

Communiversality

Quality of Life Change and Immigration Legal Benefits: Documenting Outcomes of Status Change for Immigrants and Refugees

Prepared in partnership with
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QUALITY OF LIFE CHANGE AND IMMIGRATION LEGAL BENEFITS

Documenting Outcomes of Status Change for Immigrants and Refugees

Before I got asylum, I thought I had to go back to die in my country. But then I changed my mind: I will die here, because in the next life I won't have to apply for a visa to come here, so I wouldn't have to go through all this trouble again.

- Cambodian asylee, U.S. citizen.

Executive Summary

This report provides a program evaluation of the impact of immigration legal benefits on the quality of life of immigrants and refugees in the U.S. It seeks to document the outcomes of immigration legal services using semi-structured interviews and focus groups with former clients of the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota. Research instruments can be found in the appendix. Demographics of participants are located in the methods section. Results show that while some potential outcomes such as work opportunities and family reunification may be difficult to actualize and obtain, immigrants and refugees benefit from a variety of changes in life quality as a result of improved immigration status. In particular, work opportunities and treatment, access to services and resources, and family well-being improve, along with mental health, freedom of movement, confidence in dealing with authorities, and enhanced social and legal knowledge.

This report finds the following with respect to immigrant quality of life change. First, obtaining asylum or a protective legal status in the U.S. is often a matter of life and death, keeping forced migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees out of harms way in home countries where they face persecution. Second, immigration benefits raise wages and benefits, improve workplace treatment, and result in new job opportunities, despite the persistence of racial discrimination in the workplace and some limitations of temporary statuses. Third, legal benefits enable access to vital rights and resources with immigration benefits, paving the way for more access to housing, education, childcare, and other social welfare programs, as well as securing rights to a driver's license, the ability to take out loans, and opening

checking account. Fourth, although reunification benefits are limited in practice, improved legal status keeps families together since family members no longer face a threat of expulsion, families are able to sponsor visits and settlement to the U.S. and to securely travel, as well as removes immigration status issues from interfering in family relations. Fifth, slightly improving trust in authorities, stabilized status gives immigrants confidence to confront injustice and crime by decreasing fear of police. Sixth and consequently, immigrants and refugees experience a newfound freedom of movement with the removal of constraints on mobility that result from an omnipresent fear of authorities. Change in immigration status improves mental health by replacing depression, anxiety, stress, and social stigma of unstable status with self-confidence and a feeling of freedom. Finally, the process of obtaining legal services improves knowledge of law and society overall, clearing up mixed information about and beyond immigration legal matters.

This report suggests several recommendations for improving immigration legal work and further research on the impacts of immigration legal benefits. It discusses the limits of client-based legal services and those of this qualitative research. The report concludes with a proposal for community-based immigration law education, and suggests a survey instrument for further, quantitative research to be incorporated into everyday workflow.

Introduction

How do legal service outcomes impact the quality of life of immigrants and refugees? This report answers this question by presenting results from a program evaluation study of services provided by the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota (ILCM).¹ This study explored whether and what kinds of relationships exist between (a) quality of life and its change over time, (b) reception of immigrant legal services, and (c) stabilized immigration status. .

The goal of the Outcome Documentation Study was to understand the impacts of immigration legal services by going beyond anecdotal evidence of the benefits of improved legal status in order to obtain a holistic view of the impacts of immigration legal benefits and services. Therefore, the intention behind this report is not to detail technical legal matters, nor is it to detail the life histories of immigrants and refugees. Both fall outside the scope and capacity of this report. Rather, this report

¹ The Immigrant Law Center is a nonprofit organization based in St. Paul, Minnesota whose stated mission is to provide quality immigration legal services and law-related education to meet the steadily increasing needs of Minnesota's growing immigrant and refugee communities. The ILCM primarily provides free legal assistance to low-income immigrants and refugees to obtain immigration status benefits. The organization employs fifteen staff—most of whom represent clients in immigration court hearings—and hosts several interns

underscores the relationship between immigration legal benefits and changes in quality of life using a sociological analysis of semi-structured interview and focus group data.

This report is useful in at least three ways. Immigrant rights advocates and legal workers may find this report useful for (1) communicating the impacts of stabilized immigration status with policymakers and funders, as well as (2) for legitimating an expansion of immigrant-lead educational programs. In addition, (3) an appended survey instrument can be implemented into everyday the workflow of to obtain a quantitative measure of changes in quality of life of immigrants and refugees.

Research Methods and Data Summary

Twelve interviews and two focus groups were conducted with a total of 21 of the ILCM's former clients, immigrants and refugees in Minnesota from a diversity of backgrounds and legal statuses. This section reviews the research methodology for this study, and details the research design, process, and instruments.

Research Methods and Outcome Documentation

A problematic assumption in the program evaluation field is that quantitative research tools are universally superior (e.g. mass-surveys and other aggregate level measures) for outcome documentation studies. However, qualitative methods (e.g. semi-structured interviews and focus groups) used in this study were most appropriate. These methods were chosen because:

- Standardized answers cannot capture the intensity or nuances of quality of life change, they can only prompt respondents on known measures once they are established.
- A nuanced understanding of specific quality of life changes is needed in order to construct a standardized research tool, especially for a diverse population that speaks different languages and comes from cultural backgrounds.

Only a rigorous qualitative outcome documentation study can both explain the nuances of quality of life change, and secure a reliable survey design appropriate for aggregate analysis.

Research Process Overview

In February and March 2010 the Primary Investigator (PI) conducted consultations in order to develop a research plan, participant recruitment prompts, and research instruments. At this time, the Volunteer Coordinator (VC) enlisted the help of research assistant interns (RAs). Data collection occurred in two waves in April-May and June. For both waves, the PI first trained RAs in social research methods in March and June. The PI and RAs then proceeded to determine eligible participants, recruit them, and schedule interviews and focus groups. This research team

conducted² and transcribed audio recordings of the interviews and focus groups in May and June. Finally, the PI coded and analyzed these data and prepared this report in June and July.

Research Design Instruments

The interview (and focus group) guide was compiled based on potential quality of life measures determined in consultation with ILCM staff and a research advisor at the University of Minnesota (Appendix 1). As a result, the interview guide (Appendix 2) consisted of six modules not unrelated to the shape of the results: work, family, mental health, social integration, freedom of movement, and social welfare. The following section discusses the process of and considerations for selecting and recruiting participants.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

A list of recent potential clients who contacted the ILCM was first identified through ILCM's PIKA database that tracks all contact potential clients make with legal staff. Of the 2,000-plus cases that were closed between 2005 and October 2009,³ less than half were identified as potentially eligible for this study by limiting the sample to non-senior-aged adults (ages 18-65) residing in and around the metropolitan area of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota.⁴ Since the goal of this study was to explore the impacts of improved legal status, cases were marked as eligible if they were former clients who obtained legal benefits as a result of services provided by the ILCM. As a result, 900 eligible cases were then identified by reviewing each of the files in the database and eliminating the individuals with cases that had contact with the ILCM, but did not obtain legal benefits

Of the eligible cases, 227 were targeted for recruitment. Once the eligible subpopulation was identified, a two-pronged sampling strategy was used. First,

³ This particular targeted time range was used for two reasons. First, former clients with the most recently-closed cases (a) are most likely to recall experiences before obtaining status, and (b) have the most up to date contact information and are thus most likely to be able to be contacted using contact information in ILCM's database. Conversely, limiting eligibility to individuals who obtained status more than six months before the participating in this study ensured that participants had sufficient time to experience potential benefits of an improved status.

⁴ Potential participants residing 25 miles or more outside of the city limits of Minneapolis or St. Paul were excluded because pilot recruitment calls to eligible individuals who resided beyond inner-ring suburbs were unsuccessful. Funding availability also limited researchers' ability to travel in order to conduct interviews.

cases prioritized for contact needed to be reasonably proportional to the ILCM’s successful client diversity in terms of legal status obtained as well as region and country of origin (see Appendix 3).⁵ A secondary consideration for contacting eligible cases were specific kinds of legal benefits that had the potential of making the largest difference life quality—even if that legal status made up a rather small portion of ILCM’s successful clients.⁶

Table 1: Research participant background

# of cases	primary legal benefit
3	Legal Perm. Residence
2	Asylum
6	citizenship track visa
3	non-citizenship track visa or status
6	citizenship

	# of cases	region of origin
Sex Ratio (male:female) 1:2	3	Africa
	5	Asia & Pacific. Islands
Total number of cases: 21	7	Mexico
	4	Latin America (-Mex.)

The table above summarizes the demographics of the 21 participants in this study who were successfully recruited to participate in an interview or focus group.⁷ While

⁵For example, a quota of one third of participants were prioritized for people of Mexican-descent since one third of ILCM’s total clients are of Mexican descent.

⁶ These correlated with cases coded as “good story” by legal counsel in the database. These eligible subpopulation proved to be the most willing to participate in the study. These special status cases also included previously undocumented people who received citizenship-track visas such as a U-visa or VOWA (see Appendix 3 for planned sampling quotas based on legal status obtained).

⁷ See Appendix 2 for selection quota by legal status obtained).

the sampling frame for recruitment was chosen deliberately (see Appendix 1), the successful recruitment of participants was determined by pre-existing conditions and resource constraints. First, some groups of potential participants were more difficult to contact or persuade to in the study. For example, no eligible people of Hmong decent agreed to participate in the study despite the diligent recruitment efforts of by a bilingual research assistant to contact nearly one hundred eligible households.⁸ More importantly, a majority of cases in the database had invalid, likely outdated, contact information. Second, the resources available to the research team also influenced what kinds of clients could be contacted. For instance, the unavailability of a Somali-speaking research assistant prevented interviews with the primarily-Somali-speaking population of eligible persons of Somali background. Spanish-speaking men were also more difficult to contact than Spanish-speaking women because of their daytime work schedule and RAs' work availability. Consequentially, the sex ratio was fairly disproportionate, with twice as many women participating in this study than men.⁹ Such logistical constraints should be taken into account in planning future research.

Participants in this study represent a wide range of backgrounds, approximating the broad diversity of immigrant and refugee communities in the Twin Cities.¹⁰ Participants originate from Cambodia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Liberia, Malaysia, Mexico, and Vietnam.

Most of the data used in this report comes from twelve semi-structured interviews, while the rest emerges from two focus groups. Of these, seven interviews and one focus group were conducted in English and five interviews and one focus group were completed in Spanish. The length of interviews varied between thirty minutes and an hour and fifteen minutes, while both focus groups lasted over two hours.

Data Summary

The table in Appendix 5 summarizes the key themes discussed during interviews and focus groups and the frequency at which they appeared. The most frequently cited themes in interviews and focus groups were changes in work opportunities before and after obtaining benefits as well as how legal status made an impact on family unity and separation. Reflections on legal services themselves also appeared quite frequently. However, most noticeably, the data fell across a wide diversity of

⁸ Of these, three recruited participants did not show up to scheduled interviews, while the remaining declined interviews.

