NAWC IMMIGRANT RELIEF FUND
The New American Welcome Center’s Immigrant Relief Fund was established in April 2019 thanks to a generous donation from The Chapel of Saint John the Divine. The purpose of the fund is to provide time-sensitive monetary assistance to local immigrants for one-time expenses. Between April 1, 2019 - February, 2020, the fund distributed over $2,300 aid to immigrants in Champaign County regardless of status. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the fund was primarily used to assist with legal needs and also provided interest-free microloans.

THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE
Thousands of immigrants throughout our community are on the frontlines right now from those in the healthcare sector (11.5%) to those fulfilling essential roles in grocery stores and restaurants. Others, like millions of other Americans, have lost their jobs and are really struggling.

The COVID-19 pandemic has a disparate impact on immigrant communities. Through our immigrant helpline and Immigrant Relief Fund, we’ve seen the economic devastation of the coronavirus on our immigrant community cascade from local immigrant business owners to grub hub delivery drivers. From naturalized citizens to undocumented residents, legal permanent residents to DACA students, none have been left unscathed. Those with work authorization find themselves battling to file unemployment benefit claims amidst long wait times. Meanwhile, undocumented and mixed status families have been cruelly cut out from stimulus checks (even while some have been deemed “essential” by the federal government) and are encountering hurdles as they attempt to access housing assistance and other forms of relief. Battling eligibility requirements and other obstacles at the state and local levels.

This is despite the fact that Immigrants in Champaign County, regardless of legal status, make significant contributions ($1.4 billion in 2016) to state and local taxes, including property, sales, and excise taxes. Immigrants in our community also support federal social programs like Social Security ($61.5 million in 2016) and Medicare ($16.6 million in 2016).

THE NEED
In just a little over 2 weeks (3/19/20-4/6/20), the New American Welcome Center has received 27 applications for emergency financial assistance totaling nearly $30,000. The average request is for $1,140 in assistance.

- Before Governor Pritzker’s Stay-At-Home Order on March 21: 3 applications (all on 3/19/20).
- 10-day period between March 21-March 30: 11 applications.
- Since extension of stay-at-home order on March 31: 13 applications

To date, we have distributed $4,253 in rent assistance to 10 households, but the need is urgent and rising.
Currently, the primary area of need is rental assistance, followed by food, then utilities, and other monthly bills (e.g. car payment request).

The monthly household income of most applicants is less than $1,000. The majority of applicants are not currently employed.
Applicants have suddenly lost their jobs and many have found themselves ineligible for current forms of financial relief and/or have not been able to get through the system quickly enough to meet the immediate demands of paying rent, not to mention challenges with continuing to provide food for their families, keep the lights on, and pay for water to maintain good hygiene amidst the pandemic.

**THE PROCESS**

1. **APPLICATION:** Applicants [apply online](#) using a Google form (available in English, Spanish, French, and Chinese).

2. **FOLLOW-UP:** NAWC Helpline Coordinator follows up with applicants to conduct intake and capture a fuller picture of their request and circumstance by asking the following questions:
   - Are you currently receiving any other type of assistance (e.g. benefits/charitable giving)?
   - How has you/your family been impacted by coronavirus? (Primary needs/concerns)
   - What specifically will the money be used for? Where did the estimate come from?
   - What are your current sources of income? Who contributes? What has changed?
   - Is there a date that you need assistance by?
   - Would you like to get connected to any of our other programs--legal services?
   - Have you taken the 2020 Census?

3. **INFORMATION & REFERRAL:** Often, additional needs are revealed through this process. The Helpline Coordinator references the NAWC’s [COVID-19 Resource Guide for Immigrants in C-U](#) to connect applicants to existing programs and resources for things like food or deferring bills; provides information about the stimulus checks, or how to apply to other funds for rental assistance where appropriate; and if eligible, how to access unemployment benefits, etc. We take care to ensure that the applicant has exhausted all other potential resources to preserve the mission of the IRF, which is one-time emergency assistance.

4. **DECISION:** The NAWC core staff team of 4 review the Helpline Coordinator’s recommendations and make a shared decision on the amount of assistance to be granted.

5. **DISTRIBUTION:** University Y business manager cuts a check from the Immigrant Relief Fund. The check is distributed according to what works best for the client (e.g. dropping it off at their home).

6. **ONGOING CASE MANAGEMENT:** We follow-up and continue working with the client as needed.