



**Department
of State**

**NEW YORK STATE OFFICE FOR NEW AMERICANS
2020 ANNUAL REPORT:**

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 29, 2022

Kathy Hochul, Governor

Robert J. Rodriguez, 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 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 2020, a year significantly impacted by the COVID-19 global pandemic. 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 well-being of their community, irrespective of federal immigration policy, and continued to set the standard that each state in our nation should follow.

In 2020, the ONA network of community-based providers experienced an unprecedented shift in service delivery due to the COVID-19 pandemic. By facilitating service delivery via online and virtual platforms, ONA's partners worked hard to ensure that new Americans across the state continued to have access to accurate information and needed services, while ensuring that programming was delivered safely, protecting privacy concerns and, often from remote locations.

COVID-19 has been detrimental to all communities across New York State and new Americans in particular have been significantly impacted. New Americans work in the industries hardest hit by the pandemic, and while many of them cannot afford or have access to health insurance or did not qualify for federal relief or other social services, it became critical for ONA and its partners to ensure the health, safety, and economic stability of immigrants in New York State. The Center for Migration Studies found that two-thirds (66 percent) of New York State's new American workers – those in the labor force aged 16 and over — work in essential businesses, compared to 56 percent of the native-born labor force. Foreign-born workers comprise 31 percent of workers in essential businesses, despite representing 28 percent of the state's labor force, and 70 percent of the undocumented labor force consists of essential workers.¹ These workers played and continue to play a central role in safeguarding and sustaining state residents during the COVID-19 pandemic, often at great risk to their health and that of their families.

Concerned by the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable communities, and to better understand how ONA could best support New York's new American residents, in April 2020 ONA issued a COVID-19 Needs Assessment Survey of its community partners. According to the survey, job insecurity (80.3%) was the most pressing concern,

¹ Center for Migration Studies Report, April 2020, <https://cmsny.org/publications/new-york-essential-workers/>

followed by housing (62%), mental health (54.9%), and language access (47.9%). Other important problems impacting the well-being of new American communities were raised, such as access to food. However, an analysis of the commentaries provided by survey respondents indicated that basic access to information on existing programs, albeit limited, created an additional barrier. The “access barrier” was further exacerbated by regional issues such as lack of access to Wi-Fi, technological hardware (laptops, smart phones), digital literacy, and translation/interpretation services.

ONA was also informed by the responses provided by its partners in the survey carried out by the Center for In Situ Policy Research and Qualitas of Life Foundation in early 2020. According to the survey, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in widespread health impacts, pervasive unemployment, greater debt, and increasing food insecurity among Hispanic immigrants throughout New York City and New York State. The survey of nearly 540 households specifically revealed that one-third of New York’s Hispanic immigrant population had experienced COVID-19 symptoms, yet half were unable to access medical care primarily due to a lack of health insurance. In addition, more than two-thirds of Hispanic immigrant workers have been completely unemployed since the start of the pandemic. As a result, 40 percent of Hispanic immigrant households have been unable to cover monthly expenses and more than 50 percent of families have been forced to rely on food banks and food pantries.²

Based on the feedback received from its partners and the community during the pandemic, ONA aimed its 2020 programming at facilitating the ability of its network members to deliver their services remotely, safely, and in accordance with New York State’s COVID-19 specifications and guidelines. ONA was able to support its partners to pivot to virtual programming, which presented many challenges, but also provided the opportunity for remote assistance and expanded outreach to otherwise hard to reach communities throughout the State. Specifically, ONA’s long-standing programs - its Opportunity Centers, Legal Counsels, Navigators, Golden Door, Liberty Defense Project, and New Americans Hotline - continued to provide critical services and support to new Americans across the state as detailed below. The Ramirez June Initiative, in the second year of this first in-the-nation program, broadened its scope and focus in 2020 to better serve immigrants with intellectual and developmental disabilities across the state.

ONA also worked hard to develop and incorporate programs to address concerns that specifically arose from the pandemic. In 2020, ONA launched a new program, Immigrants Can Code, which addressed the “digital divide” identified in the ONA Needs Assessment Survey by providing access to basic digital literacy trainings for new

² Center for In Situ Policy Research and Qualitas for Life Foundation. Evaluation of the Impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Hispanic Immigrants in New York City and New York State. July 20, 2020.

Americans. ONA addressed the nutritional needs of new Americans by creating and maintaining a COVID-19 resource guide, which shares information in each region of the state on free services and resources including food banks and cash assistance for those new Americans who were not eligible for other forms of relief. Also, ONA expanded its focus on mental health resources for the new American community through staff trainings with the Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and a series of mental health webinars in partnership with Ibero University in Mexico City.

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, especially as New York State recovers from, and overcomes, the negative effects of COVID-19 on the health and economic situation of its diverse and vibrant communities.

Background

In compliance with section 94-b (5) (n) of the Executive Law, the Department of State respectfully submits this annual report on the activities of the Office for New Americans (ONA). Except as noted, this report covers the period from January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020.

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 born outside the United States. 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.

ONA was established in 2012, as the first statutorily created immigrant services office of its kind in the nation and directed it to provide the community with the tools necessary for their participation and integration. 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.

In the delivery of its services, New York State's Office for New Americans defines "new Americans" as "an individual born abroad and their children, irrespective of immigration status." New York understands the complexity of each individual's situation and as such, new Americans are not defined solely by their immigration status, but by their desire to contribute to the state's social, civic, and economic life. ONA's statewide network of Opportunity Centers and immigrant integration service providers are nested within existing community-based organizations that deliver a variety of services and support, including legal services, to New York's new American communities across

the State.

ONA Programs and Services

ONA provides services including:

1. Opportunity Center Network (Opportunity Centers and Legal Counsels)
2. Liberty Defense Project
3. ONA Hotline
4. Cell-Ed
5. Immigrant Community Navigators
6. North Country Navigator Pilot
7. Immigrants Can Code
8. Project Golden Door/ Parent Support Programs
9. Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities Navigator
10. Constituency Work
11. Resource Coordination and Outreach
12. Response to National Policy Changes
13. National and International Engagement

1. Opportunity Center Network

ONA runs a network of Opportunity Centers throughout the State that provide free and confidential services to new Americans. Housed within community-based organizations, ONA Opportunity Centers provide naturalization and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) application assistance, host Citizenship Preparation classes, provide referrals to English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) classes, host community seminars on topics relevant to new Americans, and host legal consultations. Each Opportunity Center is supported by ONA Legal Counsels, experienced immigration attorneys who provide free legal support to new Americans.

Opportunity Centers and Legal Counsels faced a number of challenges in 2020 due to the pandemic, however, they were still able to deliver services to new Americans throughout the State, often working above and beyond their normal working hours and finding creative solutions and innovative practices to reach the communities they serve. These new practices are likely to remain in place in 2021.

Table 1: Opportunity Centers and Legal Counsels

New Americans Served by ONA Opportunity Centers and ONA Legal Counsels	Clients Served Between February 1, 2020 through January 31, 2021*
Clients Participating in Citizenship Preparation Classes	1,114
Clients Receiving Referrals to ESOL Classes	6,083
Clients Receiving Naturalization/ DACA/DACA Renewal Application Assistance	2,046
Clients Attending Community Seminars and Informational Law Workshops	15,695
Clients Receiving Immigration Law Consultations and Attending Legal Clinics	1,794
Clients Receiving Intake Screenings/ Direct Representation by ONA Legal Counsels	2,698
Total	29,430

*Due to reporting schedules, data runs through January 31, 2021.

