

# Legal assistance for immigrants offered

## HAP requesting help funding new program

Two employees of the regional nonprofit Hispanic Affairs Project (HAP) recently became accredited to provide immigration assistance with family-based petitions to low-income families and individuals living in western Colorado.

Hispanic Affairs Project employees Marketa Zubkova, of Crested Butte, and Nicole Bernal Ruiz, of Fruita, received legal training over the past two years in preparation for the request for partial accreditation to represent immigrants with family-based petitions. They will begin offering services immediately.

Zubkova, who holds a Master's Degree from Prescott College and a Bachelor's Degree from Western State Colorado University, in addition to degrees from her native Czech Republic, has been a HAP leader for nearly a decade. In 2013, she received the eighth annual Immigrant Liberty Awards presented by the Colorado Chapter of the American Association of Immigration Lawyers for her

extensive volunteer outreach with H2A range workers. The women will provide services in Montrose at the HAP office, located at 300 N. Cascade Ave., Suite C-4, and at Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church in Grand Junction, at 790 26.5 Road.



Zubkova

HAP is a grassroots organization serving the immigrant community in six counties in western Colorado, including Mesa, Delta, Montrose, San Miguel, Ouray and Gunnison. HAP programs include: Immigration Legal Assistance (BIA Accredited), Migrant Outreach, Combating Human Trafficking, Welcoming Colorado Initiative, Leadership Development & Community

Organizing, Supporting Pro-Immigrant Policies and Community Resource Center.

The recent approval of HAP's request for recognition and accreditation from the Board of Immigration Appeals in the Department of Justice will enable immigrants who cannot afford legal fees to receive qualified representation with immigration applications. HAP leaders say the unauthorized practice of law by people who purport to provide legal assistance but who jeopardize the future of many families is an ongoing problem in the area.

Limited financial resources often prevent immigrant families from applying for the immigration benefits for which they may qualify. As a result, the HAP board took steps to found the legal assistance program to address these issues, supporting family unity for many across the region.

HAP has begun representing clients. Community members are encouraged to support the new program by making a tax-deductible donation to the 501c3 organization. Online donations and more information are available at [www.hapgj.org](http://www.hapgj.org).