
BRIDGE TO WELLNESS

ADDRESSING LEGAL ISSUES AND BARRIERS FACED BY IMMIGRANT SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



Welcoming the World to Philadelphia since 1921

OVW DISCLAIMER

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WHO WE ARE

Mission

Nationalities Service Center (NSC) prepares and empowers immigrants and refugees in the Philadelphia region to transcend challenging circumstances by providing comprehensive client-centered services to build a solid foundation for a self-sustaining and dignified future.

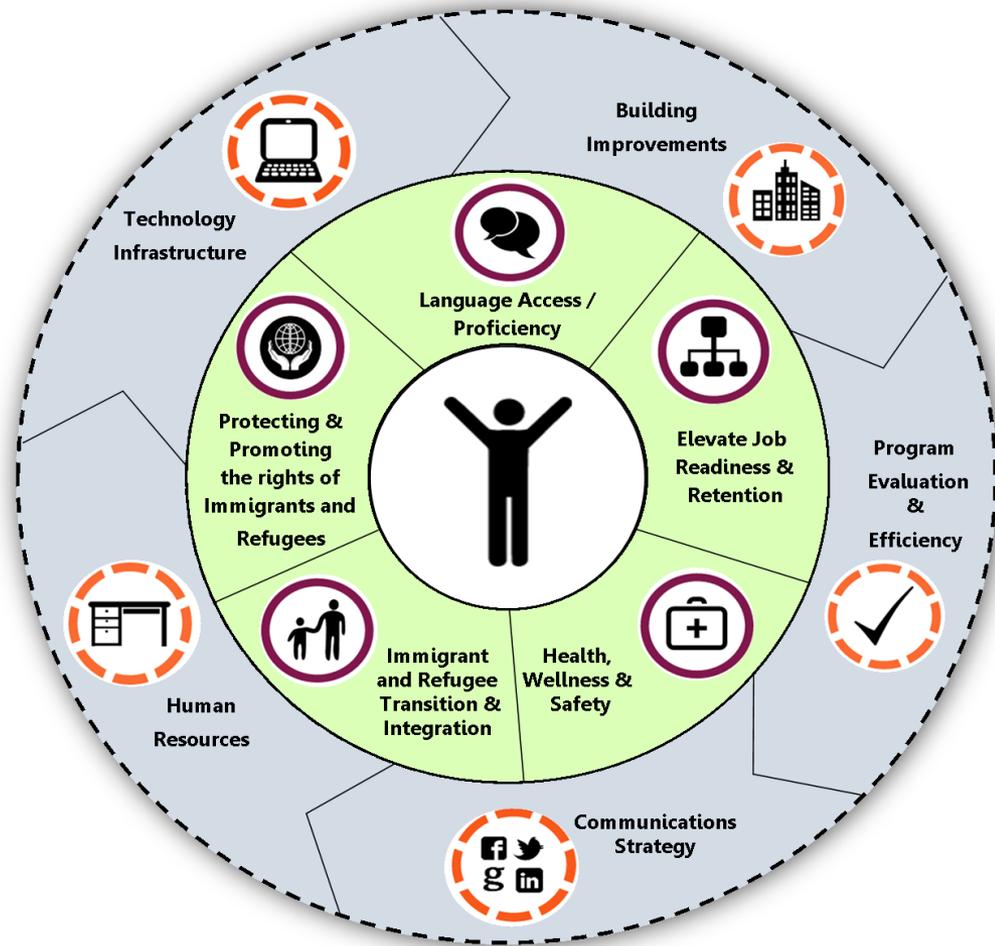
History

- Started in 1921 to assist immigrant women with language proficiency and gaining citizenship.
- Today provide services to over 5,000 refugees and immigrants from over 100 countries annually.

