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Special Citizenship Issue

Welcoming New Americans: Challenges and Opportunities for the U.S. Office of Citizenship by Alfonso Aguilar

America is facing one of the largest migration waves in its history. Immigrants are coming to our country in record numbers seeking a better future for themselves and their families. In terms of mere numbers, in no other time in our history have we received so many immigrants. Although the current numbers are still proportionally lower than the numbers of immigrants that came to the country at the turn of the last century, this recent wave of immigrants includes people from throughout the world.

The importance of integrating these newcomers into the civic life of our nation was recognized by the Bush Administration and Congress and resulted in a provision in the Homeland Security Act of 2002 to establish a new Office of Citizenship within the Department of Homeland Security. The strategic plan for the new Department states: "We will place renewed emphasis on a national effort to cultivate an awareness and understanding of American civic values and to underwrite commitment to United States citizenship." With immigration reform again becoming a hot-button national issue, the Bush Administration will ensure that civic integration

and citizenship-related programming will remain high-priority items: to quote the President, "In the process of immigration reform, we must also set high expectations for what new citizens should know... Every citizen of America has an obligation to learn the values that make us one nation: liberty and civic responsibility, equality under God, and tolerance for others."

Recognizing the importance of integrating immigrants is not a new idea. During the "great wave" of immigration at the turn of the 20th century, the United States implemented a formal and well-coordinated immigrant "Americanization" program, as the policy was then called, seeking to promote civic literacy and English language acquisition. Classes and seminars were organized and educational pamphlets were published as part of a federal government-led campaign that involved business and civic groups.

Although our current efforts may use different terminology and focus on a more diverse array of immigrants than the Americanization program did, the basic idea remains the same: our national tradition is to welcome immigrants who want to make the United

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States their home and join us in honoring Constitutional principles. Despite differences in ethnic, religious, and linguistic background, all Americans are bound together by a set of enduring civic principles as relevant today as the day our Constitution was signed: freedom and opportunity, equality before the law, respect and tolerance for difference, and the primacy of individual citizens and their rights to govern the nation. We strive to enact these ideals in our laws and demonstrate them in our everyday life. "Civic Integration" is the term that we use to sum up this crucial activity.

Today, as our nation is averaging nearly 1 million new lawful permanent residents (LPRs) and more than 500,000 new citizens annually, the successful integration of immigrants is more important than ever. To accomplish this, the Office of Citizenship is developing programs targeted at immigrants at two critical points on their journey towards citizenship: when they first become permanent residents and when they become ready and eligible to begin the formal naturalization process.

The Office of Citizenship recognizes the importance of reaching out to new arrivals immediately to help them adapt to American civic culture. To accomplish this, the Office's major first year initiative was the creation of an immigrant orientation guide. This product, called "Welcome to the United States: A Guide for New Immigrants," aims to provide newcomers with the information needed to successfully integrate into their communities. The guide was developed to fill the need for a single product that combines the entire range of vital information meant to assist immigrants. The practical information contained in the guide ranges from how to borrow money from a bank or obtain a driver's license to what rights and responsibilities one has on becoming a citizen. It also contains civics information to help immigrants become familiar with our nation's history and founding principles. In this way, the guide serves the purposes of both civic integration and providing pragmatic tips on overcoming day-to-day challenges. In order to reach the widest possible range of immigrants, the guide will be made available in ten languages and at a 4th grade English reading level.

The second group of immigrants the Office will target are those who are eligible and ready to apply for citizenship. Choosing to become a citizen is a very personal decision. The responsibility of the government is to provide as much information to eligible candidates as it can about citizenship rights and responsibilities so

they can make an informed and responsible decision. We will develop materials to assist those who choose to become citizens prepare for the naturalization exam, but our efforts will go beyond the naturalization exam and will try to promote a deeper understanding of U.S. history and civics.

During our second full year of operation, the Office of Citizenship will make new connections with immigrant communities nationwide and work to disseminate its various materials. Through outreach to other federal agencies, to state governments, and—via our Community Liaison Officers—to immigrants and the communities that receive them, the Office will strive to expand its networks.

As our nation continues to face a wave of newcomers, the work of integration will never be completely done. New challenges, political and societal, will arise. The advantage that America has over many other immigrant destinations, however, is that our political system is not based on defined cultural identities, but on civic principles and ideals. To keep this advantage, our nation must ensure that immigrants understand and identify with the constitutional principles that define the term "American." The integration into our mainstream of those who choose to live and work here remains the best way to preserve one common American civic identity.

Alfonso Aguilar is Chief of the Office of Citizenship at USCIS.



Immigration and Refugee Services of America (IRSA) is pleased to announce that as of December 2004, our new name will be the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI).

Naturalization and Citizenship in the Southeast Asian Community

By Porthira Chhim

We at Cambodian Community Development, Inc. (CCDI) are pleased to be partnering with the U.S. Committee on Refugees and Immigrants to implement its Citizenship Americorps initiative. Through this effort, we are focusing on empowering Southeast Asian refugees to naturalize and become full-fledged United States citizens.

The legacy of the refugee experience creates some of the most challenging barriers for Southeast Asians from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam to achieving U.S. citizenship. According to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), less than half of our eligible community have become U.S. citizens.

The presence of Southeast Asians in the United States has mainly occurred in the last 30 years and, thus, we are among the most recent emerging immigrant communities. The arrival of Southeast Asians to this country began in 1975, when communist forces defeated American-supported governments in the nations that had made up what was once known as French Indochina. By 1980, the United States created the Office of Refugee Resettlement and began to grant refugee admission to Cambodians, Laotians, and Vietnamese in unprecedented numbers. Most Southeast Asian Americans are themselves refugees or children of refugees. Southeast Asians and their descendants, who now number nearly two million, constitute the largest group of refugees ever to build new lives in the U.S. Southeast Asian American communities continue to experience especially rapid growth. According to the Census, one out of every seven Asian Americans is of Southeast Asian descent.

