

ELISENDA MONJAS ALBERDI

Portfolio

CERTIFICATE OF
INTERNATIONALIZATION

Exchange Programm in New
York City, FALL 2024



CONTENTS

REFLECTIVE PORTFOLIO	2
<hr/>	
INTRODUCTION	2
INTERCULTURAL EXPERIENCES: BRIDGING CULTURES IN QUEENS	3
METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE	4
CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS: NAVIGATING COMPLEX REALITIES	5
PERSONAL GROWTH: LESSONS IN EMPATHY AND ADVOCACY	6
THE BROADER IMPACT OF GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY	8
CONCLUSION	9
ANNEX 1 – ESSAY	11
<hr/>	
FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE: NONPROFITS IN THE MAKING OF IMMIGRANT RIGHTS	11
INTRODUCTION	12
THE ANSOB CENTER AND ITS MISSION	13
PERSPECTIVES FROM MAKING <i>IMMIGRANT RIGHTS REAL</i>	16
ANNEX 2 – JOURNAL OF MY INTERHSIP	23
<hr/>	
INSIGHTS FROM MY INTERNSHIP: MY JOURNEY AT THE ANSOB CENTER	23
SEPTEMBER 10, 2024 - BEFORE THE ADVENTURE BEGINS: MY INTERN DIARIES	23
SEPTEMBER 11, 2024 - FIRST INSIGHTS AS AN INTERN	23
SEPTEMBER 18, 2024 – A DAY FILLED WITH EMOTION	25
SATURDAY 21, 2024 - CULTURAL CELEBRATION	26
SEPTEMBER 25, 2024 - REFLECTIONS ON “THE ALIEN”	27
OCTOBER 2, 2024 - MAKING IMMIGRANTS RIGHTS REAL IN DEMOCRACY	29
OCTOBER 9, 2024 - BREAKING PREJUDICES	31
OCTOBER 16, 2024 - THE ANSOB’S LIMITATIONS	32
OCTOBER 23, 2024 - A DAY OF GRATITUDE AND IMPACT	34
OCTOBER 30, 2024 - COMPARING SPAIN AND NEW YORK:	35
NOVEMBER 6, 2024 - FACING SETBACKS	36
NOVEMBER 13, 2024 - POST-ELECTION UNCERTAINTY	37
NOVEMBER 21, 2024 - GUIDING THROUGH THE N-400 PROCESS	38
NOVEMBER 27, 2024 – A DAY FULL OF CHALLENGES AND REFLECTIONS	39
DECEMBER 2, 2024 - THE MEANING OF CITIZENSHIP	42
DECEMBER 4, 2024 - BRIDGING BARRIERS THROUGH LANGUAGE AND SUPPORT	43
DECEMBER 11, 2024 – A HEARTFELT FAREWELL TO THE ANSOB CENTER	44

EUTOPIA Certificate of Internationalisation (EUCI)

Reflective Portfolio

Elisenda Monjas Alberdi

Universitat Pompeu Fabra

Introduction

As a 20-year-old Philosophy, Politics, and Economics student at Pompeu Fabra University (UPF), I embarked on an exchange program to Queens College in New York City during the fall semester of 2024. This exchange gave me the unique opportunity to immerse myself in one of the most dynamic and diverse cities in the world. It was during my time at Queens College that I discovered the Ansob Center for Refugees and Immigrants, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting immigrants and refugees through services such as legal aid, English classes, and citizenship preparation.

During my four months at the Ansob Center, my main responsibilities included tutoring immigrants preparing for the American citizenship test, assisting with N-400 applications, and collaborating with the team on outreach activities such as community events and multilingual resources. These tasks not only allowed me to support individuals on their journeys toward citizenship but also to witness the systemic challenges faced by immigrant communities. The Ansob Center's mission to empower individuals and foster a sense of belonging resonated deeply with me, as it became evident how vital their work is in bridging the gaps left by public policy and offering both practical and emotional support.

This portfolio reflects on my personal and professional growth during this period, emphasizing intercultural awareness, methodological insights, and the profound impact of grassroots advocacy. Additionally, I have attached the projects I completed during my internship, which further



illustrate the depth of my experience. These include a journal documenting my daily reflections and an essay analyzing how nonprofits make immigrant rights real, examining their political impact in relation to Els de Graauw's research. Together, these materials provide a comprehensive view of my work and the skills I developed at the Ansob Center.

Intercultural Experiences: Bridging Cultures in Queens

Queens, the most ethnically diverse borough in New York City, became the backdrop for my exploration of cultural plurality. At the Ansob Center, I encountered immigrants from over 120 countries, each with unique stories, struggles, and aspirations. These interactions deepened my appreciation for cultural diversity and underscored the importance of fostering inclusive spaces.

One particularly enriching experience was my participation in Egyptian Celebration Day. As I observed the vibrant display of traditional music, food, and clothing, I witnessed the power of cultural preservation amidst the challenges of assimilation. The Ansob Center's emphasis on celebrating heritage—through multilingual outreach and cultural fairs—highlighted the role of nonprofits in supporting not just legal and economic needs but also the emotional and cultural well-being of immigrants.

In contrast, my reflections often turned to Spain, where language acquisition for immigrants is more systematically integrated into education systems. Language is not merely a tool for communication but a fundamental right that enables individuals to access opportunities, assert their identity, and participate fully in society. Comparing the linguistic isolation faced by many long-term immigrants in New York to the relative linguistic assimilation in Spain revealed systemic gaps in U.S. support structures. Without adequate language support, immigrants can feel excluded, silenced, and unable to navigate critical systems such as education, healthcare, or legal processes. Organizations like Ansob play a crucial role in addressing these gaps by offering English classes that empower individuals to engage with their communities and assert their rights. These efforts underscore the idea that language proficiency is not a privilege but an essential right, critical for ensuring equality and dignity for all.

Methodological Reflections: From Theory to Practice

During my internship, I found myself drawing on Els de Graauw's framework in *Making Immigrant Rights Real*, which outlines three strategies nonprofits use to empower immigrants: administrative advocacy, cross-sector collaboration, and strategic framing. The Ansoh Center not only exemplified these strategies but also showcased the deeply human impact of these efforts, sparking personal reflection on how social change is cultivated.

Administrative advocacy at Ansoh was not just a bureaucratic process—it was a lifeline for clients navigating complex systems. From guiding clients through the N-400 application to offering tailored tutoring for citizenship exams, the Center transformed abstract rights into actionable steps. One particularly moving case was a single mother who struggled with English. Despite systemic barriers and personal hardships, our combined efforts enabled her to gain confidence. Witnessing her progress illuminated the importance of advocacy that meets people where they are, empowering them to overcome obstacles with dignity.

Cross-sector collaboration at Ansoh was a testament to the power of community-driven efforts. Partnerships with organizations specializing in domestic violence support and literacy programs extended the Center's reach beyond its immediate capacities. Observing these alliances taught me that addressing multifaceted challenges requires not just resources but a shared vision of inclusivity and solidarity. It made me reflect on how nonprofits serve as connective tissue, bridging gaps that governments often overlook.

Strategic framing at Ansoh went beyond emphasizing diversity and inclusion; it highlighted the transformative power of belonging. Citizenship was not merely presented as a legal milestone but as a pathway to full societal participation. Events like Egyptian Celebration Day and multilingual outreach weren't just celebrations—they were affirmations of immigrants' value to society. These moments made me realize that

integration is not about assimilation but about embracing multiculturalism as a strength. I came to see how framing immigrant rights as societal enrichment challenges exclusionary narratives and fosters deeper connections within communities.

These experiences collectively deepened my understanding of what it means to advocate for rights in a way that is both strategic and compassionate. The Ansoh Center did more than embody theoretical frameworks; it breathed life into them, reminding me that social progress is rooted in empathy, collaboration, and the belief that every individual deserves to be seen, heard, and valued.



