

PBN Project Spotlight: U Visa Immigration

A Special Report on Our Impact



What's a U Visa?

Under the Violence Against Women Act, a U visa is available to those who report and cooperate with law enforcement on the crimes committed against them.

It allows survivors (and their immediate family members) to live and work in the United States, where they can get basic necessities like a driver's license, bank account, and enroll in school.

It can provide a path to lawful permanent residency.

Since 2011, more than **60 PBN volunteers** have handled **75 U visa cases**, changing the lives of **more than 100 clients** and their families.

Only 17% of undocumented immigrants report crimes committed against them.*

Client's Bravery Helps PBN Change Four Lives for the Better

Late one evening, Elaine was physically attacked. Despite her trauma and her undocumented status, Elaine took a brave step and reported the crime.



Elaine and her family.

Her cooperation with law enforcement allowed her to pursue a U visa. PBN veteran volunteer attorney Pierangela (Pierry) Murphy, worked with Elaine on her application and those of her mom, dad, and sister. The application required Elaine to recount the disturbing details of the attack so Pierry could document them.

During the interview, Elaine asked that her mom not be in the room to hear her tell the story. As difficult as the case was to document, Pierry said she "had her whole heart in it."

As a result, Elaine and her family received their U visas and are allowed to remain in the United States.

PBN Helps Client Get Order of Protection, Move on Fearlessly

Debbie was born in Mexico into a home where her dad regularly beat her mom in front of her and her siblings. When she married Mike after high school, she thought she was escaping for a better life, but life with him was much worse.

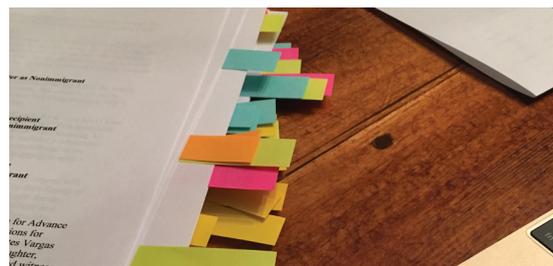
"Debbie was the definition of a woman trying to live her life and help her family. She didn't want to live in fear anymore."

~Lindsay, Volunteer Attorney

Shortly after they married, Mike abandoned Debbie to move to the United States, where he had a baby with another woman. He returned to Mexico two years later and started regularly physically and sexually abusing and raping Debbie. Her parents told her unhelpfully to stay Mike and "not make him so angry."

She stayed, eventually moving to Chicago with Mike and her children. While in a drunken rage, Mike started beating and kicking his youngest daughter. Debbie had him arrested and, with the help of PBN and volunteer attorney Lindsay, got an order of protection.

This empowered her to take control, divorce Mike, enter therapy, and move on fearlessly with her new life.



PBN Project Spotlight: U Visa Immigration, continued

Translator's Experience Drives Her Desire to Work with Other Immigrants

PBN has a track record of attracting volunteers with heart, talent, and a deep desire to change lives and pay it forward. One of these volunteers is interpreter and translator Maria Salazar, who understands how critical translation and interpretation is to many of PBN's clients.

Maria herself was an immigrant and her own mother went through the lengthy U Visa process. This experience inspired her to "pay it forward" by working with immigrants in some capacity throughout her career, ensuring people fully understand the resources available to them.



Translator Maria, right, with a client.

The case was initially filed back in 2015. Maria recalls the initial translation work was taxing because she wasn't just interpreting; she was telling the very real story of a client who experienced significant trauma. The case finally closed in 2022, opening up opportunity and stability for the client's family, including current and future children.

Maria is thankful for PBN. "The work we do is vital and the need for reliable information from trusted sources like our volunteers continues to grow."

"The work we do is vital and the need for reliable information from trusted sources like our volunteers continues to grow."

~Maria, Volunteer Translator

PBN Leaves a Lasting Impression

It was a quiet Saturday afternoon when PBN founder Donna Peel received an unexpected phone call. She heard a familiar voice greet her. It was the voice of a previous PBN immigration client.

Donna had not heard from him since 2014 when she and volunteer attorney Cindy Kelly assisted him with his U-Visa case. The client called to express his gratefulness and appreciation for all of their work for him back in 2014. After all these years, he remembered how "nice and professional" they were and how easy they were to work with.



U visa client pictured here with his wife.

He was especially appreciative that they had spoken to his young daughter, encouraging her in her aspirations to become an attorney. This is just another case in which PBN's volunteers and work made tremendous and long-term impacts in clients' lives.

Learn more about PBN's U visa project and other projects at www.pro-bono-network.org