



by Robin H. Kobayashi

For one immigrant victim of domestic violence, the problems began shortly after she moved to America to marry a United States citizen. Because she feared deportation, she remained in this terribly abusive relationship. Her husband would launch into drunken violent rages during which he would threaten to deport her if she did not perform her wifely duties. He also harmed her with scissors, cut off all ties for help, and beat her. The severity of her beatings resulted in losses of consciousness and the need for surgery.

In 2003, several young Tongan men trusted that their uncle, a village elder, would give them a chance at living the American dream with promising jobs in Hawaii. Instead, they were illegally transported to Hawai'i, beaten, starved, housed in abhorrent conditions, and forced to engage in exhausting manual labor with minimal and unpredictable payment.

Domestic violence and human trafficking take victims domestically and from abroad. Immigrants are not only more vulnerable to such crimes, but traditional resources of assistance may not be accessible to them. For many immigrants, their lack of legal status is a powerful weapon that can be used against them. Many immigrant victims are afraid of being deported, and they face



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language and cultural barriers that are exacerbated in crisis situations. Moreover, they do not fully understand the American justice or immigration system. All of these factors create obstacles for immigrants in seeking assistance.

The Hawai'i Immigrant Justice Center (formerly known as Na Loio, "Justice Center") is the only non-profit entity in Hawaii that provides legal assistance and culturally-appropriate social service assistance to impoverished immi-

grants, especially those who are victims of human trafficking, domestic violence, sexual assault, and other major crimes. With legal status, these individuals can obtain basic tools critical to one's life, such as finding a job, housing, and even health insurance—fundamentals for escaping victimization.

The services of the Justice Center are needed now more than ever as reports of domestic violence and cases of human trafficking in Hawaii have dramatically increased. But, like so many non-profits today that comprise the legal safety net, the Justice Center is struggling to continue the current level of services. There is a concern that as the safety net stretches under greater pressure, more vulnerable people, particularly immigrants, will fall through. In spite of the economic hardships that confront the Justice Center, it remains committed to helping impoverished immigrants, especially those who are victims of abuse.

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