Challenges and Limitations: Navigating Complex Realities

While the Ansoh Center’s work was deeply inspiring, it also revealed the daunting systemic and resource limitations that often hinder progress. Many clients faced barriers that stretched far beyond the Center’s capacity to address—economic pressures, limited access to education, and the perpetual challenge of balancing work, family, and self-improvement. One particularly poignant case involved a woman who struggled to prepare for her citizenship test. Despite her determination, the weight of her responsibilities left her with little time to study, and I felt both inspired by her resilience and frustrated by the systemic inequities that made her journey so arduous. Yet, even in such cases, we never gave up. At Ansoh, we remained resilient for her, constantly

reminding her of her worth and potential. When someone is shown that another person believes in them, sees their value, and trusts in their ability to succeed, it can make all the difference.

Her story reminded me of how often society's structures fail those who are already marginalized, emphasizing the urgent need for reforms that prioritize accessibility and fairness. But it also underscored the power of compassion and perseverance. By refusing to give up, we sent a message not just of support but of belief—a reminder that no matter how overwhelming the obstacles, they are not alone in their journey. These moments taught me that our resilience is a source of strength for our clients, and through our trust in them, we help them see their own potential.

The challenges extended beyond individual cases to the Center itself. Its reliance on federal and city funding left it vulnerable to political shifts, a reality that became starkly clear during the post-election uncertainty in November. Yet, amidst these challenges, I witnessed the unwavering dedication of the Ansob team. Their resilience—bolstered by New York City's Sanctuary City policies—was a testament to the power of localized advocacy. This strength showed me that even in politically volatile environments, grassroots efforts can provide a steadfast source of hope and action. The work of Ansob illuminated not just the gaps in systemic support but also the immense potential for community-based initiatives to drive meaningful change. It reinforced my belief that, despite obstacles, compassion and collective effort can make an enduring difference in people's lives.

Personal Growth: Lessons in Empathy and Advocacy

My time at the Ansob Center profoundly reshaped my understanding of intercultural dynamics, advocacy, and my own capacity for growth. I went into this experience expecting to learn how to assist others, but I emerged having learned just as much about myself. One transformative moment occurred during a tutoring session with a client who had a criminal record. Initially apprehensive and burdened by my own biases, I quickly realized the depth of his kindness and determination. It was humbling to see how wrong my assumptions had been, and this experience dismantled my prejudices in

a way that I could never have anticipated. It reinforced a principle that has stayed with me: every individual, regardless of their past, deserves dignity, support, and a chance to redefine their future.

Working with clients from diverse backgrounds also deepened my empathy and adaptability. Whether communicating in French with a Haitian client or connecting with Spanish-speaking immigrants, I realized how powerful linguistic and cultural fluency can be in building trust and forging meaningful relationships. Beyond practical communication, these moments made me reflect on how language serves as a bridge—not just to understanding but to connection, inclusion, and empowerment. I began to see that my role wasn't just to teach or guide but to truly listen, to adapt my approach to each individual's unique needs, and to ensure they felt seen and valued.

This journey was about far more than gaining professional skills. It became a moral awakening, a realization that advocacy isn't just about systems or policies; it's about the human connections we foster along the way. I left Ansob not just more informed but profoundly transformed, carrying with me the knowledge that small, intentional acts of compassion can ripple outwards, creating change far beyond what we can immediately see.



The Broader Impact of Grassroots Advocacy

Reflecting on the Ansob Center's mission, I was struck by its profound ability to fill the systemic gaps left by federal and local policies. The Center's work—offering free legal aid, English classes, and cultural programming—transformed abstract ideals of immigrant rights into tangible realities. For many of the individuals I worked with, these services were not just helpful; they were life-changing. One client, for example, shared that her English lessons not only prepared her for the citizenship test but also gave her the confidence to advocate for her children in school. Hearing her story made me realize that grassroots advocacy extends far beyond addressing immediate needs—it lays the groundwork for long-term empowerment and societal inclusion.

What stood out most during my time at Ansob was how it challenged exclusionary narratives and fostered a sense of belonging. In a world where globalization can homogenize and marginalize cultural identities, organizations like Ansob serve as vital custodians of diversity. They show that integration and cultural preservation are not in conflict but deeply interconnected. By celebrating heritage while fostering societal participation, Ansob creates spaces where immigrants feel valued and visible. Participating in Egyptian Celebration Day, for instance, was a poignant reminder of how such events affirm identities and build bridges between communities.

Iman, Ansob's executive director, captured this ethos perfectly when she said, "Citizenship is not just about legal status; it's about belonging." This philosophy deeply resonated with me, as I saw firsthand how belonging is cultivated not through policy alone but through intentional, compassionate action. Grassroots advocacy, as I witnessed at Ansob, is about meeting people where they are and showing them that their struggles and stories matter. It is about making the intangible—such as dignity, acceptance, and inclusion—feel real and achievable.

This experience solidified my belief in the transformative power of localized efforts. Advocacy is not just a grand ideal; it is a series of small but deliberate acts that ripple outward, touching lives in ways we cannot always quantify. Ansob's work reminded me that even in the face of systemic challenges, community-based initiatives can create

profound change. It inspired a renewed commitment in me to approach advocacy with empathy and persistence, knowing that by fostering belonging and visibility, we can transform individual lives and, by extension, society as a whole.

Conclusion

The conclusion of my internship at the Ansob Center marks a deeply reflective moment. This experience has been transformative, altering my perspective on what truly matters in international relations and humanitarian work. Initially, I envisioned my career centered around prestigious organizations like the United Nations or embassies. However, my time at Ansob has taught me that meaningful, lasting impact can come from smaller, community-driven initiatives. The Center's dedication to assisting immigrants on a personal level has profoundly shaped my understanding of how to create real change.



Throughout my internship, I saw firsthand how the Ansob Center's efforts—whether through legal aid, English classes, or cultural preservation—help immigrants navigate complex systems and claim their rights. The work of the Center goes beyond merely providing services; it creates a community where immigrants feel seen, heard, and supported. This stands in stark contrast to the often impersonal, bureaucratic nature of larger organizations.

As I reflect on the lasting impact of my work here, I am reminded of the gratitude expressed by the immigrants I helped, whose stories will stay with me forever. This internship has deepened my appreciation for the vital role nonprofits like Ansob play in bridging the gaps left by federal and local policies, offering support that often goes beyond what government programs can provide. The work of Ansob is a powerful testament to the difference grassroots organizations can make.

Without a doubt, this internship has reshaped my career aspirations. I no longer prioritize prestigious titles or organizations, but instead, I value the opportunity to make a tangible difference in people’s lives. Ansob has shown me the importance of supporting marginalized communities and the profound impact that small, everyday actions can have. This experience will stay with me as a foundation for future endeavors, and I am deeply grateful for the chance to be part of such an inspiring organization.

I don’t know what the future holds. I’ve been given the chance to return to work at Ansob, and while that feels like the most natural choice right now, New York has taught me that life is unpredictable. New opportunities arise, and they can completely change the course of your plans. For now, though, I know that these four months have been some of the happiest of my life.

Every day at 2819 Steinway Street, I felt at home. In Queens College, I found a community that valued me. In this big city, I discovered how small places and moments can have the greatest impact. This experience has changed my life in ways I can’t fully describe, and I will always look back on it with immense gratitude.

Thank you, Ansob Center, thank you, New York, thank you, Queens College, and thank you to everyone who made this journey so meaningful.



ANNEX 1 – ESSAY

From Policy to Practice: Nonprofits in the Making of Immigrant Rights

Elisenda Monjas Alberdi
Department of Political Science
PSCI 298.3: Independent Intern NYC & Around World
Dr. Keena Lipsitz
December 13, 2024

INTRODUCTION

Immigrant rights in the United States remain an ongoing challenge, often caught between federal policy failures and local community needs. In this gap, nonprofit organizations play a key role, acting as lifelines for immigrants seeking stability, equity, and inclusion. The Ansob Center for Refugees and Immigration, located in the heart of Queens embodies this mission. With its focus on legal aid, English classes, and citizenship preparation, the center works to empower immigrants by transforming abstract rights into tangible opportunities.

