented by community-based legal providers, who assist with direct representation, including for those facing deportation, Know Your Rights trainings, and law-related support to families. In 2019, the LDP launched the Regional Rapid Response program, to provide urgent legal assistance in each region of the state. The LDP also continued to assist immigrants through the Pro Bono project and the upstate New York Immigration Family Unity Project (NYIFUP). In 2019, LDP providers assisted over 10,000 individuals.

In 2019, ONA continued to expand upon its role as a trusted source for accurate and timely information and services for new Americans through the expansion of programs that provide assistance to those most in need and who are hard to reach. The ONA Community Navigators, launched in 2017, conduct outreach to low-income immigrant communities and connect them to vital services. In 2019, the ONA Navigators reached thousands of individuals and engaged hundreds of volunteers. In 2019, “Project Golden Door,” a parent support program for guardians of unaccompanied minors, expanded from a pilot serving four sites into 11 sites statewide. Golden Door partners connected over 400 immigrant families to under-utilized supportive public and private organizations, and existing resources and services, including mental health counseling. ONA launched the Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities Navigator Initiative in 2019, in partnership with the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (DDPC). This initiative expands the capacity of ONA’s network to connect new Americans with intellectual and developmental disabilities to needed resources, information, and services in New York State.

ONA’s core community-based services, coupled with its innovative initiatives, has led to the office being recognized both nationally and internationally. In 2019, ONA also engaged in federal immigration policy debates and submitted comments to the Trump Administration highlighting the negative economic, social and cultural impact of restrictive policies, building on Governor Cuomo’s immigration stand of prior years. Looking towards the future, ONA will continue to ensure that new American communities are supported and assisted through programming that addresses their unique needs at the local level while remaining flexible to changing policies at the state and federal level.

INTRODUCTION

In compliance with section 94-b (5) (n) of the Executive Law, the Department of State (the “Department”) respectfully submits the following report on the activities of the Office for New Americans. This report covers the period from January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019.

BACKGROUND

New York State has historically served as a leader in the United States on immigrant issues. It is an internationally recognized port of entry, symbolizing the struggles and opportunities that constitute the immigrant experience. Today, 4.4 million immigrants live in New York State, and one in four New Yorkers of working age is foreign

born. Like past waves of immigrants, today's new Americans come seeking opportunities. Our country and state have historically lent a hand in helping new Americans achieve this goal.

In 2012, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo established the Office for New Americans. "We are the gateway for immigrants worldwide and we are proud of it," said Governor Cuomo at the 2012 State of the State Address. "Other states build walls to keep people out and we open our arms and invite people in because we are the state of immigrants." In 2014, the Legislature enacted, and the Governor signed into law, Chapter 206 of the Laws of 2014, which laid out the powers and duties of ONA. ONA has the proud distinction to be the first state-level immigrant assistance office created by statute in the United States.

Through partnerships with highly qualified immigrant service providers across the State, ONA's mission is to strengthen New York State's welcoming environment for new Americans, marshal state resources to better serve new Americans and facilitate their success by providing economic, social, and civic support. ONA is unique in accomplishing its mission. States with the largest immigrant communities have historically maintained offices, initiatives, or committees to address immigrant issues. Many of these efforts focus on increased access to existing social services through targeted constituent outreach and implementing language assistance services, while others serve as constituent services or coordinating offices. ONA is the first office of its kind to create infrastructure for direct service provision by creating a network of centers focused on inclusiveness and integration.

In 2019, ONA continued to expand its efforts to offer all immigrants residing in New York State the tools to participate in the economic and overall wellbeing of their community, irrespective of federal immigration policy, and continued to set the standard that each state in our nation should follow. ONA was highlighted both nationally and internationally in various reports and events, which are detailed in this report.

ONA provided services to new Americans across New York State through various programming including:

- Opportunity Center Network (Opportunity Centers and Legal Counsels)
- Liberty Defense Project
- ONA Hotline
- Cell-Ed
- Immigrant Community Navigators
- Project Golden Door/ Parent Support Programs

- Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities Navigator
- Resource Coordination

OPPORTUNITY CENTER NETWORK

During 2019, Opportunity Centers and Legal Counsels provided services to over 20,000 new Americans.

Table 1: Opportunity Centers and Legal Counsels

New Americans Served by ONA Opportunity Centers and ONA Legal Counsels	Clients Served Between January 1, 2019 through January 31, 2020*
Clients Participating in Citizenship Preparation Classes	1,101
Clients Receiving English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Assistance	3,426
Clients Receiving Naturalization/DACA/DACA Renewal Application Assistance	3,804
Clients Attending Community Seminars and Informational Law Workshops	8,022
Clients Receiving Immigration Law Consultations and Attending Legal Clinics	2,229
Clients Receiving Intake Screenings/Direct Representation by ONA Legal Counsel	1,465
Total	20,047

*Due to reporting schedules, data runs through January 31, 2020.

Citizenship Preparation Classes

In CY19, 1,101 people attended citizenship preparation classes at the ONA Opportunity Centers. Each ONA Opportunity Center offered Citizenship preparation classes for new Americans preparing for the naturalization exam. Classes covered United States civics, history, and government and focused on preparation for the 100 questions on the naturalization exam. Classes also included time for students to practice for the citizenship interview.

Students received instruction from dedicated and experienced instructors. A student in Rochester expressed her gratitude to her instructor:

“My path to the US citizenship was easier thanks to your skillful help. Your excellence in the preparation of my documents, the topic-oriented classes you taught and your diligence to clarify my concerns made the difference in this important event of my life.”

