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Immigrant Women and Children Project

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FAST FACTS

In the past three years:

30 firms and corporations
recruited and trained
by IWC

140 pro bono attorneys
accepted IWC cases

600+ applications filed
for immigration relief

THE CITY BAR JUSTICE CENTER increases access to justice by leveraging the resources of the New York City legal community. Drawing upon our relationship with the New York City Bar, the Justice Center provides legal assistance to those in need; mobilizes lawyers, law firms, corporate legal departments, and other legal institutions to provide pro bono legal services; educates the public on legal issues; fosters strategic relationships; and advocates for changes in public policy.

The Immigrant Women and Children Project (IWC)

IWC partners with volunteer attorneys to assist immigrant survivors of domestic violence, human trafficking, and violent crimes in their immigration matters. The Project also provides direct legal representation on complex or difficult cases. IWC accepts cases from the public and from community-based and domestic violence organizations, law enforcement, and prosecutors' offices. IWC clients are global, including from China, the Dominican Republic, Trinidad, Mexico, Jamaica, Great Britain, Colombia, Brazil, India, Nigeria, Russia, and many other countries.

As a leading legal expert in human trafficking, IWC trains attorneys, law enforcement, and social and medical service providers on human trafficking, domestic violence, and other violence-related issues affecting immigrants, as well as on legal remedies. Because trafficked persons are vulnerable and are often unfamiliar with the legal system in the United States, they are often unaware that what is being done to them is a crime and a human rights violation. Persons who are trafficked are isolated and invisible, and they are generally afraid of the authorities. IWC staff has worked with the Department of State on training abroad on these topics, and the Project works with government officials and other advocates to impact laws and policies relating to immigrant crime victims. IWC is a founding member of several city, state, and national coalitions of service providers.

IWC was founded in 1996 in response to the enactment of the federal Violence Against Women Act ("VAWA"). For its first six years, IWC assisted abused spouses in obtaining immigration status under VAWA. After passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act ("TVPA") of 2000, IWC expanded its mission, and since 2002 has represented immigrant survivors of violent crimes, including sexual assault, domestic violence, human trafficking, and child abuse.

Our Clients

IWC's clients are immigrants from the New York City area who are victims of domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual assault, child abuse, and other violent crimes. New York City has long been a destination for immigrants, with 36% of the city's population foreign-born.

Immigrants are highly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, and violence against immigrants often occurs in their own homes. The power and control dynamic of domestic violence is exacerbated when an individual's immigration status is tied to that of a lawful permanent resident or U.S. citizen spouse, or when he or she is afraid to report the abuse for fear of deportation. According to the Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence, young, foreign-born women are more likely than any other group of women to be killed by their abusers. IWC helps immigrant victims of domestic violence file self-petitions under the Violence Against Women Act, so they can escape their abusers and obtain permanent residency without having to depend upon an abusive spouse.

Many victims of human trafficking are immigrants. Trafficking in persons takes many forms—from an abused domestic servant brought to the U.S. on a visa by a diplomat, to multiple victims smuggled into the country and forced into commercial sex acts by a ring of traffickers. IWC helps these immigrant trafficking victims obtain T Visas and/or "Continued Presence" temporary immigration status, which allows them to remain in the U.S. and assist law enforcement with any investigation of the crimes committed against them. In addition to the T Visa, Congress also created the U Visa to encourage the immigrant community to actively cooperate with law enforcement. U Visas provide immigration status to victims of serious crimes who are helpful in the investigation and/or prosecution of that crime. IWC assists immigrant victims who have actively cooperated with law enforcement in obtaining U Visas based on crimes such as domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault, kidnapping, felonious assault, and others.

Mexico

Valeria came to the U.S. expecting to live with her husband. Instead, he forced her into prostitution by physically and emotionally abusing her and by preventing her from seeing her son. Valeria escaped when the house she lived in was raided, and assisted in the prosecution of her trafficker. IWC helped get T visas and, later, green cards for Valeria and her son.

Dominican Republic

Wanda was violently assaulted, her hair pulled, dragged to the ground, and hit multiple times by her partner. Finally she threw Wanda out of the apartment and locked herself inside with Wanda's nine-month old citizen baby. After Wanda pressed charges against her assailant, IWC pro bono attorneys helped her get a U visa and she now has permanent residency.

Guyana

Hannah was sexually abused as a child by a neighbor. Hannah and her parents assisted with the prosecution of the abuser, and IWC helped Hannah and her family obtain U visas. They are now eligible for permanent residency.

Argentina

Carolina met her U.S. citizen husband while working in NYC. After they married, he became physically and verbally abusive, threatening to divorce her and take away their daughter. IWC helped her obtain a green card so she could remain with her daughter in the U.S.

Germany

Rosa met her husband in Italy, and he became violent toward her soon after. He would hit her and sexually assault her routinely, and threatened to harm their son. After Rosa escaped, IWC volunteers helped her file a VAWA Self-Petition. She and her son are now permanent residents.

