

ASYLUM NEWS

Asylum Division Monthly Newsletter

May 2021

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Asylum News is a professional newsletter of the Asylum Division of the RAIO Directorate of USCIS. It is intended solely as an educational resource to disseminate internal information on activities and programs of the Asylum Division.

Asylum Division Headquarters Branch Updates

Management

- **End of USCIS Hiring Freeze:** USCIS lifted the hiring freeze effective April 1, 2021 with the improvement of the agency's financial position. The Asylum Division has been given approval to hire to 100% of our authorized level, with a focus on prioritizing filling mission-critical vacancies. Of note, on April 21, 2021, four field offices opened announcements to hire for SAO positions. We are working to expeditiously fill these and other positions for which we received hiring freeze exceptions - including 8 Headquarters positions and 16 operations staff at 5 field Asylum offices, among other positions. We are currently hiring for [Asylum HQ AOs](#) (the deadline is 5/27) and be on the lookout for an MPA announcement, which will be coming out soon. HQ has appreciated the opportunity to work with two rounds of Asylum Officer detailees and we are excited to announce that HQ has posted another detail opportunity for current Asylum employees to detail to HQ- we encourage eligible applicants to apply [here](#)! Details will be done remotely from your office and at your current grade level. We also continue to engage with field staff on a monthly basis on recruiting and staffing matters, to broadly disseminate up-to-date information and provide a forum for targeted trainings on recruiting and staffing issues.
- **Stay Interviews Expand to Operational Positions:** Asylum HQ announced the expansion of the Stay Interview Pilot Program in May of 2021. Operations Staff can request one-on-one Stay Interviews with their direct supervisor. The Stay Interview program is completely voluntary and the information provided is confidential. The interviews will be conducted between May 17 – June 4. We encourage all eligible operations staff to participate in the Stay Interview program. Asylum HQ looks forward to analyzing the results of this program and will publish the results. For results of the Asylum Officer Stay Interview Program thus far, please see the Stay Interview ECN page, [here](#).

Operations

- **Memorandum Update:** *Updated Service Center Operations Guidance for Accepting Forms I-589 Filed by Applicants Who May Be Unaccompanied Alien Children* memorandum was issued and sent to all asylum staff via email from the Asylum Chief on May 7, 2021. The memo clarifies that Forms I-589 filed by potential UAC applicants who were enrolled in the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) should be processed in the same way as Forms I-589 filed by potential UACs who are in removal proceedings not being held pursuant to MPP. Such applicants who were enrolled in MPP and who have final removal orders entered in absentia or on the merits should also be processed in the same way as potential UACs who were not enrolled in MPP.
- **Memorandum Update:** *Updated Procedures for Rejecting Incomplete or Improper Form I-589, Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal, Filings* memorandum was issued and sent to Service Centers and the Asylum Vetting Center on May 19, 2021 and is effective as of May 24, 2021. The procedures and notice replace the previous version issued in November 2020.

Training

- **RAIO Foundations:** The first RAIO Foundations Face-to-Face training program was completed on May 19, 2021. Due to current operational posture, this training was conducted virtually. We would like to thank everyone who was involved as an evaluator, instructor, co-coordinator, role player, or in another supporting role who helped make this program a success! Asylum Officers will now continue to take a redesigned APSO Module and standardized Field Interview Trainings. Congratulations to the new officers!
- **APSO Module and FITs:** Following graduation from Foundations, Asylum Officers will participate in the redesigned APSO Module, a collaboration between Asylum Field Offices, Asylum HQ, and RAIO Training. The **APSO Module** will consist of nine days (June 7-18) of instruction and practical exercises and will culminate in a graded summative assessment. Following the APSO module, officers will participate in standardized **Field Interviewing Trainings (FITs)** for APSO and the I-589, depending on work assignments. HQ will provide I-589 and APSO frameworks, which will include minimum requirements, a schedule, and materials. The standardized FIT programs are designed to standardize a robust ramp-up period and to promote uniformity in training across the offices. Working groups have convened to create the local materials for the I-589 FIT, with POCs from the officer corps and FDNS.
- **Family Processing Syllabus:** Training has developed a syllabus, targeted to the adjudicator's level, to prepare them for family processing at the Family Residential Centers (FRCs). This effort will help leverage resources, increase collaboration, and promote consistency across the field and HQ.

Quality Assurance

- **Credible Fear Boilerplate Initiative:** HQ QA and FDNS are finalizing a training on identifying and addressing boilerplate in credible fear claims. The training will be followed by a nationwide pilot and QA periodic review.
- **SAO Review Working Group:** Following the return to 100% SAO review in the affirmative context on March 31, 2021, Asylum HQ convened a working group with the field to determine whether to make further modifications to the SAO review policy. The working group's kick off meeting was held on May 20.
- **APSO Module:** QA and OPs are finalizing training materials for the upcoming APSO Module scheduled for June 7-18.
- **Recent additions to the case law ECN site:**
 - Alvarado-Herrera v. Garland, 993 F.3d 1187 (9th Cir. 2021)
 - Rodriguez Tornes v. Garland, 993 F.3d 743 (9th Cir. 2021)
 - Orellana-Recinos v. Garland, 993 F.3d 851 (10 Cir. 2021)
 - Cabrera-Martinez v. U.S. Atty General, 992 F.3d 1283 (11th Cir. 2021)
 - Sanchez-Vasquez v. Garland, 994 F.3d 40 (1st Cir. 2021)
 - Ahmed v. Garland, 993 F.3d 1029 (8th Cir. 2021)

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- **A huge shout-out and Thank You** to all the ASY FDNS IOs and SIOs in the field who have worked hard to meet our targets. We are on track and look forward to meeting our remaining targets through the rest of the fiscal year.

IDEA News & Tips

IDEA Updates

- The **Remote Telework to Office (RTO)** pilot program is in full swing with over 100 affirmative asylum interviews completed remotely by officers from ZNY, ZNK, ZOL, and ZSF. Thank you to all of the participants involved for your continued hard work and for making this pilot possible.
- The **Global Interview Notes App** has made several improvements to its print view to ensure interview notes are more readable when printed for the A-file. For more release notes or to provide user feedback, check out the [Global Interview Users Teams Channel](#).
- The **Assessment Generator** now features a collapsible side navigation bar to provide additional screen space while completing an assessment. A new lock feature has also been introduced, allowing officers to lock assessments they are working on to prevent accidental edits by others. Any officer can lock and unlock an assessment, so be careful not to unlock an assessment unless you are the adjudicating AO or the reviewing SAO.

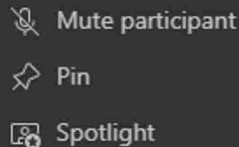
IDEA Tips

Transitioning to MS Teams: Skype will be retired on July 31, 2021, after which it will no longer be accessible or supported. In last month's [newsletter](#), we shared some starter tips to help staff begin this transition. For this edition of IDEA Tips, we're sharing some additional features to help staff make the most out of their MS Teams meetings:



Spotlight a Video

When multiple participants are on a call, you may want to spotlight a video feed to view a full-sized image of that individual (e.g., the applicant). If you want one speaker to be shown as the primary feed for all attendees, hover over their video and click "Spotlight." If you only want to change your own view and not anyone else's, click "pin" instead. Additional views are also available in the settings menu. Click on the ellipses in the top right of the meeting window to choose "together mode" or "large gallery mode" when you want multiple participants to be visible at once.



Configure Audio Device Settings

If audio quality is negatively impacting your meetings, make sure you're familiar with the various audio configurations available in Teams. In your meeting window, open device settings to change the speaker output and microphone input that you want to use and optimize audio quality based on your available hardware. Connecting a headset when using Teams audio or calling in with a desk phone may improve performance and is often preferable to using the hardware embedded in your laptop.



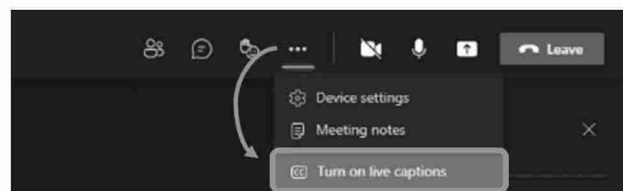
Share Content

To share content with other meeting attendees, click on the share icon. You'll then be able to select the content you wish others to see and choose whether or not you want to include computer audio (e.g., from a video). You can choose to share your entire desktop, a specific window, or a PowerPoint presentation. **Tip:** If you want to facilitate paper form review, share a scanned pdf of the I-589 form, or prepare a blank word document to verify information such as phone numbers and spelling.



Turn on Live Captions

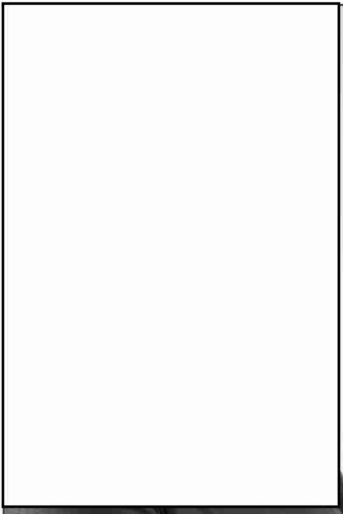
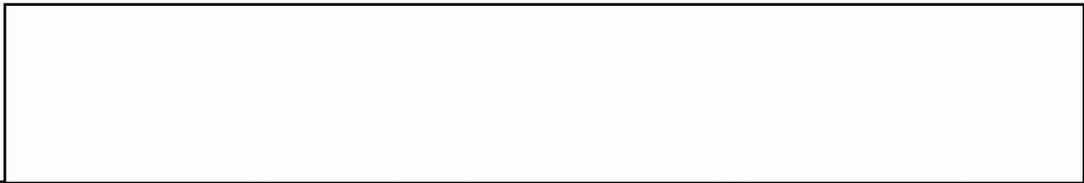
MS Teams includes speech recognition technology which may be used to generate real-time captions during Teams meetings. This feature is currently available in English only and is not always accurate; however, it may help attendees follow along with the presentation or conversation and catch missed words or phrases. To turn on live captions from your Teams meeting, click on the ellipses icon and select "turn on live captions."



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Spotlight on the Field: [redacted] **Asylum Office** [redacted]

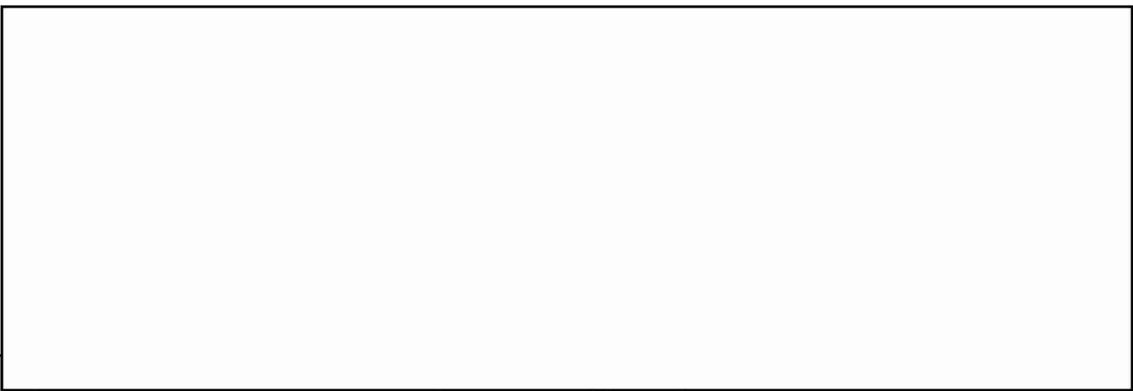
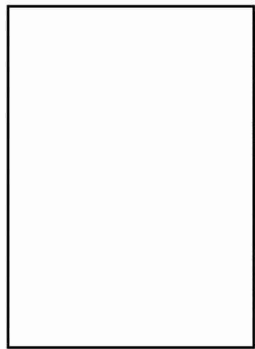
Meet our Local Leader: Jane Mitsch, Supervisory Asylum Officer, [redacted]



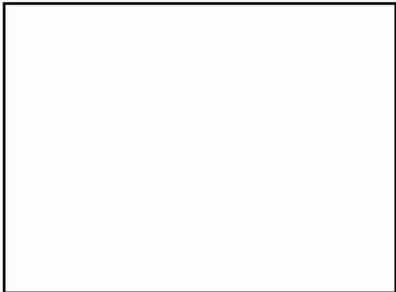
[redacted] As soon as I saw the job announcement for Asylum Officer, I knew it was the job for me and, somehow, I knew New Orleans was the place to be. At the time, I did not realize I would get to be part of the opening of a new asylum office, but I have grown up in my career in this office full of remarkable and dedicated people in a city that has won my heart. I have had some amazing supervisors along the way who have inspired me to become an SAO. I enjoy the opportunities being an SAO in a small office affords, like being able to take on a variety of collateral duties in addition to my main duties of case review and managing a team of AOs, including Terminations and Collective Commitments, to name my favorites. Being in a small office also has allowed me to get to know my coworkers well and I have been continuously impressed with the way people in this office take care of each other through all of the life milestones and curveballs these past five and a half years have thrown. Also, it does not hurt to live in

[redacted] I look forward to continuing to grow in my career here at [redacted]

Career Development Opportunity: Learn from Janet McKnight, Asylum Officer [redacted]



[redacted] If OPLA decided to proceed with the case, I would write a declaration and ultimately appear in court to testify about the fraud indicators I discovered. Unfortunately, I was unable to testify in court because of court calendar issues related to the pandemic. Nevertheless, I was able to practice testifying with an ACC in anticipation of a hearing, which gave me practice in defending my findings. I have always been interested in opportunities that broaden my understanding of how the immigration system works. This experience helped me not only expand my knowledge of the U.S. immigration system but to also understand the crucial role that asylum interviews play in the process. This detail made me more proficient as an asylum officer by developing my fraud detection skills, written analysis, and communication skills. I am grateful to have been given this opportunity.



