

LWV-Kitsap Bremerton/CK Unit Meeting Notes--Saturday, September, 17, 2022

Kitsap United Way Conference Room/Zoom

In Person: Guest Kimberly Cizek Allen, Development & Marketing Director, KIAC; Maureen Cervinsky, John Cervinsky, Connie Marchant, Debi Barner, Raejean Bridges-Avalos, Kathleen Cahall, Candy Rankin, Janice McLemore, Suzanne Schreiner

Via Zoom: Sue Hughes, Pat Troxell, Regina Adamson, Kathleen Gallagher, Gail Sackman, Pam Hamon (NK)

Maureen introduced our guest speaker from Kitsap Immigration Assistance Center (KIAC), who shared a Power Point presentation, giving us an overview of the organization's history, programs, and the clients they serve, followed by a Q&A session. Kim is an R.N. who practiced nursing for a total of 13 years. She took a break after 10 years, working for the Kitsap Humane Society doing outreach, event planning & development work. After 3 additional years in the nursing field, she decided she wanted to work in the nonprofit arena, raising awareness and doing fundraising for an organization that does a lot of good in the community. She joined KIAC as its Development & Marketing Director August, 2021.

KIAC recognizes the inherent worth and dignity of all people; their mission, as stated on their website, is to work for the well-being and empowerment of immigrants through education, advocacy and social justice. KIAC envisions a community where everyone, regardless of where they were born, has fair and equitable access to justice, respect and opportunity.

Martitha May & April Borbon started IAC in 2004, which later received 501c3 nonprofit status. The name was changed in 2013 to KIAC; the organization became more structured, establishing Family Services, Legal Services and forming a Board of Directors. In 2014 KIAC's legal program was certified by the Department of Justice, allowing volunteers who have undergone two years of rigorous training to be recognized as accredited representatives to practice immigration law. Unlike criminal defendants, immigrants are not guaranteed legal representation within the U.S. court system.

2018 brought KIAC's two programs together, resulting in a new Bremerton location at 3627 Wheaton Way (back of the building in Suite 106) and adding a satellite office in Port Townsend (now with 3 accredited representatives). Family Services at Bremerton KIAC can be reached at: 360-616-2722 or 360-440-2376. Website: kitsapiac.org Kim's email address: development@kitsapiac.org

An ongoing transition is moving the organization from being volunteer-led to being staff-led and volunteer-supported. KIAC currently has 10 paid staff members (8.5FTE). New Executive Director Jayson Vega López, a bilingual speaker from Puerto Rico, begins work at KIAC September 19.

KIAC provides three important programs to its clients: Family Services; Legal Services; Tax & Business Services.

Family Services:

Director Annika Turner (bilingual in Spanish); Coordinator Tracy Caro Gonzales

Annika, Tracy & their volunteers are a resource hub for diverse needs of immigrants. Family Services puts together a case for each client, contacts by phone or email the organizations to which they're referring the

client & lets the organization know exactly what the client's needs are, then makes every attempt to follow up & make sure those needs have been met.

Some of the services KIAC & partner organizations offer include, but are not limited to:

- Help with reading & writing documents in English or Spanish, filling out forms, making phone calls
- Help with applying for financial assistance for medical bills or setting up payment plans
- Providing information about local English classes & offering 1-on-1 conversation practice (virtually)
- Housing: Help with getting financial assistance, necessary paperwork, rentals in the area
- Free medical clinic by appointment 3x/month @ KIAC, in partnership with West Sound Free Clinic
- Language-accessible, low-cost or free dental care by appointment 2x/month through their partner organization Peninsula Community Health Services. The Molar Roller van comes to KIAC & sets up shop.
- Clothing & pantry staples: In partnership with New Beginnings Closet (near Bremerton HS), 3x/month. KIAC clients can schedule appointments 1x/month to look for seasonally appropriate clothing and also receive bags of culturally appropriate dry goods (i.e., black beans, maseca flour, white rice)
- Child & infant supplies: Partner organization Eastside Baby Corner (West Sound Hub in Bremerton) can connect KIAC clients with diapers, bottles & other items for babies and young children

