



Carnegie Results

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Carnegie Results is a quarterly newsletter published by Carnegie Corporation of New York. It highlights Corporation-supported organizations and projects that have produced reports, results or information of special note.

The Immigration Advocates Network: An Online Collaboration led by Pro Bono Net Provides Immigration-Related Resources

Editor's Note: Carnegie Corporation's "Results" series usually focuses on the outcomes of grantmaking that has supported either long-term or established programs and projects. However, in an era when communication is dominated by the Internet and news about social, cultural, political and other developments can spread worldwide in the blink of an eye, we thought it would be useful to share the story of how a web site, barely a year old, has been able to harness that power of immediacy and outreach to help nonprofit organizations involved in advancing immigrant issues. This is also the story of how coalitions of organizations with a shared goal can collaborate online to provide learning and information resources that alone, they might never be able to offer. Pro Bono Net's Immigration Advocates Network, profiled here, is still a work in progress but one with quantifiable results in the present and great promise for the future.

INTRODUCTION

Immigrant advocacy and legal support providers at nonprofit agencies across the country face ever-greater challenges as they seek to help members of the immigrant community with complex issues such as raids and detention as well as the more routine, but daunting details associated with applying for U.S. citizenship and becoming civically integrated in our society. These challenges will

increase dramatically if comprehensive immigration reform becomes a reality and the 11 million-plus undocumented residents and their children in the U.S. apply for citizenship. To help fill these needs, Pro Bono Net (www.probono.net), a ten-year-old nonprofit group, (See sidebar, pg. 4: “Pro Bono Net Celebrates Its First Decade”), together with the Catholic Legal Immigration Network (www.cliniclegal.org) and other nonprofit immigrant legal services providers spearheaded a collaborative effort to establish the Immigration Advocates Network (www.immigrationadvocates.org). The Network is an online resource that makes essential information and materials related to immigration law available to organizations in the field.

This is a story about how a great idea combined with limited resources, properly channeled, can yield significant gains, providing immigration advocates, organizers and service providers in rural and isolated areas as well as in urban communities with the information they need. The staff of the Immigration Advocates Network is small—just two people—and the funding modest, but their web site and the collaborative nature of the Network have made it a key resource. The site, which represents a strong partnership among its eleven member groups, was developed with funding from Carnegie Corporation.

THE NEED

In the year since the Network web site was launched on March 31, 2008, more than 3,250 member organizations have joined, an average of nearly 300 each month. These members have found the site so valuable that they have logged more than 55,000 visits, representing more than 27,000 unique visitors. One of these visitors is Genevieve Kramer, immigration project coordinator of the UFW Foundation, a fledgling California nonprofit with a staff of only six people. The UFW Foundation, which was launched in 2006, stretches its limited resources to assist immigrants, especially farm workers and other low-income residents in rural areas of the state. Kramer, who is an attorney,

says the web site has helped immensely in providing her and other staff with a wide variety of materials such as podcasts, webinars, training videos and a library of more than 2,000 resources including sample pleadings, practice advisories, manuals, news reports and journal articles.

The main office of the UFW Foundation, which is a sister organization of the United Farm Workers, the Cesar Chavez Foundation and other groups rooted in the legacy of Cesar Chavez’s farm worker movement, is in East Los Angeles, California, hours away from its two satellite offices in Bakersfield and Salinas. “Because we are a nonprofit, and especially a new nonprofit, we don’t have the resources to travel frequently to meet with our service providers, but the three of us are able to attend the Network webinars at no cost and then discuss them by phone,” says Kramer. “All it takes is an Internet connection and that *is* in our budget.

The Immigration Advocates Network has also helped UFW Foundation staff as well as the staff of many other member organizations with detailed points of law, including a question about citizenship. On one particular Saturday, the service provider in Bakersfield was unsure whether a woman who had come to their office for assistance might qualify for U.S. citizenship because one of her relatives is a citizen. The provider quickly found the affirmative answer in a Network podcast. “That kind of helpful, practical information that the Immigration Advocates Network web site provides in various ways draws from so many resources that it saves me time,” Kramer explains. “They do the searching for me. I can go into the section on the web site about “Know Your Rights” or “Citizenship” and find an answer. Since they collaborate with other organizations, instead of my having to look at six web sites, I can look at one or two and get a wealth of information.” She and her staff have attended twelve webinars and she says that having access to the Immigration Advocates Network was helpful in getting their applications for recognition and accreditation passed by the Board of Immigration Appeals. This certification allows lay people such as the service provid-

ers to assist immigrants when they apply for U.S. citizenship. Kramer says she also draws on the web site for a weekly radio show she guest hosts on the Radio Campesina Network. The show “De-spierta Ya Campesino” (“Wake Up Farm Workers”) is broadcast in rural areas of California, Arizona and Washington at 5 a.m., a time that immigrants are likely to be driving to work.

