



CENTROLEGAL
turn hope into action

Annual Report 2008

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Mission Statement

Our mission is 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

Centro Legal Por Derechos Humanos was founded in 1991 by two bilingual attorneys with the intention of serving Milwaukee's Hispanic community. Over the years, we have kept our Spanish name and have maintained a south-side location, but have grown to serve a very diverse group of clients.

We practice in the areas of family law and criminal misdemeanor defense because the need for representation in Milwaukee's family and criminal courts is tremendous and because these types of cases have a significant impact on a person's well-being and future opportunities.



Statement from the Director

I am delighted to be writing my first annual statement as Centro Legal's Executive Director. As a member of the Milwaukee legal community prior to joining Centro Legal, I admired the organization's important work and impact in the city. It is a privilege now to serve as Centro Legal's Executive Director and champion its mission in the community.



Despite the economic challenges of 2008, Centro Legal is pleased to report several achievements that benefited our clients and our community. In addition to opening over 500 new client cases, we developed two important outreach programs.

In February, we launched our free consultation program. Each Wednesday, we provide free consultations to individuals with family law questions. Through this program, we are able to educate individuals about their legal options and the court procedures, advise individuals planning to proceed pro se and provide referrals for other community resources. We are also able to identify those individuals most in need of direct representation services. In 2008, we provided nearly 800 consultations.

We also expanded our free family law classes. Centro Legal collaborated with several new community partners in 2008, providing classes in both English and Spanish. Providing complete representation in family law and criminal misdemeanor cases remains the core of our mission; however, we are excited about the impact and reach of these new programs.

Another highlight of 2008 is our relocation to the "Spanish Center" on Milwaukee's near southside. We are now located in the same facility as the Council for Spanish Speaking and Hispanic Professionals of Greater Milwaukee, providing opportunities for partnership and collaboration. Our new office is closer to the courthouse, positioned on major bus routes and closer to the central city.

Centro Legal is a dynamic organization and I am proud to have joined the effort. Thank you for your support as we continue to help clients who would otherwise face the justice system alone.

Statement from the Board Chair



Dear Friends and Supporters of Centro Legal:

The Great Recession of 2008—2009 is one of those historic events that will be remembered for years to come for what was lost—including jobs, savings, and businesses. Thinking of all the lessons my parents and grandparents recited over the years learned in the Great Depression, I find myself thinking about the lessons we have learned in these current trying times. As the leader of Centro Legal in the Great Recession, here are the two enduring lessons our organization has learned:

Out of adversity comes strength. As we have strengthened the management team at our firm, established systems and procedures, and moved into safer and sounder space, our senior attorney, Jason Mishelow, and Interim Director, Lisette Khalil, succeeded in April 2009 by Executive Director Heather Ramirez, took over firm management just as the Great Recession's financial stresses and strains reached a fever pitch. Two wonderful things happened. Our young management team proved up to the task: every penny was pinched until it screamed; every position and expense was evaluated and hard decisions were made and implemented without rancor; staff productivity went up and morale stayed high. Our Board focused even more intensely on policy issues presented by the financial challenges, community relations, and fundraising, with outstanding results. We learned that hard times can make us stronger, more efficient and productive, and we can do it in an atmosphere of collegiality and mutual support.

Accountability counts. At Centro Legal we want to be leaders in what we believe is the future of funding for nonprofit service agencies: measuring accountability. How do we measure the value of helping a young man avoid obtaining a criminal record? How do we count all the actions and interventions needed to protect a young mother and child from an abusive partner so they can feel safe again? We believe that as we continue to find ways to measure what we do and the outcomes of our efforts, we will prove ourselves responsible stewards for all the resources entrusted to us by you and others. We found that the credibility of our service impact numbers is helping us weather the Great Recession in many ways. We increased the overall delivery of services in the last year, even with one fewer staff attorney, by leveraging our lawyers' expertise in community family law classes and in our no-cost consultations every Wednesday afternoon—and we have the numbers to prove it! We believe our funders and donors, facing their own financial pressures, appreciate our consistent efforts to demonstrate accountability and that this has garnered their continued support because they could see that their increasingly scarce resources were being well-used.

We appreciate your support for the vital services Centro Legal performs day in and day out. We thank you for staying with us in these difficult times. We applaud your continuing support for increasing access to justice for Milwaukee's low income residents.

Sincerely yours,

Harvey A. Kurtz, President, Centro Legal Board of Directors

*"I am not
emotionally able to
do this on my own."
— Anonymous client*

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Looking Ahead

Centro Legal saw its most impactful year to date in 2008, serving nearly 1,500 individuals through our direct representation services, family law outreach classes and no-cost consultation program. We are working to continue this momentum through 2009 and beyond. Here are just some of the exciting projects we are working on:



Volunteer Lawyer Project

In 2009, we will launch our Volunteer Lawyer Program. Each Wednesday, Centro Legal provides free consultations to individuals with questions about family law matters. Centro Legal staff attorneys will train a small group of volunteer attorneys to help provide these consultations. The Program will allow us to serve more individuals in the community and help us identify those individuals most in need of our direct representation services.

