

Introduction

The Social Justice Internship grant program is a year long, 250- 275 hour internship experience. Students have the opportunity to engage in significant work at one of four Chicago area non-profits: Misericordia, Catholic Charities, ONE Northside, and Girlforward. The Social Justice Internship through the Center for Experiential Learning has the vision to develop "key initiatives" to empower students to have social justice at their core, just as it is at the core of Loyola University Chicago's mission.

Catholic Charities Immigration and Naturalization

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Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago, Immigration and Naturalization Services is a Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) recognized program since 1979. They provide legal consultations and assistance regarding most family immigration matters such as, family- based petitions, work authorization, replacement/renewal of permanent residence cards, naturalization/citizenship, DACA, inquiries for status of cases at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) offices, as well as, American embassies/consulates abroad. They also provide services to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking by evaluating and completing applications for VAWA or U Visa.

I got the opportunity to intern with Catholic Charities in their immigration and Naturalization program, where I assisted Immigration Survivors Project Specialists with advocacy on behalf of victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, including writing and translating victims personal statements and civil documents such as marriage, death, divorce, and birth certificates; writing executive case summaries; reviewing and summarizing medical, court, and police records, helping maintain database records, and making photocopies of legal cases, and supporting the Family Reunification Program with broad immigration issues related to immigration processes. I was also given the opportunity to interpret for interviews at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Chicago District office.

Learning Objectives

As a result of interning with Catholic Charities, I will learn general notions of U Visa and VAWA cases, further than declarations i.e., what documentations would be of support/needed for applications.

As a result of interning with Catholic Charities, I will learn to write a variety of statements for immigrants to gain immigration benefits.

As a result of interning with Catholic Charities, I will interpret for USCIS.

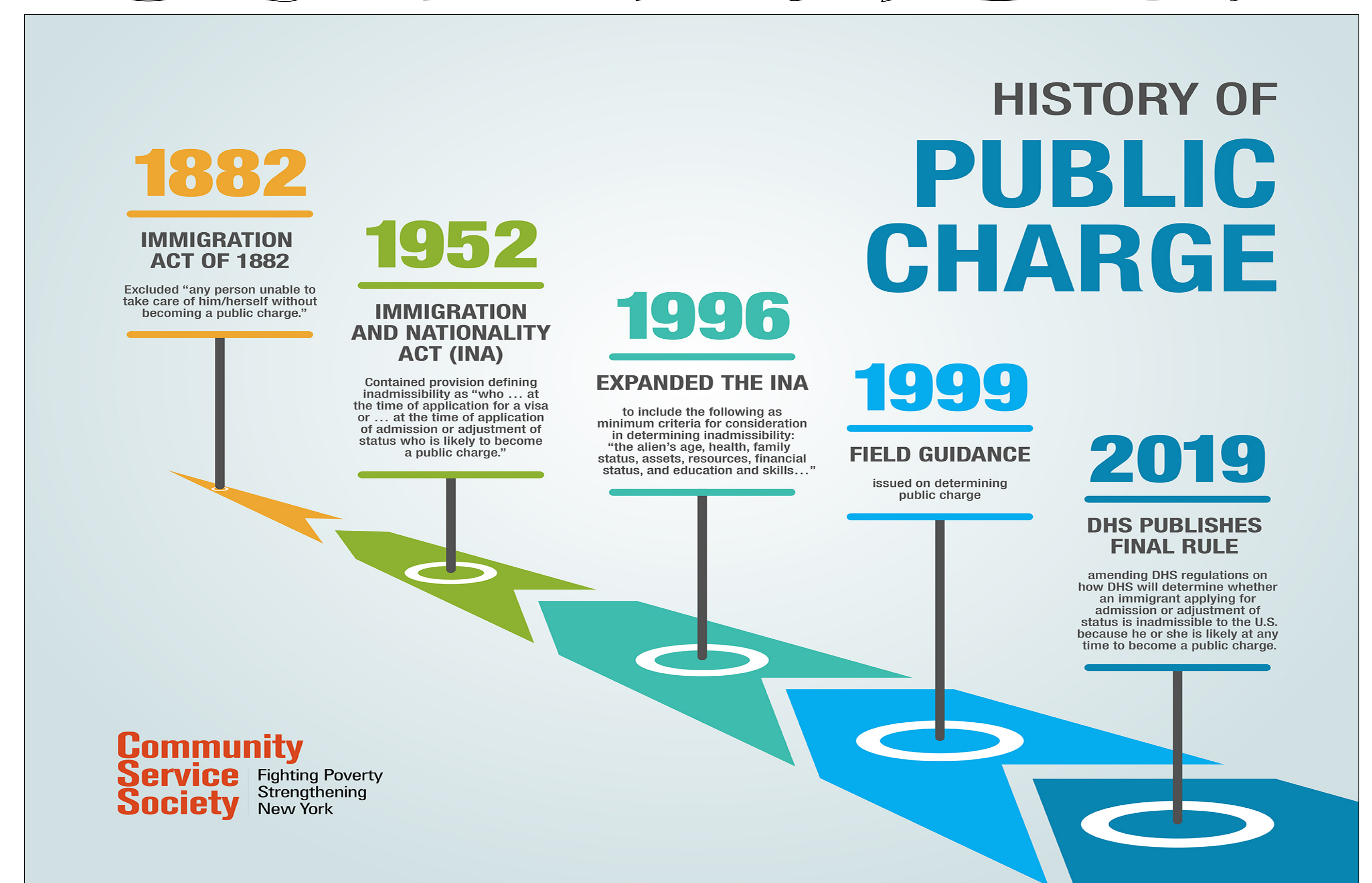
As a result of interning with Catholic Charities, I will learn family-based applications.

