LALDEF is very excited to share that we are one of ten projects that have been awarded the All Kids Thrive Grant offered by the Princeton Area Community Foundation. This five-year grant, with the purpose of “strengthening and insulating the educational pipeline so that all kids thrive from birth to twenty-five”, is an amazing opportunity for LALDEF to increase our impact in the community.

Empowered by this grant, we are partnering with Hedgepeth-Williams Middle School for the Arts (HWMSA) and the Foundation for Educational Administration to embark on a five year journey to reduce chronic absenteeism and increase academic achievement.

This will be accomplished through a three prong approach (1) on site case management and ESL classes for the parents/guardians of the bilingual students, (2) incentives for students that are hitting attendance and academic goals, (3) support and training for the teachers and administration at HWMSA to continue with the full integration of the arts into their curriculum. The collaboration is crucial to project success. LALDEF’s role in this project will be to have a full-time case manager on-site at HWMSA. A newly hired case manager will be responsible for conducting translation and interpretation, gap assessments, case management, referrals, and parent/guardian educational workshops. Her efforts will be bolstered by our ability to offer completely free ESOL classes to these parents/guardians at the middle school. Over the next five years, our case manager along with our volunteer teachers will facilitate communication between the school and the bilingual families that are an essential part of the school community.

We are very excited to begin our physical presence at the school and are honored to be a part of this collaboration funded by the Princeton Area Community Foundation.
Dear Friends,

What a difference one year can make! Policies continue changing and we continue adapting. I’m convinced that our team (volunteers, staff, and board) is comprised of superheroes. We respond at all hours to an array of concerns impacting our immigrant neighbors. I am inspired and fueled by their passion and perseverance.

LALDEF has continued to grow sustainably to meet the needs of our community. Last year at this time we were a staff of 8 and now we are a staff of 13. A year before that we were a staff of 5. Up until four months ago we were in a 950 square foot rented office and now we’re in a 4,500 square foot historic building that we OWN. This is a testament to two things 1) increased need in our community demands increased capacity, 2) you and people like you believe in and support our mission and everything that we embody.

Increased capacity through staff and space has elevated impact and opportunities for collaboration. I am so happy with the progress we have made to strengthen existing partnerships and to create new ones. Our work empowers communities through joint efforts, like All Kids Thrive. Through partnership we are able to unify many different voices to move policy forward, like with Let’s Drive NJ.

It is crucial that we continue to mobilize as a unified front to fight injustice and foster inclusive and welcoming communities. As the times continue to test our resilience, I am eternally grateful to those supporting our work. One thing that has hasn’t changed in the last year is my commitment to fight. Fight for justice. Fight for inclusivity. Fight for change. Sí se puede.

In Solidarity,

Adriana Abizadeh
**VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT**

**Why are you so motivated to help immigrants in Mercer County?**

When I began volunteering, it was because I could imagine how very difficult it is to begin life in a new country, learning a new language, finding a way to make a living, and adjusting to strange customs, sometimes under threat. Now with each new class, I find that I become very fond of the students. They are attentive and eager, and most of all, kind. As we work together to figure out how English can be learned, we become like a small family and I miss them once the semester is over.

**What does the Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund mean to you?**

It means camaraderie in the face of difficulty. I am happy to be a part of a visionary and effective organization that is on the forefront of standing up for the Latino community and changing individual lives.

**Do you have a vision for LALDEF’s work?**

The staff and the LALDEF board are the visionaries and I am amazed at their creativity and tenacity. I am satisfied to help carry out the work to be done.

**What do you want to say to others that may be interested in volunteering with LALDEF and how they can help too?**

There are different ways to help with the mission of LALDEF, and you don’t have to speak Spanish. You meet the best people here, have fun, and come away charged up from feeling that you have changed things for people.

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**FUTURO: PREPARING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS**

One of the newest additions to our team, Thelma Carrera, was in our FUTURO college preparation program and graduated in 2014. She was accepted into the Bonner Program at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) and was provided a full scholarship. While at TCNJ she lived on campus, studied abroad, remained engaged with LALDEF for policy advocacy, and joined a Latina sorority. Thelma just graduated in May 2018 and was hunting for a job just as a position opened in our legal services program. Now, Thelma is working at LALDEF as a full time Legal Services Coordinator, while she prepares for her LSATs to apply for entry into law school. Her goal is to be a legal advocate for immigrants and to help those that may not otherwise be able to access counsel.
FIGHTING FOR LEGAL STATUS

Some of latest legal case successes (all of the names have been changed to protect client privacy):

**U-VISA**

One of our clients, Maria, received an approved U-Visa this month! We initially filed her U-Visa in December of 2014. Maria traveled to the U.S. from Guatemala in hopes of finding work and establishing a life in a safer environment, forced to leave behind three of her children with relatives. Once in the U.S., Maria suffered through almost a decade of domestic violence at the hands of her husband. We are so excited that she will now be able to live her life with the protection of having legal status and she can bring her children to the U.S.!

U-Visas are for certain victims of crimes (and their immediate family members) who have suffered substantial mental or physical abuse and are willing to assist law enforcement and government officials in the investigation or prosecution of the criminal activity.

**T-VISA**

Our client, Sarai, is originally from Brazil. Several years ago, she was trafficked and forced into prostitution in the U.S. After two years, the man who trafficked her was arrested and she was able to escape. In 2015, we filed her application for a T-Visa. Since then, Sarai remarried and has one son with her Costa Rican spouse in the U.S. In 2016, Sarai’s T-Visa was approved. We successfully petitioned for her spouse living in the U.S. and her three children in Brazil that consular processed and arrived in NJ less than a month ago. This has been a long journey for her and her family. We're currently assisting Sarai with enrolling her children in school and will continue to be there for her in the future when she and her family are eligible to become legal permanent residents.