Suffering through war, violence, mass starvation, the persecution of re-education camps and genocide, Southeast Asian American refugees have high rates of illness, mental health problems, and trauma related challenges which often go unrecognized by government officials and policy makers. Learning English is a barrier to naturalization for many Southeast Asians, who, by and large, arrived with little formal education. The Khmer Rouge genocide targeted the educated and professional classes of Cambodian citizenry. The Mien community, who are an ethnic minority from Laos, are at an additional disadvantage when faced with learning English, because they have no written language themselves. As a result, according to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, South-

east Asian refugees, upon arrival, have among the lowest education levels of all refugee communities, averaging just 3 years of schooling. Refugees from Latin America average 11 years of schooling; refugees from Africa have 7.5 years before arrival in America.

This language barrier has made it difficult for many first-generation Southeast Asian immigrants to become full-fledged citizens. Because their parents have not naturalized, the 1.5-generation of Southeast Asians (young people who arrived as infants or small children but have largely grown up in the United States) remain un-naturalized. This has made them particularly vulnerable to changes in U.S. policies directed at "aliens" or non-citizens that limit benefits and resources and impose the penalty of deportation.

Resettled and compelled to build new lives for themselves and their families, many Southeast Asians continue to struggle with the day-to-day requirements for survival, and lack the disposition to become involved with the work of government. As refugees who have suffered persecution, many continue to harbor apprehension and distrust of the government and remain largely uninformed of their civic responsibilities.

The expense of applying to naturalize is an additional barrier for low income communities. Many Southeast Asians are unable to afford the total \$390.00 cost. According to the 2000 Census, while 12.4 percent of the overall U.S. population lives in poverty, approximately 30 percent of the Southeast Asian community lives below the federal poverty line. The average per capita income of Cambodians and Laotians is approximately \$11,000 per year.

CCDI brought into its staff three talented Southeast Asian Americorp Members to serve Cambodian, Mien, and Vietnamese citizenship and naturalization efforts. Vannaro Tep, who provides outreach to the Cambodian community, worked in Kosovo as part of the United Nation's Volunteer Mission supporting humanitarian efforts on behalf of ethnic Albanians, Serbians, and other refugees. Vannaro writes:

"The Cambodian genocide under the Khmer Rouge regime, completely wiped out one third of the country's population between 1975 to 1979. They attempted to create a socialist state and eliminated all opposition, systematically killing the religious, educated, and professional classes. Further, tens of thousands died through mass starvation. Families were broken apart while individuals were turned against

each other through re-education efforts and propaganda campaigns. Due to the persecution we suffered, many members of our community continue to be afraid of any kind of political involvement and shy away from any civic activity. We are just learning that we can make a difference by being involved. As an AmeriCorp member, I am pleased to be able to help my community better understand the law and how the government works here in the United States."

Fiah Ro works to provide services to the Vietnamese Community. She arrived from Vietnam to the United States in December of 2001 and speaks three languages: Vietnamese, Cambodian, and English. She is Cham, a Southeast Asian Muslim minority, and has lived most of her life in Angiang, South Vietnam where her family was resettled as refugees from Cambodia. She writes:

"Most people in the United States know about Vietnam because of the War. Over a million Vietnamese came to the United States as refugees after the War. Although many have been able to raise healthy families, get a good education, start businesses, and gain success, there are also many who continue to struggle. Being a refugee and growing up in South Vietnam, I understand very well the cost of freedom. I'm very glad to be a part of the AmeriCorp program and support community members to take advantage of all the privileges and freedoms that the United States has to offer."

Souseng Saechao, is working both at CCDI and with Lao Iu Mien Cultural Association (LIMCA) to serve the Mien community. Souseng has worked with at-risk Southeast Asian youth as a prevention specialist. He worked with youth and parent groups at high schools and middle schools to encourage healthy choices to prevent and reduce substance abuse, violence, and to enhance healthy family communication. Souseng writes:

"The Mien are a tribal people and an ethnic minority from Laos. We are an ancient people but we have no written language; we follow an oral tradition with history passed down through storytelling from generation to generation. In Laos, the Mien lived in the mountains in unclaimed areas and had no land that we could call our

own. In the United States, my community is beginning to understand that we have the opportunity to be a part of a new land we can call home. We've been given the opportunity to be U.S. citizens and obtain all the rights and privileges that that affords. I have a long term commitment to serving my community, and I'm very glad that as an AmeriCorps member I have been given the chance to help the Mien overcome some of the challenges to citizenship."

CCDI's implementation of the Citizenship AmeriCorps initiative began with the recognition of the specific challenges and needs of Southeast Asian American community. AmeriCorps Members develop education and outreach materials to engage community members in the work necessary to achieve naturalization and citizenship. Our three members have worked together to use pre-existing teaching curriculums for a citizenship and language class to cater to our community members. AmeriCorp Members utilize a generic fee waiver form that CCDI has successfully used to obtain fee waivers and relieve the cost of naturalization. CCDI's vision is that Southeast Asian Americans should naturalize as U.S. citizens, vote for candidates of their choice, and regularly communicate their views to elected officials and other important decision-makers. Only through voting and advocacy activity are the views and concerns of Southeast Asians likely to be taken seriously by decision-makers.

Porthira Chhim is the Director of Programs at Cambodian Community Development, Inc. in Oakland, California, one of IRSA's AmeriCorps sites. His email address is: Porthira@yahoo.com.



How Does One Become Naturalized?

By Maureen Contreni

When a person decides to take the necessary steps to becoming a naturalized citizen of the United States, there are specific facts that can be helpful in planning one's strategy. The following information can serve as a guide through this complex process.

Eligibility

You should consider several issues to determine if you are eligible for naturalization before you submit your application to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). In order to qualify for naturalization you must be at least 18 years of age, and be a Legal Permanent Resident for 5 years.

Continuous Residence: As a permanent resident, you must have been in the United States for 5 years, with no trips out of the country that lasted over 6 months.

Hint:

The date that your permanent residence started is on your Green Card. For refugees, this should be the day that you arrived in the United States

If you are married to a U.S. citizen, you need only to be a legal permanent resident for three years before you apply for naturalization if:

- *your spouse has been a citizen for at least three years and are living together at the time of interview.*
- *you have been married to your spouse for at least three years*

Physical Presence: During the last five years as a permanent resident, you must have been inside the United States at least 30 months.

English Skills and Knowledge of United States Civics: You must be able to read, speak and understand basic English. The immigration officer will test your skills during your interview. The officer will also test your knowledge of United States history and civics. Sample questions can be obtained at <http://www.uscis.gov> (Note: Some applicants may be eligible for a waiver on the English or civics test due to age or disability. For more details, refer to the above website.).