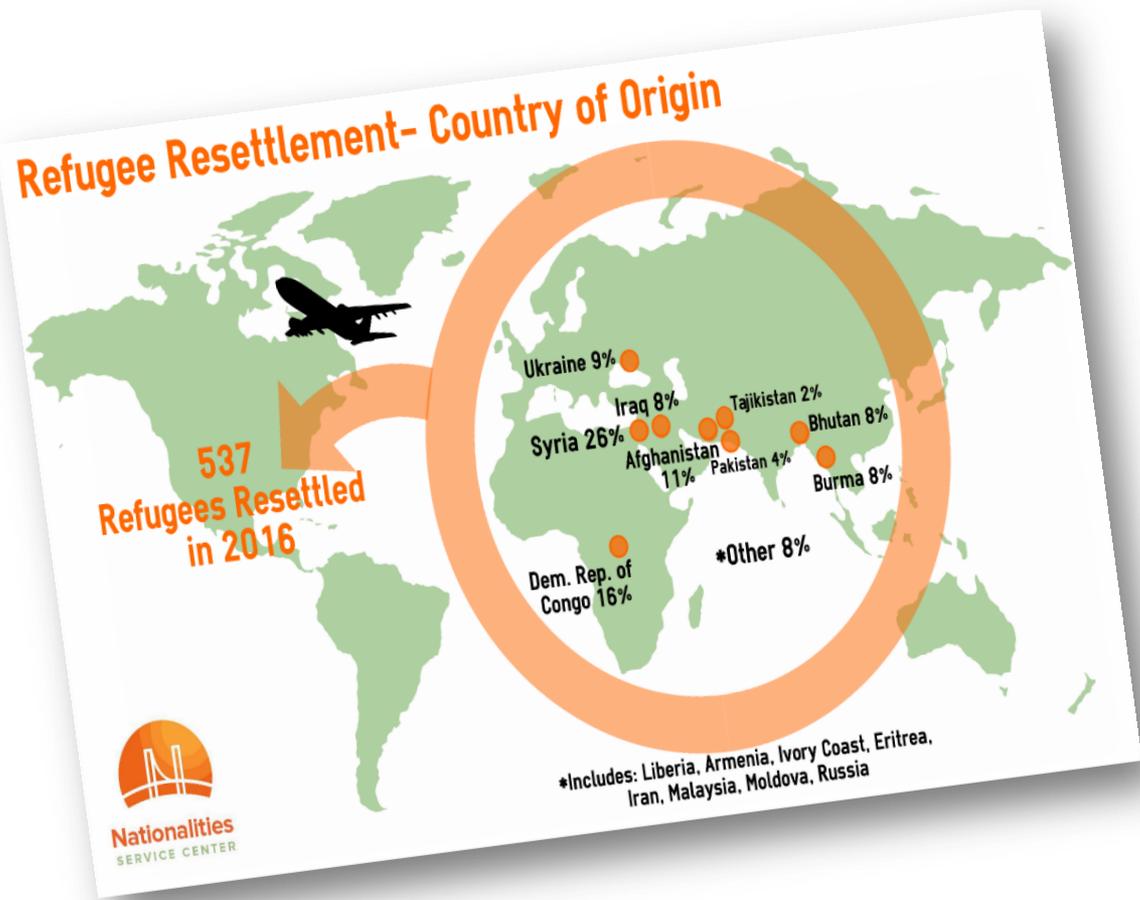


WHAT WE DO

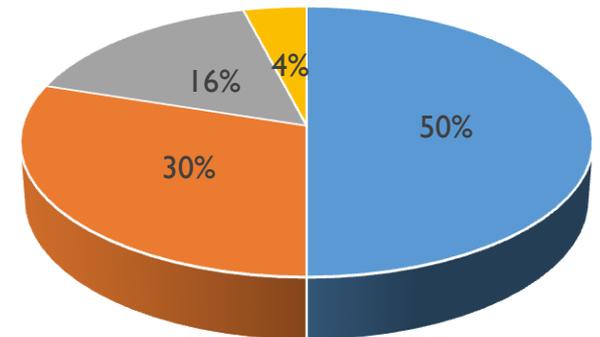
- Refugee Resettlement
- Employment Services
- Community Integration
- Health, Wellness & Safety
- Language Access
- Legal Assistance



WHO WE SERVE



In 2016, NSC provided legal services to **944 primary clients** from **94 countries**



- Latin America & The Caribbean
- Africa
- Asia
- Europe



BETWEEN WORLDS

<https://www.law.upenn.edu/institutes/documentaries/studentvideos/>

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

You have moved to another country to be with your partner. You do not know the language and you arrived on a visitor's visa, which has now expired. You are experiencing domestic violence and need help.

What are the barriers that you need to overcome in order to get help?

How do you get help?

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

You have a client who is an immigrant and her two children in your office. She is a survivor of domestic violence and unable to go back to her home because her abuser has threatened to kill her. She only has her passport and the children's birth certificates and social security cards with her.

What kind of barriers would you encounter while trying to provide services to this client?

What kind of services can you find for this client and her children?

BARRIERS IMMIGRANT SURVIVORS FACE

- *Fear of deportation*
- *Language barriers*
- *Cultural or religious beliefs*
- *Isolation/Lack of family support*
- *Financial dependency/Lack of employment authorization card*
- *Fear of losing their children/Lack of knowledge about their rights and the legal system*

HISTORY OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES AT NSC

- ❖ Since 2005 NSC's Domestic Violence Project has provided free legal immigration services to immigrant survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault in Philadelphia and surrounding counties.
- ❖ Integration of risk assessment, safety planning and referrals to service providers during our intakes/consultations. This helped clients overcome the systemic barriers that impeded their ability to access resources to escape abuse, to have safety and to become financially independent.