To illustrate how Family Services might help someone, Kim "created" a newly arrived client:

This will be about a newly arrived man who is living with family and happens to break his arm. He gets to the ER & has a cast put on, then later receives a medical bill in the mail from the hospital. He doesn't totally understand the bill--it's in English--he just knows it's for a lot of money. He shows it to his brother, who says his friend had a similar issue & got help at KIAC. Our pretend client doesn't drive yet, doesn't have a license in the state of WA; he gets a ride from his cousin. Jorge, KIAC's bilingual administrative assistant, greets the man, talks with him, realizes he needs help from Family Services. Annika will be available in 20 minutes; Jorge screens the new client for COVID & provides a mask for him. Annika talks to the man in Spanish, learns how new he is to the area, what resources he has available, what his language skills are & realizes he will need financial assistance for the medical bill. She calls her contacts at the hospital, explains about the bill, puts the contact on speaker phone, translates the conversation for the new client & is able to help set up a payment plan for him. He is able to apply for financial assistance for the bill because he came to KIAC before the 30-day window of opportunity to do so had elapsed. Annika realizes this man will also need follow-up care. He already has an appointment to get his cast off, but she sets him up with an appointment with KIAC's free medical clinic for physical therapy for his arm and to get established with a nurse practitioner for primary care.

Immigration Legal Services:

Larry Chin, with 20+ years of immigration legal experience, heads up the staff of 3, which includes Legal Coordinator Carmen Luthi, and Paralegal Alex Tomas, who is trilingual (English, Spanish, Q'anjob'al [Mayan dialect]). KIAC's Legal Services team also includes 12 trained volunteer Department of Justice accredited representatives and a handful of volunteer attorneys, who handle various immigration legal matters for over 500 clients each year.

Legal pathways for immigrants can be very convoluted and take an extremely lengthy period of time. Especially with a language barrier to complicate the process, immigrants who try to represent themselves have very little chance of understanding what is going on, let alone winning their case. Immigrants have a much better chance of favorable outcomes when they have competent legal representation. Private attorneys

are cost-prohibitive for people who are living at or below the federal poverty line. That's where KIAC comes in--their team provides high-quality, low-cost & some pro bono legal services to foreign-born individuals and their families for some 600 cases/year.

Cases can include, but are not limited to:

- Naturalizations
- DACA filing & renewal
- Work authorizations
- Asylum cases
- Green card renewal & replacement
- Adjustment of status
- Referrals for victims of domestic violence & other crimes

Kim told the story of a client and his wife who had come from their country of origin because they were being persecuted by an arm of their government. They felt their lives were at risk, so they came across the southern border to the U.S. & immediately turned themselves in to customs & border agents. The wife had some previously existing medical conditions & was released to family in Florida; for whatever reason, the client was shipped up to WA & incarcerated at the Northwest ICE processing center in Tacoma. The family reached out to KIAC, which doesn't often take on removal cases, because they can be very complex & take a really long time. In this situation, however, the legal team was not going to be handling his asylum proceedings to try to stop removal. The goal was rather to just get him out on bail so he could be released to his family & be able to go through those proceedings closer to where he would be living. Accredited representative Ray Garrido was able to negotiate a bail that was not cost-prohibitive, which it often is. The client was released, Ray helped him get to the airport, where he flew to FL & was reunited with his family later that day. KIAC staff & volunteers were grateful recipients of knitted hats that the client made for them while he was incarcerated.

Tax and Business Services:

This program is under the Legal Services department, but is completely run by volunteers. Three individuals work with Jorge to schedule appointments. KIAC has a contact who will help clients obtain ITINs (Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers). Most undocumented immigrants cannot work for someone else because they don't have a Social Security number & can't prove their legal status, but in the state of WA, even undocumented persons can apply for an ITIN, with which you can start your own business and pay taxes. The IRS does not coordinate with ICE, it just wants to ensure that everyone who is doing business in this state is paying the required taxes. KIAC volunteers also help with and show clients how to do their own state and federal tax filings.