Warning:

If you have ever been arrested or charged with any crime, no matter how minor it may seem to you and regardless if you were guilty or not, you should consult with an accredited representative or an immigration attorney before submitting your application. While some offenses make you ineligible for naturalization, some may make you deportable. It is important to know this before you apply.

Some other activities for which the USCIS may find you lacking good moral character are: lying during your interview or on immigration forms, polygamy, habitual drinking, failure to pay child support, and persecution of anyone base on race, religion, national origin, political opinion or social group.

Attachment to the United States Constitution: You must be willing to take the Oath of Allegiance, defend the principles of the U.S. Constitution, renounce all foreign allegiances, serve the United States in the military or civil service if required to do so.

Selective Service: Young men residing in the United States who are ages 18 through 26 are required by law to register for the Selective Service regardless of their immigration status. You must provide your Selective Service number on your application. You can register by calling 1-847-688-6888 or by visiting <http://www.sss.gov>. If you are over 26 and were required to register but did not, contact the Selective Service and complete a Selective Service System's Questionnaire Form. You must also attach a written explanation to your application stating the reason that you did not register.

Your Application: If you determine that you are eligible for naturalization, you need to compile the following documents to submit to the USCIS:

- **Form N-400:** This is a 10-page USCIS form. You can obtain it by calling 1-800-375-5283 or visiting <http://www.uscis.gov>. The "Guide to Naturalization" on this website has a "document checklist" that should be used to ensure that all needed forms are prepared. It is important to fill all of the forms out completely, accurately, and honestly.
- **Your Green Card:** A copy of the front and back.
- **Filing Fee:** USCIS charges \$320 for the application and \$70 for biometrics (fingerprinting) processing. You may send your payment by personal check or money order only.

- **Two Color Passport Style Photos of You:** It is best to write your name and alien number on the back of each photo in pencil.

Note: You should keep a copy of the documents for your records and submit the originals to the USCIS Service Center that has jurisdiction over your region.

What to Expect After You Have Submitted Your Application: The amount of time USCIS takes to process your naturalization application varies depending on which local USCIS office is handling your case. Generally, you should expect the process to go in the following order:

Receipt Notice: You will receive a notice from USCIS stating that their office has received your application.

Biometrics Appointment: USCIS will send you a letter requesting that you have fingerprints taken at a local Application Support Center.

Interview Notice: You will receive a notice requesting that you appear for an interview at the local USCIS office. This interview will entail:

- English and civics test
- Review of your application
- The immigration officer will notify you at this time if you are granted or denied naturalization. If you are required to submit additional documents, the officer will inform you.

Oath Ceremony: In some states, the oath ceremony can be performed at the time the test is passed; in other states, applicants need to wait for a letter from USCIS with information about the date and time of the oath ceremony. You are not a U.S. citizen until you complete this ceremony.

Naturalization Trends and Statistics

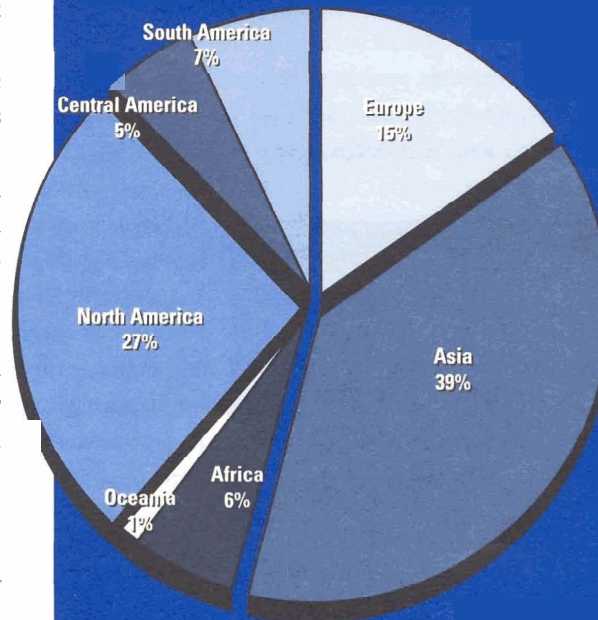
By Faith Chang

American communities have become increasingly more diverse as global politics and technological advancement drive people from all over the world to the United States. Since 1970, the foreign-born population has more than tripled, growing at a rate of about 4% annually, according to the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS). Immigrants now account for almost 12% of the total U.S. population, CIS reported. According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), North America and Asia were the leading regions of legal immigrants in 2003, followed by Europe, South America, and Africa.

The rapid growth and diversity of the immigrant population are profoundly influencing our socio-economic and political institutions. Therefore, successful integration of immigrant families through civic involvement and political participation is vital to our nation's future. "Naturalization is the gateway to citizenship for immigrants and to full membership and political participation in U.S. society."

Urban Institute, September 2003

Naturalizations by Region of Birth



- USCIS naturalized 463,204 people in FY03, a decrease of 19% from FY02. There was a processing backlog of 625,000 naturalization applications in both FY02 and FY03.

- Naturalizations have exceeded 300,000 every year since 1990, except in 1992, and increased dramatically in 1994 due to a 1992 mandatory Green Card Replacement program and the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986.

- 21.5 million Legal Permanent Residents (LPRs) were admitted to the U.S. between 1973-2002 and more than 7 million (34%) of this population had naturalized by 2002.

Top Countries of Origins of Persons Who Naturalized in FY03

Mexico	Iran
Ind	Iceland
Philippines	El Salvador
	Ukraine
China	Colombia
Korea	Cuba
Dominican Republic	Pakistan
Jamaica	Haiti

- 30%-40% of LPRs naturalized within the first 10 years of admission.
- Refugees are eligible to adjust to LPR status without regard to numerical limit after 1 year of residence. Asylees must wait 1 year after they are granted asylum to apply for LPR status.

