



Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Atlanta, Inc.

Providing Help. Creating Hope.

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: October 3, 2008

Contact Information

Jutta M. Hansen

404.885.7238

jhansen@archatl.com

Catholic Charities receives large grants for representation and legal orientation work in Stewart County, GA.

Atlanta, GA...Catholic Charities Atlanta has been awarded a large contract for a legal orientation program in Lumpkin, Stewart County GA. The Vera Institute of Justice (www.vera.org) together with the Executive Office for Immigration Review, approved a contract of \$175,000 to provide the much needed legal orientation program at the massive Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility in Stewart County, GA. This comes on the heels of a major increase in funding from the Georgia Bar Foundation for the Detention Project of Catholic Charities' Immigration Legal Services.

The Stewart facility houses 1800 Spanish speaking detainees from Mexico and South & Central America, some with criminal histories, others arrested in employment raids across the country. This contract will allow Catholic Charities to place a full time attorney at the facility, supported by a part time law student and part time clerk, to provide group orientation meetings, individual orientations, pro se workshops and pro bono referrals. These services will allow detainees to understand their rights and options so they can make better decisions. An evaluation of the Legal Orientation Project has shown that detainees receiving legal orientation services move through the immigration courts faster; the more quickly detained cases are completed, the sooner detained persons are eligible to be released from custody or removed from the U.S.



The new program will be supervised by staff attorney, Ms. Jennifer Bensman, Manager of the Detention Project at Catholic Charities' Immigration Legal Services. (photo)

The additional funding from the Georgia Bar Foundation will pay for additional assistance for direct representation of detainees, who have possible relief. These grants & contracts are evidence of the great past work of Catholic Charities Immigration Staff and their commitment to providing services to those who most need them.

For the past 30 years, through its Immigration Legal Services Program, Catholic Charities Atlanta, has provided assistance to people in removal proceedings, including detainees. Early on Sue Colussy, attorney at law and Program Director of Immigration Legal Services together with volunteer lawyers from AILA (American Immigration Lawyers Association), assisted persons in state custody, who had removal hearings while in custody. It was obvious that prisoners who understood the system and their options made better decisions about applications, appeals and removal and stayed in detention less time. Many opted to leave once they understood what was required to be granted relief by the judge.

- MORE -

Since 2002, Catholic Charities' Immigration Legal Services Program has received funds from the Georgia Bar Foundation to assist detainees through the Detention Project. The funds have provided a half-time attorney and summer law students. Ms. Bensman has managed this program since 2004 and has set a remarkable standard. She has handled cases from three facilities: Stewart, Etowah County jail (600 inmates) and Atlanta City Detention Center (600). She received hundreds of letters from inmates. She counsels many new lawyers taking detained cases, and attends several master hearings a week. In 2008 she assisted over 2800 people, representing 1390 at master hearings. Twenty four were found eligible for relief and accepted for our services and of those, 22 were argued successfully. Jennifer Bensman assisted another 1472 with legal information and education by phone, mail or visits. In 2008, she received the Mentor Award from the Georgia Asylum and Immigration project and services as the AILA liaison with ICE.(Immigration & Customs Enforcement, a department of Homeland Security)

About Catholic Charities

Catholic Charities is the social service agency of the Archdiocese of Atlanta, who partners with the community to help people facing adversity to reach wholeness and self sufficiency regardless of their background or religion. Catholic Charities is among the state's well-known, professional providers of services to families in crisis, support for pregnant women, assistance and education to immigrants and refugees. 559 Refugee Families received help to establish a new life in America. 3272 families in crisis received counseling and mental health therapy. More than 2000 individuals received legal immigration assistance. 12 babies found new adoptive families and many parents received parenting training and help. 218 families received employment services, 763 adults and 105 children and youth participated in our language training and education support programs. Our housing counseling program served 195 families . For more information, please visit www.catholiccharitiesatlanta.org or call 404.881.6571.

#