The Rockland Opportunity Center shared a story of a mother and daughter who attended the citizenship preparation class at the center:

“Maria and her mother enrolled in the citizenship class taught by Rockland Office for New Americans Citizenship Navigator. Both Maria and her mother were anxious to become US citizens, but Maria’s mother struggled with the English language. Maria was dedicated to her mother and focused her time and attention on helping her succeed. Her efforts were rewarded! Maria and her mother took their citizenship exams on the same day, and several months later were sworn-in as American citizens on the same day. Maria has continued her efforts to assist citizenship hopefuls by volunteering as a “teacher’s assistant” in ONA citizenship preparation classes. The Rockland Office for New Americans salutes Maria for her dedication to “being there” for other new Americans.”

Similar stories that depict individual successes can be seen throughout the Opportunity Centers. At another Opportunity Center in Brooklyn, a former student who attended classes at the center, passed her citizenship test and took the Oath of Allegiance this winter. The former student now co-teaches the Citizenship preparation class. Since becoming a U.S. citizen, this former student has become even more supportive and helpful to students studying for the citizenship exam. The director of the Opportunity Center shared:

“[Her] first-hand experience of the citizenship interview is a great asset to our class. She has a gift for sharing knowledge, putting students at ease, and motivating them to work hard to achieve their dreams. Since becoming a U.S. citizen, [she] has also begun teaching a Women’s Empowerment class. Before becoming a U.S. citizen, [she] was a tireless worker for the community, but now that she is a U.S. citizen, she has taken her community engagement and support to the next level. [She] is an inspiration to both students and staff, and I am so proud to see how she has utilized her citizenship preparation and experience to educate and support members of the community.”

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Assistance

In CY19, 3,426 individuals either attended ESOL classes at Opportunity Centers or received referrals to community-based ESOL programs. Each ONA Opportunity Center maintains an updated list of ESOL resources in their designated service area and makes referrals to clients as needed.

Naturalization/DACA Application Assistance

In CY19, ONA Opportunity Centers provided application assistance for naturalization, DACA, and DACA renewals to 3,804 individuals. All applications were prepared by qualified staff, including immigration attorneys and DOJ-Accredited representatives. Citizenshipworks software was available for clients at each Opportunity Center.

A legal staff member from MinKwon Center for Community Action, an ONA Opportunity Center, shared her passion for the work:

“It has been a great experience serving the Asian American and wider immigrant community as a Legal Services Coordinator at MinKwon Center for Community Action. I first came to the United States in 2018 so I understand the experiences of the immigrant community that we serve very well, leading me to seek opportunities to serve immigrant populations and to create resiliency within communities. My work at Minkwon Center and the ONA program have given me the chance to fulfill this goal and to learn more about American society and institutions.

“My role as the Legal Services Coordinator is to assist clients with various immigration applications and help them navigate through the procedural complexities of the immigration system. We work a lot with limited-English-proficient Korean seniors who are limited by their language skills, but who take a keen interest in local politics, education, and issues. So many of them yearn to become U.S. citizens and to participate in civic life. Unfortunately, due to lack of knowledge and language access, they are hesitant to get involved. Ultimately, I hope to help my clients meet their needs and dreams. And I also hope they can prove the beauty of diversity to American society.”

Community and Informational Law Workshops

In CY19, ONA Opportunity Centers and ONA Legal Counsels assisted 8,022 clients at community and informational law workshops.

Through community and informational law workshops, ONA Opportunity Centers and ONA Legal Counsels assisted new Americans obtain information they needed to fully participate in their communities, and to address the chronic lack of information in immigrant communities regarding access to, and navigation of, existing government services and federal immigration policy changes.

ONA Opportunity Centers provided new Americans with information on topics including, but not limited to, financial literacy, disaster preparedness, consumer fraud protection, and access to ESOL services.

An example of a community workshop includes one that was hosted at the Buffalo Opportunity Center entitled “Get ready for winter.” The information provided in the workshop was presented by an electricity company. Many of the new Americans who attended had never seen snow. At the workshop, they were taught how to prepare for a snowstorm, what to do in the home to prepare for cold weather, and what to keep in the car during winter. Referrals for free warm clothing were provided. A Karen interpreter was available. Clients who attended expressed gratitude for the information.

With restrictive and aggressive immigration policies from the Federal Government came the need for information on immigrant rights, and how to prepare in case of deportation, leading to numerous Know Your Rights (KYR) workshops. ONA Opportunity Centers and ONA Legal Counsels provided these workshops in 2019. The KYR workshops informed new Americans of their immigration rights and their options if/when they were confronted by immigration officers. These workshops were, and continue to be, held across the State, and are led by expert immigration attorneys. Additionally, Legal Counsels hosted other workshops including but not limited to introduction to immigration law, asylum law overview, family reunification and legal orientation for new arrivals.

Immigration Law Consultations and Legal Clinics

ONA Legal Counsels and Opportunity Centers provided 2,229 individuals with free consultations. Consultations provided individual clients the opportunity to discuss their questions with highly qualified and experienced immigration attorneys free of charge.

An example of a client who received assistance, is Hannah. Hannah received legal services by an ONA Legal Counsel after a referral from her local Opportunity Center. The ONA Legal Counsel shared:

“We represented Hannah, a victim of domestic violence who had obtained her two-year (conditional) green card through her U.S. citizen spouse. We represented her in an application to remove the conditions on her residence. While her case was pending, she also became eligible to apply for citizenship and she did so with the support of an ONA Opportunity Center. She was scheduled for an interview on her naturalization application, but the conditions on her resident status had not been lifted yet. The Opportunity Center referred her to us, and we worked with the local USCIS office to schedule interviews for both applications back-to-back. We represented Hannah at both, and her applications were approved. In a matter of hours, she went from being a conditional resident to having her citizenship application approved!”

