

Identifying Barriers... Building Competence... Transforming Lives

Jorge Asher immigrated to the United States over twenty years ago. Mr. Asher worked full-time for several years in an effort to sustain himself and support his daughter, who he had left behind temporarily – well, at least he thought – just until successfully acquiring U.S. citizenship.

One evening after a long work day, Mr. Asher's plan and vision for a better life for both him and his daughter was shattered. Standing at a bus stop on a cold winter evening, Mr. Asher was assaulted, robbed and shot several times. "I walked three blocks with blood everywhere before anyone even noticed I needed an ambulance," he said. This traumatic incident left Mr. Asher in a coma for two months, with permanent muscle and tissue damage disabling him from previous physical functioning.

Within only two months, this once-independent, self-sufficient and motivated young man was stripped of his manhood and autonomy.

During physical recovery from the many surgical procedures, Mr. Asher suffered from recurring flashbacks of his assault. Consequently, Mr. Asher was referred to a psychiatrist who diagnosed him with post-traumatic stress disorder. His condition was treated with a narcotic pain reliever, which was highly addictive. Mr. Asher initially only suffered physical impairment as a result of his assault, but later also suffered mental impairment which led to his social and emotional estrangement. In addition to using prescribed medication to cope with his trauma, Mr. Asher began to abuse alcohol and experiment with street drugs.

Needless to say, Mr. Asher's plan to pursue U.S. citizenship in hopes of offering his daughter a better life was significantly delayed as a result of his trauma.

Mr. Asher's first encounter with My Brother's Keeper was in 2002 when he established a helping relationship with the Social Worker on staff at that time. With the help of MBK staff, Mr. Asher went through detoxification and rehabilitation for his substance abuse and eventually acquired a full-time employment position which he held for an extended period of time.

During this time Mr. Asher learned the process to apply for a nonimmigrant visa for his daughter and submitted a request for his 25 year-old daughter to visit the U.S. Not having seen his daughter since she was 2 years old, Mr. Asher eagerly awaited a response. Yet, his request was denied.

Therefore, despite Mr. Asher's physical and mental limitations, he resorted to applying for naturalization and U.S. citizenship. With the assistance of the MBK Social Worker, he successfully completed and submitted his application for naturalization. However, when he appeared for his initial interview, he failed his exam.

Mr. Asher's personal disappointment and ridicule from his family, who emphasized his responsibility to his daughter, resulted in his relapse. After regaining stability and maintaining sobriety, Mr. Asher returned to MBK eager to pursue naturalization again. After assisting Mr. Asher in identifying barriers to successfully passing the exam, the Social Worker explored resources to assist Mr. Asher throughout the naturalization process. Mr. Asher hired legal consultation and representation to accompany him to his initial interview. At the initial interview, it was determined that Mr. Asher's previous trauma interferes with his ability to successfully pass the exam regardless of how familiar he is with the content. Mr. Asher has frequent flashbacks of his assault when under pressure that impair his memory. Thus, instead of

being denied naturalization, Mr. Asher was advised to have a clinician complete a medical waiver form and compose a thorough evaluation of Mr. Asher's impairments and deficits resulting from his trauma. Once successfully completed, Mr. Asher was scheduled for an interview and he was considered for citizenship regardless of his performance on the exam.

Since the barriers were identified, Mr. Asher began striving toward building his competence. He obtained a set of civic flash cards, an audio CD containing material covered on the exam for his review and registered for a citizenship preparation course, which he attended weekly for approximately four months.

Mr. Asher is now officially a U.S. citizen and is in the process of petitioning for his daughter, who is suffering from the conditions of poverty in her country, to come to the U.S. It was through Mr. Asher's tenacity through long suffering and perseverance with the resources made available to him through the MBK Social Work staff that he has been successful in accomplishing his goals!