

Finding Our Voices

SFILEN 2010

Supporting San Francisco's diverse immigrant communities
with access to legal services and community education.

Content

- 02 SF Immigrant Legal and Education Network
- 06 Reuniting American Families
- 08 CARECEN Youth Project:
Strengthening Our Families
- 11 Survivor
- 12 A Long but Necessary Road
- 13 Working for Our Families
- 15 Rising from Abuse
- 16 New Life in Tragic Times
- 18 The San Francisco City ID
- 19 Building Immigrant Power
Through School Partnerships
- 21 Counting Our Communities
- 22 Immigration reform

SF Immigrant Legal and Education Network History

The San Francisco Immigrant Legal & Education Network (SFILEN) represents a unique and groundbreaking collaboration of thirteen organizations, including some of the region's pioneering immigrant service providers and some of the city's leading legal advocacy organizations—each with decades of experience providing immigration legal services to low income immigrants. The San Francisco Immigrant Legal & Education Network is made up of the following organizations: African Advocacy Network, Arab Resource & Organizing Center, Asian Law Caucus, Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach, Central American Resource Center, Chinese for Affirmative Action, Dolores Street Community Services, the Filipino Community Center, La Raza Centro Legal, La Raza Community Resource Center, Mujeres Unidas y Activas, People Organizing to Demand Environmental & Economic Rights, and Causa Justa Just Cause (formerly St. Peter's Housing Committee). We provide free legal immigration assistance and community education to low-income immigrants in San Francisco. We represent immigrants from African, Arab, Asian and Latino communities. Collectively the Network provides services in Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Toisanese, Vietnamese, Tagalog, French and other languages. The vision of the San Francisco Immigrant Legal & Education Network is to promote full access to social services, direct legal services, civic engagement, legalization, freedom of movement, and reunification with family and community, for all immigrants and their families regardless of their immigration status.

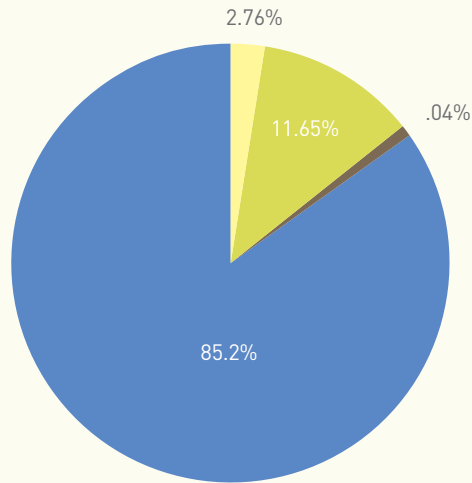


Immigrant Family Day 2009. Photo Credit: Dolores Street Community Services

SFILEN works to achieve this vision of immigrant rights through building grassroots leadership, providing free immigration legal services and comprehensive legal assistance, promoting community education, and organizing to empower the immigrant community. As an immigrant centered Network, SFILEN focuses on our work locally, learning from other organizations nationally, and with a critical perspective on how international political and economic trends impact our communities. We seek to fulfill our vision by working across racial communities and across social movements. The San Francisco Immigrant Legal and Education Network is funded by the Mayor's Office of Community Investment (MOCI). For more information, visit www.sfilemigrantnetwork.org

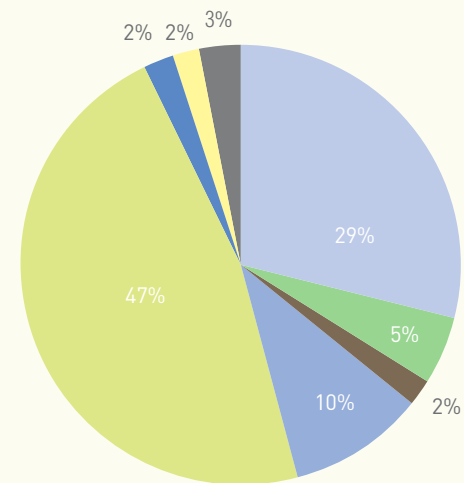
*Data is based on information compiled by the SFILEN member organizations in the course of providing legal assistance and community education, and as such, represents SFILEN's best estimate as to the numbers of clients served, their income levels by activity, and ethnicity. The data does not reflect the actual percentage of San Francisco's immigrant communities.