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Career Corner**Up the Ladder: Asylum Deputy Chief Ashley Caudill-Mirillo*****What is your most memorable moment with the Asylum Division?***

I have been with the Asylum Division for approximately thirteen years. I first joined as an asylum officer in 2008 right out of school and have never really worked anywhere else. In many ways, the Division feels like home to me. During my years with Asylum, I have made countless friends, I have been mentored by people I have a great deal of respect for, and I have mentored others seeking to make their own mark. While overwhelmingly my memories of working with Asylum are positive, there have been bittersweet and difficult moments along the way. In those moments, I have often reflected on my experience to motivate me to recommit myself to this work. While it would be difficult to pinpoint a singular moment as my favorite because so many come to

mind, one moment that I keep coming back to is that of my first asylum grant. After completing training, I was incredibly eager to begin interviewing and making decisions on cases. Since I was on a ramp up calendar, it was actually a couple weeks before I found someone eligible for a grant of asylum. The applicant was a young woman who, at the time of interview, was probably about 8 months pregnant. After reviewing her application, evaluating her testimony, and weighing the evidence, I decided to grant. On the day of her decision pick up, I arranged with one of the Immigration Analysts (now called LSAs) to let me stand around the corner, out of sight when she received her decision. I remember hearing her exclaim something that was inaudible to me, but it was clear she was very happy. When I started to walk away, I heard the Immigration Analyst say my first name. I stopped by later and asked why the applicant had asked for my first name. The Immigration Analyst told me that the applicant said she wanted to name her baby after me. Although I interviewed many people during my time as an officer and supervisor, I still remember her face very clearly. Sometimes I still wonder about her and her child. While I am confident she eventually decided not to name her child Ashley, I do sometimes get a chuckle thinking there may be a child with a very retro 1980s name walking around in the world today. That moment had a profound impact on me because it gave me some insight into the role we play in our applicants' lives. Our decision-making has the potential to profoundly change or alter lives. This memory reminds me to approach this work with humility, to never forget that there is life behind each file we touch, and that this work matters.

Why do you do the work you do?

While I was in law school, I participated in an asylum law clinic. I, along with a team of other students – including one who also works in the Asylum Division today, shared responsibility over a case that ultimately was interviewed and approved by an asylum officer at the New York Asylum Office. Notably, the asylum officer who granted that case also still works there today. That alone is the perfect example of why I love this work and this organization. Our humanitarian and protection-oriented mission is our biggest asset and people who are attracted to this mission are truly committed to it. That does not mean this work is easy or without challenge. In fact, if I am being honest, our work can be incredibly stressful and difficult at times. This is important to acknowledge because we all experience it – myself included. Like all of you, my day is packed with very little “down time.” Also, like many of you, the mission sometimes requires that I work long hours, weekends, and holidays. Although our work is dynamic and can demand a great deal of us, my reasons for doing this work are pretty simple. First, I believe in our mission and I can't think of any other mission I would rather dedicate myself to. Second, because I have worked with the Division for so long, I have developed many close personal and professional ties across headquarters and the field. I have a vested interest in the success of this organization and the people in it. Third, the everchanging landscape of our work means that we are often called upon to develop new skills and approaches. During my time in Asylum, I have worn many hats and developed skills well beyond my imagination when I first joined USCIS.

What advice do you have for new employees?

I have so many lessons learned. I don't even know where to start! If I had to sum it up: 1) Find a mentor – It can be scary but find a supervisor or manager you can learn from. They can really broaden your perspective and can become a great ally as you progress in your career. I keep regular contact with those who have mentored me throughout my years with Asylum. Whether I am asking for their advice or for their feedback on an issue, I can count on them to give me their unvarnished opinion. We may not always agree but I value their insights because they come from a place of considerable knowledge, experience, and trust; 2) Find a trusted peer – Our work can be difficult and stressful at times. Having someone to discuss complex or specific issues with or just to discuss how you are doing in general, can be good for your mind and your soul. There are several people across headquarters and the field who I rely on to fill this role for me and who, in turn, rely on me to fill this role for them. I have found that sometimes the best ideas and solutions that people identify are sparked from colleague to colleague driven conversations; 3) Asylum is a small world, so be thoughtful to others. Whether it is training, details, travel, workshops, or meetings, I have crossed paths multiple times with people throughout my career. Sometimes I have gone from peer to supervisor, other times I have been someone's supervisor and then a peer, and there have been times I have been someone's

Up the Ladder, continued

someone's subordinate and later their supervisor. If you stick around long enough, you will likely find yourself in one of these shifting dynamics. While there is no expectation that you be lifelong friends with everyone you work with, people will remember how you treat and speak to others; 4) Start every conversation with the expectation that you don't have all of the information and it may be an opportunity for you to learn something you did not know before. Each person is an expert in their work experience and we all have something to contribute. In work conversations, I try to listen, ask questions, and be open to learning something new. Regardless of title or experience, I have found this to be a valuable approach; 5) Take time to understand how your work fits into the whole. I credit my experience in Management Branch with helping me better realize the interconnectedness of our work and our organizational issues. Every position title and work unit contribute to our mission. Take time to get to know your colleagues in other work units. Their work is valuable and, if not given sufficient resources, respect, and attention, it will have a downstream impact on the entire office and organization; 6) Take your leave and make sure you exercise self-care– I don't think this requires explanation but I am known to be guilty of not doing this enough myself so I am putting this out into the ether in the hopes that I will be inspired to lead by example on this front.

What is your favorite thing to do outside of work?

I wish I had some amazing hobby or exciting life to cite to here.

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Helping Hands: A Spotlight on Volunteerism

Akmal Yacoub, Asylum Officer, [REDACTED] (b)(6)

I have always had a great love and deep respect for senior citizens. From their stories I have gained knowledge without effort. I have heard their wisdom and learned from their lessons without suffering the experiences that lead them to their understanding of life and what matters. They have so much to offer. I began volunteering in nursing homes when I was in college. Thankfully, the only qualification for the position was a heartbeat and a willingness to show up. I'm certain that if the seniors are able to hear me at all, few understand my accent and I'm also sure that cataracts deceive some of the ladies into thinking I'm more handsome than I am, but it doesn't matter. It also doesn't matter that I have no musical or artistic talent, no jokes to share and we never have people in common. What matters to them is that someone values them enough to listen to their stories, sit with them quietly during Wheel of Fortune or read them a book. They are happy to be remembered and to be acknowledged. I feel it's an honor to meet the ladies and gentlemen who fought in wars for our freedom, brought the world disco, and raised children who are today's librarians, janitors and rocket scientists.

As a newcomer to the [REDACTED] area, I was looking for ways to engage with the elder community, but COVID made that difficult. I heard about the Santa for Seniors program in winter 2020 and knew that it would be fun and rewarding for me and my peers. Within moments of me asking my colleagues at the [REDACTED] Office if they were interested in sending a gift to a senior, more than two dozen people from our office contacted me. The response was ultimately so great that I had to request more Seniors! The generosity and compassion that was expressed by our office is awe inspiring. The pandemic was especially unkind to our senior citizens. The most valuable people in our society had become our most vulnerable, but we rose to the occasion and found a way to remind them that they are not forgotten, they matter and we care.

If volunteering isn't your thing, remember you can have a great impact in this world just by being kind to a stranger, saying hello or holding open a door. If volunteering is your thing, there are always opportunities to spend time with our seniors! They have so much to offer. In the immortal words of Betty White "The older you get, the better you get, unless you're a banana."

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Asylum Division Headquarters Branch Updates

Management

- **Ephemeris National Roll-out:** Ephemeris will be expanded nationwide to all Asylum field offices by the end of FY 2021, after being piloted exclusively at ZSF. Ephemeris is a new technological tool created by RAIO IDEA to assist SAOs and AOs in PPA management by automating many of the tasks that currently require manual entry. For example, it assists in making the Biweekly Reports easier for AOs to generate and allows SAOs to conduct evaluations within Ephemeris, removing the need for separate Excel documents for the evaluation forms. Management Branch is partnering with RAIO IDEA to deliver a series of training sessions at asylum offices and work directly with teams of SAOs and their AOs to serve as local POCs for the rollout. The goal is to have all offices using Ephemeris by Pay Period 21 (starting October 10).
- **Stay Interviews Expand to Operational Positions:** Asylum HQ expanded the Stay Interview Pilot Program to operations staff in May of 2021. 72 Operations Staff participated in one-on-one Stay Interviews on May 17 – June 4 with their direct supervisor. Asylum HQ is currently analyzing the results of this program and will publish the results. For results of the Asylum Officer Stay Interview Program thus far, please see the Stay Interview ECN page, [here](#).

Operations

- **E-filing Court Packets Pilot Program:** On Monday, June 14th, the Asylum Division, in conjunction with the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), expanded the use of the DHS Portal to include e-Filing of APSO and Affirmative EOIR court packets through the EOIR Courts & Appeals System (ECAS) as part of an "ECAS Pilot Program." This process will eventually replace the current procedure of sending paper court packets to EOIR to file a case, including all case types. Each Asylum Office is participating in the pilot program and will be testing out the ECAS features for both Affirmative Asylum and APSO cases. In order to participate, asylum offices will access ECAS through the DHS portal and will be uploading all charging documents and supporting evidence and documentation. This pilot program is in response to the proposed rule, "[Executive Office for Immigration Review Electronic Case Access and Filing](#)." In advance of the implementation of the final rule, Asylum is actively working with EOIR to begin e-Filing cases at EOIR courts that currently accept court packets through ECAS. For more information about the pilot program, please reach out to your local DHS Portal/ECAS POCs or Asylum HQ ECAS POCs Arthur Hale and Matt Roscher.

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Training

- **APSO Module:** Congratulations to Asylum Officers who completed the redesigned 10-day APSO Module on June 18th. This module features combined HQ and field-driven content and consists of instruction, practical exercises, and a mock interview with graded summative assessment.
- **Field Interviewing Trainings (FITs):** Following the APSO module, beginning June 21 the recent graduate Asylum Officers will embark on either the I-589 FIT or the APSO FIT, depending on their work assignments. This element of the training redesign marks the first standardized ramp-up programs across asylum offices. The I-589 and APSO FIT frameworks delineate minimum requirements, scheduling guides, and materials. Thanks to each office for participating in the creation of materials on local office topics for the FIT program!
- **National Training Curriculum (NTC):** The NTC consists of three main components: 1) an NTC Reference Library, where the field can readily access cleared trainings; 2) a National Training Plan, which will act as a guide to delineate key topics that will be trained on a regular basis, including HQ- and field-generated content; and 3) a series of working groups that will pair offices in order to create content on key topics that can be cleared, delivered, and then distributed for national use across the field. The NTC will help leverage resources across asylum offices and promote consistency and quality. The framework and procedures are being developed.
- **National Training Needs Assessment:** Asylum HQ is in the process of analyzing results of the National Training Needs Assessment that was administered across asylum offices and HQ through FY2021 Quarter 2. More than 900 survey responses were received – Thank You! More information about the results will follow in the coming months.

