

WELCOME FROM OUR TEAM

We are excited to announce the launch of the Vermont Asylum Assistance Project (VAAP), a legal services project created in partnership with the Community Asylum Seekers Project (CASP) that will provide training, mentorship, and technical assistance to Vermont attorneys who provide pro bono legal representation to asylum-seekers.



The number of people seeking asylum in the U.S. has nearly quintupled in the last decade and without access to counsel, asylum seekers are three to five times more likely to be denied and deported, often into life-threatening situations. The trends for asylum-seekers arriving in Vermont are no different, growing significantly since the state granted drivers' license rights to undocumented immigrants in 2014. Responding to the rise in asylum claims in the state, a network of community support organizations has arisen, beginning with CASP in 2016. However, Vermont has continued to struggle to provide legal representation - paid or pro bono - to asylum seekers. The idea for VAAP was born out of a conversation about shared challenges between community support organizations in securing legal representation for asylum seekers and pro bono attorneys who have had to turn away clients due to a lack of resources and mentorship.

VAAP was made possible as a result of the coordinated efforts of the people and organizations on the ground providing support to asylum seekers in communities around Vermont, as well as generous grants from two charitable foundations. We are humbled by the energy and time that so many Vermonters contribute to ensure that immigrants are welcomed to the state and gain access to the legal system.

At present, VAAP is organizing upcoming legal trainings, seeking additional funding, and looking for collaborating attorneys and community partners. Please email vaap@caspt.org to get involved.

COME AND LEARN MORE

VAAP, along with Vermont Law and Graduate School's Immigration Assistance Project, is pleased to be providing its first training for pro bono attorneys at the VBA's Annual Meeting on September 30th. For more information and to register to attend, go to <https://bit.ly/VTbar2022>.

For questions about VAAP as we emerge or to get involved, please contact vaap@caspvt.org.



SPOTLIGHT ON PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

The Vermont Immigrant Assistance (VIA) clinic supports Vermont Law and Graduate School students to advance the immigration and related rights of non-citizens through direct services, community education, and systems advocacy. Lead Attorney and Assistant Professor Jill Martin Diaz, Staff Attorney and Visiting Assistant Professor Brett Stokes, and their students are eager to offer technical assistance and teaching expertise to VAAP to help it close the justice gap for non-citizens in Vermont. Contemporaneous to its support for VAAP, VIA has just welcomed Maya Tsukazaki, the 2022-24 Vermont Poverty Law Fellow, to our program. Maya's will be the second Vermont Poverty Law Fellowship hosted by VLGS, and the first to be supervised by a former VPLF (Jill Martin Diaz) in the program's history. In keeping with previous fellows' approach, Maya will provide legal help to low-income non-citizens in Vermont and explore state-based solutions to overcome systemic barriers to migrant justice. She is excited to help VIA and VAAP cultivate a much-needed asylum pro bono mentorship program for Vermont attorneys. Non-citizens in Vermont who need humanitarian immigration help can call 802-831-1500 or email VIAclinic@vermontlaw.edu.

The Vermont-New Hampshire Asylum Support Network (VT-NH-ASN) is a group of eight community nonprofits around Vermont and Western New Hampshire. Together they have sponsored and supported more than 75 asylum seekers by working with asylum attorneys to process their cases while providing housing, financial support, and case management assistance. VT-NH-ASN organizations are located in Brattleboro, Burlington, Rutland, Randolph, St. Johnsbury, Montpelier, the Upper Valley, and Keene, NH, and will be crucial community-based partners in connecting asylum seekers in need of legal aid to VAAP.

The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) has been working tirelessly to assist more than 130 Afghans who arrived in Vermont since August 2021. Our new staff attorney, Anna Tadio, is supporting 60 Afghan asylum seekers, several of whom are already awaiting decisions on their cases. USCRI is supported around the clock by a small group of pro bono attorneys. Once the (cont'd.)

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS, CONT'D.

asylum seekers' claims are processed, they can begin submitting petitions to reunite families. Most of USCRI's Afghan clients are here without their families, and USCRI will need help to file reunification petitions.

The Association of Africans Living in Vermont (AALV) provided pro bono legal services to a total of 681 individuals from 68 different countries between Summer 2021 and Summer 2022, including assistance and representation in a wide array of immigration issues: asylum, family reunification, adjustment of status to lawful permanent residence, citizenship, temporary protected status, and victims' visas. With the arrival of more than 100 Afghans into the Brattleboro area starting in 2022, AALV worked with the Ethiopian Community Development Council to meet this community's legal needs. The majority of the arrivals were humanitarian parolees whose status was only for two years. Some were still in the process of applying for their Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) status, and they too were paroled into the U.S. In order for most of the parolees to gain permanency in the U.S. and have the opportunity to reunite with their families, they had to apply for asylum. So far, AALV staff have represented 14 individuals/families in their asylum proceedings. In addition, they provided assistance in case preparation to 42 individuals and general orientations about asylum to 15 others.

WHO WE ARE



Rebecca Wasserman (she/her) is an attorney in the Office of Legislative Counsel for the Vermont General Assembly. She is also an adjunct professor and supervising attorney for the Legislation Clinic at Vermont Law and Graduate School. Prior to moving to Vermont, Becky was an associate in the Financial Regulation Group at the UK-based law firm, Linklaters, LLP. Becky started working with asylum seekers more than ten years ago through her law school's immigration clinic, and has worked in a pro bono capacity on a number of immigration matters, including volunteering at the southern border in 2018 and 2019. She is licensed to practice law in Vermont and New York.



Kate Paarlberg-Kvam (she/they) is Executive Director at the Community Asylum Seekers Project. Kate holds a PhD in Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and is a former postdoctoral fellow at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, where she conducted research on gender, displacement, and postwar reconciliation efforts. Kate works with CASP's team of pro bono asylum attorneys to connect with and serve asylum seekers in Southern Vermont, and will be lending CASP's resources toward the co-leadership of this collaborative effort to increase the availability of pro bono asylum support.



Jill Martin Diaz (they/them) is Assistant Professor and Lead Attorney of Vermont Immigrant Assistance (VIA) at Vermont Law and Graduate School. They support student clinicians to advance immigrants' rights through direct legal services, systems advocacy, and community education. Prior to this appointment, Jill was a Vermont Poverty Law Fellow at Vermont Legal Aid and an Immigrant Justice Corps Fellow at Sanctuary for Families NY. Jill is passionate about legal work that promotes more equitable resource distribution and more equal access to justice. They are licensed to practice law in Vermont and New York.