Florence Project Receives National Community Leadership Award!

The Florence Project was selected to receive the 2010 John Jay Award for Community Leadership from the City University of New York’s John Jay College of Criminal Justice for its work on behalf of detained immigrants and refugees in Arizona. While the award is usually given to an individual, the nominating committee was so impressed with the Florence Project’s work it decided to give the award to an organization for the first time. Legal director Kara Hartzler, staff attorney Katie Ruhl and Board President Noel Fidel were present to accept the award at a ceremony on April 6th in New York City, with featured speakers including Mia Farrow, actress Ellen Burstyn, and Rossana Rosado, publisher of El Diario La Prensa. The Florence Project is thrilled to be recognized by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, an internationally recognized leader in criminal justice research and education.

20th Anniversary Celebration

On Saturday, March 27th, Florence Project staff, board members, alumni, supporters, friends and former clients came together from across the country to celebrate the organization’s 20th anniversary at the home of Board Member Peggy Kirch and husband Art Piccinati. Florence Project founder Chris Brelje was honored, along with law firm Lewis & Roca LLP, who funded Chris’s year-long sabbatical from the firm to start the Project in 1989. To commemorate our 20th anniversary, we have also compiled a history of the organization into a book, which will be published in the coming months by the Hispanic Institute of Social Issues. Copies of the book can be preordered by contacting the Florence Project at firrp@firrp.org.

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Immigration attorney Delia Salvatierra reached out to the Florence Project in December 2008 looking for opportunities to volunteer for our clients. After successfully assisting an unaccompanied minor win Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, she volunteered later that year to help "Juan", a severely mentally ill man detained in Florence. The Department of Homeland Security alleged Juan was born in Mexico and entered the United States without inspection. After initially meeting Juan, Florence Project staff struggled to assist him, not being able to confirm his identity or assess his options for legal relief because of his serious mental illness. After months of internal strategizing, Florence staff attorney Katie Ruhl submitted an amicus brief to the Immigration Court on Juan’s behalf, raising these concerns, arguing it was the government’s burden to prove his foreign birth, and informing the court that the Florence Project would assist in locating treatment and housing for Juan if the court terminated or administratively closed proceedings against him. In response, the Immigration Judge ordered the Department to conduct a mental health evaluation, and subsequently found Juan to be incompetent.

Knowing she was confronting significant due process issues relating to competency, Katie began thinking about possible pro bono referrals. While she was speaking with Juan one day in the Florence attorney visit area, she ran into Delia Salvatierra, who recognized Juan was mentally ill, asked questions about the case and volunteered to assist. Because the judge had found him to be incompetent, Katie and Delia decided to seek her appointment by the court as his pro bono counsel so she could advocate for proceedings to be terminated.

Concerned about whether Juan could effectively consent to her representation given his mental health issues, Delia consulted the state bar ethics hotline and conducted independent research, with inconclusive results as to whether she could ethically appear on his behalf when his competency had not been restored. Delia nonetheless appeared at Juan’s next court hearing and explained her intent and role to the Immigration Judge, who concluded Juan was not competent to consent to her representation and declined to appoint her as pro bono counsel for him but recognized her role of being present to advocate on his behalf and the safe release plan she had found for him if he were to be released. Apparently recognizing that they were seeking to deport an incompetent man who could not be appointed counsel, the Department thereafter moved to terminate proceedings against Juan and released him that evening by dropping him at the Phoenix bus station at midnight.

When, the next day, Delia learned Juan had been released in this manner, she immediately left work and drove to the bus station and found him sitting at the station, where he had been all night. She made arrangements for him to go to Washington, where she had found safe housing for him, and worked with the Florence Project to advocate for the Department to pay for his bus fare to Washington. Before she put him on the bus that evening, she and her husband took him to their home so he could shower and eat before his trip. She has since heard that Juan is safely settled in Washington. Thank you, Delia, for your above-and-beyond help in this especially challenging case!