Quality Assurance

- **Updated CF Checklist:** On June 7, 2021, QA issued an updated CF Checklist. For guidance, please refer to the recorded webinar distributed as well as the CF Checklists samples on the [ECN](#).
- **APSO Module:** QA SMEs instructed sessions and facilitated practical exercises throughout the APSO Module training program that ran from June 7 to June 18. QA was also involved in implementing the CF mock interview, leading a calibration session for field reviewers, and assisting in review of submissions.
- **ASY HQ Materials for Field Teams Page:** QA and Training created a new Teams page that will initially be used to distribute HQ training content to the field. Materials for CF Refresher training were posted to the page on May 21.
- **Recent additions to the Case Law ECN site:**
 - Galeas Figueroa v. US Atty General, 2021 WL 19911889 (3rd Cir. 2021)
 - Quintero v. Garland, 2021 WL 2133916 (4th Cir. 2021)
 - Dawson v. Garland, 2021 WL 2125800 (9th Cir. 2021)
 - Islam v. Secretary, Dept of Homeland Security, 2021 WL 2020284 (11th Cir. 2021)
 - Matter of D-G-C-, 28 I&N Dec. 297 (BIA 2021)

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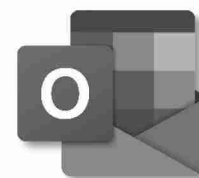
IDEA News & Tips

IDEA Updates

- Offices continue to provide positive feedback on the use of **Teams for APSO** interviews. Interviewing officers laud the program for its crystal-clear audio quality and ease in connecting multiple parties to an interview. Schedulers appreciate how Teams can integrate existing APSO scheduling practices. Thank you to all the offices who have made the switch. Reach out to Asylum IDEA if you are curious to learn more about Teams for APSO!
- The Q3 **Asylum Division Job Satisfaction Survey (ADJSS)** ended on 6/22/2021 – thank you to all who took the time to respond! We are currently analyzing the results of the survey. Q2 results are available for viewing on the [ADJSS ECN](#) page. The survey results, published quarterly, analyze retention issues that contribute to departures. Please take a look at the Q2 results. Your voice matters!
- **FDNS CARRP referrals** in Global are almost fully live. New guidance and training is coming that will apply to all CARRP referrals (not solely interview-based). This includes re-interviews in affirmative cases related to CARRP.

IDEA Tips

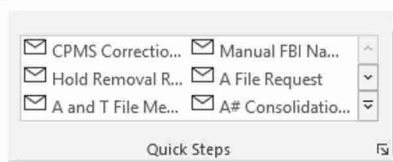
Efficiency in Microsoft Outlook: In our last [issue](#), we highlighted some features to help staff become better acquainted with MS Teams. For this edition of IDEA Tips, we're sharing some ways to optimize how you use **Microsoft Outlook**. Let's get those inboxes organized!



Quick Steps – For Routine Emails

Buy back some minutes in your day with Quick Steps! Using Quick Steps, you can pre-save template emails to different groups in your office. Access Quick Steps through **Home**. Click on the bottom right-hand arrow to show **Manage Quick Steps**. Click on **New** and **Custom**

to create your Quick Step email. Use the **Name** field to title your Quick Step. Create a new message

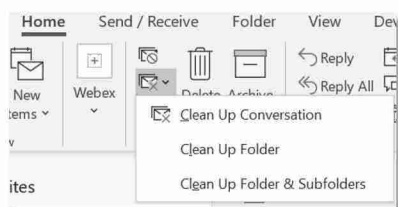


by selecting **New Message** within **Actions**. Click **Show Options** to personalize the message and recipients. Click **Finish**, and your Quick Step will appear in the original list in the Home tab.

Clean Up – Free Yourself of Redundant Emails

Does your Outlook inbox show multiple individual replies to the same message thread? Do you wish everything could be consolidated to reflect the one existing thread?

Clean Up helps to streamline your message threads and organize your inbox.



This tool will not delete any messages not replicated elsewhere in a thread. To try it, click on the middle envelope logo within the **Delete** panel in the **Home** tab. You can clean up a specific message thread, a folder, or a folder and subfolders.

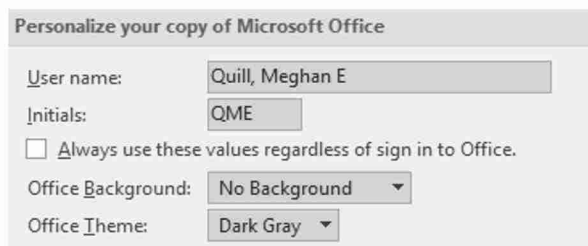
Search for Emails

Empower your email searches with **Operators!** NOT, AND, OR, =, and other operators help optimize searches. Searching for **Asylum AND Trafficking** will return items containing both terms, no matter the order. The **about:**, **from:**, **received:**, **sent:**, and **to:** operators help fine-tune message searching. For example, searching **from:"meghan quill" about:"asylum"** will return items sent from *meghan quill* where *asylum* appears in the body, attachment contents, or subject line. To find emails received in a specific timeframe, see the image below for example search criteria!

received>=10/1/19 AND received<=10/5/19

Change your Outlook background

Do you want to make your Outlook display more visually appealing? Change your color scheme by clicking on **File>Options>General** and exploring Office Background and Office Theme within Personalize your copy of Microsoft Office. You can experiment with different color schemes and backgrounds. Customize away!



(b)(6) Spotlight on the Field: **Asylum Office** 

Meet our Local Leader: Antonio Donis, Director, ZAR

Can you tell us how you arrived at USCIS?

My USCIS journey began like many others, with Jeddy hiring me. At the time she worked for Asylum Division headquarters and I worked for the United States Coast Guard. I had recently graduated from George Mason University's School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution and after a brief stint at Oxford where I studied forced migration, I decided to change careers. I applied to the Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) program and saw a job announcement for a vacant Asylum Officer position at USCIS.

What were some pivotal career moments that led you to your current position?

As a PMF, I had the opportunity to serve in a variety of different roles throughout RAIIO. I adjudicated asylum cases in San Francisco, credible and reasonable fear cases in Houston, humanitarian parole cases in Arlington, and refugee cases in Nepal. As I approached the end of my tenure as a PMF, then director of ZAR, Ron Rosenberg, asked me to serve as his acting Supervisory Program Manager (SPM). Over 10 years later, I remain grateful to the CIS Assistants, Immigration Analysts, and MPAs who took me under their wing and showed me how important their contributions are to the mission. They taught me how an asylum office actually works and what success really looks like.

Fast forward to the spring of 2014. I was serving as the Deputy Director of ZAR when a surge of Central American women and children crossed the Rio Grande Valley into the U.S. The surge became a national crisis in the summer of 2014, and I was asked to stand up asylum pre-screening operations at a makeshift detention facility on the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Artesia, NM. As the USCIS team lead, I worked with an all-volunteer force of asylum officers and supervisors from across the country to ensure that all residents who manifested a fear of returning to their home country received a protection screening. When I returned from this detail, I shared the insights that I had gained with USCIS leadership and helped the Houston Asylum Office stand up other family residence centers.

The following year, I was offered the career opportunity of a lifetime: to build a brand new USCIS office from the ground up. I can still remember visiting the empty office space that would eventually become the New Orleans Sub-Office. It was dark and dusty and there were absolutely no signs of life. In less than a year, it was buzzing with new employees, fresh ideas, and a simple but profound mission: to find and protect refugees. In 2016, I left Asylum to stand up a new division at the Administrative Appeals Office. This was the first time in my USCIS career that I wasn't directly involved in our humanitarian protection mission. And while I enjoyed learning about the 50+ other benefit types that USCIS is responsible for, I could not shake the feeling that leaving Asylum was a huge mistake. Then one day, out of nowhere, I heard that Jeddy was retiring. And I made it my goal to return to ZAR, this time as Director.

Was enlisting in the Coast Guard at 17 years old a good decision for you?

The short answer is yes. I was in a tough spot and needed a way out. The Coast Guard gave me that and so much more. Within 10 years, I went from working as a mess cook to working at the White House. More importantly, I went from being a high school dropout and runaway to someone who lived by a set of core values and found purpose in what he did and meaning in what his agency stood for. Although I no longer wear a uniform, I remain service-minded. This is what drew me, and countless other veterans, to USCIS. And I imagine the same is true for you.

How would you define your leadership style?

I have had the good fortune of working for, and learning from, some of the best leaders in the Coast Guard and USCIS. My very first skipper, the commandant of cadets at the Academy, Ted Kim, Ron Rosenberg, and Robert Daum to name a few. Something distinct about my leadership style is my belief that I am here to serve others and not the other way around. This philosophy drives my thinking and my actions. And in my 22+ years of service, it has never failed me.

Are their traits in other leaders that you want to develop yourself?

When it comes to leadership, you are either getting better or getting worse, which is why I spend so much time studying leaders around me. I recently found myself saying, "I want to be more like the Elba Lumbi's and Karmen Golla's of the world." I see the way they treat others and try to emulate their greatness.

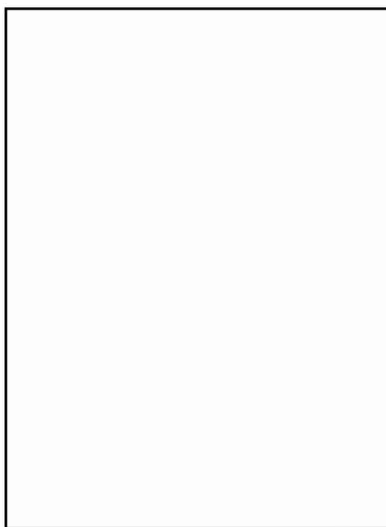
What advice can you share with aspiring leaders?

Aspiring leaders sometimes set unrealistic expectations for themselves and others. This may result in success, particularly in the short-term, but there is a cost to doing business this way. It can create a culture where people fear failure, which will keep them from being their best. When working with aspiring leaders, I ask them to think about how they "show up" at work, especially during the tough times. I also challenge them to approach difficult decisions or conversations with warmth, inquisitiveness, and vulnerability. Finally, I encourage them to show themselves and others some grace.

Any final words of encouragement for Asylum Division employees?

Cut yourself some slack. We have been in survival mode for the past 18 months and many of us are still waiting to exhale. It's important to acknowledge that you've made it to today, and to the people who love you and depend on you, that's all that matters.

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Career Development Opportunity: Learn from Karmen Golla, Acting Training Officer, 

When the solicitation for an Acting Training Officer at popped into my inbox, thoughts of excitement and hesitation came to mind; yet I submitted my statement of interest just before the deadline. I joined the and was eager to begin asylum officer training at FLETC on . I was even more thrilled when my colleagues selected me to serve as the co-President of their class. Twelve days later, however, training was suspended, and I became a member of "that class:" the Evacuated Class. My colleagues and I returned to our homes filled with the feelings of uncertainty that were rising all around us due to the global pandemic. Although I completed training by July 2020 and began credible fear, reasonable fear, and MPP interviews, I wondered if my training and experience thus far was enough to serve as an Acting TO. I ultimately applied because my career goal is to become a permanent Training Officer and there was no better way to express this interest to others, even if I did not get the position. Also, by the time the solicitation was posted, I was yearning for a way to connect with my colleagues and learn from those who had more experience. I have never been happier, that I embraced my vulnerabilities, than when I was offered the Acting TO detail! I appreciated that I already possessed the skill set and temperament to assist, mentor, and instruct officers on how to conduct asylum interviews and apply techniques to increase efficiencies. In my role as Acting TO, I learned where to find the answers to officers' questions, and I enjoyed sharing these resources with my colleagues. I settled into the position after acknowledging that I had done this before. Prior to joining the government, I worked as a tutor for a test prep company and was also an adjunct professor of paralegal studies at . At I became a member of the working group. Through workshops and programming, the working group creates opportunities for employees to learn more and develop professionally. Through these collective experiences I learned how to deliver trainings, build curriculum, and assess training needs to develop appropriate educational content to meet learning goals. I connected this knowledge with the information that I gathered during management meetings, TO check-ins, and other planning meetings. As Acting TO, I developed a greater understanding that my role was to support asylum officers, to ensure they can justly and efficiently carry out RAIO's mission. My 120-day detail recently ended. I am happy to return to interviewing applicants and to continue to grow as an Asylum Officer. This detail gave me the confidence to never hesitate again. I continue to mentor newer officers, invite questions, and calls for assistance. These moments of pause help me feel like I managed and accomplished another step toward my ultimate goal of becoming a permanent Training Officer.

