

ABLE IMMIGRATION ADVOCACY PROJECT REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY



Advocates for Basic
Legal Equality, Inc.



The Immigration Advocacy Project at Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc. (ABLE) provides quality legal services and legal information to immigrants and refugees in the Miami Valley. We also provide critical information to community partners who serve these same communities. ABLE's advocacy focuses on keeping families together, protecting victims of crime, and building a stronger community.

Our local work is made possible by the commitment of our funders, including the Consulate of Mexico in Indianapolis, Dayton Police Department, Justice for Migrant Women, NEO Philanthropy Four Freedoms Fund, NEO Philanthropy Anti-Trafficking Fund, Ohio Access to Justice Foundation, Ohio State Bar Foundation, The Supreme Court of Ohio Civil Justice Program Fund, Vera Institute of Justice, Welcome Dayton, and many supportive individuals.

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We are living in times of tremendous suffering for immigrants, refugees, and many vulnerable populations. Hateful rhetoric and cruel policies have harmed so many of our neighbors, friends, colleagues, and classmates. Children all over the country, including in Ohio, have been ripped from the arms of their parents and separated from their families for months or even years. We know that children experience many problems when their parents are taken away, including depression, anxiety, acting out, sleeplessness, and poor school performance. The pain inflicted on immigrants and refugees will be long lasting.

There is a significant unmet need for representation and immigration advocacy for low-income immigrants. There are an estimated 46,000 foreign-born individuals living in the Miami Valley, and there are now more than 14,000 removal cases pending before the Cleveland Immigration Court, which has jurisdiction over all of Ohio. In January 2017, there were only 6,000 such cases. A recent study found that only 37% of all immigrants and 14% of detained immigrants have counsel. There is a critical need to improve access to trustworthy and affordable legal services for thousands of Ohio's immigrants.

Despite these challenges and struggles, when resources permit, we are able to secure justice for our client communities. We work to keep families together and keep people safe. We believe that family unity and stability are basic human rights, and that no one should suffer from domestic violence, persecution, torture, or human trafficking. Our clients come from around the world, from various racial and religious backgrounds, young and old, and everyone in between. Our advocacy has resulted in families being reunited after years of separation, students continuing their education, helping turn victims into survivors, and a chance for everyone to feel part of the Miami Valley community.

Through community presentations and legal clinics, we educated people in the Miami Valley on immigration laws, addressed and clarified speculation about changes to policy and law, and responded quickly and effectively to many immigration emergencies. Each presentation addressed audience questions and was followed by one-on-one individual consultations. Participants also received a copy of ABLE's "Preparing Your Family for Immigration Enforcement: Know Your Rights." This handbook includes details on individuals' Constitutional rights, a Limited Power of Attorney for childcare needs, and a family emergency planning guide - all aimed at empowering families to make critical decisions for themselves in advance, rather than waiting for an emergency and then making those decisions under extremely stressful circumstances. With grants from The Supreme Court of Ohio Civil Justice Program Fund and the Ohio State Bar Foundation, the handbook is now available in six languages: English, Spanish, Arabic, Swahili, Somali, and Mandarin. It will soon be available in Kinyarwanda and French.

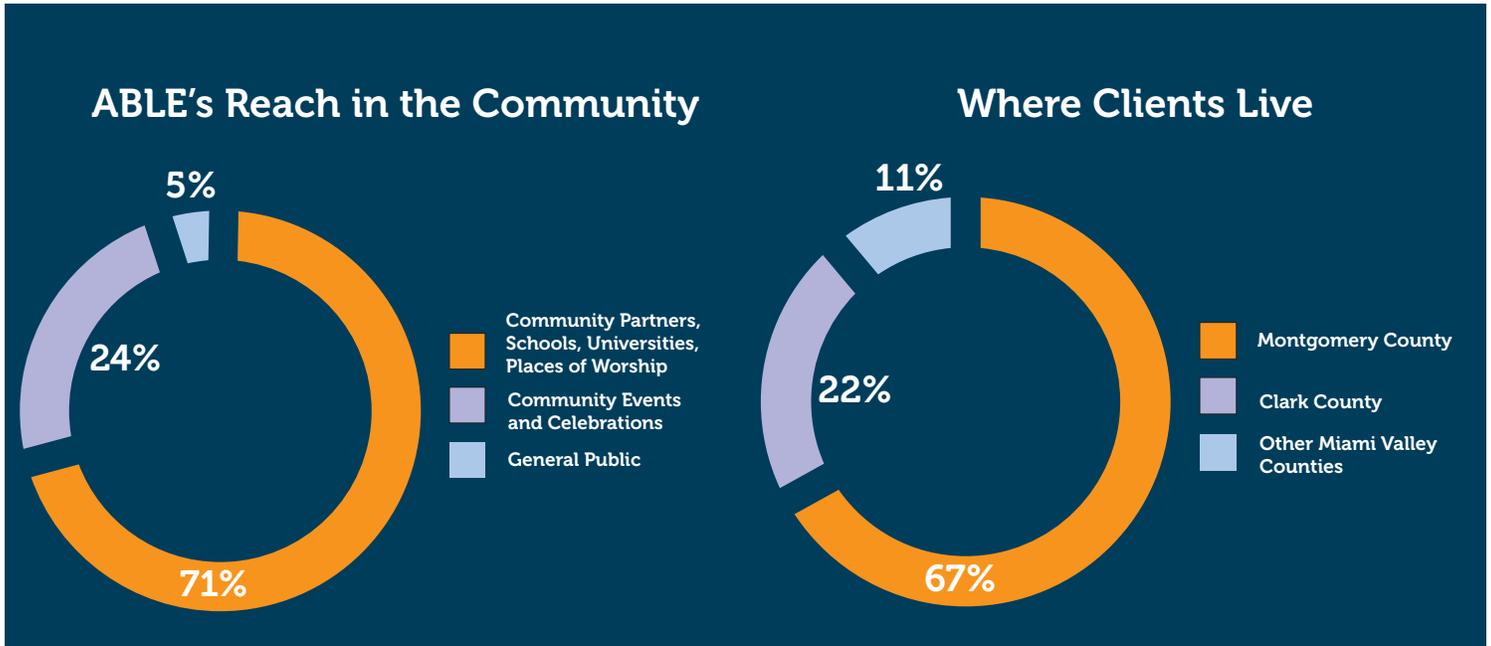
Working together with Welcome Dayton, ABLE has conducted asylum, DACA renewal, refugee adjustment of status, legal screening, and citizenship workshops and clinics, and provides leadership on the Welcome Dayton Committee, and the Government and Justice Subcommittee.