⁹ On the other hand, a female only focus proved to be an advantage, as women felt safe to share their personal stories.

¹⁰ See methods section for a discussion of the barriers to gaining access to Hmong and Somali respondents.

themes, both within and beyond the topics the study planned to cover. The medium and low frequency themes ranged from changes in different measures of mental health (e.g. “fear & stress,” “security,” “depression & happiness”) to impacts of status change on relationships within the nuclear family (e.g., “family-kids,” “family-spouse”). While this summary analysis should not be taken as hard data, it provides a basis for analyzing the results of this study, which are detailed in the following section.¹¹

Results

This main section reports the results of the Outcome Documentation Study. It is organized into eight meta-themes that were constructed from the preceding schema: seeking refuge, work, family, freedom of mobility, mental health, political and civic participation, and legal knowledge. Each meta-theme narrates the voices of immigrants and refugees who have obtained immigration benefits by first pointing to their quality of life before obtaining immigration status benefits, and then detailing the changes experienced once they obtain immigration legal benefits.

Seeking Refuge

This study finds that obtaining documented or permanent legal status in the U.S. is often a matter of life and death, due to the civil strife or material conditions immigrants and refugees can face if deported or forced to return to their communities of origin. Lina is a middle-aged Cambodian refugee. “I came here from Cambodia because I have a problem in my country,” she explained.¹²

“If I had no help, I would have been in big trouble. I am sure my life was in danger. I probably would have been killed...I don’t know how I did it. If I stayed I had one choice, to die in my country. If I come here I have two choices: to die or to live. So my mother sent a letter to me saying ‘what are you going to do over there?’ I told her I will be fine as long as I reach America....I left behind my family, my four children over there” (ODS_13_EFG).¹³

Lina first obtained asylum status, and now has the protection of U.S. citizenship. She lives in St. Paul.

¹¹ These themes are interrelated, and are not intended to be bounded, mutually exclusive categories. They appear as they were used initially to code or organize the data.

¹² To guarantee anonymity, names of some of the most vulnerable asylee, refugee, U-visa, and VOWA participants have been changed.

¹³ Citations following quotes refer to the Outcome Documentation Study (ODS) interview and focus group number, followed by the initials of the interviewer or “ESG” for English-language Focus Group or “SFG” for Spanish-language Focus Group. Demographic data on each participant can be obtained from the VC.

Rashid also first left his family behind when he fled Indonesia after first being displaced from his home. He was followed for years, persecuted and tortured by the military because of the political nature of his art. “So, I tried to get out of my country,” he recounted. “We flew to the USA, the flight was transited at the Minneapolis airport, and Immigration caught us.” Fearing being sent back home, he spent months in detention in the U.S. fearing to tell his story to officials without access to an independent advocate:

“I still hid my real situation, I still hide my real situation because I am afraid of the Interpol. If I told them, they would call my country back home. So I just told them ‘please, please don’t deport me back home because I lost everything.’ If they would have sent me back home, I would even lose myself” (ODS_08_EO).

After a lengthy legal battle, Rashid successfully obtained asylum and, later on, permanent residency, and brought his family over to join him in the U.S.

Many immigrants who have been residing in the U.S. for a long time, some of who even immigrated as children, still do not have access to obtaining residency or legalization. They continue to face the possibility of being forced to return to countries where they have no resources or a working knowledge of society. For instance, unlike her siblings, Wakida was denied her green card and constantly lived in fear of being deported to Ethiopia: “Before I didn’t even know what to do, I don’t even have a place to go back. And how would I live when I go back? I don’t even have money or anything where I come from. I don’t have a place to live. I would not survive.” (ODS_04_RR). Once she obtained legal assistance, Wakida was finally able to obtain her green card, and is looking forward to becoming a U.S. citizen.

Many others have similar stories. Having lived in the U.S. since immigrating as a child, Claudia was orphaned as a teen. Years later, she lived with her boyfriend and brother when Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) authorities came knocking. “I didn’t know that Immigration was searching for me...they came to our house ...they sent me to prison and to be honest, I was afraid. I didn’t know anything what was going on...I didn’t know Mexico. And I said ‘what am I going to do? My parents are dead. I’m not in contact with anybody in Mexico, so who knows what would happen to me” (ODS_13_SFG). After three months in immigration prison and many hours of legal support, she was able to obtain a citizenship-track visa. Claudia lives in St. Paul and is looking to apply for college.

(ODS_13_SFG) As these stories indicate, obtaining asylum or a protective legal status is often a matter of life or death. It has innumerable effects on quality of life since it keeps asylum seekers, refugees, and forced migrants out of harms way in their home countries.

Work

This report finds that immigration legal benefits also improve job opportunities and workplace treatment. Before receiving legal benefits immigrants are treated poorly at work, have less job opportunities and security, low wages, no benefits, and hefty work permit fees. Undocumented people have the most adverse experiences with work prior to legalizing their status. Amdis, a U-visa recipient and long-time Twin Cities resident noted, “before I could not look for work anywhere. I couldn't walk calm because I feared that they could deport me anytime.” W did not discuss much about work, perhaps because, as her case file reveals, she was sexually assaulted by a supervisor before she was able to legalize her status and find a safer job. The lack of basic workplace protections for those working without documents points to why some may opt to use appropriated documents.

While not all previously undocumented peoples' experiences are as traumatic as Amdis', they are just as important. Geovany, a Salvadoran man from Minneapolis described the poor pay, job insecurity, workload, and lack of benefits his precarious job afforded before he obtained Temporary Protection Status (TPS) for himself and his family:

“Interviewer: How was your ability at finding a job before obtaining your papers?

Geovany: Well, it was difficult. I got paid less...less opportunities.

Interviewer: Did you ever feel like you had to work more than other people who were paid similarly to you?

Geovany: Yes, I did, for fear of getting fired. I did not have benefits, all I had was work” (ODS_03_DE).

Four other respondents who previously lived without access to immigration documents reported similar experiences with exploitation at work: higher workloads, low benefits, job security, and wages.

Another Salvadoran observed the precarious job security of his coworkers in the form of speed-ups, labor rights violations, and arbitrary layoffs: “There are people from Mexico or others who are working there undocumented, and they work more. When someone is no longer convenient or that person no longer allows themselves to be used or exploited...that is when companies begin to opt to find out their status. When they realize that person is no longer needed, then they check their papers...even if they have been there for 3 or 4 years” (ODS_02_DE). Undocumented workers are often exploited by employers for their skills, as happened to Jacqueline: “They told me that they were bankrupt. But, I don't know, they were telling me that I did a good job and that I did more than I had to do. That they would like to alter my level. But they never did it. And also they used me to communicate with other people and for translation. And that was not my job. For me, words do not cost anything, but they never took that into account” (ODS_13_MB).

Those who were documented but did not yet have legal permanent residency reported problems obtaining quality employment. With a legalized immigration status, immigrants may be able to secure a better job, work options remain limited without a green card. Tran, a Vietnamese social worker from St. Paul experienced limited job opportunities before he obtained permanent residence:

“When I first had a social security [card], I think it was not good enough. When you have the green card, you become a permanent resident and you don’t have to have any kind of document and work permit to work in the U.S. With a green card you can work anywhere in the U.S” (ODS_09_EO).

Noting the experiences of his clients, Tran elaborated:

“The place where I work, there are people coming from a refugee camp from Thailand. They don’t have residency. But some jobs ask for a green card as a qualification. So these people need a lot of help.” (ODS_09_EO).

Charles’ was granted permanent residency, but never received his green card in the mail. He described the lack of job security and poor pay while living with photocopies of his expired documents:

“It was very difficult. I had to do a temp job before. You work for two to three days and then get a new job....its not permanent. You know you may not have money to pay for rent, for food. The reason is that most jobs want to know you are a resident before they give you a job” (ODS_05_RR).

Wakida is an older East African asylee. She explained: “Some [work visas] do not expire, but ours did. So when I bring it to an employer, they say they can’t accept this. I worry a lot” (ODS_04_RR).

However, immigration benefits improve job opportunities and reduce exploitation of immigrant labor, **giving** legal rights, enhanced job security, and better wages and benefits. Obtaining legal status improves job prospects, such as by cutting out the intermediaries that connect undocumented workers with employers willing to hire them. “I am finding better opportunities,” said Angel, who received his TPS. “Companies are opening doors for me because I go there directly. I present my documents and have no fear of anything. That has opened the doors a lot” (ODS_02_DE).

Claudia, has found better job opportunities, quality, and wages since obtaining a citizenship-track visa: “since I have my social security and everything, they can give me better jobs. But before I couldn’t even apply...For example, the job I had recently

paid me better. The people there treated me well” (ODS_11_EO). Since receiving her work permit, Claudia has been promoted at her new job even though undocumented worked in her previous position for more than six months (ODS_13_SFG).

When another focus group participant inquired whether her bilingual capabilities may have influenced her promotion, Claudia replied, “Language, too. But also because I had a work permit.” When asked what would happen if all of their coworkers obtained improved status, focus group participants agreed with Claudia that they “could ask for more money” (ODS_13_SFG). That is, legalization would empower undocumented workers and force employers to pay better wages.

A temporary legal status has substantial limitations in the way it can improve life quality in the workplace. First, jobs hiring immigrants with work permits, in practice, tend to be limited, temporary, and offers poor job security: “They told me they did not want illegal people, hence if my work permit should expire, they would not let me work there anymore,” Ana noted about her employer while she struggled to maintain a valid work permit. (ODS_13_SFG). Second, immigrants are forced to look constantly for unstable jobs to maintain their legal status, and are not able to advance a middle-class career. “They told me if I do not use my work permit, they can take it away,” Claudia explained (ODS_12_EO). After working first as a cleaner and then on a factory line, Ana tried to apply for college but could not afford the time with work obligations.

“I still need to look for jobs to get by. If I lose my work permit, I have to start all over again. If you lose your work permit and social security number, they can take it away from you and you will become an [undocumented] immigrant again. I even applied at the police office to answer phones since I am bilingual. The Latino officer told me, ‘if you work here, I am not going to feel alone anymore, but don’t you care how much they pay you?’ ‘No,’ I told him, ‘I just want my job so my visa will work out’” (ODS_12_EO).

Thus, while work visas, and especially temporary status benefits, have positive consequences for work quality and job treatment, they also have substantial limitations.

Permanent residency and citizenship advance job opportunities and job security more than a visa. “When I first had a social security card, it was not good enough,” explained Tran. “When you have the green card, you become a permanent resident and you don’t have to have any kind of document and work permit to work in the U.S. With a green card you can work anywhere in the U.S.” As Tran indicated earlier, many of his Vietnamese social work clients need a green card in order to find

adequate employment (ODS_09_EO). Ana has been able to keep her job because she was able to improve her status beyond her work permit. She stated: “when I obtained my residency, my supervisor and other bosses congratulated me. And when I obtained my citizenship, they were very happy as well” (ODS_12_EO).

