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**2002-2003**

**Catholic Campaign for  
Human Development**

***Profile of a Funded Group***

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**Baltimore's New  
Immigrants**

Two years ago, an immigrant parent came to an organizing meeting at the Center. He wanted help with public school district bills. Because he was a city resident, did he have to pay the out-of-state charges for his children to attend public city schools? The district had already collected over \$2,500.00/year from him.

When another immigrant from Trinidad and Tobago petitioned the INS for a family member to come to the US, he thought he needed legal assistance. He enlisted the services of an immigration attorney, but what he got in return were high attorney bills, frustration, and a lot of documentation work that he discovered he could do. After paying the attorney, he ended up completing the process himself.

Last year when a refugee woman came to the Center for assistance, things

were fairly desperate. She had lost all her documents at a homeless shelter and was in need of stable support. War-related traumas came back to haunt and disable her.

Events like these are not uncommon at the **Immigration Outreach Service Center** in Baltimore, Maryland. Opened in June 2000, the Center was established in response to the immigration needs of many of the parishioners at St. Matthew Catholic Church and members of the communities where the Center is based. A full-time director was hired in 2000 with funds from the **Catholic Campaign for Human Development** and from the Open Society Institute. Today Ms. Jean Holloway oversees both the service component at the walk-in center, as well as the Immigrant's Organizing project. To date, people from over 47 countries have come through their doors. The Immigrant Organizing Project, which seeks to organize immigrants for change, sponsors workshops, seminars and annual Immigrant Institutes on civic issues that most affect immigrants.

**Maryland Issues: Abell  
Foundation Report on  
Immigrants and the Cost of  
Living**

But, what does the future hold for immigrants, especially low-income immigrants and refugees in Baltimore city? Three important factors are at work here. The first factor is related to an Abell Foundation report by the Morrison Group in 2002 on **the positive effects of immigration on cities**. This highlighted a possible solution to the problem of Baltimore's declining population. The report writers

advocated a proactive approach by city government leaders. Baltimore could attract new immigrants into Baltimore neighborhoods and jobs through a coordinated effort by the mayor's office, local employers, colleges and city agencies. Mayor Martin O'Malley in Baltimore expressed positive interest, but there is controversy around the availability of adequate healthcare, adequate job opportunities and affordable housing.

Another factor is related to the cost of living in Maryland. The federal poverty line in 2002 was \$18,200.00 for a family of four. Workers leaving welfare earn an average of \$7.40 an hour. According to a welfare reform study from the Ford Foundation released in December 2001, **a single adult living in Baltimore needs to make \$9.13 an hour** – or \$19,280 a year – to balance a budget. This is still without provision for retirement, emergency money or higher expense purchases like cars, much less three other family members. Moreover, there is a **large gap between Maryland's cost of living and the federal poverty line.** According to the Ford Foundation study, the "self-sufficiency standard for Maryland" highlights this gap. For Baltimore City, the self-sufficiency standard for a family of four is nearly \$44,500.00 – not \$19,280. This is the amount determined to afford available housing, healthcare, food, transportation, education and clothing. For professional immigrants, for middle income immigrants and for well-supported immigrants, this may not be a struggle. For low-income immigrants and for immigrants without much formal education, these economic facts, however, are part of an employment climate and economic climate that is especially grim.

Thirdly, there is a **social and legal climate of suspicion, restriction and civil rights reversals** arising from the 1996 federal Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act. The events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the subsequent Patriot Act legislation have far-reaching consequences for immigrants and foreign-born citizens. See the Detention Watch Network website ([www.lirs.org](http://www.lirs.org)) for more about one expanding civil containment measure.



IOISC MEMBERS WITH CARIBBEAN HEALTH WORKERS  
(photo courtesy of IOISC)

### **Future Prospects: Social Realities, Empowerment and Solidarity**

For the Immigration Outreach Service Center, all these Maryland state factors present obstacles and opportunities. **“A lot has changed for the worse,” says Jean Marie Holloway.** Immigrants pay taxes but receive few benefits. Minor US infractions can lead to deportation. Documentation requirements are especially hard for refugees and asylees who flee countries in disarray. The domestic economy and general social climate are challenges for immigrants. There are institutional needs as well. **“We need to find more volunteers to build greater capacity,” says Owen**

Charles, “and we’re looking for an administrative assistant and for interns.” But **the Center’s strengths will help members to engage those future opportunities.** They are in a good position to advocate for the needs of low-income immigrants and for the long-term needs of immigrant communities. The Casey Foundation and Catholic Campaign for Human Development remain committed partners. The Maryland Coalition of Refugee and Immigrant Organizations is a network partner. **Many of the 560 clients served come back as volunteers or train as future leaders.** New connections are made each week to community organizations, to immigrant coalition members and faith-based groups. In fact, a 20 member parish group from St. Francis Catholic Church in northeast Baltimore spent half a day in February with IOSC members. They will find ways to commit their time, talents and resources to the work that IOSC carries on in the city. Community economic development opportunities await. Strength will build as new partnerships and new solidarities like these form to make Baltimore a city safe for residents now and for residents to come.



Immigrant Organizing Project Meeting  
(photo courtesy of IOSC)

### ***Revisiting Immigrant Actions***

Outcomes are important, so what happened in the end to the three immigrants mentioned earlier?

**Through research, members of the Center discovered that, in fact, the Baltimore city schools illegally charged the immigrant parent.** In a demonstration of support, members of the Center accompanied the immigrant parent to a meeting with representatives of the school district who, as a result, refunded the money with interest. Moreover, IOSC alerted other immigrants living in the city about the illegal practice. Secondly, **the immigrant from Trinidad and Tobago is now a Board Member and volunteer at IOSC.** He uses the knowledge he gained from his initial experience to assist members of the immigrant community in completing their INS applications. In fact, the Center now employs an immigration attorney to handle the legal work for its clients. The Center’s fees for services are about one third the costs of services provided by commercial immigration attorneys.

And lastly, the refugee woman met successfully with Jean Marie Holloway at the Center during drop-in clinic hours. **It has taken a long time, but this woman now has all her documents back** and the Center is keeping a copy for her. She has also made initial contacts with other members of her national community in Baltimore. Moreover, she visited a local mental health organization where workers are experienced with immigrant trauma.

**The Immigrant Organizing Project at IOSC is about tracking these actions and mobilizing immigrants** in their civil efforts. It is about participating in local issues and in decision-making with groups such as

Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD) and other grassroots campaigns for community development. **It is about the work of empowerment, solidarity and social justice.**

To join the community building, community organizing work and institutional change efforts at IOSC, contact them at **Immigration Outreach Service Center (IOSC), 5401 Loch Raven Boulevard, Baltimore, MD 21239. Director: Jean Marie Holloway; tel: (410) 323-8564. Visit [IOSCmatthew@msn.com](mailto:IOSCmatthew@msn.com).**