



CENTROLEGAL

Annual Report 2010

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Mission Statement

To improve access to the court system and assure quality legal representation for clients regardless of income, ethnicity, or native language by providing legal education and representation to low-income clients who are in personal transition out of poverty toward safety and self-sufficiency.

Background

Founded in 1991, Centro Legal is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization that provides bilingual legal services and education for low income individuals in Milwaukee County. We serve a diverse group of clients in family law and criminal misdemeanor defense cases. As part of our family law program, we offer specialized services for victim of domestic abuse. We also serve as court appointed counsel for minors in family and paternity courts.

Centro Legal focuses on family law and misdemeanor defense cases because these types of cases have a serious impact on a person's well-being and future opportunities. We help our clients navigate the legal system so that they can focus on their families, jobs and education. Our goal for our clients is that they maintain stable homes and remain employed in the face of legal difficulties. For our clients that suffer from domestic abuse or are in a period of transition; our services empower them to transition from poverty to stability and self-sufficiency.

Statement from the Director

Dear Friends,

On behalf of our staff, Board of Directors and the many clients we served this year, I want to thank you for your support. This year has presented challenges and opportunities. I am very pleased to share with you our outcomes and successes through this Annual Report. Some of the highlights include:

- **We provided legal counsel to nearly 1,800 people with legal needs this year.** A legal issue can impact every aspect of a person's life – his or her job, family, education, and future opportunities. The stories of Susan and Danielle told in this Report show how the successful resolution to a legal problem can serve as the catalyst for positive change in a person's life.
- With more people unemployed and underemployed, the demand for our services was greater than ever. Partnering with other non-profit agencies in Milwaukee has become a key part of our strategy to expand our reach and maximize our impact. **We partnered with 15 different organizations to deliver our programs in 2010.**
- **Centro Legal was officially welcomed as a program partner of the United Way of Greater Milwaukee!** The United Way has generously supported our work on behalf of domestic violence victims since 2007. We are very excited about this opportunity to expand our partnership.



Our programs and services would not be possible without the generous support of our Board of Directors, volunteers and donors. It is a privilege to be a part of the Centro Legal community and serve as its Executive Director. Together we can improve access to justice for those in our community facing a legal crisis.

Sincerely,

Heather Ramirez

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather V. Ramirez". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Executive Director, Centro Legal

2010 Legal Services Summary

- 745 free legal consultations were provided
- 197 individuals attended family law outreach classes
- 473 new client cases were opened in 2010
 - 15% Criminal cases
 - 35% Family law cases
 - 50% Guardian ad Litem cases
- 566 client cases were closed in 2010
 - 16% Criminal cases
 - 34% Family law cases
 - 50% Guardian ad Litem cases

Client Demographics

Gender

	Criminal	Family
Female	22%	85%
Male	78%	15%

Age

	Criminal	Family
Average Age	35	37
20 & under	4%	1%
20 to 30	33%	33%
31 to 40	35%	35%
41 to 50	18%	23%
50+	10%	8%

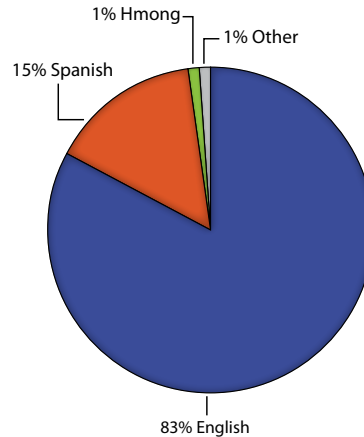
Household Income

(Percent of Poverty Level)	Criminal	Family
0% <125% (no income)	62%	75%
126 to 200%	29%	19%
201 to 300%	9%	6%

Race/Ethnicity

Caucasian	33%
Hispanic	30%
African-American	28%
Asian	4%
Other	5%

Primary Language



Larry Bonney
 Nancy Bonniwell
 Wendy Reed Bosworth and Robinson Bosworth III
 Deb Bronder
 Christy Brooks
 Jean Buelow
 Mary Campbell
 Ernesto Chacon
 Hon. Karen Christenson and Mr. Dick Christenson
 William and Therese Corrigan
 Carlo Cotrone
 Susan Croft
 Joseph Sheppard Crumrine
 Domingo and Sylvia Cruz
 Leslie Davis
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 Thomas and Mary Jo Dempsey
 Samantha Dennis
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 Lloyd Dickinson
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 Alison Helland
 Cate Jamison
 Cindy Johnson
 Terry and Linda Johnson

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 Lesley Ann Kagen
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 William Mulligan
 Anna Munoz
 Francisca Murillo
 Marshall Murray
 Rick Ninneman
 Kenneth Nowakowski
 John O'Connor
 John O'Connor
 David and Janet Olsen
 Pamela Orin
 Bradley Page
 W. Stuart Parsons
 Mary Payne
 Edward Paz
 Megan Peccarelli
 Mark Peterson
 Roger Pettit
 Christina Plum
 Jessica Poliner
 Skip and Ildy Poliner
 David Poniewaz
 Megan Potter
 Comm. David Pruhs and Janelle Pruhs

Family Law Program

Centro Legal has served clients in Milwaukee County Family Courts for over 20 years. We focus on family law because the need for representation is tremendous and because the outcomes in these cases can significantly impact family safety and stability. In cases involving domestic abuse, it is especially important for the client to work with an attorney who can equalize the power imbalances and give voice to the client's best interests. We use our expertise in family law to turn hope into action for families facing a legal crisis. Our bilingual staff is uniquely qualified to meet the needs of Milwaukee's diverse communities.