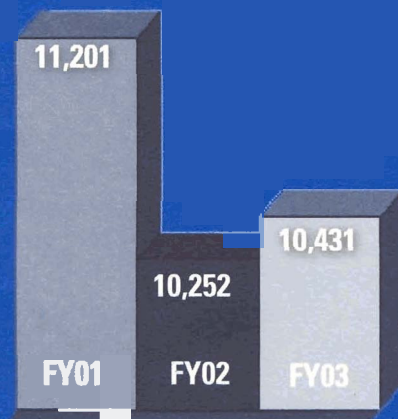
The Census Bureau reported that an estimated 40% of foreign-born residents have become naturalized citizens in 2000.

- In 2002, there were an estimated 11.4 million LPRs and 7.8 million were eligible to naturalize. Mexico was the leading country of birth with an estimated 3.1 million LPRs.
- In 2003, the number of persons granted LPR declined by 34% to 705,827 from FY02, due to security checks that affected application processing at USCIS.
- There were 44,927 refugee and asylee immigrants admitted in FY03, a decrease of 64% and 59% from FY02 and FY 01, respectively.
- Refugees and asylees represented 6.4% of immigrants admitted in FY03 compared to 12% in FY02 and 10% in FY01.

Countries with High Refugee and Asylee Populations Granted LPR 1971-2003

Bosnia-Herzegovina
Colombia
Cuba
Guatemala
Hong Kong
Laos
Philippines
Russia
Thailand
Ukraine
Vietnam

Asylee Status Adjustments FY01-FY03



Faith Chang is an intern at the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants. She and her family migrated from the Philippines to the U.S. in 1994 and became naturalized citizens in 2000. For further information, you can e-mail her at: mc4930a@american.edu.

Note: If you have petitions pending to bring relatives to the United States, you should consult an accredited representative or an immigration attorney before becoming a U.S. citizen. While in many cases becoming a U.S. citizen shortens the wait for your relative's visa, it may have negative effects on other cases involving derivative relatives.

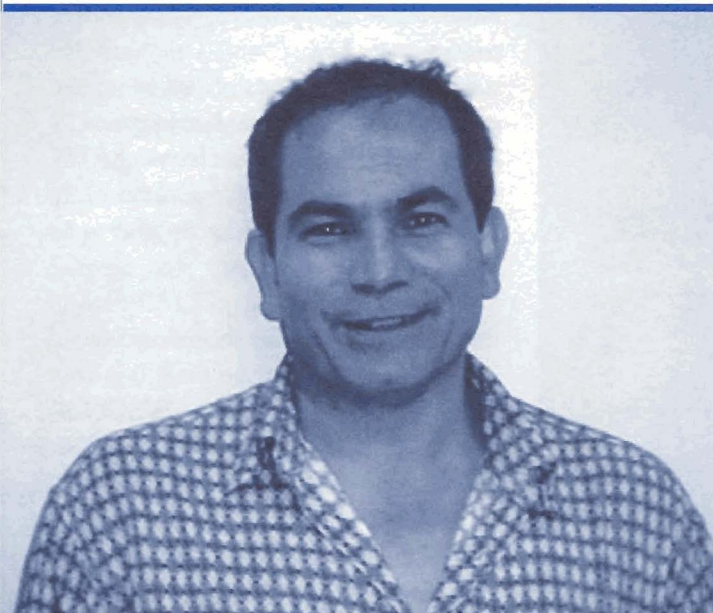
Because you will be receiving several important notices in the mail, it is very important that you inform USCIS of your address changes by calling 1-800-375-5283.

Maureen Contreni is a graduate student specializing in U.S. history with emphasis on 20th Century immigration history. She is a former employee of the International Rescue Committee where she helped immigrants seeking naturalization. Her email address is: maureencontreni@yahoo.com.



Redesign of the U.S. Naturalization Test

Under the Immigration and Nationality Act, applicants for U.S. citizenship are tested on their knowledge of English and of U.S. history and government. These tests are designed and administered by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), an agency under the Department of Homeland Security. In 2001, the agency began the process of redesigning the testing program because of concerns that the current testing procedure may not be sufficiently uniform and that the test content may not be appropriate to determine if applicants have a meaningful knowledge of the subjects covered on the test.



Victor Marzana is from Bolivia and works as a Brick Cutter and in Construction. He has been in the United States for 23 years; only this year did he decide to become a U.S. Citizen. He received his LPR status through the First Amnesty and is becoming proficient in English. He is a Tae Kwon Do student and instructor and has made a commitment to continue to attend classes and also help tutor future citizenship students taking the naturalization test. He was assisted by the Coalition of African, Asian, European, and Latino Immigrants of Illinois (CAELII). Photo Credit: Jose Garcia

As part of the redesign effort, USCIS has requested independent advice from the Board on Testing and Assessment of the National Research Council of the National Academies which formed an expert committee to meet the goals of helping optimize the validity, reliability, and fairness of the redesigned tests and administrative procedures and to provide an assessment of the processes used to develop and evaluate the new testing program before its nationwide implementation. The non-governmental National Academies consist of the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering, the Institute of Medicine, and the National Research Council.

This Committee on the Naturalization Test Redesign is a totally independent body making recommendations to the U.S. Government.

In the Expert Committee's interim report, is-

sued in late 2004, the following four key recommendations were made:

- USCIS should put into place an advisory structure to advise the agency in making important decisions about the naturalization test redesign.
- A detailed plan for test development should be created with help from a technical advisory panel and review by an oversight committee. The research and test development plan should comply with testing standards and should include all of the necessary steps for developing a valid, reliable, and fair test.
- Work on developing the content framework (including publishing the history and government framework in the Federal Register) should cease until a clear, transparent, and publicly accountable process is defined and vetted with an oversight group.
- After a determination has been made about the various item formats that will be used on the redesigned test, USCIS and its testing contractor should develop a detailed plan for standard setting, with input from the technical advisory group and a final recommendation by the oversight committee.

The issues considered by the Committee include content and skill frameworks, test item development, test scoring and administration procedures, the comparability of test forms, study materials, performance standards, disability exemptions, and due consideration that takes into account the applicant's age or background.

