



The Legal Connection

Vol. 2, No. 1 Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center (APALRC) Fall 2003

A Message from the Executive Director

Dear Friends:

This month, I traveled to Hawaii to accept the 2003 *Trailblazer's Award* at the 15th Annual Convention of the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA). Notably, the eight other honorees included judges, partners in law firms, two U.S. Attorneys, and the first Asian American law school dean. In accepting the award, I acknowledged the tireless efforts of the APALRC staff and volunteers, and thanked NAPABA for sending an important message to our community.

The message is simply this: at the same time that our community needs attorneys moving upward into the highest ranks of America's most powerful institutions, we also need those who are willing to move "downward" in order to help build power in the lives of the poorest and most disenfranchised members of our own communities. Viewed through this lens, the APALRC has, without a doubt, truly blazed remarkable trails in its short five year history.

Day in and day out, our staff and volunteers spend countless hours helping victims of domestic violence, workers facing exploitation, and senior citizens who need help accessing public benefits. The individuals we serve cannot afford to hire an attorney, and without our help, would find it impossible to understand or navigate the U.S. legal system because of language and cultural barriers.

Our staff and volunteers are not rewarded with hefty paychecks, fancy offices, or prestige and status in the traditional sense. And yet they come to

their jobs each day, driven by the ideal that our community's interests cannot be truly advanced unless we as lawyers and law students are also willing to make the move down to help empower those at the very bottom. Receiving the *Trailblazer's Award* has given all of us at the APALRC a rare opportunity to step back, reflect upon, and celebrate the difference we are making in the lives of the individuals we serve everyday.

As you read through this second edition of *The Legal Connection*, we hope you will find inspiration in the progress we have made in blazing trails for Asian Americans throughout the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

Best Wishes,

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Providing Legal Aid to Maryland Asian Seniors

Lynne Chiao, Fall 2003 Intern, contributed to this article

The APALRC launched its new community outreach initiative to Asian seniors in Maryland with an event in the Chinese community on November 7, 2003. The free presentation and walk-in legal clinic were held in Germantown, Maryland, in collaboration with the Chinese Cultural and Community Service Center (CCACC) and the Maryland Legal Aid Bureau (LAB).

The legal presentation addressed issues of particular relevance to seniors, such as wills and public benefits. Interpretation in Mandarin was conducted by two of the APALRC's law student volunteers, Gail Kan and Peter Pang. Translated informational brochures and educational materials were distributed to the fifty Chinese seniors who attended. Following the presentation, the seniors who had legal questions were able to sit down and speak with one of nine APALRC bilingual law student volunteers.



Gail Kan and Peter Pang provide interpretation during a presentation to Asian seniors by Jennifer Goldberg (right) of the Maryland Legal Aid Bureau.

Based on the success of this event, the APALRC plans to significantly expand its community outreach initiatives to Asian seniors during the upcoming year, through legal presentations, clinics and the distribution of materials in various Asian languages.

When I first decided to volunteer at the APALRC, my only goals were to add public service work to my blank law school résumé and practice my Chinese language skills. My work as a hotline volunteer provided me with a real world perspective on the practice of law that supplemented my legal education to a degree I never imagined possible.

Apart from volunteering on the hotline, I have also had the unique opportunity to serve on the APALRC board in my capacity as a student liaison. Working on the board has introduced me to the behind-the-scenes work of running a non-profit organization. Having the opportunity to help fundraise, provide direction for the organization in general, and work with the board and staff of the APALRC is a dream come true for anyone who has a desire to make a difference within the community.

For me, my time at the APALRC has evolved from a simple public service project to an important legal training experience, a lesson in non-profit management, and an outlet for making friends. I will never forget translating for a mono-lingual client as her lawyer negotiated a settlement for her case. All in all, working at the APALRC has truly made my law school experience so much more exciting and meaningful!