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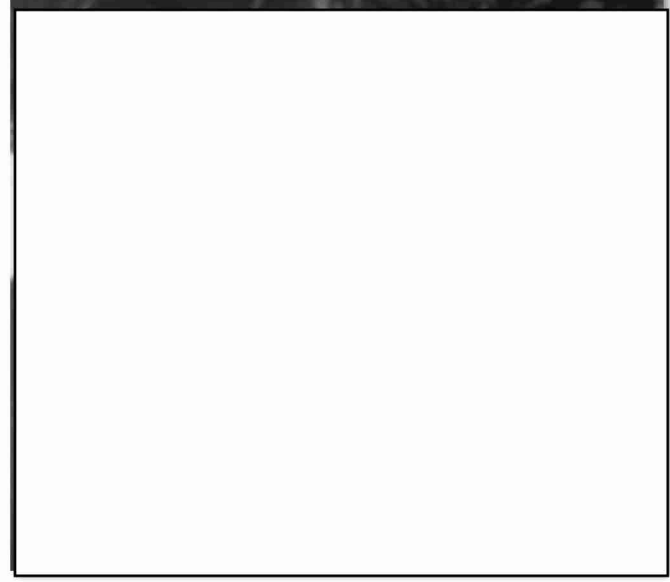
Anniversary Corner

Rhonda Roberts, Training Branch; Giacomo Picciotto, Operations Branch

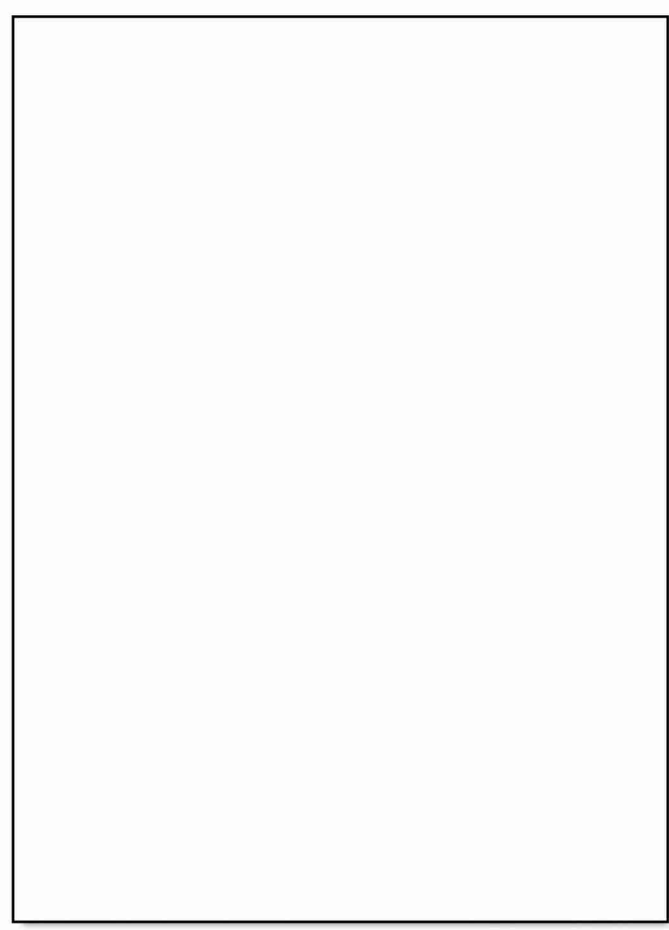
As part of the 30th Asylum Anniversary celebrations, the June edition of the Communications Newsletter features a very special treat for readers!

Asylum IDEA was privileged to (virtually) sit down with **Rhonda Roberts** and **Giacomo Picciotto** to discuss their professional motivations, lessons learned from their roles in the field and at HQ, and hopes for the future of our program.

We invite you to watch and/or listen to the words of wisdom shared by these legends of the Asylum Division. Regardless of whether you are new to Asylum or close friends of Rhonda and Giacomo, you will no doubt be inspired by their stories. Enjoy! (b)(6)



Giacomo and his lovely wife on the day of their engagement. [Click here to listen!](#)



[Click here](#) to listen to **Rhonda** discuss her career!

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Helping Hands: A Spotlight on Volunteerism**Viachaslau (Slava) Bortnik, Asylum Officer,** 

I was proud to be awarded the and it made me reflect on my history of engaging in volunteer activities. The first time I volunteered, it was not voluntary. In Belarus, where I grew up, there was not a culture of volunteerism. At a young age I was forced, along with all my peers, to join a youth organization that purported to build "a spirit of service." At the time, my heart was not into it.

It was not until years later that my spark for serving in the interest of others was ignited. I joined while attending college. I became quite active and helped to grow presence from a single local chapter into a national organization with members all around the country. Over the following years, I took on additional volunteer roles with , focusing on human rights in the former Soviet Union.

While I was sharing my time, I was gaining so much. gave me the opportunity to learn about and support human rights campaigns in many countries. I traveled extensively for trainings and conferences and met people from around the world. Overall, I spent twenty-five years actively engaged in Amnesty's work.

In addition to my work with , I served as a volunteer interpreter for asylum seekers from my home region, as well as for activists coming to DC to meet with their peers and government officials. I prepared food for , an organization serving those with HIV, and volunteered with other national and local charities. All these volunteer activities also helped me learn about how institutions work and develop my leadership skills.

Eight years ago, I relocated to the United States to pursue additional education and continue my volunteering. When I became an Asylum Officer in I redirected my volunteer efforts towards organizations that have a direct impact in my community, such as the .

In addition, my husband and I enjoy the arts and community-based cultural events. We channel our love of the arts through volunteerism. Live performances have returned to Washington, DC, and we are excited to return to to serve as ushers and assist with fundraising efforts. I whole-heartedly enjoy working in service of others and continue to seek out opportunities to donate, contribute and make a difference in my community.

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ASYLUM NEWS

Asylum Division Monthly Newsletter

July 2021

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Asylum News is a professional newsletter of the Asylum Division of the RAIO Directorate of USCIS. It is intended solely as an educational resource to disseminate internal information on activities and programs of the Asylum Division.

Asylum Division Headquarters Branch Updates

Management

- The Management Branch is pleased to announce that the **Asylum Interpreter Services ECN site** has a crisp, new look with useful links to interpreter services resources and reference materials. We encourage you to bookmark this site and use it as your Asylum Interpreter Services toolkit. Click here for the link to the new [Asylum Interpreter Services ECN site](#). Please feel free to provide feedback to the Asylum Interpreter Services Team: Margaret Mayers, Alex Kerr, and Selfida Pastora.
- Ephemericis **National Roll-out:** Management Branch is partnering with RAIO IDEA on the national roll-out of Ephemericis, a new technological tool created by RAIO IDEA to assist SAOs and AOs in PPA management by automating many of the tasks that currently require manual entry. Ephemericis is now being used office-wide at ZSF, while ZLA pilots the tool. On July 12th, ZCH, ZHN, ZMI, ZOL and ZTB participated in an Ephemericis train-the-trainer session to begin piloting the tool. The next multi-office Ephemericis training to pilot the tool is scheduled August 3rd for ZAR/ZAC, ZNY, ZNK, and ZBS.
- **Asylum HQ Staffing:** We are thrilled to welcome our new round of Asylum HQ detailees this month. We are also actively hiring for the Asylum HQ AO vacancies in the following branches: IDEA, Management, Operations, QA, and Training.

Operations

- **Tampa Asylum Office:** The work to establish the asylum office in Tampa, FL is proceeding at full speed! The Tampa Asylum Office (ZTB) is already set up with access to Global and other systems, such as TECS. Asylum Headquarters IDEA, Management, and Operations branches have been particularly involved in this project. The new office will soon have its own website. It will be set up in the Asylum Case Status Online (CSOL) and the Service Request Management Tool (SRMT) systems. While the official announcement is forthcoming, ZTB will open officially on Monday, August 2. Meanwhile, under the leadership of Asylum Office Director Brett Lassen, the office is almost fully operational. They have even conducted some asylum interviews! To say that ZTB has hit the ground running is an understatement: it is even set up to conduct interviews with the remote participation of an attorney or accredited representative!
- **Overseas Verification Requests (OVR)** continue to be paused at many overseas posts due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Training

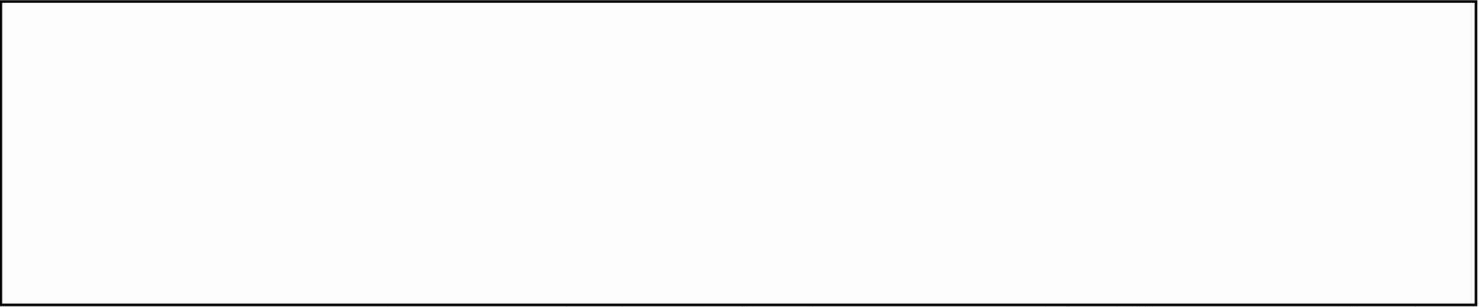
- **National Training Curriculum (NTC):** Asylum Training continues its work on the NTC’s framework and procedures. The NTC consists of three main components: 1) an NTC Reference Library, where the field can readily access cleared trainings; 2) a National Training Plan, which will act as a guide to delineate key topics that will be trained on a regular basis, including HQ- and field-generated content; and 3) a series of working groups that will pair offices in order to create content on key topics that can be cleared, delivered, and then distributed for national use across the field. The NTC will help leverage resources across asylum offices and promote consistency and quality.
- **Field Interviewing Trainings (FITs):** Congratulations to the Foundations Class 2101! Following the APSO module, many recent graduates completed either an I-589 FIT or an APSO FIT, depending on their work assignments. Once the Credible Fear (CF) portion of the APSO FIT is complete, local offices have the discretion to assign the officer a full CF caseload, complete the Reasonable Fear FIT, or (should additional CF training be needed) participate in an extended Credible Fear FIT. A special thanks to the Asylum Officers for participating in these programs and for providing helpful feedback! In addition, thank you to each office that participated in the creation of materials for the FIT program.
- **Supervisory Asylum Officer and Section Chief Training:** A training for SAOs and Section Chiefs is tentatively scheduled to occur in August and September. This training will focus on leadership, management, and quality assurance, and is distinct from USCIS’ Foundations of Supervision Training.

Quality Assurance

- In June and July 2021, HQ QA worked on **Master Data Reconciliation**. This initiative reconciled data in the Affirmative Database with data in Global (e.g., the total number of cases on HQ Hold in Global versus the total number of cases on Hold in the Affirmative Database). Reconciliation was successful.
- On July 20, HQ QA scheduled a **Train-the-Trainer** training with all field Terrorism-Related Inadmissibility Grounds Points of Contact (TRIG POCS). QA identified two cases to review and analyze during the training. HQ TRIG POCS led the training.
- Between August 2 and August 6, Asylum Officers will participate in the **FY21 RAIO I-589 Review** and will calibrate cases for review with the field.

FDNS

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- We encourage you to reach out to your local FDNS office for an overview of the different types of fraud present in your office and/or the specific schemes that your local FDNS office investigates. If other questions arise, please reach out to your local management first and then to FDNS.

IDEA News & Tips

IDEA Updates

- **Global and Application Support Center (ASC) address changes:** Address changes are now being communicated between Global and the National Appointment Scheduling System (NASS), the system responsible for scheduling biometrics appointments for applicants. When a staff member enters an address change in Global, the address will now be automatically updated in NASS for that specific biometric appointment request. ASC appointments should be updated accordingly.
- **Remote Telework to Office (RTO) Pilot:** The RTO pilot is expanding to all asylum offices with staff training conducted throughout July at ZHN, ZAR, ZTB, ZLA, ZCH, and ZMI.
- **IDEA Tech GIFs:** Do you enjoy visual guides? Check out [Asylum IDEA Tech GIFs!](#) This site helps to show you everything from muting a participant in MS Teams to merging calls in Avaya Workplace.
- **Global Religions and Ethnicities:** The "Entry" tab in Global now features 50 religions and over 170 races and ethnic groups. Please contact if you encounter a religion or race/ethnicity/tribal group that is not already included.

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IDEA Tips

The Excitement of PowerPoint: In June's issue, we highlighted some key ways to optimize the use of Microsoft Outlook. For this edition of IDEA Tips, we will focus on Microsoft PowerPoint. While some users fear PowerPoint, it is a powerful tool that, with practice and some key tips and tricks, will greatly enhance your work!



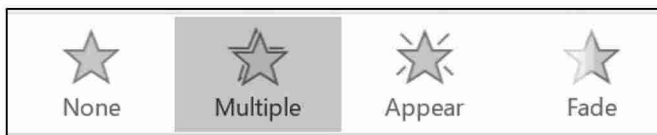
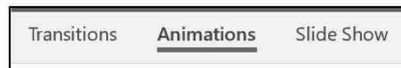
Removing Photo Background

Do you want to use part of an image for your PowerPoint presentation, and delete the pre-existing background? With the image in your slide, select **Picture Format** and click **Remove Background**. This feature will automatically identify some parts of the image background for removal. If you want to select additional parts to remove, click **Mark Areas to Remove** and highlight the additional parts of the image you want to remove. Once you are done, click **Keep Changes**.



Animation Pane

The **Animation Pane** can help bring movement and dimension to your PowerPoint presentation! To access, click on **Animations**, located between **Transitions** and **Slide Show**. Animations will allow you to insert a variety of options, including floating and fading objects, as well as animations triggered by a specific click within your slide.