“The Immigration Advocates Network web site has been planned and launched with a very small investment from Carnegie Corporation,” says Geri Mannion who leads the U.S. Democracy Program and the Special Opportunities Fund of the Corporation. “Immigration laws are complicated, and especially given the dispersion of immigrants to areas of the country without a deep bench of folks experienced in immigrant issues, establishing the Immigration Advocates Network was an opportunity to combine the use of technology with a national network of great immigration resources. So, if you are a social service provider in rural Nebraska or South Carolina, you can easily find accurate information for an immigrant client or their family member. And, if comprehensive immigration reform becomes a reality, there will be a national need to provide legal resources and help for potentially millions of people. The Immigration Advocates Network could be a crucially important resource for helping these people. Finally, it is a wonderful example of collaboration and careful planning and should be raised up as a model for what can be done when people work together to solve complicated problems. It shows how a relatively small amount of grant funds and a committed group of individuals can take a great idea, couple it with new technologies, and achieve success.”¹

Corporation funding, which was given to Pro Bono Net to establish the Network web site,

¹ Mannion, a naturalized citizen of the U.S., was a child when her parents emigrated from Ireland and remembers them struggling to complete citizenship forms at the kitchen table in their Bronx apartment. She and Taryn Higashi, executive director of Unbound Philanthropy, recently were awarded the Council on Foundations’ distinguished Robert W. Scrivner Award for Creative Grantmaking in recognition of their work in forming the Four Freedoms Fund, a funder collaborative focused on immigrant integration.

began in 2005 with a grant of \$40,000 that was awarded for the initial planning of the web-based information portal, continued in 2006 with an additional award of \$50,000 for the pilot phase of development and in 2007 with a third award of \$300,000 to establish the site. An additional Corporation grant of \$400,000 toward support and expansion of the Immigration Advocates Network was recently awarded to Pro Bono Net.

“Carnegie Corporation funding is critical for the Immigration Advocates Network and a wide range of very important immigrant organizations that will have a big role in the immigration reform process in Washington, D.C.,” says Bob Hildreth, a Boston financier who lived and worked in Latin America for 30 years and has been active in several areas of immigrant advocacy and education. “Besides that, these organizations have also benefited on the ground because they are directly involved in immigrant rights work.” In March 2007, Hildreth personally provided more than \$200,000 in bonds for illegal immigrants who were arrested in a federal raid on a factory in New Bedford, Massachusetts, that makes vests and backpacks for U.S. service men and women. He later launched the National Immigrant Bond Fund (www.immigrant-bondfund.org) that, according to its mission statement, “seeks to reaffirm the values of dignity and due process by helping immigrants detained in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) actions to post bond quickly to secure a fair hearing in America’s courts.”

LAUNCHING THE SITE

The Immigration Advocates Network is a product of several years of meticulous planning by Pro Bono Net, the Catholic Legal Immigration Network and other national immigrants’ rights organizations to consider creating a web site for immigration legal services providers that would broaden the perspective and give groups with a focus on immigration an opportunity to share their expertise and experience with other members. In May 2005, they convened a meeting of a dozen leading immigrants rights groups, inter-

Pro Bono Net Celebrates Its First Decade

In the early 1990s, Mark O'Brien and Michael Hertz, co-founders of Pro Bono Net, were working at top law firms in New York City. O'Brien directed an award-winning pro bono program at Davis Polk and Wardwell, and Hertz was an associate (later partner) on the pro bono committee at Latham & Watkins. They met doing pro bono work on behalf of Chinese asylum seekers who had entered the U.S. on the *Golden Venture*, a ship with 286 undocumented Chinese passengers, which ran aground on the shore in Queens, New York. "At that time, the total number of pro bono asylum cases being placed with pro bono lawyers in New York City was somewhere between 75 and 100 cases annually," explains O'Brien. "Overnight more than 250 additional clients needed representation and the conventional mechanisms for recruiting, training and supporting pro bono volunteers were completely overwhelmed. That was how Michael and I met, and it definitely shaped our views on the critical importance of collaboration across the often siloed sectors of the legal community to respond effectively to emergent needs."

