



# CENTROLEGAL

Annual Report 2009

## Table of Contents

Mission Statement & Background . . . . .	2
Statement from the Executive Director . . . . .	2
Client Demographics . . . . .	3
Family Law . . . . .	4
Criminal Law . . . . .	5
Financials . . . . .	6
Events . . . . .	6
Board of Directors and Staff . . . . .	7

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# CENTROLEGAL

## 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

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 victims of domestic abuse. We also serve as court appointed counsel for minors in family and paternity courts.

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

## Statement from the Director

Dear Friends,

Centro Legal's programs served a record number of people this year, reaching over 1500 Milwaukee residents! Through the combined efforts of our Board of Directors, donors and our dedicated staff we achieved several noteworthy accomplishments this year.

- We expanded our network of community partners and directly collaborated with 18 different non-profit agencies to deliver our services;
- We streamlined the intake process for the consultation program;
- We launched a volunteer lawyer program to help us serve more individuals during our weekly consultation program;
- Our donors and supporters provided us with a record level of support through individual and event contributions.

We are grateful to our volunteers, donors and non-profit partners for working alongside Centro Legal to increase access to justice for Milwaukee families. The generosity of our supporters allowed us to survive one of the most challenging economic times in our history and approach 2010 stronger than ever. Centro Legal has developed a culture that values professional excellence and accountability. It is a privilege to be a part of the Centro Legal community and serve as the Executive Director. I encourage you to read the client stories featured in this Annual Report. Together we can help more individuals facing a legal crises achieve safety and stability.

Sincerely,  
Heather Ramirez

Executive Director, Centro Legal



- Stacey Bruckner
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- Stacey Gannon
- Paul R. Garcia
- Luis Garza

## 2009 Legal Services Summary

509 new complete direct representation client cases were opened, including:  
 30% Family law cases  
 19% Criminal cases  
 51% Guardian ad Litem (GAL) cases, including:  
 600 free legal consultations were completed.  
 193 individuals attended family law outreach classes.

## Client Demographics

### Gender

	Male	Female
Criminal Defense Clients	79%	21%
Family Law Clients	22%	78%

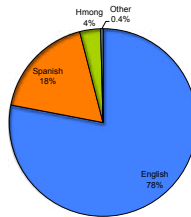
### Race/Ethnicity

Caucasian	27%
Hispanic	38%
African-American	27%
Asian	6%
Other	2%

### Age

	Criminal	Family	Total
Average Age	33	37	35
17 to 20	8%	1%	4%
21 to 25	19%	13%	15%
26 to 30	24%	22%	22%
31 to 35	11%	16%	14%
36 to 40	12%	16%	15%
41 to 45	12%	10%	11%
46 to 50	6%	11%	9%
51+	8%	11%	10%

### Primary Language



- English
- Spanish
- Hmong
- Other

### Household Income

(Percent of Poverty Level)	Criminal	Family	Total
0% (no income)	11%	30%	23%
<125%	58%	52%	54%
126 to 200%	21%	10%	14%
>200%	10%	8%	9%

Heather Gatewood  
 Sheila Gavin  
 Michael A. Gehl  
 Joshua Gimbel  
 Lisa M. Gingerich  
 Peter D. Goldberg  
 Michael J. Gonring  
 Linda Gorens-Levey  
 Hon. Sandy Grady  
 Sandra Grady  
 Melvyn & Nancy Grossman  
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 D. Michael Guerin  
 Jorge Guillen  
 Peter & Deborah Gunnlaugsson  
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 Matthew Haan  
 James Hampel  
 Edward Harness  
 Susan M. Harper  
 Sara D. Harvey  
 Alison Helland  
 Charles & Susan Henderson  
 Cristina Hernandez-Malaby  
 Ann M. Hetzel  
 Jan Hoeksema  
 Comm. William Honrath & Elizabeth  
 Blackwood  
 Erin Horman  
 Trish Jochen  
 Craig R. Johnson  
 Terry & Linda Johnson  
 Judy Jorgenson  
 Lesley Ann Kagen  
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 Pat Kandziora  
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 Christina Katt  
 Lori Keller  
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 Julia Kornilova  
 Randy Robert Koschnick  
 Mary J. Koshollek  
 Carol Kracht  
 Clair Miller Krause  
 Stephen Kravitz  
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 Harvey Kurtz & Yvonne Larme  
 Catherine A. La Fleur  
 Emily Larsen  
 Steve Lautz  
 Jane Leedle  
 Benjamin Levin  
 Ileene K. & Robert A. Levine  
 Micaela Levine  
 Amy Linder  
 Lisa Laplante  
 Rebecca Lopez  
 Lawrence & Charlene Lynch



## Family Law Program

Centro Legal provides complete representation in all matters related to family law. Centro Legal's staff attorneys are experts in family law, and we represent our clients for the entirety of their cases. Our efficient and effective advocacy minimizes the amount of time our clients must spend away from their work and families.

### Family Law Cases

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

### Family Law Outreach Classes

Centro Legal staff attorneys provide family law information classes at local non-profit agencies. These classes teach participants about the processes and procedures of family court and provide 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. Centro Legal provides these one to two hour classes in both English and Spanish. Attendees include service providers and patrons seeking information for themselves. In 2009 alone, Centro Legal partnered with 14 non-profit agencies to provide 18 classes, reaching over 193 attendees.