KIAC builds connections with other community organizations and providers and fills in when it sees service gaps. KIAC enjoys robust partnerships with 35 organizations, including those mentioned previously, plus: Kitsap Community Resources (KCR); Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC); Kitsap Public Health District (mainly concerning COVID).

Kim showed a video which further detailed the work that KIAC does:

KIAC is the trusted hub for immigrants in the West Salish/Puget Sound region.

The video told the story of Maria, who with her husband came to the U.S. from El Salvador. Her husband passed the citizenship test, but Maria struggled to learn English & did not. Her husband passed away unexpectedly & Maria was left with little income. KIAC helped her get firewood through the winter, her only source of heat, provided a tutor who helped her study for her civics test & practice for her interview. She passed the full 100-question citizenship test & her interview, becoming a U.S. citizen in December, 2021.

Who KIAC Serves:

60% of undocumented individuals continue to live in the U.S. after they overstay a visa, with illegal border crossings comprising the remainder. Nine percent of Kitsap County's population is foreign-born (18,000); KIAC serves 2,000 clients annually, up 100% from 2019. Indigenous Guatemalans make up 56% of their clientele, followed by Mexicans and Filipinos. Kitsap County has quite a diverse population; overall, KIAC clients come from over 70 countries. Most clients are young families, often living with other family members; some are unaccompanied minors. 80% earn less than 200% of the federal poverty line income. KIAC's clients live primarily in Kitsap & North Mason counties, but also in Clallam, Jefferson & Thurston counties. There is no umbrella organization in the state or region that coordinates an immigration assistance network; each nonprofit works independently. KIAC is unique in how many services they provide to families. Other immigrant assistance organizations in western WA include: Jefferson County Immigrant Rights Advocates (JCIRA) in Port Townsend; Northwest Immigration Rights Project (NIRP) in Tacoma; FIRELANDS in Aberdeen.

Because they are the "only game in town" offering nonprofit, immigrant-centric services, the demand is overwhelming. Kim said they are working at full capacity right now and are experiencing continued increased demand for the hub of services they provide. At this point they do not have the staff and enough volunteers to be able to advertise their services. They know it is currently challenging to get in and receive services from KIAC. Their ethical obligation is to their current clients, for whom they are working on 600+ open cases. They are also working on better call management when potential clients or others call the KIAC office. In response to an inquiry from unit member Regina, a community liaison for primarily Asian clients, Kim said she will put Regina in direct touch with Annika.

Questions & Answers:

Q.: Do immigrants here feel intimidated?

A.: Kim said Kitsap County seems to be pretty immigrant-friendly, perhaps more than elsewhere in WA. Still, she hears from immigrants: "I don't go where I don't have to go." Gasoline is expensive, and they don't want to raise their public profile. However, the prevailing climate does not feel as bad as it was in recent years.

Q.: What is the relationship of our immigrants with city and county law enforcement?

A.: In WA state, local law enforcement officials are not in partnership with ICE and are not allowed to detain someone who is maybe stopped for a traffic offense for an additional period of time, to allow ICE to come apprehend the person for an immigration issue. As a federal agency, however, ICE still has access to the state's prison roster to be able to cross check with anyone they also have in their system.

Q.: Please talk about the 2020 census and the participation of undocumented individuals in Kitsap County.

A.: As we know, the 2020 census became really politicized, prompting fear among undocumented persons of raising their public profile if they participated. KIAC received a grant to promote local participation in the census. Annika typed up instructions in different languages, made phone calls, sent text messages. Larry

said immigrants tend to stay away from any issue that becomes politicized in our country--thus, the lower percentage of undocumented persons who choose to get COVID vaccines.

Q.: How does KIAC handle translation needs for those clients whose native language is not spoken or understood by KIAC staff or volunteers?

