

Wharton students and NSC staff celebrate Thanksgiving with newly-arrived refugees, November 23, 2008



 Nationalities Service Center  
Serving immigrants and refugees since 1921

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# NSC NEWS

WINTER 2008

## Chinatown Immigration Law Project

In September NSC began its Chinatown Immigration Law Project. Two of the people that have been helped are “Mrs. Chang” and “Lee.” (Note: all clients names have been changed to protect their confidentiality.)

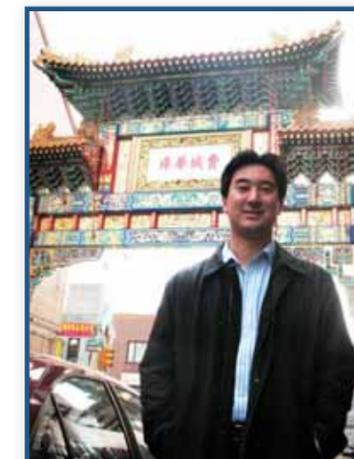
“Mrs. Chang” is 90 years old. She was born and raised in Shanghai, and she has had her green card for over 20 years. She is active in the senior housing development where she lives with her husband. Several years ago, she was riding a bus when a robber grabbed her purse and ran off the bus at a stop. She usually carried her green card with her everywhere, and that day was no exception. In addition to other personal items, she lost her green card that day. With the assistance of a kind senior center volunteer, Mrs. Chang filed the papers for a replacement green card. She paid the necessary fee, and she followed through appropriately when she received the notice from the Immigration Service (USCIS) for her fingerprinting appointment. She took the bus across Center City to the fingerprinting location on 8th Street. She assumed everything would be fine and that she would be receiving her replacement card soon.

A few months later, Mrs. Chang received a notice from USCIS that she had to redo her fingerprints. This time, she had to go to a location in Northeast Philadelphia, well outside of Center City Philadelphia, where USCIS had moved its fingerprinting operations. All by herself, this remarkable 90-year-old woman with limited English ability spent hours transferring between multiple bus routes to and from this new site. She knew she had already done her fingerprints and that there was no good reason to do them again. But she was determined to follow the instructions and do things the right way. After completing her fingerprints a second time, she assumed she was ok.

Several months later, Mrs. Chang stopped in our office with a new notice from USCIS. She explained to us that she had

been trying to get a replacement green card, and it was getting impossible to deal with USCIS. Had she known about our services, she said, she would have visited us sooner. This time, USCIS had determined that the fingerprints she had done were illegible and would not be sufficient for a proper FBI check. Because of the alleged inability to do an FBI criminal check, USCIS wanted police clearance checks from every jurisdiction where she had lived in the past 10 years.

In the United States, Mrs. Chang has only lived in two states – Pennsylvania and New Jersey. We were lucky there were only two. We helped her file requests for record checks in both states, and we were not surprised when both showed she had no criminal record. We immediately sent the record checks to USCIS.



Six months went by. We scheduled an appointment for Mrs. Chang and accompanied her to USCIS to inquire about the replacement card. The Information Officer said her application was still pending. We nodded in agreement. The officer said he would inform the application service center to pull the file and see what was going on. One month later, a new card arrived in the mail.

Today Mrs. Chang is preparing for her naturalization interview. She has been studying diligently with her husband about the Constitution and our nation’s history. She says she is excited that she will soon be able to vote. She has also started keeping her important documents in a safe deposit box at the bank.

“Lee” works in a Chinese restaurant. Diners might notice him carrying dirty dishes or mopping the floor. Or they may catch a brief glimpse of him standing at a fiery stove stir-frying their meal whenever the kitchen doors swing open. Most diners will leave the restaurant happy and full, and they will never think twice about the anonymous man in the kitchen who fed them that night.

