

CCS immigration assistance program reunites families

WESTERN WASHINGTON
BY ARMANDO MACHADO

During many years in his native town, San Blas in central Mexico, Francisco Davila longed to visit his daughter Lilia Ortiz and two of his sons living in Skagit County.

In 2008, that dream came true.

With help and moral support from Catholic Community Services, Davila, then 58, received U.S. permanent resident status, along with his wife, Juana.

Lilia, who obtained U.S. citizenship the previous year, also received assistance from the CCS program called Catholic Immigration Legal Services. Based in Seattle and Mount Vernon, CILS is designed to assist low-income people and families in Washington state.

"It had been many years since I had seen my brothers and my children," said Davila, now 62, during an interview at St. Charles Church in Burlington. "Then finally I was able to come and obtain residency. It was a very good process — very good because it didn't take very long. And I am thankful for Donna and her office."

Donna Rieper is a CILS coordinator in Mount Vernon.

Family unification

Since 2008, Davila, who works in construction, has lived part of each year in Skagit County, and part in San Blas, which is in the state of Zacatecas.

"I became a citizen so that my parents can get permanent residency."

LILIA ORTIZ

He has six grown children, three in Skagit County and three in Mexico.

"I became a citizen so that my parents can get permanent residency," said daughter Lilia, 39.

After Lilia became a citizen, Rieper began

the residency process for her parents, handling all the procedures, the paperwork and sending the necessary applications.

About three months after the process began, Lilia was accepted as her parents' sponsor.

CILS offers citizenship application assistance for a nominal fee. The assistance is free for people living in Seattle because of additional funding from the

CATHOLIC IMMIGRATION LEGAL SERVICES

100 23rd Ave., Seattle,
206-328-5714

320 Pacific Place, Mount Vernon,
360-416-7095

By appointment only

city, Rieper said. The program also offers family reunification services, citizenship/naturalization (including fee and disability waivers), adjustments of status (green cards), travel documents, employment authorization, replacement of green cards, mock interviews, accompaniment to USCIS interviews, and other resources and referrals.