Despite these limitations, better immigration legal benefits give immigrants and refugees new opportunities as well as a feeling of belonging and therefore motivation to seek better jobs. “It gave me more confidence” Liliana said about obtaining citizenship. “When I am applying for jobs,” she continued, “I feel a bit more confident that I will get the job. I feel one step ahead of people who don’t have that opportunity. So it felt really good to check that box” (ODS_07_RR). Claudia never imagined a middle-class career before improving her status:

“My boyfriend told me “you could change your career.” And I answered, ‘what career?’ ‘Attorney,’ he says. Attorney, like an immigration lawyer: I have never thought about that. If I had the chance to go to college, I guess I could also do something to help other people, like they helped me” (ODS_12_EO).

In sum, immigration legal benefits raise wages and benefits, and improve workplace treatment and job opportunities despite the limitations of temporary status benefits.

Access to Resources and Services

Beyond changes in their working lives, immigrants and refugees access to vital rights and resources improve with the benefits of an improved legal status. This applies to housing, education, childcare, social assistance, access to loans and drivers licenses, and a variety of basic resources and services.

Jacqueline immigrated as a child, and lived in the U.S. without documents because of her family’s situation. She describes how access to welfare and services would have helped her improve her material situation.

“People always asked me ‘why don’t you apply for help?’ To this day they tell me ‘they will help you get a house, etc.’ But I say ‘no.’ Its not true...If you don’t have a legal status, they will not help you...[Before,] I was not able to receive assistance for my child care, to receive scholarships, to obtain any help to find a house. They could even help you obtain a good job. And I couldn’t do any of this because I didn’t have a legal status. If had these resources earlier and if I had this help, I know that I would have moved forward more easily...because if you don’t have money, everything is a fight” (ODS_14_MB).

Before she obtained her U-visa, Jacqueline’s children were denied access to childcare providers and a quality education because she was not eligible for social benefits. This delayed her children’s development:

“I couldn’t subscribe my son to programs like ECFE because these programs can’t [subsidize] your childcare...If you cannot receive help from the government, they cannot help you.” I also think my children are more intelligent...my son was two and spoke in full sentences. And I could send him to any school because I could not pay for it. That’s what hurts me...I hope to be able to help my children, that they will be in a better position one day—in terms of education” (ODS_14MB).

Having immigrated as a child, Jacqueline herself was denied equal access to education since grade school because of her status. She recalls: “In second grade, my class made a field trip to Mexico and I couldn’t go. And my teacher wanted me to go with them...because I was the only Hispanic in the class. Hence, everybody else went, but I couldn’t go.” When W wanted to apply for college, she could not obtain grants because of her undocumented status:

“I spend almost my whole life here in the US. [Grade, middle,] and high school—I did everything here. And I applied for [college] for a long time. And I thought that my efforts would pay off someday, that when I leave school I would enter college. Unfortunately, [when] I graduated, I couldn't continue. They do not give scholarship to people like us. And my family is...my mother's resources are very limited. She can't pay for me. And that's what hurt me a lot, that I couldn't continue with my studies. Because I know that if I had continued and graduated, I would be in other circumstances right now” (ODS_14MB).

“But I still have hope,” Jacqueline concluded, who has obtained a citizenship-track visa.

Elicia was also not able to continue to her education to enter college because of her prior immigration status:

“It was like someone cut you at the knees and there was no hope. Are you serious: where's my future? How am I supposed to make an impact in this world, to be a productive citizen. I want my education. That was the plan. I am not supposed to stop. I felt like my whole world had crumbled.”

Elicia’s best friend obtained permanent status and went onto college. They went to school together since grade school and were planning on going to the same college. Even though they were both admitted on paper, Elicia was not permitted to enter the school because she was undocumented. “There was jealousy there” she recalled, “Jealousy as in, 'why not me?' I really want to do this. We are 23 years old now, and from 18 all these years had gone by. And I was getting desperate”.

However, with her citizenship-track visa, Elicia is attending college—and making elaborate business plans to start a childcare center for underprivileged children.

“This is connected to my legal status because I am able to do this. I would not have otherwise been able to be in school full time... I have the Pell Grant. I can get loans if I want. The government is paying for my education. I wouldn't be able to do this if I still had the same status that I had. I wouldn't be able to even think about getting grants to fund the vision that I'm seeing. I wouldn't be eligible for anything. Much less, I wasn't even supposed to be even working to pay my bills much less being able to get funding for programs”

Obtaining social assistance figures prominently into the lives of immigrants and refugees as well. Although she had her asylum papers, Wakida, the main provider of her large East African extended family household, was denied section eight housing assistance before she was able to obtain her green card.

“When I applied for housing benefits, I was rejected because of my immigration status and because I did not work enough—even though I have two kids. Before my income was low and I still had to pay more than my income...So we applied for low income housing. And still I get very high bills. I asked section eight: why?”

Interviewer: And what did they tell you?

Wakida: They say its “because of immigration papers” (ODS_04_RR).

Other basic rights and services such as having a driver’s license and checking account are inaccessible to undocumented people:

“Interviewer: You had mentioned other types of loans. Did you not seek them because you didn’t want them or because of your immigration status?”

Geovanny: I didn’t seek them because of my status and lack of papers. I could not ask for a house loan or auto loan, because they would check my social security and records and learn that I was an undocumented person.”

Jacqueline had similar experiences. “When I go to the bank to open an account, I was told, ‘where is your ID? Where is your social security?’ Hence, all these things complicate everything. And a lot of people are struggling with these things.” With benefits, such resources become accessible, “But not us, not anymore,” concluded Jacqueline about her new ability to have a checking account. (ODS_14_MB).

The effect of a prior immigration status lingers, as even those who obtain permanent residency or citizenship continue not to be able to purchase a home for a long time after obtaining benefits due to their longstanding lack of access to accumulate a credit history, and thus be able to obtain a loan. Nevertheless, with permanent residence, access to credit begins to open, as Amdis experienced: “I feel better because I can buy--actually apply for a house...what I don’t have on my name is credit because I was not able to have credit...and now two years will have passed and it will go over on my name” (ODS_11_EO).

However, with improved immigration status comes better access to rights, resources, and services. “I have tried to get a driver’s license since I was fifteen. I went to a school...but they rejected me because I didn’t have a visa,” W recalled. “But then years later I finally obtained my license and it was wonderful” (ODS_14_MB). Partly paralyzed by a stray bullet, Marco, a 32-year old permanent resident from Mexico finally, first obtained a U-visa as a crime victim and was able to receive his driver’s license when he moved to Minnesota to obtain legal assistance. “This helps me a lot....Now I am not afraid to drive” (ODS_06_EFG). Wakida was able to receive more welfare benefits with her green card, and obtain them much more easily than while she still held a temporary status. “Every time I went to the [welfare office] they asked me for immigration papers, so I had to go to work to get them all the time. I was frustrated they took so much time from me. I didn’t get much...[But] it is easier to apply for and receive [welfare] benefits once you get your [immigration] benefits. They gave me more than they used to” (ODS_04_RR).

Improving her immigration status enabled Lina to obtain a U.S. American education, buy a house, and integrate into society. “When [the ILCM] first accepted my case, I had no choice. I had no reason to go to school, I couldn’t buy a house, because I didn’t have asylum. That’s the benefit I got through the Immigrant Law Center. I got a degree, I got a house, and I can live with piece of mind now that I am a U.S. citizen” (ODS_06_EFG).

In sum, legal benefits enable access to vital rights and resources with immigration benefits, paving the way for more access to housing, education, childcare, and other social welfare programs, as well as securing rights to a driver’s license, the ability to take out loans, and opening checking account.

Family

In addition to material disadvantages, immigrants and refugees are frequently separated and alienated from their families before obtaining immigration benefits. This occurs in three ways: (1) family members face expulsion from the U.S., (2) individuals are not able to see or reunite with family abroad (3) interpersonal relations with family members in the U.S. are strained by problems with their immigration status.

Maria's husband was deported before she had access to legalize her family's immigration status. She has been barely able to support their two children in the U.S. without a well-paying job "They deported him a year ago. I have been unemployed for a year. There are no jobs," she said. Another focus group participant interjected:

"Claudia: I can imagine that it must have been very difficult for the children too.

Maria: Yes, for them too. Because they deported their father and they love their father."

Most participants in this study had a family member deported or personally knew of others in their communities with such a story. Due to widespread experience with such trauma in immigrant communities, there is a constant worry that one will be separated from their family. This is true even if they have less stable statuses such as work visa or temporary protection status. "Before they feared that immigration would come and take me away and that they would need to come with me. They are already settled here. They do like to visit Mexico but they don't want to live there," explained Maria about her young children (ODS_11_EO). Even though Geovanny obtained his, two of his children did not have access to legal documents before they came of age. "I worry about them that they will catch them and send them to El Salvador," he said (ODS_03_DE). Similarly, Claudia recounted, "When I saw that they deported people for any kind of reason, I thought may be I should become a citizen. That's what I have to do because of my children. I have five children. And they say 'Mom you have to....What if they take you for any reason and then what about us?' That is why I started the process" (ODS_13_SFG). A fear of separation from U.S.-born children is central to the way immigrant and refugee families experience the constant threat of deportation. Thanks to having obtained legal benefits—at least two of them along with their children—all three of the families continue to live together in the U.S.

Before obtaining citizenship, and especially permanent residency, immigrants and refugees often become estranged from family abroad since their status prevents them from seeing each other. Many are forced to leave family behind before they are

able to join them. As, Angel, another Salvadoran respondent succinctly put it: “Someone leaves their homeland out of necessity and to search for a better life for their families. I am a single father...and I came here with much pain because I had to leave my children there” (ODS_02_DE). Asylees and recent refugees also fear speaking over the phone with family abroad without the protection of a more stable immigration status, fearing persecution from foreign governments (ODS_14_EFG, ODS_09_EO).

Families are also separated by restrictions on international travel, since leaving the U.S. may mean not being able to re-enter the country. “I have not seen my aunt in so long. She is in Mexico. It is as if we were strangers. They are close but we do not know them” (ODS_14_MB). Most immigrants without citizenship or residency who are not able to travel abroad are also left without an ability to sponsor relatives’ visits. “I am not thinking of going home” laughed Charles, a Liberian immigrant and permanent resident in his thirties when asked about his family. “I am not a refugee.... I have taken America to be my home. I would like to reunite with my kids. That is my hope and prayer.” Before obtaining citizenship, it is very time-consuming to sponsor family, and immigrants are thus not able to reunify without citizenship if they are unable to travel back home. Rashid’s daughter, Ayu was not able to obtain the immigration status to follow him to the U.S. with her mother for years after Rashid obtained asylum.

“My dad was here in 2001. I came two years later, but my mom came in 2005. My parents were separated for four years, and I was separated from my mother for three years. It was tough...At the time my dad was first in the U.S. I missed him. I was confused: am I going to stay here or am I going to be able to move there, given that my dad was in jail for seven months...Its hard because when he left we physically had nothing. At home [in Indonesia] we basically lived on the street.” (ODS_06_EFG).