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## Chinatown Immigration Law Project

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Lee is married and has a young son. He came from China to the United States alone, however, and he has been leading a lonely, yet hopeful, existence. His wife and son are currently in hiding back in China. After having their first son, Lee's wife was forced by local officials to have an inter-uterine device inserted to prevent further pregnancy, pursuant to China's One-Child Policy. They later discovered, however, that the IUD failed to work and that Lee's wife had become pregnant again.

Overjoyed by the news that they would be having another child, but fearful of the reaction of local authorities, Lee and his wife sought to keep the pregnancy a secret. The news of their pregnancy was somehow discovered by local officials. Lee's wife was forcibly taken into custody, whereupon four officials held her down on the floor, one person restraining each of her arms and legs. A doctor then performed an abortion. Still in custody and recovering from the incident, Lee's wife knew she was also scheduled to undergo a sterilization procedure. Despite the severity of what she had experienced, she managed to escape during the night.

Lee's wife and son are now in hiding in a different province of China. Lee, also fearing a forced sterilization procedure, fled China and made his way to the U.S. With legal representation by NSC he successfully applied for asylum. It is only a matter of time now until he can be reunited with his wife and son.

Lee's case is, unfortunately, an all-too-common story. Despite the growing need for immigration legal services in the Chinese community, and the diversity of our clientele, NSC's legal department has worked with relatively few Chinese immigrants. We know the Chinese community has substantial, unmet needs for the kinds of immigration legal services we provide, and we were determined to break down the linguistic and cultural barriers that have prevented local Chinese immigrants from seeking our services.

Thanks to a generous fellowship award from the Independence Foundation, this past September NSC launched the Chinatown Immigration Law Project. This project will provide free immigration legal services to low-income residents of Philadelphia's Chinese community. The project is headed by Brian Wang, who graduated from Temple University Beasley School of Law in May 2008. Brian was an intern at NSC during the summer of 2006 and the 2006-07 school year. As an intern, Brian worked on Lee's case, doing legal research and providing much-needed Chinese language support, a crucial skill that NSC had been lacking.

Brian is a fluent speaker of Mandarin Chinese, and he will be maintaining a visible presence in Chinatown to bring immigration legal services directly to residents and workers in the neighborhood, as well as to any other immigrants in the

region who come to Chinatown seeking assistance. Community organizations will play a crucial role in the success of the project. Brian has been meeting with the various groups that serve the community for advice and assistance in educating the community about NSC's services. We are truly grateful to those who have already offered their assistance and full support for this project.

Philadelphia's Chinatown is home to nearly 5000 residents, over 110 businesses, 3 churches, and 2 Buddhist temples. US Census data from 2005 showed 72,898 people of Asian descent living in Philadelphia. Of this total, 50,692 were foreign-born. Eighty-five percent speak a language other than English at home, and 50% report their ability to speak English as "less than very well." US Census data from 2000 showed 17,783 people of Chinese descent living in Philadelphia. In recent years, immigration to the Philadelphia region from China, particularly from Fujian Province, has increased. While exact numbers of immigrants are lacking, we know that Philadelphia's Chinese community is growing, given the geographic expansion of Chinatown and the revitalization of other city neighborhoods in Northeast and South Philadelphia.

Many Philadelphia municipal and private service providers are not well-informed about serving immigrants. The lack of adequate services and barriers to accessing services has a particularly serious impact on the Chinese community, which has been historically marginalized, insular, and distrustful of outsiders. Language and culture are the major barriers, and immigrants who are desperate for assistance will naturally seek help within the community. Tales abound of unscrupulous individuals within the community who take advantage of immigrants' desperation and fear of seeking outside help by demanding extravagant up-front cash payments for services, which are often performed improperly or not at all. Furthermore, the victims of such scams are reluctant to seek redress through the police or government officials, or by filing lawsuits. Immigrants are often fearful of having to use English and traveling to unfamiliar locations outside of Chinatown. Many cynical fraud victims stop seeking help entirely. Immigrants converge on Chinatown for what they believe are reliable services. Due to their isolation and vulnerability, however, they are limited in their choice of service providers and become easy targets. Given their precarious circumstances, the potential for irreparable harm is severe.