T-Visas allow certain victims of human trafficking and immediate family members to remain and work temporarily in the United States, typically if they agree to assist law enforcement in testifying against the perpetrators. In Sarai's case special circumstances will make her eligible to become a legal permanent resident.

**ADJUSTMENT OF STATUS**

Juana, originally from Costa Rica, arrived in 2000 on a tourist visa and was reunited with her mother, Teresa, who is a legal permanent resident. At age 16, Juana became eligible for and obtained DACA. Teresa petitioned for her daughter in 1998 and received an approved petition notice, but didn't know the next steps. Her case was mishandled by another attorney before she came to LALDEF. We assisted Teresa in obtaining a refund from the previous attorney and we helped her continue the legal process. Juana was required to consular process to adjust her status to legal permanent resident. This summer they traveled back to Costa Rica for an interview at the consulate. She has now reentered the US and is awaiting her green card in the mail.

Lawful permanent residents, also known as “green card” holders, are non-citizens who are lawfully authorized to live permanently within the United States. In order to adjust status to permanent residency in this case Juana was required to consular process.
A DEEPER LOOK AT ALEKS: FROM REFUGEE TO ATTORNEY

My name is Aleksandra N. Gontaryuk and, as you may be aware, I am LALDEF’s supervising attorney. What you probably don’t know is that I am a refugee. I came to the United States when I was a child from the former Soviet Union country of Ukraine. My maternal great grandmother, the only surviving member of her family to come out of Auschwitz, came in the 70s during the first Aliyah – the mass emigration of Soviet Jews mainly to Israel, but also to the United States. Later, in the 90s, my maternal grandma, my grandpa, my parents, uncle and I all came to the U.S. in the post-Soviet wave of Aliyah. And, although I was very young when I came, the difference was stark; we went from a collective farm to the concrete jungle of New York. And, the struggle was a daily one – not that my family ever showed it, and therefore, the memories remain as sharp as ever in my mind.

My family, with its history of being persecuted, came here to find an opportunity to live peacefully. Without a dime to their name, without much help or understanding of their new surroundings, and without knowing the language or the culture, they sought to find something better – for me, for the family. They worked like crazy; they put themselves through more schooling, worked obscene hours, and tried so hard every single day, all with grace and gratitude for even having such an opportunity. Despite all of the adversity, they succeeded. I can never forget that.

Knowing these difficulties, it is so important to me now to help those in similar circumstances – people unaware of the culture, the language, the processes, people seeking better; better for themselves, better for their families, people seeking refuge from unspeakable and unimaginable circumstances, people seeking to defy the standard work hours, the bar on what is an already sharp learning curve, and overcome more than most see in their lifetimes. These people all deserve to get some help in what is an already extremely difficult situation. This is one of the reasons why the work that I do holds such importance in my life. This is what makes me fight so hard for our immigrant neighbors. My parents and grandparents worked extremely hard to give me the life and opportunity I now enjoy so much. As an immigration attorney, I want to help others obtain the same opportunity – the beautiful American dream which founded this country.
2018 IN PHOTOS

FUTURO at NBC Studios in NYC
Communiversity
Spring Health Screenings
Spring Loteria
New Citizens
IRS VITA Site Tax Preparation
Voter Education Workshop
Families Belong Together Rally
Annual Stakeholder’s Meeting
First Time Homebuyer Workshop
Fall Loteria
Let’s Drive New Jersey is a policy campaign that is actively working to expand driver’s license access to undocumented New Jersey residents. As members of the New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice we have been actively working on the campaign by gathering petition signatures, meeting with and writing to legislatures, informing the community, and rallying at the State House.

Legal status should not be an insurmountable obstacle to obtaining a New Jersey Driver’s License. This legislation would not only make New Jersey roads and residents safer, but it would also significantly benefit the state’s economy by contributing to insurance payments, gas and automobile purchases, and license fees. Furthermore, and most importantly, this change in policy would radically improve the quality of life for countless families in New Jersey by increasing mobility which could have a direct impact on educational advancement and better employment opportunities.

New Jersey, much like the twelve other states plus Washington DC, which have already passed similar legislation, would offer a license that complies with the federal REAL ID act. The first expanded license bill was passed in Utah in 2005. New Jersey needs to move forward with this common sense bill that would benefit all New Jerseyans. We encourage you to go to www.letsdrivenj.org for more information, news, and ways to support the cause. Together we can make New Jersey a safer and more inclusive state!
IMPACT: ADULT EDUCATION

One of our star English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students, Antonio, sat down with us for a quick interview about him and the ESOL course that he has been taking at LALDEF. In 2009, Antonio immigrated from Guatemala to Trenton where he lives with his family. Since his arrival he has dedicated most of his time to work and studying. He decided that he wanted to focus on learning English so he wouldn't have to depend on others for daily life.

He started out in a different program in Trenton, but he was pleasantly surprised to find LALDEF in his search for a more structured English program. He told us that he loves how prepared the volunteer teachers are for classes, especially for a subject that can be discouraging when you don't understand at first. He also appreciates that the teachers focus on using English during the entire three-hour class, rather than reverting back to Spanish for activities and lessons.

Antonio hopes to continue with ESOL courses at LALDEF. He also expressed a desire to enroll in our new TASC preparation program. TASC is a high school equivalency exam, furthering their education and giving students more work opportunities. Antonio told us that he knows he will die with a book in his hand. He plans on learning as much as he can and he will do so at LALDEF for as long as he can.