Conclusions and Reflections

I applied for the Social Justice grant program, with the intent of gaining more experience and knowledge in immigration and applying it to a social justice framework. Coming from immigrant parents, working with the undocumented population is something I am very passionate about. During my time at Catholic Charities, in their immigration and naturalization program I have been able to gain a better understanding of our immigration system, it is extensive and complicated. I was also able to learn plenty of myself. The work can be emotionally draining; however, I was able to channel their suffering to a form of activism on my behalf. I have been able to better my communication skills in both English and Spanish, learning new vocabulary to serve as a better advocate. I am grateful for this learning experience, which has sadly come to an end and I value deeply the relationships I have built with the immigration specialists and the clients. Unfortunately, fear can stem from ignorance, but if we work collectively and value human dignity – we can make a change. Which is why I plan on taking what I have learned about immigration law and policy, vulnerable populations and serving others, and apply it to my social work practice to better serve the undocumented population by making sure they have the education and proper resources and tools to succeed.

Implications Under our Current Administration

The immigration specialists serve as assets to the community as they have become professionals and experts in the undocumented population. They prove great leadership, serving as networks and resources for the population they are assisting. They take action to fight against injustices and difficulties that the undocumented population face. One of the many ways is by being lively and maintaining up to date with new obstacles, laws, and policies that get implemented, which often, only makes it harder to obtain an immigration benefit. During my time interning, I was able to observe firsthand how constantly and drastically immigration policies and laws are changing, which sometimes make it almost impossible to keep up. One of the changes that had the biggest impact on the organization and the immigrant population during my time there was the change in "Public Charge". Public charge is a test to determine if someone applying for a green card through a relative, or a visa to enter the United States, is likely to depend on certain public benefits in the future. It looks at the persons age, health, household size, financial resources, education, employment history, and other factors.



On January 27, 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court lifted the last remaining nationwide injunction which was preventing the rule from going into effect. On February 21, 2020, the Supreme Court lifted the last remaining, Illinois-only injunction, allowing DHS to implement the new public charge rule nationwide effective on February 24, 2020. The process has only become much more extensive, time-consuming, and costly. There are also not enough immigration specialists for the work that needs to be done, with the clients that they have. However, immigration specialists still find great value in their clients that they work hard and are constantly taking initiative and educating themselves.

Immigration and COVID-19

As reflective of the course, one of the easiest ways for us to collectively make a change is to get informed. Information is power. The world is filled with fake news, stereotypes and misconceptions, where the immigrant population is often one of the many vulnerable populations targeted. Under this current administration and COVID-19 pandemic, the undocumented population needs our support to build a stronger and healthier country. The current administration has weaponized this crisis to further damage the immigration system, as "Public Charge" continues to restrict and cause fear for immigrants to seek emergency care.

Ways to get involved:

- Learn how COVID-19 is affecting immigrant communities. Visit bit.ly/ILRC-covid19
- Sign the "United We Dream" petition to suspend ALL enforcement activities and operations at www.unitedwedreamaction.org
- Resources for Immigrant worker rights. Visit www.legalaidatwork.org/factsheet/coronavirus-faq/.