Through this project, NSC will establish a close relationship with Philadelphia's Chinese community and will become trusted as a reliable service provider. Chinatown will continue to be a starting point for immigrants to the Philadelphia region, and given NSC's expertise and location, we will become an even more valuable resource to immigrants who are searching for services in Chinatown. For more information, contact Brian Wang at 215-893-8400, or [bwang@nscphila.org](mailto:bwang@nscphila.org).

## New to the NSC Family

NSC welcomes several new members to our family. Congratulations are in order for Steven Larin on two counts. In September, Steven and his wife Beth welcomed an addition to their family, their beautiful daughter Anabella. Steven, who had been staff attorney for over two years, was promoted to Director of Legal Services in September as well. With Steven's promotion, we welcomed a new staff attorney, David Bennion, to the NSC family. Prior to joining us, David had been practicing immigration law for a non-profit agency in New York. He brings new energy to our wonderful legal team. Also new to the Legal Department is Jesuit Volunteer John Thompson. John, a recent graduate of Gonzaga University in Spokane, is serving as our Citizenship Project Coordinator. Brian Wang joins the Legal Department to lead the Chinatown Immigration Law Project. (For more about Brian and the Chinatown

project, see the front page story.) We also congratulate Juliane Ramic, Director of our Social Services Department, who gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, Shayla, on August 12th. We also welcome Sarah Robyn, who joined the Social Services Department as a part-time case aide. Sarah has experience in Jordan and Rwanda working with women and youth on HIV/AIDS, gendercide, genocide, and health issues. In addition, we are thrilled to welcome Pamela Jones-Burnley, who joined us as Office Manager in May. Pam comes to NSC with many years of relevant experience. She very quickly assumed significant responsibilities and has become a key, respected part of our management structure.

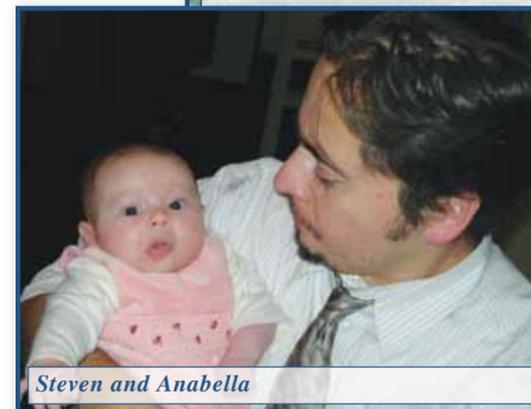
We want to encourage you to check out our new website [www.nscphila.org](http://www.nscphila.org) and contact us if we can ever be of service to you.



NSC Staff at "Fun Day"



Shayla



Steven and Anabella



from left to right, Betsy O'Neil, Sarah Robyn, Pamela Jones-Burnley, David Bennion, John Thompson and Brian Wang

## Edith Feld and Excellence in Volunteering

Nationalities Service Center's (NSC's) Department of Education is proud to honor the memory of our longest-term volunteer teacher since our opening in 1921. Edith Feld was a beloved teacher to hundreds of international students from all over the world. Edith began volunteering with us as a teacher of English as a Second Language (ESL) in 1979. At that time, she was Assistant to the President of Girard College. She continued teaching at NSC well after her retirement, until the age of 91, in 2007. In addition to teaching ESL, Edith often brought clothing, furniture, and appliances from her home in Germantown to share with our immigrant community. Sadly, Edith passed away earlier this year.

Edith was a caring and devoted teacher. Her students were extremely fond of her. She was always well-prepared and eager to share stories, conversation, and knowledge with her class. Edith's students often brought her special gifts from their countries to show their appreciation of her kindness, patience, and understanding. Edith never forgot a face, and she remembered her students' names long after they had completed their English studies. She cared not only about her students' academic achievements, but also about their personal struggles and success. Edith's students felt completely accepted and highly respected. They freely



Edith Feld with a student

shared stories about their lives and concerns in Edith's class and remained in contact with her long after they left Nationalities Service Center. NSC's Education Department staff, along with all of Edith's students, admired Edith's energy and commitment to excellence in volunteering.