In 1998, Hertz secured funding through the Law and Society program of the Open Society Institute to explore ways in which new Internet technologies could be used to build a more effective pro bono delivery system. O'Brien soon joined Hertz in taking a leave of absence from their jobs, and together they talked with provider organizations about the challenges pro bono groups face in recruiting, training and retaining volunteers and held other conversations with law firm colleagues about how to get attorneys engaged and what the communication and training challenges might be. They also identified which emerging web-based technologies could be used to create more transparency in the system they were designing. In April 1999, working with two pro bono organizations, Human Rights First and In Motion, and their collective pool of roughly 600 volunteers, they were ready to launch their site in New York; within two years the model had been replicated in San Francisco, Minnesota and Washington, D.C.

"Through its ability to cultivate collaborations within the public interest community ranging from immigrants' rights to events such as Katrina, Pro Bono Net plays a unique role in the field," says Matthew Burnett. "It doesn't just build web sites for organizations; it fosters

these collaborations using technology as a vehicle to support a range of services to private pro bono attorneys, nonprofit staff and law students and faculty."

Commenting on Pro Bono Net's emphasis on collaboration, Hertz wrote in a March 2009 *Pro Bono Net News* article that, "We made an early strategic decision at Pro Bono Net that was crucial to our success, but that nearly killed us in the early days: we would not build technology for individual organizations, but instead would build a platform that all organizations in the sector could use. This decision made it much harder at first to convince organizations to work with us. Why would resource-starved nonprofit organizations put energy into another organization's web site? Why would they share their materials on and direct their volunteers through that site?" Hertz, who now serves as a member of Pro Bono Net's Board of Directors and is chief knowledge officer of Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer in London, adds that hard work and a few success stories showed that all the members benefited by pooling their very limited resources, which could then be shared by other members at a low cost.

Today Pro Bono Net, which has evolved beyond an exclusive focus on pro bono delivery to support collaborations across a broad range of access to justice initiatives, serves lawyers in many different practice areas, and has nearly 60,000 members in sites across 30 states as well as in Canada. Pro Bono Net has also partnered with local legal aid, bar and court partners to create a national network of consumer legal information web sites (www.LawHelp.org) with support from the Legal Services Corporation. Each year LawHelp gets more than three million visitors, representing about sixteen million page views. Another program is Online Document Assembly (www.npado.org), which helps individuals find their way through the maze of paperwork needed to represent themselves in court. Pro Bono Manager (www.probono.net/probonomanager), a hosted web service that helps law firms manage their pro bono programs, was launched with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in 2007, as an earned income venture, and has garnered eight of the leading national law firms as customers. Donald Kerwin says, "Pro Bono Net really established themselves after September 11 and then later after Hurricane Katrina and were quite revolutionary in showing how technology could be used to mobilize pro bono support for people in the most vulnerable of situations and in situations that require representation across various legal disciplines."

viewing them prior to the meeting to determine if there was a common set of challenges that the groups faced in providing training and support to their networks of advocates around the country and whether they thought there was a need to develop a new online capacity.²

Mark O'Brien, executive director and co-founder of Pro Bono Net, explains that there was a consensus among the groups that a central resource would be helpful, so "we agreed to try a pilot phase to develop a web site and build content in a couple of substantive areas and around technical assistance for nonprofit legal aid organizations." This first effort was funded by the Corporation and the JEHT Foundation.³

The collaboration has grown to include ten groups plus Pro Bono Net. (See sidebar, pg. 7: "Members of the Immigration Advocates Network.") The fact that each group has its own area of expertise has been a strength, allowing each organization to contribute to the experience and knowledge of their partners. Donald M. Kerwin, Jr., who was a leader in the early planning of the Network when he was executive director of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, says, "Several national legal support agencies had worked closely together for some years, and they had developed different areas of expertise and had different networks as well, meaning that they supported different local programs. The Immigration Advocates Network allowed us to create a web site and support tool that has become far more than just a web site; it has become a source of technical support,

²Participants in the May 2005 convening were: American Immigration Law Foundation, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild, Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Immigrant Legal Resource Center, Church World Service, American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Arab-American Community Service Initiative/Access Detroit, Legal Momentum, National Immigration Law Center, ACLU Immigrants Rights Project, The Advocates for Human Rights and the Asian American Justice Center.

