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Number of Countries of People  
Assisted By The  
Immigrant Workers Citizenship Project

Name of Country	Number of People Assisted
Albania	11
Argentina	4
Armenia	3
Bangladesh	4
Barbados	1
Belgium	2
Belize	2
Bolivia	1
Bosnia	20
Brazil	2
Bulgaria	5
Burma	1
Cambodia	5
Canada	1
Chile	4
China	2
Colombia	14
Costa Rica	4
Cuba	73
Dominican Republic	1
Ecuador	6
Egypt	1
El Salvador	66
England	2
Eritrea	2
Ethiopia	20
France	2
Germany	2
Ghana	1
Greece	2
Guatemala	32
Haiti	3
Honduras	13
India	2
Iran	2
Israel	2
Italy	3
Jamaica	1
Laos	8

Number of Countries of People  
Assisted By The  
Immigrant Workers Citizenship Project

Name of Country	Number of People Assisted
Mexico	472
Morocco	1
Nicaragua	18
Pakistan	1
Panama	1
Peru	15
Philippines	65
Poland	1
Romania	1
Russia	1
S. Africa	1
S. Korea	10
Serbia	2
Spain	1
Thailand	28
Venezuela	2
Vietnam	5
<b>Total Countries</b> 57	<b>Total People Assisted</b> 955

I have prepared some very brief remarks in support of the Bill before you. Rapidly, I would like to present the Immigrant Workers Citizenship Project in a quick what-when-where-why-how format, which, hopefully, can provide you a clear picture of our program.

Simply stated the Citizenship Project serves the legal immigrant community - a community of not less than 120,000 legal immigrants in Clark County alone - by providing free naturalization services to achieve U.S. Citizenship. Legal immigrants to become citizens must be holders of a green card for not less than five years. Naturalization services include helping our clients to fill out the ten-page application, to assemble all necessary documentation, to enroll in our English and Civics classes, and to prepare for their INS interview.

Our non profit project, a 501(c) 3 organization, opened its doors 18 months ago - on October 1, 2001 - and has demonstrated impressive results. Nearly 1000 ten-page applications with documentation have been submitted to INS in a process, which includes fingerprinting and a background check. (From the time of submittal to the testing and interview is typically an interval of

eight to twelve months) Over 250 of our earliest clients have already gone through the oath ceremony and have become U.S. citizens.

A lengthy application, a test in civics, and an interview account for barriers to citizenship. Until our arrival the immigrant population has too often been abused when the unscrupulous have charged outrageous fees for filling out the application while abandoning their clientele to face a test given in English on the U.S. Constitution and other matters, with no preparation – condemning them to failure and of course the loss of their application fee of \$310.00.

To date, this project has handled over 10,000 telephone and drop in inquiries. We know the barriers, both real and imagined, to citizenship. We charge no fees for our services. We are a staff of 6 including myself, two teachers and three citizenship specialists. We guide the legal immigrants through the application and document process and stay with them in our classes and when they are ready conduct mock interviews. Our staff and volunteers have now served legal immigrants from 57 nations, 57 different countries. (One of the handouts I prepared for this meeting has this list of countries and the number of people served).

Let me conclude this brief presentation through a personal perspective, aimed at completing the picture of this project. Since the 60's I have been deeply involved in refugee and immigrant matters, hence deeply conscious of the United States as a land of immigrants. (Today's statistics certainly bear this out: Over 11% of our U.S. population – roughly 32 million people – are foreign born).

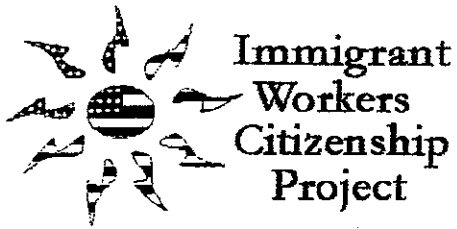
Recently – from 1995 to 1999 – I brought in 450 Bosnian refugees to Las Vegas. My resettlement task was clear. Help them to help themselves – with food, clothing, shelter, transportation, medical, and legal assistance – by concentrating on securing employment. I need to quickly inject here – since I'm wearing a collar today – that there is no mention of religion today or during the last forty years since we are talking about the American philosophy of giving everyone full dignity, certainly the goal of all spirituality. The employment rate for my refugees is 100% but these legal immigrants will not be fully empowered until they are U.S. citizens with the full rights, privileges, and protection of this great land.

This employment effort concentrated on the hotel industry, which put me in even greater touch with the immigrant community as nearly all my refugees

were trained by the Culinary Academy, a tuition free school run by management and labor. This project formed itself in 2001 when, with the Culinary Union and another heavily immigrant labor organization, UNITE, we obtained \$200,000 seed money from Clark County. We leased a building in downtown Las Vegas at 6<sup>th</sup> and Clark, hired a staff, trained volunteers, and sought additional dollars from all sources. Raising money has been our major problem. The project is labor intensive and calls for a monthly budget of \$26,000; however with some unique arrangements, some pro bono professional help, volunteers and a lot of sacrifice we are currently fully functional on less than ½ of this budget. As you know, foundations have taken heavy losses in their portfolios; Governments have revenue shortfalls; and other sources are contributing less. We have been able to secure some donations in the \$5-\$10,000 category and most recently Park Place Entertainment gave us \$25,000.00, but we need help for the population of legal immigrants is very large and we have just begun. We want to serve all of Nevada.

