

# FALL 2025

# NEWSLETTER



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## The Strength of Community – Standing Together for Justice and Dignity

At Catholic Migration Services (CMS), we are reminded every day that actual change happens through the power of community, when compassion meets courage, and when partnerships turn into action.

In this issue, we celebrate the strength of our clients, staff, volunteers, and partners who work side by side to build a more just and welcoming New York City. From our clients' narratives- such as *Frances'* long fight for fair pay, and *Jose and Carla's* journey toward healing and hope – each story is a testament to resilience, dignity, and the transformative impact of standing up for what's right.

We also welcome the next generation of advocates, like **Shelby** and **Jack**, who remind us that the call to serve is timeless.

Together we continue to build a city, a future rooted in fairness, compassion, and hope.

## Hope in Motion: How CMS Helped Jose Walk Again

When Jose, a 28-year-old asylum seeker from Honduras, walked for the first time in over five years, it was nothing short of a miracle.

In 2020, Jose fled racial violence in Honduras, but his journey to safety turned into a nightmare. While passing through Mexico, he was brutally beaten and fell into a coma. Carla, Jose's mother, was still in Honduras suffering from racial and domestic violence. She rushed to Mexico to be by her son's side. When Jose finally woke up, he found himself paralyzed, relying on a wheelchair, and barely able to speak or comprehend anything. For Carla, witnessing her once vibrant son in such a vulnerable state was heart-wrenching.

Mother and son's challenges intensified when the U.S. border was closed due to the Trump administration's policies. As a result, Jose and his mom were forced to remain in Mexico for years, causing his condition to deteriorate. In 2022, with assistance from the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP), Jose and Carla were granted Title 42 medical exemptions and paroled into the U.S. They reunited with Carla's daughters and grandchildren and moved to a shelter in New York City.

Carla and Jose came to Catholic Migration Services (CMS) in 2023. Carla secured free legal assistance for both of them, and their dedicated CMS attorney worked tirelessly to ensure they could apply for asylum, work permits and social security cards, navigating complex procedures to accommodate Jose's cognitive disabilities. Moved by their story, the attorney partnered with Legal's Aid Homeless Rights Project, which helped relocate the family to a safer shelter with private space for Carla to care for her son. Their CMS attorney also helped them secure additional assistance and CityFHEPS housing vouchers. With their new documents, Carla was able to enroll in a New York State program to receive a full-time salary as Jose's caretaker.

Then, in a stunning medical breakthrough, Jose's doctor performed brain surgery that changed everything. For the first time in five years, Jose stood up—and walked. Today, he can also speak and recall parts of his asylum journey.

For Carla, who had spent years consumed by fear and caregiving, this moment symbolized hope restored. Now, the two enjoy peaceful days together, looking toward a brighter future. Their CMS attorney continues to represent them in their asylum case and in securing special safeguards to ensure Jose feels supported when he testifies in court.

After years of suffering, separation, and uncertainty, Jose and Carla finally see what once seemed impossible—a life filled with stability, safety, and hope.



From Left to Right: Isadora (CMS attorney), Jose and Carla

## The strength in our partnerships – Fighting for Fair Pay

For almost ten years, Frances dedicated herself to the care of her client in Port Washington, NY. From 2015 until February 2024, she worked tirelessly as a home-health aide. Her responsibilities included preparing meals, cleaning the house, doing laundry, grocery shopping, accompanying her client to doctor's appointments, and consistently ensuring her client's well-being day after day.

Her work was demanding, often stretching until late in the evening. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when so many New Yorkers feared for their safety, Frances agreed to live in her client's home to continue caring for her to avoid the risk of exposing her to COVID. Frances worked seven days a week, sacrificing her own rest and time with her family. Her pay never reflected these long, exhausting hours.

Despite her loyalty and care, Frances never received overtime pay, sick days, or recognition. Each week, she accepted what

was offered, trusting that her hard work would speak for itself. When she asked for a small raise due to the years and hours she had been investing in the care of her client, she was abruptly terminated.

