

Probe reveals rampant ripoffs hitting immigrants

Fraudulent businesses in rogue storefronts in Queens often fleece immigrants hunting for jobs or immigration help by taking fees for services they don't deliver, according to a report out Thursday.

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When a Queens employment agency promised Peruvian immigrant Gerardo Llanque a welding job in 2010, he quickly forked over \$100.

But when Llanque, 49, showed up at the Brooklyn address the agency gave him, no one was there.

“It was an abandoned building right in front of a cemetery,” he said. “I felt terribly bad. Even in this developed country, corruption exists.”

Fraudulent businesses in rogue storefronts in Queens often fleece immigrants hunting for jobs or immigration help by taking fees for services they don't deliver, according to a report out Thursday.

Many agencies also break the law by posting misleading signs and not providing contracts, researchers with New Immigrant Community Empowerment and the Community Development Project of the Urban Justice Center found.

They are urging the Queens district attorney to set up a special unit to target fraud against immigrants.

“Just walking down Roosevelt Ave., you notice the intensity with which services are targeting immigrants, said Valeria Treves, executive director of New Immigrant Community Empowerment.

“It's very clear that there's rampant substandard predatory practices by businesses in our community.”

Treves sent out 10 Ecuadoran and Mexican immigrants posing as fake “shoppers” to a random sample of more than 50 businesses along Roosevelt Ave. in Jackson Heights, Elmhurst and Corona this summer.

The shoppers pretended to seek services. During three out of 13 visits, staffers promised the researchers they could get them work permits, even though nothing in their stories suggested it was possible. One agency asked for \$7,000 for arranging a work permit and green card. None of the firms had posted the “not an attorney” sign New York State law requires.

More than half of the job agencies promised work — even though it’s illegal for such agencies to guarantee results.

Eighty percent of the job firms told the seekers to pay an upfront fee, averaging more than \$120; in nearly every case, the agencies did not reveal the fee was refundable.

While placement agencies can collect advance fees from low-wage job hunters, they are legally bound to refund the money if they don’t find them a job.

All too often, this doesn’t happen, said Treves. She thinks state lawmakers should modify the law so employment agencies can’t take upfront fees from anyone.

A spokesperson for the city’s Department of Consumer Affairs said it inspects hundreds of immigrant service shops each year and gets consumers back tens of thousands of dollars.

Read more: <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/probe-reveals-rampant-ripoffs-hitting-immigrants-article-1.1180547#ixzz29OEdkDTE>