Client artwork

Pro Bono Attorney Successfully Navigates Complex Mental Health Case
2009 Volunteers

Thank you to the following people who volunteered their time with the Florence Project in 2009. We could not have done our jobs without you!

- Carmen Abarca Wilson
- Sayed Abdelatti
- Evangeline Abriel
- Mario Acosta Jr.
- Dr. Bruce Adler
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- Judith Costello
- James Diamond
- Chloe Dillon
- Dorien Ediger-Seto
- Mathew Edmundson
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Denise Woodson Ofria
Elizabeth Young

Board Member Profile: Sharon Kirsch

Sharon Kirsch, an assistant professor at Arizona State University, joined the Florence Project’s Board in 2008. She has since played an instrumental role in shaping the organization’s image by hosting a media training for our staff, helping us develop a communications plan and assisting with the language and design of our publications. She took a few minutes from her busy day to answer the following questions.

What is your day job?
I am an Assistant Professor of English and Rhetorical Studies in the New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences at Arizona State University. I specialize in women writers and public speakers, literary and critical theory and late American literature and culture. I’ve always been interested in how language works, how arguments are crafted, how words persuade people, and how language practices can effect social change.

I also have a background in public relations, corporate identity development, community outreach and grant administration. My professional career began in grant administration in higher education at the National Endowment for the Humanities in Washington, DC and culminated in a management position as Vice President of Corporate Communications for a national healthcare management company that focused on revitalizing and operating inner city hospitals in underserved communities. My responsibilities included all aspects of corporate communications including media and public relations, corporate identity development and crisis communications.

in immigration law. More than this, I am inspired by the commitment, dedication, intelligence, and compassion displayed every day by the staff as they work with some of Arizona’s most vulnerable populations.

How do you like to spend your free time?
Free time? Please explain.... (With my spouse, my children and my puppy!)

How did you get involved in the Florence Project Board of Directors?
The Board was coming out of its strategic planning process in 2008 and was looking for someone with a background in communication and invited me to join.

What attracts you most about the Florence Project?
I was drawn to the Florence Project by its mission to provide and coordinate free legal services and related social services to indigent men, women, and unaccompanied children detained in Arizona and by its stellar national reputation for being a leader

Sharon Kirsch, Board Member and Assistant Professor at Arizona State University
Perhaps the most well-known path to a green card is through a petition from a family member. Parents may apply for their children, wives may apply for their husbands, adult children may apply for their parents, and so on. Many feel families should be able to reunify with each other in this manner and that obtaining permanent residence through a relative is quite simple. Unfortunately for most families, the road to permanent residence is long, confusing, and expensive (approximately $2,500-3,000 in fees for an undocumented immigrant).

A typical family-based adjustment of status case before the Eloy Immigration Court lasts somewhere between eight and twenty months. In detention, the unrepresented applicant for a green card must fill out numerous applications requiring detailed information about his activities over the last several years, must schedule a medical examination off-site and organize transportation, and must identify a sponsor earning well above the poverty guidelines. And, there is the constant risk that an old conviction or prior deportation may come to light and pose a new obstacle or delay.

The Florence Project’s Eloy team was deeply disturbed to see that between September 2007 and September 2008, only one person successfully adjusted their status to that of permanent resident by virtue of a family petition. We concluded that in all likelihood many of the applicants simply became overwhelmed by the complexity and length of the process and discouraged by the limited amount of attention the Eloy team could provide them.

So, in the Summer of 2008, National Lawyers Guild Haywood Burns Fellow Laura Belous, then a first year law student at the University of Arizona, launched the Eloy Intern Adjustment of Status Program. The law student interns running this program, under the supervision of the Florence Project staff attorneys, are the primary staff members responsible for guiding these green card applicants through their removal proceedings. In support of these cases, the law students draft a variety of complex legal briefs, ensure that fees are paid, medical exams are complete, and sponsors are in place. The interns also prepare documentary and testimonial evidence for the applicants’ final merits hearings.