Sierra Leone

Madeleine came to the U.S. as a child to live with her aunt. Her aunt was physically and verbally abusive and beat Madeleine with a belt and a hanger. Madeleine was removed and sent to the foster care system and eventually became homeless. IWC helped the adult Madeleine obtain a U visa and get back on her feet.

Romania

Dmitri met his wife in the U.S., and at first they were deeply in love. However, she soon became physically and verbally abusive, scratching and biting him and threatening to have him deported. After Dmitri separated from her, IWC helped him file a VAWA self-petition. He recently became a permanent resident.

China

Wei was trafficked into the U.S. at the age of fifteen and forced to work thirteen hours a day in restaurants to pay off the large debt her parents owed her traffickers. She was not allowed to go to school, and the traffickers threatened to hurt her if she didn't earn money. After Wei escaped, IWC helped her get a T visa and then a green card.

India

Vinita was trafficked as a domestic worker by a diplomat family who confined her to the home. In the U.S., she worked 18 or more hours per day without a single day off, for a pittance. She was shouted at, shoved, slapped, and routinely raped by her male employer. After Vinita escaped, IWC helped her get a T visa and then a green card. She is suing her traffickers for back wages and damages.

Japan

Makiko was attacked, beaten, and left tied up in a closet while her belongings were stolen by an unknown attacker. Makiko reported the crime to police and IWC assisted her with obtaining a U visa. She recently became a permanent resident.

PARTNER LAW FIRMS AND CORPORATIONS 2009-PRESENT:

American Express Bank
Baker & McKenzie
Blank Rome LLP
Chadbourne & Parke LLP
Chase Manhattan Bank
Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP
Debevoise & Plimpton LLP
Dechert LLP
Duane Morris LLP
Fragomen, Del Rey, Bernsen and Loewy, LLP
Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP
Greenberg Traurig, LLP*
Hunton & Williams LLP
Jackson Lewis LLP
Kirkland & Ellis LLP
Klasko, Rulon, Stock & Seltzer, LLP
Latham & Watkins LLP
Mayer Brown LLP
McDermott Will & Emery
Metlife
Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy LLP
O'Melveny & Myers, LLP
Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP
Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP
Pfizer Legal Alliance
Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP
UBS
Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP
White & Case LLP
Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP

*Sponsor of Equal Justice Works Fellow at the City Bar Justice Center

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Lessons Learned from IWC's Years of Advocacy

OBTAINING LEGAL STATUS IS LIFE CHANGING

Working to obtain legal immigration status opens up a world of possibilities for clients: freedom from violence and abuse, reunification with children, employment authorization, a Social Security number, a chance to complete an education and a more stable and secure life in the United States. Said one Justice Center client, "Horrible things happened to me and my children. But the support of the police and the legal system meant that I had the strength to make sure that V. won't bother us again. And it gave me the opportunity to begin a new and better life."

WORK IN TEAMS TO PROVIDE THE BEST CLIENT EXPERIENCE

We encourage volunteers to work in teams of two attorneys. Support staff and interpreters also play a role. Cases may involve court appearances, deadlines, or complex issues. Teamwork ensures the client will have continuity throughout the representation. Clients are the experts on their own experience and should work as part of the team. IWC staff mentors the team and is available for any questions or guidance.

WORK IN COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Working in partnership with other service providers and law enforcement increases referrals, capacity of service, and ensures a more positive experience and outcome for clients. IWC is a founding member of the New York

Anti-Trafficking Network, which was founded in 2002 and is the oldest and largest Network of service providers in the New York City area. IWC is a member of the Freedom Network, a national anti-trafficking coalition of service providers, and sits on various state and local human trafficking task forces. These task forces are multi-agency and involve NGOs and law enforcement agencies that are working together to identify more trafficking cases and provide a holistic approach to working with victims.

IF THE LAW DOESN'T WORK, CHANGE IT

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act was passed in 2000. After a few years of providing direct service to victims who can benefit under the law, gaps were identified. One area was the lack of understanding of trafficking on the state and local level. IWC took a leading role in drafting and passage of the New York State Anti-Trafficking Law and in helping law enforcement implement it, as well as the federal law, through policy advising.

SHARE EXPERIENCE WITH LOCAL, NATIONAL, AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

IWC staff meets often with delegations arranged by the U.S. State Department consisting of law enforcement, NGOs, and other officials working on trafficking, domestic violence, and other women's issues. These delegations visit the U.S. from around the world, including from Taiwan, Taipei, Bulgaria, Bangladesh, Nepal, and other countries.

Suzanne Tomatore Director, Immigrant Women and Children Project

As Director of the Immigrant Women and Children Project, Suzanne Tomatore has trained community-based organizations, health-care providers, law enforcement and government officials, including international delegates from the U.S. Department of State International Visitors Program, on human trafficking. She has lectured on this topic across the United States and abroad, including Europe, Canada, Venezuela, Mongolia and the Philippines. Ms. Tomatore is also the co-chair of the Freedom Network, a coalition of more than 25 non-governmental organizations that provide services to, and advocate for the rights of, trafficking survivors in the United States. She also sits on the steering committee of the New York Anti-trafficking Network. In addition to her trafficking work, she has also taught immigration law at the City University of New York Graduate Center School of Professional Studies.