³The JEHT Foundation ceased operations in January 2009; the foundation's donors had invested with Bernard L. Madoff Investment Securities.

training, coordination and information for all the nation's charitable legal programs for immigrants. Suddenly, all of this expertise is available in one place; that in itself is a major contribution. The immigrant legal rights agencies have always worked well together, but it took the Network to knock down completely the barriers that existed between them. Carnegie Corporation has been absolutely crucial to the development of Pro Bono Net, to the Immigration Advocates Network and to a number of the Network's constituent agencies. This is a project that would never have gotten off the ground and would never have developed without the active support and guidance of Geri Mannion and the Corporation." Kerwin currently is vice president for programs of the Migration Policy Institute (www.migrationpolicy.org).

The Network web site bustles with activities such as podcasts, including a recent conversation about legal challenges to an immigration raid in Van Nuys, California, and webinars, including one about the civic engagement of older refugees and another about resources required to support an immigration legal services program. Its library "shelves" are stocked with information, including articles about capacity building, family-based immigration, naturalization and citizenship and the REAL ID Act and drivers' licenses.

"The Immigration Advocates Network is an innovator in providing resources on immigration issues through the Internet. We offer many different types of resources, such as podcasts that are amateur versions of Terry Gross' 'Fresh Air' productions (on National Public Radio) about important immigration issues," says Debbie Smith, an attorney who is the project director of the Immigration Advocates Network. "We interview leading experts in the field on hot topics in immigration law and distribute the recording to our network of nonprofit service providers who otherwise might not have access to materials they need to represent clients. We don't serve individual clients, but rather we help nonprofit organizations that provide direct services to clients, by giving them the resources that enable them to function at a

high level.” Smith continues, “Our network of people includes the nonprofit lawyers, paralegals and Board of Immigration Appeals accredited representatives who work for various nonprofits: the network of Catholic and Lutheran agencies as well as the network of agencies that focus on domestic violence, refugee assistance and other immigration issues.”

Smith, who works in the San Francisco branch of the Network, in the offices of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, is the daughter and granddaughter of immigrants. She has had nearly twenty-five years of experience working in immigration law and was the national coordinator of the American Baptist Church class action settlement, a court-approved agreement that benefited more than 250,000 Salvadoran and Guatemalan asylum applicants. She says, “I always felt very connected to the immigrant story of everyday people fleeing persecution or trying to make a better life for themselves in the U.S., and at the same time confronting unfair and unjust immigration laws and practices. There is nothing more rewarding than working with these communities.”

ONE YEAR LATER

There are numerous benchmarks to indicate how indispensable the Immigration Advocates Network has become to its more than 3,000 members: through March 2009, it posted more than 2,000 library resources which were downloaded 20,000 times by members. “We did not have any particular expectations in terms of site traffic such as visits and downloads,” explains Mark O’Brien. But the membership numbers have significantly exceeded our expectations during year one. One of the key goals of the Immigration Advocates Network is network building within the nonprofit immigration sector, and while there were not any specific membership recruitment targets set, our expectations were framed during the planning process by a rough estimate that there are 400-500 nonprofit offices around the country providing legal assistance to immigrants. That was our primary target, and we believe that with 3,000-plus members from

the nonprofit sector we’ve made strong inroads into reaching that audience during year one.”

More than 200 training sessions, 22 webinars and 14 podcasts are available on the site. These high-quality materials that have been developed by experts in the field offer a trove of crucial information to immigration advocates, especially since 40 percent of their members are from rural programs and about 55 percent from small programs with fewer than five advocates.

