

PATH TO CITIZENSHIP

Annual Report - November 2015

STEERING COMMITTEE

Rev. Laura Arnold and Lorraine Borowski, *Congregational United Church of Christ*

Dave Carlson and Carol Birkland, *First Lutheran Church*

Kathi Mitchell and Barb Dale, *First United Methodist Church*

David Judisch and Kate Narveson, *Good Shepherd Lutheran Church*

Megan Strom, *Luther College*;
Makayla Marinak, *Luther College Student Congregation*

Carl Peterson, *Northeast Iowa Unitarian Universalist Fellowship*

Ruth Palmer,
St. Benedict Catholic Community

Julie Fischer, *Northeast Iowa Peace and Justice Center, Inc.*

WHO WE ARE

PATH TO CITIZENSHIP is a northeast Iowa organization whose mission is to aid people who need help navigating the complicated path to legal status. Founded by a coalition of Decorah area faith groups and working in partnership with Justice for Our Neighbors (JFON), a national ministry of the United Methodist Church, Path to Citizenship provides free legal advice on the immigration process. With the help of JFON immigration attorneys, we hold quarterly legal aid clinics and have no-interest microloans available to assist low income families with legal fees and associated costs.

WHY WE CAME TOGETHER

Our community is made up of immigrants and the children of immigrants. In the first hundred years of immigration to our community, primarily by Europeans, very few rules governed who could settle here from other parts of the world. Since WWI, the government has placed more and more restrictions on immigration, yet many people still come, even without legal status, seeking safety and security for their families, political freedom, and economic opportunity. Current laws allow some new immigrants to start on a path to legal residency. For some, the path leads to legal permanent residence, while for others, it allows a period of respite from violence and war in their home countries and the opportunity to pursue education or work, free from the fear of deportation.

The good news: with just a little support, some immigrants can follow the path, gaining security for their families and hope for their children. Our legal aid clinics and microloan fund can make the difference, giving people just the boost they need.



Legal Aid Clinics

During 2014, we established a framework to provide quarterly legal aid clinics. We quickly realized immigration law is mind-boggling in its complexity even for attorneys, and with no immigration attorneys in northeast Iowa, we were fortunate to learn of JFON. As one of now six Iowa JFON locations, we offer quarterly clinics at no charge to eligible clients. JFON provides immigration lawyers and other expert staff, while we provide the physical space, funding, and an amazing volunteer staff.

72
individuals
from **10**
countries

The first clinic was held on September 5-6, 2014. Over the year, immigration attorney Ann Naffier met with 72 individuals from 10 different countries for help with a variety of immigration issues. She also conducted volunteer trainings and gave a community presentation on Executive Action at Postville for 75 participants.

At the clinics, **volunteers** help with *orientation, translation, child care, and hospitality*. Trained volunteers complete intake interviews and provide initial guidance through paperwork, freeing the attorney to assess legal options.

Future quarterly clinics will be held at Decorah First United Methodist Church on

January 8-9

August 26-27

March 11-12

November 4-5

May 6-7

Microloan Fund

The second part of our mission is the development of a microloan fund. Following the generosity to the highly successful Decorah area Jubilee Fund, and to the Peace and Justice Resettlement Program, which helped young people eligible for visas in the aftermath of the Postville immigration raid, a Pay It Forward microloan program for basic life necessities was established in 2012 at the Northeast Iowa Peace and Justice Center.

100%

Modeled on Pay It Forward, with its **100%** repayment rate for over 20 loans, this new revolving microloan fund will offer no interest loans for filing fees, travel expenses, required physicals and biometrics, and other associated legal costs.

FUNDRAISING

Our fundraising goal for the first year was to raise **\$11,000** needed by Iowa JFON for expenses related to the four Decorah clinics in 2014-15

We are deeply grateful to the **150th Celebration of Lutherans** in Decorah, held at the Luther College Center for Faith and Life November 10, 2013, a big boost in our initial fund drive.

Through the generosity of our donors, the **funding goal for 2014-2015 was met.**

Funds have been forwarded to the Iowa JFON office to cover the costs of immigration attorney Ann Naffier and support staff.

Decorah First United Methodist Church:

\$3,500 from a Matthew 25 2014 grant, \$6,000 from a Matthew 25 2015 grant, Trust Fund donation, and individual donations, as well as providing the use of their facilities for the clinics.