Other families have been separated for much longer. “I have been here for almost eight years now,” said Lilitiana, the youngest and only sibling in her family who came to the U.S. as a child with her parents on a work visa. She was not able to obtain citizenship to arrange visits from siblings in Mexico until recently. “The relationship between my brothers and sisters is kind of falling apart,” she sighed. “We didn’t see each other. We have missed important dates in our lives. I don’t think they want to live here. But I wanted them to at least be able to come visit my graduation and wedding. When you’re so far apart you miss special occasions” (ODS_RR_08). Another interview respondent noted, “You miss many years. I have three new nieces that were born. I miss them all. Everyone gets married too” (ODS_14_EFG).

Being divided by borders from aging and dying family figures prominently into experiences of separation from family abroad. “Before I couldn’t go anywhere,” said Wakida. “If my sister died in Canada, I couldn’t go.” Several other respondents experienced death in the family while they did not have the ability to travel home because of their immigration status. Lina, the refugee from Cambodia did not have too exceptional of a story:

“My mother was very, very sick and I could not go. And she passed away. Could you believe it? This is not okay. This is before I got my green card. I told my friends I don’t care anymore if I give up everything I have here, I need to go see my mother. I talked to her in the morning and that night she passed away.”

Continuing the focus group discussion, Ayu agreed with Lina, “It’s the same in my family. My grandmother died a couple of years ago. Same thing. I cannot leave the country...Talking on the phone with my grandmother and grandfather before they passed away, they asked ‘when are you going to see me,’ knowing it may be the last time we talk on the phone...My dad could not make it.” The inability to and insecurity of travel abroad before obtaining citizenship perpetuates the separation of immigrant families.

In addition to separation across borders, unstable status or delays in improving legal status are detrimental to relations between immigrants and their spouses in the U.S.. After having her immigration application denied due to insufficient legal advice on the application process, Wakida’s husband was advised by his peers to leave his wife. “A lot of people even [asked] my husband, ‘Why have you married her? She doesn’t even have her paperwork,’” she remembered her worries about her marriage before obtaining a green card. Kao, the Vietnamese social worker, experienced conflicts with his wife because he had to take time off work to accompany her in resubmitting a mysteriously-rejected citizenship application. Finally, Charles and his longtime wife from Liberia separated because of the material and psychological stresses they experienced while obtaining his permanent resident status.

“At this time my wife started disappointing me, going out with someone from work, living in good conditions. When I was back home, I had a good job, a good home, taking care of the kids....She had someone she was going out with. As a matter of fact she drove me out.

Interviewer: Is this in the U.S.?

Charles: Yes, we are separated.

Interviewer: And this was at the time you had problems getting your green card?

Charles: Yes.

With improved immigration status, these interpersonal problems diminish. Family values and the institution of marriage are thus intimately tied to a stable

immigration status. Separation and the threat of deportation, lack of access for reunification, and conflicts with spouses overshadow the lives of immigrants and refugee families with a disadvantageous immigration status.

With permanent residency and citizenship, however, the quality of family life improves. Most importantly, immigrants no longer face deportation of their loved ones with a legal immigration status. For Claudia, obtaining legal status gave a piece of mind to her children:

“It helped me a lot with my children. They say ‘oh mom, now they will not deport you anymore.’ Although they are born here, there is always this fear that there might be a legal change that one day you won’t qualify anymore to be in this country. So although they are almost adults, there is still this fear that one day they will come to take us. So it was a good change” (ODS_12_EO).

Improved material conditions improve relations within families. “When they gave me permanent residency, my children were really happy that I would no longer have to struggle.” Maria went on, “if I lost my job, I would find a new job easily. And they like that” (ODS_11_EO). Charles struggled to take care of his kids in Liberia until he obtained his green card and a better job. “When I am back home, that means I am supporting them. When I leave them, there is no support for them when I am in America because I didn’t have a job...Thank god I later got a job, a permanent job, and was able to send money for their support and livelihood” (ODS_08_Security in family unity and the well-being of children is a thus a key benefit of improved immigration status).

Second, results show the benefits of faster family reunification petitions, which speed up as immigration status improves. Bringing family members to safety is just as serious of a safety concern. “The reason why we wanted to become citizens was that we wanted to petition for our relatives. El Salvador is a country where there is a lot of violence. It is very dangerous where I lived, very dangerous...I am interested in doing this for my brothers and sisters, but I am more interested in doing this for their children because they are still very little and remain in much danger” (ODS_13_SFG). Rashid was able to reunite with his wife and daughter after several years apart after living in the U.S. as an asylee (ODS_09_EO). “As a citizen you are interested in helping your family because you know that they live in a very dangerous place,” told Maria from El Salvador. “If they came illegally, they would have to start from scratch like all the other people who run away from Immigration. So our wish is that they can come freely and obtain a job” (ODS_13_SFG). Having obtained her residency, and anticipating naturalization, Maria said, “I would like to invite my mother and some of my brothers so that they can come here.” The opportunities and realities of reunification may differ, however. “My family is all in Guatemala. From time to time they send me an email asking when I would appeal for them, although its very ironic,” Sonja explained. “They are actually not interested in [immigrating] to the U.S. due to economic conditions here. So it is

never an expressive wish within the family, but a freedom to apply for relatives that we didn't have before" (ODS_13_SFG). The benefit of reunification is thus also a benefit to sponsor visits, not just relatives' immigration. Liliana, a resident and soon-to-be citizen, is glad she can have her siblings' visit: "Before they could not come here to my graduation. I have not seen them for three years now...I think about by mom. She just had an accident. They can't come and see her. You want to have that opportunity to come visit. Not seeing them is hard...Once I am a citizen," she said, "I am glad they will have someone in the U.S. to sponsor for a visit" (ODS_07_RR).

Third, those with residency and citizenship can also safely travel abroad. For most, this means the ability to visit family, even if they are not able to visit or reunite with family in the U.S. "I am able to go to Mexico. That is what has changed in my personal life. I am able to go visit my family. It makes a lot of difference," said Marco, who received permanent residency after obtaining a citizenship-track visa. He went on, "I am not able to go and come back, because before you think you are not going to be able to come back." Lina concurred. "I do not think they are going to come here anytime soon," she said about the prospectus of reunification with her kids in Cambodia, "but I try to visit them as much as possible." For Liliana, residency—versus a visa—means the security of being able to go to Mexico to see her family on urgent occasions. "I have brother and sisters. I can request a visa to see them, especially in case of an emergency" (ODS_07_EO). "Every year we have a family reunion. That is why I decided to apply for citizenship," Tran, a Vietnamese immigrant, explained.

While improved immigration status allows immigrants to reunite with their families, immigration policy and the hefty cost of applications limit opportunities for reunification. Ana's father in El Salvador passed away before she could afford to obtain a passport right after she was naturalized. With the long time that has passed while her application was in process, she may now no longer be able to bring her young nieces and nephews over to the U.S. Even though she can finally sponsor them, they may be too old to qualify. She describes her family's legal-material bind as a catch-22:

"Since this process takes so much time, it might be that they won't be eligible anymore. So you want to go to your country and visit your relatives, but you can't because you don't have papers. And now that you have papers, you can't go because you don't have money...Hence, we have our papers and we feel good, but at the same time we cannot do what we want to do. Until now I wasn't able to petition for my sisters, but now we don't have any money" (ODS_13_SFG).

With long legal benefit processing periods and high application costs, reunification may work for resource-poor immigrant families on paper only.

Finally, with a citizenship-track visa and especially with citizenship benefits, immigrants' interpersonal and spousal relationships are no longer so strained by immigration matters. For Elicia obtaining her legal status through other means meant looking for love and partnership in marriage as opposed to a tool for benefiting status in of itself:

It never really crossed my mind to get married. I have heard people say "get married." Getting married for that just didn't seem right to me. I look at marriage as something you do for love. But I don't anymore: if I was in that situation now, I probably would. If I didn't get my stuff, and I didn't meet John and come to the ILCM, I probably would. But when you're younger like that, you think "Are you crazy?" That's something I never thought about even though I had male friends that would do it.

By lowering stress on spouses detailed earlier and decreasing incentivizes to marry for citizenship, improved legal benefits uphold what family values advocates call "the sanctity of marriage."

Despite some limitations, family unity and well-being are a major benefit of improved legal status: Although reunification is limited in practice, immigration benefits keep families together since family members no longer face the threat of expulsion, families are able to sponsor visits and settlement to the U.S. and to securely travel to home countries, and immigration issues do not place such a great strain on family life.

Safety, Crime, and Fear of Authorities

Before securing a stable legal status, immigrants and refugees are especially distrustful of police, and are thus reluctant to confront crimes committed against them. Asylum seekers and refugees are weary of police when they first arrive to the U.S. because of a combination of their unstable immigration status and experiences fleeing government persecution in their home countries. Take, for example Rashid's time spent in detention, or Lina's fear of police before she obtained asylum status. This is related to a fear that they continued to be persecuted by authorities from her home country. "I do not even trust Cambodian people here because all of my life I had to be careful. That is why I am afraid. Before I got asylum, every time I see the police I don't want to see them. I am afraid they know my story...I waited for two years. It is not easy to get asylum in this country" (ODS_14_EFG). However, many non-refugee status migrants are also weary because of government practices in their countries of origin.

"M: Before I obtained citizenship, I felt unconfident to talk with a police officer...most Vietnamese people, if they don't have an

ID, they don't feel secure when the police stop them and asks them for something.

Interviewer: Do they feel like that in Vietnam or here?

M: Yes, in Vietnam. That is why, when we first arrived here, we feel the same way.”

Thus, fearing police because of experiences prior to immigration is not only a refugee issue, but is relevant for migrants from a diversity of backgrounds before they secure better immigration status.

This fear of police also has little to do with criminal activity by those who are afraid of authorities. Charles explained:

“Whenever I see a police car blinking stopping someone, I would turn around to just not be there. I have never been arrested for anything from the day I was born to this day I am speaking with you. I have never had any problem with police. But I have been insecure back at my home country because of the war” (ODS_05_RR).

As Amdis explained, this fear is motivated by the possibility of police collaborating with immigration officials to deport people because of a nonpermanent immigration status. “Before, my kids feared police because immigration could come and they would take me away from them” (ODS_11_EO). The consequences for children and entire communities unable to come forward only creates crime:

“Interviewer: Did you feel comfortable going to the police for any kind of reason?

W: No. This is a great tragedy. A lot of people are victims of crimes and they are afraid of going to the police. Me too. I experienced things a couple of times like that but I never went to report them before I had my papers. Unless I am afraid for my life, I would not have done it” (ODS_13_MB).

Marco agreed, saying, “This happens every day. When I didn't have papers, I would not report things to the police. If something wrong is happening in the neighborhood it will happen every day as long as people feel too afraid without the right papers” (ODS_12_EFG). Nearly all respondents, even those with permanent residency but without citizenship, reported a fear of authorities before obtaining immigration status benefits.