Opportunity Centers were crucial sources of support within new American communities during COVID-19 as exemplified below by the experiences at two of ONA’s Opportunity Centers.

The ONA Westchester Opportunity Center highlighted this work:

“One of our successes has been finding solutions through remote programming, such as utilizing Zoom conferencing for our classes and consults. In addition to remote programming, we responded to the immediate crisis of food insecurity among our client base by partnering with local organizations to provide weekly food distributions at our Mount Kisco center which has regularly served food to 3,000 people each week since the _____

crisis began. Additionally, we have worked together and mobilized large groups of volunteers to assist in food deliveries to our most at risk and COVID infected clients.”

The ONA Opportunity Center in Rockland shared:

“Many participants of the Rockland Office for New Americans program face daily challenges to feed, shelter & clothe their families. However, in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, they have demonstrated that people can come together to help each other overcome pandemic challenges. One of our participants, a mother of three, became ill with COVID-19 and had no idea how she would care for her children while fighting COVID-19. She had no family here and did not know where to turn. She did not have to ask for help! Several Rockland ONA participants heard about her problem, and quickly united to bring groceries and look after her children. Fortunately, she has recuperated and is continuing on the path to English literacy and hopefully US citizenship. She now has a support system, ‘a new family’ that helped her overcome a huge challenge, and she will be there for them whenever the need arises.”

Citizenship Preparation Classes and ESOL Referrals

In 2020, the ONA Opportunity Centers pivoted their operations and programs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Traditional in-person citizenship preparation classes transitioned to remote programming, held through virtual platforms such as Zoom. While the digital divide (detailed elsewhere in this report) made it challenging for some individuals to join these classes remotely, for other students, the virtual classroom setting allowed them more flexibility, particularly as they could join the classes from home instead of having to travel to a physical site or obtain childcare.

In 2020, 1,114 people attended remote citizenship preparation classes. The classes provided green card holders with English language skills and content knowledge of U.S. civics, history, and government, needed to prepare for the naturalization exam. In addition, the ONA Opportunity Centers provided 6,083 individuals with referrals to ESOL assistance.

Citizenship preparation classes were taught by instructors and dedicated volunteers. The Rockland County ONA Opportunity Center shared a story about a community member who began volunteering for their organization in 2012. Beginning as an English literacy coach, he transitioned to assisting clients prepare for the citizenship exam under the ONA grant. According to the Opportunity Center, he reveled in his student’s success, especially on the day one of his students was sworn in as an American citizen. Sadly, in April 2020 he passed away from

complications due to COVID-19. Shortly after, his family contacted the organization hosting the Opportunity Center to establish a Citizenship Fund in his memory to help Rockland County residents finance their citizenship applications.

Naturalization/ Deferred Action for Childhood Assistance (DACA) Application Assistance

The COVID-19 pandemic had a disproportionate impact on new American communities that faced issues such as access to technology and economic hardship. In response to the pandemic, and recognizing technological inequities, Opportunity Centers transitioned to remote immigration application assistance, to ensure services were accessible by phone and through other virtual platforms. In 2020, ONA Opportunity Centers provided 2,046 individuals with application assistance for naturalization, DACA applications, and DACA renewals. All applications were prepared by qualified Department of Justice (DOJ)-accredited representatives or immigration attorneys.

A staff member from Queens Community House (QCH), one of the ONA Queens' Opportunity Centers, shared a story of a client whom they assisted:

“A DACA applicant came to the United States at the age of six from Chile. He remembers growing up in the U.S., doesn't remember anything from his native country. Learning English later than his classmates made it difficult in first grade. However, he made it his primary language, making it possible to be able to successfully graduate with honors from elementary school, middle school, and high school. Coming into high school, he realized opportunities he had no access to, unlike his U.S. Citizen counterparts who worked as soon as they could.

“Growing up in the U.S., he only has memories, ideas, and the mentality of being an American as well. Thankfully, he was able to apply for his first work authorization through DACA. This year he came to QCH to renew his work authorization. We also through another grant were able to assist him with the fee for his DACA renewal. His parents are unemployed, and they do not have legal status either, and couldn't help him financially.

“He is now in college, doing well, and is trying to obtain a stable job as soon as he graduates from college. He, like many other families with no legal status, is struggling to survive during this pandemic.”

Community and Informational Law Workshops

Despite the challenges of facilitating the community's access to vital information and programs brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, Opportunity Centers and Legal Counsels identified and implemented innovative ways to specifically address the chronic lack of information or misinformation on existing government services that new

Americans were eligible for and the ongoing changes in federal immigration law and policies. In 2020, ONA Opportunity Centers and Legal Counsels assisted 15,695 clients at community and informational law workshops. Workshops provided new Americans with trusted resources and reliable information necessary to fully participate in their communities.

Amid the pandemic and changing federal immigration policies under the Trump Administration, ONA Opportunity Centers and Legal Counsels hosted virtual informational law workshops to provide up to date information on federal immigration policies to immigrant communities. Workshops were led by highly qualified and experienced immigration attorneys, including ONA Legal Counsels. Workshop topics included but were not limited to: DACA policy changes, COVID-19 effects on USCIS cases, immigration court process, immigration relief, what to expect from the new Biden Administration, ICE encounters and expedited removal.

In addition, ONA Opportunity Centers provided online community workshops on topics including, but not limited to, COVID-19 related information, digital literacy, unemployment, housing, census 2020, child education, family preparedness, and emergency planning. Providing these trainings and workshops virtually allowed for additional community members, who may not have ever participated in person previously, to join, and ONA Opportunity Centers were creative in the use of various online platforms to meet the communities where they felt most comfortable and could easily access the trainings, such as utilizing Facebook Live and WhatsApp.

Immigration Law Consultations and Legal Clinics

ONA Opportunity Centers and ONA Legal Counsels provided 1,794 individuals with free immigration law consultations. Consultations provided individuals the opportunity to meet one-on-one with the ONA Legal Counsel to discuss their individual immigration law questions. In addition, ONA Legal Counsels held legal clinics, including virtually and by phone, to assist individuals with immigration related applications.

Direct Representation

In 2020, ONA Legal Counsels provided direct representation to 2,698 immigrants in select cases related to immigration proceedings. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the disruption of the U.S. immigration system, including but not limited to the suspension of immigration court hearings and increased application processing times, which led to many challenges for immigrants across New York State. During these times of uncertainty, the ONA Legal Counsels continued to provide support and services to immigrants in need, often doing so online or by phone, and sometimes in person, which placed their lives at significant risk at the height of the pandemic, despite

taking all necessary safety precautions.

Services provided by Legal Counsels varied depending on the needs of the individuals being assisted. An ONA Legal Counsel in New York City shared a story of a client whom they assisted:

“One of my clients filed a petition to remove the conditions on her spousal-based permanent residence (to obtain a ten-year green card), but during the pendency of the petition, her husband died from COVID. USCIS issued a request for evidence (RFE) after the spouse’s death, challenging the validity of the marriage and compounding my client’s grief. We responded to the RFE, and the petition was approved.”