In 2007, Edith moved from her home in Germantown, where she had lived for at least three decades, to a retirement home near Princeton, NJ. Her students were very sad to say good-bye, but they understood Edith's need to finally slow down. She taught until her very last day in Philadelphia. Edith was always much more concerned about others than she was about herself. Although by no means a wealthy woman, she felt that she always had more than enough to share with NSC's immigrant community. Edith had amazing physical and emotional strength. Through age 91, she took two buses from Germantown to Center City to teach her class, often carrying heavy items with her to donate to our clients. Edith died on July 15th, 2008 in her new home in New Jersey.

NSC's Department of Education has established the Edith Feld Excellence in Volunteering Award to honor this remarkable woman.

In fond memory of Edith, NSC's Department of Education has established the Edith Feld Excellence in Volunteering Award. This award will be given to one or more outstanding volunteer teachers of ESL each year, beginning in 2009. For 2008, we would like to recognize the following teachers for their long-term commitment to our students and to NSC, as a whole:

Name:	Taught From:	
<b>Bill Mezger</b>	<b>1985 - 2004</b>	(currently a member of NSC's Board of Trustees)
<b>Karen Buck</b>	<b>1990 - 2006</b>	(currently a member of NSC's Board of Trustees)
<b>Margaret Harris</b>	<b>1990 - present</b>	(currently a member of NSC's Board of Trustees)
<b>Del Guilfooy</b>	<b>1999 - present</b>	
<b>Carol Sue Steinbach</b>	<b>2003 - present</b>	
<b>Toby Harke</b>	<b>2004 - present</b>	

Thanks to all of our outstanding volunteer teachers, the Education Department is able to offer 13 classes, mornings and evenings, to approximately 800 students per year. Their commitment to the immigrant community and their very hard work has contributed significantly to the quality of our classes.

Edith Feld was a model of excellence in education, and NSC's Education Department hopes to continue in her outstanding tradition for many decades to come.

## The times are a changin'

by NSC Executive Director Dennis Mulligan

Hello friends and supporters of NSC! These are exciting and hopeful times at Nationalities Service Center, in our city and region, and in our country. I write this as NSC's new Executive Director, having been named by our Board of Trustees to succeed Nan Feyler. Nan left NSC to take a very important position in Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter's administration. Nan accomplished a great deal as our ED, including overseeing the move to our terrific space at 1216 Arch Street, and she left NSC a better and stronger agency.

Important changes are happening in our city, our region, and our country. The recent election of Barack Obama as our next President holds great significance to our clients and staff, and to us as an agency. We feel extremely proud, excited and gratified that our wonderfully diverse society chose an African-American, the son of a Kenyan, to lead us. In the last several decades the United States has become much more truly representative of our global village. Immigration from all corners of the globe has immeasurably enriched and revitalized our society, extending and deepening our traditions as a society of immigrants. The recent election demonstrated the emergence of a more diverse, open society and the potential power of all segments of our society.

The vital importance of immigration in Philadelphia and the region was the subject of a report recently issued by the Brookings Institute and several Philadelphia Foundations. The findings of the report, called "Recent Immigration to Philadelphia: Regional Change in a Re-Emerging Gateway," make clear the urgent importance of NSC's work:

