

## **TRAVELING ATTORNEY PROVIDES IMMIGRATION LEGAL SERVICES THROUGH VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN'S ACT (VAWA) GRANT**

In 1994, Congress recognized that many immigrant victims of domestic violence who depend on their abusive spouse to help them apply for legal status in the U.S. are afraid of leaving their abusive relationship in fear they would lose their legal status. The abusive spouse uses the immigration process as a means of controlling the victim and keeping them in the abusive relationship. VAWA was passed to address such issues and permit victims to gain legal status on their own without the help of their abusive spouse.

Mid-Shore Council on Family Violence (MSCFV) and Prince George's County, Office of the Sheriff realized there was an increasing need in their communities to address and provide immigration legal services to immigrants who are victims of domestic violence. MSCFV, in partnership with the Office of the Sheriff, received a grant to hire a Traveling Immigration Attorney to work out of each agency serving these individuals in their communities. The VAWA Project began implementation on March 1, 2007 with a grant from the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention through the Office of Violence Against Women and is considered a model project in the State.

The project is a collaborative effort between Mid-Shore Council on Family Violence (MSCFV) and the Domestic Violence Unit of Prince George's County, Office of the Sheriff to provide immigration legal services to immigrants who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault under VAWA. The agency serves six counties, which includes Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's and Talbot on Maryland's Eastern Shore and Prince George's County.

Ms. Helen Chen, the Traveling Immigration Attorney, spearheads the VAWA project and has experience working with immigrant victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and other crimes. She provides immigration legal services to individuals who qualify for immigration relief under VAWA, conducts outreach in the various counties MSCFV and Prince George's County, Office of the Sheriff serves and builds collaborations with other service providers in the community to help address the various needs of these individuals. Helen is assisted by Ms. Kelly Guzman, the Immigration Bilingual Advocate who helps with interpretation and translation of documents, document preparation and other immigration matters pertaining to the client. Together, Helen and Kelly travel between the two agencies to serve the clients and conduct outreach and advocacy.

For further information, please contact Helen or Kelly at 410-479-1149