HISTORY OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES AT NSC: CONTINUED

- ❖ Collaboration with mainstream DV service providers outside Philadelphia (e.g. circuit rides, cross training, cross referrals, direct services on-site).
- ❖ On-site legal and case management services for clients which is a unique way to provide comprehensive services by allowing staff to communicate more effectively about the needs of our clients and to offer cultural and linguistic specific services.

WHAT IS BRIDGE TO WELLNESS?

Bridge to Wellness (BTW) is a collaboration between programs at NSC that utilizes both a legal representative and a case manager to provide comprehensive domestic violence services. This collaboration enhances our ability to provide access to VAWA immigration benefits, and other services that clients need in order to escape violence.

- The legal representative's expertise and time are used efficiently (e.g. interviewing immigrant victims, drafting the initial version of the victim's affidavit, tracking down and gathering evidence that the victim will need for her immigration case).
- The case manager provides safety planning, referrals to other service providers, and emotional support (e.g. shelter, family attorneys, access to medical care, counseling, ESL classes and others).

WHO WE SERVE

Primarily Latina survivors
of domestic violence,
sexual assault, and
stalking



WHAT SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE?

Legal Services

- Intake/Assessment
- Free legal immigration services for clients:
 - Seeking relief under VAWA (Self Petition, U-visa, Asylum and others).
 - Clients in Removal Proceedings.
 - Training and technical assistant to pro bono attorneys, law enforcement agencies and other domestic violence service providers.

Therapeutic Case Management

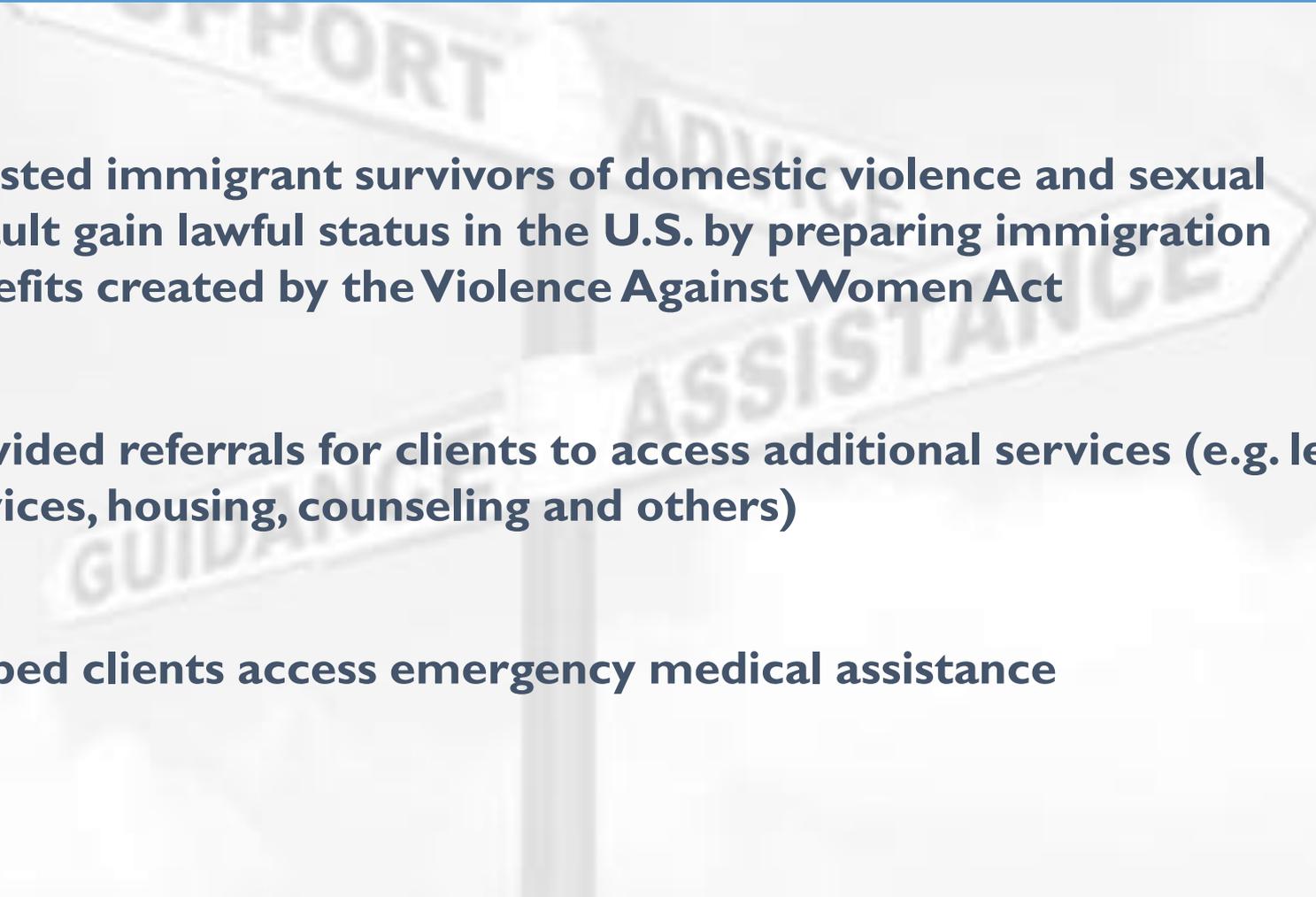
- Comprehensive assessment
- Service and safety planning
- Access to NSC services
 - ESL, Wellness Programs, Donations
- Therapeutic art groups and outings
- General support for survivors and their families