- The study found that nearly 75 percent of greater Philadelphia's labor force growth since 2000 is attributable to immigrants. *NSC's employment programs for refugees and asylees, our English as a second language classes and literacy classes, and our immigration legal work are all focused on helping immigrants qualify for and find jobs in the region's economy.*
- The study highlights that immigrants who have arrived since 1990 have revitalized South Philadelphia, Olney, Southwest and West Philly, and many towns in the counties surrounding the city. Immigrants have moderated population loss in Philadelphia, maintaining an adequate

labor force as the native-born population ages. The report states "Immigrants bring fresh energy, entrepreneurship and vibrancy to many parts of the region." *NSC draws clients of all ages, religions and cultures from all parts of the region to our diverse programs, including our Chinatown Immigration Project (focused on immigration legal needs of our Chinese-speaking neighbors), our Senior Center (which serves a diverse population of foreign-born and native-born seniors in Olney), our interpretation and translation service (which provides a vital link to services for many families), our community-building work in communities of recently arrived refugees (such as Iraqis, Meshketian Turks, and the Karen from Burma), and our legal work on behalf of immigrant families and victims of domestic violence, torture survivors and victims of persecution based on religion, ethnic group, sexual orientation and gender.*



- The study found that our region has a diverse mix of immigrants and refugees from Asia, Latin American, the Caribbean, Africa and Europe. *Each year NSC serves clients from all over the world, typically from about 90 different countries. Our incredibly talented, diverse, multi-lingual staff comes from 15 countries and speaks 20 languages.*

NSC plays a vital role in Philadelphia and the region by carrying out our mission of helping immigrants and refugees participate fully in American society by promoting public awareness of the benefits of diversity, eliminating barriers caused by language and cultural differences, protecting legal rights, strengthening families and promoting self-sufficiency. As the recent study makes clear, these activities and goals are not simply good for the individuals helped, but play a key part in our region's economic growth and vitality.

We invite you to be a part of the exciting and compelling work we do at NSC! Please give generously to our annual appeal, or donate needed goods or services. Getting involved can mean volunteering at our Senior Center, in an ESL class, or by helping to find furnishings for a refugee family about to arrive. If you are a doctor, a psychologist, a lawyer or a wiz with new technologies, you can contribute through professional pro bono work. The rewards are great, and you will be helping not only one family or individual but also contributing to the economic and cultural enrichment of the entire Philadelphia region.

## NSC Naturalization Work Helps Fully Integrate the Region

**NSC** has been providing quality legal services to low-income immigrants for over 50 years. A very important part of the legal work we do is our assistance to permanent residents seeking to become United States citizens through applications for naturalization. For the past 3 years, much of our naturalization work has been handled by full-time AmeriCorps and Jesuit volunteers working as trained legal assistants under the supervision of lawyers in the Legal Services Department.

John Thompson, a Jesuit Volunteer currently on our staff, describes his work: "I have seen first hand the impact of the work that we do. Many times NSC is the only resource for those who need help the most. Immigration law can be really complicated and each client's situation is unique. Some of the most inspirational clients that I have worked with have the most complicated backgrounds. The expertise of our office teamed with our clients' hard work has helped change lives."

Below are stories of several of the clients with whom the AmeriCorps and Jesuit volunteers have worked. The first two come from Kristina Koenig, who was an AmeriCorps Volunteer for two years and is now one of our Legal Assistants. The third story is from Karin Brandt, who was an AmeriCorps Volunteer for a year before heading off to MIT to pursue her Master's degree!

"Susie"

Susie is a client who charmed and amazed me from the moment I first spoke with her. She is a refugee from Ethiopia, and the mother of four children. From the start, I enjoyed her warmth, eagerness and intelligence. The process of applying for citizenship is complicated, but she was very much on top of everything that she needed to pull together for her application.

Susie came to one of our pro-bono naturalization clinics for help with her naturalization application. I spent the better part of three hours helping the volunteer law students as they worked with Suzie to complete the many questions on the form. Susie impressed all of us with her ability to pull all of the many dates and other details of her life history out of her head so easily.

She enrolled in our Citizenship Class, and even before the first class Suzie had learned many of the U.S. history and civics questions asked at the naturalization interview. I had taught ESL for almost a year, and Susie was one of the most dynamic and inquisitive students I had ever worked with. She was always looking up at the bulletin board for events that are of interest to her. The class learned much about her country and her perception of American culture, and she patiently worked with the other students as they struggled to keep up with her. Susie passed the naturalization test easily. Now all four of her Susie

have also naturalized. She was exhilarated to have the right to vote for the first time in this year's presidential election!