Another ONA Legal Counsel in Hudson Valley shared a story about a new American who received direct representation:

“In December, we received a Scheduling Order from the Immigration Court ordering us to file for all potential forms of relief within less than 30 days for an unaccompanied minor client who we were representing in Family Court in an effort to obtain Special Immigration Juvenile Status (SIJS). We worked quickly to file a motion with the court opposing the Order and, in the alternative, to extend the deadline. The client was struggling financially due to COVID-19 and so it took several weeks for us to even make contact as her phone had been shut off for lack of payment. When we were finally able to make contact, we had only a little over a week to work with her to put together an asylum application. We were able to file this asylum application within the filing deadline. Over a month later, we received a response from the court, denying our motion to withdraw the Scheduling Order but granting the extension of the deadline to file for 90 days. Shortly thereafter, [the client] was able to obtain a guardianship order and so will be able to file the SIJS application within the 90 days as well, ensuring that our client will not be foreclosed from applying for any forms of relief for which she is eligible.”

2. Liberty Defense Project

In 2020, the Liberty Defense Project (LDP) remained a critical source of support in New York State for the thousands of new Americans who have been assisted with much needed free legal services during a time of uncertainty due to changing federal immigration policies and enhanced immigration enforcement.

Since its creation in 2017, the LDP and its partners, through the free and expert legal services they provide, have become the front-line defense against federal policies that targeted immigrants and the rise of arbitrary arrests and detentions by ICE under the Trump Administration. Over the past three and a half years, LDP-funded programs have expanded, both geographically and in scope, with services that continue to focus on the most vulnerable,

including those with a prior order of removal, who were particularly targeted by federal enforcement agencies. In 2020, the LDP continued to fund the Regional Rapid Response (RRR) program which supports immigration attorneys to provide urgent deportation defense in each of the 10 regions of New York State. The LDP also funded several special initiatives, including the Upstate New York Immigrant Family Unity Project, the Pro Bono Project, and the NYC Rapid Response Legal Collaborative.

The COVID-19 outbreak placed both immigrants and the legal providers who serve them in an unsafe and untenable situation - federal immigration courts continued to hold hearings and deport individuals during this unprecedented healthcare crisis and many immigrants worked on the frontlines providing essential services, from healthcare to farm labor to deliveries and restaurant work.

Despite these immense challenges, LDP-funded partners were able to find creative and innovative ways to continue to provide critical services and assist new Americans in need of urgent legal services. In addition, the LDP remained a vital funding source for immigration attorneys, whose experience and legal expertise was critical to the success of these programs. Under the LDP, over 50 immigration attorneys were funded in 2020 at community-based organizations across New York State.

In 2020, LDP programs assisted a total of 30,279 individuals - 28,229 individuals were assisted through the LDP Regional Rapid Response program and 2,050 through the LDP Special Initiative programs including Upstate NYIFUP, LDP Pro Bono, Safe Haven, and the NYC Rapid Response Legal Collaborative:

Table 2: LDP Regional Rapid Response

Services provided January 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020	Number of Individuals Served
Legal Screenings & Intakes	2,331
Direct Representation	3,300
Assistance in ICE Detention Facilities	46
Know Your Rights trainings	21,233
Law-related Support	1,319
Total	28,229

Table 3: LDP Special Initiative Programs

Services provided January 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020	Number of Individuals Served
Upstate New York Immigrant Family Unity Project	416
LDP Pro Bono Project	450
Safe Haven Program	544
NYC Rapid Response Legal Collaborative	640
Total	2,050

LDP Regional Rapid Response

In 2020, the LDP’s RRR network of LDP-funded attorneys continued to provide a variety of legal services to new Americans 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.

Upstate New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP)

Since 2017, the LDP has funded the Upstate New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP), a program which expands the New York City NYIFUP program to cover clients appearing before the four upstate New York immigration courts. In 2020, this program continued providing direct representation to all eligible immigrant clients in the upstate immigration courts and to eligible clients who had their cases transferred from upstate courts to NYC immigration courts. In light of COVID-19 restrictions implemented by the Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR), attorneys funded under the Upstate NYIFUP program adjusted their service delivery, remotely preparing cases and representing clients in immigration courts.

LDP Pro Bono Project

Since 2017, the LDP has funded the Pro Bono Project led by Catholic Charities Community Services, Archdiocese of New York, a program to expand the pool of volunteer attorneys available to represent clients in both affirmative and defensive immigration matters by training currently practicing and retired non-immigration attorneys on immigration law. In 2020, this program continued to represent clients in affirmative and defensive immigration matters before immigration courts and USCIS, recruiting and training new pro bono attorneys and volunteers, and conducting on the ground outreach throughout the mid-Hudson Valley, while adhering to COVID-19 safety guidelines.

Safe Haven Program

Beginning in 2019, the LDP funded the Safe Haven program, in partnership with Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights (NMCIR), established under the premise of meeting the immigrant community in the spaces they feel most safe: consulates of their countries of origin and religious institutions. In 2020, the program provided New York City's immigrants with Know Your Rights presentations and legal consultations through relationships with local consulates and churches, as well as taking on clients for direct representation in complex immigration matters, including remotely as a result of the pandemic.

NYC Rapid Response Legal Collaborative

Since 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 legal cases that were not being assisted through the NYIFUP program in New York City. In 2020, this program continued to fill a critical gap in services by providing direct representation to individuals who would otherwise most likely have been deported and separated from their families, despite the additional challenges of providing such assist during the COVID-19 pandemic.

LDP Success Stories

Below are some important stories shared by our LDP legal providers that not only highlight the impact of the services on the individual lives of new Americans in New York State and their families, but also how ONA's grantees collaborate and leverage the network they are part of, ultimately enhancing the State's capacity to provide the community with comprehensive and holistic support.

Prisoners' Legal Services, an ONA LDP Regional Rapid Response partner, shared:

"In early June 2020, J. called the New Americans Hotline regarding his cousin A., who was detained by ICE in Clinton County Jail. The Hotline referred the urgent case to the ONA constituent team, who spoke with J. about the case and referred him to ONA's LDP partner in the North Country, Prisoners' Legal Services (PLS). PLS worked hard to get A. released from detention, including successfully appealing to the Brooklyn Bond Fund to post the \$10,000 bond.

"A. was fleeing his home country of Haiti, where he had been a mayor, because of his fears of political persecution. He was making his way to Canada to seek asylum when he was turned back at the border and detained by Customs and Border Patrol (CBP). Once PLS secured A.'s release, they worked with a local

community group, Plattsburgh Cares, and the ONA Navigator in the North Country, to secure a rideshare for him to travel from Plattsburgh to Albany since there was no bus service due to the COVID-19 pandemic. From Albany he took a bus to NYC where a family member met him.”

This was a particularly positive story as it took place during the constraints imposed on ONA’s community partners due to the pandemic. Notably, this assistance was provided in the North Country region, an historically underserved area of the state for immigrants. However, ONA funding in 2020 supported several programs in the North Country, two of which – the Liberty Defense Project and the ONA Navigator – assisted with this case.

