

Documenting the Undocumented: Effects of COVID on Immigrants

Stephanie McNulty, Kate Espinosa, Roger Avila-Vidal

This two-part project, funded with CSEwL seed funding and a sabbatical enhancement grant, created a partnership between F&M, CWS, and the Lancaster Neighbor Fund for twelve months, first through a three month research project and then in an applied research capacity. Two F&M student researchers also participated in the research portion and have since graduated. The target audience was the broader Lancaster community in general and immigrants in Lancaster more specifically. The research team included members from CWS and F&M. During the applied research phase, the Legal Services department at CWS participated generously. The project goals consisted of the following:

- Explore the impact of coronavirus on the immigrant population in Lancaster using ethnographic and qualitative research methods, with a focus on analyzing the policy implications of the Pennsylvania government's policy response.
 - Better understand the experience of undocumented immigrants by interviewing this population about their experience.
 - Better understand the broader immigrant experience through ethnographic observation and applied research with CWS's Legal Services department for nine months.
- More deeply understand the legal systems in which immigrants are embedded.
- Deepen the community partnership between F&M and CWS through action and research.
- Engage undergraduate students in meaningful and systematic research to refine research and communication skills.

The team conducted qualitative research during the summer of 2021 and later published the report "Documenting the Undocumented: Immigrant Narratives about the Effects of COVID-19 in Lancaster County." Dr. McNulty then spent nine months working in legal services conducting ethnographic and applied work to further document immigrant experiences. This allowed her to better understand the extremely complex immigration system in the United States, which she often teaches at F&M.

We are grateful for CSEwL support, which allowed us to publish and disseminate the report and made visible a community's experience that is often overlooked. The two undergraduate students, both immigrants themselves, improved their research and analytical skills, and F&M deepened its ties to an important community partner. Professor McNulty also stayed research active and deepened her knowledge about immigration during the coronavirus pandemic, which has been essential to her longer-term career trajectory. More specifically, the main outcomes were:

- A report about the experience of the undocumented population in Lancaster: "Documenting the Undocumented: Immigrant Narratives about the Effects of COVID-19 in Lancaster County."
- Dissemination of the report through a joint CWS-F&M webinar, the Academic Minute series, as well as social media and other outlets.
- Intensive training about immigration law through a six-week course.
- Applied action research by working as a CWS Legal Services long-term volunteer and assisting with family petitions and citizenship petitions. Approximately ten citizenship cases promoted and twenty family petitions sent through consular processes as part of the action research model.
- Improved course on Latin American and Latinx politics at F&M.
- The two F&M undergraduates graduated with honors and currently have fellowships in Teach for America and the American Farm School (in Greece).



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Beyond these outcomes, the impact of the funding is hard to measure. We know that the general community and social service providers have access to the report and can see that the undocumented community was disproportionately and negatively impacted by coronavirus. Several policy implications emerged, such as the need to provide mental health services to this community and the broader need for immigration reform in the United States. Lancaster immigrants themselves benefited from both having their voices heard and disseminated, and, through the applied research model, having their cases move through the complex immigration system faster than may have been possible without this support.

Looking toward the future, CWS and F&M are continuing their partnership with Legal Services beyond the life of the grant. We are also talking about a course that would emerge from this partnership.