By contrast, immigrants and refugees felt more security and less fear with the protection of a stable immigration status. Better status may bring more trust

towards police to solve crimes. “I had the experience of doing something I would never have imagined doing as an immigrant,” Ana, a U-visa holder shared, “I am working as a volunteer helping the police.” She added: I went to the police office in Maplewood and they gave me a special phone that I could call if I saw something suspicious. And this Latino officer was very surprised when I came to introduce myself. I said ‘I would like to volunteer.’ And they just looked at me strangely; ‘Doesn’t this scare you?’ And I said, ‘Before, yes, before I was scared to even look at you,’ she laughed. “But not anymore. Sometimes, I’m going for a walk and I see something that doesn’t appear normal or a cry or something – I talk. And the officers at Maplewood gave me a medal of sorts, that I am the first Latina in Maplewood to do this. They told me ‘I would have never expected that a Latina who is not a citizen, much less a resident to come in hear without fear.’” However, while Ana is a pioneer of community partnerships with police, she has also been marginalized in her community as an informant. “There are a lot of people from the church who know who I am. They know where I came from. They know that I was an immigrant and that I'm not a resident. And they look at me and they are scared. And one of the persons, said "don't approach me. You'll go and talk to the police” (ODS_09_SFG).

The results show that most immigrants are indeed more likely to go public with crime and injustice once they obtain benefits. However, it is not evident that people who obtain legal benefits develop a new trust in police, but rather that they understand they can no longer be criminalized for not having valid or unstable immigration documents. When asked why having a valid status matters, Maria answered, “because you can improve the community. It needs people who want to improve it. Now I can walk down the street without being scared that the police would stop me because now I have my ID. Before I was scared to even go for a walk in the neighborhood or walk at night at all because police can stop you and ask you what you are doing...and they arrest you for just walking down the street” (ODS_13_MB). In other words, Maria sees the continuity in racial profiling practices as preventing social integration and freedom of mobility, rather than a default mistrust in police as creating crime under-reporting. For Ayu, obtaining a green card is “a confidence builder” for approaching the police. Yet, she added: “now that I have better papers, if someone stole my car, I would want it back and call the police. But before, I would fear they would come back to me”. Despite a decrease in a fear of confronting police, abusive police practices—not a newfound trust in police—remain the frame of reference for this new mode of engagement with authorities.

Charles also feels more confident around uniformed authorities and government officials: “Before they would ask all kinds of questions you are afraid to answer. But now that you know you have your card, you know that if security asks, ‘Who are you?’, you can say ‘I am a resident.’ ‘How do I know you are a resident?’ You can now show them your [green] card.” Tran was no longer “unconfident” when speaking to

police as well, despite his being used to interacting differently with authorities in Vietnam. “I feel more confident when I have the green card and citizenship,” he concluded (ODS_09_EO). After obtaining a valid asylum status, Lina felt confident to march into a police station, and successfully obtained money back after a landscaper scammed her. When asked if she could imagine going to the police before she obtained her papers, she exclaimed, “No! You would not show up to a police station because the officers assume you would have done the same.” These results do not demonstrate that immigration benefits instantly produce newfound trust in police. Rather, these stories indicate that: (1) immigrant people of color defer to their experiences with discrimination when engaging with police, and (2) a stabilized immigration status gives a feeling of security and freedom.

Freedom of Movement

While policing practices limit mobility, legal documents and permanent residency increase freedom of movement. In addition to the international mobility improvements detailed in the family section above, the restrictions on movement around one’s community, city, and across the country are a result of policing of undocumented immigrants—as well as those with other statuses who are effected by discriminatory policing practices.

The ability to move around one’s community becomes limited. “I felt like no one before, I felt like a nobody,” Geovanny recalled about the years when he was undocumented. “I would hide in my room. I wouldn’t go out” (ODS_03_DE). Simply moving in public space becomes a problem. Similarly, Charles stated, “I felt that I may go somewhere and they may take me to jail even though I had a copy of my green card document when I had lost the actual document...That was my feeling. I used to keep out of big buildings, government buildings...I was afraid (ODS_05_RR).

Walking down the street can even become a challenge. Before obtaining legal status and obtaining her visa, Claudia noted, “There was this fear I would have sometimes when you go on the street that there would be those from Immigration and that they would take you with them” (ODS_14_SFG). As a minor, Wakida was documented vis a vis her father’s status. She spent most of her adulthood unable to move on to permanent residency. “When I got denied for a green card, I was worried. Before I was 18, I went anywhere. I had my papers and I wasn’t scared.” Once she turned eighteen her asylum papers expired, and like many undocumented people, she restricted the way she moved around her community: “I didn’t feel scared to go anywhere because I just didn’t do anything but go to work and home. I didn’t do anything to make me scared. When I am done with my job at the store, I go home” (ODS_05_RR). Similarly, Lina only went to a community center before she obtained her asylum status: “The only part I knew is the Neighborhood House that I walk by when I am done with housework at night. That is all I did” (ODS_13_EFG). “Before, I was scared of going out and looking for jobs,” Maria explained of the time when

she lived without legal documents (ODS_12_EO). These stories demonstrate how limits on mobility often prevent immigrants from running everyday errands, such as applying for jobs, which are necessary for social integration.

The stabilizing of immigration status largely removes such restrictions on freedom of movement. Having legalized his immigration status and obtained TPS, Angel noted, “I feel more comfortable with more freedom...I have my documents, and they can no longer detain me. For that reason, I feel free” (ODS_12_DE). “There is a difference when you obtain help,” said Maria Rosa, who obtained a legal status and citizenship-track visa. She explained, “you can travel within the U.S. because you feel tranquility” (ODS_13_ESG). “It was a big change for me, in the sense that I was so reserved because of the fear. And now I am like a flying bird. And I’m not scared anymore to go to other places” (ODS_12_EO).

In summary, an immigrant’s quality of life is improved by the stabilizing of immigration status because this diminishes a constant fear of the authorities, thereby increasing freedom of movement.

Mental Health

The social-psychological consequences of change in immigration status impact mental health. Before obtaining status, depression and stress result from experiences with social disadvantage and social stigma. Improved immigration status turns stress and anxiety into self-confidence, and fear into tranquility and a feeling of freedom.

The experience of living undocumented, Geovanny explained, “gave me a lot of stress, a lot of sickness. I felt full of fear.” He continued, “It is different now. At the time, I suffered from the pressures of stress. I had to go to the doctor for that. Now I am taking medication for blood pressure. This was [because of what happened] before my papers” (ODS_03_DE). For Angel, living without valid documents “caused a lot of stress. I couldn’t go to the store, for example, because there were people, whether it was the truth or a lie, who would say there were immigration agents there or that is where they go. So one goes out for fear of being caught.” Home is no safe haven either. Rosa recounted, “When someone would knock on my door, I was scared. I hoped that it was not Immigration and that they would not come and take me with them...Sometimes I didn’t even open the door” (ODS_11_EO).

Wakida, an Oromo asylum seeker, felt a constant fear because of what she observed and heard in her community: “Before, I didn’t have the right paperwork, and I just heard all these things people told me: ‘They are going to take your social security from you...and lock you away...the Ethiopian government may know we came to the U.S., or the U.S. would think we are actually from Kenya.’ And we knew someone this happened to” (ODS_05_RR). No matter what the cause of fear, the social

psychological consequences of a lower immigration status are detrimental to mental health, causing fear and stress.

Another mental health consequence of unstable immigration status is depression. “In addition to my own problems, I felt like it limited my own world even more,” said Lucia about the barriers of living undocumented. “My options were more limited. There were moments in my life when I fell into depression. I fell into this logic to fear people who don’t want us to be here, that we are worth nothing” said Lucia. When she was little, “I didn’t want to be who I was,” she continued. Charles struggle to remain independent without his papers brought him to depression and hypertension: “I felt disappointed. I didn’t have a job or money to pay for anything. You feel down-hearted...You are a human being and by the law you need a green card to be a resident. I felt miserable. You cannot fill your immediate needs: food medication. Especially when it came to wintertime, I felt disappointed.” At this time, he began doubting the successes of living in the U.S. promised: “Everything here is law and order. I felt very stressed. I cried a lot. With all the tears, I asked myself, ‘is it true that people cry in America,’” he laughed as he recalled. “Several times I asked myself this. I developed hypertension”(ODS_05_RR). Similarly, Lina, remembered the time before she obtained her asylum status, “I was depressed. I lived in fear.” She sought out therapy at a local community center for her anxiety and trauma. “I went from session to session in order to be able to speak. I don’t want to be crazy” she declared. She laughed, reminiscing of her visit to a psychiatrist who prescribed her medications for her stress: “This is real! I know Paxil, I know Usper, I know panic attacks. (ODS_12_EFG).

Due to a lack of self-confidence, immigrants and refugees without a stable immigration status sometimes lack the motivation to seek out opportunities for better jobs, go to school, and advance their careers. “Before I could not look for work anywhere. I couldn’t walk calm because I feared that they could deport me anytime,” Rosa recalled. “I didn’t feel secure. I felt like something would happen to me” (ODS_11_EO). Marco held a piece of paper in his hand, as he told of his hiring experiences when he was undocumented: “You are not confident to apply, you’re shy. You know what they are going to do,” he says as he rips up a would-be job application. “Without a right, or a social security number, you don’t even have a chance. This one doesn’t matter, that one doesn’t matter. Ok, in the garbage. They don’t care if you have a lot of experience” (ODS_13_EFG). As the next section shows, legal inclusion and exclusion alter the possibilities for social integration.

However, after obtaining immigration benefits—especially legalization—mental health improves. Geovanny, who felt “stressed, sick, and full of fear” before obtaining TPS, said “its different now...that was all before my papers...I can drive without worry, or find a job. So now, while I don’t feel 100% safe, I definitely feel a lot safer” (ODS_03_DE). Once she received her permanent residence, Wakida’s

anxiety went away along with worries about her expired asylum papers. “I feel much better than before...People ask me if you are a resident, and I say ‘Yes!’ Now people don’t make me scared anymore. I feel better, healthier...Everyday I opened my safe to look at my green card and for the next three days, I can’t believe it: is it true I have a green card?” (ODS_04_RR). Once she obtained legal status, Claudia felt confident in obtaining residency, and therefore no longer feels anxious and depressed:

Well, in my case, things have changed a lot. I'm not that worried anymore. My happiness has changed. I was really depressed. I was scared. A lot of times, I went to the hospital because of stress. And the change is now that I'm calmer, happier and I know that I'll be happier if I could move to the next level. And I pray to God that he will help me to pass this hurdle. Because I know that when my permission to work will expire, I'll have to go again to these offices, maybe I'll have to present myself in front of an immigration judge. Of course, I know, it will be a little scary, but I know that everything will be fine (ODS_14_SFG).

Having obtained his residency document, Charles finally feels safer than he did in war torn Liberia: “My life has changed a lot. I am more secure than before when I was back home. I can enter buildings and walk freely in the streets without being afraid.” Claudia was held in ICE detention, but was able to unlearn that fear once she socially integrated with her new legal documents. She explained, “I am more calm now...I was scared to go to get my Minnesota ID. I was scared they would still reject me...but it was 1,2,3. I already got my ID...I have told my friends, my brother, my neighbors what I went through. Being in jail was not a good experience. Being under observation of Immigration was quite an experience. But this experience of getting my ID afterwards took away the fear” (ODS_12EO).

