

## FIRN CLIENT STORIES

### **Immigration Counseling and Legal Assistance**

**Lea's Story.** "Lea" was first referred to FIRN in 2005 for guidance with how to stay in the U.S. to continue her education. FIRN's immigration counselor identified her options and successfully found a way for her to return to the US with a student visa. Upon finishing school, she expected to receive the Optional Practical Training (OPT) visa, which lasts a year. Unfortunately, her school filed her documents improperly with USCIS and her OPT was denied. She contacted the school's Designated Officer for international students and was advised to get a lawyer because there was nothing they could do. When she contacted USCIS for help, she was told to leave the country immediately. Instead, she returned to FIRN for advice and assistance. At the time, Lea was not working, so FIRN's affordable rates allowed her to fight for her case instead of returning to her native country. After reviewing her case and explaining the options available to her, FIRN's part-time attorney filed a motion to reopen her case for the Optional Practical Training. After an enormous amount of work on her case, it was approved by the USCIS. When the OPT was due to expire, Lea again turned to FIRN's immigration staff, who successfully petitioned for a change of status to the H1B, which was approved, placing her well on her way toward a career in international business.

**Building a New Family.** "Maria" is from Mexico. Recently married, Maria wanted to change her children's last names to honor her husband's (unofficial) "adoption" of them. FIRN helped her file the appropriate court files. Needing the fathers' consent, FIRN tried various methods of contacting them. When this didn't work, FIRN helped Maria file an order for alternate service and the names were officially changed. Then, FIRN helped her apply for new birth certificates and social security cards with the children's new names. As English is her second language, FIRN also helps her fill out school forms.

**Generations of Immigration Help.** Fleeing the turmoil in Bosnia in the 1990s, the "M" family arrived to the United States in March of 1999 as refugees. "Sam", his wife and two daughters were resettled through FIRN's refugee resettlement program, and by that summer, both girls were A and B students in a local high school. Sam applied for his work permit in late March, and was hired by a local company as a master carpenter, sent to a computer-aided design class in another state, and then promoted to supervisor. His wife, "Mary", worked full-time at Target and was promoted from stock clerk to ladies sales clerk. Things were going well until the family tried to file with Immigration (then known as the INS). The medical office that completed their Vaccination Supplement form signed them improperly and failed to seal the envelope. After the family finally was able to procure the forms with proper signature and seal, the Nebraska INS office denied two of the applications and lost two of the forms. FIRN sent copies of the forms and prepared an appeal, which reopened the cases and led to the whole family receiving permanent resident status. Five years later, the entire family was eligible to apply for citizenship and they are now naturalized citizens. Sam's employer has since died, leaving his company to Sam. Sam's daughters are both marrying Europeans, and FIRN is helping

them to file their immigration forms – continuing our long-standing involvement in the life of this family.

**Dispelling Alicia’s Fear.** FIRN helped “Alicia” file to renew her immigration status known as Temporary Protected Status (TPS). A few days after her FIRN immigration counseling session, she called to discuss her application and voiced her fear of rejection because in 2005, she had received a work permit (a copy of which is required for part of the TPS application process) with her name misspelled as “Alita”. FIRN assured her that, because her 2006 card was correct, she should have no issues with her application. Later, when Alicia picked up the application FIRN had prepared for her, she lamented to one of FIRN’s immigration counselors: “Immigration [Services], you know, they are very particular,” she said in Spanish, and elaborated on her fear that her application would be denied. Instead of Alicia filling her TPS forms out alone, with limited English skills, FIRN provided her with a reliable service and comforting care that led to her TPS. Although FIRN provides many concrete, tangible services, sometimes what is most remarkable is the reassuring support we offer through our very personal interactions.

## **Immigration and Adult LEAP**

**A Bangladeshi Family’s Ordeal.** When “Pam” began coming to FIRN, she had already acquired her green card and then her U.S. citizenship through her marriage. She petitioned for her parents in Bangladesh, who then petitioned for their five other children (Pam’s siblings) in 1997. FIRN helped guide the family through a series of long delays and government errors that lasted nearly a decade. It included filing for a V-visa under the LIFE Act of 2000 in an attempt to reunite the family while the children’s’ petition for permanent residency was pending. Meanwhile, Pam’s marriage had soured as she became a victim of domestic violence, and FIRN helped her through the process of separation and divorce from 2002 to 2003. When Pam’s father “Ali” was diagnosed with terminal cancer in 2003, FIRN helped the family request an expedited processing for their applications for humanitarian reasons but encountered long delays that were not resolved until after the children reached 21 years of age. By immigration standards, they were no longer considered “immediate relatives”, so their V-visa applications were denied and Ali died in March of 2004 without being able to see his children. Although Pam accompanied her father’s body back to Bangladesh and reported her father’s death to US Embassy, they continued to treat the deceased as the petitioner. In February 2005, FIRN helped to file a new set of petitions for permanent residency through Pam’s mother and sent a duplicate after the original was lost by the immigration service. Finally, she was granted her late husband’s priority date, and the children started arriving in 2006 and 2007. The children are now all working and have benefited from FIRN English tutoring through the Adult LEAP program. One of Pam’s younger brothers attributes his success in obtaining a driver’s license in large part to the help he received from his Adult LEAP tutor in learning the driver’s license test materials. FIRN’s I&R Counselor has also helped the family apply for energy assistance and resolve medical billing errors.