WHY THIS PROJECT IS EFFECTIVE

- BTW Recognizes the importance of providing culturally and linguistically appropriate holistic services to clients, including: legal services, case management, family centered and group programming, risk assessment, safety planning and referrals to health experts and legal experts in other areas such as housing, public benefits, and family law.
- Comprehensive services are key in order to obtain employment authorization, lawful status, access to medical care, and referrals to other appropriate services which clients often need to be able to become independent.



BRIDGE TO WELLNESS SUCCESSES

- 
- **Assisted immigrant survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault gain lawful status in the U.S. by preparing immigration benefits created by the Violence Against Women Act**
 - **Provided referrals for clients to access additional services (e.g. legal services, housing, counseling and others)**
 - **Helped clients access emergency medical assistance**

BRIDGE TO WELLNESS SUCCESSES: CONTINUED

- **Advocated for clients' rights to services**
- **Connected clients with appropriate school and health services for their children**
- **Assisted clients with enrolling in community ESL classes**
- **Supported clients in receiving the necessary health and mental health services they need**

CLIENT STORY

- Maria* is from Honduras. She was 15 years old when she was forced to move in with her oldest sister and brother-in-law, Hector*. He later raped her and forced her to be in a relationship with him. Maria had Hector's child at 16.
- She and her sister were often beaten. He also threatened to kill them if they tried to escape. One day, Maria tried to leave the house with her new born baby. Hector shot her in the leg before she could reach the door.
- Eventually, the abuser forced Maria, her sister and their children to move to the U.S. where he continued to abuse them.

**Names have been changed*

CLIENT STORY

- At the end of 2015, Maria was placed in removal proceedings and came to NSC seeking help with her immigration issues. NSC's legal team prepared a U-visa petition for her which is currently pending approval with immigration officials.
- This will eventually allow her to obtain an employment authorization card, state I.D. and social security number which will allow her to legally work in the U.S. to support her and her child. Maria was also referred to our Bridge to Wellness program.
- An NSC case manager was able to provide safety planning and to connect her with other domestic violence service agencies that helped her file a police report and a protection from abuse order against her abuser. Our case manager also advocated on behalf of Maria to get her access to medical care after she complained about pain in her leg where she was shot. In August of 2016, Maria received surgery to remove the bullet from her leg which was causing her continuous pain. Our case manager continues to work with Maria and has been helping her and her son access ESL classes and head start education services.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Areas to build:

- Expand collaboration with other departments and populations served by NSC.
- Provide culturally specific therapeutic/trauma informed services.
- Expand capacity to surrounding counties where there is limited to no access to pro bono immigration legal services and case management (e.g. circuit rides to provide direct legal services on-site).



SUSTAINABILITY

- **Funding Stability:** Making long term plans based on a stable funding environment.
 - **Strategic Planning:** The process that defines program direction, goals and strategies.
 - **Organizational Capacity:** The resources needed to effectively manage the program and its activities.
 - **Partnerships:** Connection between program and community.
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SUSTAINABILITY

- Program Adaptation: The ability to adapt and improve in order to ensure effectiveness.
- Communications: Dissemination of program outcomes and activities to decision-makers and the public.
- Political Support: Internal and external environment which influences program funding, initiatives and acceptance.
- Program Evaluation: Monitoring the process and outcome of program activities

QUESTIONS?

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