When Frances came to Catholic Migration Services (CMS) through a referral from the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA), she was heartbroken but also determined to stand up for herself and fight for what she deserved. For the first time in years, she had someone to listen, believe in her, to guide her through the legal process.

The compassionate worker's rights attorney at CMS spent months documenting her case, reviewing pay records and correspondence. Frances' former employer disputed her account, even suggesting that they do not owe her anything at all. But CMS stood firm, and with patience, professionalism, persistence; her CMS attorney advocated on Francis' behalf, reminding the employer's lawyer that domestic workers have rights protected under the New York State law. Ultimately, CMS helped Frances recover nearly \$25,000 in unpaid wages and compensation; a heard earned victory that brought both relief and validation.

Unfortunately, Frances' story is not unique. Across New York, thousands of domestic workers, mostly women, immigrants, and women of color continue to face long hours or unpaid work, and unfair conditions. With the support of organizations like CMS and NDWA, more workers are finding their voices and demanding the respect and justice they deserve.



## CMS Clinics

### Supporting Stability, Opportunity, and the Path to Citizenship

This fall, CMS continued its commitment to empowering immigrant and low-income New Yorkers through two impactful community clinics.

On October 20th, the CMS naturalization team, with the invaluable support of 12 dedicated volunteers from AIG and Harwood Lloyd, LLP, hosted a successful Naturalization Clinic. CMS staff and volunteers assisted with naturalization applications. They also informed our clients of the recent changes to the naturalization process, including the new U.S civic exams, as well as the possibility of a more invasive assessment of the applicant's good moral character. Thanks to the compassion and teamwork of our staff and volunteers, the clients that we served that day were informed of the policy changes, prepared to



NYC Rent Freeze Program Clinic Volunteers



face them, and one step closer to achieving their dream of becoming U.S. citizens. Just a few weeks later, on November 13th, our housing team, in collaboration with New York Lawyers of Public Interest, Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP and Morgan Stanley, hosted a NYC Rent Freeze Program Clinic to assist elderly, low-income with applying or renewing their Rent Freeze Benefits. With the support of fourteen volunteers, CMS assisted thirteen clients in applying for or renewing their Rent Freeze benefits—helping them maintain safe, stable housing in the communities they call home. Together, these clinics reflect CMS's mission in action: providing vital legal assistance, strengthening community support, and helping New Yorkers build secure futures.

## Community Events

### Empowering Asylum Seekers with Knowledge and Guidance

On November 19th, CMS organized an informative and empowering presentation for Spanish-speaking asylum seekers who have already filed their asylum cases in the immigration court. This presentation walked participants through key topics such as the type of evidence needed to support an asylum case, what to expect during and after an immigration hearing, and the next steps in the legal process. In addition to sharing this vital information, CMS also provided attendees with the opportunity to schedule one-on-one consultations with immigration attorneys.

### Know Your Rights: Negotiation of Employment Agreements

On October 3rd, Catholic Migration Services Worker's Rights program hosted an online presentation in partnership with the National Domestic Workers' Alliance, focused on negotiating employment contracts. This virtual event reached 81 workers and was led by Managing Attorney David Colodny.

The topics covered in this presentation included fundamental employment rights such as minimum wage, overtime, and sick leave; common areas for negotiation; the value of written contracts; and practical tips for effective communication throughout the negotiation process. Participants also had the opportunity to share their experiences in past employment negotiations and challenges they overcame.

This event was one of the five educational workshops CMS hosted in partnership with the National Domestic Worker's Alliance. Furthering our shared mission to empower and protect workers through education and advocacy.

### CMS Helps Mobilize Sunnyside Tenants for Critical Housing Rally

CMS Organizers worked around the clock this November to support tenants in a significant rally demanding safe and dignified housing. On November 15, tenants from across Queens and Brooklyn joined the Bronstein Tenant Union and members of the Right to Counsel Coalition for a powerful demonstration in front of 43-09 40th Street in Sunnyside. Together, they called on Bronstein Properties—one of NYC's most notoriously neglectful landlords—to make long-overdue repairs, stop displacing tenants, and ensure safe, affordable homes.