Estimated Clients By Income Level*



- Above Moderate Income
\$63,350 or greater
- Low Income
\$23,751-\$39,600
- Moderate Income
\$39,601-\$63,350
- Extremely Low Income
\$0 < \$23,751

Estimated Clients By Ethnicity*



- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Hispanic
- White
- White-Hispanic
- American Indian or Alaskan Native; Asian and White (Hispanic included)
- Other

SFILEN was formed to address the daunting legal challenges confronting immigrants today. According to Census data, in 2000, more than one third of the City's residents were foreign-born (36%). By any estimation, the number of immigrants has continued to grow since the last census — and much of this growth has been amongst persons without documented status. According to a recent report by the Pew Hispanic Center, 30% of the foreign population in the country is undocumented and 40% of that undocumented population entered the country since the last census. Legislation in 2007, including the Patriot Act and the Real ID Act, has substantially eroded the rights of these new Americans, whether documented or undocumented. Pending legislation could even further

negatively impact the rights and status of immigrants. The San Francisco Immigrant Legal and Education Network has successfully completed three years of collaborative work which has improved and increased immigration legal services to San Francisco's immigrant population. Outreach and education activities, together with a strong referral and follow-up system and increased numbers of legal consultations, form processing and representation has provided greater support and security for immigrant families. SFILEN has also increased cooperation and collaboration between existing service providers and has increased efficiency, grown new capacity, overcome language barriers and isolation, and improved shared knowledge.

Reuniting American Families

The cornerstone of the United States immigration system is family unification. Family-based petitions accounts for two-thirds of all legal immigration to this country. However, our current system unjustly keeps family members separated for years and sometimes even decades.

In August 2002, Mr. Guozhao Su, 72, and his wife, Qiaozhen, 70, both immigrants from China, petitioned their daughter, Huan Ling, and her child to come to the United States. Because of their advanced years and limited English proficiency, Mr. and Mrs. Su looked forward to being reunited with their daughter so she could care for them.

“Without their children, the Su’s were left alone in the United States.”

However, it took more than seven years for Mr. Su’s family to be interviewed at the Guangzhou Consulate for their immigrant visa. Another bureaucratic defect caused the processing to be delayed by another six months. The Consulate never even contacted Mr. Su’s family about this additional delay.

Mr. and Mrs. Su were not the only ones that worried about their daughter’s visa petition; their son, Simon, also cared about Huan Ling’s case. Simon was in the U.S. Army and was deployed to



Mr. and Mrs. Su sharing their story at the December SFILEN Community Townhall on Immigration Reform. Photo Credit: Dolores Street Community Services

Afghanistan at the time. He asked about Huan Ling’s case every time he called home to speak with his parents. He couldn’t believe her visa petition was taking so long to approve.

Having their son, Simon, in the service of the U.S. Armed Forces in Afghanistan made Mr. Su and his wife very nervous all the time. They were also afraid that his concern about Huan Ling’s immigration case shifted his focus away from his own safety and his duty as a soldier. Without their children, the Su’s were left alone in the United States and, because of their age, they felt they were becoming more and more forgetful and needed someone to take care of them.

So, Mr. and Mrs. Su went to Asian Law Caucus for help. With ALC's assistance, the couple contacted the Office of the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, and expressed their worry about their daughter's visa application. Their son, Simon, also contacted Senator Dianne Feinstein office's while still in Afghanistan, for assistance. Mr. Su was so moved by his conviction that he volunteered to share his story during the San Francisco Immigrant Legal and Education Network Immigration Reform townhall meeting in December 2009 in order to advocate for all families who are in the same position.

With collective effort and inquiries to the Guangzhou Consulate, the Su's daughter and grandson finally received their visa approval on December 28, 2009. Huan Ling and her son came to the U.S. before Chinese Lunar New Year, and reunited to celebrate this important holiday as a family for the first time in many years.