*~ Gail Kan, 2nd year law student
Georgetown University Law Center*

Law Students Educate D.C.'s At-Risk Youth

Synta Keeling, Fall 2003 Volunteer and APALRC Student Board Member, contributed to this article

Through a grant from the Addiction, Prevention and Recovery Administration at the DC Department of Health, the APALRC successfully completed its first Street Law Substance Abuse Project this past spring semester. Street Law is an innovative program where APALRC law student volunteers conducted workshops that were designed to teach Asian American high school students about the dangers of substance abuse, and how the District's drug laws are designed to discourage drug use among youth. More than thirty high school students participated in the workshops.

Partners for the Street Law Project included Asian American LEAD, Boat People SOS, and Chinatown Community Service Center.

APALRC law student volunteers Synta Keeling, Melissa Mandor, Grace Ryu, Jane Song, and Anna Nguyen designed and taught the curriculum, which included mock trial sessions where high school students learned about the law from the perspective of a prosecutor, a defense attorney, a judge, and the affected client. The cases used were drawn from the youths' own experiences in school and with their families. From the practice of developing and presenting arguments, youth participants learned how the court system often more aggressively pursues and punishes drug offenders than certain other crimes such as truancy, theft, or assault. Additionally, they gained a comprehensive view of how drugs can hinder a promising future.

I began volunteering at the APALRC during my first year of law school. The APALRC allowed me to leave the rigid boxes of legal analysis for a weekly reprieve that involved interaction with clients. The experience regularly reminded me of why I wanted to be a lawyer.

The APALRC offers careful supervision and guidance that alleviate the new volunteers' initial hesitation about working with clients. As a volunteer, I participated in an eight-hour legal training, worked under a clear protocol as to how to handle client issues, and had access to a staff attorney and hotline manager to address any problems.

After my first year, I decided to become more involved with the APALRC as a student board member by offering strategies for recruiting new volunteers, retaining existing volunteers, and keeping the staff and the board informed about volunteers' needs. Given that the APALRC heavily depends upon law student volunteers, student board members are essential in reaching out to volunteers and ensuring the high quality of the APALRC volunteer program.

*~ Synta Keeling, 2nd year law student,
American University, Washington College of Law*

Legal Interpreter Project Grows; Handbook to be Published This Year

by Manish Patel, Program Assistant

The APALRC's Legal Interpreter Project (LIP) has entered into its third year. Working in consultation with Angie Carrera, the Language Access Coordinator for Fairfax County, the APALRC held its fourth legal interpreter training at the law firm of Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld LLP in August 2003. Out of over 60 applications received, 30 individuals representing the following 11 Asian languages were chosen to participate in the two-day training: Mandarin, Korean, Vietnamese, Bengali, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Mongolian, Indonesian, Hakka, and Teo Chew. In the words of one participant, "I came home, perhaps like other trainees, knowing exactly what to expect as an interpreter."

After the initial training, 11 individuals were accepted into the program based on their performance on oral tests and written examinations developed by APALRC. With the assistance of Ms. Carrera, who has extensive experience in courtroom interpretation, these tests were created in order to better assess each candidate's fluency in both his or her native language as well as English. The APALRC's current number of active legal interpreters stands at 23.

Since the project began in the fall of 2001, APALRC interpreters have been assigned to nearly 200 cases to conduct on-site interpretations for client-attorney meetings, phone interpretations, and translations of affidavits and other legal documents.

In response to the many requests the APALRC has received from community and legal aid groups from across the country interested in replicating LIP, the APALRC plans to publish a handbook at the end of 2003. The goal of the handbook is to offer practical and simple tips that other groups may



Ms. Carrera facilitates a role play exercise at the legal interpreter training session.

follow in order to build a similar program in their communities. The publication of the handbook is made possible through the generous support of the Open Society Institute's Program on Law & Society.

The APALRC Welcomes Its Newest Interpreters!

