



## **MY SISTERS' PLACE**

### **Contact Information**

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### **Description of Organization**

My Sisters' Place provides legal services to victims of domestic violence, trafficking, stalking and sexual assault in Westchester County. The Family Law Unit assists domestic violence victims in family law matters such as orders of protection, custody, visitation, child support, and appeals. My Sisters' Place also provides limited services in the area of divorce -- My Sisters' Place runs a pro se uncontested divorce clinic. The Immigration Unit assists immigrant victims of domestic violence, trafficking, stalking and sexual assault with Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Self-petitions, Battered Spouse Waivers, U-Visas, T-Visas, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, public benefits and other immigration matters.

### **Volunteer Opportunities**

#### **Pro Bono Attorney – Family Law Practice**

My Sisters' Place is seeking *pro bono* attorneys to assist its Family Law Unit with motion practice in Westchester Family Court, mainly with child support cases. Domestic violence victims can seek child support from their abusers in their local Family Court. Using a formula set forth in New York State's Child Support Standards Act, victims may also demonstrate the need for childcare expenses, extracurricular activities, and unreimbursed medical expenses. *Pro bono* attorneys will work with the client to complete the required Financial Disclosure Affidavit and develop the case, including evaluating the evidence, conducting discovery, and representing the victim at the child support hearings.

#### **Pro Bono Attorney – Immigration Practice**

My Sisters' Place is seeking *pro bono* attorneys to assist its Immigration Unit prepare Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Self-petitions and Battered Spouse Waivers for its clients. Battered immigrants who need to rely on their U.S. Citizen or Legal Permanent Residents spouses to petition for legal immigration status are vulnerable to abuse. Quite often, these victims know little about their rights in the U.S. and their abusive spouses control them with

threats of deportation. Immigrant women with U.S. citizen children are particularly vulnerable to this abuse and intimidation.

A battered immigrant married to a U.S. Citizen or Legal Permanent Resident can obtain legal immigration status by filing a VAWA Self-petition or Battered Spouse Waiver. This requires approximately 40 hours of work over the course of 3-6 months. Based on the information gathered from the initial intake at My Sisters' Place as well as the attorneys' interviews with the client, the attorney drafts the client's supporting affidavit, which is the most important part of the case. In this affidavit, the client provides a detailed account of the courtship, marriage, abuse and escape from the batterer. The attorney also gathers additional evidence for the application, including police reports regarding the abuse, criminal and family court orders of protection, and affidavits from friends and family members. The Managing Attorney of the Pro Bono Project at My Sisters' Place reviews and revises drafts of client affidavits and completed immigration forms and other materials necessary to case. This one-on-one supervision ensures both a rewarding experience for the volunteer attorney and high-quality work product.

#### Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Self-petitions and Battered Spouse Waivers

Battered immigrants who need to rely on their U.S. Citizen or Legal Permanent Resident spouses to petition for legal immigration status are more vulnerable to abuse than their American counterparts. Quite often, these victims know little about their rights in the U.S. and their abusive spouses control them with threats of deportation. Immigrant women with U.S. citizen children are particularly vulnerable to this abuse and intimidation.

#### U Visa Clinic

Undocumented immigrant crime victims are often reluctant to report crime to the police and cooperate with law enforcement for fear that they will be deported and fear of reprisals against family members in the U.S. and in their home country. As a result, criminals remain at large and crimes go unpunished.

The U Visa was created in 2000 to provide safety and security for undocumented crime victims, granting temporary immigration status to victims who report crime and assist law enforcement in the prosecution of those crimes against them. Within three years of being granted a U Visa, the crime victim family members are eligible to apply for legal permanent residence ("a green card").

#### U Visa Adjustment (Green Card) Clinic

Within three years of being granted a U Visa (see above description of U Visa Clinic), an immigrant crime victim and qualified family members are eligible to apply for legal permanent residence ("a green card").

#### Pro Se Uncontested Divorce Workshop

MSP's Pro Se Uncontested Divorce Workshop helps low-income domestic violence survivors file uncontested divorces. Although they may live apart from their abusers for a number of years and have successfully litigated or negotiated custody, visitation and support issues, many domestic violence victims cannot take that final step to sever their legal relationship to their abuser. They simply cannot afford to hire a matrimonial attorney and few free legal services programs exist to handle divorces in New York.