The Committee welcomes perspectives from the field such as the following examples of input already received related to a discussion about the importance of civic engagement and good citizenship indicators and the hopes for fostering a sense of belonging among immigrants, rather than simply testing for citizenship. There is concern that the test may result in higher standards for applicants when there is no plan to help candidates meet those standards. Key suggestions to date include:

- Funding by the U.S. Government for ESL and civics classes in order to help broaden the good citizenship indicators;
- An effective federal policy to help people through the citizenship process;
- More consistency in the "customer's experience" while, at the same time, allowing for flexibility and discretion especially when it comes to age and education of applicants;
- Lowering application fees;

- Questions administered on tape by someone without an accent;
- Immigrants 65 years or older could test in their own language;
- Individuals 75 years or older might be exempt from the test;
- Groups tested and interviewed together to increase their comfort level;
- Mock interviews by citizenship teachers helpful.

It is anticipated that the redesigned test will be completed in late 2007 under the leadership of the USCIS Office of Citizenship. More background about the naturalization test redesign is provided on the USCIS web page: <http://uscis.gov/graphics/services/natz/NatzTesting.pdf>.

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Citizenship AmeriCorps Initiative: Meeting the Heartfelt Need

By Marlane Codair

One year ago, the International Institute of Boston (IIB) held its first meeting concerning participation in IRSA's Citizenship AmeriCorps Initiative. The goals of the Initiative contained solutions to the longstanding heartfelt need for increased services to help refugees and immigrants overcome barriers to Citizenship. IIB clients have continuously faced many of the barriers identified by the Initiative, so the hope and enthusiasm of IIB's staff fueled the decision to participate in the program. The program officially began September 27, 2004 with two dedicated AmeriCorps Members, Whitney Johnson and Rebecca Amdemariam. The first quarter of the Initiative has been completed, and there has already been remarkable success.

Historic Information

Founded in 1924, the International Institute of Boston (IIB) is a leading immi-

grant-focused legal and human service provider that fosters the success of refugees and other immigrants in the United States. Fundamental to all of the IIB's programs and services is our basic desire to protect human welfare and the inclusion of newcomers in the services of government and general society. Permeated in our services is the promotion of self-sufficiency – giving clients the tools to help themselves become active participants in the civic, political, and economic richness of American life. Each year, IIB provides 7,000 newcomers with



IRSA Citizenship AmeriCorps members Rebecca Amdemariam and Whitney Johnson with newly naturalized citizen, Fei Yue Chen. Photo Credit: International Institute of Boston

direct, practical assistance through English and literacy classes, refugee resettlement, economic development assistance, job counseling and placement, legal aid, citizenship preparation, and social services, including crisis intervention, casework, and mental health counseling, all housed under one roof. The diverse groups of people receiving assistance come from all regions of the globe, including over 60 countries. They make their homes in over 45 greater Boston communities. The vast majority are of lower income. IIB also endeavors to work in coalition with partners such as the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants.

The Initiative

The first month of IIB's Citizenship AmeriCorps Initiative began with intensive training for Whitney and Rebecca under the guidance of our managing attorney, Rebecca Minahan. The training included observation in our Walk-In Legal Clinic, application assistance, ethics guidelines, ESL and civics tutor training and telephone screening for immigrants.

Each AmeriCorps member was given a special project in addition to regular Legal Clinic work. Whitney was given the project of increasing our Citizenship Study Center by recruiting and training volunteer tutors and matching them with immigrants in need of assistance in preparing for the English, Civics and History test and general interview requirements to pass the interview for Naturalization. Rebecca was given the project of developing a weekly Citizenship Clinic day that would provide screening and document preparation and application assistance appointments. Under the Initiative, both AmeriCorps members develop strategies to reach out to the various immigrant communities to help those with barriers to naturalization; such as senior citizens, people with limited English proficiency, and those with disabilities. An additional goal is to engage public and community agency support to join with us in helping immigrants become accomplishing their goal of Citizenship.

Citizenship Study Center

Our goal of increasing the number of refugees and immigrants who participate in our Citizenship Study Center has already been achieved in the first quarter. AmeriCorps members recruited and trained seventeen volunteers, as well as made effective tutor and student matches. For the most part, IIB's Study Center uses a one-to-one tutor model. We have found this successful because the tutor can assess individual learning styles

and progress most effectively at the student's level of English. The tutors meet once weekly for one to two hours, preparing applicants for the English, History, and Civics tests and the interview, using appropriate ESL techniques. Most of the tutoring is done at our location during Study Center. One tutor is working with an elderly couple at the public library closer to their home because traveling to Boston from their community is too difficult. The volunteer was encouraged to search various community locations. Together they decided on the library where they were offered a conference room for citizenship tutoring sessions.

Another skilled ESL volunteer, Marylou Leung, undertook a month of intensive tutoring to help an applicant prepare for her second interview. (See story that follows) The applicant had already passed the History and Civics portion of the exam but not the reading and writing. When this student first came to the Study Center for help, she was only able to read, with difficulty, part of one or two sentences. Her second interview was fast approaching. After assessing the applicant's learning style, Marylou developed ESL resources for this student, including lists of words as aids for reading and writing practice. She described these aids to the student as dictation hints, sentence starter words, connecting words, action words, and naming words. The progress of this dedicated student was extraordinary. She passed her interview and is now a citizen. Marylou is now helping us plan a workshop for our other tutors to help them increase their ability to assess the applicants and identify learning styles.

Robert is a volunteer with experience teaching Citizenship Classes. AmeriCorps members recruited him to teach a Citizenship Class on the same evening as the Study Center. This class is a placement for people with higher levels of English who do not need the one-on-one tutoring. Robert's dedication as a volunteer teacher has provided a valuable preparation component for the students in his class.

Citizenship Clinic

IIB has now implemented a Citizenship Clinic every Tuesday. Outreach by AmeriCorps members helped to recruit and train volunteers for forms assistance at the Clinic. The Clinic applicants are screened for their ability and readiness to apply for Naturalization. If any issues arise during the screening of an applicant, a consultation is scheduled with an immigration lawyer in our Le-

gal Clinic. Applicants are given the Naturalization Biographic Data form as homework to gather the necessary information for their application. This form also lists the necessary documents, CIS fees and photo requirements. Application assistance is provided during the Clinic. IIB's accredited representatives supervise the Clinic.