A.: It was suggested to Kim to look into the Red Cross Language Bank, which can provide in-person & over-the-phone interpretation, as well as written translations. Kim also spoke about the possibility of engaging previous clients to benefit newly arrived immigrants.

Q.: How many KIAC clients take and pass their citizenship test each year?

A.: Kim estimated 20-40 clients annually become U.S. citizens.

Q.: Is the public-charge rule still in place?

A.: (From *The Border Within* book): "Rooted in colonial-era 'poor laws,' the notion of public charge was codified in an 1882 immigration law aiming to restrict entry to or in some cases deport individuals who would be a burden on the state....In the modern era, the public-charge doctrine has almost never been used in deportation cases. It is instead used to determine whether someone should be admitted into the country or allowed to adjust their existing status and become a legal permanent resident." The Trump-era public-charge rule greatly expanded the set of programs to include public health insurance, food assistance and housing. "In early 2021, Biden ordered a review of the public-charge rule with the likely goal of making it less restrictive, though in reality a full unwinding of the rule will require a regulatory process and will not take place overnight."

Kim said the public-charge rule does not apply to asylum application cases. Also regarding asylum cases, if an individual is offered asylum from another country's government, that person is less likely to be granted asylum here. An Ethiopian may want to join his family in the U.S., for example, but if South Africa has agreed to grant him asylum status, even though the man knows it would be an unsafe and threatening environment in South Africa, he would likely not be successful in his asylum application here.

Q.: What are KIAC's funding sources?

A.: Fully half of KIAC's annual revenue comes from private donations. The other 50% is from government and general grants.

What are the Needs at KIAC?

Donations, Donations, Donations! Of funds, clothing & other goods, our time.

Kim told us about a crowd-funding campaign coming up in the next couple of weeks--check the website for more information!

Sign up to receive KIAC's monthly newsletter (email Kim @ development@kitsapiac.org) It's available in eight languages!

Learn about opportunities to donate clothing to New Beginnings Closet, to donate infant & children supplies to Eastside Baby Corner, to collect dry goods for KIAC's food distribution program, to donate fun & functional items each December for Holiday Bundles for 250 families.

If you're a bilingual Spanish speaker (or reasonably fluent in any other foreign language), please volunteer! Even if you are not bilingual, you can help someone practice their English speaking skills, prepare for the citizenship test. Committing just one hour/week would be tremendously helpful.

KIAC & LWV could be great partners in encouraging new citizen clients to vote!

What can we do at the local level to encourage immigration reform?

Learn about the facts! KIAC's monthly newsletter is a mine of information about the immigrant experience & dispelling myths. Be compassionate and clear about the issues with those in your sphere of influence.

Anytime legislation is changed, pay attention to how it will affect undocumented persons in our community:

*****Beginning May 3, 2023, every air traveler 18 years of age and older who resides in WA state will need an Enhanced Driver's License (EDL) or Enhanced Identification Card (EIC) or another acceptable form of ID to fly within the U.S. (i.e., a Permanent Resident Card, U.S. Military ID, U.S. Passport Book/Card).*****

Undocumented persons living in WA can currently get a driver's license, but will not qualify for an EDL or EIC, both of which require U.S. citizenship. Already an undocumented person cannot leave the U.S. if he or she is in an immigration legal process. This new requirement will mean that they will no longer be able to fly domestically, either, making it extremely difficult to visit family members who live elsewhere. Most of the affected persons have lived in this country for many years.

It's very easy to send an email to our representatives in Congress and in the Senate, telling them how important comprehensive immigration reform is, not only for undocumented individuals and mixed citizenship families, but for the economic and cultural benefit of all citizens. Templates are available online to get us started.

We thank Kim very much for taking time out of her Saturday to speak to us about the very important work she and all the staff and volunteers do at KIAC and for their deep commitment to serving those new arrivals in our community who are looking for a safe harbor in which to live, work and bring up their families.