Connecting with Young Professionals

Centro Legal is proud to have been selected as one of FUEL Milwaukee's "adopted nonprofits" for 2008-2009. This program pairs young professionals with local organizations looking for high-level, professional volunteers. Centro Legal's relationship with FUEL Milwaukee will be invaluable in our event planning, office administration, and public relations efforts.

Family Law Classes

Centro Legal's staff attorneys will continue to provide family law information classes at local non-profit agencies. This class teaches participants about the processes and procedures of family court and provides them with a basic understanding of family law issues and remedies. The class breaks down common myths and misconceptions about family court and provides attendees with realistic expectations about the court process. We plan to expand our non-profit partners in 2009.

Our Services

Family Law Cases

Divorce	Paternity	Child Placement
Spousal Support	Child Support	Child Custody
Domestic Abuse	Restraining Order	Guardian ad Litem

Criminal Defense Cases

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



2008 Legal Services Summary

781 free legal consultations were completed.
 152 individuals attended family law outreach classes.
 510 client cases were opened involving attorney representation in court, including:

- 196 (38%) Family law cases
- 115 (23%) Criminal cases
- 199 (39%) Guardian ad Litem cases
 - 144 minor alleged father GAL cases (28% of total)
 - 55 family GAL cases (11% of total)

Family Law – Client Story

Lily, a native Hmong speaker and mother of seven, came to Centro Legal to seek relief from an abusive husband. During Lily's marriage, she was a victim of both severe physical and emotional abuse. Financial burdens and language barriers made leaving the relationship particularly daunting. She worked full-time in a factory to support her family, receiving no support from her husband. She could not afford a private attorney.



A local domestic abuse advocate referred Lily to Centro Legal, where she received legal representation at no cost. Centro Legal attorney Jessica Marquez Murphy represented Lily for the entirety of her case. Throughout the process, Attorney Marquez Murphy worked alongside a Hmong advocate who provided translation services and connected Lily to community resources and support services. The court awarded Lily a favorable judgment; which included a restraining order, sole custody, child support and an equity interest in her home. During this same period, Lily's husband was found guilty of six different domestic violence crimes.

Unfortunately, Lily's story is one that we see often at Centro Legal. Centro Legal started the Domestic Abuse and Family Law Program so that women like Lily can find compassionate support and pursue the needed legal actions to break the cycle.

Criminal Defense Story

David, a college student, found himself in a difficult situation after he made the regrettable decision to drive without a license. David had previously been convicted of operating a vehicle while intoxicated, and had his license revoked. When David was charged with "Operating After Revocation," he turned to Centro Legal to settle the case as quickly as possible.



Centro Legal attorney Michael Balter encouraged David not to rush through the legal process, but to take the steps necessary to reinstate his license and resolve his legal problems. Attorney Balter worked closely with volunteer attorney Ilana Avital on David's case. Together they explored David's options and helped David navigate through the legal process. With the advice of his attorneys, David completed the requisite driver's safety program and court ordered alcohol assessment. Centro Legal also helped David research and secure an insurance provider. David's driver's license was reinstated, and the criminal charge was ultimately reduced to a ticket.

This case illustrates the positive impact legal counsel can have on an individual's life and future opportunities. Following the case, David wrote:

"I want to thank you for all that you have done for me with my case. I appreciate the time and effort that [Attorney Balter and volunteer Attorney Avital] have provided and recommend you both to other clients that may have similar issues. At my last court date, Attorney Balter was extremely helpful and got me through what could have been disastrous. I had no idea that the things that Michael did for me were even possible. I cannot stress enough that you two were awesome and very professional. Keep up the great work!"

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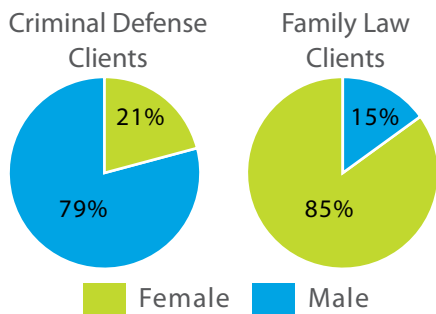
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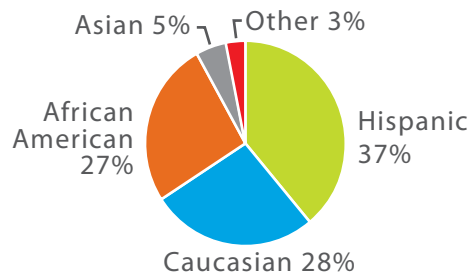
- Aala Reed
- William J. Abraham
- ABRAZO Marketing
- American Girl
- Catherine Andersen
- Anonymous
- Apple A Day Massage
- Arbor House
- Robyn E. Arnold
- Art Source
- Michael Balter