A provider from one of the LDP Special Initiatives, Upstate NYIFUP, shared:

“As a young man, “Anton” came to the United States from a Caribbean country as a lawful permanent resident. In addition to his parents, who are green card holders, and his brothers, who are US Citizens, Anton has a large and tight-knit extended family in New York City that often gathers together. When Anton was detained downstate for reasons relating to his mental health struggles, he met a NYIFUP attorney who helped him apply for cancellation of removal. Working together with a social worker from the NYIFUP team, they created a post-release plan that outlined the mental health support he would receive upon release and gathered evidence in support of his case from an expert witness. Anton won his case and was welcomed back to New York City by his relatives. He has gained certification in a trade and is planning to work in his uncle’s business.”

Catholic Charities Community Services, Archdiocese of New York, ONA’s partner for the LDP Special Initiative Pro Bono Project, shared:

“We wrote in our FY20Q2 report about the attorney who represented B, a Catholic Charities client originally from Trinidad and Tobago. B was a victim of domestic violence and was abandoned by her U.S. citizen husband, leaving her legal status in limbo – she was in removal proceedings facing the risk of deportation. The risk of family separation in her case poses serious challenges for her as she is the caretaker of her 15-year-old son, who is autistic and has been receiving special needs services for nine years. Her son’s father is unable to support their needs as he is currently serving a long-term prison sentence. Although she has experienced abuse at the hands of her ex-husbands, B has never let that stop her from taking care of her family or community; she works full-time and frequently volunteers at her church.

“We are delighted to share that B’s I-751 Petition to Remove Conditions on Residence was finally approved and her pro bono attorney submitted a Motion to Terminate Removal Proceedings that was granted by the

immigration judge at the end of 2020. B is now interested in pursuing naturalization and Catholic Charities has placed her case with a new PBVA [Pro bono Volunteer Attorney] who will work with her to complete this final step on her journey to becoming a U.S. citizen.”

3. ONA Hotline

The ONA 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). The New Americans Hotline is operated by Catholic Charities Community Services, Archdiocese of New York.

The New Americans Hotline responds to general immigration and naturalization questions and provides referrals to the caller’s local Opportunity Centers, ONA legal service providers, as well as to other public and private immigrant-related programs. It also acts as a resource to coordinate and refer to the appropriate District Attorney immigration assistance fraud complaints. The New Americans Hotline number is 1-800-566-7636.

In 2020, the New Americans Hotline staff transitioned to remote operations due to the pandemic. Despite being remote, the Hotline answered over 20,000 calls and made over 30,000 referrals. Topics included questions about the 2020 census, Federal changes in immigration practices and regulations, and questions related to accessing COVID-19 resources.

In response to a continuous flow of immigration related changes at the national level, ONA, in partnership with Catholic Charities Community Services and media partners, hosted the following phone banks aimed at maintaining the community informed with relevant and trustworthy information:

- January 7, 2020, Green Light Bill, yielded 268 calls
- February 11-12 2020, Public Charge Rule, yielded 695 calls
- August 5-6 2020, Census 2020, yielded 225 calls
- December 9-10 2020, A New Administration, what does that mean for immigrants, yielded 290 calls

4. Cell-Ed

Cell-Ed is a first-in-the-nation public-private partnership established in 2015. It is a phone-based English learning

system providing English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes to individuals who have difficulty reaching an actual classroom. 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. This program provides unlimited access to Cell-Ed’s complete course catalog of English Language Learning, plus literacy, numeracy, civics, job readiness, digital literacy and more.

Five years since the program was introduced to New York State as the first-in-the-nation mobile English-learning program, the pandemic demonstrated how needed Cell-Ed is, and how impactful it is in the lives of immigrants and refugees.

During the pandemic, Cell-Ed has provided a valuable tool for community organizations serving new Americans throughout the State. Make the Road New York has implemented Cell-Ed as a way to supplement their in-class instruction and as a way to mimic their in-class instruction during the pandemic. An ESOL Teacher at Make the Road New York stated:

“In-person classes do not allow for complete individual attention, but with Cell-Ed, learners have the opportunity to learn whenever they want for however long they want.”

This sentiment was shared by the Central American Refugee Center, who mentioned that Cell-Ed orientations were amongst their most well-attended programs and served as a lifeline during the pandemic. Their Executive Director shared:

“Even the best ESOL program is going to fail if the learner cannot identify the applicability of what they are learning to their personal life. Cell-Ed is very effective at making this connection because it is not just ESOL. Cell-Ed is digital literacy. Cell-Ed is citizenship preparation and civics. Cell-Ed is workforce development. Cell-Ed is academic skills. Cell-Ed provides a variety of different skills to the learner that help them navigate their communities and workplaces.”

Given Cell-Ed’s flexibility of access, in the midst of the pandemic, access to COVID-19 information, health, education, closures, etc., was accessible via Cell-Ed, helping address limited access to wifi and online services that new Americans experience.

While most users were drawn to the ESOL and Citizenship courses offered through Cell-Ed, in 2020, many were also drawn to the expanded catalog of courses, which now included a WorkReady series, and SkillBuilderSeries/Pre-

HSE (literacy, numeracy, social studies, writing, etc.). In 2021, Cell-Ed will be developing a digital literacy program as well, which will seek to meet the new workforce needs of a post-pandemic world.

In 2020, users doubled the average amount of time spent on Cell-Ed to six hours, with a course completion of about three minutes. Building on the record success of 2019, users continued to utilize the program well into 2020 when most in-person services and classes were cancelled, paused, or moved onto other virtual platforms. Despite not having the traditional outreach campaign to promote Cell-Ed and onboard new users, ONA welcomed over 800 new users to Cell-Ed and graduated over 130 users.

5. **ONA Immigrant Community Navigators**

Established in 2017, the ONA Immigrant Community Navigator program ensures that there is dedicated outreach and community welcoming efforts to help low-income immigrants gain access to the same opportunities available to all others throughout New York State.

The ONA Immigrant Community Navigators are located throughout the State and oversee a specific region. These local leaders are responsible for coordinating and conducting outreach to low-income immigrant and refugee communities, and for creating a grassroots network of support and services. Through these efforts, ONA seeks to maximize the participation of low-income immigrant community members in New York State's civic and economic life.

June 2020 not only marked the end of the contract year for the ONA Immigrant Community Navigators, but also concluded the three-year contract cycle for the first cohort of ONA Navigators. During their last year, ONA Immigrant Community Navigators continued to build on their successes of the past three years through ongoing outreach with the low-income immigrant and refugee community, while also leading community conversations, workforce development workshops, trainings, impact days, and roundtable meetings with stakeholders. All of this allowed them to build strong credibility and relationships within their communities, which continues into the current programming.

When stay at home orders were issued to protect communities from COVID-19, many organizations and institutions struggled to provide remote services to their constituents. However, the ONA Immigrant Community Navigators rose to meet this challenge. Each ONA Immigrant Community Navigator seamlessly transitioned their in-person programming to virtual programming, reaching their communities in the most convenient and accessible way.

Through online and virtual platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, Webex, Facebook Live, or through conference calls, the ONA Immigrant Community Navigators were able to continue with their programming with a minimal amount of disruption. At the conclusion of the three-year grant, the ONA Immigrant Community Navigators served over 10,000 low-income immigrants and refugees through all of their programming and engaged over 1,000 volunteers.

