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Immigrant still fighting to stay

Oct. 30, 2008

By Jenny Andreasson
Observer Staff

The Becks welcomed a healthy baby girl into their family, but their immigration woes are not over yet.

The Voice first reported the story of Miriam Beck, who is married to an American citizen, in May when she was denied health care for her unborn child. She began her journey through the immigration maze in 2005, initially filling out the wrong forms and hitting snags throughout the process.

In July, Miriam got a break — she started receiving care from Winnie Palmer Hospital and an immigration law firm took her case pro bono.

"Their case is pending and headed in the right direction," said Rebecca Morgan, attorney in the immigration division of the NeJame, LaFay, Jancha, Ahmed, Barker and Joshi law firm.

If all goes well, Miriam will have her physical exam this week and then her interview with immigration officials will be scheduled. After the interview, Miriam will be mailed a decision — an anticipated document that Morgan says could come in days or could take a whole month.

"It is a very long, sometimes heart-wrenching process for people in the U.S. who want to start their lives together and then they hit this big speed bump," she said. Innocent people such as Miriam get trapped in the system all the time because they aren't counseled on which forms to fill out.

The process for an immigrant to adjust their status based on marriage costs \$2,000, and that doesn't include the cost of an attorney, document translations for non-English speakers and document copies, Morgan said.

Without a Social Security card, Miriam has been unable to work, leaving her husband Stuart, a carpenter, as the only income earner for them and their four children. "I can't work; there's no money," she said. "It's such a struggle."

Stuart didn't earn enough from his small business, Becks Custom Trim, to qualify as the sole sponsor for Miriam's residency. Luckily, family friends David and Sandy Ribakoff stepped in as a co-sponsor, but it only meant more paperwork, Miriam said.

It's almost been four years since they moved to Oviedo from Scotland for the American dream, she said. "We've come so far now ... it seems like the end's just nowhere in sight."

Beck Family Fund

Miriam Beck is nearing the finish line to become a U.S. Citizen but fees are holding up the process. If you would like to help, donate to the family fund at the Washington Mutual at 3 Alafaya Woods Blvd. in Oviedo. The account number is 3173678241 and the routing number is 267084131.

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