Reflecting on my four-month internship at the Ansob Center, I have come to appreciate how small organizations can create profound impacts. It was here that I saw immigrants navigate complex systems, both to gain citizenship and to secure a sense of belonging in a society that often marginalizes them. From helping clients understand the intricacies of the N400 application process to addressing language barriers, the Ansob Center stands as evidence of the transformative power of localized, grassroots efforts.

Drawing from Els de Graauw's analysis in *Making Immigrant Rights Real*, my personal experiences, client interactions, and two interviews—one with Iman Mehelba, the Executive of the center, and another with a client who passed her naturalization test after receiving our services—this essay will evaluate how the Ansob Center mirrors and diverges from broader nonprofit strategies in addressing immigrant needs, assessing its success in empowering immigrants with accessible legal and social services.

Within a reality where immigrants face mounting challenges, organizations like the Ansob Center offer hope. This essay seeks to highlight how such nonprofits not only fill the gaps left by federal policies but also redefine what it means to make immigrant rights real.

THE ANSOB CENTER AND ITS MISSION

The Ansob Center for Refugees and Immigrants supports immigrants and refugees in navigating life in the United States through free legal aid, English classes, and citizenship preparation. At its mission, the organization aims to empower individuals with the tools they need to build stable and dignified lives. The executive director, Iman Mehelba, describes the Center’s approach as holistic, emphasizing not just legal support but also community-building and cultural integration — it is a home for many, fostering a sense of belonging.

Founded as an affiliate of St. Rita’s Center in the 1990s, the Ansob Center initially served a small, local community of immigrants. Over time, it expanded its reach, evolving into a key organization for diverse immigrant populations across Queens. As of 2024, the Center has assisted over 10,000 immigrants, refugees, and asylees from more than 121 countries, helping them secure better jobs, integrate into society, and achieve their dreams. Its unique approach lies in its dual focus: providing practical legal and social services while simultaneously creating a welcoming environment where immigrants feel seen, respected, and supported. This duality is particularly evident in its community-building activities, such as cultural events and support groups, which complement its formal services.

The Center relies heavily on federal and city grants, such as USCIS funding, to offer free services that are often prohibitively expensive elsewhere. While these grants sustain operations, reliance on external funding creates challenges, particularly during political uncertainties. To address this, Ansob also engages local stakeholders, community support, and donations, ensuring resilience even during financial strain.

Evaluating Success

The Ansob Center’s success can be measured not only through qualitative data—such as the trust it builds among clients—but also through tangible outcomes, including the number of citizenship applications processed, ESL class attendance, and the high rates of success in citizenship exams. For instance, the number of citizenship applications processed has increased from 547 in 2023 to 642 in 2024, reflecting growing trust in the organization’s ability to help immigrants achieve their goals. Additionally, the Center served 2,652 students through its ESL programs in 2024, both in-person and online. This figure demonstrates the significant role the Center plays in language acquisition, a key factor in immigrant integration.

The success of the Ansob Center is also evident in its consistently high pass rates for naturalization exams. Over the past few months, I personally tutored 38 clients preparing for their exams, and 33 of them successfully passed—a remarkable success rate of 86.8%. This achievement reflects the effectiveness of the Center’s tailored support, including its ESL classes and civics test preparation.

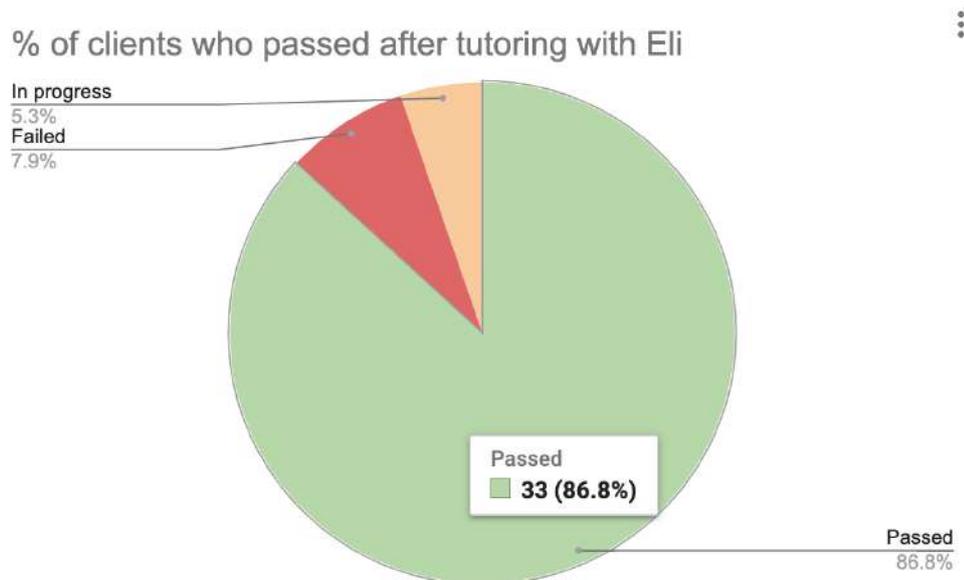


Figure 1: Percentage of Clients Who Passed After Tutoring with Eli. Created by author, 2024

The chart above illustrates these outcomes, showing the overwhelming percentage of clients who passed after working with me. While only 3 clients did not pass, this was largely due to their limited study time outside tutoring sessions. Additionally, two clients remain in progress. These results demonstrate not only the dedication of the Ansob Center but also its tangible impact on empowering immigrants to achieve citizenship.

Our interviewed client case is a particularly compelling example of the Center's impact. A recent immigrant with significant personal challenges, including financial struggles and the stress of adapting to a new country, she initially doubted her ability to succeed. Through personalized tutoring sessions and consistent emotional support, she gained the confidence to pass her naturalization exam on her first attempt. This woman expressed immense gratitude, stating that the Center was not just a place to prepare for a test but a space where she felt understood and empowered.

Beyond these numbers, Iman Mehelba highlighted the importance of meeting clients where they are in their learning journey. Ansob's mission extends beyond test preparation; it focuses on empowering immigrants to navigate language barriers, bureaucratic challenges, and cultural integration with confidence. The organization often exceeds its targets, not only in success rates but also in the meaningful impact it has on clients' lives. While funding challenges persist, Ansob continues to adapt, ensuring its services remain effective and aligned with its mission to support immigrant rights and inclusion.

One recommendation to enhance the Ansob Center's reach is to adapt to modern communication tools, particularly social media. Recognizing the potential of digital platforms to connect with broader audiences, another intern and I initiated

efforts to establish and grow the Center's presence on Instagram. Although the account was created just three weeks ago, it has already gained 92 followers, showcasing its potential to engage the community. Together, we are planning a bilingual video to explain Ansob's services and impact, aiming to increase awareness, attract clients, and connect with nonprofits and funders. Leveraging social media can modernize outreach and foster greater collaboration and support.

PERSPECTIVES FROM MAKING *IMMIGRANT RIGHTS REAL*

The Ansob Center's work highlights the essential role of nonprofits in supporting immigrants. Els de Graauw's *Making Immigrant Rights Real* offers a framework for understanding how organizations like Ansob address challenges and advocate for immigrant rights. By examining strategies such as administrative advocacy, cross-sector collaboration, and strategic framing, we can situate Ansob's localized efforts within a broader context, shedding light on both its strengths and opportunities for growth.

Summary of Key Arguments

In the absence of robust and direct federal programs, nonprofits step in as essential intermediaries, bridging the gap between governance and immigrant communities. De Graauw identifies three strategies that nonprofits use to make immigrant rights tangible: administrative advocacy, cross-sector collaboration, and strategic framing.

Administrative advocacy involves working closely with government agencies to implement immigrant-friendly policies. Nonprofits focus on transforming "rights on paper" into practical access by influencing how policies are interpreted and executed.

This approach underscores the vital role nonprofits play in ensuring policy implementation aligns with immigrants' needs.

Cross-sector collaboration emphasizes partnerships with unions, community organizations, and public officials to pool resources and amplify impact. These alliances strengthen nonprofit capacity and expand their reach.