Lucia also said she felt freer when the ILCM started her paperwork: “I felt differently, I felt free. This fear you sometimes have when you go on the street that there are those from Immigration, it was gone. So you feel more free and you have more rights” (ODS_12_EFG). When she heard a knock at home, Rosa could now open the door freely: “I can now go talk to them,” she said (ODS_11_EO). Once they obtain legalized status, immigrants can unlearn the social stigma of being “illegal” that they socially internalize. “To be honest,” Lucia reflected, “I don’t think that I am guilty because [my parents] brought me to a place I didn’t know.” In time, Lucia unlearned the trauma of a racially-labeled “illegal” youth in the U.S.: “I learned to love myself and my culture, my origin, my family, who I am because when I was growing up I didn’t want to be a Mexican, I wanted to be an American” (ODS_13_MB).

As the next section will show, better immigration status not only improves mental health, but also increases participation in civic and political life.

Social Belonging and Civic Participation

Before improving their status, and especially prior to obtaining citizenship, immigrants and refugees do not feel like they belong in U.S. American society, and are reluctant to participate in civic and political activities as well as speak out about injustices they experience. Civic participation takes a backseat to individual survival without the rights and social inclusion afforded by a stable immigration status.

“Before you received legal documents,” Lina explained, “you don’t care about society. You don’t have time to think about it. All you think about is your life and that you protect your life and that they don’t send you back to your country. You cannot feel [anything] about society. You see something wrong, but you cannot say anything. And you don’t want to think, you don’t want to be involved...because [you’re] going to be in trouble.”

Fleeing from one country to another, forced migrants are excluded from both societies before obtaining legal benefits: “ I feel like I don’t belong. I don’t belong to either country,” said Ayu about her time before obtaining permanent residence. “Its not just that you feel it. Its that you actually don’t belong to anywhere...I’m not supposed to go to any embassy to get a passport.” Lina agreed, “I’m not a Cambodian in my country, I am an alien...You are right: Before I become a U.S. citizen I feel like I don’t belong in any place” (ODS_13_EFG).

A lack of security and access to basic rights, as well as a sense of social exclusion, make it difficult for immigrants and refugees to speak out against injustices committed against them. When Geovanny’s daughter was born, he and his family rented an apartment that had a pest problem. “When we called the clinic that is in charge of those things, and told the landlord about the situation, he threatened to call immigration if we complained. That was back in 1996. We were fearful because of this threat, that we would be reported. We remembered this” (ODS_02_DE). Lina was also discriminated against by a landlord since she as an immigrant, and was too fearful to speak against this because of her legal status. “I just have to let them steal it...I got kicked out of my apartment after living there for just two nights. My lawyer said to sue them. And I said no...Its dangerous.” Even with permanent resident status, Lina continued to fear deportation and did not speak up against injustice where she worked. One department store violated employees’ rights by demanding they work off the clock. She explained: “when I worked at Dayton, I was not a U.S. citizen. And I know that even though I had a green card, I can still be deported. I know that because I’m not a U.S. citizen. That’s why when I was over there I didn’t say too much.” (ODS_13_EFG).

However, improved immigration status transforms attitudes on political and civic participation. Obtaining a green card enabled Charles to call the United States home and become more socially involved. “It helped me a great lot, just being out and talking to people. I was free. I can meet you and I can talk to you. It makes me feel a bit lively that I am a legal resident...I feel at home. I feel like America is my home” (ODS_04_RR). Citizenship status, especially, creates a new sense of belonging enabling immigrants to speak up to injustices that affect their lives: “the legal document helps us have more confidence in ourselves,” English focus group participants declared. Lina illustrated this point with a story about a landscaper who took her money without doing the work. Since she had obtained documents, for the first time in her life, Lina went to the police station, and demanded assistance to help get her money back. The next day, she did. “That’s a lot of benefit I received from legal papers,” she explained. “People do a lot of things to me. But before I let them do it to me because I was afraid. But not anymore...I feel more confident, I have changed...I feel like I need to stand up for myself. So if someone steps on my toe, I will scream, I won’t just keep it down to myself” (ODS_13_EFG). Feeling like one belongs to society allows people to speak to injustices in their lives.

“Just being able to vote gives you more of a responsibility, like you can be making societal decisions.” -- Liliana

Liliana’s experience at a local community center after obtaining citizenship is quite a contrast between her attitude towards civic engagement before applying for benefits. “Before I received documents, I did not feel good about community service or volunteering,” said Liliana, who immigrated from Mexico City as a child. Now that has changed. “Close to my house there is this center,” she recalled, “and I asked if I can volunteer. So they told me to bring my paperwork to prove I am a resident. So I came with my citizenship papers...when you say you are a citizen you know what it means to be here.” Before obtaining citizenship, Liliana says she “hardly paid attention to politics.” That too changed once she obtained citizenship: “I started thinking about it,” she said, “I didn’t really pay attention until I decided to be a citizen, what is this president doing, what is this governor saying or making into laws...being able to vote gives you more of a responsibility, you are making societal decisions. You feel more involved, being a citizen” (ODS_07_RR). As Liliana’s experiences demonstrate, becoming a citizen can produce an integrated identity which helps to increase civic participation among immigrants.

Knowledge of Law and Society

In addition to direct benefits of status, a mediating factor influencing immigrants and refugees’ quality of life is knowledge of law and society. Feeling secure and

healthy is related to access to information about legal and social rights and norms, as well as immigration law and enforcement practices. This section describes a distinction between folk and expert knowledge immigrants and refugees draw on to understand society before and after receiving immigration benefits.

Before obtaining legal benefits and legal services, many immigrants and refugees are exposed to a variety of conflicting messages about law and society. Wakida's troubles started when she wrongly filed a refugee-track application, which was rejected since her family came on asylum. Before she applied for help with the ILCM, Wakida says, "I never had a real lawyer before. I did not even know that the [parents' asylum] document is very important to me because I was seventeen when I came here...When people talked to me, I felt bad....I didn't know how this paper works, how it could help me...My friends were telling me terrible things. They would discourage me so I would go home...My friends were deceiving me and were not telling me the truth" (ODS_05_RR).

Fear of authorities is exacerbated by a lack of accurate information about how to deal with legal issues in immigrant communities. As Rosa also explained: "We are uninformed, because a lot of what people are doing is listening to people who know a little bit. And still what they know can be wrong. Rosa went on to relay the following story:

"That happened to my family. When we started with TPS, my sister told me 'what they are doing is giving information to Immigration so that they can come to our house to take us away.' And they were always against that we fill out all these forms. And time passed and they never were able to obtain their documents, while we already became citizens. And all this is due to wrong information they received. They always believed what other people were telling them."

"There is a huge lack of information," Ana agreed, detailing an incident when employers attempted to get their immigrant workers to fill out forms, saying they were "arguing for a new reform." She went on, "They are only tricking them because if they fill out the form incorrectly, they receive a deportation order instead of a permit. That is due to wrong information. Such people do not work for the community but for their own profit." Some view for-profit and inaccessible legal services as perpetuating this lack of knowledge. Ana also stated: "There are a lot of people who have the wrong information, that is why we need to give them the right information... Some people just pay and pay until they end up in their home country" (ODS_14_EFG). Expert legal knowledge is thus seen as problematic even before obtaining legal services.

Yet, most see a lack of legal and social knowledge within immigrant communities as a problem in of itself: “I don’t know if it is fear of negligence, but I do not know whom to go to. I do not know whom I should communicate with” (ODS_13_MB).

Consequently, an apprehension of interacting with state and other officials, whether associated with police authorities or not, makes immigrants less likely to seek out information from legal experts and other official sources. Even the 2010 Census door-to-door data collection sent shockwaves through immigrant communities. “They will come with immigration,” Lucia’s brother told her. Lucia explained, “A lot of people, people with no documents were scared that they would come and send them away. The whole world was scared” (ODS_12_EO). A lack of accessible information leaves makes it very difficult to distinguishing between harmful state repression with legitimate immigration assistance and other engagements.

Oftentimes, it appears that knowledge of social and legal issues is passed on through the media and immigrant social networks. Charles explained:

“For those of us who are immigrants and refugees from Africa we first look for our brothers and sisters who are from Africa to ask them how the system here works because you come to a country that you don’t know anything about. You hear it on international news but then you come here and you realize that things work much differently that what you heard. Somebody advised me that everything in America is law.”

A lack of knowledge impeded Charles’ ability to find work before obtaining his green card: “especially because of my training,” he said, “I was not told how I could find good jobs...Nobody was there to give me advice to consult me” (ODS_04_RR).

Until they obtain access to accessible legal support, immigrants and refugees have a difficult time improving their immigration status and quality of life. “I was going to do this by myself,” said Liliana about her citizenship application, “but I remembered my experience with my residency card. What if I made a mistake? I do not know how to apply: what do these numbers mean?” Although she speaks fluent English, the young Latina noted that “English has been really hard for me...especially legal immigration status benefits. She concluded: “It was really helpful to have someone who knows the legal terms and vocabulary,” (ODS_07_RR).

Accessible immigration legal services bridge the aforementioned knowledge gap. For Wakida, there was a sharp contrast between how she felt before and after she received legal assistance. “When different people talk to you, they tell you scary things, so I just worried about it. I worried a lot. When I got my lawyer, I felt better. She gave me hope.” Wakida was eventually able to get her own asylum status, although acquaintances had advised her to immediately apply for permanent

residency. Charles also felt more secure in his knowledge of U.S. law and society with his legal benefits and services. “Before I did not understand the system. Not until I came to the ILCM did I start understanding the system.” “Everything they did at the ILCM changed my life,” Tran concluded. “I know if I didn’t receive this service,” Lina said, “I wouldn’t have been able to receive asylum” (ODS_6_EFG).

Although immigration benefits begin to bridge the legal knowledge gap, information still flows through marginalized communities through social networks, not experts. Elicia, who came as a child from Liberia and spent most of her adult life undocumented, left without access to status since her father’s untimely death. Her explanation of how she helped a friend in trouble shows why immigrants without a good immigration status are more likely to trust information from peers with similar experiences and statuses:

“People don't realize how much this thing affects you to the core of your soul, it really effects you. So I make sure I interact with people from my country, people from other countries who can relate, who can understand, because you can't talk about this to people who haven't experienced this: ‘you are a citizen, what do you know? You have it’ (ODS_10_EO).

In sum, immigration legal services improve immigrants’ quality of life by providing practical legal knowledge necessary to the social well-being of individuals and their communities. At the same time, immigrants rely most heavily on and trust most knowledge that comes from their communities and status peers, not just from legal experts. The following section will illuminate why the latter is the case.