Tenants at the Demonstration in front of 43-19 40<sup>th</sup> St

Tenants shared testimony about mold, leaks, pest infestations, harassment, and months-long gas outages, including a building-wide rent strike at 43-09 40th Street, where residents have been without gas since April. "The way they've dealt with repairing our gas line since April 28 has been haphazard," said Carol Scudder, a tenant of this building.

Elected officials joined tenants in calling on Governor Hochul to pass statewide tenant protections, including the Clean Hands bill and Statewide Right to Counsel, to ensure that tenants across New York can hold landlords accountable. [Read more here!](#)

## Volunteers Spotlight

### Shelby & Jack — Answering the Call to Serve

This fall, we're thrilled to highlight Shelby and Jack, two Jesuit volunteers who, in just two months at CMS, have already made a meaningful impact on the lives of immigrant and asylum-seeking communities.

Shelby graduated from Clemson University Honors College with a B.A. in Spanish and International Health. Her passion for advocacy began during her junior year of college, when she worked with refugees, an experience that transformed her initial interest in medicine into a calling to serve immigrant communities.

Jack, a recent graduate of Marquette University with two majors in Sociology and Criminology and a minor in Spanish, discovered a similar calling. Initially on a pre-dental track, realized during his first year of college that his true path lay in law and social justice, a decision that led him to dedicate his skills to serving vulnerable communities.

Both Shelby and Jack were connected to CMS through the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, eager to contribute to an organization where service, justice, and teamwork come together. They've been struck by the CMS team's shared passion and commitment, describing the organization as a place where learning, collaboration, and social impact thrive.

In their short time with CMS, both have already experienced the profound rewards of this work. For Shelby, one of the most meaningful moments of her service so far came while helping a potential client, a mother of three, facing an imminent ICE check-in. Unsure of CMS's capacity to assist, Shelby quickly reached out to staff members for guidance. Together, the team mobilized to offer the woman support, including preparing a letter to the judge confirming that the woman would soon be receiving a consultation with CMS and connecting her to a network of court watchers. Thanks to their collective efforts, the woman was able to attend her ICE check-in safely.

Although her case remains uncertain, Shelby reflects the experience as a powerful example of what collaboration and compassion can achieve. "What I took away from the experience is the importance of teamwork and asking for help, I see that as one of my most important roles at CMS... making the people we serve feel heard and connecting them to help even when their situation seems hopeless.... That's also why I'm appreciate the collaborative culture at CMS."

Jack assists with naturalization applications, and for him there is nothing better than celebrating alongside clients as they achieve citizenship. "Seeing someone post a picture outside the immigration office with their certificate of citizenship—it's such a real reminder of why this work matters," he said.



Jack & Shelby in our Brooklyn Office

Shelby was born in California, grew up in Wisconsin, moved to North Carolina for college, and studied abroad in Córdoba, Argentina. She is proficient in Spanish and is currently learning Farsi. Jack, originally from the Chicago suburbs, moved to Milwaukee for college and has been enjoying New York City's vibrant street food, exploring its cultural life, and learning Spanish. Outside of CMS, Shelby enjoys reading, hiking, and ice-skating during the holiday season, while Jack plays piano, guitar, and even a bit of banjo, balancing his love for music with his commitment to service. Both volunteers see law school in their future and hope to continue advocating for immigrant

communities, inspired by the hands-on experience and compassionate guidance they've found at CMS. Their dedication, curiosity, and heart of service embody the spirit of our organization, and we're grateful to have them on our team.

## Shining Star Event Recap

On November 6th, Catholic Migration Services hosted our annual Shining Star reception. Congratulations again to our honorees, and thank you for your service to your parishes and communities. Thank you, as well, to our sponsors. Your contributions support Catholic Migration Services' mission to welcome the stranger in our midst by providing high quality free legal services to New York City residents, without regard to their religion, race, national origin, immigration status, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

### ***Special thanks to our sponsors:***

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From Left to Right: Raluca, Jack, Shelby, Magdalena and Alice

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Harwood Lloyd LLP  
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