In 2020, the ONA Immigrant Community Navigators played a critical role in New York State’s 2020 Census efforts. With a focus on low-income immigrants and refugees, the ONA Immigrant Community Navigators had built relationships and credibility with the most hard-to-count communities. Beginning in 2019, ONA Immigrant Community Navigators held townhalls, information sessions, and conducted ongoing outreach to prepare their communities for the Census count. Once 2020 began, their efforts translated to educating and informing the public about the process and importance of the Census. The ONA Immigrant Community Navigator for the Hudson Valley shared:

“In the Fall of 2019, we led a presentation on the 2020 Census and its importance in our day to day lives. One of the attendees was so inspired by this information that she worked very closely with me in spreading the word in our most vulnerable communities, and even helped friends and neighbors fill-out their Census forms! She was so excited to take on this leadership role and was more than happy to share her experiences in any and all outreach efforts!”

July 2020 also served as the beginning of the new contract cycle for the new cohort of ONA Immigrant Community Navigators. During this cycle, ONA welcomed partnerships with new organizations to the network and specified areas of need within the service regions. In comparison to previous years, programming was immediately virtual due to the ongoing pandemic. ONA Immigrant Community Navigators provided programming to low-income immigrants and refugees to help them support their children in remote learning, provided updated workforce development workshops to help them with the digital literacy that will be needed in a post-pandemic job market, and were crucial in connecting communities to public health resources and information. Already in the first two quarters of the 2020 – 2021 contract year, ONA Immigrant Community Navigators assisted over 2,100 clients.

6. North Country Navigator Pilot

The North Country Navigator Pilot, started in 2018, ensures that there is dedicated outreach and community welcoming efforts in the North Country to help immigrants gain access to the same opportunities available to all others throughout New York State. Due to the unique nature of the North Country, being at the border of New York

and Canada, and the general lack of resources due to its location, the pilot program was developed separate from the ONA Immigrant Community Navigator program to meet the distinctive needs of new Americans in the region.

In 2020, the North Country Navigator program, in partnership with the Joint Council for Economic Opportunity for Clinton/Franklin Counties (JCEO) in Plattsburgh, continued its work as an ONA partner, but was heavily impacted by the pandemic. The bulk of the Navigator’s work, as the pandemic unfolded, was related to the Canadian border closure which prevented asylum seekers from crossing into Canada. These cases required extensive services that were not easily available. The ONA Navigator worked closely with a local agency, Plattsburgh Cares, along with the ONA Liberty Defense Project attorney in the region, to coordinate and locate resources to meet the needs of the individuals and families who found themselves “stranded” in the North Country. The ONA Legal Counsel for the North Country, Hiscock Legal Aid Society (HLAS) based in Syracuse, also continued to advise on legal matters, conducting legal consultations and hosting clinics in the region.

Through this grant, 104 individuals were served, accessing 249 different community services. The types of resources sought for individuals the Navigator assisted were comprehensive and included:

- Transportation
- Legal Services
- Interpretation
- Housing
- Emergency housing
- Temporary Shelter Supplies to assist families with travel needs (car seats, food, clothing)

The extensive collaboration required by the Navigator to assist individuals and families in need allowed for the formation of an informal network of support, highlights this region’s changing demographic and organizational landscape. More on the formalization of this partnership – the creation of the Cross-Border Network collaborative – is discussed in the National and International section of the report below.

7. Immigrants Can Code

In September 2020, ONA launched the Immigrants Can Code program, a new pilot workforce development initiative for low-income immigrants in New York State. This initiative, in partnership with AlbanyCanCode, provides access to free virtual digital literacy training in basic computer skills, as well as more advanced software training courses.

The COVID-19 pandemic showed how important digital literacy is for those who may not already have these skills, and who may have had to seek new employment that required them to work remotely. ONA’s COVID-19 Needs Assessment Survey, conducted in April 2020, also reinforced the need for digital literacy training options to address the high level of job insecurity our immigrant community is experiencing as a result of the pandemic.

The first digital literacy training course ran for 10 weeks, from November 2020 – January 2021, and included 12 participants. In addition to the digital literacy training, participants received assistance with updating their resumes and participation in employer roundtables to ensure that the digital computer skills they learn translate to potential employment opportunities. Students did not need to already have a computer at home to participate in the virtual digital literacy training, AlbanyCanCode provided laptops and software at no cost for those in need.

A student from the 2020 Immigrants Can Code digital literacy cohort shared the following testimonial:

“I have personally benefited from the program with greater confidence in my computer skills especially in applying to remote jobs, which require more intermediate computer skills.”

Another student shared:

“For me it was a way to gain back some confidence in myself after losing my job due to the pandemic. Being part of the class also taught me new computer skills and helped me brush up on some others.”

8. Project Golden Door/Parent Support Program

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 as well as 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. Golden Door and its network of “parent support groups,” led by qualified mental health counselors, took on additional importance during the pandemic, providing perhaps the only source of “outside family” communication and access to mental health support for many of New York’s new Americans.

In 2020, Golden Door “parents support groups” were located at 12 sites statewide and connected over 1,527 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.

In 2020, due to COVID-19, Golden Door programming transitioned services from in-person to virtual. Golden Door program staff called to let clients know of the changes and worked with them to download apps and to assist them with connecting to remote programming. Group topics included Bullying, How to Teach Children About Life, Sexuality & Healthy, Responsible Decisions, Stress Management, Early Intervention, Avoiding Scams, Contingency Planning, Navigating the Educational System in the US, Labor Rights, Domestic Violence and Child Abuse, Human Trafficking, Health Care in the US, Financial Literacy, Understanding the Citizenship Process, and Nutrition: Healthy Eating.

Participants shared positive feedback to facilitators on their sessions. A participant shared:

“I enjoy these sessions because they always teach me so much and the facilitators are always open to teaching us new things.”

Another participant shared:

“I did not realize that I was in an unhealthy relationship - I love that these sessions provide so much information because it teaches me about things that I did not know.”

In addition to running family support groups, the Golden Door program provided direct counseling with program supervisors as a crossover to individual therapy, counseling, family therapy, domestic violence shelters, case managers at site locations, and the suicide hotline.

This work took on heightened importance during COVID-19, with participants sharing appreciation for space to come together during times of isolation. A Golden Door participant shared:

“These sessions are a good distraction to everything that is going on in the world, especially because we get to talk about how we are feeling.”

9. Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities Navigator Initiative

Since 2019, the ONA Ramirez June Initiative has built the capacity of the ONA network to serve immigrants with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families. The ONA Ramirez June Initiative, a first of its kind State-run program, provides targeted technical assistance, outreach, and builds partnerships among immigrant service providers and developmental disability service providers in New York State. The Ramirez June Initiative is a three-year grant funded by and in partnership with the NYS Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (DDPC).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ramirez June Initiative pivoted to providing services virtually, including outreach, which brought challenges to reaching communities in need, but also allowed for unique opportunities to enhance accessibility and participation across the state. In-person and virtual outreach in 2020 included interpretation during outreach events in Mandarin, Spanish, and American Sign Language. As a result of ONA Ramirez June Initiative workshops, trainings, and outreach in 2020, 250 individuals reported satisfaction with Ramirez June Initiative grant participation.