Lastly, **strategic framing** public narratives. Nonprofits craft messages that highlight how immigrant rights benefit entire communities, framing their advocacy in terms of shared economic and civic gains. This not only garners public and political support but also counteracts anti-immigrant rhetoric.

De Graauw's work provides a roadmap for understanding how nonprofits operate within constraints like limited funding, legal restrictions, and polarized political climates. By conducting these strategies, nonprofits both advocate for policy changes and also institutionalize practices that make immigrant rights tangible and enduring.

Comparison with the Ansoh Center: Insights and Contrasts

De Graauw's framework provides valuable insights into the work of non-profits like the Ansoh Center, which aligns with several aspects of the book's strategies while also reflecting the unique challenges of a smaller-scale nonprofit.

Administrative Advocacy: Transforming Rights on Paper into Reality

The Ansoh Center's administrative advocacy exemplifies De Graauw's concept of transforming "rights on paper" into lived experiences. This advocacy is evident in its comprehensive support for clients throughout their naturalization journeys. From assisting with N-400 applications to providing civics classes and personalized tutoring for naturalization tests, the Center ensures clients are fully prepared for this critical process.

A particularly impactful element of this work is the **free ESL classes**, which empower immigrants by breaking language barriers—key to both inclusion and securing rights. Language learning at Ansob is more than a technical skill; it is a bridge to societal participation. English proficiency enables immigrants to access better job opportunities, engage in democratic processes, and integrate more fully into their communities. This empowerment is tied to the Center’s emphasis on citizenship, which Iman described as a transformative goal that provides stability, opportunities, and a sense of belonging.

Ansob’s advocacy extends beyond class offerings to include proactive client engagement. Staff members follow up with clients who miss classes, offering additional tutoring or other support to ensure progress. This approach underscores Ansob’s commitment to inclusion, ensuring no one is left behind in their journey to full participation in society. This holistic approach not only reduces financial barriers but also conveys a message of care and commitment, making clients feel valued and empowered.

The center’s administrative advocacy, though focused on individual cases, has a cumulative impact that extends beyond the clients it directly serves. Each successful case adds an empowered voice to immigrant communities, contributing indirectly to broader societal and political changes. These successes demonstrate the potential of immigrant inclusion, offering compelling evidence for policymakers to address systemic barriers and expand supportive programs. However, while Ansob’s advocacy focuses on immediate, localized needs, it contrasts with the larger-scale policy engagements discussed in De Graauw’s book. Unlike the San Francisco nonprofits that collaborate with unions and public agencies to push for policy reforms, Ansob’s smaller scale and limited resources necessitates a grassroots approach. This focus on personalized support ensures clients

receive direct, immediate assistance, but it also limits the Center's ability to influence broader immigration policies.

Cross-Sector Collaboration: Strengthening Impact through Partnerships

The Ansob Center exemplifies cross-sector collaboration by working closely with other community organizations to enhance its services and address gaps. According to Executive Director Iman Mehelba, the Center partners with organizations specializing in areas such as domestic violence support, asylum resources, and literacy programs. For example, Ansob refers clients needing domestic violence services to nonprofits that provide legal protections and access to shelters. Similarly, it collaborates with the Queens Library to connect clients with literacy programs that the Center cannot offer in-house. These partnerships ensure that clients have access to a broad spectrum of support, even when their needs extend beyond Ansob's direct expertise.

In addition to these targeted collaborations, Ansob actively participates in community fairs and events to expand its network and raise awareness of its services. These events not only allow the Center to reach more potential clients but also strengthen relationships with other nonprofits and community leaders. Such collaborations are essential for building a robust ecosystem of support for immigrants, enabling organizations to collectively address complex challenges.

While Ansob's collaborations are smaller in scale compared to the large coalitions described in *Making Immigrant Rights Real*, they are vital to its ability to provide holistic, effective services. These partnerships reflect the Center's commitment to ensuring that no client is left without the resources they need to build a stable and dignified life in the United States.

Strategic Framing: Citizenship, Diversity, and Cultural Preservation

The Ansob Center exemplifies strategic framing by emphasizing the benefits of diversity, cultural preservation, and inclusion while empowering immigrants to become active participants in society. Citizenship is presented not just as a legal endpoint but as a pathway to civic engagement, economic empowerment, and societal inclusion. As Iman Mehelba highlighted, the Center underscores the importance of immigrants' contributions to a pluralistic and multicultural society. This framing motivates clients to see themselves as integral members of their communities while promoting the idea that immigrant integration benefits the broader society.

Ansob's framing also extends beyond individual empowerment. The Center actively participates in cultural fairs, such as Egyptian Celebration Day, to highlight the richness of immigrant heritage. At these events, Ansob provides resources and shares information about its services while promoting cultural pride and community belonging. Flyers in Spanish, Arabic, and English ensure that the Center's message reaches diverse audiences, emphasizing the importance of preserving one's cultural identity alongside integration into American society.

Moreover, Ansob has taken steps to engage in broader public advocacy. For example, it has held meetings at schools to promote cultural awareness and educate communities about the value of diversity and immigration. Iman expressed a desire for greater public education on the benefits of immigration and multiculturalism, reflecting the Center's aspirations to shift societal narratives over time.

Unlike some of the nonprofits in De Graauw's studies, which lead large-scale public campaigns, Ansob's efforts are more grassroots and community-centered. Nonetheless, these initiatives demonstrate the Center's commitment to reshaping

perceptions of immigrants and building a more inclusive society. By framing diversity as a strength and immigrants as vital contributors, Ansob reinforces its mission to make immigrant rights real while fostering a deeper appreciation for multiculturalism.

CONCLUSION

Nonprofits like the Ansob Center play a vital role in making immigrant rights real by addressing systemic gaps left by federal and local policies. During my internship, I saw how the Center's work—legal aid, English classes, and cultural preservation—helped individuals navigate complex systems and claim their rights. These efforts, however, are not entirely independent of government support. Ansob relies on funding from both federal and city sources to sustain its services, meaning that, indirectly, these government entities contribute to providing critical language and integration support for immigrants. This highlights the interconnectedness between nonprofit initiatives and public policy.

Reflecting on my experiences, I am deeply moved by the humanity and dedication I observed at Ansob. The Center's work transcends basic service provision, creating spaces where immigrants feel valued, included, and supported. *Making Immigrant Rights Real* provided a framework for understanding the strategies behind these efforts, but my time at Ansob revealed the personal and emotional dimensions of their impact.

In a world that often reduces immigrant rights to political rhetoric, the Ansob Center stands as a testament to the power of grassroots efforts. By turning policy ideals into lived realities, the Center shows that inclusion is not just an aspiration but a

commitment to action—proving that when communities are supported, they thrive, and society as a whole is strengthened.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

de Graauw, Els (2016). *Making Immigrant Rights Real: Nonprofits and the Politics of Integration in San Francisco*. Cornell University Press.

ANNEX 2 – JOURNAL OF MY INTERHSIP

Insights from My Internship: My Journey at the Ansob Center

September 10, 2024 - Before the Adventure Begins: My Intern Diaries

Starting my internship at the Ansob Center for Refugees and Immigrants feels like diving into an opportunity where I can truly make a difference. I'm thrilled to be joining a non-profit organization whose mission is to help refugees and immigrants as they face the challenges of relocating to a new country. This role is incredibly meaningful to me because of my passion for international relations and my commitment to helping those who, unfortunately and unfairly, aren't provided with enough aid. Beginning tomorrow, and continuing every Wednesday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., I'll be tutoring migrants for the American citizenship test, collaborating with an immigration lawyer, and participating in activities to support refugee inclusion. I'm excited to gain hands-on experience and see firsthand how these tasks can impact individuals and communities. I hope to deepen my understanding of immigration issues, refine my skills in advocacy and support, and connect my academic learning with real-world challenges. Above all, I expect to feel a deep sense of fulfillment from helping those who need it most. Through this journal, I want to capture not just what I do, but how it affects me personally and shapes my journey towards creating positive change.