CARECEN Youth Project: Strengthening Our Families

A 15 year old minor from El Salvador came to the Immigrant Youth Project at the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN). The minor was physically assaulted while he was walking to the bus stop across the street from his high school and is eligible for U Visa status. The injury was serious enough that the minor had nose surgery to correct the damage done to him. He made a police report and cooperated with the San Francisco Police Department. The minor and his family are currently cooperating with the San Francisco District Attorney's office in the criminal investigation.

The Central American Resource Center is representing the client and providing case management. CARECEN is in the process of completing his U Visa application and reviewing evidence that we believe is relevant for his U-Visa approval. We are also representing the minor's parents as beneficiaries of their son's U-Visa application.

As part of CARECEN's case management, we are in contact with the client on a weekly basis. We have made contact with the school therapist in regards to his mental health. We are also in constant contact with his parents regarding updates and documents that are needed to complete their son's case. Our goal with the client and his parents is to assist them in obtaining legal status, as a family.

“I didn’t even know what human trafficking was. All I knew was that I felt like I was a worthless human being, and I had been convinced that I was doing something wrong. I just want to let you know that when you said you would help me and I started crying, it was because I was so relieved and happy that someone believed my story.”

—Jennifer

Survivor

Jennifer is a human trafficking survivor. She considered herself lucky that she could read because she didn’t have to drop out of school until she was able to complete the sixth grade. When Jennifer was 16, Jennifer’s aunt, Aunt Mary, who she only met three times when she came to visit, asked her to come to live with her in the United States. For \$100 a month, Jennifer would help Aunt Mary around the house and babysit her children. Aunt Mary also promised that she could enroll in school again and learn English. Jennifer thought she could send money back to help her parents and her four other younger siblings, so of course she said yes. What Jennifer didn’t know was that for the next two years of her life she would sleep on a threadbare mattress on the kitchen floor, and work without any pay seven days a week, from 5am to past midnight everyday.

Jennifer was also never able to attend school because Aunt Mary said she was too stupid, and worthless anyways, to learn English. Aunt Mary took Jennifer’s passport and threatened to deport her if she ever left the house or talked to anyone. Being deported sounded scary - Jennifer thought that perhaps being deported meant that she would have to be locked up somewhere for a very long time. Aunt Mary also told Jennifer’s parents that Jennifer never sent money home because she was frivolous and spent all of it on clothing and makeup. Whenever Aunt Mary’s children cried or got a scrape on their knees, her aunt would beat Jennifer with a broomstick on the head and starve her for not properly watching the children. Jennifer finally escaped when she attempted to commit suicide and a hospital worker contacted the Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach and the Asian Anti-Trafficking Collaborative.

* Name changed for the purposes of maintaining client confidentiality.

A Long but Necessary Road

“I never told my story, no one knew, I never talked about it.”

Guadalupe Medina has been a member of Mujeres Unidas y Activas (MUA) since 2004. In 2006 she began the process of applying for a U Visa for herself and her children. Guadalupe suffered domestic violence at the hands of her husband but was not willing to tolerate it any longer. Guadalupe sought help in San Francisco services such as shelters, housing assistance, Cal Works, and food stamps to help her leave her abuser and be able to support her children. Because she did not have a social security number these avenues of support were closed to her. She tried to find other avenues herself but became frustrated by the process. Guadalupe was an active participant in MUA's support meetings but never felt comfortable sharing her story. “I came to MUA because a friend invited me, but I never told my story, no one knew, I never talked about it. And it was difficult. There were no services I could use; I could not apply for housing assistance or food stamps because of my status. The places we had to live were awful because I could not pay more.”

Guadalupe began participating in leadership development trainings and peer counseling work with MUA. She began the process of applying for her U Visa but found once her application was submitted that it could not go further because no more applications

for this visa were being processed. The wait time was pushed back, from eight months to one year, to two years and beyond. Guadalupe began working more closely with allied organizations. The process was difficult even with additional help. Guadalupe has spent four years trying to process her U Visa to protect herself and her children from the violence they suffered. “I was hurting, I was very sad, but out of the sadness you need to allow the good things to come through too, even though it is hard.” From her experiences dealing with the system Guadalupe has become aware of the networks of help available to survivors of domestic violence. Although this has been a very difficult and long road, Guadalupe uses this experience and knowledge to counsel other women going through similar processes. “I can put myself in their shoes and I don't want them to go through what I went through. I had to wait a long time, but thanks to God, the community, and myself, things are getting done.”