Sofia Checa (Maryland)

Susheel Gupta (Maryland)

Wen Jin (District of Columbia)

Andrew Lee (Maryland)

Michael Mou (District of Columbia)

Mai Nguyen (Maryland)

Nhi Nguyen (District of Columbia)

Thomas Nguyen (Northern Virginia)

Micky Pham (Northern Virginia)

Inda Setiabudi (District of Columbia)

Maki Teshima (District of Columbia)

Advocacy Efforts Continue for Improved Language Access in DC

The APALRC's efforts to advocate for improved language access continued in the District of Columbia throughout 2003. Since the fall of 2002, the APALRC has been collaborating with Latino, African, and other Asian organizations to bring about changes in the way DC government agencies and their staff interact with limited-English proficient individuals in the District.

In 2002, Councilmember Jim Graham (Ward 1) introduced the *Language Access Act*. As currently drafted, the Act would require DC government agencies to provide both oral language services and written translations of vital documents after reviewing their services under a four-factor balancing test.

Since the legislation was introduced, there have been several public hearings to discuss the extent and depth of problems that individuals with limited English have had while accessing government agencies. The APALRC and other organizations testified at these hearings and presented the stories of individuals who had been denied appropriate



An Asian American panel testifies before D.C. City Council on barriers to government services.

medical care or benefits due them because of language barriers.

In addition to testifying at public hearings, the APALRC assisted in a June press conference, during which DC officials were presented with hundreds of postcards signed by DC residents supporting the passage of the Act. The Act will have to move through two subcommittees before it is voted on by the City Council.

APALRC Hotline Handbook Garner National Attention

Early this year, the APALRC, in partnership with the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, published a handbook entitled *Developing and Maintaining a Successful Legal Referral Hotline for Immigrant Communities: A How To Handbook*. To date, the handbook has been distributed to over 300 organizations nationwide. The handbook contains practical tips on how to set up a multi-lingual legal referral hotline based on the APALRC's model. For a copy of the handbook, please visit <http://www.apalrc.org/handbook.htm>. Requests for hard copies can also be made by emailing handbook@apalrc.org. In addition, APALRC staff members are available for technical assistance and support. The program is part of a model project made possible through a two-year grant from the Open Society Institute's Program on Law & Society.

APALRC Responds to “Special Registration” Policy

On January 26, 2003, the APALRC conducted a “Know Your Rights” presentation followed by a pro bono legal clinic at the Muslim Community Center in Silver Spring, MD. The presentation and clinic focused on employment and immigration matters.

Immigration issues were especially important to the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities because of the new “special registration” policy requiring individuals from certain designated countries to register with the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) by specified deadlines. This policy applied to males sixteen years and older who are not United States citizens or green card holders.

During the latter part of December 2002, Pakistan was added to the list of designated countries affected by the “special registration” policy; a few weeks later, Bangladesh was added. As a result, the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities became increasingly concerned about the registration requirements and the consequences for not registering. Stories from the first round of

registration about legal immigrants being detained and deported for minor immigration violations or as a result of BCIS’s own backlog and delay in processing immigration applications led to further fear and confusion in the community.

Through this workshop and clinic, the APALRC helped to ensure community understanding about “special registration”, and to connect individuals with attorneys who could provide brief legal advice and/or take on cases for a reduced fee or at no cost.



An attorney panel provides the South Asian community with information on legal rights.

Abramson Foundation Selects Etcubañez as 2003 Award Recipient



APALRC Staff Attorney **Marita Etcubañez** was selected as a 2003 recipient of the Frederick B. Abramson Public Service Fellowship. This fellowship is awarded

annually to a select group of young lawyers in the District of Columbia committed to working in the public interest. Marita was honored at a reception held on October 29 at the Thurgood Marshall Center. “I entered law school with the hope of gaining knowledge and skills that I could put to use helping others, and I have been very fortunate to have found employment that allows me to accomplish that goal. I am proud to be able to

serve my own community. And I am grateful to have the support of the Abramson Foundation.”

Marita joined the APALRC as Staff Attorney in May 2003. In addition to supervising the hotline, Marita provides oversight over all other APALRC legal projects. Marita will play a lead role over the next year in developing APALRC’s new workers’ rights initiative. Her previous work experience includes advocacy on behalf of migrant and seasonal farm workers as an attorney with Texas Rural Legal Aid. She also worked with labor pool workers in Baltimore, Maryland, as a staff attorney with the Homeless Persons Representation Project. Marita received both her undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Michigan.