Direct Representation

Using a “universal representation” model, ONA Legal Counsels provided direct representation in select cases related to immigration proceedings to any immigrant who met the geographic eligibility requirements. This provided the opportunity for new Americans who have complex legal needs that require legal representation to receive the help they need. In 2019, ONA Legal Counsels provided direct representation to 1,465 immigrants. Immigration legal services provided by the ONA Legal Counsels included, but were not limited to, the following types of cases:

- Adjustment of Status
- Naturalization
- Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS)
- Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)
- Asylum
- U Visas
- T Visas
- Family-based Immigration
- Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)
- Application for Temporary Protected Status
- Deportation/Removal Proceedings
- Employment Authorization Document

- Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA)
- Affidavit of Relationship (AOR)
- B1/B2 Visa
- Consular Processing
- Consular Report of Birth Abroad
- Country Specific Humanitarian Relief/ Humanitarian Parole
- Green card Renewal/Replacement
- Removal of Condition
- Immigration assistance related to a criminal matter
- Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA)
- Notice of Appeal or Motion (I-290B)
- Ombudsman Request (DHS-7001)
- Passport Application (DS-11)
- Travel Document Application (I-131)
- Waiver of Inadmissibility

Legal Counsels work on a multitude of cases. Services provided by Legal Counsels varied depending on the needs of the client. An ONA Legal Counsel in Central New York shared a story of a client who she assisted:

“On August 6, 2019, a client who had been denied naturalization in the past, was successfully represented by our Immigration Program at her naturalization interview. She took the oath of allegiance on September 19, 2019, becoming a U.S. citizen on that date. The client, who is from Somalia, suffers from a number of disabilities. Before her admission to the U.S. as a refugee she had lived for years in a camp in Kenya under conditions of severe hardship, resulting in the death of a number of her children.”

Another example of a client who received services, was Diane, who received representation by an ONA Legal Counsel in partnership with The Legal Project in Albany:

“Diane has lived in the U.S. since she was in elementary school, but she was born in Mexico. She faced removal to Mexico after an arrest brought her to ICE’s attention. She told ICE that her mother was a U.S. citizen and ICE referred her to The Legal Project for assistance.”

“We learned that Diane’s mother, Mercedes, was born in the U.S. while Diane’s grandmother, Gloria, worked here as a farmworker. Gloria decided to return to Mexico when Mercedes was still a child. When Mercedes grew up, she lived back and forth between both countries. She gave birth to Diane in Mexico, but eventually raised her in the U.S.

“To prove that Diane had acquired U.S. citizenship from her mother, we needed to show that Mercedes had lived in the U.S. for two years before Diane’s birth. However, there were very few witnesses or records available to us. Tragically, Gloria had perished in a house fire in 2016. The fire also consumed the family records. Through affidavits and newspaper articles, we were able to construct a timeline that showed that Mercedes had lived in the U.S. long enough to transmit citizenship to Diane when she was born. Diane’s application for a Certificate of Citizenship was approved and she is no longer facing removal.”

HOTLINE AND WEBSITE

The Opportunity Center network is supported by a toll-free, multi-lingual New York State New Americans Hotline, which provides live assistance in more than 200 languages and operates from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. (EST), Monday through Friday (excluding Federal holidays). In 2019, the New Americans Hotline responded to general immigration and naturalization questions and provided referrals to the caller’s local Opportunity Center, as well as to other public and private immigrant-related programs. It also acts as a resource to coordinate immigration assistance fraud complaints. The New Americans Hotline number is 1-800-566-7636.

In 2019, the New Americans Hotline provided general assistance to 20,457 new Americans, which brings the total number served by the Hotline since ONA’s inception in 2013 to 173,829. The New Americans Hotline is operated by Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York.

Table 2: ONA Hotline

New Americans Served by the ONA Hotline	Calls Received January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019
Number of New Americans Served Through the New York State New Americans Hotline	20,457

The ONA Hotline also provided a vital role assisting with the dissemination of up-to-date and reliable information on critical federal policies through targeted call-in days that are supported by Facebook live and media partners Telemundo, Univision, and El Diario (see list below). Constituents in need of clarification or worried about a particular issue were able to call-in and get their questions answered on the spot by trained staff.

For the dissemination of accurate and timely information, ONA is also supported by a dedicated website, www.newamericans.ny.gov. Through the website, new Americans can locate their nearest Opportunity Center and gather additional information about the immigrant integration services available in their community. ONA also shares current program and policy information through social media on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Table 3: 2019 ONA Hotline Call-in Days

Date	Topic	Partners	Calls Handled / Clients Reached	Referrals Provided
July 29, 2019	Know Your Rights	Telemundo	199	N/A
August 5, 2019	Standby Guardianship	NYC Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA), NYLAG, The Legal Aid Society, Univision and El Diario	108	97
September 9-10, 2019	Public Charge	MOIA, NYLAG, The Legal Aid Society, New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC), Hispanic Federation, Univision and El Diario	1,056	563

September, 12, 2019	Public Charge Facebook Live	MOIA, NYLAG, The Legal Aid Society, Mobilization for Justice and Univision	4,734 people reached	N/A
October 15, 2019	Public Charge	MOIA, NYLAG, The Legal Aid Society, NYIC, Hispanic Federation, Univision and El Diario	296	211

CELL-ED: FREE ESOL TRAINING VIA MOBILE PHONES

Governor Cuomo announced Cell-Ed in 2015; an easy to access phone-based English learning system, to ensure that all New Yorkers who want to learn English can do so regardless of their geographic location, proximity to resources, childcare issues, and work schedule. Since then, the need for remote services has only grown and ONA has successfully increased its program’s reach.

Cell-Ed has the capability of reaching and educating more new Americans than traditional classroom settings and has proven to be a successful tool for immigrants seeking to learn English. Cell-Ed provides lessons over voice and text on devices ranging from basic flip phones to smartphones, allowing a large number of clients to access the program. The partnership between Cell-Ed an ONA provides unlimited access to Cell-Ed’s complete course catalog of English Language Learning, literacy, numeracy, civics, job readiness, digital literacy and more.

