



Linnea Matthiesen

JESSICA MARQUEZ MURPHY AND LINNEA MATTHIESEN

BY JESSICA POLINER, L'06



Jessica Marquez Murphy

While a law student and supervised fieldwork intern with Centro Legal on Milwaukee's South Side, Jessica Marquez Murphy, L'07, received her assignments and set out to accomplish them. Not an hour into her first day as an intern, she headed to the courthouse. Marquez Murphy submitted child support papers, filed a summons and petition for a divorce, and requested pretrial dates in two courtrooms. Nearing the end of her day, Marquez Murphy reunited with her supervising attorney, Linnea Matthiesen, L'03, for the most nerve-racking task of all. Under the watchful eye and guidance of Matthiesen, Marquez Murphy made her first appearance of record under the student practice rule in a stipulated-divorce case.

A little more than a year later, now a lawyer herself, Marquez Murphy works side-by-side with Matthiesen at Centro Legal, a nonprofit law firm providing legal representation in the two largest areas of low-income litigation—family law matters and misdemeanor criminal defense. Both Marquez Murphy and Matthiesen agree that the agency's principal differentiator is the firm's cost-sharing model, where in most cases the client pays a portion of the fee. "In two years and over 150 closed cases later, I have had only two clients fail to show up for a hearing, and both called to tell me beforehand," adds Matthiesen.

Marquez Murphy and Matthiesen credit Marquette Law School for providing them abundant opportunities for practical experience. Marquez Murphy explains, "I was fortunate to enroll in the substantive law classes that I wanted, including all of the family law classes, the child abuse seminar, the domestic violence workshop, and the restorative justice program. More than anything, though, the Law School allowed me to learn outside of its walls."

And learn she did. Marquez Murphy volunteered with the Boys and Girls Club, served as a Public Interest Law Society fellow at the Task Force on Family Violence, and interned at Legal Action of Wisconsin and, ultimately, at Centro Legal. While still a law student, Marquez Murphy

gained an understanding of the plight of low-income women and children, especially when domestic violence is present. Marquez Murphy knew that she wanted to combine her various experiences and her substantive legal knowledge to aid domestic violence victims. Centro Legal provided her the opportunity.

In her last semester at the Law School, Marquez Murphy helped to author a grant application to help fund Centro Legal's family-court representation of victims of domestic violence. "Unfortunately, because domestic violence is a common matter among our clients, there is an overwhelming need for this project," Marquez Murphy explains. United Way recently approved the grant.

Referrals are made to the project from the District Attorney's office and domestic violence support organizations. Nearly all clients are at-risk individuals who need a safer and more stable home life to avoid slipping into a crisis situation. Before she had worked for even six months with Centro Legal, Marquez Murphy could count 35 individuals as her clients, a reflection of the high caseload at Centro Legal.

Of course, Marquez Murphy is not alone at the project. As a family law attorney focusing on guardian ad litem appointments and divorce cases, Matthiesen works closely with Marquez Murphy to provide a variety of services to the project's clients. "With the United Way grant, we are now able to assist domestic violence victims through a divorce, if this is desired, help implement safety plans, and make referrals to other community agencies when necessary," relates Matthiesen. Both Matthiesen and Marquez Murphy also work with new supervised fieldwork interns from Marquette, who help Centro Legal tackle its large caseload. "I am eager to share my experience and knowledge with them," says Marquez Murphy.

Centro Legal's executive director, Chris Ford, feels the same way. "We need more folks, whether students or lawyers, like Linnea and Jessica," he says. "Some very fine individuals are emerging from Marquette Law School." •