Family Law Cases

Divorce, Child Support, Guardian Ad Litem, Paternity, Child Custody, Child Placement, Domestic Abuse, Spousal Support, Restraining Orders

Family Law Outreach Programs

In addition to our complete direct representation services, we reach nearly 1,000 individuals each year through our outreach programs.



Free Legal Consultations

Every Wednesday, we provide free consultations to individuals with questions about family law matters. We help them understand their legal options, prepare individuals planning to represent themselves, deter inappropriate claims and provide referrals.

Family Law Classes

We collaborate with non-profit agencies across the city to provide our family law information classes. The class teaches participants about family court procedures and provides them with a basic understanding of family law issues and vocabulary. We dispel common myths and misconceptions about the court process and inform attendees about the resources available to them at the courthouse. We have partnered with 30 different Milwaukee non-profits to deliver this class.

Family Law – Client Story

Like many victims of domestic violence, Susan found herself in a cyclical pattern of abuse. Though she convinced her husband to seek counseling several times, he would continually drop out and revert back to acts of violence.



After an incident where her husband threatened to destroy their house and kill her, Susan fled for her life. She worked with police and the district attorney to criminally prosecute her husband; however, she could not afford to hire an attorney to help her with her divorce case. Susan tried to secure the divorce on her own, but she made some errors during the process which enabled her husband to reopen the case and vacate the divorce judgment. Soon after, he made demands for child visitation and property.

Susan was referred to Centro Legal by a local domestic abuse shelter. We represented Susan at no cost as part of our domestic abuse program. Staff attorney Jessica Marquez Murphy helped Susan secure a complex settlement that met her needs and protected her children. Centro Legal also connected Susan to other community resources to help her deal with the stress and toll of the case. Susan knew many challenges awaited her, but felt she could confidently address them because the divorce was final.

Criminal Law Program

Centro Legal represents clients who do not qualify for public defender representation but also do not have the resources to hire a private attorney. We ensure our clients understand their legal rights and responsibilities, enabling them to make informed decisions about their cases.

In certain cases, Centro Legal is able to negotiate an alternative agreement with the District Attorney's Office called a Diversion or a Deferred Prosecution Agreement. Through these programs, the client enters an agreement with the district attorney to complete programming to address identified areas of need such as substance abuse treatment or mental health services. When a participant is successful, charges are never issued or are dismissed. These programs allow individuals who would otherwise end up incarcerated or on probation the opportunity to address the substance abuse and mental health issues that often lead to criminal behavior. Participants are able to stay in community and remain employed without the stigma of a criminal record.

A criminal charge does not have to derail a person's life and future opportunities. Centro Legal is the only non-profit organization in Milwaukee with a program dedicated to that providing legal representation in criminal cases.

Criminal Defense Cases

Battery, Theft, Diversion Agreements, No Contact Violation, Disorderly Contact, Operating After Revocation, Operating While Intoxicated, Deferred Prosecution Agreements, Possession of Controlled Substances.

Criminal Defense – Client Story

Danielle was referred to Centro Legal by the public defender she met with while she was in custody. She was scared and nervous. Danielle had been arrested for obtaining a prescription drug by fraud. She had become addicted to the medication after being prescribed it for legitimate purposes. However, it was now ruining her life. She was unable to keep her job and was facing possible criminal charges. Centro Legal represented Danielle and helped her make an informed decision about resolving her case through a Diversion Agreement with the District Attorney's Office. Danielle was able to get into counseling and maintain sobriety. Felony charges and a conviction would have derailed Danielle's educational and career goals. The agreement not only protected Danielle from criminal charges, it gave her the chance to get the help she needed to address her substance abuse issues.