Outreach

Through the efforts of our AmeriCorps members, we have been able to do outreach to immigrants and their families to inform them of the qualifications for the Naturalization process and to help overcome barriers. Flyers were sent to all refugees that IIB helped with adjustment of status applications that may now be eligible to apply for Naturalization. Citizenship flyers were sent to community based organizations informing them of our Citizenship Clinic and Study Center. Information sessions are being held at the Boston Center for Adult Education and the Jamaica Plain Adult Learning Program. IIB's AmeriCorps members are in the process of helping the Jamaica Plain Adult Learning Program open a Study Center for their own ESL students, which will begin in the Spring. The members have shared tutor training resources and Citizenship materials with the JP Center. Recently, AmeriCorps members provided a workshop to train volunteer tutors for the JP Center.

First Quarter Success

Celebrating the victory with immigrants as they become new Americans is a joyous occasion. On February 10, 2005, just four months after the program began, AmeriCorps members from IIB along with dedicated volunteer tutor, Marylou Leung, attended the Oath Ceremony at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston where 1,400 immigrants became United States citizens, among them were four from IIB's AmeriCorps Citizenship program. Many of the new citizens were refugees.

IIB's program began only four months ago. Thanks to the dedication of Whitney and Rebecca, support of the IIB Legal team, volunteer tutors, and the determination and hard work of the participants of the program, already seven immigrants are new Americans and several others have interviews scheduled for March. Proud of their accomplishment, most of our new American friends have returned to IIB shortly thereafter to begin the process of upgrading petitions to bring their spouses and children who have been waiting under the family preference system. Some ask for help in bringing their finances, parents, brothers and sisters to the United States.

After their long journey to become Americans, they are happy to register to vote, apply for U.S. passports for themselves and their minor children, as well as obtain Citizenship Certificates for them. We rejoice in helping them participate in the benefits they have gained by being citizens. Meanwhile, our AmeriCorps members immediately fill their vacant seats in the Study Center with other immigrants looking to complete the same goals.

We at IIB want to express our heartfelt thanks to the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants and AmeriCorps for partnering with us to make the Citizenship AmeriCorps program possible. •

Marlane Codair is an Accredited Representative for the Board of Immigration and Appeals and a paralegal at the International Institute of Boston. Her email address is mcodair@iiboston.org.

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Tutoring Amas; A Success Story of the IIB Citizenship Study Center

By Marylou Leung

My sessions with Amas started on December 8th; the Center had warned me that it would be difficult for Amas to acquire the required knowledge of English needed for her naturalization interview on January 12th. However, Amas was willing to work hard and, fortunately, we had the hours to give her in terms of tutoring. Although she spoke quite well and seemed to understand English fairly well, her written and reading skills were very poor.

We began our work together by using the everyday sentences that the Boston office often asks during the interview and the 100 questions as it was not clear if she had passed that part of the initial interview. Later, we determined from her paper work that she would only be retested on writing and reading.

As a result, I prepared practice sheets and word lists for her to practice the everyday sentences – ten sentences at a time. These sheets were assigned as homework and each session we reviewed her work. She would read each sentence for me and then she would have dictation on the sentence. Mistakes were recorded and she was asked to write those out 3-5 times each. In the beginning, we did not have a tape of the sentences so she had her sister dictate those to her at home. Later, Whitney, one of our AmeriCorps volunteers, made a tape of the sentences

which Amas found to be an excellent aid in her learning.

I noticed that Amas was still having difficulty with individual words so I prepared the single word practice sheets to give her more help and repetition in writing the words. I also wrote out dictation hints to remind her of the strategies we were using to be successful in writing out the sentences.

We started to practice the interview questions, beginning with pictures and then working up to words and sentences. I used many interviews and eventually at the end gave her the Literacy Interview, which seemed to be the most comprehensive. Whitney helped in this process with good ideas about what interview hints a client would need for success.

Whitney worked with Amas for an additional five hours, giving her a different voice to comprehend. Whitney also did some exercises with her, which led me to prepare paragraph and sentence sheets for the sentences we were using. Now we have a complete package of materials to use for these sentences which includes the tape, the sentences, the individual words and the exercises, which can be used by other students.

Unfortunately, Amas was unable to attend the last few sessions before her interview because of illness, but I phoned Amas the night before her test and she sounded much better and was studying. I reviewed a few points with her and told her I was very proud of her progress during this process.

Amas passed the interview. The officer asked her to read and write the same sentence which was "I go to work everyday." That was a great sentence for her as she had had a lot of success in writing that particular sentence during our sessions.

Amas worked extremely hard to be successful and it is gratifying to see her success. When we first started to work it would take us two hours to go through 10 sentences—reading and dictation. It was often a painful process as she never seemed to remember the individual words, and each word she spoke or wrote was as if she had never seen it before. By our last few meetings, she could read all of the 55 sentences in less than 15 minutes. Her writing also improved dramatically, although it lagged somewhat behind her reading.

We worked with her for a total of 20.5 hours and I worked for an additional seven hours preparing the practice sheets, word lists, and exercises.

Marylou Leung is a volunteer tutor at the International Institute of Boston. She is also a professional tutor and an attorney.

Becoming an American

By Paula

America. I knew something about this country. I knew where it was located; I knew its population was diverse, that it was a country of movie stars and films, and a country that many people only dream of seeing one day.

What I did not know was that my home country would be at war. The war destroyed everything—homes and families and people's dignity. The war destroyed the peace and friendship that we had known.

Then came Hope. America said she wanted to protect and save human lives and accept people like me. I moved here. The country that many people dreamt about became my reality. The worry I had for my family's lives and my own, the nights without sleep...all this changed to hope, freedom and safety. In the United States I met people willing to understand me and help me with my emotional recovery and moving here gave me a chance to start a new life.

Throughout the past six years I've worked very hard. I improved my English. That was the key for progress and a better future. I've learned a lot about job readiness, American culture and history. I've learned what is valuable and important in this country, and the benefits and the responsibilities of being an American.

A year ago I became eligible for citizenship. The International Institute of Boston provided assistance with my application and citizenship study material as well as interview practice. Recently, I attended a swearing-in ceremony and I became an American citizen. It was a very big moment in my life, an honor and a privilege, and a responsibility as well. Now that I am an American citizen, I can enjoy many other privileges that an American citizen has. Now I have the right to vote, to be involved in my community, and, at my work place, to help other people who might need my help. It's my chance to make things better.

I think that it is great to be a part of this country and the American society. I feel as someone who thinks that this country is my new home and believe with all my heart that this feeling will stay forever. God bless America.