A discussion of unit business followed:

Shoreline Management Act & LWVWA Consensus Process:

Following recent completion of a 2-year Shoreline Study by a committee of LWV members in Washington state, each local league is being asked to participate in LWV's unique consensus process for revising the current LWVWA position on the Shoreline Management Act. Each local league will come up with their own strategy to look at the **nine consensus questions developed by the study group. Our Kitsap League will form a committee of interested persons to attend 2-4 meetings in October & November, then an all-League meeting will be called in December to talk about the committee's conclusions and ask questions. All consensus forms are due to LWVWA by January 10, 2023.**

Saturday, September 24 from 10:30am to Noon: A briefing on the Shorelines study. [Register to attend](#)

This is a link to the Study: <https://lwvwa.org/resources/Documents/Studies/Shorelines/Final%20Study%20pdf%202.pdf>

New Format for The Voter:

Sue Hughes, former editor of The Voter, passed the baton at the end of May to Maurie Louis. Maurie has been trying out a new full-page, linear format and asked Sue to check in with each unit to get feedback. The Voter is LWV-Kitsap's public document. It is sent to Kitsap League's members through Mail Chimp. Some members are not receiving the email due to their service provider's restrictions; however, it may be accessed on the Kitsap League website, where it may also be read by the general public. The consensus was generally positive; people found the new format easy to read. We thanked Sue for her hard work and dedication in composing our League's monthly newsletter.

Update on Know Your Community digital booklet:

Raejean said the revision of the original booklet has become a much bigger project than was originally expected. It continues to be a work in progress, though much work has been done & several sections are essentially completed. The intent has always been to make it easier for the public to understand the workings of their local government. They've had some good cooperation from elected officials; it's possible that newly electeds could change the way some things are run. Linda Streissguth has done a lot of work with county administration. Raejean & Maureen are looking at least another month before they try to put online the sections that are ready rather than wait until the revisions are fully done. The eventual print version will be much shorter than the digital version.

Voter Services Activities:

Candy said several people in our unit will be participating in National Voter Registration Day activities on September 20: registering voters & passing out voter-related materials at the three libraries in our area, on the Bremerton-Seattle ferry, at Silverdale Goodwill, at Olympic College. We will have volunteers at the Bremerton Farmers Market on September 22 & 29.

Next up is our VOTE NOW sign holding; two of our faithful sign holders will be unable to join us, so I ask everyone to please step up & sign up for one or more dates:

From 4-5pm on Saturday, Oct. 22; Friday, Oct. 28; Saturday, Oct. 29;

Thursday, Nov. 3

3 Locations: Silverdale Way & Ridgetop Blvd.; Fred Meyer; Adele Ave. & Kitsap Way

Candidate Forums:

We talked briefly about forums this year & how for the first time, we've had to cancel one of our proposed forums (for Kitsap County sheriff) in order to maintain non-partisanship because only one candidate would be participating. Pat Troxell said it has been a tradition that local candidates come for a Q&A session to The Pearl, where she lives. Last year Maureen collected the questions submitted by the community through the League's website for all the forums. She created a spreadsheet organizing the questions by forum and shared them with the forum committee for consideration and selection. Given the time constraints of the forums and the number of questions submitted, not all questions could be asked.

Our League's October, 2022 Candidate Forums Schedule:

Monday, 10/17, 6:30pm: 23rd LD House Pos.1&2 Tarra Simmons, Drew Hansen, Paige A Jarquin

Wednesday, 10/19, 5-6pm: County Commissioner Dist.3 Katie Walters, Josh Hinman

Wednesday, 10/19, 6:30-7:30pm: PUD Commissioner Dist.1 Alice Tawresey, Debra Lester

Friday, 10/21, 6:30pm: County Auditor Paul Andrews, Mike Simpson

Saturday, 10/15, 3pm @ Norm Dicks Government Center: In addition, we are co-sponsoring with the Washington Debate Coalition & Braver Angels an in-person forum with 26th LD Senate candidates Emily Randall & Jesse Young.

Tuesday, 10/18, 6:30pm: Tacoma-Pierce County League has scheduled a forum with 26th LD candidates. Our League will provide publicity for their forum.

Recorded by Candy Rankin