Immigrant clients and their families are part of the fabric of our community. Legal representation increases the chance for due process and fairness for clients facing a system that is often unbalanced and unjust. Although representation cannot entirely repair the significant harms inflicted by these systems, it plays a key role in reducing these harms and delivering due process.

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How ABLÉ's Immigration Advocacy Project makes a difference:

In 2019, ABLÉ reached more than **1,500** people directly through **44** community outreach presentations and many news articles through various media outlets. Hundreds were provided with brief counsel and advice following outreach and presentations, and through referrals from community partners. Thousands more were reached with written and online materials.



Results of Screening and Investigation:

Because of ABLÉ's immigration questionnaire and in-depth screening, the majority of individuals screened were eligible for some immigration benefits and retained ABLÉ to represent them in that application for relief.

CASES ACCEPTED FOR FULL REPRESENTATION

86% (92)

CASES ACCEPTED FOR COUNSEL & ADVICE ONLY

14% (15)

SPECIFIC CASE TYPE IN THE MIAMI VALLEY

U Visa / VAWA	32
Family Reunification (includes Refugee Adjustment of Status)	37
DACA Renewal	11
Immigrant Children	16
Asylum	3
Other	8



For all of **Angela's** life, she has been a devoted mother and wife. She spent countless hours volunteering at her children's school and involved in many parent activities, and in public, her marriage seemed perfect. But Angela's idyllic family had a secret: her husband would physically and emotionally abuse her.

Angela grew up in Mexico, but she has been living in Dayton for more than 15 years. One day, after 25 years of marriage, Angela found the courage to take one last brave stand against her husband and told him that she would no longer tolerate his abuse. She wanted a divorce. Immediately, in retaliation, her husband called immigration authorities and reported her. Nine days later, an immigration agent arrested her after she dropped off her sons at school. She was

taken to an immigration detention facility and was processed for "expedited removal" given her immigration history. Angela could no longer keep her secret because she was in the fight of her life. She did not want to be separated from her sons.

After four months of advocacy, which included repeated phone calls, emails, jail visits, legal briefings, and court appearances, ABLÉ advocates were able to temporarily stop Angela's deportation and free her from detention. She has been reunited with her children and is now in the process of applying for permanent residency status to remain in the United States. ABLÉ also connected Angela to resources to obtain a protection order and start the divorce process. With ABLÉ's legal assistance and support, Angela is laying the groundwork for survival and independence from abuse.



ABLÉ outreach workers met **Bryan** and **William** while visiting a migrant farmworker camp. Bryan and William told outreach workers that they had come to this farm from their home country on H-2A agricultural worker visas for the past three years, but this year, things were different. The growers told the workers they had to double their output, forcing them to work at unsafe speeds that caused workers to get injured and sick. They forced the workers to toil in hot fields recently sprayed with pesticides in the morning, and then to work in the freezer without proper protective gear in the afternoon. The workers were not paid the rate they were promised or for all the hours they worked. The growers told Bryan and William that if they said anything or tried to escape, they would be deported and would never be allowed to work in the United States again.

ABLÉ outreach workers helped Bryan and William connect with ABLÉ and LAWO attorneys, who screened and identified Bryan and William as victims of human trafficking. ABLÉ attorneys represented Bryan and William as they reported their trafficking victimization to law enforcement and in an application for T Nonimmigrant Status or "T Visa," which allows victims of a severe form of trafficking in persons who have been helpful to law enforcement to obtain permission to live and work in the United States. In 2019, Bryan and William's T Visa applications were approved. Bryan and Williams now have permission to live and work in the United States and are on a path to U.S. citizenship.



Esther was referred to ABLÉ by a community partner after she was a victim of years of domestic violence by her ex-partner and father of her children. After one particularly bad incident that resulted in permanent injury to Esther's knee and leg, Esther reported the crime to the police and her ex-partner was arrested. Esther repeatedly met with the prosecutor's office and testified in front of a grand jury. Her ex-partner was ultimately convicted of domestic violence.

ABLÉ attorneys screened Esther and determined she was eligible for U Nonimmigrant Status or a "U Visa," a form of immigration relief available for certain crime victims who suffered substantial physical or emotional abuse and cooperated with law enforcement in the detection, investigation,

or prosecution of the crime. ABLÉ attorneys assisted Esther with her U Visa application before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). In 2019, USCIS approved Esther's U Visa application. Esther now has authorization to live and work in the United States. She is enrolling in nursing classes so that she can get a better job to support her three U.S. citizen daughters.