Paula is a refugee who was assisted by the International Institute of Boston and became a naturalized citizen.

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Refugee Voices™

Unseen, Unheard, Unaided: Urban Refugees in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

by Gregory Chen
Director of Policy Analysis & Research

The words "Tailoring Mart" invite visitors into the small storefront shop in Dar es Salaam (Dar) where Thierry Noel Mageni and other refugees have launched an initiative to support urban refugees' efforts to earn a living while also serving to local Tanzanians. A woman in a blue outfit steps inside the shop and asks to see the dress she had ordered. By supplying her own fabric and design, she saved 15,000 Tanzanian shillings, about \$14. The smile on her face signals a happy customer.

As a new project of the Refugee Self-reliance Initiative (RSI), the mart's sales are still too low to provide the refugees with reliable income. After subtracting costs, only about \$35 is left in monthly profit, which the tailoring master, Kalambay, says they put into a community kitty for emergency purposes. As of August 2004, the mart had trained 15 women; ten work in regular shifts of four. They rent the space from a Tanzanian man for \$30 a month. "He knows we are foreigners, but not that we are refugees," said Mr. Mageni, revealing his concern that their refugee status is a liability in the city.

As the founder and the driving force behind RSI, Mr. Mageni is constantly on the move organizing meetings within the community. Originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo, he fled from conflict in the eastern Kivu region to Uganda in 1996. UNHCR granted him refugee status, but two years later he was transferred

to a refugee camp in Tanzania where he found life unbearable: "Our freedom was denied. We were kept like cattle, like cows on a farm. We were denied the right to work or to show what we were capable of." After eight months, Mr. Mageni left for Dar. "Here we must work and live clandestinely but we are earning something which allows us to survive."

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Thierry-Noel Mageni of the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative, based in Dar es Salaam, with customers at the Tailoring Mart. Photo: G. Chen/USCR

As the founder and the driving force behind RSI, Mr. Mageni is constantly on the move organizing meetings within the community. Originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo, he fled from conflict in the eastern Kivu region to Uganda in 1996. UNHCR granted him refugee status, but two years later he was transferred to a refugee camp in Tanzania where he found life unbearable: "Our freedom was denied. We were kept like cattle, like cows on a farm. We were denied the right to work or to show what we were capable of." After eight months, Mr. Mageni left for Dar. "Here we must work and live clandestinely but we are earning something which allows us to survive."

Many urban refugees are much worse off and survive only by begging or on charity. One man, a four-year resident of Dar, said he received about \$30 from his church when he first arrived. He tried teaching French to Tanzanians and foreign visitors but his illegal urban status made it hard for him to collect his fees: 10 of 14 students, he said, owed him for up to six months of lessons but were unwilling to pay—as an illegal resident of Dar, he could not complain to the police. Now he survives on money from church or acquaintances. "Our lives are hopeless and meaningless," he says, "I need to contribute to my community but the laws are so strict that businesses won't hire me and my own teaching effort has failed."

Of ten refugees gathered in the tailoring shop, most agree that women have more success in establishing these small business efforts. They offer different explanations: one thinks women are targeted less than men by the immigration authorities and thus can engage in street vending more easily; another says that more women have learned Kiswahili through frequent local contact in the markets; yet another says he prefers to look for activities that generate greater income rather than street vending which have limited potential. Of course, more potentially lucrative activities or business ventures pose more risk.

As nascent ventures, the tailoring mart and poultry operation are financially precarious, and Mr. Mageni recently reported that RSI will have to close them down unless they receive additional funding. But RSI cannot legally register with the Tanzanian government and therefore is ineligible for many funding sources.

Unless Tanzania relaxes its restrictive rules on urban refugees, they will continue to struggle in Dar. UNHCR, humanitarian agencies, and international donors could support the urban refugee population through programs that offer credit to start businesses or vocational training. These same agencies could sup-

port the government by compensating it for the services it grants refugees in urban environments, such as health care, access to schools, and other social services.

Banking on the Future: The Importance of Financial Literacy The first in a five part series

The Center for Applied Linguistics recently conducted a study on the cultural orientation practices of refugee resettlement agencies in the United States entitled "Current Refugee Orientation Practices in U.S. Resettlement Agencies". Thirty-six resettlement agencies across the U.S. were surveyed. When asked what questions refugees most commonly asked upon arrival, twenty six respondents out of thirty three cited money as the primary issue of concern among new arrivals. "Money is a big one—and money means all questions concerning money."

Resettlement agencies have first hand experience with the hurdles new immigrants face when attempting to navigate the U.S. financial system. Case managers are on the front lines. They help newly arriving immigrants open bank accounts, explain how an Automated Teller Machine works, and distribute information on the importance of repaying the International Organization of Migration loan [IOM]. In addition to providing information about the U.S. financial system, resettlement agency staff often acts as mediators and counselors for their clients when they are faced with financial difficulties. There have been many cases where a client overdraws on his/her account and can't pay the overdraft fees. Some clients do not understand the concept of credit and do not pay their monthly bills; affecting their financial well being for years to come.

Newly arriving refugee populations represent a diverse array of backgrounds. Many hold post secondary degrees while some lack a formal education. Some refugee populations have no experience using a bank and the concepts of credit and interest may be contrary to their cultural norms. "Many refugees coming to the United States, including the Somali Bantu, have had very little exposure to systems of modern finance and limited access to formal education in their countries of origin" says Rachel O'Hara, the Somali Bantu Program Officer at Immigration and Refugee Services of America (IRSA).

Regardless of a refugee's background, the majority come to the U.S. with financial goals. It is critical that

refugees understand how the U.S. financial system works, what their rights are and what opportunities are available to them to invest their money. An immigrant who is economically self-sufficient is an asset to their community, a case for the continuation of U.S. immigration policies and is often, through remittances, a life line to those persons they have left behind.

The key to financial literacy is knowledge. The most important aspects of financial literacy are budgeting, basic banking, credit and debt management, and asset development. Currently, many resettlement agencies in the IRSA network provide various financial literacy training and support. Several operate successful Individual Development Account (IDA) programs and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) preparation assistance. Two IRSA partner agencies currently have grants through American Express to provide financial literacy education. Marilyn Rymniak, Director of Adult Education at the International Institute of New Jersey, operates the financial literacy program. She believes financial literacy education is a vital course of study for new immigrants. "For immigrants, refugees and asylees to successfully access and acculturate into mainstream American society, they must also understand how to access America's complex and often perplexing financial system. Being financially literate becomes a powerful force enabling them to take advantage of what American society has to offer".