Working for Our Families

Recently, La Raza Community Resource Center witnessed a great victory for one of the families served. A gentleman from El Salvador along with his wife and child came to our agency for assistance. The family had arrived in the United States in June 1991, when Temporary Protection Status (TPS) was approved for El Salvador due to a natural disaster there. Through his TPS he applied and received a work permit, and was legally employed until 2007.

* Name changed for the purposes of maintaining client confidentiality.

When he went to renew his TPS in 2007, he sought out the assistance of a volunteer consulate program that unfortunately did not know immigration procedures, so when Immigration received his application, it was denied.

He came in to La Raza Community Resource Center to speak with the Family Support Specialist, seeking various services. The gentleman and his family faced a web of problems without a valid TPS work permit. His employer fired him because without TPS he could not legally be employed. Yet at the same time, he could not apply for unemployment because the work permit had expired.

Therefore, because of their legal status, he and his family were in need of food, rental assistance, and food stamps. To begin aiding the family, we offered help with food by inviting them to join our food pantry, rental assistance, and other services for health care. Next, our Family Resource Specialist transferred the family to our Immigration Specialist for help with the core issue that the family needed to solve—their legal status.

Our Immigration Specialist helped the gentleman fill out an application for employment authorization. After several months of corresponding with US Immigration Services—the gentleman was granted a work permit. He returned to his job at the airport, and began to build his financial structure once again.

The importance of this successful intervention not only provided a person with a valid work permit, it ushered an entire family toward economic independence. This vignette also brings to light the importance of the work of San Francisco Immigrant Legal and Education Network members, who provide timely access to legal assistance to our immigrant community as well as supportive services to make families whole and communities strong.

Rising From Abuse

La Raza Centro Legal's client, Vida*, is a mother of two who comes from Brazil. Vida was granted asylee derivative status stemming from her husband's principal asylum application that Immigration had already granted. Prior to entry to the United States and afterwards Vida was suffering from domestic violence at the hands of her husband. In addition to the ongoing physical abuse, Vida lived in constant fear of having Immigration and Customs Enforcement detain her since her husband threatened to call immigration to take her status away and deport her if she tried to leave or divorce him. He would threaten this every time she tried to stand up to his abuse. Vida was waiting on a communication from immigration regarding her adjustment of status, but her husband had withheld all mail from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and as a result she did not receive the correspondence. Thankfully Vida checked her status online and found that her case had been closed for failing to respond to immigration's communication.

Vida came to our office seeking help to re-open her adjustment of status case. Since Vida was only working a part-time job as a housekeeper she was unable to afford the fee associated with reopening her case. In addition to submitting the motion to reopen Vida's case, we submitted a fee waiver request. La Raza Centro Legal was successful in having her case reopened and the fee waived. Thankfully, Vida was awarded a 10 year legal permanent resident card. She is currently in the process of divorcing her husband.

* Name changed for the purposes of maintaining client confidentiality.

New Life in Tragic Times, the Struggle Continues

Carmel Jean Francois' baby girl was born in San Francisco just two weeks after the 7.0 magnitude earthquake brought shock and devastation to Haiti - Carmel's country of birth. While Carmel stayed at his wife's side, waiting for the birth of their baby girl, he managed to fit in a few moments to join other Haitians in the Bay Area on January 15 to call on the public to act in solidarity with his island nation. He joined other Haitians at the office of the African Advocacy Network (AAN), a new project of Dolores Street Community Services, for an early morning press conference with State Senator Leland Yee to highlight local Haitian voices. AAN's project director, Adoubou Traore, spoke in French and English to the public, "Sechez vos larmes - Dry your tears, now is the time to unite and rebuild!"

**"Sechez vos larmes - Dry your tears,
now is the time to unite and rebuild!"**

Carmel is just one of several AAN clients overcoming the bureau-cratic obstacles involved with arriving to the U.S. while trying to stay in touch with family abroad. AAN has provided a venue and support for its clients to advocate for their communities by cospon-soring press conferences and community events.