Legal Workshop Educates Korean Community About Their Rights in the Workplace

Michelle Han, Summer 2003 Intern, contributed to this article

Working in partnership with the Korean Community Service Center (KCSC), the APALRC co-sponsored a “Know Your Rights” presentation and free legal clinic for the Korean community on July 8, 2003, that addressed employment law issues. This event was held at the Messiah Presbyterian Church in Annandale, Virginia.

The legal presentations addressed laws governing employment discrimination, worker’s compensation, wage and overtime violations, as well as the rights of undocumented workers. Participating attorneys included Sarah DeCosse from the Department of Justice and Justin Mixon from the Virginia Justice Center. After the presentations, volunteer attorneys from government agencies, legal service organizations, and private practice were available to answer individual legal questions, with the assistance of APALRC bilingual intake volunteers and interpreters.

In response to the many employment-related calls and inquiries the APALRC receives on its hotline, the

APALRC plans to significantly expand its worker rights initiative during the upcoming year. In addition to continued outreach through legal workshops, community-based clinics, and translated materials, the APALRC will soon begin conducting brief advice sessions on the hotline for employment-related matters, and provide extended legal representation on select cases.



An individual consults with a pro bono attorney (left) with the assistance of an APALRC legal interpreter (middle).

Interning at the APALRC was a unique and fulfilling experience. I decided to intern at the APALRC because I was looking for a legal position that involved the Asian community and possible utilization of my Korean-speaking ability. Interning at the APALRC was ideal in this regard. I enjoyed working directly with the clients, and also appreciated the efforts of the APALRC staff to constantly increase our awareness of APA issues. While interning at the APALRC, I handled many of the Korean-speaking clients and also coordinated an employment law presentation and clinic for the Korean community in Annandale, Virginia. I am very proud to have been a part of the APALRC and I am excited to watch the APALRC continue to grow and serve.

~ Michelle Han, JD/MBA candidate, Case Western Reserve University

Hope for Victims of Domestic Violence

Jane Song, Summer 2003 Intern, contributed to this article

Through the generous support of Altria Group's Doors of Hope grant, The Washington Post, and the Spring Creek Foundation, the APALRC has been working in collaboration with Catholic Charities Immigration Legal Services (CCILS) and the Archdiocesan Legal Network (the Network) to ensure that women, such as the one portrayed below, are

able to access a comprehensive set of linguistically and culturally appropriate legal services. Since the project began in the fall of 2002, the APALRC, CCILS, and the Network have helped over 80 victims of domestic violence receive appropriate legal assistance for issues related to immigration, divorce, child custody and protective orders.

Sonia Patel, whose real name is being protected, is a 24 year-old woman of Indian descent. In February 2003, Sonia called the APALRC's hotline, indicating that she felt more comfortable speaking in Hindi or Gujarati, two South Asian languages. One of the APALRC's Hindi-speaking volunteers, a first-year law student at American University, conducted a thorough intake of the client's issues, through which she learned that Sonia had traveled to the U.S. on a tourist visa. Sonia had later married a permanent resident (or green card holder). Soon after the marriage, Sonia's husband became verbally and emotionally abusive, and eventually forced her out of the house. With no money and no job, Sonia survived through the support of religious centers and acquaintances.

After a review of Sonia's situation, the APALRC referred her to Catholic Charities Immigration Legal Services. There, an attorney helped Sonia extend her tourist visa, secured a work permit for her, and submitted a petition for a green card under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). During the process of legal representation, the APALRC provided Sonia with a Hindi interpreter to facilitate communication between her and her attorney. Sonia is currently waiting for her immigration paperwork to be processed, and is looking forward to a life free from abuse.

Save The Date!