IRSA recently conducted a survey of the network's financial literacy activities. An overwhelming majority of the survey respondents agreed that their clients have a need for financial literacy education. Sixty seven percent indicated that their clients come to them on a regular basis with questions about their finances. However, only half of the agencies that responded offer financial literacy training and only twenty seven percent indicated that they have financial literacy materials translated into other languages. Interestingly, 100 percent of the respondents indicated that their clients open a bank account and that the agency has a procedure in place to ensure that their clients open a bank account.

So, new immigrants in the IRSA network are banking, but do they understand how to get the most out of their bank accounts and are they armed with the information they need to get the best deal. The case for financial literacy education can not be more important. On average, IRSA Match Grant (a program funded through the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to ensure refugees attain economic self-sufficiency in 180 days) participants who successfully complete the pro-

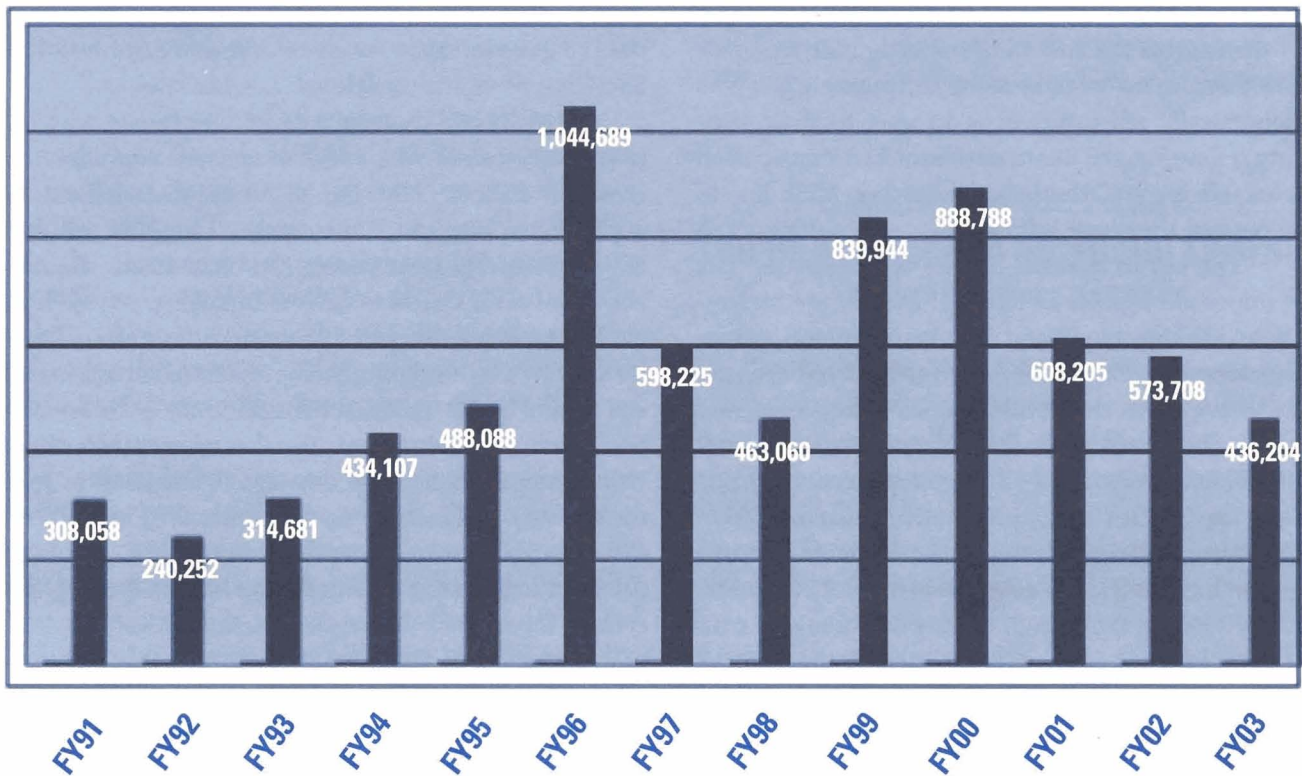
gram earn an annual salary of \$14,872. According to the U.S. government, a family of four that earns less than \$36,784 per year is considered "low income".

Many IRSA clients fall into that category. Being low-income paired with a lack of financial education is a recipe for disaster. "How our clients use their dollars is as important as how much they make. Our IDA program has affirmed that poor people can build assets. Equally important is for clients to be wise in buying. Paying high interest rates and other bad financial choices can neutralize a family's comfortable income. Outside of basic health and mental health, financial self-sufficiency is the foundation of refugee resettlement. Families need to learn about money management from day one. They need to start their savings and learn to manage what they have. With some heads-up information, they can avoid the pitfalls of debt and unnecessary expense", says Martha Deputy, Executive Director of the Western Kentucky Refugee Mutual Assistance Association, a IRSA partner agency.

While being low income presents challenges for new immigrants, not having access to the information necessary to make good financial decisions puts them at a further disadvantage. There is no doubt that employment and therefore income play a role in an immigrant's financial well being. Financial Literacy training should be a core component of a new immigrant's entry into the working world.

It is for this reason that IRSA has initiated the "Banking on the Future" Financial Literacy Program. Through a grant provided by the Center for Financial Services Innovation (CFSI), IRSA has developed a financial literacy curriculum that can be integrated into case management services. Through a combination of case manager orientation and financial literacy education along with practical applications using refugees bank accounts, IRSA is hopeful that it's clients will not only use the bank effectively to manage their finances, but understand and apply the concepts to create financial stability and eventually asset growth. By implementing a financial literacy curriculum that can be integrated into the partner agencies current activities, IRSA hopes to develop a network-wide standard of evaluation that can in turn be used to monitor it's clients financial practices, conduct case studies and then develop and implement strategies to ensure IRSA clients have access to the education and tools they need to create a better life for themselves and live the American dream! •

Number of Persons Naturalized



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