Community and Status Envy

Previous sections partially discussed the effects of quality of life changes beyond individual or household benefits. Recall Leticia’s story of the jealousy she experienced toward her documented friend when she was denied access to attend college, or the way Wakida’s community caused her distress about her status, and the way Ana was excluded by her community for working with police. This section further explores the relationship between immigrant status and communities. Immigrants and refugees had not experienced a change because they continue to experience a low quality of life. “In reality, there was not much change, only a bit more security,” said Jacqueline (ODS_13_MB). , The absence of quality of life change can be seen at the group level, resulting in social division from uneven immigration status in immigrant communities. Specifically, a *status envy* between those who have a stable immigrant status and those who do not can increase conflict within immigrant communities.

Status envy is manifested as insecurity and mistrust especially in undocumented and mixed-status communities. It is expressed in places such as work, where different positions and rewards for people with different legal statuses sow divisions amongst workers. As Angel explained, “at work there are ill-intentioned people who if they don’t like you, go to the boss, and if the boss ignores them they file a complaint against you to immigration so that immigration can come and take you away on their own” (ODS_02_DE). Social mobility, such as occupational advancement, becomes an uneven and unfair contest. “It hurts you emotionally,” said Maria. “As time passes, I constantly saw others move on and you don’t have an ID, so you don’t have rights. It hurt me a lot... It was emotionally devastating” (ODS_13_MB). Maintaining a healthy sense of self-worth and confidence are mental health issues that can emanate from such experiences.

However, increasing access to stable immigration status can ameliorate status envy problems in communities. Leticia now works a job with a higher concentration of people with a documented immigration status. “Where I work now, its very calm. There is no gossip. The people there all have documents,” she noted. “Yes, it was a good change. They pay me more, and yes, I work a lot but not comparable to the work I had before. And people don’t talk behind each other’s backs. No, its very calm...There is more respect” (ODS_14_SFG). Improving immigration status helps to eliminate status inequities and, therefore, improving mutual respect within immigrant communities.

However, this research shows that status envy persists in immigrant communities when they are targeted by the government and denied basic rights due to a lack of stable immigration status. Leticia’s comfortable new job was with ABM—a company that chose to fire over a thousand janitors in the Twin Cities—most of whom had valid work documents—when they were audited by ICE. A coworker from another contractor “bothered” Leticia. Even though Leticia was very happy to get this new job, she also realized that “this woman worked there too and they [ABM] removed her. And I think she acted like that to me,” she continued, “because she wanted to work more and they gave her only a small amount of hours” (ODS_12_EO). Claudia elaborated on this lack of change: “I would say that there is still a lot of envy between Latinos at work who earn better money. There is a lot of racism among the same people. Even sometimes in the family there is a lot of envy.” She continued to describe how status envy has sowed divisions in her family, “My brother, he is working all day. He has three jobs and he does not have a work permit. And my sister-in-law told me that he envies me. ‘You don’t work but you have a work permit and to him who is working three jobs, they don’t give it to him.’ My nieces ask me why I don’t give him my work permit. They are small. They don’t understand what a permit is” (ODS_14_SFG). As long as immigrants continue to experience discrepancies between legal and social rights, individual-level immigration benefits may even exacerbate status envy tensions within communities.

Those who have obtained immigration legal benefits are cognizant of their status privilege, but do not find avenues for redress other than guilt of their newfound status. As one participant stated: “Sometimes I feel bad because I am not walking in their shoes” (ODS_12_EO). It will take more than guilt to move towards community and policy-level solutions that would improve immigration benefits across immigrant communities.

Recommendations and Limitations

This section suggests recommendations for improving immigration legal work and further research on immigrant quality of life change. Using study results and analysis in this report, it discusses the limits of individual legal service provision and those of this study. Specifically, this section provides a mandate for community-based legal education and suggests a survey instrument for further quantitative research on quality of life change.

This report has analyzed the results of an outcome documentation study on the impact of immigration legal benefits on the quality of life of immigrants and refugees in the U.S and in Minnesota in particular using qualitative interviews and focus groups with former clients of the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota. Results show that while some benefits such as work opportunities and family reunification may be difficult to actualize and take advantage of, immigrants and refugees benefit from a variety of changes in life quality with improved immigration status. In particular, opportunities increase in the areas of work, access to resources, and family, along with a variety of secondary benefits: improved mental health; greater freedom of movement; decreased fear of authorities; and enhanced social and legal knowledge.

Several recommendations are in order. Participants in this study offered several valuable starting points for improving immigration legal work. Nearly all respondents praised the free legal assistance they obtained. Although out of the scope of this report, many eloquently articulated why more resources are needed to support such an important service. More importantly, many recommended an expansion of education programs, and were willing to lend assistance in that endeavor. As Kenny advised, “they [the ILCM] can use the money to put out more publications so they can spread the message to a lot of people. There are lots of illegal immigrants here that need help” (ODS_13_EFG). Moreover, Tran suggested that he would educate his coworkers and clients on immigration law if he obtained some training: “In the social work field in the Vietnamese community, we need more training, we need more information about immigration so that we can help more people with their immigration issues.” He went on to contrast his on-the-ground social work with the expert legal assistance of the ILCM, saying:

“It is different with your office. Your office is professional. [My clients]

might ask me questions about immigration, but right now, I cannot help them at all; I just fill out the form. There are lots of questions. I usually tell them to go and ask for help here at the ILCM” (ODS_09_EO).

It may be worth heeding an even wider call for education if not for any other reason than that, like many other immigrant law centers today, the ILCM struggles to provide individualized attention to the many who seek legal advice.

This report’s findings in regards to patterns of information circulation within immigrant communities also points to the need for such programs. The section on legal knowledge discussed how those who have not obtained immigration benefits especially rely on folk knowledge in their communities—rather than expert legal knowledge—to understand law and society. Especially in the absence of accessible and reliable legal expertise, those who share or have once shared certain experiences of immigrant life become the experts. Rather, they are the peers people turn to in order to understand, for example, what to do when a Census or an ICE official knocks on their door. These issues necessitate an educational intervention beyond the limits and capacity of individualized, client-based legal services. They call for reliable information about immigration law and enforcement practices to be disseminated by and from within immigrant communities. This report thus recommends an expansion of community-based immigration law education programs.

A client advisory council may be a first step in this direction. Workshops on immigration law and know-your-rights trainings may be hosted first for former ILCM clients to create a wide base of immigrant-led experts. These community legal workers can then be empowered to inform, or host their own workshops for, their communities. There are many opportunities for partnerships. For example, the Detention Watch Network travels to sponsor a 2-day long Immigration Detention 101 workshop that “offers basics on the detention and deportation system and provides guidance on how to organize communities directly impacted by deportation.”

Fortunately, this research has inadvertently produced a strong base for such a program. Although it also happens to be a built-in bias in interview studies, a helpful unintended consequence of “creaming”—to recruit the most interested of eligible participants—has created a base of activist former clients, many of who showed interest in participating in a client advisory council.

In addition, this study has another research design bias: it selects for successful clients only. This overlooks several alternative outcomes. One possibility is that potential or actual clients who did not receive immigration benefits experienced the same quality of life change across a similar period of time of integrating into life in

the U.S as clients who have successfully obtained immigration benefits.

The most important limitation of this study is that it used individuals as units of analysis, overlooking the impacts of immigration status inequality at the societal level. The fact that community impacts and status envy still appeared as an emergent theme in the results of this study goes to show the extent of barriers of unstable immigration status. More in-depth community-based ethnographic research and focus groups are needed to fully understand these issues. Ultimately, unconditional amnesty, federal comprehensive immigration reform, and equal access to citizenship rights are needed to solve these deep-seated social problems.

The most applied and actionable limit of this study is that it has not produced aggregate-level data that funders trust most to evaluate programs, and politicians demand in order to advance public policy change. Quantitative research methods such as mass surveys can produce such results. To this end, this report recommends that a quality of life survey questionnaire be implemented into the everyday workflow of immigration legal services.

Driven by findings of this study, Appendix 5 provides such an instrument for further research. The survey contains five modules related to the most important and quantifiable findings from the 2010 Outcome Documentation Study. The five modules include a series of specific questions about work, access to resources and services, family, crime and safety, and mental health. It also asks respondents to judge whether their experience in each of these areas is impacted by their current immigration status. Each question is designed on a five-point Likert scale (e.g. strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree). However, the instructions ask respondents to circle a number on a corresponding visual: a ten-point numerical scale on an extent of agreement diagram.

This survey questionnaire can be used in a pre-post research design to create a natural experiment, administering the questionnaire before and after the “treatment” of immigration legal benefits. For example, a likely client visiting the office may be asked to participate in a pre-test version of the survey. Once a client receives an immigration benefit, a post-test survey can be sent in the mail with a confirmation letter. Given spatial and social proximity, high return rates on both the survey—especially the form the latter—can be projected to well over 50%. With a large enough sample, this would give researchers the flexibility to create sub-samples, which would still be statistically representative for each variable. In time, a plethora of useful studies can emerge out of this research; some about impacts on the quality of life of U-visa clients, some about immigration benefit impacts on access to resources and services, and if a sub-sample is large enough even some studies on participants of certain national backgrounds about whom little is yet known (e.g., refugees from Myanmar). Results from these studies may, in turn, be used to steer the work of community legal workers and the client advisory council.

Appendix 1 – Initial Quality of Life Measures Used

The preliminary list of potential quality of life measures hypothesized, outlined prior to data collection and used to develop the interview guide.

<i>Quality of Life Measure</i>	<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Scope of services effected¹⁴</i>	<i>Potential Outcomes</i>
Civic Participation	Voting, speaking out against injustice in community	Esp. citizenship, and also legalization	Voting: record number applied for citizenship in 2008; voice vs. police abuse; Language
Family Future	Family unity, College admission, retention and other opportunities	Legalization, green card family reunification (FR)	Latino school access and drop out rate b/c of status probs.; ability to petition for family reunification
Mobility and Travel	Local mobility and travel, International travel; freedom of mobility.	Legalization, Green Card, Citizenship	Drivers license or insurance; barriers and fears of detention during travel lifted
Personal Well-being	Mental Health, Physical Safety, Family Safety	Legalization, esp. U-Visa and VAWA	Fear of deportation. Safety from abuser for domestic and sexual violence victims and family in U.S. & home country.
Social Benefits	Medicare, education loans, social assistance.	Citizenship, Green Card, Legalization	Elderly feel safe to file after citizenship; crime victims apply when feel safe from abuser
Work	Legally-documented, safer, and better-paying work	Legalization	Better-paying work with documented status
	career opportunities	Citizenship	Govn. jobs & grants

¹⁴ The typology used here to describe the scope of clients effected by the kind of legal status or outcome obtained through ILCM assistance: (1) legalization, (2) permanent residency, (3) family reunification, and (4) citizenship. (1) includes a variety of ILCM services, but is condensed here for practical purposes. VAWA and U-Visas are granted to victims of domestic and sexual violence in the U.S.

Appendix 2 –Interview Guide

This interview instrument was used largely as a guide. Interviewer and focus group leaders had the flexibility to ask semi-structured and follow up questions that followed the of flow a conversation, making sure to touch on at least the five modules within the guide.