As ONA’s Immigrant Community Navigator in Saratoga County shared:

“Our organization is located in a rural part of the state, which means many of our clients are farmworkers living in remote areas without regular access to transportation or WiFi. This makes getting to ESOL classes a challenge even for the most motivated learners. And, even when we have had the capacity to offer classes in these more remote areas, it is always a challenge to find a time

that works for everyone. For this reason, Cell-Ed is an essential resource to communities like ours.”

During 2019, the ONA network welcomed 1,127 new learners (an increase from the 961 learners in 2018) and increased the total number of active users to 3,500 learners since the beginning of the program. Furthermore, 167 learners graduated from the ESOL courses in 2019. All of these numbers demonstrated that Cell-Ed is a program that the new American community was engaged in and benefited from. The ONA Immigrant Community Navigator in Saratoga County added:

“Cell-Ed is a perfect fit for our client base because it is accessible even to those with limited access to technology. It does not require students to have a smartphone or computer or internet. Cell-Ed is a great tool for all English language learners, even those who are able to attend in-person classes.”

The usability and graduation trends that we observed in 2019 clearly showed that a need for remote services is increasing, particularly for those in remote areas of our state, who face transportation issues, geographic isolation, childcare issues, and busy schedules.

LIBERTY DEFENSE PROJECT

The Liberty Defense Project is the first-in-the-nation, state-led, public-private legal defense project created by Governor Cuomo in 2017 to provide free, confidential, and expert legal assistance to any immigrants, regardless of their status, including those facing deportation. The LDP, which is administered by ONA, expanded its services in scope and geographic reach in 2019, ensuring all immigrants in New York State have access to universal representation.

The LDP Regional Rapid Response (RRR) program was launched in 2019 to support immigration attorneys in each of the regions in New York State to provide urgent legal assistance to individuals being targeted by federal immigration enforcement. In addition, LDP continued assisting individuals through new and expanded special initiative programs providing targeted services to communities in need, particularly those in detention and facing deportation.

In 2019, LDP programs assisted 10,897 individuals (7,177 through RRR and 3,720 through Special Initiatives):

Table 5: LDP Regional Rapid Response

Services provided April 1, 2019 – December 31, 2019	Number of Individuals Served
Legal Screenings & Intakes	2,216
Direct Representation	1,543
Assistance in ICE Detention Facilities	143
Know Your Rights trainings	2,244
Law-related Support	1,031
Total	7,177

Table 6: LDP Special Initiative Programs

Services provided January 1, 2019 – December 31, 2019	Number of Individuals Served
Upstate New York Immigrant Family Unity Project	1,227
LDP Pro Bono Project	696
Safe Haven Program	1,673
NYC Rapid Response Legal Collaborative	124
Total	3,720

Responding to community needs

In 2019, the LDP Regional Rapid Response program was launched through a competitive contractual process (Request for Applications-RFA), to fund LDP attorneys in each of the 10 Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) regions of the state. LDP Regional Rapid Response attorneys provided services including rapid legal response for urgent cases, direct representation, removal proceedings, assistance to individuals in immigration detention centers, Know Your Rights presentations, and law-related support to families of those facing deportation.

Addressing changes in federal immigration policy

To help address some of the most restrictive federal immigration directives, which have strained the capacity of many of New York’s immigration service providers, the LDP implemented or expanded upon a series of special initiative programs:

- **Increasing deportation defense upstate:** Through a contract with the Vera Institute of Justice, the LDP funds the upstate New York Immigrant Family Unity Program (NYIFUP), which provides free legal representation to any immigrant detainee. Since October 1, 2018, over 1,100 detained individuals have been provided with direct representation, many of whom would otherwise not have had access to, or been able to afford, an attorney.
- **Increasing the pool of immigration attorneys:** Through the LDP Pro Bono project, administered by Catholic Charities Community Services, Archdiocese of New York, over 140 volunteer attorneys have been recruited to provide pro bono legal services since 2018. The program has placed more than 240 cases from 17 counties across the state with its volunteer attorneys. The Pro Bono project continues to build the capacity for legal services outside of New York City, which is critical for those immigrants most in need.
- **Increasing the expertise and flexibility in scope of legal representation:** Starting in October 2019, the LDP has funded the New York City Rapid Response Legal Collaborative, an initiative of NYLAG, UnLocal, and Make the Road, to assist with the most complex immigration legal cases that were not being assisted through the NYIFUP program in New York City. In just the first few months of the program, 46 individuals were provided with direct representation, individuals who would otherwise most likely have been deported and separated from their families.

Most importantly, the LDP funds immigration attorneys, whose unique experience and legal expertise is critical to the success of the programs. Under the LDP, over 50 immigration attorneys were funded at community-based organizations across New York State in 2019.

Stories of Success

LDP RRR Grantee for Mid-Hudson Region

“We are very happy to report we have had a number of success this quarter including two cases where we obtained the requisite family court orders for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status cases. One case involved a 2-year-old child who was facing removal from the United States. She was the victim of abuse and neglect at the hands of her father. We were contacted after she already had her last hearing date before an immigration judge and was awaiting a decision on her asylum application. Because it seemed her asylum case would not be granted, we quickly filed for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status in order to protect the child from imminent deportation. We were able

to petition the family court in Dutchess County and ultimately, receive the requisite orders so the child could apply for protection under Special Immigrant Juvenile Status.”

LDP RRR Grantee for Finger Lakes Region

“We helped a Yemeni asylee obtain U.S. citizenship. The 70-year-old man had lived in the United States for over twenty years but struggled with English. At the naturalization interview in October 2019, he failed the English and the civics test. A retest was scheduled for mid-November. The client studied intensely for the test, and he passed. In December 2019, he naturalized at a ceremony with his family members watching. We were able to meet language needs through the help of our LDP staff attorney who speaks fluent Arabic.”