Throughout the following academic year (2008-2009), Laura continued to intern with the Florence Project and this academic year (2009-2010), Chloe Dillon, also a third year law student at the University of Arizona, took over the program. Laura and Chloe received additional support from shorter term interns Sarah Box (the University of Utah) and Marie Kessler (Northeastern University). Over the course of the last two years, Laura and Chloe have provided precisely the support and encouragement that the applicants for adjustment desperately needed to persevere with their cases. The outcomes that this duo has achieved are astounding.

With the assistance of Laura and Chloe, “Jorge” managed to finally adjust his status after nearly 14 months of detention. Jorge had worked for many years as a farmworker in the California Central Valley. Life was a struggle for his family; Jorge’s U.S. citizen child was born blind and struggled with leukemia throughout Jorge’s removal proceedings. While he was detained, Jorge’s wife could hardly keep the family afloat; never having learned to read, she had difficulty finding employment. Jorge’s proceedings dragged on for months on end because he simply could not pay the fees associated with adjustment of status or find a sponsor earning above the poverty level. Individual donations from members of the Arizona Chapter of the American Immigration Lawyers Association covered the missing fees, and we found a volunteer willing to act as Jorge’s sponsor. This is only one example of the more than 15 clients who have successfully adjusted their status in the last sixteen months with the help of our interns. We are extremely grateful to Chloe and Laura and we wish them the best of luck on their bar exams this summer!

**Florence Project Services in 2009**

- **Live rights presentations** regarding people’s rights and remedies in removal proceedings. In 2009 we provided rights presentations to 7,169 men, women, and unaccompanied children.

- **Individual case assessment** for all who request it. In 2009 we provided case assessment to 3,668 people.

- **Pro se assistance** for people fighting cases who cannot afford to hire private counsel. In 2009 we provided intensive pro se assistance to 3,240 people, assisted 267 people in their merits hearings for legal relief, and provided 38 workshops on the topic of cancellation of removal for 201 detailed lawful permanent residents.

- **Direct representation**, as resources allow and **pro bono referrals**. In 2009, we provided direct representation to 130 adults and referred 71 cases to pro bono attorneys in the community. Our Children’s Project successfully represented an additional 33 unaccompanied minors pursuing relief before the Immigration Judge.

- **Assistance with raising issues of deportability or eligibility for relief** before the immigration judge and the Board of Immigration Appeals either through pro se brief preparation or full representation.

- **Application preparation** and **documentation gathering** to support legal claims. We work with clients’ families to prepare affidavits and supporting documentation.

- **Pro se bond assistance** and **assistance with supervised release, habeas corpus petitions** and requests for humanitarian parole. In 2009, we assisted 535 people with their bond cases and 48 people with other requests for release from custody.

- **Trainings and consultations to public defenders** on the overlap of criminal and immigration law through our Arizona Defending Immigrants Program. In 2009 we provided 7 trainings to 180 practitioners and provided 697 consultations to public defenders and defense attorneys.
Since our last full newsletter, the Florence Project has said goodbye to four wonderful staff members. In June, we bid farewell to Eloy legal assistant SARAH PLASTINO so she could attend Georgetown University law school and then in July said goodbye to Florence legal assistant CHRIS STENKEN who went on to assist in organic farming projects in South America and settle in Tucson. In September, Florence staff attorney MARCO ACEVEDO left the Project for a position with the FBI and Eloy staff attorney CHRISTINA POWERS also left us to join her husband in Pittsburgh, where she is continuing to represent indigent detainees in removal proceedings. We wish Sarah, Chris, Marco and Christina the very best!