September 11, 2024 - First insights as an intern

My first day at the Ansob Center was an eye-opening experience. I spent the day providing civic practice tutoring to immigrants preparing for naturalization, and it was clear how much this support means to them. I started by checking my schedule and

sending confirmation emails for my three sessions. Each session began with an overview of the test process: a simulation of the 100 civic questions, followed by English writing practice where participants transcribed sentences I read aloud. We reviewed key vocabulary and carefully examined their N-400 applications to ensure they understood the terms and answered accurately. But beyond the technicalities, what stood out was the gratitude these people showed me — it was touching.

Many of the immigrants I worked with were nervous—struggling with the language barrier, feeling overwhelmed by the bureaucratic process, and facing economic problems that make this process so tough. It was hard to see how much anxiety they were dealing with, knowing that a test could determine so much about their future. It made me think about how the immigration system in the U.S. can be unfairly difficult, especially for those who are already vulnerable. Yesterday, someone came in to thank us in person—she had just passed her naturalization test and couldn't stop expressing her gratitude to the members of the Ansoh Center. While tutoring, I also noticed how consistently thankful immigrants were for the support I provided. They told me that my help was making them feel more confident and prepared. These were such emotive moments and made me realize how much impact we can have, even with small acts of support. I felt so happy and fulfilled knowing I could be a part of that. Moments like this highlight why non-profit organizations like Ansoh are so important. We're not just helping people pass a test; we're offering support in a system that often feels stacked against them. I'm excited to be part of this work, to help in any way I can, and to learn of the people I meet here.

September 18, 2024 – A Day Filled with Emotion

Today was incredibly touching. In the morning, I helped Iman with a civic teaching class for a group of 10 immigrants. It was their last session in a 12-session citizenship course, making the day extra special. We reviewed the vocabulary for the naturalization test, went over the test's components, and even simulated a passport application for when they pass. The atmosphere was so emotional.

What struck me most was Iman. She's not usually their teacher, but she still knew all the students by name. This showed how much she cares and the effort she puts into her work. Iman was so reassuring, constantly reminding the students that they would succeed. The students were also very supportive of each other, interacting like a close-knit group. Both Iman's warmth and the students' interactions felt like a high school or primary class, which surprised me, especially since they were all over 30. It reminded me of how in early ages, teachers connect with their students, where classes are places not just for learning but for growing and bonding. Since it was the last day, they organized a small party with homemade food from their home countries, and the Ansob Center provided pizza and certificates of completion. Two moments really touched me today.

First, a woman came in today to share that she had passed her test. She hugged Iman and kept saying it wouldn't have been possible without the center's help. Hearing her gratitude brought tears to my eyes. It reminded me how vital organizations like Ansob are in ensuring immigrants get the support they need to navigate this system and access the rights they deserve.

The second moment happened when a student stayed after class and told Iman she was sad the course was over. She said she loved coming to class, learning, and feeling appreciated by the Ansob members. Watching these immigrants form friendships, plan future meet-ups, and find comfort in each other was heartwarming. Ansob isn't just a non-profit helping with paperwork; it's a home for many—a place to feel safe, equal, and valued, regardless of where they come from.

Later in the afternoon, I tutored two men in civic lessons, which went well. To top it off, I emailed one of the women I tutored last week, and she told me she had passed her naturalization test and that my help had made a big difference. I can't express how fulfilled this job makes me feel. Being part of something so meaningful and directly helping people is a wonderful experience, and I'm incredibly grateful for this opportunity.

Saturday 21, 2024 - Cultural Celebration

Saturday was an enriching day as I attended Egyptian Celebration Day, a lively fair celebrating Egyptian culture. The street was lined with huts offering traditional Egyptian food, clothes, souvenirs, and Arabic music. The Ansob Center had its own hut, where we provided information about our services to immigrants. We were there from 9 am to 4 pm, and I enjoyed seeing people from different backgrounds come together to celebrate, proud to share their heritage with the broader US community. At 1 pm, a speech by US officials played both the Egyptian and US anthems, highlighting the importance of preserving cultural identity, even after becoming US citizens. Watching the attendees speak their native languages and sing their songs was heartwarming and emphasized the value of cultural preservation.

This event made me reflect on *Making Immigrant Rights Real* by Els de Graauw, where she stresses how non-profits like Ansob not only help immigrants with essential services but also provide spaces to maintain and celebrate their cultural identities. The celebration was a clear example of this, showing how organizations foster community and help immigrants assert not just legal rights but cultural ones. In a world where globalization can sometimes erase cultural differences, it was beautiful to see how proud and happy people were to express their culture. This is exactly why it's so important for non-profits like Ansob to exist: they fill in the gaps where government systems often fall short, offering not just legal aid but also fostering a sense of belonging and cultural preservation, crucial elements for immigrant communities in the US.

September 25, 2024 - Reflections on “the Alien”

Today was a very busy day: I had 4 civic tutorings lasting 1 hour 30 each one of them. It was very nice, each of the persons I tutorized were from different places: Mexico, Argelia, Egypt and Jordan. This plurality of nationalities, very often seen in New York, made me reflect on the chapter of a book that I read yesterday talking about our conception and the creation of the Other (the non-western). In concrete, this fragment made me reflect a lot:

“If we agree, along with Blair, that democracy, freedom, and justice are desirable political principles that should underlie global governance, shouldn't we be finding ways to ensure that ‘the starving, the wretched, the dispossessed, the ignorant, those living in want and squalor from the deserts of Northern Africa to the slums of Gaza, to the mountain ranges of Afghanistan’ somehow have a voice in these deliberations about them? Wouldn't we expect that political

participation, the co-constitution of global order by the rich and the starving, by the blessed and the wretched, by the fortunate and the dispossessed, by the ignorant and the educated, would be the first priority of those who sought to ‘reorder’ the globe to facilitate ‘freedom’ and ‘community’? (...) A reasonably democratic order – at the global or local level – would make place for a politics that promotes the participation of those who are the objects of a policy. But what we get with Mallaby, Ikenberry, and Blair is global governance without the voice, consent, or participation of those who are to be governed.” - Muppidi in “Colonial and postcolonial global governance” 2004, p. 279

This reading made me reflect on how immigrants are often viewed as the Other, even described as **aliens**, lacking a direct voice in the policies that affect them. However, organizations like Ansof (try to) challenge this paradigm. At Ansof, there is no notion of the Other; everyone’s voice is valued equally. Here, the “Other who needs protection and assistance” is treated with dignity, not seen as an **alien**—a US term I’ve learned through my internship to describe non-U.S. citizens, demonstrating the very notion of the Other. In contrast to UN organizations that discuss the needs of the Other without genuinely considering their perspectives, Ansof makes a real difference in people’s lives. They protect human rights without hypocrisy, simply by opening their arms and treating everyone as equals—equally civilized, equally capable of having opinions, equally human, and equally qualified for high-skilled jobs. Unfortunately, this is not always reflected in how these individuals are treated in the U.S. or in North Countries, despite constitutional guarantees and despite human declaration of rights.

I am grateful to be making a tangible impact in the world, contesting in some way prevailing perceptions, even as a European girl whose position benefits from global inequalities. I want to be treated as an equal, not as a model or someone viewed as “superior.” I do not wish for my culture or political and economic systems to dominate globally. I love being surrounded by diversity and multiculturalism; that’s what truly fulfills me. Western countries have much to learn from those in the Global South, just as the Global South has valuable lessons for the North. Our different perspectives on life are what make our world extraordinary. The Ansob Center embodies these values, fighting for human rights in their truest form.

October 2, 2024 - Making immigrants rights real in Democracy

Today was another busy day at the Ansob Center, where I spent 1.5 hours tutoring immigrants preparing for their naturalization test. A recurring issue that all of them face is their struggle with English. Although this might seem like a minor issue to some, language is critical for immigrants in the U.S. to assert their rights. Without the ability to speak English, their voices are often silenced, as their participation in democracy is hindered. The U.S. prides itself on being a democracy, but it does little to ensure that all of its inhabitants, including immigrants, are able to participate in this system. Immigrants, who make up a large percentage of the country’s population, often find themselves excluded due to language barriers, limiting their ability to exercise freedoms like speech and expression.

