

# The RMIAN Reporter

## 10-Year Anniversary Edition



### RMIAN Celebrates Our 10th Anniversary

By Hiroshi Motomura, founding RMIAN Board Member

RMIAN started small, with just an idea. In early 1991, Dan Kowalski reached out to me when he was Colorado AILA Chapter chair. With his encouragement, I arranged for my immigration law students at Colorado Law to attend deportation hearings, some at the Aurora detention facility.

At one hearing, I met a young lawyer named Curt Heidtke, who represented pro bono a Romanian man who had applied for asylum. After the judge denied the claim, Curt wondered out loud, why aren't there more lawyers for these detainees? What kind of a system is this?

Dan and I started plotting. We thought immigration lawyers would take cases pro bono, and

that the law schools would give externship credit to law students who interviewed detainees.

Dan got the AILA Colorado Chapter to fold our idea into its Pro Bono Coordinating Committee. Ken Stern and David Simmons helped us arrange law student access at Wackenhut. Norm Aaronson and Lisa Green were founding committee members. The Denver Bar Association gave us a phone line for detainees to leave messages. I recruited a succession of talented Colorado and Denver law students, among them Juliet Basile, Tessa Alexander, Deirdre Mokos, Tracy Ashmore, Carol Lehman, Ron Wada, Dan Horne, Craig Iha, and Ari Weitzhandler.

The RMIAN model evolved slowly. We knew that lawyers would take pro bono cases if we could train them. The Colorado Bar Association agreed to host and publicize what became an annual training. These volunteers needed mentors, and a number of AILA members stepped up, including Ann Allott, Sandra Sal-trese, Tim Bakken, Bev Oserow, and Margaret Choi.

Our core group was small, but we were joined by talented young lawyers: Pat Medige, Laura Lichter, Jeff Joseph, and Laurie Herndon, plus former interns Carol Lehman and Ari Weitzhandler. They set up a system for immigration lawyers to meet with detainees to evaluate their cases.

Ellen Polsky joined us from the ESL Program at CU, to give invaluable help with interpreters. There were a lot of moving parts, but knowing that we all relied on each other kept us going, and turned an idea into an organization.

Our history as "RMIAN" started when a first-year law student at Colorado named Sun-Young Chi asked for my advice and help in finding a summer job. Around that time, I'd heard of a program that the American Bar Association had for "mini-grants" of \$5000 to support organizations that did pro bono work. Hmm...

Sun-Young and I applied for the grant, which became her summer

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### Reflections on RMIAN's Detention and Children's Programs

By Mekela Goehring, Executive Director

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Last month I was at the newly expanded immigration detention center in Aurora, CO meeting with a young woman. We had just finished a group know-your-rights presentation and she and I sat together to do an individual intake. In talking, we soon realized that we both had twelve month old babies at home. But she had been at the detention center for over a month, held without bond, and we both started crying as she described her feelings of helplessness and sorrow at this forced separation from her child. That evening, I drove home to my son, unable to shake the horror at a system that would arrest and detain a mother for a civil violation, leaving her baby in the hands of a neighbor. The next week, one of RMIAN's attorneys represented her

in a bond hearing, and she was able to bond out of the detention center.

Seven years after starting to work at RMIAN as a staff attorney, the injustice present in our daily work continues to tear at my soul. Yet I am surrounded by amazingly intelligent, compassionate, and dedicated co-workers, board members, and volunteers who are passionate about providing justice in a system filled with injustice. The stories we encounter on a daily basis, of children overcoming insurmountable obstacles of persecution and violence only to be arrested by immigration authorities and then expected to navigate an adversarial legal process on their own, defy the fundamental values of our American legal system.

RMIAN exists because a group of people—first a very small group of people and now a very large network of people—believe that providing lawyers in an immigration system, at the very least to children and to the detained, should be a right, not a privilege available only to those with the resources to pay. Under this purpose, RMIAN's work has brought together hundreds of men, women, and children from the most unlikely circumstances to work for a more just society. While we continue to represent individuals, we also work for a day when children are not forced to represent themselves in immigration court and mothers are not put in immigration detention and separated from their babies. ◻

## RMIAN Anniversary

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job. By the time Sun-Young graduated, she had funding for a part-time job. Holland and Hart had hosted our Coordinating Committee meetings, and now handled our incorporation as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. But we needed a name to go with the idea.

