



WHY REPRESENTATION MATTERS: STORIES ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE RECOGNITION AND ACCREDITATION PROGRAM

Recognition and Accreditation, or R&A, is a program administered by the Department of Justice, or DOJ, that creates the opportunity for immigrants to access qualified legal advocates, no matter how much money they have in their pockets. Accredited representatives are non-attorneys who have received training in immigration law and have been approved by DOJ to provide legal services. Accredited representatives must be affiliated with a nonprofit organization that has been “recognized” by DOJ as an organization serving low-income clients. The DOJ implemented a [new rule](#) on Aug. 26, 2019, that threatens the continuation of this vital program. The stories below highlight why R&A matters and why it should be protected.

For resources on this subject visit: [cliniclegal.org/defending-access-justice-and-due-process-challenging-justice-departments-new-interim-rule](https://www.cliniclegal.org/defending-access-justice-and-due-process-challenging-justice-departments-new-interim-rule).

Sadia

Sadia came to the United States as a refugee in 2012. At the time, forced to flee for safety, she was unable to bring her two boys with her. Once Sadia was resettled, she immediately began working with an accredited representative at Catholic Community Services of Utah to petition for her children to join her in her new country.

Today, Sadia and her children are nearing the end of their five-year separation. The case is in its final stages and she is just waiting for their flights to be booked. Without her accredited representative, Sadia said that being able to see her children again “would not have been possible [...] my children would not have been approved. It would be devastating.”

If Sadia had the opportunity to speak to members of the administration in charge of the R&A program, she would want them to know that the legal assistance she received at Catholic Community Services of Utah is “an important part of the refugee process.” She said, “There are so many other people in my situation and these are vital services that people like me who cannot afford to go to a private attorney need...these services must not be disrupted.” Sadia added that in addition to petitioning for her children, her accredited representative helped her with her permanent residency and then citizenship.

Sadia is thankful that she is safe now, but she is waiting for her children. She wants everything for them in their new country, in particular, the education they have missed while seeking safety. She thinks about the upcoming moment at the airport when she will see them again. Without hesitation, Sadia said, “That will be the happiest moment of my life.”

For more resources visit us at [cliniclegal.org](https://www.cliniclegal.org)

Luis

Luis first became an accredited representative seven years ago while working as an immigration advocate in Oregon. He explained, "I wanted to become an accredited representative because I saw an opportunity to help my community in a deeper way. I didn't have the means to go to law school and the accreditation route gave me the opportunity to practice law when I otherwise wouldn't have." As a new accredited representative, Luis was able to help young people across Oregon obtain Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, changing their lives and creating new opportunities for them.

Over the years, as an accredited representative, Luis has helped thousands of people. He said, "Recognition and Accreditation has been around for over 50 years. Its intent is to serve low-income, indigent individuals. [...] If we were to see R&A disappear, we would be taking away the little due process and access to counsel that the most vulnerable individuals have available to them." One story stands out in his mind: "A few years ago, I met a woman at a detention center who had suffered a miscarriage while detained. Because of my accreditation, I was able to gain access to the detention center to work closely with her to support her not only in the legal matter, but also as an advocate, raising up her story. Ultimately, I was able to help get her released from detention."

Luis continued, "It is stories like these of people who would not have been able to pay for a private attorney that continues to solidify my belief that R&A is meeting the needs of individuals who are invisible to most of us." He adds that R&A also creates access for people who are immigrants themselves and have gone through processes firsthand to become legal advocates for others. "That kind of representation matters," he said.

Jaqueline

Jaqueline met Sister Janet, who would later be her accredited representative, at her church in 2007 when she was assisting her cousin with a green card. Jaqueline had graduated high school a few years earlier, but because she was undocumented, her life was at a standstill. After learning about the legal services that Sister Janet was providing members of her community, Jaqueline approached her and offered to volunteer as an interpreter.

She recalled that Sister Janet wanted to know everything about her. When she learned about Jacqueline's current situation, Sister Janet asked if she was interested in going to college. Jaqueline remembers telling Sister Janet that she would love to but there was no way she could afford it. Sister Janet told her about a scholarship program to a private college and encouraged her to apply.

"I took the application home and it sat on my kitchen counter for three months," Jaqueline recalled. "I told myself, there was no way I would get it. But my mom pushed me and Sister Janet kept calling me." Finally, Jacqueline applied and won the scholarship. She went to school to study nursing and graduated in 2011.