Hello, my name is _____ and I work as a researcher at the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota. We asked you to speak with you today as part of a study we started conducting with former clients to learn about changes in the lives of immigrants and refugees since they have improved their immigration status. Understanding our conversation today will help us lobby for just immigration policy and continue providing our free legal services for Minnesota’s immigrant and refugee communities. To thank you for your participation, you will receive a \$25 Target gift card at the end of our focus group. With that said, you have the right to stop the interview whenever you like. Please know that everything you say today will remain anonymous; that is your identifying information will not be attached to anything you say. Likewise, nothing you say here will impact any of your past or future cases with ILCM.

Module X: Introduction

To begin, I have a few background questions.

- 1) What circumstances in your life influenced you to approach the immigrant law center to improve your immigration status a few years ago?
- 2) Thinking about those issues that influenced you to seek legal help, how would you say the papers you had before you improved your status impacted the kind of life you lived?

Throughout this group want to ask you about impacts on your family of changes in your immigration status. Some answers to these questions may overlap, but they refer to different parts of your lives we would like to learn about.

Module A: Family

People who have the right documents are generally able to see their family when they want. But is the situation similar for immigrants and refugees.

- 1) Before you obtained better immigration status, how was your ability to maintain

relationships and support your family affected by the papers you had?

2) How has this changed? In what ways are you able to maintain ties with your family differently because of the rights you have obtained with your new papers?

3) Students may also be under a lot of stress because the papers their families are able to hold. What was your or your children’s experience in school before you received your status/papers?

4) School may also be important for families. How did obtaining your status/papers change your or your children’s ability to stay in school? Access college?

Module B: Personal Safety and Mental Health

1) I also have a few questions about well-being and freedom before and after people receive better papers.

2) Before you obtained your status, how did you feel around police and other authorities? For example, how did the papers you have affect your ability to move around in your community without fear of police—such as to go to the store or run different errands? Has this changed or stayed the same since you have updated your status?

3) The same may apply to people who have more power in their own life who may mistreat them. Having obtained status, how do people feel about challenging those mistreat them in their communities?

Module C: Work

Next, I have a set of questions about work before and after you obtained your status/papers.

1) How has obtaining your papers changed the kind of job opportunities available to you?

2) How were you treated differently at the job you had before you obtained

immigration benefits compared to the situation at work now?

- 1) How has the kind of job you hold effected your personal and family's well-being?

Module D: Civic Participation

Finally, I want to ask you about changes in your participation as a member of this society before and after obtaining your status/papers.

- 1) Do you feel like you belong to this society more so than you did before you received your papers? How so?
- 2) Many people are motivated to get their status/papers because they want to move closer to being able to vote in political elections. How did you feel about your in/ability to participate in the recent 2008 national elections?

+"Overall, how have you been satisfied with the life you have since you received your new papers?

+"People imagine their lives will be different once they receive benefits. Have you been surprised in any ways that your life has NOT changed since receiving your new papers?

+How can the ILCM improve its services and advocacy for MN's immigrant and refugee communities?

Is there anything you wanted to add about how your life has changed since you have changed your immigration status with help from the Immigrant Law Center?

Thank you for participating.

[Distribute Gift Cards]

Would you like us to send you a final copy of our report on this study? [If yes,] Would you prefer that by email or a print copy by regular mail? [Confirm mailing or email address].

I have one last question. We are currently looking for more input from clients in our projects. Can someone from our office contact you with regards to taking part of our Client Advisory Council?

Appendix 3 – Sampling Quotas by Immigration Status

Projected participant quotas by legal status obtained, March 2010. (Total of nine to thirteen interviews planned; 12 successfully completed in addition to focus group participants.)

<i># interviews</i>	<i>Status Obtained</i>	<i>Explanation and Notes for Selection</i>
2-4	Citizenship track visas and asylum; VAWA, U-Visa.	These esp. include female victims of domestic and sexual violence in U.S. Over-sampled here b/c will be ethically complicated to integrate into focus groups. Victim advocates should be invited to sit in. Also, include detention “Fast-Net” cases—documented but didn’t know it,
1-3	Other temporary statuses, legalized.	TPS, and other non-citizenship track visas. (Includes those who have not yet attained permanent residency). Include those who lost documents and obtained help with replacement.
2-3	Permanent legal residency, “Green Card”	Include refugees as well as those who come over by family reunification or otherwise.
2-3	U.S. Citizenship	Most advantaged and socially integrated; Many long term ILCM clients who received other ILCM services; Easier to speak with younger African women (also more accomplished), not older African men.

Appendix 4 – Survey for Future Research

The following instrument is derived using the results of this study and can be implemented into everyday workflow of immigration law offices for former clients.

Form 1

Client Survey

Please take a few minutes to fill out a survey about your experience as an immigrant or refugee in Minnesota. Your answers will remain confidential and anonymous, and will *not* affect the outcomes of your case. **But, this study will help** us expand our legal services and lobby for better laws for Minnesota’s immigrant and refugee communities.

Directions: Circle **one number** on the following chart.

g) How much would you agree or disagree with the following statement?

I believe that my experiences with work are impacted by my immigration status.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied		Neutral			Satisfied		Very Satisfied	

First, a few questions about work.

1) Considering consequences of your immigration legal status, how satisfied you have you been at your most recent job with respect to the following:

a) Wages and benefits at work,

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied		Neutral			Satisfied		Very Satisfied	

b) Workload at your current job.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied		Neutral			Satisfied		Very Satisfied	

c) Relationship to your bosses and coworkers

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very Unsatisfied		Unsatisfied		Neutral			Satisfied		Very Satisfied

d) Your job security (confidence that you will not lose your job)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very Unsatisfied		Unsatisfied		Neutral			Satisfied		Very Satisfied

e) How much your voice counts in making decisions and solving problems at work

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very Unsatisfied		Unsatisfied		Neutral			Satisfied		Very Satisfied

f) The opportunity to obtain a better job in the near future

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very Unsatisfied		Unsatisfied		Neutral			Satisfied		Very Satisfied

g) How much would you agree or disagree with the following statement?

“I believe that my access to most of the services listed above is impacted by my immigration status.”

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral			Agree		Strongly Agree

2) How satisfied are you with your access to the following **services and resources**, keeping in mind consequences of your immigration status.

a) Social welfare benefits (e.g., childcare assistance, medicare, section 8 housing, or food stamps).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very Unsatisfied		Unsatisfied		Neutral			Satisfied		Very Satisfied

b) Education funding (e.g., grants or scholarships)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very Unsatisfied		Unsatisfied		Neutral			Satisfied		Very Satisfied

b) Financial loans (for a car, a house, etc.).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very Unsatisfied		Unsatisfied		Neutral			Satisfied		Very Satisfied

c) Drivers license

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very Unsatisfied		Unsatisfied		Neutral			Satisfied		Very Satisfied

d) A banking or checking account

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very Unsatisfied		Unsatisfied		Neutral			Satisfied		Very Satisfied

e) How much would you agree or disagree with the following statement?

I believe that my access to most of the services listed above is impacted by my immigration status.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral			Agree		Strongly Agree

3) Now some questions about family unity. Considering any consequences of your immigrant legal status, how much would you agree or disagree with the following statements:

a) “I can reunite with my family left in my home country by successfully sponsoring their long-term visit or resettlement to the U.S.”

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral			Agree		Strongly Agree

b) “I can travel and have the opportunity to visit my family when I like to.”

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	

c) “I can freely go out and travel in my city and to other parts of the country”

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	

d) “I feel secure that my family in the U.S. will remain together and *not* be separated by deportation”

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	

e) Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement?

I believe my family life and freedom of mobility is impact by my immigration legal status.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	

4) Next, a set of questions about your views and experiences with safety, crime, justice, keeping in mind consequences of your immigration legal status.

Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements?

a) I feel safe from mistreatment at work.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	

b) I feel safe when I am on the street and when I go out.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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5) Before we finish, a few questions about society. Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements, keeping in mind consequences of your immigration legal status.

a) I feel like I belong to this society.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	

b) I feel included to participate in civic groups and associations (e.g., park district programs).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	

c) I feel like my opinion is included in the political decisions made in this country.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	

d) “I feel secure that my family in the U.S. will remain together and *not* be separated by deportation”

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	

e) Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement.

I feel that my personal well being is related to my immigration status.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	

7) A few final questions about your personal well-being, still keeping in mind consequences of your immigration legal status.

a) “On an average day, I feel calm and without fear.”

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	

b) “On an average day, I feel free and unconstrained.”

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	

b) “On an average day, I feel happy and self-confident.”

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	

d) Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement.

I feel that my personal well being is related to my immigration status.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	

Lastly, please provide us with some information about yourself, for demographic information only.

Gender: Male Female

age: ____

country of origin: _____

Immigration status you are seeking now or have just obtained: _____

Number of years you have lived in the U.S.: _____

Appendix 5 -- Data Summary

Frequency Rate	Theme and Frequency	Theme Description
High (28-34)	work-opportunities (34)	new job prospects , career improvement
	legal services (30) family unity & separation (28)	impacts, praise, and critiques of; suggestions threats to family separation via deportation; impacts of separation with family abroad
Medium (11-22)	access to services & resources (22) mental health – fear & stress (20) no change (20) civic participation (20) knowledge of system (20) mobility international (19) discrimination (19) education (19) voice, justice (18)	from checking account, to loans, welfare assistance stress-related consequences of fear of authorities explicitly no impact of benefits propensity for involvement in civic associations knowledge of law and society circulated via social networks ability and restrictions on international mobility experience with discrimination based on status, race, religion, etc. impacts on and of formal education demonstrated willingness or reservations to confront mistreatment.

Frequency Rate	Theme and Frequency	Theme Description
<p>Medium (11-22)</p>	<p>fear of authorities, safety (18)</p> <p>mental health – security (16)</p> <p>mobility – local, national (15)</p> <p>refugee story, situation @ home country (13)</p> <p>political participation (12)</p> <p>community divisions, status envy (11)</p>	<p>Apprehension or trust of authorities</p> <p>security in or anxiety regarding immigration status</p> <p>restrictions and freedom to move around locally and travel within U.S</p> <p>reasons for leaving and why it is dangerous to return</p> <p>voting, political involvement and consciousness</p> <p>social conflicts resulting from immigration status differences within communities</p>
<p>Low (4-10)</p>	<p>family reunification (10)</p> <p>work – exploitation (10)</p> <p>mental health – confidence (10)</p> <p>family –support 10)</p> <p>social belonging (9)</p> <p>mental health – depression, happiness (9)</p> <p>family – spouse (8)</p> <p>family – kids (6)</p> <p>language (5)</p>	<p>Ability to sponsor family members resettlement or visits to U.S. maltreatment at work. Outward self-confidence or extreme social seclusion</p> <p>Material and emotional support,</p> <p>Feeling of belonging to society</p> <p>extreme sadness, happiness; references to depression; joy of obtaining status</p> <p>Relationship with spouse, effects on</p> <p>Relationships with kids, effects on</p> <p>English language proficiency</p>