ONA Ramirez June Initiative Outreach

In 2020, the ONA Ramirez June Initiative created, translated, and distributed resources on topics such as accessing disability services in New York State, the 2020 Census, and the impact of “public charge” on the immigrant disability community.

The ONA Ramirez June Initiative also posted content on ONA’s social media platforms highlighting disability awareness campaigns including Developmental Disabilities Awareness month in March 2020, Autism Acceptance month in April 2020, stories from the deaf new American community for Immigrant Heritage Month and World Refugee Day in June 2020, disability pride month in July 2020, and mental health awareness campaigns in October 2020.

In 2020, the ONA Ramirez June Initiative hosted several webinars pertaining to disability awareness, developmental screenings, and accessibility. Webinars that were held in 2020 were:

Table 4:

Date	Title	Presenter	Participants
2/25/2020	Accessing Services for New Americans with	Cynthia Stewart, Ramirez June Developmental	39

	Developmental Disabilities	Disabilities, ONA	
4/14/2020	Autism Acceptance Month	Cynthia Stewart, Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities, ONA; Misha Williams, Director, Office of Diversity & Inclusion	50
4/23/2020	Helping New Americans with Developmental Disabilities	Cynthia Stewart, Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities, ONA	11
4/24/2020	Working with New Americans with Developmental Disabilities	Cynthia Stewart, Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities, ONA	18
4/28/2020	N-648s: Best Practices for a Changing USCIS Landscape	Erin Riker, Staff Attorney in the Refugee and New Americans unit at the Center for Elder Law and Justice; Cynthia Stewart, Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities, ONA	129
6/11/2020	Developmental Screenings and New Americans--Strategies for Identifying Developmental Delays	Melissa Passarelli, M.S., Director of Programs Docs for TOTs, and Lea Passage, M.H.A., Early Childhood/Population Health Project Coordinator, UBMD Pediatrics; Cynthia Stewart, Ramirez June	33

		Developmental Disabilities, ONA	
8/20/2020	Disability Resource Training	Cynthia Stewart, Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities, ONA	9
8/25/2020	Deaf Refugee Advocacy: The Benefits of Using Deaf Advocates for Deaf New Americans	Diana Pryntz, Interim Executive Director and Co-Founder of Deaf Refugee Advocacy; Cynthia Stewart, Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities, ONA	42
9/30/2020	Behavioral Strategies and Self-Care Tips for Caregivers (Mandarin and English)	Suzannah Iadarola, Ph.D., BCBA-D, Director, Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities University of Rochester Medical Center; Cynthia Stewart, Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities, ONA	29
10/27/2020	Disability Rights: Know Your Rights Training	William Tronsor, Staff Attorney, Disability Rights New York; Cynthia Stewart, Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities, ONA	20

ONA Ramirez June Initiative Partners

In 2020, the Ramirez June Initiative further developed its network of partnerships with a variety of state entities, which allowed a cross-collaboration that ensured the program reached new audiences and shared about the unique

role of the initiative. Partnerships included the NYS Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), a fellow member of the DDPC led Community of Practice (CoP) on Cultural and Linguistic Competence in Developmental Disabilities.

In a unique role for ONA, and in recognition of the barriers immigrant families face accessing early identification of developmental delays and disabilities in young children and connecting with disability services, the ONA Ramirez June Initiative partnered with NYS initiatives supporting children and families. The ONA Ramirez June Initiative was a participant of the NYS Governor’s Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) and a member of the NYS Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) Impact Initiative State Advisory Team.

To address the needs during the COVID-19 pandemic and to bolster the identification of developmental delays and disabilities, the ONA Ramirez June Initiative became a member of the New York State Act Early Response to COVID-19 initiative led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The NY Act Early Initiative project increases capacity to coordinate statewide efforts around developmental promotion and early identification during COVID-19 utilizing existing activities, resources, and materials.

A family assisted by the ONA Ramirez June Initiative shared:

“Good morning, my old son’s community Habilitation, Day Habilitation and, Respite service has been approved, thank you again for your help! I appreciate it from bottom of my heart! my sons wouldn’t be the same without you!”

10. Constituency Work

In 2020, the Office for New Americans constituency team responded to over 60 urgent referrals from the New Americans Hotline, speaking with these constituents directly to understand their situation and then connecting them to the services and information they needed. Most of the ONA Hotline callers needed urgent direct referrals for immigration legal services from ONA’s legal partners because of their fear of deportation. Callers cited other needs in addition to legal assistance, including mental health, guidance relating to domestic violence, rent relief, and reporting cases of housing discrimination relating to immigration status.

Additionally, ONA responds to constituents who contact the Office of the Governor with immigration-related queries. In 2020, the ONA constituent team responded to over 130 unique constituent correspondence that were received by the Governor’s office and re-routed to ONA. In the responses to these constituents, ONA provided

guidance on how to apply for a gubernatorial pardon, made direct referrals for immigration legal assistance, and helped connect constituents with their Federal or State Representatives.

ONA also responds to immigration related calls made directly to the NYS Department of State or ONA offices, follows up with constituent needs as indicated from participation in outreach events, requests for services for clients made by ONA grantees whose client is moving to a different New York state region, assists with immigrant constituent referrals from other state agencies, and more.

Among the many constituents helped during 2020, the ONA constituent team assisted a new American family in reuniting with their newborn twins in Russia during the midst of COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions. Over a period of several months, ONA's partners provided legal assistance and the ONA team made referrals to appropriate government officials, ultimately facilitating the reunion but also their attainment of U.S. citizenship for the family. The reunited family shared:

"I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your quick response. Our struggle is not over yet but knowing that we have someone assisting us is very soothing feelings that we haven't had in a long time."

11. Resource Coordination & Outreach

ONA Website

In 2020, ONA continued to utilize its website (<https://dos.ny.gov/office-new-americans>) to share important information with the new American community, as well as all New Yorkers. This was particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic, as timely information needed to be accessed and shared digitally instead of in person. Through its resource page on the website, ONA shared up to date information on "public charge" as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically tailored for new Americans. ONA also shared multi-lingual flyers and resources on a variety of ONA services. ONA posted monthly events to its calendar in to promote the numerous community seminars and workshops conducted by its partners.

ONA Social Media

ONA utilized social media posts on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/NYSNewAmericans>) and Twitter ([@NYSNewAmericans](https://twitter.com/NYSNewAmericans)) to reach community members across the state. Through social media, ONA shared partner events, information on program services, important immigration policy updates, and linked to announcements and information on the New York State response to COVID. Between January 1, 2020 and December 31, 2020, ONA

gained 225 new followers on Facebook (with a total of 2,377) and 2,329 page likes. On Twitter, ONA had 1,552 profile visits, with 247,698 tweet impressions and 90 new followers (with a total of 1,823).

COVID Resource Guide

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the vulnerability of New York’s immigrants as many lost their jobs and were unable, for a multitude of reasons like immigration status, to access supportive resources or benefits, such as rental and/or nutrition assistance and benefits. Based on feedback from the ONA community, the In Situ Report and the ONA Needs Assessment Survey, ONA understood that the priorities and needs among new American clients shifted away from immigration matters and more towards immediate and basic needs, including food, financial support, housing, and medical resources. Given that ONA service providers were limited in how they could assist their clients with these wrap-around services, ONA created the COVID-19 Resource Guide to help fill the service gap. The guide is a crowd sourced list of food pantries/community fridges, mutual aid groups, cash funds or grants, and other digital resources available to immigrant New Yorkers. The list breaks down resources based on nationwide, statewide, and NY REDC region availability, and has been updated every three weeks since it was made available on the ONA website in June 2020.