The APALRC has been selected as a beneficiary for the *First Friday Asian Pacific American Bar Association's* (APABA) happy hour and social networking event on February 6, 2004, from 6:00-9:00 p.m. While creating a casual environment for APA young professionals to meet and network with others, the goal of this event is to help benefit and support local APA charities. APABA features an APA charity each month at various establishments that have agreed to donate half of the net proceeds of the event to support the charitable organization. Mark your calendars now! A venue announcement will be posted on our website at <http://www.apalrc.org>. You also can call (202) 367-3098 for details.

A Special Thanks to APALRC's 2003-2004 Law Student Volunteers!

Each year, the APALRC is truly fortunate to have an incredible group of dedicated law student volunteers to staff our multi-lingual legal referral hotline. Through the fall of 2003, a record 47 law students who speak 16 Asian languages have been volunteering their time with us! Through the hard work and commitment of the following students, the APALRC hotline will have assisted over 400 individuals with their legal issues by the end of 2003:

American University Washington College of Law

Helen Choi
Synta Keeling
Jieun Kim
Janet Lee
Alpha Lillstrom
Peter Pang
Lina Soni
Gilbert Tsai
Maryann Woo

Georgetown University Law Center

Nicole Chang
Jocelyn Chia
Valerie Chow
Jean Chung
Gail Kan
Neal Kemkar
Joseph Kim
Justin Kim
Helesa Lahey
Brian Lee
Paul Lee
Erek Loosli
Syma Mirza
Taron Murakami
Jason Park
Vidhya Prabhakaran
Mark Roche
Jiayu Sun
Susan Taing
Chin Chin Yop

The George Washington University Law School

Janet Canon
Moonhee Cha
Katy Chang
David Chiang
Young Ha Cho
Sang Jun Han
Sharmili Hazra
Brad Krueger
Jason Lagria
Bruce Larson
Gening Liao
Jennifer Ngai
Shephali Patel
Jaspreet Saini
Mueed Shams
George Wu
Lei Young
Li Zhuo

In addition, the following individuals worked as interns/externs during 2003:

Jolsna John, American University, Washington College of Law; Spring 2003 Intern.

Ade Hutapea, Georgetown University Law Center; Spring 2003 Intern.

Michelle Han, Case Western Reserve University; Summer 2003 Intern.

Bianca Karim, George Washington University Law School; Summer 2003 Intern.

Tram Nguyen, Howard University School of Law; Summer 2003 Intern.

Jane Song, American University, Washington College of Law; Summer 2003 Intern. [Asian Pacific American Bar Association Educational Fund (AEF) Award Recipient].

Lina Soni, American University, Washington College of Law; Summer 2003 Intern. [Asian Pacific American Bar Association Educational Fund (AEF) Award Recipient].

Albert Ting, American University, Washington College of Law, Summer 2003 Intern. [Asian Pacific American Bar Association Educational Fund (AEF) Award Recipient].

Wanli Xu, UC Hastings College of Law; Summer 2003 Intern.

Lynne Chiao, University of California, Irvine; Fall 2003 Intern.

Deanna Singh, Georgetown University Law Center; Fall 2003 Extern.

APALRC Welcomes Its Newest Board Members



Ravi Ravishankar is a management consultant with Cisco's business consulting group. For the last 15 years, Ravi has served in the technology industry in various capacities across the world. Ravi is a member of TeleManagement Forum and International Telecommunications Union. He has a master's in Engineering and an MBA from Virginia Commonwealth University. "With my background in technology and business consulting, I hope to help APALRC hone its operations and broaden its strategic focus." Ravi lives in Reston with his wife and two boys.



Yuvora Nong is the Lead Counsel at The Law Offices of Yuvora Nong. He handles matters related to immigration law, along with general civil litigation cases. He currently represents Cambodian clients, as well as clients of other ethnicities before the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Immigration Courts, and Circuit Courts. Mr. Nong is licensed to practice law in Florida, Virginia and the District of Columbia. He serves on the Board of Directors of the Cambodian American National Council and is also counsel to the Royal Embassy of Cambodia. He is a member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association and the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association.