LDP Special Initiative – NYC Rapid Response Legal Collaborative (RRLC)

“In late November, a young woman with an order of removal came into our partner’s office seeking help with an abusive partner. She did not know she had been ordered removed or that she was just weeks away from reaching the deadline to file a motion to reopen based on “exceptional circumstances” in her case. The RRLC team screened her and in the course of several meetings completed her motion to reopen, I589 and a declaration setting out the horrific trauma she had suffered in her home country and the domestic violence she had endured in the US, and filed with the court one day before her deadline. Two weeks later, an immigration judge reopened her case.”

LDP Special Initiative – Upstate NYIFUP

“Joan,” a native of India, lived in western New York with her abusive husband. She attempted to escape from him, seeking refuge at a safe house. She reported her husband to the police and attempted to understand her immigration options without an attorney. Her husband soon tracked her down, luring her out of her safe house with flowers and offers to rebuild their marriage. When she ventured out to talk to him, she discovered that ICE was there instead, waiting to detain her. At the Buffalo Federal Detention Center, Joan met her NYIFUP attorney, who helped her obtain release on bond, find stable housing in Western New York, and an attorney to represent her in her family court case against her husband. Free from detention and abuse, Joan and her attorney are working together to obtain immigration relief under the Violence Against Women Act, offering hope for a brighter future.

LDP Special Initiative – Pro Bono Project

Rebecca B. spent the bulk of her professional life working in securities law and banking compliance for investment banks and asset managers. Her legal work was heavily regulatory in nature and did not include litigation. In 2012, Rebecca stopped working full time and began to explore other areas of the law through pro bono involvement. She quickly determined that she was passionate about helping immigrant New Yorkers and over the years volunteered with the Legal Aid Society, the New York Legal Assistance Group and abroad working with organizations assisting Syrian refugees in Germany. Today, Rebecca is a member of the New York State Attorney Emeritus Program and came to Catholic Charities through AEP's recommendation. In July 2019, Rebecca began working with V, a 17-year-old young man from Mexico eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status due to abandonment and neglect by his father and abuse and abandonment by his mother. V was forced to begin working to help support his family at age nine and came to the U.S. to reunite and live with his older brother. Rebecca worked with V for four months out of the Catholic Charities Bronx office, meeting regularly with him and an interpreter to prepare his guardianship petition and special findings motion for Bronx Family Court. In December 2019, at Rebecca's first family court appearance with V and his brother, the Referee granted both the petition and the SFM, paving the way for Rebecca to file V's I-360 application before V's 18th birthday in February.

“Reflecting about the differences between private and pro bono work, Rebecca stated, “the work differs [in] that clients are often unable to penetrate the maze of rules, documentation, and inefficiency that stands between them and their goals. Clients in corporate America believe that the law works for them, or at least not against their reasonable requests; [pro bono clients] often feel the law frustrates their reasonable requests. So, helping a pro bono client has a two-fold reward: first, you can solve a legal problem, but second, you can make the law accessible to people that have been shut out of its reach.”

ONA IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY NAVIGATOR

There is a chronic lack of accessible information about publicly available services and programs in low-income immigrant and refugee communities throughout New York State. Low-income new American communities in

New York State often lack reliable information regarding workforce development opportunities and other opportunities open to all New Yorkers to fully participate in our State’s civic and economic life. Meanwhile, the complex relationship between immigrants and government has further left newcomers at a deficit for reliable, trusted information. Taken together, this has left New York State’s new American population ignored for career pathways, vulnerable to financial fraud and lacking access to possible ladders of opportunities. Dedicated outreach and community welcoming efforts are needed to help low-income immigrants gain access to the same opportunities available to all others in the State and country. To address this need, ONA partners with non-profit organizations throughout to coordinate and conduct outreach to low-income immigrant communities, and to create a grassroots network of ONA Immigrant Community Navigators to help low-income new Americans.

The nine organizations that were selected to house ONA Immigrant Community Navigators in the fall of 2017 continued to support low-income immigrants and refugees throughout the State in 2019. The conclusion of the second contract year and beginning of the third contract year demonstrated more effective, widespread, and community driven programming. This included programming that supported social, civic, and economic integration, coordination of services, outreach in support of available services, all of which were led by the ONA Immigrant Community Navigators in partnership with grassroots organizations, community leaders, community-based organizations (including ONA Opportunity Centers, Community Action Agencies, Regional Economic Development Council’s Opportunity Agenda workgroups, faith-based organizations, and local governments).

The Long Island ONA Immigrant Community Navigator said:

“The ONA Immigrant Community Navigator program has expanded the types of services that our organization can provide to the low-income immigrant and refugee community in order to address community needs. This program means that more low-income immigrants and refugees on Long Island are accessing the information, resources, and services that are crucial to their well-being, stability, and success.”

By the end of the second contract year on June 30, 2019, the ONA Immigrant Community Navigators had reached over 5,000 individuals and engaged over 600 volunteers. During the last six months of 2019, ONA Immigrant Community Navigators reached over 4,062 individuals and engaged over 397 volunteers.

In 2019, the ONA Immigrant Community Navigators were highlighted by the National Skills Coalition as an effective example of how a state can support low-income immigrants and refugees.¹ In Buffalo, the Western NY ONA Immigrant Community Navigator said:

“In order to get a job, you usually need a resume. Many of our low-income immigrants and refugees have never put a resume together, and forget to include meaningful experiences that would help them stand out as a candidate. As a result, one of most popular programs is a resume building workshop. In fact, after one workshop a client secured a job with Wegmans. It was great to see the direct effect of the workshop.”