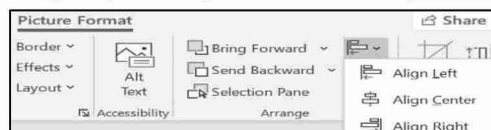
Design Ideas

Do you sometimes feel creatively challenged with your slide layout? Worry no more! The "Design Ideas" functionality will suggest a variety of different slide designs to help bring life to your slideshow. To access it, click on **Design** and **Design Ideas**.



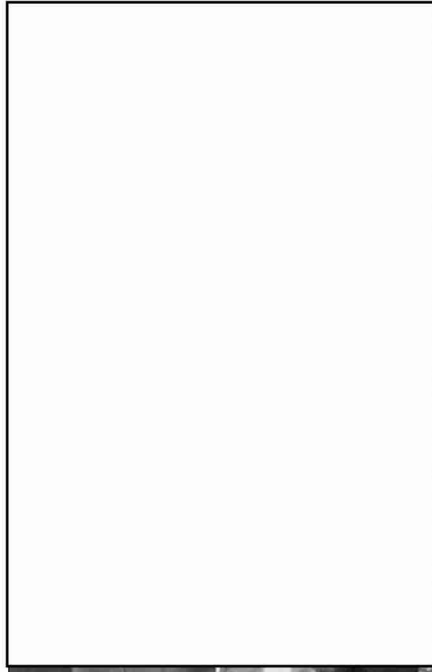
Aligning Images

Do you have multiple images in a slide that you want to align for a more polished and organized look? First, highlight the objects you want to align. Click on **Shape Format** and **Align**. You will then see multiple options for alignment. For example, Align Top will top align all highlighted images. If you are aligning pictures, click on **Picture Format** and **Align Options** (located to the right of "Bring Forward").



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Spotlight on the Field: **Asylum Office**



Meet our Local Leader:

Sabine Diogene, Supervisory Legal Administrative Specialist

My supporting role as a leader in the government has been filled with so many unexpected blessings. I started my career with the federal government almost 15 years ago, while still navigating my way through college. By then, I had casting calls for several majors until I finally decided to major in Public Administration. My reasoning was that the government was never going out of business and there are so many career paths to choose from. And boy, was I right!

I have been blessed to work for the Field Office Directorate (FOD) as a Congressional Liaison, Immigration Service Officer, and Operation Support Specialist. Now I work at as a Supervisory Legal Administrative Specialist. As I excelled through the auditions of my career, I anticipated every role with great expectations to learn something new and to pave the way for others.

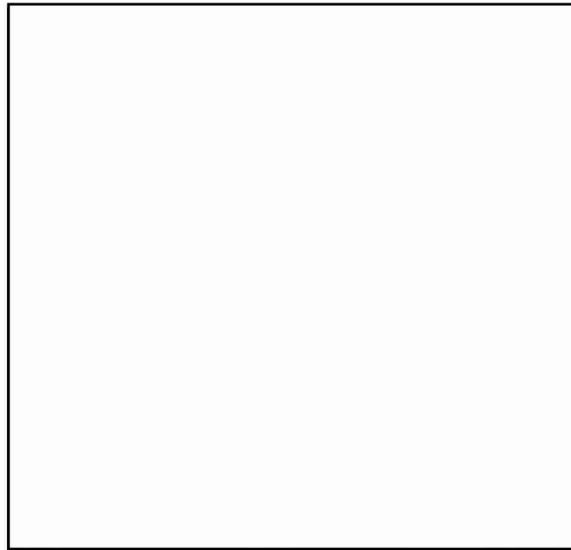
I have met and worked alongside some giants who poured so much into me. I will always be grateful to them, as well as the others who simply kept me grounded. You will never forget how someone made you feel, so I take what I admired in them and return the favor to someone else.

My role as a supervisor has always been to inspire and motivate others. Call me the guardian, coach, or cheerleader; either way you'll be motivated for career advancement, training and development, details, Professional Development Program (PDP), or whatever else that gives you purpose to show up and play your best leading role. I am an advocate for growth and creating a better you, and I firmly believe that we write our own narrative.

Being charged with the purpose to empower others to reach their full potential is humbling and something dear to my heart. Let's be honest, I would not be able to succeed if I did not have such an amazing cast of experts supporting the Mission even through the toughest year. Their resilience and dedication are my fuel to pick up my script daily and give it my best shot.

Spotlight on the Field: Asylum Office

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Learn from Isabella Poschl, Senior AO and current Acting Training Officer

In February 2020, I became a Senior Asylum Officer. It was just in time to start acclimating with one class of Asylum Officers (AOs) before we shut down due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, I was determined not to let something like a global pandemic stop me from acclimating AOs into a full interview schedule after the completion of training. A group of seasoned Asylum Officers met to work virtually with the new officers on their interview skills.

Once we were back in the office, it was solidified in my mind that integrating, mentoring, and teaching new AOs was far and away my favorite part of the job. This year, as a Senior Asylum Officer, I learned so much about what it means to be a mentor and I became a better listener. I listened to new AOs' concerns, fears, and limitations and to help them plan on overcoming them and become the best possible officers.

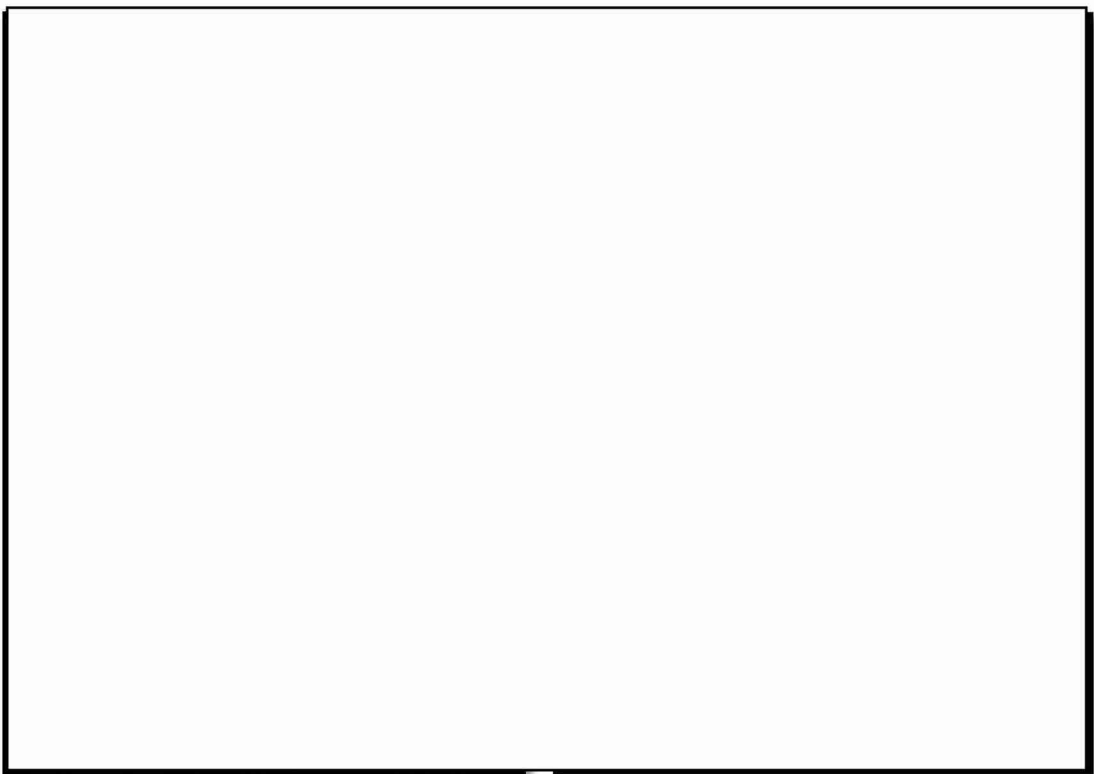
I was recently selected for an Acting Training Officer detail. This made the best use of all the skills I have acquired over the last year. This role allows me to work with the entire office through developing and presenting helpful trainings specific to the identified needs of our officers. It also allows me to work one-on-one with AOs; specifically, newer ones who may still be adjusting to their position and workload. My first project was a set of Skilled Interview observations where new and seasoned AOs alike gathered to observe a Senior AO interview. The interview was followed by a small group discussion, allowing AOs to walk away with some new perspectives and ideas on how to handle their own interviews.

I am thankful for this wonderful opportunity and look forward to helping other officers in this Acting Training Officer capacity at the Miami Asylum Office.

Helping Hands: A Spotlight on Volunteerism

Jair Obregon, Asylum Officer,

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[Redacted text block] "Every child is one caring person away from been a triumphant story - Why not let that person be you?"

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Career Corner: Up the Ladder

Jennifer Rellis, Management Branch Chief



How did you start out in this field?

I went to law school later in life after wearing many other hats (to name a few: poet/English literature instructor; nonprofit arts administrator; and fundraising/alumni relations coordinator). My traditional legal career was cut short after I was laid off for economic reasons in the spring of 2009. While losing your job is never a positive experience, I used this as a springboard to obtain a position that was more aligned to my interests than corporate law. I had always been interested in international law and humanitarian issues in law school, so I took the opportunity to make a bold career transition and focused my search on nonprofit and government work. After reaching out to my network, I scheduled an informational interview with a senior leader in RAIO who recommended that I consider the Asylum Officer position as a great entryway into the organization. Luckily, ZNY was hiring and after speaking to their Deputy, I applied for the position while completing a volunteer clerkship for the Supreme Court of Israel. Within a few months in November 2009, I was moving back to the States from Jerusalem, finding an apartment in New York, and returning to federal service after previously serving as a federal law clerk in the U.S. Eastern District Court of Pennsylvania.

Being an Asylum Officer is a hard job and one I did for nearly four years. I don't think anyone, or anything, can really prepare you for what the job entails. I will always remember the work and the amazing and resilient individuals I met. One of my initial assignments (pre- in-house certification) at ZNY was serving asylum decisions on applicants. What power to tell someone that the U.S. government has granted them asylum protection. As an AO, I was most impacted by two deaf applicants whom I interviewed after transferring to ZAR. These people were just utterly ignored and abused by their society. Yet they possessed such a positive spirit and belief in the future. Another applicant had watched her former partner kill her children in front of her eyes before he shot the applicant. She miraculously survived being shot by him, as well. Adjudicating cases like these and being able to provide asylum protection to deserving individuals will always be an unforgettable experience.

I've made lifelong friends at residential training (AOBTC #32!) and had amazing life experiences working in Artesia, New Mexico, at the first family residential center. I've been incredibly privileged to volunteer for refugee processing trips to Ethiopia and Turkey. I've grown along with the Division. USCIS has been an amazing place to develop my career.

Was there a career setback you faced which you later realized was an advantage?

Certainly, being laid off from my law firm job, as I noted earlier. But that very career disappointment set me on the path to this amazing organization. We have a truly amazing community of incredibly talented individuals and promotions are tough at times. I always tell people to apply to a different position in asylum again, if you are not selected the first time. While disappointing at the time, I've realized later on that it was advantageous. I remember joining Asylum HQ in November 2014, as an Asylum Officer on the QA branch, and really wanting to work on unaccompanied children issues. But that was covered, so I was assigned to reasonable fear and ended up making a huge impact as part of their streamlining measures necessitated by the Alfaro-Garcia settlement. I drafted and tested the first Reasonable Fear checklist, which was a fantastic efficiency measure. Another monumental career experience for me was being selected as the first Deputy Director of the Arlington Asylum Pre-screening Center (ZAC), which was created to take on the APSO workload from other offices in order to create efficiencies and leave local offices to focus on their affirmative backlogs. It was a tremendous opportunity to bring so many new employees into federal service and do something that had not been done before in the Division—transferring APSO jurisdiction on a large scale. In this role, I learned a lot about myself and got to see my strengths for organizing and managing multiple projects and teams at the same time. I also was exposed to staffing, facility, budget, and labor-employee relations issues, which positioned me well for my current job as Management Branch Chief.

If I had been selected for those other positions, I'm sure I would have been propelled in an equally interesting job path, because that is the nature of working at USCIS and specifically asylum since 2009. But I am tremendously happy with the path I took and the experiences I have had along the way.

What types of professional development do you recommend?

Professional development can be so much more than a 4-month detail. Those are actually rare opportunities. In my entire USCIS career, I've only had that opportunity once as part of the Executive Potential Program. First off, I recommend making connections with other people and finding out what they do. Volunteer for opportunities. Ask how you can be helpful in your local office. Take that difficult case. Delve into your work and read and know the procedures manuals. Communicate with your supervisor that you are interested in giving a training on something that you know how to do well. RAIIO and Asylum is a really small world so build a network. I am still friends with people that I went to training with in 2009 when I was first starting out with the Agency. A tremendously underutilized tool is the Individual Development Plan (IDP). Think about some concrete, specific, and attainable goals and ask your supervisor to work on one with you. Taking ownership over your career development is extremely important.

How do you strike a work life balance?

This is a tremendously difficult issue for so many of us quite simply because we are so passionate about the Division and our work, but it is so important. Our work is a marathon, not a sprint. I've had to get comfortable over the years with walking away from my laptop at the end of the day with many unfinished tasks and unread emails. I prioritize and re-prioritize to ensure that the most important items are pushed forward.