“Network podcasts and webinars bring national experts right to the desktops of our members,” says Matthew Burnett, project coordinator of the Network at Pro Bono Net, adding that many of their members would have to spend precious time and resources to attend similar trainings in person, traveling many miles and staying overnight. Burnett joined Pro Bono Net in 2005 as a circuit rider, working with state and national legal aid organizations in implementing innovative and effective technology to increase access to justice for low-income individuals. Burnett also represented asylum seekers at East Bay Sanctuary in Berkeley and Northwest Immigrants Rights Project in Seattle during law school, which is how he first became involved in immigrants’ rights.

Other features of the web site are the national training calendar, an area that provides alerts on new immigration practice advisories, an agency watch section on actions and misconduct in the field and a searchable member roster. Social networking also adds value to the site, with more than 300 people following the Network on Twitter (www.twitter.com) and 400 members and supporters active on Facebook (www.facebook.com) and posting information to a LinkedIn group (www.linkedin.com).

“Over the past year, the Immigration Advocates Network has served as a really valuable resource for the immigrant advocacy community,” says Irena Lieberman, former director of the American Bar Association Commission on Immigration. “In particular, the national training calendar has been a great asset for the ABA’s offsite pro bono projects in Harlingen, Texas, Seattle, and

San Diego. The calendar has allowed new staff to take advantage of training opportunities locally or through the web that they might otherwise not be aware of.”

Another measure of the success of the Immigration Advocates Network is that the site was recently recognized as a finalist for a prestigious Webby Award. “Hindsight is always 20/20, but the Network has facilitated new relationships and new ways of delivering content, doing training and providing technical assistance that is really of great benefit to the field,” says Burnett. “Even folks from outside the nonprofit immigration sector are recognizing that. None of the Webby Award judges are immigration experts or even aware necessarily of what is going on in the field, but they recognize that the Immigration Advocates Network is using innovative technology to push the envelope.”

NEW CHALLENGES

As the Network looks forward to the next years, it has a solid infrastructure and ability to provide crucial services to its members. It is exploring ways to become at least somewhat self-sustaining, i.e., by charging a modest fee of \$25 for viewing a webinar.

With the downturn in the economy, some recent law graduates are finding that their acceptance into large firms is being deferred. Smith says, “We’re trying to figure out how to incorporate some of those people in our work and develop nonprofit services that can be used by people in our network.”

The Immigration Advocates Network seeks to develop new library materials about U visas (a special visa for noncitizen victims of crimes who assist authorities), the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), detention and asylum and to provide a one-stop library on comprehensive immigration reform. During the upcoming debate about immigration legislation,

it will be critically important to supply current information in a public education program to help prevent victimization of immigrants.

“Some unscrupulous individuals such as notaries and visa consultants will see this as an opportunity to start collecting fees without providing services and otherwise exploiting immigrants,” explains Kerwin.

If legislation is passed by Congress, it will mean a massive restructuring and reorganizing of existing agencies; the Immigration Advocates Network can play a crucial role in helping ease the transition by providing information about the content of the law as well as the regulations and instructions issued by Homeland Security and other details about the program. The group will also be poised to help with community outreach and legal representation.

The Network is exploring other ways to expand its services, considering the development of a national directory of immigration legal service providers and the use of new technologies for online chats and other innovations. They also are considering how to reach out to groups including those that address issues such as domestic violence that do not generally view their activities as serving immigrants, though in reality many of their clients are indeed immigrants.

Regarding plans to expand and develop the Immigration Advocates Network Burnett says, “Our efforts over the next couple of years are going to focus on building our member base, identifying new areas of need within that community and selecting opportunities for growth that complement

Immigration Advocates Network Partners

In addition to Pro Bono Net, partners of the Immigration Advocates Network are the ACLU Immigrants’ Rights Project; American Bar Association Commission on Immigration; American Immigration Lawyers Association; American Immigration Law Foundation; Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.; Immigrant Legal Resource Center; Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service; National Immigration Law Center; National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild, Inc; and the Advocates for Human Rights.

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the work of our partners. It's a nice challenge to figure out where you are doing things right and where you have opportunities to grow."

Mindful of the need to support the community that the Immigration Advocates Network is designed to serve and stay in tune with their concerns, Kerwin says, "Both Pro Bono Net and the Network, as well as all the agencies working under the Pro Bono Net rubric, have done an excellent job in keeping the focus where it should be and remaining responsive and relevant."

Written by: Joyce Baldwin. Baldwin has written on a wide range of topics for many national publications and is author of two biographies for young adult readers.



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