Thank you so very much for giving us this opportunity to talk today and may I answer your questions.

Thank you again.



## **Purpose**

The Immigrant Workers Citizenship Project was opened on October 1, 2001, to help all immigrants become US citizens by making the naturalization process free of additional costs, intelligible, and accessible.

## **Background**

The background of this non-profit project can be viewed in many lights, but it is illuminated clearly in the Latino population. Las Vegas' 302,143 Latinos make up 22 percent of its residents which is 70 percent more than the national average, and growing almost twice as fast as the fastest growing region in the US. Las Vegas' (Clark County's) Latino growth rate was 360 percent between 1990 and 2000, California and Arizona were 43 and 88 percent respectively. This numerical significance is not reflected in the political arena. Only 9 percent of registered voters are Latinos. Canvassing has shown that nearly 40 percent (approximately 120,000) of this Latino population is eligible for citizenship, but they have not applied. As a result, Nevada has only four Latino elected officials while Arizona has 268 and California 757.

Las Vegas immigrants live in a region dominated by the hospitality industry. Employing 25 percent of the workforce, hospitality represents the vast majority of economic base employment and regional income. Consistent with national trends, approximately 70 percent of Latino workers are found in the service sector and in clerical, warehousing, and construction jobs. For example, HERE Culinary 226, long on the forefront of advancing immigration causes, has a union membership of 45,000 of whom 40 percent are Latino and up to 20 percent are Asian. Recent surveys have shown as many as 12,000 are not citizens, yet virtually all have lived the required five years in the United States and can afford the INS application fee of \$310.00.

## **Empowerment**

US residents are not fully empowered unless they are citizens. Only with citizenship comes all rights and privileges accorded Americans, not the least of which is the right to vote. In these perilous times, the rights of non-citizens are being threatened in unconscionable ways. It is the responsibility of citizens to provide whatever help is necessary to see that these threatened members of our community are empowered.



## **History/Statistics**

In July of 2001 Father Phil Carolin, director of refugee resettlement for the Episcopal Diocese of Nevada, joined with two immigrant-laden, labor organizations to form the Immigrant Workers Citizenship Project. The purpose of the Citizenship Project is to assist all workers in Nevada to become U.S. citizens by offering free naturalization services; of course, the Project serves not only workers but all immigrants. All members of the Board of Directors bring experience in immigration matters and organizational development and have committed to raising funds. The Project began with \$200,000 in seed money from Clark County and has received an additional \$110,000 from the City of Las Vegas, labor organizations and individual donors. Recently Park Place Entertainment donated \$25,000.

In the wake of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the Project quietly opened its doors on October 1, 2001. By March of 2003, its 18<sup>th</sup> month of operation, staff and volunteers had handled over 10,000 drop-in and telephone inquiries while submitting nearly 1000 applications from immigrants of 57 nations. Although INS processing often takes eight to twelve months from submittal to interview, already over 250 of the Project's earliest clients have become U.S. citizens

## **The Process**

The naturalization process is relatively straightforward for the Project workers. For those with complete documentation, good English skills, and some knowledge of the American system of government, it can be just as straightforward for the applicant. Experience shows that the straightforwardness of process rarely translates in to practice and that complexity is often found in the simplest of requirements. Implemented in excruciating detail and precision, these complexities are real barriers to naturalization and, in the wrong hands, can make the process unaffordable for most. Unraveling these complexities, while often not technically difficult, is extremely labor intensive. To address this situation, the Project has developed the following process.

The first step in the naturalization process is to orient the applicant to the naturalization requirements and to determine what of the essential qualifications, documentation, and skill may be missing. Volunteers and staff work with applicants in their native languages to complete the application and assemble documentation. The volunteers, staff and the

applicant work together to diagnose any barriers that might remain and to map out a strategy for overcoming them.

Resources available to the applicant include enrollment in our in-house citizenship classes, in our in-house English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and guidance in requesting necessary documentation. The Project has created a phone bank that follows up to ensure the process stays on track.

Historically, having made it successfully through the application process, more than a few applicants failed the interview or citizenship examination. Failure at that point required the applicant to start the process all over. To prevent this unfortunate outcome the Project offers interview and citizenship examination training including mock interviews and sample tests.

Having successfully completed the naturalization process, the new citizen is reminded of the rights and privileges of US citizens, including the responsibility to register as a voter.

## **Project Staff and Volunteers**

It is the role of the paid staff at the Project to train volunteers and to assume only those activities and responsibilities that volunteers cannot complete. The Project provides materials that will assist community and union leaders to educate their co-workers and neighbors about the citizenship process. Volunteers are trained in regular sessions at the Project offices. To ensure that the process comes full circle, training includes identification of problems requiring staff assistance. As demand for Project services grows, it will be necessary that an increasing proportion of resources be devoted to paid staff, so that even more volunteers can be trained and the professional services necessary to resolve barriers to naturalization are available.

## **The Future**

By removing barriers the rate of successful applications is expected to increase dramatically. Constrained only by funding the Project will then expand its reach throughout Nevada.

The Immigrant Workers Citizenship Project is providing free, quality, centralized assistance to applicants; naturalization information for the community; and outreach to the non-citizen, resident community. Empowered by citizenship, Latinos, Asians, and all immigrants will increase their effective participation in the economic and political life of Nevada.