Haitians from around the Bay Area gathered at the AAN offices days after the earthquake for a press conference with State Senator Leland Yee. A full account of the event can be read at <http://missionlocal.org/2010/01/haitian-communities-plea-for-help/>
Photo Credit: Joe Sciarillo

At the February 18 Comprehensive Immigration Reform gathering at Mission Dolores Basilica, Ifonia Gelin spoke, linking the struggle of Haitian immigrants with the larger movement for immigrant rights. She reflected on the event, "I thank everyone in this diverse movement for their solidarity with Haiti and the Haitian community. We are truly grateful for bringing us in to this fight for immigration reform!" While solidarity and resilience are the human forces behind rebuilding Haiti, the immigrant rights movement has drawn inspiration from Haitians to continue fighting for communities and families.

The San Francisco City ID



Ms. Day with the FCC staff after being the first San Franciscan to receive the San Francisco City ID. Photo Credit: Filipino Community Center

It's a relief to have a San Francisco city ID and I'm also glad to know that I was the first one to get it.

Prior to getting my City ID, I was in a process of adjusting my immigration status and knowing that there is no guarantee for getting this, I need to have identification.

Filipino Community Center helped me get my San Francisco city ID and since then it helped me a lot and I feel relieved. Having an identification has provided me a sense of security, safety and confidence. I feel confident to apply for jobs, to travel around

without the fear of being apprehended and having access to government and private agencies and its services, as well as facilities, libraries, museums and parks at discounted rates.

I strongly encourage everyone regardless of their immigration status, to get their San Francisco city ID so they can experience and benefit from the things that it offers. Having an identification and security nowadays are really important.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Filipino Community Center and the San Francisco Immigrant Legal and Education Network for their work and support. I also encourage the San Francisco community to contact these organizations if they need assistance in getting their city ID.

Mabuhay!

Building Immigrant Power through School Partnerships

Due to the economic hardships that our communities are facing, 2009 was a year of struggles and difficulties for many people. As a result, delivering know-your-rights information and reaching out to the community to do community education became a constant challenge for organizations like People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights (PODER). Therefore, it was time for PODER to strategize and develop new and different approaches to continue our effort to inform, educate and connect our communities to services that the San Francisco Immigrant Legal and Education

Network (SFILEN) offers. PODER's 2009 strategy translated into building positive partnerships with high schools in the neighborhood. By doing so, we not only informed the community, but we built solid and stable partnerships that allowed us to develop links, and deepen community trust among students, parents, and school personnel.

For example, this past year, PODER worked closely with Mission High School, John O'Connell High School, and the International Studies Academy (ISA). The level of participation from each high school varied based on the school capacity, interest, and demographics. The key school events that brought us together were the AB-540 (Dream Act) week of awareness and school assemblies for all students. PODER was able to deliver presentations about the AB-540 legislation, know-your-rights information, SFILEN services, and PODER in general.

Beyond the presentations, PODER established a strong collaboration with Mission High to do informational sessions about topics such as Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CIR) with a group of parents who are members of English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC). In addition to holding educational sessions for parents, PODER has constantly maintained our participation at Mission High School and John O'Connell in particular, developing our partnerships through collaboration in students-led projects such as supporting the student advisory boards, clubs and associations.

In the next couple of months, PODER and Mission High School will be collaborating and launching a letter writing and petition mini-campaign to support both comprehensive immigration reform efforts which include the Dream Act and the state Dream Act—SB 160 bill proposed by Senator Gilbert Cedillo. By supporting and advocating for both CIR and SB 160 legislation, we hope to maintain our partnership in raising awareness in our communities while at the same time empowering youth and parents from the different high schools to demand and stand up for their rights.

Counting Our Communities

For the immigrant communities that we serve, the Census is a crucial resource and opportunity. Being counted in the Census means our communities can define how much federal funding their neighborhoods receive, define the number of seats their district gets in the House of Representatives, and impact future city planning efforts. We can influence how much funding our schools receive, the quality of our public transportation services and, have the ability to affect federal laws. Unfortunately, our immigrant communities face many obstacles when accessing this vital resource, such as language access and trust in the federal government.