“The legal staff helped me a lot and made me feel relaxed in making my decision. [Staff attorney] Jessica helped me handle my fear . . .” – Client

Amanda Ethel Quester
Abby Ramirez
Austin and Heather Ramirez
Agustin and Rebecca Ramirez
Kirsten Reneau
Aly Rieser
Buddy and Catherin Robinson
Merton Rotter
Kate and Jeff Ruidl
David and Denise Ryan
Steven Rynecki
Susan Sager
Sherry Saiki
Hon. Richard Sankovitz
S. Edward Sarskas
Mary Scheibel
Lea Schneider
Victor and Jayna Schultz
Varsha Shah
Daniel Shneidman
Kelli Sieplinga
Luke Sims
Sarah Smith
L. William and Kathleen Staudenmaier
Christian and Barbara Steinmetz
Dwight Stephenson
Gary Strand
Richard and Linda Terlau
William Thiemann
John Thompson
Joseph and Kay Tierney
JoHannah Torkelson
Lawrence Towers
Kelly Twigger
Daniel and Dawn Vaccaro
Jack and Sharon Vaccaro
Rob and Rebecca Valcq
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Patrick and Barbara Vanderburgh
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Andrew Vedder
Michelle Velasquez
Hon. Jeffrey Wagner
Phillip and Doris Wanazek
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Jonathan Wertz
Wendell and Dorothy Yonker
Catherine Young
Tyler Zacharias
Hon. Dean Zemel and Debbie Zemel

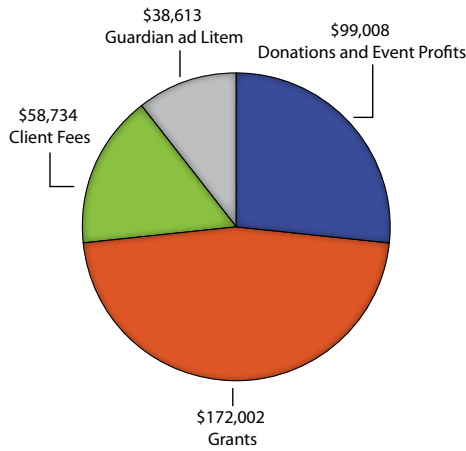
In-Kind Donors

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Anvil Pub & Grill
Bangles & Bags
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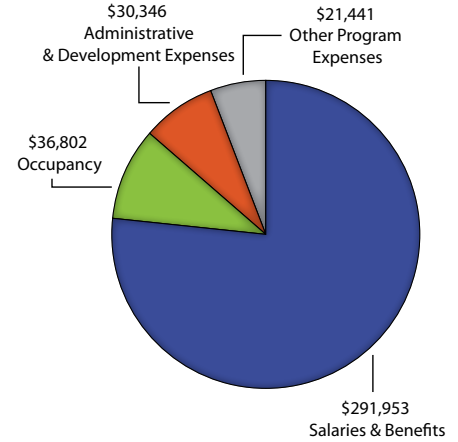
- Beauty
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- Marquette University Spirit Shop
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- Milwaukee Bucks
- Milwaukee Community Sailing Center
- Milwaukee County Parks
- Milwaukee County Zoo
- Milwaukee Food Tours
- Milwaukee Public Museum
- Milwaukee Repertory Theater
- Milwaukee Wave Professional Soccer
- Milwaukee Yacht Club
- The Milwaukee Yoga Center
- Mount Olympus Resorts
- Anna Munoz
- Next Act Theatre
- Stacey Opperman
- Palms Bistro & Bar
- Penelope's Restaurant of Elm Grove
- Jessica Poliner
- Austin Ramirez
- Rebecca Ramirez
- Roots Restaurant
- Ruth Kallio-Mielke & Steve Mielke

Financials

2010 Revenues: \$368,357



2010 Expenses: \$380,542



Events

"Centro Legal Annual Luncheon"

February 25, 2010

Italian Conference Center

Over 225 guests attended this annual event. Through the generous support of our sponsors and supporters, we raised critical funds to support our programs and services.

Event Sponsors:

Foley & Lardner LLP
 FIS Global
 We Energies
 Reinhart Boerner Van Deuren, S.C.
 Quarles & Brady LLP

"Centro Gala"

August 5, 2010

Discover World at Pier Wisconsin

This event was our most successful fundraising event to date, raising over \$30,000 to support Centro Legal's Family Law Programs

Event Sponsors:

Quarles & Brady LLP
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 Blommer Peterman
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 Tri City National Bank
 M&I Bank

"Noche de Ninos"

December 2, 2010

Bacchus

Centro Legal partnered with the Hispanic Professionals of Greater Milwaukee to Collect donations of toys and books for local families.

Event Sponsors:

Davis & Kuelthau, S.C.

Board of Directors

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Staff

Michael Balter, Criminal Attorney
Guadalupe Campos, Office Manager
Samantha Levihn, Family Law Attorney
Jessica Marquez Murphy, Family Law Attorney
Jason Mishelow, Senior Attorney and CFO
Heather Ramirez, Executive Director

“For me, Centro Legal is that rare job where idealistic plans and dreams about equality, service, and fairness have not just survived, but have continued to grow and strengthen over time.”
- Jason Mishelow, Senior Attorney and CFO at Centro Legal

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Skylight Opera Theatre
Sky Knights Prachute Club
Sprecher Brewing Co., Inc.
Sunset Playhouse
The Abbey Resort
The Ambassador Hotel
The Capital Grill
The Greg Jennings Foundation
The Pfister Hotel
The Spa at West Wood
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