After graduation, Jaqueline could not work due to her immigration status, so she volunteered. About a year later, in 2012, the DACA announcement came. Sister Janet called her immediately and told her to come in. They began the application right away and Jaqueline was one of the very first people in South Dakota to receive DACA. Shortly after, she landed her "dream job" working as a nurse.

However, not long after beginning her new job, Jaqueline began experiencing medical problems. As soon as her health insurance kicked in, she went to the doctor who diagnosed her with congestive heart failure at age 27. "I learned that I had a congenital heart defect that I had no idea about," Jaqueline said. "Without DACA, I wouldn't have been able to afford insurance or have the surgery that saved my life. As a nurse, I have seen firsthand people being turned away because they do not have health insurance or a social security number [...] People do not know the security a little piece of paper gives you. Without DACA there is no way I would be alive."

Jaqueline said it is hard to put in to words what her accredited representative did for her. "The Sister was a Godsend. Having expert legal advice on crucial issues makes all the difference...she was on top of everything, always calling me and telling me what to expect. It made me feel safe." Jaqueline knows what happens when people do not have access to a legal advocate. "You see people get duped, people tell them they can fill out forms for them and steal their money and give them false hope. People need experts [for their immigration cases]."

The legal assistance that Sister Janet provided Jaqueline has had a ripple effect. Through DACA and her job, Jacqueline was able to pay for her brother's college education. "I tell him, you have to pay it forward. We have to work together to make the world a better place."

Rosario

Rosario became an accredited representative nearly 30 years ago in response to the “great need” she witnessed in her community. Over the years, Rosario has provided assistance to thousands upon thousands of immigrants in Texas. “I have been doing this for a long time,” she said, laughing, “I help asylees, refugees, with family petitions, lawful permanent residency, TPS. I work with clients who have survived crimes and domestic violence. We assist them all.” In addition to helping the people who come to her office, Rosario provides legal assistance at homeless shelters in Dallas. “I had a client from Cuba who is at a shelter right now and he lost his Social Security card,” Rosario said, sharing a recent story. “When you apply for a work permit, you can ask for a social security number, so I helped him with that. He was 70 or 75 [years old] and was so scared. When he was able to get his social security number, he was so happy he hugged me! It was empowering for him. It was the key document he needed.”

One of the key services Rosario provides as an accredited representative at Catholic Charities Dallas is helping people become citizens. Every Friday, she and her colleagues serve between 25 and 30 people in naturalization workshops. “When you become a U.S. citizen, you don’t have to worry anymore,” said Rosario. “You no longer have to renew your documents ... It’s so important. The very first thing people want to do is vote. Vote for the person you want to represent you.” She added, “If I go to church, the grocery store, I see people who say, you helped me 15 or 20 years ago! I do not always remember, but I say, ‘Thank you so much. Are you a citizen?’ I always ask!”

Rosario says that R&A allows Catholic Charities and other programs across the United States to run efficiently and reach the most people. She explained, “The other area that we work on in our office is helping people who are in removal proceedings. That is what the attorneys do. They are packed with cases. So all of the other people we serve [at Catholic Charities Dallas] are through accredited representatives.” Without R&A there is no way her program could continue to help the same amount of people. “If attorneys had to sign everything, we would have to see less people. We would have to drop our numbers.”

In addition to emphasizing the programmatic benefits of R&A, if Rosario had the opportunity to speak to decision makers, she would also want them to know that being an accredited representative is a calling. “It’s a beautiful job,” she said. “That’s why I’m still here. Assisting people is the most beautiful job.”

Charlotte

“I thank Catholic Charities for everything, for a new life in America,” said Charlotte, a refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and former client of Catholic Charities Indianapolis. She described the experience of working with her accredited representative, Timothy, as like helping her to see. “Coming from another country, it was like being blind,” Charlotte remarked. Her accredited representative got her through every step of the process. “He helped us in everything, we never missed an appointment. He helped me get my green card and even get a job [...] if I am here [alive] today with my family; it is because of their [Catholic Charities’] help.”

When asked what she thinks would’ve happened without the assistance she received through the Recognition and Accreditation program at Catholic Charities Indianapolis, Charlotte said, “Oh my God. I think we would be very bad, we would lose hope and be sent back to where we came from. I did not know where to go or where to start. I’m very thankful [...] I have safety in America.”

Charlotte said that her accredited representative “allowed us to get our dream.” Her kids are now in school studying and “we are able to help ourselves.” She added, “I will never forget them [Catholic Charities] in my life. I am prospering now.”