

ATLANTA ASYLUM NETWORK



INFORMATION FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS: VOLUNTEERING WITH THE AAN

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What do we do?

The Atlanta Asylum Network (AAN) provides physical and psychological evaluations for asylum seekers in the Southeast. In keeping with the mission of Emory's Institute for Human Rights, the AAN strives to promote the rights of people who have suffered human

rights abuses. Asylum seekers who have experienced torture and abuse are referred to the Network to be evaluated by healthcare providers, who then correlate any physical and psychological findings with the torture and abuse that the asylum

seekers report. These findings are documented in affidavits for the Asylum Court.

Why?

Medical or psychological

affidavits are known to assist in the approval of asylum cases, but the services are unaffordable or inaccessible for many applicants. According to TRAC Immigration, the grant rate for the city of Atlanta from 2000 through the early months of 2005 was 12.5%. To date, 41% of our past clients for whom we



have records have been granted asylum by the Atlanta court—an increase of 29%.

Volunteer Overview

The Atlanta Asylum Network relies upon physicians and

psychologists who volunteer their time and expertise. Health professionals have a unique opportunity to aid torture survivors and other individuals fleeing persecution by providing evaluations and expert testimony.

What is the health professional's role?

- To receive training to work with torture survivors and recognize torture-related physical and psychological sequelae.
- To be available to perform at least one evaluation a year.
- When possible, to conduct an evaluation and form an opinion as to whether a client's persecution claims are consistent with physical or psychological findings.
- To write an affidavit to report your findings from the evaluation.
- To consider giving in-person or telephone testimony when the case is heard in the Asylum Court.

Q: How much time is required?

A: An evaluation takes approximately 2 hours. Writing an affidavit takes about 4 hours for new professionals; subsequent affidavits require less time. If you are asked to appear in court, that usually requires several hours, though this varies widely.

Q: Will I have to go to court?

A: Unless you are subpoenaed, a very infrequent occurrence, you will not be required to go to court—your affidavit is your testimony. If you would like to testify, this may enhance the asylum seeker's case.

Q: How will I benefit?

A: Our providers report a range of benefits from their service, including the opportunity to help torture survivors begin the healing process, and to help protect survivors from further abuse. Providers also note a newfound appreciation of the rights and privileges we enjoy in the US. Professionally, providers appreciate the training and experience in conducting evidentiary exams and forensic medical and psychological work. Finally, they enjoy having a network of colleagues who share a common service commitment.



WHO IS AN ASYLUM SEEKER?

Any individual who has been in the US for less than one year and can demonstrate a credible fear of persecution can apply for asylum through the Department of Homeland Security—US Citizenship and Immigration Services. Individuals must meet the US Refugee Act Criteria:

" Any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of perse-

cution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion."

Additionally, the President of the United States has included acts of forced sterilization and forced termination of pregnancy as grounds for asylum applications.

Contact Information:

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We're on the web!

[http://humanrights.emory.edu/
atlantaAsylumNetwork/index.htm](http://humanrights.emory.edu/atlantaAsylumNetwork/index.htm)

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"We live in a world of continual conflict and challenge. Working with brave individuals who are seeking asylum in our country to escape the torture, persecution, cruelty and injustice from their native



lands is an awesome and humbling experience. Their strength and courage is an inspiration and an insight into many social conditions and how they impact health. I learned that saving lives is not only about heroic procedures in the ER on a Saturday night. It astonishes me how an act as simple as a physical examination can touch a stranger's life so immensely and result in such moral fulfillment for myself."

- Jason Prystowsky, MD, MPH

WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

Atlanta Asylum Network is in need of volunteer physicians, psychologists, and gynecologists from the community to perform evaluations for asylum seekers. As an evaluator, you are an essential part of our organization and the asylum process. Evaluators have the opportunity to build upon their own experience in their field of care while providing an invaluable service to someone in desperate need.

It is easy to get involved. Email us at **atlantaasylum@yahoo.com** in order to be added to our database of medical and/or psychological evaluators.

