

CLINIC Newsletter, November 2004

CLINIC Member Agencies Report on Citizenship Day Activities

The June issue of the CLINIC newsletter included an article about Citizenship Day, which fell on September 17. Citizenship Day was established in 1952 to celebrate the privileges, rights, and responsibilities of U.S. citizenship and to honor both native-born and naturalized citizens. The article urged member agencies to use the opportunity of Citizenship Day to launch and sustain citizenship and civic-related activities, such as citizenship workshops, voter registration at naturalization oath ceremonies, community outreach on the benefits of citizenship, and Congressional advocacy on pro-immigrant legislation. The article also asked for member agencies to contact CLINIC with examples and stories of activities they had undertaken in honor of Citizenship Day. We received the following examples from the field.

Catholic Charities of Omaha, NE

Catholic Charities of Omaha hosted a naturalization oath ceremony on September 28 in honor of Citizenship Day. Needing a space large enough to hold 111 applicants from 33 countries, Catholic Charities asked a local Catholic high school to lend its facilities. The school was happy to do so, viewing the event as a citizenship lesson for the students. The school's American government class came and watched the ceremony, and the school choir sang. The mayor was a guest speaker, as well as Scot Adams, Catholic Charities' executive director. Shelley Schrader, the immigration program director, was the master of ceremonies. Catholic Charities' service league provided a reception afterwards with cupcakes placed in the shape of a U.S. flag. Several TV stations covered the event, and it was featured on the evening news and in the Omaha World Herald. Catholic Charities has already been asked by CIS to host this event again next year, and hopes to make it even bigger. Shelley Schrader notes that the CLINIC newsletter article inspired her to plan this event, and states, "It was a lot of hard work, but very moving and fun."

Catholic Charities of Santa Rosa, CA

Catholic Charities of Santa Rosa held an evening event on Citizenship Day featuring a citizenship application workshop and a voter registration booth. To publicize the event, the agency arranged for PSAs on Spanish radio stations, sent a press release to the local newspaper, made an announcement at a meeting of Latino service providers, and posted flyers in the reception area. The workshop was held in the conference room. With two staff and three volunteers, Catholic Charities assisted about 20 immigrants to complete the N-400. Volunteers in another room staffed the voter registration booth, where they decided to call past naturalization clients helped by Catholic Charities to remind and encourage them to register to vote. Staff also made a brief presentation on the history of Citizenship Day. The atmosphere was festive, with patriotic decorations and a big cake that said, "Vote!" Two dozen roses were donated to give to newly registered voters as an incentive, and leftover roses were given to the appreciative citizenship applicants. Project assistant Mary Lowe says that the agency plans to do a Citizenship Day event again next year and notes, "Special events motivate people to act – it brought new clients to our office and generated excitement and awareness for voting."

Catholic Charities of Austin, TX

Catholic Charities of Austin joined with two other organizations to sponsor a citizenship intake

workshop on September 11 that was attended by 70 people. Many private attorneys and other volunteers participated. Attendees had a chance to speak with attorneys and were screened for naturalization eligibility. Those eligible were invited to come back for a naturalization group processing workshop on October 9. Not all 70 individuals were eligible for naturalization, so only about half of them were assisted with their N-400 applications at the workshop. Immigrants who participated in the workshop also had a chance to practice the citizenship interview with volunteers. According to Catholic Charities' immigration program director Leo Anchondo, these events were a very rewarding endeavor that brought many agencies and individuals together and showed the efforts of immigrants to respond to such opportunities. He states that the sponsors are committed to organizing similar citizenship events in the future.

Catholic Charities Hogar Hispano of Falls Church, VA

Hogar Hispano sponsored a citizenship workshop on September 11 that was attended by 58 people. About 26 of the attendees also registered for citizenship classes. The agency's naturalization coordinator, Esmael Hussein, is currently teaching four citizenship classes. Class locations include a senior center, Somali community center, and Afghan community center. In describing his outreach efforts, Mr. Hussein notes that in preparation for each workshop, he distributes 4,000 flyers at 120 sites throughout the local area such as mosques, churches, and ethnic businesses. He recommends dropping off flyers on Thursdays and Fridays to reach most people who go out on the weekends. Mr. Hussein reports that he has already completed a schedule of citizenship workshops for 2005, with eight workshops planned.

For more information on citizenship programming ideas, contact Laura Burdick at 202-635-5820 or lburdick@cliniclegal.org.