With goodbyes come hellos and an expansion of the Florence Project family. In June, we welcomed new Eloy legal assistant ARGENTINA INIñUEZ to our team. Argentina is a native of Douglas, Arizona and has studied and lived in Oaxaca and Chiapas, Mexico and Siena, Italy. In July, we welcomed new Florence legal assistant CINDY SCHLOSSER. Cindy grew up in North Dakota and in addition to teaching high school her work experience includes working as the border awareness coordinator for Annunciation House in El Paso, Texas. The Florence Project also welcomed two new staff attorneys in September. New Eloy staff attorney RACHEL KLING is a 2009 graduate of Boston College Law School and her immigration experience includes working in BC’s immigration and asylum clinic and interning at CASA of Maryland and the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau. Rachel grew up in Silver Spring, Maryland and has spent time in Guatemala and Israel. New Florence staff attorney BRIAN WOLF is a 2009 graduate of City University of New York Law School and a native Arizonan. Brian worked as a student in CUNY’s Immigrant and Refugee Rights Clinic, for the Immigration Law Unit of the Legal Aid Society of New York and for the Tlachinollan Human Rights Center of La Montañita in Guerrero, Mexico. We are thrilled to belatedly welcome Argentina, Cindy, Rachel and Brian on board as our newest FIRRPies!

In other staff news, Congratulations to Eloy staff attorney TALLY KINGSNORTH on her position as an adjunct faculty member with the University of Arizona James E. Roger College of Law. Tally is channeling her exceptional persuasive writing skills and love of appeals to teach legal writing to first year law students. We also extend our congratulations to Office Manager MICHELE DANDO and her husband Paul as they welcomed their second granddaughter, Elleigh Eryn Dando, into the world on March 1st.

Muchísimas Gracias, Jacque!

At the end of March, the Florence Project bid farewell to Development & Outreach Director Jacque Ahrenberg. A graduate of Arizona State University, Jacque joined the Florence Project staff in April 2005 after working in the development office of the Phoenix Theater for two and a half years. In her five years with the Florence Project, Jacque has led our fundraising efforts with great success and has been a wonderful coworker and friend. Working with our Board, staff, and supporters, she has left us with a much more sophisticated development program and an active and diverse individual donor base. We look forward to seeing Jacque succeed in her next professional endeavor and wish her the very best!
THE FLORENCE PROJECT RELIES ON THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF INDIVIDUALS, CORPORATIONS, FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS, FOUNDATIONS, AND LAW FIRMS IN ORDER TO PROVIDE ITS MULTITUDE OF LEGAL AND SOCIAL SERVICES.

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La línea Spring 2010 6
We have only listed January–December 2009 donations. Please let us know if you believe your name has been omitted in error so that we can correct any mistakes.

Please remember the Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project in your will!

Through a charitable bequest, you can:

- Help us provide free legal services to immigrants and refugees
- Possibly reduce the tax burden on your estate
- Leave a legacy to help future generations

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P.O. BOX 654
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Visit our website and contribute via PayPal:
WWW.FIRRP.ORG
ABOUT THE FLORENCE PROJECT
The Florence Project’s work is carried out primarily through five programs: the Florence “Justice and Efficiency” Model, the Eloy Pro Se Model, the Detained Immigrant and Refugee Children’s Initiative, the Defending Immigrants Program, and the Integrated Social Services Program. As part of its direct legal services, the Project has created “Know Your Rights” videos and self-representation packets as an educational resource for non-profit service providers and detained people nationwide. Nationally, the Florence Project advocates for positive change in federal policies and practices towards those detained and it serves as a resource-development and training center for detention program “best practices.” The Florence Project undertakes its national advocacy through membership in the Detention Watch Network, a coalition of more than 100 nonprofit organizations that work with the 200,000 men, women, and children who are held in the U.S. annually as immigration detainees.

MISSION & VISION
The Florence Project provides and coordinates free legal services and related social services to indigent men, women, and unaccompanied children detained in Arizona for immigration removal proceedings. The Project strives to ensure that detained individuals have access to counsel, understand their rights under immigration law, and are treated fairly and humanely by our judicial system.

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P. O. Box 654
Florence, AZ 85132
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