We wanted to serve the region, hence “Rocky Mountain,” and we wanted to mobilize others, so “Network.” And we were drawn to an acronym, fitting for a deportation defense project, that could be pronounced “remain.” And so RMIAN it became.

That’s RMIAN’s “pre-history.” Recounting the past decade is better left for others, so I’ll hit

fast forward. Sun-Young became our first employee and our first Executive Director. Mekela Goehring became our first staff attorney, and later our second Executive Director. We were chosen as a Legal Orientation Presentation site by the Department of Justice. Kristin Petri joined us as an Equal Justice Works Fellow to start the chil-

dren’s project, now integral to our work.

We’ve grown and matured a great deal over these past ten years. Looking back, it’s clear that RMIAN’s values are the legacy of our founding commitment to a simple yet profound idea about a way to help the immigrant community. ◻

## The 5th Annual AILA Immigrant Liberty Awards

On June 10, 2010, the Colorado Chapter of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) hosted the 5th annual Immigrant Liberty Awards to benefit the Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN).

The Master of Ceremonies was Raj Chohan, former reporter and host of KBDI’s flagship public affairs roundtable “Colorado Inside Out” and current attorney at Baker Hostetler.

The Immigrant Liberty Awards were created to recognize the outstanding achievements of

immigrants and those who advocate on behalf of the immigrant community. Honorees have demonstrated their dedication to improving the lives of immigrants, either through direct advocacy, affecting public policy



*Ricardo Perez, 2010 Immigrant Liberty Award Recipient*

or providing a positive and inspiring example.

Awards were presented to the following honorees:

- **Ved Nanda**—Professor, University of Denver Sturm College of Law
- **Pedro Calderón Michel**—News Anchor, Noticias Univision Colorado
- **Ricardo Perez**—Executive Director, Hispanic Affairs Project
- **Constantina Tomescu-Dita**—Olympic Marathon Gold Medalist

AILA and RMIAN also awarded the second annual Pro Bono Service Award to **Regina Germain**, Adjunct Professor of Asylum Law at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law, for her commitment to justice for all people, especially the most vulnerable immigrant populations in Colorado.

A sincere thank you to all our event sponsors and volunteers for making the 2010 Immigrant Liberty Awards a success.

Congratulations to this year’s award recipients! ◻

## RMIAN’s 2009 Detention and Children’s Program Accomplishments:

- The **Detention Program** provided 203 know-your-rights presentations at the GEO/Aurora facility to 2,682 men and women in immigration detention in Colorado
  - Provided intensive pro se support to 229 detained men and women fighting their cases on their own
  - Provided 1,541 individual intakes to detained men and women
- Staff attorneys represented 15 detained men and women
- Referred out 67 new detention cases to pro bono attorneys, in addition to ongoing cases
- The **Children’s Program** represented 95 children, conducted 129 intakes and consultations, and referred 23 cases to pro bono attorneys
- RMIAN gave 51 community presentations and trainings to 1,422 community members

## RMIAN’s Project Updates

- The **Anti-Human Trafficking Project**, in its third and final year of funding at RMIAN, continues to provide free legal services for detained adult and immigrant child survivors of human trafficking. Thus far in 2010, RMIAN has identified and assisted more than 20 victims of human trafficking and has recently seen an increase in the number of referrals involving trafficked youth. For more information, contact [kwalentik@rmian.org](mailto:kwalentik@rmian.org).
- RMIAN launched the **Pilot Social Service Project** in January 2010 to provide wrap-around supportive services to vulnerable clients in immigration detention who are represented by volunteer attorneys. Rachel Boyle Lee-Ashley (Director of Programs, MSW) is working with Megan Hope, a MSW graduate student from the University of Denver, to provide more holistic services to clients while in detention and to develop plans and referrals for services upon release. For more information, contact [rboyle@rmian.org](mailto:rboyle@rmian.org).