Everyone must discover what personally recharges them. I would encourage you to do something for yourself before you start work each day. For me, that is working out. I find it helps me focus and get energized for the day. Now that I've been doing a lot more telework, I've developed a new habit of taking a 20-minute walk around my neighborhood in lieu of a lunch break. Even though I live in urban Washington, DC, I am close to an island and nature preserve and literally can see herons and turtles when I pop onto [Kingman Island](#) for a minute. This tremendously restorative short break helps me focus in the afternoon.

I also love to recharge through time with family and friends, as well as various hobbies (gardening, baking, cooking, reading, and biking to name a few). And I've run into many ZAR employees at local beer festivals in the area pre-COVID. Get out there and enjoy your weekend! I'm an avid traveler (47 countries!) and look forward to resuming international travel, when it is safe.

ASYLUM NEWS

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August 2021

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Asylum Division Headquarters Branch Updates

Management

- **ADJSS:** Management Branch and IDEA Branch continue working together on the Asylum Division Job Satisfaction Survey. The third quarter FY2021 Asylum Division Job Satisfaction Study (ADJSS) has been completed and HQ staff is currently analyzing the results. The Q4 study starts on September 7. We encourage everyone to complete the survey - it just takes about 10-15 minutes to complete, and the results are being used to determine how to improve retention across the Division.
- **Recruiting and Hiring:** MB continues to coordinate with field offices and our HROC and RAIQ HQ partners in recruiting and hiring for national positions. Recently, nationwide announcements went out for LAS and CIS Assistant positions. We are also working on nationwide announcements for the AO-2 (GS-9/11/12) position. We are pleased to announce that the Asylum Division opened new postings at all field offices for the GS-13 Asylum Officer (AO3) position and the GS-14 Supervisory Asylum Officer (GS-14 SAO) position. The AO3 position and GS-14 SAO position are new positions that were created to support the work underlying the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking announced by Director Jaddou on August 18, 2021. These positions are open to current USCIS, CBP, and ICE employees with competitive status and CTAP eligibles. These postings will be open from 8/20/2021 – 8/30/2021 and individuals can choose to apply to two geographic locations.

Operations

Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) for Residents of Hong Kong

On August 5, 2021, the White House issued a memorandum for the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Homeland Security titled: "Memorandum on the Deferred Enforced Departure for Certain Hong Kong Residents." The measure defers for 18 months the enforced departure of Hong Kong residents who were present in the United States on the date the memorandum was issued. The Memorandum includes certain eligibility conditions and directs the DHS Secretary to authorize issuance of employment authorization to the noncitizens whose removal has been deferred.

The Affirmative Asylum Procedures Manual at III.B.5: III.B. Categories of Cases (dhs.gov) provides Asylum Division-specific information about Deferred Enforced Departure (DED). Please note that DED is adjudicated by ICE. Asylum Officers should continue to issue NTAs to noncitizens who are removable and aren't granted asylum or NACARA 203. ICE will determine eligibility for DED.

Because the decision to extend DED protection is made by the President, it is not a statutory provision under the Immigration and Nationality Act and as such, it is not considered an immigration "status." DED is not considered to be a valid immigrant, nonimmigrant, or Temporary Protected Status under 8 C.F.R. 208.14(c)(2). When issuing an NTA for a person who appears to be covered by DED, include a memorandum to the file addressed to the ICE Office of the Principal

Asylum News is a professional newsletter of the Asylum Division of the RAIQ Directorate of USCIS. It is intended solely as an educational resource to disseminate internal information on activities and programs of the Asylum Division.

Legal Advisor (OPLA) and Enforcement and Removal Operations indicating, "The individual who is the subject of this memorandum may be covered by Deferred Enforced Departure (DED)." AAPM III.B.5.

To recap: residents of Hong Kong who were in the U.S. on August 5, 2021 and are removable may be eligible for DED, under certain conditions enumerated in President Biden’s Memorandum.

- **Notice of Proposed Rulemaking:** On 8/18/2021, as announced by Director Jaddou, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Department of Justice (DOJ) published a notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) to streamline and accelerate the process for individuals in expedited removal after a positive credible fear determination. Instead of being issued an NTA and placed in INA § 240 removal proceedings before an immigration judge (IJ) as provided for in current regulations, the proposed rule would allow USCIS asylum officers to adjudicate claims for asylum, withholding of removal, and Convention against Torture (CAT) protection for individuals who receive a positive credible fear determination. Under the proposed rule, the individual may request EOIR review of any finding of non-eligibility by the asylum officer, and the case will be placed in asylum-and-withholding-only proceedings before an IJ, who will review the case *de novo*. The full NPRM may be accessed here: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/08/20/2021-17779/procedures-for-credible-fear-screening-and-consideration-of-asylum-withholding-of-removal-and-cat>

Training

- **National Training Curriculum (NTC):** The NTC Working Group has announced the pair of offices selected to create content for the inaugural NTC training, which will be distributed nationally to asylum field offices. ZMI, ZSF, and HQ have begun meeting to plan a training module on Time Management. The NTC Librarian and NTC Coordinator will continue to build the NTC Reference Library, which provides the field with access to cleared trainings. In addition, work continues on the National Training Plan, which will serve to guide regularly scheduled trainings.
- **Supervisory Asylum Officer (SAO) Training and Section Chief (SC) Training:** Trainings for SAOs and SCs were held in August and will also be taking place in September 2021. The trainings are in two parts: 1) Leadership and Management Skills, including managing remote employees and giving feedback; 2) Quality and Technical Knowledge, including presentations on QA review and IDEA, as well as Affirmative and APSO case calibration sessions. These trainings are distinct from USCIS’ Foundations of Supervision Training.
- **National Training Needs Assessment:** Asylum HQ has been analyzing and formatting the results of this Assessment, which was administered across asylum offices and HQ through FY2021 Quarter 2. We expect to share the results before the end of FY2021.

Quality Assurance

- **RAIO QA I-589 Review:** QA is working with RAIO QA and first-line field reviewers to review affirmative cases for the FY2020 RAIO QA review.
- **Global Interview Tool Case Review (Affirmative):** QA has been conducting an informal review of affirmative cases interviewed with and without the Global Interview Tool to assess how the tool may be impacting quality and efficiency.
- **Recent additions to the Case Law ECN site:**
 - *Ortiz v. Garland*, 2021 WL 3179028 (6th Cir. 2021)
 - *Rosales-Reyes v. Garland*, 2021 WL 3400826 (8th Cir. 2021)
 - *Singh v. Garland*, 2021 WL 3176764 (2d. Cir. 2021)
 - *Nolasco v. Garland*, 2021 WL 3280799 (4th Cir. 2021)
 - *Omowole v. Garland*, 2021 WL 3204721 (7th Cir. 2021)
 - *Gilbertson v. Garland*, 2021 WL 3276528 (8th Cir. 2021)
 - *Vasquez-Guerra v. Garland*, 2021 WL 3196896 (5th Cir. 2021)

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The Homeland Security Investigations’ (HSI) National Gang Unit delivered two trainings – one for the Asylum Division and one for the International and Refugee Affairs Division – on Salvadoran gangs and indicators of gang membership. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Asylum FDNS deeply appreciated the outstanding attendance for these two trainings, as well as the very thoughtful questions submitted in advance and through the Q&A platform.

IDEA News & Tips

IDEA Updates

- **Remote Telework to Office (RTO) Pilot:** The RTO pilot expansion has launched at three asylum field offices: ZAR (July 22), ZCH (July 29), and ZMI (August 2). Two officers from each site have begun conducting affirmative asylum interviews remotely from their home telework locations, with over 400 RTO interviews successfully completed to date across the division thanks to the hard work by all staff involved.
- **Remote Attorney Pilot:** The Remote Attorney pilot has expanded to all asylum offices, making it possible for attorneys or representatives to participate in an affirmative asylum or NACARA interview remotely after submitting an opt-in form to the local asylum office.
- **Global Interview Notes APSO Pilot:** Global Interview Notes for APSO is now live at ZLA, ZNK, and ZHN. Thank you to all those involved for your participation and feedback as we continue to develop these tools and expand their availability.

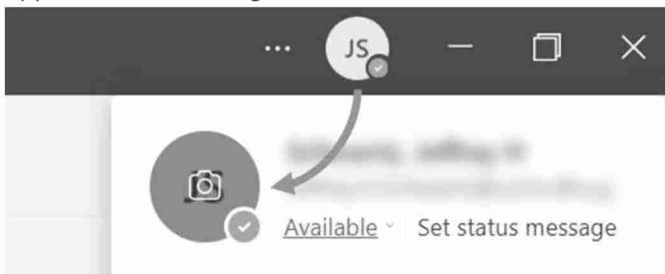
IDEA Tips

MS Teams: Now that all staff have fully transitioned over to MS Teams, it may be a good time to personalize your profile. For this month's edition of IDEA Tips, we're focusing on some features to customize your profile in MS Teams and throughout MS 365 applications.



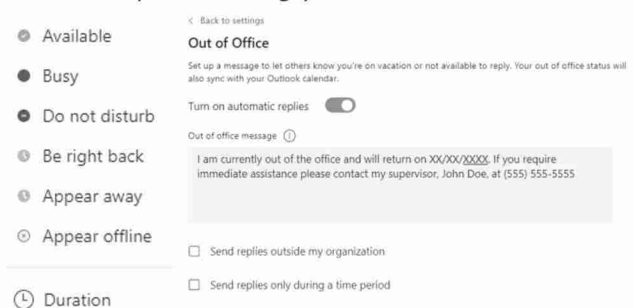
Add your profile picture

When you are first set up on MS Teams, your profile picture defaults to your first and last initials. To add a profile picture, click your initials at the top right of the screen. Then, click on the camera icon that appears when you hover over your profile and upload a new photo. Your new photo will be displayed across all MS 365 applications including Microsoft Outlook.



Set your status or add a status message

Setting work-life boundaries while teleworking can be a challenge. Make sure you're still taking your breaks and letting colleagues know when you're unavailable. To change your status, click on your profile photo in the top right of the screen. You can adjust your status icon, schedule an out of office message, or simply let people know that you're taking your lunch break.



Add pronouns or a nickname to your profile

If you would like to add pronouns or a preferred nickname to your profile, log in to [myIT](#) and click your name in the top right of the screen to get to your "myAccess Profile." Then, click your name in the top right again and select "My Profile." Here, you can edit your profile details including adding a "Nickname," which will appear in parentheses after your full name.

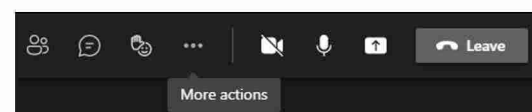
Name and Organization ▼

Last, First MI.:

Nickname:

Change your background

When appearing on camera in a Teams meeting, change your background by selecting "Background filters" when joining, or selecting "Apply background effects" from the actions drop-down menu from within a meeting. You can choose to blur your background, select a preloaded background, or upload your own. USCIS-branded backgrounds are available on the [Video Interview ECN](#). An animated visual that demonstrates how to change your background is also available on the [IDEA Tech Gifs ECN](#).



Spotlight on the Field: [redacted] **Asylum Office** [redacted]
(b)(6)

Meet our Local Leader: Rachael Star Sundborg, Supervisory Asylum Officer



What brought you to the Asylum Division?

I was working in private practice in Boston, representing clients before USCIS and EOIR, and after a particularly intense individual hearing for a detained client, I was starting to think about what was next in my career. Shortly thereafter, I had a very pleasant interaction with an ISO at a field office after one of my client’s interviews for adjustment of status. She told me that before becoming an ISO, she was an AO. As she described her experience as an AO, I realized her description fit perfectly with where I was hoping my career would take me. The very next day, I logged onto USAJobs, and there it was: an Asylum Officer posting at [redacted] Within a few months, I packed my bags, put my dog in my backseat, and moved down to Houston. After moving back to the Northeast to be closer to family and working in the Field Operations Directorate for a couple of years, I jumped at the opportunity to rejoin the Asylum Division at the newly created [redacted]

What do you enjoy most about a career in immigration?

I love both the adjudicative nature of our work and that we work in a field that is ever-changing. Although it can be tough to constantly keep up with the frequent changes, the other side of the coin is that we are consistently intellectually stimulated by needing to learn a new process or procedure. How many other careers are there out there where you are continuously learning something new every week?!

What do you like doing outside of work?

Playing in the dirt planting flowers and trees, walking through the woods, [redacted] I did not have much direction (and was a horrible tween), and then one of my friends introduced me to the sport. I fell in love with the sport, and it gave me direction both in school and toward the goal of being recruited and competing at the Division I collegiate level. The sport entirely changed my life, and I feel very grateful to now be able to give back to the sport as a referee.