The Ansob Center plays a crucial role in filling this gap. By providing free English lessons and civic education, the Center helps immigrants not only prepare for their

naturalization tests but also empowers them to participate more fully in society. Their ability to speak English is essential for ensuring their rights are protected, but the government does little to assist them in this regard (besides from funding the non-profits). The Ansoh Center, and organizations like it, become the critical force ensuring that immigrants have a chance to be heard and contribute to society. It's a reminder that democracy can only truly exist when all people, regardless of their background, are given the tools to engage.

However, there are limits to what these organizations can do, primarily due to economic constraints. This became painfully clear to me while working with one immigrant, a single mother, who struggled significantly with English. During our tutoring session, it was evident that she had been relying on memorization rather than understanding the material. When I asked her specific civics questions, her responses showed she didn't grasp their meaning. Her daughter helped translate, and we made some progress by ensuring she understood rather than simply memorized. We also enrolled her in beginner English classes, though she admitted she couldn't fully attend due to work and family responsibilities. Despite these efforts, I sadly doubt she will pass her test in three weeks. Her lack of English proficiency will be evident during both the English exam and the N-400 interview. While I encouraged her to focus on the civics portion and her daughter pledged to help, the reality is that she will likely need more time and preparation. This situation left me feeling frustrated, not with her, but with the limitations we face. Nonprofits like the Ansoh Center lack the financial resources to offer more classes, and immigrants, who must work to sustain themselves, often don't have

the time to commit to language learning. These challenges highlight the systemic barriers immigrants face, even when they are determined to succeed.

Despite the challenges and limitations the Ansob Center faces, we remain dedicated, always giving our best to help immigrants overcome obstacles and succeed. This strong dedication makes me feel very proud of where I am belonging now.

October 9, 2024 - Breaking prejudices

Today has been a really beautiful day. As soon as I arrived at the office, I read an email from a Mexican woman who had passed her naturalization test. She thanked me for all the support I gave her during her preparation and mentioned how nervous she was before the exam. She said that everything I told her helped her switch her mindset and calm down, which made me incredibly happy. The day was very busy, almost non-stop, but it was also deeply rewarding, as it always is. Every day, I continue to learn something new.

One of the biggest lessons I had today came from a cultural shock. I tutored someone who had a criminal record, including an attempt to injure someone. Before meeting him, I felt a bit nervous, even scared. However, after spending time with him during the tutoring session, I was surprised by how kind and respectful he was. This experience made me reflect on the power of prejudice and how we often form unfair images of people with criminal backgrounds versus those without. It's closely connected to immigration as well, as prejudices are a significant cause of racism and harm how we perceive immigrants. At Ansob, we make it a point to help people without judgment, no matter their past. This experience reinforced my belief that, despite how difficult it can

be, everyone deserves someone to defend their rights, regardless of their mistakes. It reminded me of something my mother, who is a lawyer, once told me. As a child, I used to question how she could defend criminals or people accused of terrible things. She explained that, thankfully, in Spain the law guarantees everyone the right to be defended until proven guilty. Without this, the world would be ruled by prejudice, and no one would want to defend someone just because they were accused of a crime. Even if someone is guilty, they still deserve legal representation and protection of their rights. At the time, I couldn't fully grasp her words, but eight years later, I now understand exactly what she meant.

Ansob's work embodies this principle completely—ensuring that everyone, regardless of where they come from or what they have done, has their rights protected and is treated with dignity and respect. No one is left behind, and everyone is given the support they need to rebuild their lives and become part of society.

October 16, 2024 - The Ansob's limitations

Today was a long and challenging day. I started with three successful in-person tutoring sessions for students who had prepared for their naturalization test. However, the day took a difficult turn later. I had an in person meeting scheduled with a woman preparing for her naturalization exam next week, but after waiting for ten minutes without showing up, I called her and she said she had forgotten about the session and couldn't make it on time. I offered to continue the session over Zoom, hoping she could still benefit from the practice. During our session, it became clear she hadn't studied. She didn't know the answers to the questions I asked and frequently interrupted the call or left without explanation. Despite this, I persevered for over two hours, determined to

help her. When we attempted the English test, she struggled to write in English, something I had noticed weeks ago, which led me to enroll her in free English lessons offered by the Ansob Center. When I asked if she'd attended, she admitted she had fallen asleep during the lessons. This lack of commitment was frustrating, especially after all the effort the Ansob Center puts into helping people.

She eventually expressed doubt that she would pass the exam and asked to reschedule her official appointment. Although disappointed, I encouraged her to focus on studying the civics portion of the test, and even if she fails the English test next week, she will have a second chance to retake it in two months. If she starts attending English classes now, she'll have a better chance of passing the English test during that second attempt. By the end of the call, she apologized for her attitude and thanked me for encouraging her to keep on studying and for my persistence to help her. However, the situation left me with a bittersweet feeling.

The Ansob Center is deeply committed to helping those in need. Over the past month, I've witnessed firsthand how the center is making a real difference in empowering people to secure their rights in the U.S. We work tirelessly to support our community, but there are limits to what we can do—we can't study for our clients or do the work for them. Despite my frustration with this woman today, I refused to give up on her because that's not the Ansob Center's approach. We don't give up on people; instead, we encourage them to learn and empower them to advocate for their rights. We remind them that they are just as valuable as any other American citizen and that their voices matter and deserve to be heard.

October 23, 2024 - A Day of gratitude and Impact

Today, I stayed past my regular hours at Ansob to support a few clients preparing for their citizenship exams, which felt incredibly rewarding. First, a man who I'd been tutoring for three weeks arrived with a box of donuts to thank me. He had passed his naturalization exam and attributed his success to the help he'd received during our sessions. Hearing this filled me with pride, especially when Iman congratulated me. This moment reminded me that our work is genuinely making immigrant rights real. Helping clients navigate the complex process of obtaining citizenship—something they might otherwise find daunting—demonstrates how empowering our support can be.

Later, I spent two hours with a Chinese woman who was nervous about her exam scheduled for the next day. She struggled with English, so we reviewed potential questions intensively to ensure she felt as prepared as possible. Seeing her improve as she grasped the content reassured me that our work goes beyond teaching answers—it's about building confidence. I also worked with a Mexican woman who was feeling nervous, even losing sleep over the exam. She told me that after our 90-minute session, she felt at ease and ready to face it. Her sense of calm and gratitude was incredibly touching and underscored the deep impact we can have on people's lives. These exams mean everything to many of our clients; they are not only a step toward citizenship but a pathway to freedom and stability.

One client, a man from Mexico who's lived in the U.S. for 30 years, shared his reasons for wanting citizenship. He dreams of moving back to Mexico but wants the flexibility to return to the U.S. to visit his American-born son. He explained that life in the U.S. has become increasingly unaffordable and that he could save money by living in Mexico and

visiting his family occasionally. However, the current green card regulations, which require him to stay in the U.S. for at least six months each year, restrict his choices. Hearing his story reminded me how vital citizenship is for many immigrants. It's not just a legal status; it's an opportunity for a stable and fulfilling life. Knowing I can be a part of these journeys gives my work meaning and drives me to help each client achieve their goals.

October 30, 2024 - Comparing Spain and New York:

After two months in New York, the cultural diversity here continues to amaze me, especially compared to Spain. I was immediately struck by the number of Asian and immigrant communities, particularly in places like Flushing, where different cultures coexist so visibly. Attending Queens College, located in Queens, the second-highest county with immigrants in the U.S., has only deepened my awareness of this diversity. Every day, I encounter people from all over the world, and my work at the Ansoh Center has further opened my eyes to the challenges these immigrants face.