This momentum and success continued because of the deep and steadfast relationships that each ONA Immigrant Community Navigator built with their communities. The Mohawk Valley ONA Immigrant Community Navigator shared:

“I had a client talk to me about life and some of the challenges they were facing. She came to The Center to seek help with getting her driver’s license, and was very interested in attending ESOL classes. As we continued to talk, I saw that she had brought her child with her – a young boy about the same age that I was when I arrived to New York. It reminded me of my mother. It was something I will never forget: we talked about the same things my mother and I faced, only this time around, I could get the help they needed.”

These connections have improved the content of general outreach, roundtable meetings, community conversations, workforce development workshops, trainings, and impact days because they were more personalized. The weaving of the personal with programming allowed the ONA Immigrant Community Navigators to serve as better leaders, and to empower the local community in 2019. The Westchester ONA Immigrant Community Navigator shared:

“Engaging our client population in issues that impact their daily life has been very successful. For example, one of our Community Conversations was about the Constitution and its role in our everyday lives. The value of this discussion became very clear when we began outreach for the 2020 Census. Our clients understood the connection, and quickly became strong and active advocates in our community to ensure that everyone is counted.”

¹ https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/At-the-intersection-of-immigration-and-skills-policy_web.pdf

“One client, a mother of three who lives in Mount Kisco, became a strong advocate for making sure that everyone is counted. She led the way, and began reaching out on her own to her neighbors to ensure that they completed the Census.”

The ONA Immigrant Community Navigator program was vital in 2019 not only by providing accurate and reliable information to New York State’s most vulnerable communities, but because it also supported individuals and families in their American Dream, and inspired them to finally achieve it.

NORTH COUNTRY NAVIGATOR PILOT

2019 marked the completion of ONA’s first year of the ONA Immigration Community Navigator pilot program in the North Country, in partnership with the Joint Council for Economic Opportunity for Clinton/Franklin Counties (JCEO) in Plattsburgh. The ONA Navigator program in the North Country was created to expand ONA immigration services in that under-served region.

In 2019, the program served individuals in the North Country region from over 25 countries. To best serve the legal needs of clients in the Franklin and Clinton Counties, JCEO collaborated with the ONA Legal Counsel for the North Country, Hiscock Legal Aid Society (HLAS) based in Syracuse. JCEO hosted its first immigration consultation day with HLAS in June 2019. JCEO conducted the outreach, scheduling, and managing of logistics. Given that access to hidden immigrant populations is a challenge in the North Country, outreach required extensive effort. JCEO relied on word of mouth and recruitment through trusted partners. JCEO managed to recruit enough clients for a fully booked consultation day.

In 2019, JCEO also coordinated community presentations in partnership with HLAS. The Legal Counsel’s role was to consult with individual clients regarding immigration issues, raise awareness on state and federal immigration policies and educate the community on relevant topics. Since beginning this legal partnership in 2019, it has greatly expanded JCEO’s capacity to do outreach by offering a concrete service to immigrants.

The importance of this partnership is reflected through the HLAS supervising attorney’s description of the services that have been offered to the immigrant community in the region:

“Through this collaboration, the North Country immigrant community has been offered assistance in obtaining green cards, citizenship, removal defense, family-based immigration benefits, and

humanitarian-based relief, amongst others. From May of 2019 to December of 2019 the attorneys have been able to help over 150 individuals; whether from direct representation or counsel and advice. Given the scarcity of legal resources in the region, through this collaboration, both JCEO and HLAS continue persistent outreach efforts to inform the immigrant community of ONA's funded presence and willingness to help. Slowly but surely JCEO and the HLAS attorneys are becoming trusted advisors to the North Country immigrant community and jointly both organizations seek to expand their reach. By continuing to deliver trusted information and with the spread of word-of-mouth accounts of successful interaction with both agencies, demand for services is expected."

PROJECT GOLDEN DOOR (Previously named Parent Support Project)

Many parents and sponsors of unaccompanied and undocumented minors residing in New York State are among the most vulnerable and marginalized residents in the State due to economic, social, and linguistic barriers. Their situation is made worse by a lack of access to basic information and fear of engaging with government agencies because of their legal status. Their lack of understanding of the issues they face, and lack of access to mental health services, not only hinders the adjustment and integration process for the child, but also of the family unit as a whole.

In 2019, the program expanded to 11 sites Statewide and connected over 400 immigrant families to under-utilized supportive public and private organizations, and existing resources and services, including mental health counseling. Named after the famous line in Emma Lazarus' New Colossus poem, etched on the Statue of Liberty, Project Golden Door worked through a partnership between ONA, the Children's Village, and community organizations serving immigrants. The parent support program provided a cost-efficient support system and equipped these caregivers with the confidence to protect their children, prevent their isolation, improve their own lives, and in turn, enrich New York's communities by providing the necessary tools for these children to integrate into their new communities.

This program is unique in that no other State or organization offers this type of service specifically tailored to meet the needs of the caretakers of unaccompanied children and children separated at the border. After participating in the program, group members also took advantage of outside services, and were more likely to come to the office for check-ins, deepening their connection with the ONA Opportunity Center, reflecting the

high level of trust being developed through the group process. Perhaps most importantly, parents understood that they were not alone in this journey – that others are going through the same fears and challenges and are welcomed community members in New York State. A Golden Door group facilitator shared:

“Many of the participants have expressed enjoying having some place to go to where they can learn and express themselves, while be around other parents. They truly enjoy all of the topics, especially the topics that are taboo in their home countries such as mental health, sexual health, relationships, [Domestic Violence] DV, education.”

In 2019, Project Golden Door was evaluated as part of a capstone project at SUNY Albany. The study involved quantitative and qualitative analysis in which a graduate student interviewed participants, social workers, and staff at key Golden Door sites and evaluated their participation rates, etc. The study found that after participation in Project Golden Door, participants gained access to services and benefits. The study cited that of the project participants:

- 62.5% accessed SNAP benefits
- 75% accessed health insurance or Medicaid benefits
- 37.5% accessed mental health services
- 87.5% accessed immigration legal services (in addition to any they were already receiving at the start of the group)
- 12.5% accessed gang prevention programs.