## How has RMIAN helped you?

The importance of an organization such as RMIAN, of which there are few, was demonstrated in my pro bono case with RMIAN in 2006. My client was an early-twenties Cambodian male, who had undoubtedly gone through a rough patch in his life with respect to criminal activities. However, deportation to Cambodia, where he did not know people, the language, how to get a job, the political structure, currency denominations, and the list goes on, was simply not acceptable. We fought for several months to develop my client's case, and ultimately to present it to the judge through many tears and uncontrolled sobbing by his family. When the judge determined that my client would get to stay in the only country he had ever known, the feeling of elation, accomplishment and justice were unlike any I've had in the four years of practicing since.

*Derek Blass — Board Member*

RMIAN has helped by identifying needs and training advocates for the most vulnerable in our society. RMIAN's advocacy and mentoring has allowed our attorneys to understand and help immigrant children who have suffered abuse, neglect or violence. RMIAN is invaluable to the Denver community in ensuring due process, fairness and humane treatment for immigrant populations in Colorado. We are hon-

ored to partner with RMIAN in this endeavor.

*Candace Whitaker  
Faegre & Benson LLP*

RMIAN has taught me that a small, non-profit organization can house very talented attorneys who accomplish great things on behalf of a vulnerable population group. And RMIAN has inspired me to become one of those attorneys.

*Grace Chisholm — Intern*

Doing an internship at RMIAN reaffirmed my desire to practice immigration law and specifically helped to develop a passion for working with those in removal proceedings.

RMIAN is an essential organization because it provides the only legal information and assistance most detainees receive before having to maneuver a complex immigration system alone. Also, without the Children's Program, many undocumented children would not be able to obtain their legal status.

*Kris Walentik — Legal Assistant/Anti-Human Trafficking Outreach Specialist*

It is important to have an organization such as RMIAN in Colorado because it helps immigrants have a better life not only for them but family as well. I'm very impressed with the first rate re-

sults you guys get and I'm very proud of you. I'm sure many others are just as proud of you too. Thank you for everything and congratulations on your 10-Year Anniversary!"

*Aymen — RMIAN Client*

RMIAN is the best organization I've ever dealt with. RMIAN helped me at a time when my life was in pieces, when I was at my lowest, in an immigration detention center. They gave me hope the day I was released from the detention center and I was able to see my children and family after 2 long months-- that was truly the happiest day in my life. By helping me become a legal permanent resident in the United States, RMIAN gave me a sense of belonging and security. I now have restored faith in myself and have been able to do more and go further than what I initially believed. When RMIAN helped me get a work permit for the first time, it was a dream for me, as I no longer had to apply for odd jobs without benefits. I now work at the Department of Human Services in Colorado Springs and am able to support my children. My words are not just on my behalf: I thank you for all people who were or are in a similar situation like I was. RMIAN made me feel they cared about the importance of families. They were very understanding, patient and were always eager to try their best to fight for me. Mekela is a won-

derful, amazing and gifted individual and I appreciate her so much in my life, she is an Angel. I wish from the bottom of my heart this organization can be recognized internationally and I pray they continue helping other people from different countries and communities.

*Miriam — RMIAN Client*

A veteran immigration lawyer knows firsthand how complex and unforgiving our system can be—all the more so for children, asylum seekers and those in detention. Before RMIAN, these individuals would have been lucky to have even the slightest idea of how the immigration courts worked or how to defend themselves from deportation—and only a very fortunate few would have been matched with pro bono counsel. Fortunately, over the last decade, RMIAN has evolved from being a mere volunteer clearinghouse to a champion for this vulnerable population. Their committed staff and supporters have earned their "wings"—scores of families and individuals owe their lives and freedom to their care and dedication. I am proud to have been there from the beginning, and look forward to collaborating in the years to come. Congratulations—and thank you—for your decade of service.