In Spain, it's rare to meet someone, immigrant or not, who doesn't speak Spanish. Even for non-Spanish-speaking immigrants, such as those from Morocco, families usually learn the language within a year or two of arriving, and students are provided special education support. However, in New York, I've worked with immigrants who have lived here for over 20 years and still don't speak fluent English. This is a clear sign of exclusion, as many immigrants form their own ghettos and only interact with others from their home countries. New York's boroughs are divided by nationality—Flushing for Asians, Astoria for Greeks and Portuguese speakers, Brooklyn for Latinos, and so on.

This underscores the vital role of organizations like Ansob in promoting immigrant rights and social inclusion. Nonprofits like Ansob not only provide economic and legal assistance but also offer essential services like English classes, giving immigrants the tools they need to become part of the broader society. They protect immigrants' human rights, ensuring that their voices are heard and helping them step out of the isolation of their communities to fully participate in American life.

November 6, 2024 - Facing Setbacks

Today, for the first time, one of my students did not pass her citizenship exam. Over the past two months, I've mostly had positive news and success stories, so I felt saddened by her outcome. Yet, I know this result wasn't due to a lack of support on our part. This woman, whom I'd previously tutored for two hours, often disconnected during sessions and admitted her own doubts about passing. I had even enrolled her in free English classes, but she had chosen not to attend. It's a challenging reality to realize that you can't help someone who isn't ready to commit, but even so, it's disappointing to see them fall short of their goal.

This experience is a reminder that working here isn't always about celebrating victories; sometimes, it's about facing setbacks and understanding that, no matter our dedication, some individuals may not achieve their objectives. I only learned about her result after I called her today to check in, and she explained what had happened. Despite her struggles, I am determined not to give up on her. Applicants have two chances to pass the citizenship test, and I emphasized to her how crucial it is to make the most of this second opportunity in a month and a half. I encouraged her to attend English classes and offered extra one-on-one sessions to help her prepare.

It's important that she understands she is capable of succeeding if she stays committed. This woman, who bravely left her life and family behind to come to a country where her language isn't spoken, shouldn't feel defeated now. She has already demonstrated incredible courage, and my goal is to remind her of her worth and determination. I hope to inspire her to see that the difficulties she faces are surmountable and that success is within her reach.

November 13, 2024 - Post-Election Uncertainty

It has been a week since the election, and the results are not looking particularly hopeful for a non-profit organization like Ansob, which supports immigrants. In the office, we can see how much more nervous people are. Immigrants who need to renew their green cards next year are now asking to start the process immediately. The office has been more crowded than ever in the past two months. People come in with questions all the time, and though they don't explicitly mention the power shift, you can feel it in the urgency. I admit that I felt a wave of worry, too. What's going to happen now? Will there be any drastic changes? Is Trump really going to follow through with a hard-line stance on immigration?

Speaking with Iman, our executive director, helped me understand the real threats this shift in power presents for immigrants and for Ansob. Our organization now faces uncertainty in terms of funding, as Trump's administration is known for cutting budgets for non-profits, especially those supporting immigrants. This not only affects the availability of resources but also creates a bottleneck in processing times, making it tougher and slower for immigrants to get the help they need. As a non-profit, we feel the pressure of accepting every client who walks through our doors, knowing they rely

on us to safeguard their rights. Yet, we operate without a clear picture of what our funding will look like, or even when it will arrive. It's stifling, to say the least, to provide critical support in such an unstable environment.

This morning, however, we received an encouraging email from the NYC mayor's office. The mayor's message reassured us that New York City will remain committed to its Sanctuary City policies, providing a haven for all immigrants regardless of their status. He highlighted that NYC's Sanctuary City laws create a clear boundary between local and federal immigration enforcement, safeguarding the privacy of immigrant residents and allowing them to access essential services without fear of deportation. It's a reminder that New York City, despite federal policies, remains a place where immigrants are valued and protected.

Reading this message gave me a sense of relief and hope. The commitment from the city's leadership reflects the resilience of New York's immigrant community and the people working to support them, including us at Ansob. While the path forward under the current federal administration may be filled with challenges, the city's stance strengthens our resolve to continue our work with determination. It's motivating to know that we're part of a city that values immigrant contributions and will stand by them even in uncertain times.

November 21, 2024 - Guiding Through the N-400 Process

Today, I had the chance to observe the process of assisting clients with the N-400 application for U.S. citizenship. It was fascinating to see how the Ansob Center ensures its clients feel supported every step of the way. The process begins with verifying the

applicant's eligibility for the N-400. Staff members then collect detailed information about their recent residences, employment history, travel records, marital status, and more.

A particularly noteworthy step is assessing whether the client qualifies for Medicaid, as this can cover the \$700 application fee, making the process free. The staff doesn't stop at just informing clients of this possibility—they personally contact the Medicaid office to confirm the client's eligibility, demonstrating their commitment to minimizing financial barriers. Once eligibility is confirmed, an appointment is scheduled for the client to submit their application officially with the center's immigration attorney.

I was struck by how deeply involved the Ansob Center is in this process, not only ensuring clients have accurate information but also advocating on their behalf. Many immigrants are overwhelmed by the complexities of this system and could easily make costly mistakes or abandon the process altogether without such guidance.

The collaboration between the Ansob Center and organizations like Medicaid highlights the power of cooperation among different institutions, all working toward the shared goal of supporting immigrant communities. This work is vital in safeguarding immigrants' rights and making the path to citizenship accessible and equitable for those who need it most.

November 27, 2024 – A Day Full of Challenges and Reflections

Today has been one of the most emotionally intense days I've experienced at the Ansob Center. It began with a two-hour session with a Mexican woman who doesn't speak English and has special permission to take the civics test and interview in Spanish.

Despite this accommodation, she was incredibly nervous and struggled to answer many questions. She shared with me that she had to leave school at a young age, and studying now feels overwhelming, not because she doesn't try, but because it's genuinely difficult for her.

It broke my heart to see her embarrassed for not knowing answers in her own language. I worked hard to create a safe, encouraging environment for her, focusing on repetition to help her retain the material. We went over the questions she missed twice, and I've scheduled two more sessions with her to provide additional support. Moments like this remind me how critical it is to help people feel confident and prepared. I was especially grateful to connect with her in Spanish—our shared mother tongue—which highlighted for me the power of speaking multiple languages. At the Ansoh Center, we stress the importance of learning English, not just for passing the test but for empowerment and integration into society.

In the afternoon, I had a profoundly touching moment with a man I had worked with for two months. He came to the Center to tell me he passed his naturalization interview after failing the first one. His gratitude was overwhelming. He told me how much my help made a difference, and I could see the pride and happiness in his eyes. It was hard to say goodbye after seeing him every Wednesday and witnessing his progress firsthand. When we started, he could barely write in English without mixing it with Spanish. Through dedication—his and mine—he learned to write flawlessly. I felt immense pride in his success and honored to have played a role in his journey.

The day ended with one of the most difficult cases I've encountered. A Portuguese woman with limited English and an extensive history of hardship sat across from me,

trying to hold herself together. She has been in the U.S. for 20 years, working tirelessly to support her three children, often for 12 hours a day, leaving no time to learn English. Her lack of language skills made her vulnerable; she shared how early in her time here, she was taken advantage of, falsely accused of a crime, and had to fight to prove her innocence. Now, she's battling cancer, having already undergone three surgeries.

Her frustration and pain were palpable as she spoke. At one point, she broke down in tears, expressing the weight of her struggles and the lack of support she's received. It was devastating to witness. I tried my best to comfort her, offering water, listening patiently, and creating space for her to express her emotions before we continued with the session. By the end, I scheduled two more sessions for next week, determined not to give up on her.

Reflecting on her case, I'm reminded of the critical role the Ansob Center plays in protecting the rights of immigrants in the United States. Language barriers can strip people of their agency and make them easy targets for exploitation. This woman's experience underscores how vital it is to provide free, accessible support like what we offer at Ansob.

When she left, she thanked me repeatedly, telling me she'd never forget how much I cared. She shared that in the past, she paid for services to learn English but never felt as supported or accepted as she does at Ansob, where everything we do is free. Her gratitude reaffirmed my belief in the importance of this work. The Ansob Center is more than just a place of learning—it's a lifeline, a beacon of hope for those who feel unseen or forgotten.