The study concluded by stating “Project Golden Door has the potential to create the necessary bridge to help newcomers to become self-sufficient and active members of their new communities.”²

RAMIREZ JUNE DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES NAVIGATOR INITIATIVE

Launched in 2019, and in partnership with the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (DDPC), this initiative expands the capacity of ONA’s network to connect new Americans with intellectual and developmental disabilities to needed resources, information, and services in New York State. The DDPC funds this three-year innovative grant project, which created a new staff position at ONA, the Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities Navigator. The Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities Navigator’s role is to create and distribute disability-

² Cruz, Diana (2019). *Final Capstone*. Unpublished master’s capstone, SUNY Albany.

related resources, conduct outreach to new Americans and immigrant service providers, raise awareness of human trafficking of new Americans with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and report initiative findings and strategies to the DDPC.

The Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities Navigator Initiative was created in recognition of the challenges and barriers facing immigrants with developmental disabilities in New York State and their inability to access comprehensive services due to issues such as language, culture, and eligibility. The Ramirez family and the family of Siewling (June) Lum, for whom the initiative was named, are two new American families who faced complex barriers to accessing services for their family members with developmental disabilities in New York State. Developmental disabilities, such as intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, are common, including in the immigrant community. It is estimated that one in six children in the U.S. has one or more developmental disability and one in fifty-four children has autism spectrum disorder, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

In November 2019, the newly hired Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities Navigator conducted an in-person training for 13 ONA staff and a webinar training for 10 ONA Immigrant Community Navigators. The training provided an overview of intellectual and developmental disabilities, use of person-centered and identity-first language when discussing individuals with developmental disabilities, and provided information about supportive services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In November and December 2019, the Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities Navigator connected with 60 individuals from ONA's network of Opportunity Centers, Liberty Defense Project partners, and community partners, to introduce the Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities Navigator Initiative, to hear the concerns and unmet needs of new Americans with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and to schedule outreach events for new Americans and immigrant service providers in 2020.

RESOURCE COORDINATOR

The ONA Webinar Series

The purpose of the ONA Webinar Series, which kicked off in 2017, is to provide timely information on resources available to ONA's network of grantees and other immigrant serving partners in New York State.

By providing information through a webinar format, ONA has linked its statewide network of ONA Opportunity Centers, Legal Counsels, Liberty Defense Project partners, Navigators and other immigrant serving ONA partner organizations with critical resources in a manner which bridges geographic and physical distance. In 2019, ONA hosted webinar presentations on the most pressing topics affecting New York’s immigrant community, from representation in the 2020 Census, to the public charge rule, and fair housing rights.

In 2019, ONA also spearheaded webinar efforts to train Department of State staff internally on ONA’s mission and highlight unique projects the Office has undertaken to ensure the well-being and success of New York State’s new American population.

Table 4: ONA Webinars Held in 2019

Date	Title	Presenter
2/6/2019	Workers’ Compensation Board	NYS Workers’ Compensation Board
3/26/2019	Regional Immigration Assistance Centers	NYS Office of Indigent Legal Services
5/20/2019	An Update on Fair Housing: Lawful Source of Income	NYS Division of Human Rights
6/26/2019	New York Immigrant Family Unity Project	The Legal Aid Society
7/30/2019	2020 Census: Uplifting our Communities Through an Accurate and Complete Count	Hispanic Federation
8/27/2019	Citizenship Works	Probono Net
8/28/2019	Public Charge Webinar - for Department of Health	Office for New Americans and New York Immigration Coalition
9/24/2019	New York State Mentoring Program	New York State Mentoring Program
10/29/2019	Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence & Address Confidentiality Program	NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, Department of State Address Confidentiality Program
11/26/2019	Court Ruling Upholds Special Immigrant Juvenile Status for NY Youth over the age of 18	Legal Aid Society

Collaborative Policy Development

As other New York State agencies engaged in their own outreach efforts to their respective new American constituencies regarding policies issued by the federal government, ONA worked with them to provide needed information and data on the impact to the immigrant community and to policy. For example, with the Public Charge Rule, ONA worked with the Division of Housing and Community Renewal to issue an informational poster titled “What You Need to Know about the Department of Homeland Security Change to the Immigration Public Charge Rule.”³

As part of its charge to inform state government and officials on policies, demographic changes and all relevant trends affecting immigrants in New York State, ONA implemented the issuance of Immigration Explainers shared with such officials. In 2019, the following Explainers were issued with the assistance of ONA’s Albany Law School Government Law Center Fellows:

- Naturalization Denials on Terrorism- Related Inadmissibility Grounds (TRIG) explainer
- Federal Backdoor Immigration Policies: A Real Invisible Wall
- Get Informed About New U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Proposed Policy – What You Need to Know
- The U.S.- Mexico Border Wall: Background and Present Implications

RESPONSE TO NATIONAL POLICY CHANGES

As President Trump took office in 2017, a series of strategic federal immigration related executive orders, rules and proclamations began to be issued, many with drastic impact on New York’s immigrant families. Such policies have increased the fear of deportation in many of New York’s immigrant families, and led them to opt to hide instead of taking care of their health, continue accessing nutritional programs, sending their U.S. citizen children to school, etc.; generating a dramatic “chilling effect” that ONA needed to address. To do so, ONA gathered its network of community partners, state agencies, research institutions, and stakeholders in general, to evaluate and develop recommendations pertinent to each restrictive policy issued by the Federal Administration.

ONA submitted comments to the Trump Administration highlighting the negative economic, social and cultural impact of restrictive policies and built on Governor Cuomo’s immigration stand of prior years.