The ONA Webinar Series

To respond to the needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, ONA expanded its monthly Webinar Series for its network of partners. Through the monthly Webinar Series, ONA connected its grantees and the greater network of immigrant serving community-based organizations with timely information and assistance on topics like the 2020 Census, fair housing, N-648s, mental health, and more. ONA’s webinar series is also a platform to convene its grantees, particularly Opportunity Centers, so that they can learn from one another.

The list below captures the webinars coordinated by ONA in 2020.

Table 5

ONA WEBINARS		
Date	Topic	Presenter
1/28/2020	Census 2020: Strategies for ensuring an accurate count of New York State’s hard to count communities.	Julio Rivera, Northeast Census Campaign Manager, National Associate of Latino Elected Officials
2/25/2020	Accessing Services for New	Cynthia Stewart, Ramirez June

	Americans with Developmental Disabilities	Initiative for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, ONA
3/31/2020	Catholic Charities Pro Bono Legal Program	Susan Marks, Pro Bono Legal Manager, Catholic Charities
4/14/2020	Autism Acceptance Month	Cynthia Stewart, Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities, ONA; Misha Williams, Director, Office of Diversity & Inclusion
4/16/2020	Being Welcoming During Crisis	Rachel Peric, Executive Director, Welcoming America
4/23/2020	Helping New Americans with Developmental Disabilities	Cynthia Stewart, Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities, ONA
4/24/2020	Working with New Americans with Developmental Disabilities	Cynthia Stewart, Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities, ONA
4/28/2020	N-648s: Best Practices for a Changing USCIS Landscape	Erin Riker, Staff Attorney in the Refugee and New Americans unit at the Center for Elder Law and Justice; Cynthia Stewart, Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities, ONA
5/7/2020	Best Practices for Working from Home & Remote Planning	ONA Opportunity Centers & NYS ONA
5/14/2020	Cell-Ed: Tool for Remote Learning	Dr. Jessica Rothenberg Aalami, Founder, Cell-Ed
5/26/2020	Helping New Americans Navigate the U.S. Job Search Process during COVID-19 & Beyond	Upwardly Global: Jina Krause-Vilmar, President & CEO, Kimberly Cohen, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Sarah Olson, Program Director, Eastern

		Region, and Rachael Barrett, Senior Director, Jobversity
6/11/2020	Developmental Screenings and New Americans--Strategies for Identifying Developmental Delays	Melissa Passarelli, M.S., Director of Programs Docs for TOTs, and Lea Passage, M.H.A., Early Childhood/Population Health Project Coordinator, UBMD Pediatrics; Cynthia Stewart, Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities, ONA
6/30/2020	Updates on the 2020 Census & Effective GOTC Strategies	Jeff Behler, U.S. Census Bureau's New York Regional Director, and Meeta Anand, Census 2020 Senior Fellow, New York Immigration Coalition,
7/9/2020	Primeros auxilios psicológicos y autocuidado / Mental Health and Self-Care First Aid Toolkit *in Spanish	Dr. Angélica Ojeda García and Dr. Gabriela A. González Ruiz of Universidad Iberoamericana (IBERO)
7/15/2020	Access to Food & Nutrition During COVID-19	Wendy Demarco, SNAP Policy Bureau Chief, OTDA; Jessica Pino-Goodspeed, Child Nutrition Programs Specialist, Hunger Solutions New York & Krista Hesdorfer, Child Nutrition Programs Specialist, Hunger Solutions New York; Lindsey McMahon, Policy Coordinator, NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets; Melissa Monsalve, Community Liaison for

		Immigration Affairs, ONA
8/25/2020	Deaf Refugee Advocacy: The Benefits of Using Deaf Advocates for Deaf New Americans	Diana Pryntz, Interim Executive Director and Co-Founder of Deaf Refugee Advocacy; Cynthia Stewart, Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities, ONA
9/29/2020	Consumer Protection	Griselle Baret, Empire Fellow and Special Assistant, NYS Department of State Katie Sherwin, Director of the Consumer Services Unit, NYS Division of Consumer Protection
9/30/2020	Behavioral Strategies and Self-Care Tips for Caregivers (Mandarin and English)	Suzannah Iadarola, Ph.D., BCBA-D, Director, Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities University of Rochester Medical Center; Cynthia Stewart, Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities, ONA
10/16/2020	Virtual Meeting of Opportunity Center Partners	NYS ONA & Opportunity Center Meeting
10/27/2020	Disability Rights: Know Your Rights Training	William Tronsor, Staff Attorney, Disability Rights New York; Cynthia Stewart, Ramirez June Developmental Disabilities, ONA
10/27/2020	Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence	Vanessa Owens, Domestic Violence Program Administrator, NYS OPDV
11/17/2020	Fair Housing	New York State Division of Human Rights, the New York State Division of Licensing and the New

		York State Homes and Community Renewal.
12/8/2020	El Dibujo como expresión del mundo interno del migrante / Drawing as an expression of the internal world of migrants	Dr. Angélica Ojeda García and Dr. Gabriela A. González Ruiz of Universidad Iberoamericana (IBERO)

Protecting Immigrant New Yorkers Task Force

ONA has been a member of the Protecting Immigrant New Yorkers (PINY) Task Force since its creation in January 2013. The PINY Task Force was created to strengthen enforcement against the unauthorized practice of immigration law through enhanced coordination between the state agencies, New York State Attorney General’s Office, District Attorneys’ offices, local government consumer affairs departments and federal agencies. The PINY Task Force meets monthly to promote best practices, encourage dialogue and idea-sharing, coordinate enforcement action against scammers, produce common materials including public awareness ad campaigns, know-your-rights flyers, and consumer scam advisories. In 2020, as a result of the pandemic, the Task Force met virtually. The ONA Hotline also served as the Task Force’s main means of reporting immigration fraud by the public.

Prior to 2020, several members of the Task Force had expressed interest in replicating the efforts of the Task Force in upstate New York and an initial meeting to do so took place in 2019 in Buffalo. ONA took steps in 2020 to formalize the necessary collaboration and identification of relevant representatives, which was completed in early 2021. These steps led to the creation of an upstate subcommittee which is currently strategizing on ways to engage local District Attorneys and advance possible investigations already identified by USCIS upstate officials.

12. Response to National Policy Changes

As President Trump took office in 2017, a series of strategic federal immigration related executive orders, rules, and proclamations were issued, many with a drastic impact on New York’s immigrant families. Such policies increased the fear of deportation in many of New York’s immigrant families and led them to opt to go into hiding instead of taking care of their health, continue accessing nutritional programs, sending their U.S. citizen children to school, etc. This generated a dramatic “chilling effect” that ONA needed to address. In 2020, ONA continued engaging its network of community partners, state agencies, research institutions, and stakeholders, to evaluate and develop recommendations pertinent to each restrictive policy issued or action undertaken by the Trump

Administration. As in the previous year, in 2020 ONA continued to submit comments to the Trump Administration highlighting the negative economic, social, and cultural impact of its restrictive policies and built on New York State’s immigration position of prior years.