Reflecting now, I see how Ansob helps protect not just immigrant rights but also human dignity. We provide tools for empowerment: language skills, civics knowledge, and community support. These are not luxuries but necessities that enable individuals to lead dignified lives and defend themselves against injustice. It's a privilege to be part of an organization that genuinely changes lives.

December 2, 2024 - The Meaning of Citizenship

Today, I reflected on why people are so determined to become U.S. citizens, even though many already hold green cards and have permanent residency. Beyond the ability to vote or avoid certain administrative burdens, citizenship offers a sense of permanence and security that profoundly impacts individuals' lives.

A few weeks ago, a Mexican man shared that he wanted citizenship so he could freely visit his family in Mexico while maintaining the ability to return to the U.S. to see his son, who was born here. Today, another Mexican woman told me that for many, achieving U.S. citizenship is the ultimate dream because it removes fears about time limits abroad. She wants to visit her aging mother and family more frequently without risking her residency status.

The most emotional story I heard today was from an Algerian man who works two jobs in New York to support his wife and two young children in Algeria. He dreams of bringing them here after becoming a citizen. His commitment to studying for the exam, knowing it is key to his family's future, is deeply inspiring.

At the Ansob Center, we emphasize the importance of citizenship to our clients, helping them understand the stability it provides. Citizenship allows them to fully participate in

society, vote, apply for a U.S. passport, and access better job opportunities. Our center ensures clients feel supported throughout the naturalization process, from verifying eligibility and handling fee waivers to offering civics and ESL classes that prepare them for the exam.

We also help clients recognize the broader significance of citizenship. It empowers them to take control of their futures and reinforces their sense of belonging. As Iman, Ansob's executive director, explained, our work is about more than legal assistance—it's about equipping immigrants with tools to thrive. Citizenship is a gateway to financial independence, access to resources, and the confidence to integrate into society.

By helping clients navigate these processes, we not only reunite families but also enable them to build better lives. Witnessing these transformations highlights the profound impact of our work in protecting immigrant rights and fostering their dignity. It's a privilege to play even a small role in these journeys.

December 4, 2024 - Bridging Barriers Through Language and Support

Today, a woman from Haiti came to the Ansob Center seeking assistance. She only spoke French, and I was the only one able to communicate with her. She is in the U.S. on a Temporary Protected Status (TPS) permit, a program introduced to help individuals from disaster-stricken countries live and work here for 2-3 years. However, she now wants to apply for permanent residency and needed free legal services. Unfortunately, the Ansob Center does not handle green card applications for TPS holders.

Determined to help, I stayed with her until we found another nonprofit organization with the capacity to assist. I called three different offices, and while only one seemed

like a possibility, they warned me that such cases are challenging. They offered to conduct an interview and explore her options.

During our conversation, she revealed that she lives alone in New York, earning just \$20,000 annually. Her husband and daughter remain in Haiti. The thought of surviving in such an expensive city without support or knowing the language was heartbreaking. When she realized I spoke French, she clung to me, relying on me for guidance. It was deeply rewarding to be able to support her, yet I felt powerless knowing I couldn't do more.

I also called her lawyer, who does not speak French, to explain the situation and ensure the woman understood her next steps. This experience highlighted the critical role of nonprofits in providing free services to those who are excluded and vulnerable. Without such organizations, many lack the linguistic or financial tools to advocate for themselves.

This case reinforced my belief in the importance of offering support to those in need. Free services can bridge gaps, empowering people to navigate a system that otherwise marginalizes them.

December 11, 2024 – A Heartfelt Farewell to the Ansob Center

Today was my last day at the Ansob Center, and it was incredibly emotional. This experience has meant so much to me, and saying goodbye felt like leaving a home I had built for myself over the past four months. I could never have imagined feeling so fulfilled in an internship. When I first began, my dreams had always been centered around working with organizations like the United Nations or Spanish embassies—big, prestigious names that I believed would define my career in international relations. So,

when this opportunity arose, while I was happy and grateful for it, I initially felt a slight pang of disappointment because it wasn't what I had envisioned.

However, my time at Ansob quickly shifted my perspective. This small, community-centered organization opened my eyes to what truly matters. Seeing how it operates, how it makes real changes in people's lives every single day, has shown me that smaller organizations often achieve what larger ones struggle to do—they connect with individuals on a deeply personal level. Working here has made me realize the joy and fulfillment of directly helping others. The gratitude I've felt from the immigrants we assist, the appreciation they've shown me for the smallest gestures, has been life-changing. It is something I doubt I could feel in a larger, more bureaucratic environment.

Today's farewell felt like a culmination of all the connections I've built here. One moment stood out: the Portuguese woman I had worked with two weeks ago came to see me with a gift. She had failed her test, yet she told me that the way I treated her—with kindness and without judgment—had helped her emotionally in ways she couldn't describe. She said she needed someone to believe in her, and that my support gave her the confidence to keep trying. Despite her setbacks, she is determined to pass the test on her second attempt, and I have no doubt she will. Her gratitude deeply moved me. It reminded me that Ansob's work goes beyond legal services—we create a community where people feel valued and supported, as everyone should.

The Ansob team—Iman, Hanan, Damaly, Mona, and everyone else—has been extraordinary. Watching them work tirelessly to support every person who walks through our doors, regardless of who they are or where they're from, has been incredibly inspiring. Iman, in particular, is a person I admire deeply. Her commitment to

immigrant rights and her ability to bring such kindness and professionalism into her work have left a lasting impression on me. She is making a difference in the world, and I hope to one day have a similar impact.

This internship has made me rethink what I want in life. I no longer believe fulfillment comes from working in the most renowned organizations; it comes from the ability to make a difference. Even small gestures, like helping someone prepare for a citizenship test or finding a resource for someone in need, can change lives. Seeing how the Ansob Center provides these services every day has been humbling and inspiring.

As I reflect on these months, I feel so much gratitude. Gratitude to Iman for giving me this opportunity and trusting me to be part of her incredible organization. Gratitude to my colleagues for welcoming me, supporting me, and making me feel like part of a family. Gratitude to Keena, who helped make this internship possible, and to my parents for their unwavering support. Most of all, I am thankful to every immigrant I've worked with, who made me feel useful and appreciated. Their trust in me and their gratitude for my help will stay with me forever.

I am deeply grateful to the Ansob Center, New York, Queens College, and everyone who made this journey so impactful and unforgettable.

 per a mi

Hi Eli
Thank you for helping me practice to my interview
I passed the exam today me and my daughter
Thank you very much

 per a mi

Hi Eli,
Good morning ☀️ Thank you so much for your kind words and support! I really appreciate all the help and guidance you've given me during our civics tutoring sessions.

 to me

Thank you so much for your support. May God bless you.

 per a mi

Hello

I passed my Citizenship exam, I am very happy, I thank you very much for all your help

 per a mi

Good morning Eli,

I just completed my interview today and passed it. Thank you so much for help with everything on my case. I'm just waiting now for the letter with the oath ceremony date.

Again thanks for everything

 per a mi

You are so sweet Eli, thank you!

Thank you so much for your support and guidance! I couldn't have done it without your help.

I really appreciate the time and support you put into helping me succeed.

 per a mi

Hi Elisenda,
I passed citizenship test!
Thank you 😊

 per a mi

hello how are you? i just want to let you know that i passed my test. the ceremony will be scheduled shortly. really thank you for all the support.

 per a mi

Good evening Eli
Thank you for everything and thank you for your help you been a great to me to pass this exam.

You have a wonderful night

 per a mi

Thank you so much Eli, that means a lot.

Hi Elisenda thank you 🙏 pase mi examen 🎉 el día de hoy me siento muy feliz, mil gracias por tus lindas palabras de verdad tocaron mi corazón, desde ese día me sentí muy bien Gracias otra vez .te deseo un futuro maravilloso 🎉

Safata d'entrada

naturalization exams

 per a mi

Thank you 😊 so much