³ <https://www.newamericans.ny.gov/da/public-charge-resources.html>

The following is a list of ONA public comments submitted on proposed immigration federal policies:

Public charge

U.S. Department of State - Visas: Ineligibility Based on Public Charge Grounds- Interim Final Rule - <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=DOS-2019-0035-0146>

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services – Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds - <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=USCIS-2010-0012-46018>

Refugees and Asylees

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Fee Schedule and Changes to Certain Other Immigration Benefit Request Requirements - <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=USCIS-2019-0010-7906>

U.S. Department of Homeland Security - Asylum Application, Interview and Employment Authorization for Applicants - <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=USCIS-2019-0011-0591>

U.S. Department of Homeland Security - Removal of 30-Day Processing Provision for Asylum Applicant-Related Form I-765 Employment Authorization Applications - <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=USCIS-2018-0001-2734>

Housing

Housing and Urban Development - Housing and Community Development Act of 1980: Verification of Eligible Status - <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=HUD-2019-0044-10348>

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS

Since 2015, ONA has been part of a small and unique network of state government offices for immigrants and refugees, intent on sharing information, resources and tools, and learning from each other on how to best serve new American communities. Although each state office has a unique administrative and program structure (some are part of Governor’s Cabinets, others are housed in state agencies), all share the same mission of welcoming new Americans into our communities. As of 2019, the ONA State Network member states are: New York, Michigan, California, Maryland, Massachusetts, Ohio, Washington State and most recently New Jersey.

This collaboration between states was the subject of an initial report highlighting key takeaways by the Pew Research Center in 2015,⁴ which demonstrated how the New York State Office for New Americans has set the example for future national platforms and local approaches. For example, ONA’s successful Opportunity Center model was highlighted in 2017 at the *United Nations’ Fourth Mayoral Forum on Human Mobility, Migration and*

⁴ <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2015/09/17/state-immigration-policy-offices-3-takeaways>

*Development*⁵ in Berlin, Germany, marking the first time a state-led integration effort had a policy brief shared at a United Nations event.

Continuation of Research on Naturalize New York

Building on ONA’s NaturalizeNY private-public campaign project that ended in 2018, data gathered and initial reports from April 2019 noted that:

*“The academic partners of NaturalizeNY, SUNY Albany, George Mason University and Stanford University based on program findings, follow up surveys with NaturalizeNY participants, and follow up nudges, found that an information nudge increased the rate of American citizenship applications among low-income immigrants eligible for a federal fee waiver. Approximately half of the 9 million naturalization-eligible immigrants qualify for a federal program that waives the cost of the citizenship application for low-income individuals. However, participation of this fee waiver program remains low. We found no evidence that the nudge was less effective for poorer or less educated immigrants. These findings contribute to the literature that addresses the lack of utilization of public benefits by low-income populations and suggest that lack of information is a barrier to citizenship among low-income immigrants who demonstrate an interest in naturalization.”*⁶

The benefits of providing financial support for naturalization has made NaturalizeNY a national model that can be replicated in communities around the country and has even been discussed in a policy brief by the *Proceedings for the National Academy of Science*⁷ (one of the world’s most cited multidisciplinary scientific journals). Evidence provided by this research informed 2019 policy discussions and comments to immigration policy proposals from the Trump Administration aiming to increase the cost of immigration benefit application fees, including that of naturalization. ONA, Stanford University and Robin Hood Foundation submitted comments opposing such increases using evidentiary data provided by NaturalizeNY. It is our hope that this evidence continues to inform future policy discussions and helps build strategies to assist immigrants in their efforts to integrate.

⁵ Forum: <https://www.facebook.com/NYSNewAmericans/posts/1498596136829578> / Brief:

http://www.migration4development.org/sites/default/files/ona_immigration_berlin_mayoral_forum.pdf

⁶ A low-cost information nudge increases citizenship application rates among low-income immigrants, April 2019, Stanford University Nature Human Behavior <https://immigrationlab.org/publication/low-cost-information-nudge-increases-citizenship-application-rates-among-low-income-immigrants/>

⁷ <http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2018/01/09/1714254115>

Research on ONA's ESOL model

New American Economy, an internationally recognized organization interested in New York State's ESOL programs, and which conducts research on ESOL platforms across the country, engaged ONA's Opportunity Center in Long Island (CARECEN) in their research in 2019. The research began in 2018 and will continue through 2020. This research focuses on the benefits of adult ESOL courses, particularly in how different course levels can impact an individual's economic and social integration.

Research on Public Charge

September 15th, 2019 – ONA Advisory Board Membership for Study on fear among immigrant communities in New York City - led by the Center For Migration Studies

As initial rumors and the first leaked draft of the Trump Administration's proposal to change the definition of the long standing concept of public charge, a concept that guides who can eventually become a green card holder and eventually a citizen, spread across the nation, ONA's leadership convened advocates and stakeholders to mobilize awareness, disseminate correct information to the immigrant community, and engage in litigation opposing the rule. This eventually led to ONA's participation as an advisor in the Center for Migration Studies' research on the impact of the rule in New York City.

The Center for Migration Studies' project, funded by the Altman Foundation, focuses on immigrants' access to New York City services - with particular attention to how fear influences immigrants' engagement with accessing New York City agencies. While initial discussions and study evaluations began in late 2019, the timeline for interviews and focus groups will be informed by the advisory board and implementation will begin in 2020.

CONCLUSION

In 2019, ONA fulfilled its mandate to assist immigrants and refugees across the State. In 2020, ONA will continue to assist any new American eager to contribute to the State's economy, and to become a vibrant part of our society. Working vigilantly, ONA will continue to work to protect new Americans as they transition to full participation in New York State's communities, including by addressing immigrant services fraud. In addition, as New York's new Americans continue to face fear because of current federal policies, ONA will continue to provide the tools, resources, and information necessary to protect our immigrant and refugee communities.