

Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement VOLUNTEER NEWSLETTER

January 2018

Legal Clinic Highlights of 2017

- 25** Participants received naturalization application assistance
- 14** Fee waiver applications completed
- 13** Clients attended biometrics appointments
- 1** Client scheduled for citizenship interview
- 45** Registered volunteers

Volunteer In 2018

*Upcoming
Naturalization
Clinics*

Saturday
February 10

Saturday
March 17

**Save the
date!**

Naturalization Clinics Help Community Members Begin Path to Citizenship

In 2017, Riis Settlement hosted a series of legal clinics in which trained volunteers and staff members assisted immigrant community members to complete immigration applications.

In 2017, Riis Settlement's Immigrant Services program saw an increase in demand for legal services and information from the immigrant population in response to the fast changing political climate. With support of our funder FPWA, our team comprised of Immigration attorney Paula Forero, paralegal Sophie Simon, and Director of Immigrant Services Driftner Martinez devised a project plan centered on providing free legal consultations and conducting

an extensive series of Know Your Rights workshops and legal clinics to increase access to vital legal resources throughout Western Queens.

Three naturalization legal clinics were scheduled to take place. The first one on Saturday, August 12th, was held at Riis Settlement's main site in Queensbridge. We served ten clients who received citizenship application assistance; four of which completed fee waiver applications. Our mix of experienced and first-time volunteers provided assistance with registration and completing immigration forms. Early Saturday morning, clients arrived and were greeted by volunteers, who reviewed the required documents and provided clients

with a list of questions to study for the civics exam. Clients then moved on to application assistance stations, where volunteers went over questions on the application forms in their native language. At the final station, the immigration attorney reviewed the completed applications, answered legal questions, and provided information on the next steps in the process.

After the September 5th announcement by the Trump administration rescinding the DACA program—a program that gave nearly 800,000 young immigrants work authorization and protection from deportation—the legal services team worked rapidly to reach out to the community.

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Volunteer Spotlight: Genevieve Kessler

Describe a bit about yourself and your background.

For the last year, I have worked with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) as a Field Advocacy Officer. I focus on supporting our offices across the United States to build relationships with their elected officials at the local, state, and federal level. These relationships are vitally important to not just sustaining our programs for refugees and immigrants, but ensuring that our communities are welcoming of them. This was an exciting transition for me after almost a

decade working for Members of Congress.

What motivates you to volunteer?

I enjoy my current role and the ability to drive a message and advocacy strategy for an organization like the IRC, but the one thing I missed dearly about public service was the direct engagement with constituents. As a result, I began seeking out volunteer opportunities that would allow me to provide one-on-one assistance to people.

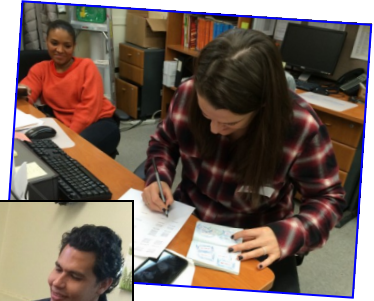


Genevieve volunteered with Riis Settlement at two naturalization clinics, welcoming participants and reviewing their documents before they advanced to application assistance stations.

What did you enjoy most

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Volunteers, we couldn't do it without you!



"I believe that the people who come to this country make a great sacrifice in their life so that their children and grandchildren can have more. It was certainly the case for me. That is why I also believe their voices in the political process are vitally important and citizenship should be an immediate and accessible goal."

Volunteer Spotlight: Genevieve Kessler

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about volunteering at the citizenship clinics?

I found it incredibly satisfying to welcome people into the clinic and help them organize the final documents for their citizenship application. I have been to so many citizenship ceremonies during my time working for Congress and always found them inspiring. It was wonderful to know that I could be a part of that process for a few people.

Do you have past experience working with immigrants or vulnerable populations?

In my career, I have always worked with immigrant communities: providing direct services or supporting immigrant and refugee programming. While working for Congress, I directed the immigrant casework services in those districts helping thousands of people reunite with families and achieve citizenship. In my last position as the Deputy Director for Congressman Sean Maloney (NY-18) I successfully advocated

with USCIS to open a satellite district office in the Hudson Valley, saving constituents significant time and money as they no longer needed to make a 2 hour drive to NYC for each appointment.

What special skills or experience do you bring as a volunteer, if any? What skills or experience do you look to gain, if any?