"Teresa"

My first week at NSC I spoke to a woman named Teresa. She is 78 years old, from Ireland, and had been a permanent resident for more than forty years. She had wanted to naturalize for a very long time but was intimidated by the process.

She was determined to naturalize. "I want to die an American citizen," she said. She traveled several hours with her neighbor to come and complete her application with me. I was moved by the earnestness with which she answered each question and how seriously she took the oath of allegiance. She leans toward being non-violent, and was torn as to how she should answer the question on the naturalization application about her willingness to bear arms. We discussed this for almost an hour and I was so impressed by her total dedication to telling the truth in her application and also to living the truth of what she believes. Her final decision was to agree to take the oath, as she would be willing to defend the U.S.

Teresa was nervous as her interview approached, but she passed the examination easily and is now a U.S. citizen. We speak often and it now feels like we're old friends. I feel so grateful to be able to give her my time and support, and to be a part of her dream of becoming a U.S. citizen.

"Shahida"

When Shahida first came to NSC she was trying to flee her abusive U.S. citizen husband. We represented her in her VAWA self-petition, which led to her gaining permanent resident status without needing to depend on his sponsorship. When she was eligible to apply for naturalization several years later we assisted her again. Shahida, who is from Pakistan, didn't have a clear understanding of the requirements or the process of applying for naturalization. Once we explained to her the procedure and what was needed, however, she took it upon herself to do everything in her power to become a US citizen.

Despite not knowing much English in the beginning of the naturalization process, Shahida studied the civics questions for the exam and learned how to read, write and speak English. In the course of less than a year, this amazing woman spent many, many hours of hard work to become a United States citizen. Her sheer determination and devotion to accomplishing her dreams was truly inspiring.

Shahida is now a U.S. citizen, and she is on her own and working to support herself and her children.

## Education Department Student Stories

**M**ohammad works every day from 8:00 pm to 8:00 am. He is from Mali, and he has experienced war and torture. After his 12-hour work shift, Mohammad comes to NSC twice a week from 9:30 am to 12:00 pm to study English. Although he is physically exhausted, he participates enthusiastically in class, knowing that his efforts will help him become an active participant in US society. Mohammad is currently an intermediate-level student and is doing very well. He is now able to communicate clearly, and he is ready to learn more complex sentences. Despite his busy work schedule, Mohammad continues to make his English studies a high priority so that he can succeed economically, socially, and emotionally.

Rosario, a student from El Salvador, busses tables at a restaurant in Center City. This is Rosario's fourth session at NSC, and her communication skills have improved tremendously. Every session, Rosario saves \$1.00 at a time

until she has the tuition for the following session. At registration time, Rosario pays the one hundred and forty dollar tuition in the one dollar bills that she has received as tips. This session, when Rosario came to register, she announced that she had been promoted from busser to waitperson because she is able to communicate well with the customers.

Anita survived the Tsunami in Indonesia and is now in the United States trying to make a new life for herself. English class is not only a place where Anita can learn English, but it is also an opportunity for her to find support, a place where she is comfortable to talk about the trauma that she has suffered. Anita's husband disappeared in 2000, and she has not heard from him since. Anita has found a community at NSC where she can speak freely about herself, her experiences, and her successes. As a result, Anita's English is improving by the day.

### NSC Mission

The mission of NSC is to help immigrants and refugees participate fully in American society. We implement this mission by focusing on four main objectives:

- Protecting legal rights
- Strengthening families and promoting self sufficiency
- Eliminating barriers created by language and cultural differences
- Promoting public awareness of the benefits of diversity in American society

### NSC Services

NSC provides services that help immigrants and refugees become self-sufficient and to be active participants in their communities.

- English language classes
- Legal services
- Refugee resettlement, employment and social services
- Services to elderly immigrants at our Senior Center
- Translation and interpretation services for individuals, as well as for government and private organizations

