

TRII: A New Home  
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[www.therighttoimmigration.org](http://www.therighttoimmigration.org)

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### Summary

Entering into the summer, we were feeling re-energized by the intensification surrounding immigration in the United States which fueled our efforts in achieving our three project goals: creating a citizenship program with the Newcomer Academy of the Waltham High School, developing a training program to prepare students to become immigration representatives, and expanding our non-profit, The Right to Immigration Institute (TRII). Fast forward three months later and we are leaving the summer with having expanded our citizenship program to include drop-in hours for all Waltham Public Schools, a 100-page interactive training program, and an organization prepared to provide high-quality legal services.

### Project Review

During our initial conversations with Mary Jo Rendon, Co-Chair of the Newcomer Academy of the Waltham High School, prior to receiving the Davis Projects for Peace Award, she told us that one of the biggest needs of her students and their families was naturalization services. Based on this information, we began to participate in intensive naturalization workshops and we created an initial plan of how we would provide naturalization services.

After we had a draft plan, we followed up with Mary Jo. Due to the increased polarization surrounding immigration, Mary Jo told us that there had been an increase in demand for services in the by Waltham parents. Due to this change, Mary Jo made a big ask: could we provide office hour-style services to the entire school district? We had recently brought on another immigration attorney to our TRII team, but we weren't sure we could handle this new demand. We hit the drawing board again and set upon figuring out the most efficient means to help. The result was a program that subsidizes filing fees for families, partners with the Waltham Public Library to offer a space for providing legal services, supplies outreach materials, and offers a system for tackling language barriers by connecting with interpreters. When we brought this updated program back to Mary Jo, it looked like we had created the perfect fit. This program is set to begin at the start of October and is expected to reach a minimum of 100 parents and students.

As part of our business model, we are planning to train students to become Board of Immigration Appeals accredited representatives who can help non-citizens in immigration court. To meet this goal, we set about creating a training program. TRII's Board Treasurer, Professor Douglas Smith, has nearly 30 years of immigration experience as an attorney and educator, so he acted as the mentor for this project. We took several immigration trainings and did countless hours of research in preparation for designing our program. After several meetings with Professor Smith, our training program was developed. It is comprised of two parts: immigration training and immigration mentorship. The main difficulty we ran into was figuring out how we could be both succinct and thorough. In addition, we needed to figure out how to most efficiently spend our money on useful resources.. After having our training program proofed by two immigration attorneys and one writing specialist, we are now set to begin at the start of September with about 10 participants who will begin providing immigration services by January.

The final goal of our summer project was to expand TRII so we could provide high-quality immigration services. This goal is less flashy than the other two, involving purchasing insurance, designing and buying our website, paying for basic filing fees, and buying supplies are essential in our success. With new business cards, office space, and updated immigration references, we are prepared to provide services to the thousands of non-citizens in Boston's immigration court system without representation.

#### Davis Projects for Peace Award Reflection

Peace is not when there is no war. Peace is not when countries are on good terms diplomatically. Peace is not when countries do not have internal conflicts. Rather, each of these are a piece of the larger aim of peace. Peace is when a mother raising two children on her own can come home and feed her children who have come home from a long day at their high-quality school. Peace is when someone who wasn't born in this country can walk through a park without fearing that they will be harassed. Peace cannot be bound by a definition in a dictionary nor legalese written by a professor. Peace is an aspiration we strive towards based on the qualities we know that will bring us safety, care, and happiness.

With TRII: A New Home, the title of our project, our goal was to try and work towards one of the most important parts of peace: community. For peace to exist, people must be willing to listen, help, and care for one another. Providing immigration services is one step towards achieving that goal. By helping integrate immigrants into the community fabric of the United States through immigration services, they are one step closer to joining the foundational network that brings people together. In the short-term, our project will provide peace to non-citizens that no longer need to worry about being torn from their families. In the long-term, we help foster a stronger community by making it possible for non-citizens to connect with employers, buy a home, and raise a family. While it is an oversimplification to call citizenship a golden ticket, immigration services really do go a long way in changing someone's life.

When we first founded TRII, we viewed immigration as a political and legal issue. Our view was narrow and limited by the way it is presented in the media and by our previous interactions with immigration. However, as we began delving more deeply into this project and interacted with more experts in the field, we realized that immigration is a human issue. That is, when approaching a case with a client, while we may still hold strong political opinions about how the immigration court system works, the most important aim for us should be simply figuring out how we can help the person in front of us. This new focus has helped us become better listeners and helped to ensure we first and foremost fully understand someone's story so that, even if we lose their case, we can still fight as hard as possible.

#### Personal Statement

*It is rare that you can wake up every morning and work on a project that you not only feel is personally important but that can also transform the lives of others by providing them with a path to citizenship.*

- Jonathan Goldman

*After three months of working endlessly on this project, the most important thing that I've learned is that, while the road may not be easy, bringing about change and doing something that no other organization has ever attempted is possible if you're willing to get knocked down, figure out why you fell, and learn how to stand stronger again.*

- Victoria St. Jean



Victoria St. Jean and The Right to Immigration Institute Board Treasurer, Douglas Smith, at an event where they connected with teachers before the new school year so they would have their contact information and a basic understanding of what to do if they have a student who needs help.



Jonathan Goldman helping explain how a client could qualify for a visa by showing them the bulletin schedule provided by United States Citizenship and Immigration Services.