

Health providers learn about law and immigrants

By Asher Pavel

SHARON—The Sharon-based Foundation for Community Health, in collaboration with Catholic Charities in Dutchess County, presented a forum June 22 on laws that have an impact on social and health service providers who serve immigrants.

Approximately 25 service providers from the Northwest Corner, southeast Columbia County and northeast Dutchess County gathered on Wednesday, June 22, at the foundation's Sharon offices to learn about laws that affect their interactions with immigrants.

The program was presented by attorney Raluca Oncioiu, head of Catholic Charities of New York's Immigrant Law Department, based in New York City. Catholic Charities in southern New York has 14 branch offices in the Hudson Valley and New York City, she said.

Gertrude O'Sullivan, director of communications and special programs for the foundation, said the organization had offered a similar program two years ago and felt that the time had come to offer it again.



PHOTO BY ASHER PAVEL

Immigrant law specialist Attorney Raluca Oncioiu with Catholic Charities in New York City spoke at the forum.

"This forum provides the knowledge that service providers must have. Without understanding immigrant law, a provider may inadvertently make a mistake that can permanently affect a client's eligibility to receive social and medical services."

When Oncioiu asked, only 20 percent of attendees indicated they had any previous experience with immigrant law.

Oncioiu noted that immigration law is extremely complex. On the federal level, there are four different agencies involved with immigrant law: the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice, the Department of State and the Department of Labor.

Some of the subtleties that service providers should know include the difference between immigrants and non-immigrants; immigration classifications; who counts as a nonimmigrant visa holder; who counts as an undocumented immigrant.

Different status levels affect how and what services can be provided.

Participants in the forum were also taught the different paths that immigrants can take to become lawful residents of the U.S., including seeking asylum. They learned about the naturalization process and they learned why immigrants can be deported.

To find out more about programs offered by the Foundation for Community Health, go online to www.fchealth.org.