With the support of the City, member organizations of the San Francisco Immigrant Legal and Education Network are conducting culturally and linguistically competent door-to-door canvassing, as well as delivering Census literature to individuals in the hard-to-count Census tracts located in Bayview/Hunters Point, Chinatown, Excelsior, Mission, South of Market, Tenderloin, Western Addition, and Visitacion Valley. By having deeply-rooted organizations that community members trust and know, we anticipate the community will be more willing to participate. Network organizations are also collaborating to organize workshops to inform the community about the importance of the 2010 Census. In addition to explaining the importance of the Census and informing participants on how to be counted, our goal is to have the community more active in civic engagement. Ultimately, SFILEN members in partnership with the City, will work to ensure the hard-to-reach communities will be counted.

Immigration reform

As seen through these vignettes the San Francisco Immigrant Legal and Education Network helps folks navigate the complex and often frustrating United States immigration system everyday as we work with community members struggling to build a life in this country for themselves and their families. These families are denied recognition as full and equal members of society. The issues impacting our community locally are happening across the country which is why we need national changes to our immigration system to help our immigrant communities thrive and contribute to the American mosaic. We need national immigration reform that upholds the core American values of democracy, opportunity, and fairness to move our nation forward together.

The San Francisco Immigrant Legal and Education Network held a community Townhall in December of 2009 to open a venue for our community's voices to rise in the nationwide struggle for reform. Along with moving testimonies, SFILEN also proposed our Platform for the Rights of New Americans which includes:

- Creating meaningful opportunities for undocumented immigrants to legalize.
- Creating a workable, realistic framework for future immigration to the United States that includes reuniting families and addresses future workers.
- Ending workplace discrimination and expanding protections for immigrant workers.
- Adopting humane enforcement policies and judicial standards that uphold basic due process.
- Establishing rational border protections.



December 2009 Townhall on Immigration Reform
Photo Credit: Dolores Street Community Services

(For a copy of the unabridged version of this platform, please contact 415-282-6209x15).

The San Francisco Immigrant Legal and Education Network remains committed to providing quality legal assistance and community education around immigrant issues, and we are also dedicated to working towards long term solutions for our communities.

Legal Organizations

AAN / African Advocacy Network
c/o 938 Valencia Street
San Francisco, CA 94110
415.503.1032

AROC / Arab Resource & Organizing Center
522 Valencia Street
San Francisco, CA 94110
www.araborganizing.org
415.861.7444

ALC / Asian Law Caucus
55 Columbus Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94111
www.asianlawcaucus.org
415.896.1701

APILO / Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach
1121 Mission Street
San Francisco, CA 94103
www.apilegaloutreach.org
415.567.6255

CARECEN / Central American Resource Center
3101 Mission Street
San Francisco, CA 94110
www.carecensf.org
415.642.4400

LRCL / La Raza Centro Legal
474 Valencia Street, Suite 295
San Francisco, CA 94110
www.lrcl.org
415.575.3500

LRCRC / La Raza Community Resource Center
474 Valencia Street, Suite 100
San Francisco, CA 94110
www.larazacr.org
415.863.0764

Outreach Organizations

CAA / Chinese for Affirmative Action
17 Walter U. Lum Place
San Francisco, CA 94108
www.caasf.org
415.274.6760

DSCS / Dolores Street Community Services
938 Valencia Street
San Francisco, CA 94110
www.dscs.org
415.282.6209

FCC / Filipino Community Center
4681 Mission Street
San Francisco, CA 94112
www.filipinocc.org
415.333.6267

MUA / Mujeres Unidas y Activas
3543 18th Street, Suite 23
San Francisco, CA 94110
www.mujeresunidas.net
415.621.8140

PODER / People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights
474 Valencia Street, Suite 125
San Francisco, CA 94110
www.podersf.org
415.431.4210

CJJC / Causa Justa Just Cause
474 Valencia Street, Suite 156
San Francisco, CA 94110
www.cjjc.org
415.487.9302



San Francisco Immigrant
Legal & Education Network
938 Valencia Street
San Francisco, CA 94110
P: (415) 282.6209 ext.15
F: (415) 282.2826
sfimmigrantnetwork.org