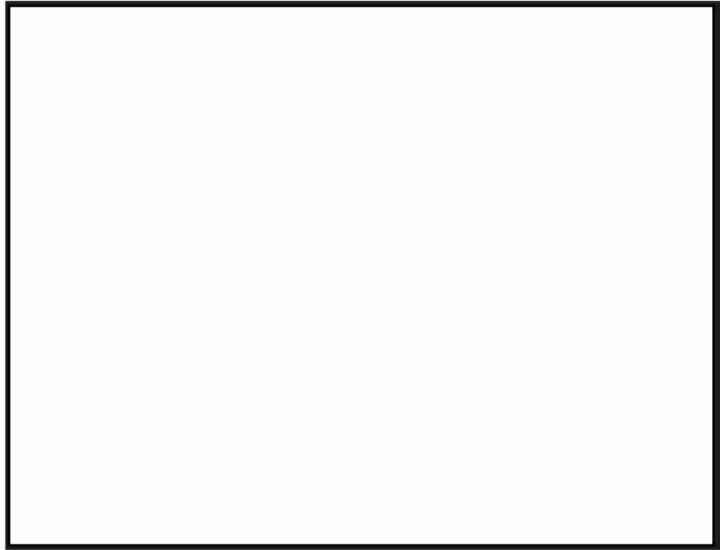
What does being a leader mean to you?

Despite being a supervisor for nearly six years, I still have a hard time considering myself a leader! I think that is partly because I constantly want to evolve and be better. I think that the transition from an officer to a supervisor is a difficult one: the officer position is so focused on technical proficiency, but there is much more to being a good supervisor than writing the most legally sound assessments or knowing the ins and outs of FBI Name Checks. However, just like as an officer, it is in the most challenging times that your skill can really shine and/or be an experience to learn a great deal. It is extremely difficult to keep that in mind in the midst of those tough decisions or conversations, but I can think of multiple instances in which after being able to reflect on the experience, I set new goals for myself and learned more about how I want to evolve as a leader.

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Spotlight on the Field: [redacted] **Asylum Office** [redacted]

Learn from Allison Bennett, Management and Program Analyst



Happy August everyone! I am excited to share my career development experiences with RAIO Ignite.

[redacted] I joined one of RAIO Ignite’s first Working Groups, [redacted]. In addition to ranking high on the IdeaScale campaign (#2, with 73 votes), [redacted] addressed many of the themes that came out of the [redacted] research phase, where it became clear that staff across the directorate would benefit from RAIO-specific rotational opportunities.

I loved the chance to work with a fabulous group of RAIO employees and help build out what would become [redacted]. We received human-centered design training from the OPM Lab and worked closely with both an Executive Champion (Ashley Caudill-Mirillo) and our team lead, Katy Kauffman.

After the conclusion of our Working Group session, I remained on the team as a part-time detailee to help grow [redacted], along with Ashley Rice from [redacted]. In March 2020, I was detailed full-time to [redacted] to continue my work on [redacted] and help with some of their other initiatives, like RAIO Passport, Policy Sync and Flexible Scheduling. Today, I run [redacted] - hopefully many of you have used our [redacted] [redacted] ECN site to apply to the many professional development opportunities currently available!

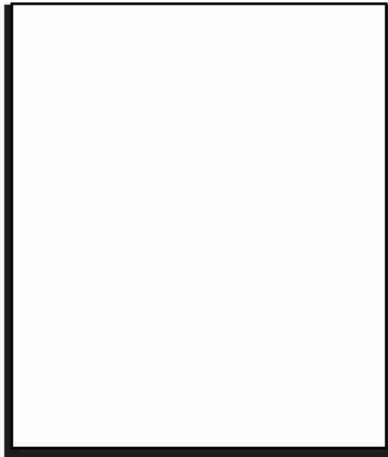
I greatly benefited from my time at [redacted] and I appreciated the chance to meet so many talented people from across the directorate. I learned new skills that I apply in my MPA duties at [redacted] integrating human-centered design thinking to help improve the office. I would highly encourage everyone to apply for a professional development opportunity (using [redacted] of course!) in order to learn a new skillset, engage with employees from other offices, and bring back fun new ideas to help your local office!

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Spotlight on the Volunteerism: [redacted] **Asylum Office**

(b)(6)

Community Service: JoAnne Loretta, Mission Support Specialist



To me, community service is fulfilling in a personal and spiritual sense.

During a time in my life where I was almost homeless and indigent, I returned to my childhood church, where I was raised and educated. Having no money to give for the collection basket, I knelt on the kneeler and began to pray. I asked to be shown a light, to help guide me through the dark times I faced. I promised to pay it forward through random acts of kindness and volunteerism. I waited and hoped for the best.

Almost 30 years later, I am delighted to share that my life circumstances improved, and community service continues to play a pivotal role in my life. I devote my volunteerism toward the fine arts. I sing in four choirs, including the [redacted] and the church choir where I initially made my promise to volunteer. With the [redacted] I also help to raise money to purchase tickets to our [redacted] [redacted] concert. These tickets are distributed to organizations that serve underprivileged communities, to help ensure that the beauty of music is accessible to all.

Before the pandemic, my community service also extended to local and government organizations. I volunteered at a local food bank and soup kitchen, distributing hot meals to needy residents. As a former member of the [redacted] [redacted] I also sang in Washington, D.C. for the five-year anniversary.

When I reflect on my service, I am humbled by the incredible impact these organizations have on their local and national communities. It is also a reminder that I kept my promise to practice daily, random acts of kindness.

Tampa Field Office Grand Opening



The Tampa Asylum Office celebrated its grand opening on Monday, August 2, with a Town Hall and a ribbon-cutting ceremony. The office began interviewing asylum applicants in late June.

The Tampa Asylum Office opened in response to an increasing asylum workload in Florida. The Tampa and Miami asylum offices will share Florida's growing USCIS asylum workload, with the Tampa office adjudicating asylum claims filed by applicants from western and northern Florida as well as portions of central Florida. The office currently operates in a temporary facility and is scheduled to move to a larger, permanent facility in 2022.

Asylum Division Chief Andrew Davidson participated in the ribbon-cutting ceremony, which followed a Town Hall led by Chief Davidson and, via Microsoft Teams, Asylum Division Deputy Chief Ashley Caudill-Mirillo. Shari Merlano, vice president of the Local 1458 Union, also joined the Town Hall virtually.



Tampa Asylum Office Director Brett Lassen (left) and Asylum Division Chief Andrew Davidson (right), standing with the Tampa Asylum Office team, prepare to cut the ribbon at the official opening of the Tampa Asylum Office on Aug. 2.



Asylum Officer James Fagan (third from left in this photo) conducted the Tampa Asylum Office's first asylum interview on June 28.

ASYLUM NEWS

Asylum Division Monthly Newsletter

September 2021

What's Inside...

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Page 4: IDEA News & Tips

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Page 7: Spotlight on Volunteerism

Page 8: ZAR Feds Feed Families Silver Award

Page 9: HQ New Hires

Asylum Division Headquarters Branch Updates

Management

- **FY21 Closeout PPAs:** HCT issued guidance on PPA closeout for FY21 and issuing FY22 PPAs, which can be accessed [here](#). Some key information and dates in the memo include:
 - The FY21 performance cycle ends on September 30, 2021
 - We encourage all employees to reflect on your performance over the past year and write a self-assessment. More information on self-assessments can be found [here](#).
 - FY22 annual appraisals must be issued for all eligible employees by October 31, 2021
 - For FY22, we are transitioning to the new Employee Performance Management (EPM) tool, which uses an electronic platform
- **New Positions in Asylum Division:** As announced by Director Jaddou and also noted in last month's newsletter, on 8/18/2021 the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Department of Justice (DOJ) published a notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) to streamline and accelerate the process for individuals in expedited removal after a positive credible fear determination. In recognizing the additional complexities and responsibilities that come with the second interview portion of the NPRM, USCIS has authorized the hiring and allocation of higher-graded AOs and SAOs, commensurate with these new requirements. In support of this new rule, two new positions were created within the Asylum Division: the GS-13 Asylum Officer (AO-3) position and the [GS-14 SAO](#) position. The announcement for the positions at all field offices was posted on USAJOBS from 8/20-2021 – 8/30/2021, and field offices will begin interviewing and selecting candidates in the near future.

The new [AO-3 position](#) differs from the current [GS-13 Senior Asylum Officer \(AO\)](#) position in that the AO-3 will be exclusively focused on adjudications under the regulation and will not have mentoring as an explicit job function. The AO3 will primarily conduct complex adjudications to determine whether an individual qualifies for asylum, statutory withholding of removal, or withholding or deferral of removal under the Convention Against Torture (CAT). It should be noted that GS-13 Senior AOs are also able to conduct the new complex adjudications contemplated under the rule as it falls within the scope of work defined in their position description.

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Operations

- **New Ops Supervisor:** Asylum Ops congratulates and welcomes Ebbled Joseph to his new position as one of two Ops supervisors. Ebbled joined the Ops Team in December 2018. He started his federal career at ZHN as an AO and served as an SAO and Section Chief at ZAR and ZAC.
- **Interpreter TFR:** The Management and Operations HQ Branches have collaborated to extend the [Interpreter TFR](#), as of September 20, 2021 through March 16, 2022. The extension includes a modification providing, in limited circumstances, for USCIS to either reschedule the interview and attribute the interview delay to USCIS for purposes of employment authorization, or, in its discretion, allow an applicant for asylum to bring an interpreter when a USCIS interpreter is unavailable. Chief Andrew Davidson issued [guidance](#) on September 16, 2021.
- **Vangala vs. USCIS – Guidance:** On July 20, 2021, USCIS settled a lawsuit over the “No Blank Spaces rejection policy.” This policy was in place between October 7, 2019 and December 22, 2020. See the Notice of Settlement Agreement [here](#). ZGA has a key role in the implementation of this settlement agreement. Chief Andrew Davidson issued [guidance](#) to SCOPS and the Asylum Division on September 16, 2021.
- **Mendez-Rojas v. USCIS – Additional Guidance:** An August 19, 2021, [memorandum](#), “Updated Procedures for Closing Forms I-589, Applications for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal, Filed by Individuals Who Were Previously Issued a Notice to Appear” provides instructions on how to close an I-589 case in Global, requires security checks and lists other updates to the Affirmative Asylum Procedures Manual (AAPM).
- **Guidance on Interacting with the RAI0 Research Unit:** On September 7, 2021, Asylum Chief Andrew Davidson issued a [memorandum](#) clarifying how RAI0 Research Unit can assist Asylum Officers: “Uniform Procedures for Communication between Asylum Officers and the RAI0 Research Unit” with associated updates to the relevant sections of the [AAPM](#).

Training

- **RAIO Foundations:** The second round of **RAIO Foundations Training** began on September 3, 2021. Currently, the largely self-directed **Foundations Asynchronous Virtual** portion is in session and will run through September 24, 2021. There will be a Knowledge Check at the end of Asynchronous, but no graded activities. Then, from September 27 through October 22, 2021, students will continue on to Foundations **Synchronous Virtual**, which will include live sessions, mock interviews, and two A-File multiple choice exams (October 6th & 22nd) and one graded claim mock (October 15th). Asylum Officer students will then follow-on to the **I-589 Module** (October 25 – November 19). Asylum Officers next will complete the **APSO Module** (November 29 – December 10). Thereafter, officers who successfully complete the courses will participate in the **I-589 or APSO Field Interviewing Training (FIT)**, a nationally standardized ramp-up program, depending on their office work assignment.
- **National Training Curriculum (NTC):** The NTC Working Group is finalizing the content for the inaugural NTC training, which will be distributed nationally to asylum field offices in September. ZMI and ZSF designed a training on Time Management: Interviewing Tips. The training includes a presentation, practical exercise and discussion prompts. The NTC Librarian and NTC Coordinator will continue to build the NTC Reference Library, which provides the field with access to cleared trainings. In addition, work continues on the FY22 National Training Plan, which will serve to guide regularly scheduled trainings.
- **Supervisory Asylum Officer (SAO) Training and Section Chief (SC) Training:** Asylum HQ Training, in collaboration with the Asylum HQ’s Quality and IDEA Branches, held SC and SAO Trainings in August and September 2021. The trainings were in two parts 1) Leadership and Management Skills featured information on managing remote employees and giving feedback. 2) Quality and Technical Knowledge training included a demo of Policy Sync; Asylum HQ QA Branch’s presentation on QA Review and APSO case calibration; and a presentation by Asylum HQ’s IDEA Reporting Team on the AO Utilization Report, with their Tech Team presenting on the Global Assessment Generator and Global Note-Taking Tool. These trainings are distinct from USCIS’ Foundations of Supervision Training.