On July 15, 2020, ONA submitted comments in opposition of the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s “Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, Procedures for Asylum and Withholding of Removal; Credible Fear and Reasonable Fear Review,” published in the Federal Register on June 15, 2020 (85 FR 36264).

- OMB Control No. 1615-0067; EOIR Docket No. 18-002; A.G. Order No. 4714-2020; Document No. 2020-12575

ONA’s Impact on Federal Regulatory Decisions--Building on Findings of ONA’s NaturalizeNY Research and Partnership

On December 27, 2019, ONA, informed by NaturalizeNY (one of ONA’s earlier naturalization programs), submitted comments in opposition to a rule issued in the Federal Register (84 FR 62280) by USCIS which was set to increase various immigration application fees, including the naturalization fee. The rule was scheduled to take effect on October 2, 2020.

However, just a few days before (September 29, 2020), U.S. District Judge Jeffery S. White enjoined the Fee Rule from being implemented nationwide. The case, [Immigrant Legal Resource Center, et. al. v. Wolf, et. al.](#), was brought by eight non-profit organizations that serve low-income immigrants. While the court based its decision on the improper appointment of Homeland Security Chief, Chad Wolf, and violations of the Administrative Procedure Act (APA), the research findings NaturalizeNY helped inform Judge White’s decision.

In his decision, Judge White made reference to research performed by NaturalizeNY as published in the *Journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* [in 2018](#), discerning the harmful impacts fee increases will have on immigrants’ ability to naturalize.³ The article was cited after Judge White wrote, “Unlike the FCC in *Consumer Electronics*, it is not immediately evident that DHS has been gathering data over the years about the impact of price increases on applications for immigration benefits. In addition, these statements appear to ignore information presented during the notice and comment period that contradict DHS’ beliefs about price elasticity of demand”

³ Jens Hainmueller et al., A randomized controlled design reveals barriers to citizenship for low-income immigrants. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* Jan 2018, 115 (5) 939-944.

(p.23) and then noted, “Those facts support the conclusion that Plaintiffs would be likely to succeed on the merits of their APA claim.”⁴

13. National and International Engagement

National Network of Office for New Americans

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 the nation’s new American communities. Although each state office has its own administrative and program structure (some are part of governor’s cabinets, others are housed in state agencies), they all share the same mission of welcoming new Americans into our communities.

In 2020, the ONA State Network member states were: New York, Michigan, California, Maryland, Massachusetts, Ohio, Washington, New Jersey, Nevada, Colorado and Ohio. This collaboration between states was the subject of an initial report highlighting key takeaways by the Pew Research Center in 2015,⁵ which demonstrated how the New York State Office for New Americans has set the example for future national platforms and local approaches.

Currently, the National ONA Network’s collaboration is facilitated by New American Economy (NAE) and World Educations Services (WES). These organizations established communication with the Biden Immigration Transition Team in late 2020 enabling the sharing of state expertise and best practices as the new administration aimed to frame its national immigration policy and thus address the damage to the nation’s immigration landscape of the previous four years under the Trump Administration.

Binational Collaborations - U.S.-Canada Cross Border Network

New York North Country’s limited availability of immigrant related resources and limited access to those services that do exist has long been of concern for ONA. As a result, ONA implemented the ONA North Country Navigator program referenced above. Through the ONA North Country Navigator’s efforts in 2020, ONA’s footprint in the North Country region grew vis-a-vis previous years, raising awareness of the need for national and inter-state collaboration. This need was increased by the impact of COVID-19 that prompted the border closure.

⁴ Immigrant Legal Resource Center, et al. v. Wolf, et al., 20-cv-05883-JSW, 23 (N.D. Cal. 2020)..

⁵ <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2015/09/17/state-immigration-policy-offices-3-takeaways>

Specifically, the border closure highlighted the need for ONA’s Navigator to lead a coordination of resources to families stranded in the North Country region without support. It also raised the need for the dissemination of timely and accurate information on Canada’s immigration and border policies and procedures, leading to a binational focus on means to assist.

The members of this US-Canada Cross-Border Network, include the ONA Navigator, LDP and Legal Counsel programs representatives, as well as nonprofit, advocacy, and legal groups representative of:

- New York’s border regions extending to Saratoga and Albany;
- Other U.S. States such as Maine, Michigan, and Ohio; and
- International cities such as Toronto, Montreal, and the border town of Hemmingford in Canada.

The possibility to refer immigrants when needed to the Canadian attorneys benefited New York’s new Americans who did not otherwise have access to necessary services.

ONA-Ibero University in Mexico City Mental Health Collaboration

Beginning in 2019, ONA’s network of service providers expressed feelings of secondary traumatic impacts while servicing their new American clients under the Trump Administration’s anti-immigrant policies. These concerns, documented in reports by the ONA program analysts, were amplified with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Feedback in 2020 from the ONA network and results from the ONA COVID-19 Needs Assessment Survey showed that service providers and their clients needed mental health support during a time of increased stress and uncertainty. This need highlighted a gap in services, as most mental health resources are not informed on the immigrant experience nor are they readily accessible to the immigrant community due to financial, linguistic, or cultural barriers.

To help fill the gap in mental health resources, ONA partnered with Dr. Angelica Ojeda Garcia and Dr. Gabriela Gonzalez Ruiz, professors of psychology and researchers at Ibero University in Mexico City. The research done by both professors focuses on the migrant experience, the effects of migration on the self and family structures, and what tools could be offered to those individuals to foster a healthy sense of self against the backdrop of dramatic change. The collaboration with Ibero University produced a series of webinars offering participants – members of the ONA network and other immigrant service providers – with mental health and wellness tools based in art therapy practices. Aligning with ONA’s holistic approach to service provision, the goal of this work is to equip immigrant service providers with tools they can use themselves and share with their clients to foster a self-care and wellness

practice, ultimately improving the mental health of both groups.

ONA piloted the first of these webinars in July 2020, and after receiving a positive response from the network, created a preliminary series of five webinars expanding on what was called the “mental health toolkit.” All webinars were delivered in Spanish, with English translation and closed captioning available when requested. As feedback from the ONA network continues to show mental health as the number one concern of the new American community, ONA is exploring continuing this work beyond the current series set to end in May 2021.

Conclusion

In 2020, the ONA network faced many challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through strong, innovative programming and the dedication of its statewide network of community-based providers, ONA was able to meet the needs of new Americans across the State and serve those communities most in need. In 2021, ONA looks to build on the successes from the past year to continue to make New York State a welcoming place for all new Americans.

APPENDIX A

Press releases on ONA in 2020:

“New York State Office for New Americans Announces Immigrants Can Code to Empower Immigrants with Digital Literacy Skills” <https://dos.ny.gov/news/new-york-state-office-new-americans-announces-immigrants-can-code-empower-immigrants-digital>

“The Office for New Americans Marks One Year of The Ramirez June Initiative to Assist Immigrants with Disabilities” <https://dos.ny.gov/news/office-new-americans-marks-one-year-ramirez-june-initiative-assist-immigrants-disabilities>

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