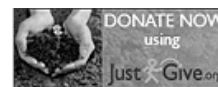
*Laura Lichter  
Volunteer Attorney*

## Thank You for Your Support

RMIAN wishes to thank the following contributors for their support in 2009-2010:

- Department of Justice/Vera Institute of Justice
- Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement
- Colorado Lawyers Trust Account Foundation (COLTAF)
- The Denver Foundation
- Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Services
- Presbyterian Church USA
- Faegre & Benson, LLP
- The Joseph Family Foundation
- The Anschutz Family Foundation
- The Jared Polis Foundation
- Buck Foundation
- University of Denver Sturm College of Law
- Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP
- Qwest
- American Immigration Lawyers Association Colorado (AILA)
- Stern & Curray LLC
- Elkind Alterman Harston PC
- Lau & Choi, PC
- Entravision Communications
- The Large Law Firm
- Lichter & Associates
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- The Irwin Law Firm
- And many other generous donors

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## Honoring our Volunteers

A heartfelt thank you to the following **Volunteer Attorneys** who recently donated their time and expertise to represent RMIAN clients pro bono:

Amy Diaz, Andrew Lower, Andy Schmidt, Ann England, Annie Harrington, Beverly Muhaso, Blair Daniels, Brett Myers, Bryon Large, Calvin Lee, Cassie Ta, Charles Pelky, David Collins, Dean Batchelder, Derek White, Donna Pryor, Douglas Arbuthnot, Evan Pope, Jennifer McGinn, Jessica Greene, Joe Gilmore, Josh Norkin, Karen McCarthy, Karlyn Shorb, Katie Biber Chen, Katie Glynn, Katie Speer, Kristin Karr, Lara Nochomovitz, Leslie Peden, Mari Matsumoto, Maria Monclova, Maria Valdez, Marie Williams,

Marika Frias, Matthew Cooper, Matthew Stromquist, Maya Wilbourne, Megan Hall, Melinda Pasquini, Michael McCarroll, Michelle Albert, Norm Aaronson & CU Law School Civil Law Clinic, Peter Smith, Phil Barber, Reed Morgan, Saira Malik, Sarah Stettner, Shelley Wittevrongel, Talvi McCuskey, Tamika Palmer, Thomas Carroll, Tomasita Cisneros, Veronica Mabry, Warren Myers, and Whitney Michak.

Our 2010-2012 **Pro Bono Mentoring Panel** is comprised of Colorado's finest immigration attorneys. We are extremely thankful for their willingness to share their knowledge: Joy Athanasiou, Mark Barr, Lisa Battan, Catherine Chan, Sarah Doll, Regina Germain,

Aaron Hall, Megan Hall, Bryony Heise, Brad Hendrick, Christine Hernandez, John Huss, Jessica Kunevicius, Mari Matsumoto, Bernadette Ginger McGuire, Francesca Ramos, Alyssa Reed, Jennifer Kain Rios, Kelly Ryan, Maria Valdez, and Emily White.

**Interns** are essential to the RMIAN team. We are thankful for their time and commitment this year:  
 Spring 2010: Gracie Chisholm, Vanessa Conway, Courtney Butler  
 Summer 2010: Haley Farrar, Sarah French, Cori Marsden-Alonso, Kris Walentik  
 Fall 2010: Ashley Shannon, John Saint, Kim Tremblay, Megan Hope, Michelle Doherty, Quintero Millan.

## RMIAN's Extended Family

### 2010 Staff:



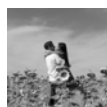
Executive Director Mekela Goehring's son Ryler celebrated his first birthday!



Managing Attorney Kristin Petri's daughter Audrey turned two.



Director of Programs Rachel Boyle married William Lee-Ashley.



Staff Attorney Krishma Parsad announced her engagement to Robert Mastroianni.



Kris Walentik joined RMIAN as a staff member!



Staff Attorney Andrea Gomez Oxman's daughter Oslo was born in June.

### 2010 Board Members:

Patricia Medige — *Chair*  
 Hiroshi Motomura — *Secretary*  
 Victor Ezidinma — *Treasurer*  
 Derek Blass  
 Ellen Polsky  
 Megan Hall