DACA workshop garners few applicants

Mistrust feared; renewal deadline Oct. 5

DAVE GONG | The Journal Gazette

More than two hours into Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic's Saturday workshop for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals participants, only a few people had come to ask for help.

“I do think there’s a lot of fear out there, and I think there’s a lot of distrust,” Director Desiree Koger-Gustafson said. “And I think that does negatively impact things like this, especially when they’re kind of out there in the media.”

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, grants protection against deportation for two years for undocumented immigrants who entered the U.S. as minors. President Donald Trump's administration announced this month that the program will be rescinded. DACA participants, also known as “Dreamers,” have until Oct. 5 to renew their participation in the program.

“They're young, most of them speak English, this is where they grew up,” Koger-Gustafson said. “They need to renew their status in order to keep that for a longer amount of time until, hopefully, we get something figured out in our legislature for these kids.”

Those who attended the workshop received help on the necessary forms. Volunteers checked over the documents and made sure each person had everything they needed to process their application. The Neighborhood Christian
Legal Clinic will then send the forms to the government. Because the application deadline is so close, Koger-Gustafson said there won’t be enough time to hold another workshop.

“Because of the firm deadline of Oct. 5, we want to make sure those applications are put together appropriately, because if (the applications) get kicked out, they won’t get them back to be accepted on time,” Koger-Gustafson said.

Nine attorneys and five non-attorneys volunteered. Although Koger-Gustafson said it’s not clear just how many DACA participants reside in northeast Indiana, she said the Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic and Catholic Charities have served about 700 to 800 people since 2012.

The Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic is a not-for-profit agency that helps low-income residents with legal needs, as well as preventative education, Koger-Gustafson said.

“There’s a vast amount of the population that just can't afford to walk through the legal process and need help in that regard,” Koger-Gustafson said.

dgong@jg.net