Meet APALRC's Newest Staff Members



Manish Patel joined the APALRC in July 2003 as the new Program Assistant. Manish coordinates the Legal Interpreter Project, helps manage the hotline, and assists in the development of the APALRC's IT infrastructure. Manish is a graduate of Stanford University where he received honors in Economics and Mechanical Engineering (Product Design). Before coming to the APALRC, Manish worked on APA issues in central Virginia and more recently in the California Bay Area. In addition to his commitment to APA issues, Manish is an entrepreneur and inventor. He most recently developed and licensed a medical device used with stethoscopes. Manish is considering attending law school in the future.



Tram Nguyen is a 3rd year law student at Howard University School of Law. She has been an intern and a volunteer at the APALRC since the summer of 2002. This past summer Tram worked on the recruitment and training of new interpreters for the Legal Interpreter Project (LIP). Tram is currently the Hotline Manager and is fluent in Vietnamese. Tram plans to continue working in public interest after graduation.

With Gratitude

The generous support of our donors and funders ensures that the APALRC can continue to provide much-needed legal services to Asian Americans in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. The APALRC would like to acknowledge the following 2002-2003 funders for their support of its mission:

Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld LLP

Alston & Bird LLP

Altria Group, Inc.

Asian Pacific American Bar Association Educational Fund (AEF)

Crowell & Moring LLP

DC Bar Foundation

DC Department of Health, Addiction Prevention and Recovery Administration

Dewey Ballantine LLP

Eugene & Agnes E. Meyer Foundation

Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC)

Finnegan, Henderson, Farabow, Garrett & Dunner LLP

Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP

Holland & Knight LLP

Jones, Day, Reavis & Pogue Foundation

King & Spalding LLP

Kirkland & Ellis

Maryland Legal Aid Bureau

Mayor, Brown, Rowe & Maw LLP

Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation

Open Society Institute

Paul, Hastings, Janofsky & Walker LLP

Potomac Legal Aid Society

Powell, Goldstein, Frazer & Murphy LLP

State Farm Insurance Companies

Spring Creek Foundation

The Washington Post

Thomson West

U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Special Counsel for Immigration-Related Unfair Employment Practices

Wiley, Rein & Fielding LLP

Wilson, Sonsini, Goodrich & Rosati Foundation

We would also like to recognize the support of our individual donors, the Asian Pacific American Bar Association (APABA), the South Asian Bar Association (SABA), the George Washington University Law School, the Georgetown University Law Center, and the Washington College of Law at American University.

Lastly, we would like to thank Deepa Iyer, former Legal Director at the APALRC, and Parag Khandar who supported the APALRC through their charitable wedding in May 2003.

New Website Unveiled

The APALRC invites you to explore its newly reconstructed website at <http://www.apalrc.org>. As part of its ongoing fundraising efforts, the website includes a link to an e-philanthropy site where visitors can donate online to support the APALRC's mission. Also, if you are interested in joining our mailing list, please complete the subscription form on the website. The APALRC welcomes your feedback at hotline@apalrc.org.

Earn Membership Rewards

You can now earn Membership Rewards by using your American Express card to donate to the APALRC. Just visit the American Express Donation Site at <http://www.americanexpress.com/give>, click on the link that reads, "click here to contribute to your favorite charities," type in "Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center," and follow the instructions for a secure contribution that not only earns you rewards but also helps support the APALRC's programs and services.

733 15th St., N.W., Ste. 315
Washington, D.C. 20005-2112
Phone: 202-393-3572
Fax: 202-393-0995
Email: hotline@apalrc.org
<http://www.apalrc.org>

Support Equal Access to Justice!

Yes! I would like to support the APALRC. Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution, made payable to "APALRC," in the amount of:

\$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 \$1,000 Other \$ _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ E-mail: _____

My employer will match my contribution. _____

Please address your contribution to:

APALRC
733 15th St., N.W., Ste. 315
Washington, D.C. 20005

You can also donate online by visiting <http://www.apalrc.org>