Quality Assurance

- **Affirmative Backlog:** QA continues to work on its pending Affirmative caseload.
- **Recent additions to the case law ECN site:**
 - *Plancarte v. Garland*, No. 19-73312, 2021 WL 3700406 (9th Cir. Aug. 20, 2021)
 - *Tabora Gutierrez v. Garland*, No. 19-60408, 2021 WL 3877753 (5th Cir. Aug. 31, 2021)
 - *JOSE GEOVANI RODRIGUEZ-RAMIREZ, Petitioner, v. MERRICK B. GARLAND, Att'y Gen., Respondent.*, No. 19-70506, 2021 WL 3891090 (9th Cir. Sept. 1, 2021)
 - *MIRABEL E. MUNYUH, AKA Mirabel Endam Munyuh, Petitioner, v. MERRICK B. GARLAND, Att'y Gen., Respondent.*, No. 19-72890, 2021 WL 3745359 (9th Cir. Aug. 25, 2021)
 - *B.C. v. Att'y Gen. United States*, No. 19-1408, 2021 WL 3891557 (3d Cir. Sept. 1, 2021)
 - *Mumad v. Garland*, No. 20-2140, 2021 WL 3824234 (8th Cir. Aug. 27, 2021)
 - *Dai v. Garland*, No. 15-70776, 2021 WL 3700404 (9th Cir. Aug. 20, 2021)
 - *Murugan v. U.S. Att'y Gen.*, No. 19-13715, 2021 WL 3732271 (11th Cir. Aug. 24, 2021)
 - *Singh v. Garland*, No. 19-704-AG, 2021 WL 3744895 (2d Cir. Aug. 25, 2021)

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IDEA News & Tips

IDEA Updates

- **Assessment Generator (AG):** The AG is now integrated with the Global Interview Notes tool. AOs can view their interview notes while writing their assessment in the AG. Watch this short [video](#) to learn how.
- **Job Satisfaction Study:** View the results from the Q3 Job Satisfaction Study [here](#).

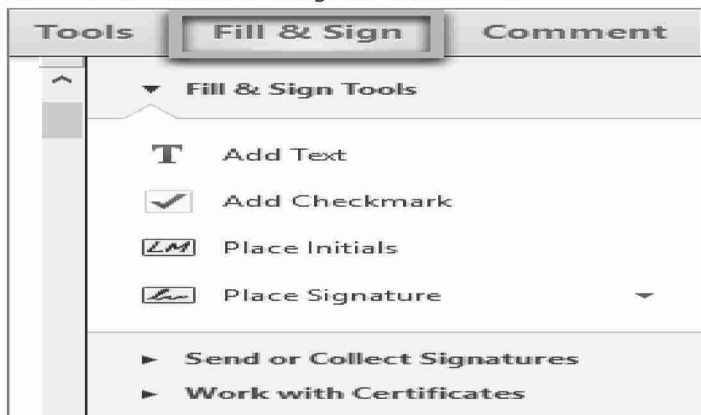
IDEA Tips


Adobe Acrobat Pro: Now that we have been relying more on Adobe for digital signatures, it is a good idea to get more familiarized with it. You can sign a document to attest to its contents or approve the document. Based on the intent, you can use different types of signatures. For this month's edition of IDEA Tips, we're focusing on some signature features in Adobe Acrobat.



Sign a PDF using your signature

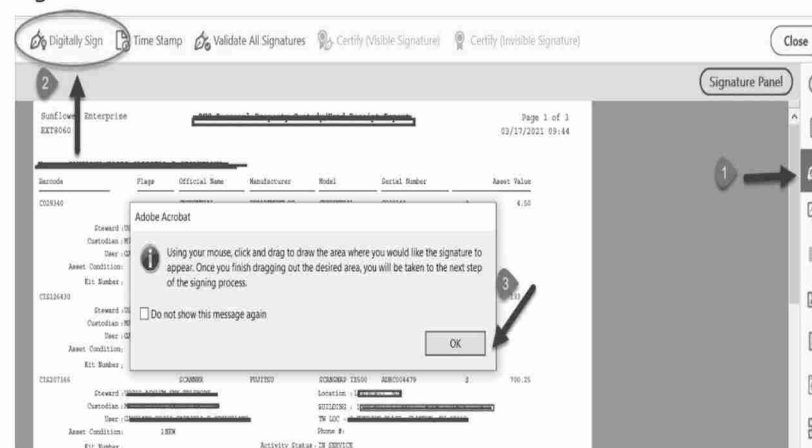
To sign a PDF, you can type, draw, or insert an image of your handwritten signature. You can also add text. When your document is complete, the signature and text become part of the PDF. To do so, open PDF in Acrobat and click Fill & Sign in the toolbar.



In the **Fill & Sign Tools** panel, click **Add Text**  to add text, such as your name, title, or date. Click in the document where you want to add the text and start typing.

Sign a PDF using Digital Signatures

Digital IDs are used for certificate security and digital signatures. Along the right side of the screen, you should see a list of icons. Select the one that looks like a green fountain pen with the word "Certificates" following the icon. Once you select this icon, a new sub-menu will appear above the document: click Digitally Sign. You will see the following window instructing you to create a rectangle where you want your signature to appear. Click "OK" and then scroll down to the appropriate signature section on the document.

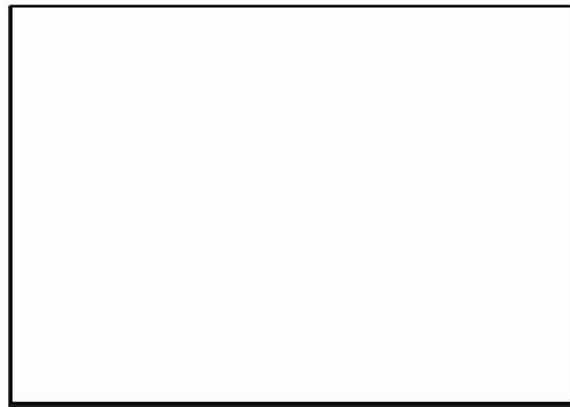


You may see one or more name options. Select the first correct option and then click "Continue." If the first option does not work, proceed to the next option until the correct one is selected. You will be prompted to enter your PIV card ID. A new window will appear showing your digital signature.

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Spotlight on the Field: **Asylum Office**

Meet Our Local Leader: Karin Hooks, Supervisory Management & Program Analyst



How long have you been at ZLA?

I've been at I was an Asylum Officer (AO) for 5 years, a Supervisory Asylum Officer (SAO) for 10 years, and Supervisory Management and Program Analyst (SMPA) for the last 4 years.

What brought you to the Asylum Division?

During law school, I received a grant to work at a non-profit organization. I had no interest in working in immigration law; however, out of convenience, I selected an immigration organization around the corner from my school. On one occasion, the interpreter canceled at the last minute and couldn't attend the asylum interview. Since I spoke Spanish fluently, they asked me to be the interpreter. Although the applicant was not granted asylum, I was impressed with the AO who was patient, empathetic, kind, professional, and gave the applicant every opportunity to present her claim. It was then I decided that asylum was my calling. I took a little detour working in private practice, but soon found my way to . Everything fell into place so perfectly; some may call it luck, but I call it destiny.

What do you enjoy most about a career in immigration?

I love that the job we do matters, and we can make a difference in people's lives. One of my favorite stories is about an applicant whom I had granted asylum. Out of the blue 10 years later, he called me to tell me he had become a citizen and thanked me for changing his life for the better. Even when I don't have direct contact with an applicant, I know that every file I touch represents a person and that my actions will impact that person and their families. I take that responsibility to heart to avoid delays and ensure a fair result.

What do you like doing outside of work?

Traveling, going to concerts, and spending time with family. During the pandemic we have started watching tv shows as a family. I especially like watching teenage tv shows with my daughters. I live within a 15-mile radius of my immediate family and we like to see each other frequently.

What does being a leader mean to you?

Supporting my amazing team! I try to lead by example and with compassion. We have many talented individuals with incredible potential. I try to coach them into unlocking their full potential to collectively achieve great success.

Spotlight on the Field: (b)(6) **Asylum Office**

Learn from Ashley Rice, Senior Asylum Officer



Happy September, everyone! I am excited to share my career development experiences with RAIO Ignite.

While at [redacted] both as an Asylum Officer and a Senior Asylum Officer, have had several opportunities to participate in various details that strengthen my adjudicative skills. In 2019, RAIO posted detail opportunities for [redacted] that would focus on using Human Centered Design to further develop ideas and themes that stemmed from recent staff interviews. What caught my eye about [redacted] was the opportunity to think in a different way from my normal adjudicative role. As part of the first round of [redacted] working groups, I worked with colleagues throughout RAIO on [redacted]. While on this detail, I received training in Human Centered Design as we started to flush out what is now, RAIO Connections. [redacted] Allison Bennett and I stayed on as part-time detailees to further develop Connections.

I believe that my participation in Ignite helped me secure a detail with RAIO’s Communications and Operational Readiness (COR) branch as I was able to highlight my recent experience with project development and Human Centered Design. Looking back on my [redacted] detail, I am proud to have had a hand in developing a resource that assists RAIO staff in their own professional development.

In July 2021, I started a detail with COR, working with the Strategic Communications team. Currently, I work closely with our communications partners in USCIS in developing and maintaining RAIO’s external communication posture. This includes coordinating meetings to discuss upcoming potentially notable changes in policy or procedure that affects stakeholders and assists in developing RAIO’s response. Another large portion of my detail is working on a new strategic communications plan that uses aspects of Human Centered Design. I am working to implement surveys and conduct informational interviews to determine a baseline for RAIO’s current communication to better inform further means of communication.

Spotlight on the Volunteerism: [redacted] Asylum Office

Community Service: Daria Ibn-Tamas, Asylum Officer

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Volunteerism and community involvement are an integral part of my life. An inspirational quote from Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman to serve in the U.S. Congress, serves as my roadmap:

“Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth.”

At a young age, I was acutely aware that I benefitted greatly from the kindness of strangers and understood the impact that one person can make. My mother worked double shifts but she would use her days off to canvass the neighborhood for donations in support of [redacted] and that instilled a sense of duty within me to one day help others.

Through faith-based organizations and Girl Scouts, I learned how to participate in activities that offered compassion, empathy and kindness. I

learned to be aware of problems in my community and seek solutions.

I have served as a board member for numerous organizations and community outreach programs. I am a life member of [redacted] Sorority, Incorporated, a sustainer member of [redacted] Incorporated. Other causes that I have contributed to include [redacted] and [redacted]

In recent years, my focus has shifted to involving children in the philanthropic process. Since the pandemic, I partnered with organizations that could connect me with children in low income, rural and tribal communities with limited access to computers or internet. I mentor children through programs that build self-esteem, leadership development and public speaking skills. I guide them to recognize community issues and empower them to view themselves as agents of change. Through an extra-curricular program called [redacted] in Los Angeles, I have observed the students blossom with confidence and it is a source of pride knowing that I have contributed to the next generation of volunteers.



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Feds Feed Families Names ZAR Silver Group Hall of Fame



The Arlington Asylum Office collected a total of 1,114 pounds of food during the Feds Feed Families Campaign this summer. Of that total, 299 pounds came from a combination of in-office and home-pick up donations, and 815 pounds were collected gleaning watermelons, peppers, jalapenos and tomatoes at JK Farms on August 21.

All donations benefited the Arlington Food Assistance Center. This year, ZAR’s amazing, hard-working team members each contributed to the effort by sending individual emails, setting up collection boxes, hanging fliers, doing in-home pickup, taking donated food to food banks, or participating in the gleaning event. It was truly a team effort!

A big congratulations to everyone at ZAR who donated and participated in the FFF campaign this year! Their significant contributions made a difference in combatting food insecurity in their local community.

Feds Feed Families highlighted ZAR’s tremendous giving by naming them a Silver Group Hall of Fame Recipient for contributing at least 750 pounds of food. Read the USCIS Connect article [here](#).

ZAR’s FFF 2021 Team:

- Lana Georgiou
- Letty Coffin
- William Cornelius
- Rosevony Duroseau
- Sharonda Futrell
- Liz O’Malley



HQ New Hires

Congratulations to all our newly selected Asylum HQ Employees

IDEA Branch:

- Rasec Vargas joined as an MPA on June 20th
- Victor Olivieri joined as an MPA on August 1st
- Marc Harbatkin joined as an MPA on August 29th
- Alyssa Xu was selected for IDEA Branch Chief and began her new role on August 30th
- Jeffrey Schwartz joined as Asylum Officer on September 26th

Management Branch:

- Emily Barry-Murphy joined as Asylum Officer on September 12th
- Eva Garon joined as Asylum Officer on September 26th

Operations Branch:

- Ebbled Joseph was promoted to Supervisory Asylum Officer on September 12th
- Lisa Seguro Andre joined as Asylum Officer on September 12th
- Mallory Lynn joined as Asylum Officer on September 12th
- Ben Nebo joined as Asylum Officer on September 12th

Quality Assurance Branch:

- Zoe Meier joined as Asylum Officer on August 29th
- Risa Katzen joined as Asylum Officer on September 12th
- Lara Jayasanker joined as Asylum Officer on September 26th

Training Branch:

- Cory Clements joined as Asylum Officer on September 12th
- Kelley Costello joined as Asylum Officer on September 26th
- Farihah Karim joined as Asylum Officer on September 26th