St. Benedict, Decorah; **St. Patrick**, Waukon; **Our Lady of Mt. Carmel**, Lawler; and **St. Francis de Sales**, Ossian gave \$2,600 with the help of Catholic Charities Harvest of Blessings matching grants.

Luther Student Congregation \$2,100

First Lutheran, \$1,500

Good Shepherd, \$620

Unitarians, \$160

Winds of Peace Foundation, \$1,500 grant

Many individual donations

Looking Forward

We are now working to raise **\$14,000 for the 2015-16 clinics.** We have a start with some initial gifts for our second year: \$1,335 from Good Shepherd Lutheran. \$5,000 from a Catholic Charities Campaign for Human Development grant for operating expenses and an additional \$5,000 for the microloan fund to help with the government fee of \$465 for DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and DAPA (Deferred Action for Parents of Americans.)

In the past some fees were waived for required forms for low-income immigrants. DACA and DAPA fees will not be waived. In coming years, we will continue this pattern, funding the legal aid clinics first, and dedicating money raised beyond that amount to the microloan fund. Several other foundation grant requests are in process.

Unaccompanied Minors

The past year saw increasing numbers of unaccompanied minor children from Central America. Given the 50-100 hours of legal help needed for each child, the **annual amount of funding needed for the coming year is \$14,000**. We plan to reach out to congregations throughout the area and explore grant possibilities from both foundations and local businesses that benefit from immigrant labor.

Iowa JFON has identified over 65 UAC's (Unaccompanied Minor Children) in Iowa and the Decorah clinic has worked with 10 of them. Path to Citizenship has also gone beyond the JFON services to find legal guardians for six of the UAC minors, to provide transportation to the required court interviews and appearances in Omaha and Des Moines, and to bring in a Catholic Charities counselor for the UAC families.

Leadership

We are saying a sad goodbye with thanks to the past year's Translation Coordinator, Sarah Wicks, and wish her well on her move to Dubuque. We welcome Megan Strom, Luther Spanish professor, our current Translation Coordinator. We thank our many volunteers who make the clinics possible. We also thank the committees from First United Methodist, Unitarian Universalists, Good Shepherd, St. Benedict, Congregational UCC, and First Lutheran for providing hospitality at the clinics. Ruth Palmer has been invited to the archdiocesan Catholic Charities board, and as a Clinic Coordinator member of the Iowa JFON board, is facilitating meetings to explore coordination of services to immigrants in the archdiocese

Hospitality Coordinator: Barb Dale with FUMC Social Concerns Committee

A Special Thank You to Rhonda Perez, Administrative Secretary and Reverend John Caldwell of Decorah First United Methodist Church.

To 50 volunteers who helped out at our first year of clinics, giving over 330 hours of service.

Future

Path to Citizenship plans to expand clinic services and fundraising beyond the Winneshiek County and Postville area. Also, when funding and JFON staffing permits, we hope to offer clinics every other month in the near future. Donations, volunteers, and guardians are continuing needs.

THANK YOU!

Clinic Coordinators: Kathi Mitchell, Ruth Palmer

Volunteer Coordinator: Kim Toussaint

Interpretation Coordinators: Sarah Wicks, now Megan Strom

Child Engagement Coordinators: Blanca Nunez, Blanca Schroeder

A model of effective collaboration Path to Citizenship had its genesis in efforts by individual congregations. For instance, in 2013, Good Shepherd donated several thousand dollars and many hours to help one hard-working parent through the process of documentation so that now, after over 20 years of marriage, he, his wife, and their two sons enjoy the security of legal immigration status. Other congregations reported similar efforts, and the Center for Peace and Justice had more appeals for help than they could handle. At an initial meeting of advocates from across the faith community, we agreed that we should pool resources and expertise. In 2013, our organizational year, we consulted with immigration attorneys from Minnesota Legal Aid, Colorado, and Des Moines, researching what services people most needed. By the summer of 2014, we had a clear sense of direction, initial funds, and a team of wonderful volunteers, ready for our first clinic, which took place September 5-6, at Decorah First United Methodist Church.

Please send contributions to:

Path to Citizenship

PO Box 382

Decorah, IA 52101

Individual donations will be matched by the national JFON office until their \$5,000 goal is met.

For questions, call: 563-380-7707 and ask for David.

For Clinic appointments, please call 515-255-9809, on Mondays 9am-12 or Fridays 1-4pm.