I am incredibly aware of how daunting the citizenship process can be, but also how momentous! This is a significant moment for applicants and it is important for me to make sure they do not become overwhelmed by the process. What I gained was the opportunity to practice Spanish (my second language) in a practical and professional setting. One of the most exciting aspects of learning a second language is using it to help people.

Anything else you'd like to share

Decades ago my grandmother came here from Cuba – after Fidel Castro took over, she lost contact with her

family for years and never had a chance to see them before she passed away. A few years ago I made my first trip to Havana to meet the family. While sitting at my great aunt's kitchen table, I was hit with the very obvious realization of just how different my life could have been if my grandmother did not make the choice to come to the United States. I believe that the people who come to this country make a great sacrifice in their life so that their children and grandchildren can have more. It was certainly the case for me. That is why I also believe their voices in the political process are vitally important and citizenship should be an immediate and accessible goal. Their life should not just be about sacrifice, but about power to vote and shape the future that they want for their children. Voting matters and that is why supporting their path to citizenship is so important to me.

The Citizenship Process

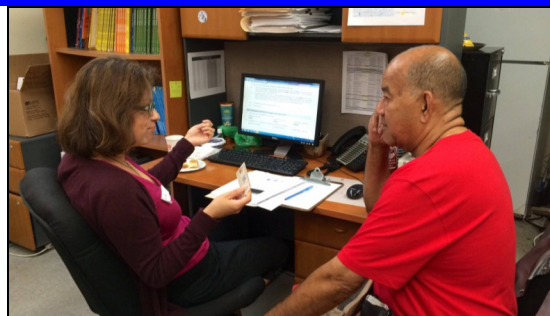
Application assistance events help our participants begin the process of becoming U.S. citizens. Completing the Form N-400 Application for Naturalization is merely the first step. After the application is filed, we continue to help participants navigate the citizenship process, which can typically take as long as nine months.

1. Submit N-400 Application for Naturalization

2. Attend fingerprinting appointment

3. Attend citizenship interview (English and civics exam)

4. Attend oath ceremony and become a naturalized U.S. citizen!



Immigration attorney Paula Forero explains the citizenship process to clients during their initial consultation. After submitting the application, clients are notified of all immigration appointment dates and meet with the immigration attorney to prepare for their citizenship interview.



(Above) Volunteers at DACA renewal assistance event, held on September 30th. The event provided application assistance to DACA recipients before the October 5th filing deadline.

Riis Settlement immediately responded by providing up-to-date information and legal assistance. Immigration attorney Paula Forero created a one-page letter and infographic with key updates for DACA holders that was distributed to 25 clients who had filed their DACA applications at Riis Settlement. They were notified that DACA holders with work permits expiring before March 5th, 2018 must apply to

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renew their status by October 5th, 2017 — a fast approaching deadline.

On September 30th, Riis hosted two simultaneous application assistance events to complete DACA renewals and naturalization applications. In collaboration with the *Western Queens Immigrant Coalition*, Riis Settlement helped organize a successful DACA event in which 26 volunteers were recruited and trained in less than two weeks. At the naturalization event, staff and volunteers completed six citizenship applications, a green card renewal, and six fee waiver applications.

On November 4th, Riis

Settlement hosted the final naturalization clinic of 2017. At the event, seven permanent residents came in to complete their citizenship applications and four completed fee waivers. One of the volunteers was program director Driftnery Martinez, who volunteered at her final event at Riis Settlement before beginning her new position with the Mayor's Office for Immigrant Affairs.

For early 2018, Riis Settlement will continue to serve the immigrant community by providing free legal consultations, Know Your Rights workshops, and legal clinics, with two naturalization clinics planned for February and March 2018.

Learn more about Riis Settlement

Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement (Riis Settlement) offers comprehensive services to youth, adults, seniors, immigrants and families. Our mission is to build and strengthen underserved communities in western Queens and act as a catalyst for change. The resources, opportunities and support we provide serve as a catalyst for change for community members to reach their greatest potential and achieve social and economic self-sufficiency.

Riis Settlement's Immigrant Services program was established in 2001 to support the needs of the growing immigrant population in western Queens by providing beginner to advanced English classes for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL); citizenship instruction; individual case management; immigration legal services, and civic engagement opportunities. Since its inception, the program has grown exponentially — the ESOL program alone having served over 450 immi-



grants in 2016-2017.

For more information about Riis Settlement, go to www.riissettlement.org

(Above) ESOL students, instructors, and staff celebrate the end of the Fall 2017 session.