Client Demographics

Gender



Race/Ethnicity



Age (Adult clients only)

Age Range (years)	Criminal Law	Family Law	All Clients
17 to 20	11%	1%	5%
21 to 25	28%	9%	16%
26 to 30	11%	16%	14%
31 to 35	17%	18%	18%
36 to 40	14%	21%	16%
41 to 45	9%	15%	13%
46 to 50	4%	12%	9%
51+	6%	8%	7%
Average Age	32	38	35

Primary Language

Language	% of Clients
English	72%
Spanish	23%
Hmong	4%
Arabic	0.5%
Russian	0.5%

Household Income

Percent of Poverty Level	Criminal Law	Family Law	All Clients
0% (no income)	18%	20%	19%
1% to 99% (under the poverty level)	32%	35%	34%
100 to 125%	10%	10%	10%
126 to 200%	23%	23%	23%
>200%	17%	12%	14%

Financials

2008 Revenue: \$522,294

- Donations & Grants: \$377,176
- Guardian Ad Litem ("GAL"): \$43,393
- Client Fees: \$101,725

2008 Expenses: \$483,922

- Salaries: \$367,860
- Occupancy: \$34,867
- Administration & Development Costs: \$63,763
- Other Program Costs: \$17,432

"I want to be heard, and to be able to put a rest to this fear of not knowing what will happen if I don't stand up.

Centro Legal can speak up for me."

- Anonymous client

Events

“Centro Legal Uncorked!”

April 24, 2008
Eisner American Museum of Advertising and Design

Event Sponsors:

Foley & Lardner LLP
Gass Weber Mullins LLC
Reinhart Boerner Van Deuren SC
Beneco of Wisconsin
IVIZE

Centro Legal Uncorked was a wine tasting fundraiser attended by a diverse group of 150 young professionals from around the greater Milwaukee area. This first-time event raised a net profit of \$5,570!

“If I can have help resolving this issue, I can apply for jobs so my family does not have to be ashamed”
– Anonymous client

“Women Helping Women”

August 8, 2008
InterContinental Milwaukee

Event Sponsors:

M&I
Michael Best & Friedrich LLP
Godfrey & Kahn S.C.
Metavante
Quarles & Brady LLP
Stark Investments

Our first annual Women Helping Women auction was a huge success, raising a net profit of \$21,304!



“Noche de Ninos”

December 3, 2009
Palms Bistro

Sponsor:

Davis & Kuelthau s.c.

Centro Legal partnered with Hispanic Professionals of Greater Milwaukee (HPGM) to assist with HPGM’s annual event gathering donations of toys and books for local families. Together, we collected 144 toys for distribution throughout the community, including five past Centro Legal clients’ families.



- Jessica Barnett
- Bartolotta Restaurant Group
- Beadwork by Design
- Betty Brinn Children’s Musuem
- Ron & Barb Blair
- Blush
- Joseph Branch
- Brookfield Fads
- Cedar Creek Pottery
- Cedarburg Coffee Roastery
- Central Bark
- Patricia Cervenka
- Hilary Chermak
- Marion Coffey
- Connections Ticket Service
- Core Concepts
- Crowne Plaza Milwaukee
- Domingo & Sylvia Cruz
- Cubanitas
- Amy Dallas
- Danceworks, Inc.
- Sandy & George Dionisopoulos
- Discovery World
- Door Shakespeare Inc.
- Entercom Milwaukee
- Bryan & Lyn Eskra
- Exclusiva Hair Design
- Fitness Together
- Foley & Lardner LLP
- Bryan Foster
- George Watts & Son, Inc.
- Gimbel, Reilly, Guerin & Brown
- Girly Girl Baubles & Beads
- Ann & Matthew Granitz
- Great Lakes Diver Service & Supply
- Green Bay Packers
- Hackley-Holt House
- Hair Decisions & Oasis Spa
- Michael Hatch
- Kelly Hudson
- Idlewild Golf Course
- InterContinental Hotel
- Invivo Wellness
- IPic Entertainment
- David & Kim Irwin
- IVIZE of Milwaukee
- Trish Jochen
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**Heather Van Vugt Ramirez was appointed to the position of Executive Director on April 1, 2009*

"I have been given a lot of opportunities, and by being involved with Centro Legal I can help other people find ways to make opportunities for themselves as well."
– Domingo Cruz,
Centro Legal Board

Lakefront Brewery
Samantha & Peter Levihn
Molly Linn-Miller
M&I Bank
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Marquette University Spirit Shop
Massage Envy
Michels Family Foundation
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Milwaukee Brewers Baseball Club
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Palms Bistro & Bar
Jessica Poliner
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