### Free Family Law Consultations

Every Wednesday afternoon, Centro Legal's staff attorneys provide free consultations to individuals with questions about family law matters. During these consultations, we help people understand their legal options, prepare individuals planning to represent themselves in court, deter inappropriate or ill-timed claims, and provide referrals when appropriate. Sometimes people come to Centro Legal with non-legal needs and we direct such patrons to appropriate community resources.

## Family Law – Client Story

Amy, a young mother of six, came to Centro Legal seeking relief from an abusive husband. Amy had been beaten and locked out of her home without access to a car or her phone, which was broken by her husband during the incident. Fearing for the safety of her and her children, Amy ran to the nearest neighbor to call the police. She obtained a temporary restraining order, but her husband had hired an attorney for the final hearing.



Amy came to Centro Legal fearful of the possibility that she would need to litigate for her and her children's safety in a courtroom against an experienced attorney. Attorney Jessica Marquez Murphy was able to represent Amy at no cost for the entirety of her case as part of the Domestic Abuse and Family Law Program. Attorney Marquez Murphy was able to secure the restraining order and file for divorce against Amy's batterer. Ultimately, the court awarded Amy favorable custody and placement, child support, and a property order.

A few months ago, Amy returned to Centro Legal with the good news that she is now living in her own apartment and has created a safer and more stable environment for herself and her children. Her eldest child has plans to attend college; something she never thought would be possible. Amy has made a difference in her own life and the lives of her children.

Centro Legal started the Domestic Abuse and Family Law Program so that women like Amy can find compassionate support and pursue the needed legal actions to move forward in life.

## Criminal Misdemeanor Defense Program

Centro Legal is one of only two non-profit organizations in Milwaukee that provide direct representation in criminal court. Centro Legal's bilingual criminal law attorney represents clients who do not qualify for public defender representation, yet do not have sufficient income to hire private counsel. Our attorney ensures that clients understand their legal rights and responsibilities, enabling them to make informed decisions about their cases.

### Criminal Misdemeanor Defense Cases

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

## Criminal Misdemeanor Defense – Client Story

Adam first learned of his legal predicament when his employer informed him there was a warrant out for his arrest for disorderly conduct while armed. Because of the warrant, he was fired from his job. Adam was shocked by the news and promptly turned himself in to the police.

He was determined to find a lawyer who would help him fight these life-changing charges that had already cost him his job. He began his search for an attorney and found private counsel that agreed to take his case, but required a \$2,000 retainer. Though Adam tried his best to scrape together the money, he ultimately found it impossible with no source of income.



Just as Adam resigned himself to the daunting task of facing the legal system alone, a clerk at the Milwaukee County Courthouse recommended Centro Legal. Centro Legal attorney Michael Balter agreed to take Adam's case and assured him that together they would work toward resolving his legal problems. Attorney Balter took the case to trial, and after cross-examination of the witnesses it became evident to the jury that the claims against Adam did not hold up. In less than 15 minutes, the jury had made its decision to find Adam not guilty and acquit him of all charges. Days later, Adam was rehired by his former employer. Adam stated, "If it wasn't for Centro Legal, I would have tried to do it myself and then lost. Centro Legal helped me get my life back on track."

Adam's case, and many like it, illustrate the positive impact legal counsel can have on an individual's life and future opportunities. Centro Legal and staff attorneys, including Attorney Michael Balter, help clients navigate the legal system rather than face it alone.

*"If it wasn't for Centro Legal, I would have tried to do it myself and then lost. Centro Legal helped me get my life back on track."*

*– Adam, Client*

- Margie Mahlberg
- Teresa Mambu Rasch
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- Brad Markwart
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- Ryan McCullough
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- Jon & Pam McGlocklin
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- Judith McMullen
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- Samantha Miller
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- Kari Race
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- Abby Ramirez
- Austin Ramirez
- Heather Ramirez
- Rebecca Ramirez
- Megan Raynor

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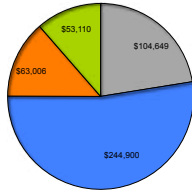
Theresa Reagan  
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 Micaela Velazquez



# CENTROLEGAL

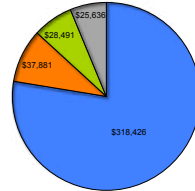
## Financials

2009 Revenue: \$465,665



- Donations & Events
- Grants
- Client Fees
- Guardian ad Litem

2009 Expenses: \$410,434



- Salaries
- Occupancy
- Administration/Development Costs
- Other Program Costs

## Events

### “Centro Legal Annual Luncheon”

February 18, 2009  
 Italian Community Center

#### Event Sponsors:

Foley & Lardner LLP  
 Metavante  
 WE Energies

### “Women Helping Women”

August 6, 2009  
 InterContinental Milwaukee

#### Event Sponsors:

Quarles & Brady LLP  
 Godfrey & Kahn, S.C.  
 WE Energies  
 Marshall & Ilsley Bank  
 Michael Best & Friedrich, LLP  
 Metavante

### “Centro Legal On Tap”

April 30, 2009  
 Lakefront Brewery

#### Event Sponsors:

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Nearly 200 guests attended Centro Legal's First Annual Luncheon. Judge Michael J. Dwyer was the keynote speaker.

Centro Legal's second annual Women Helping Women event was a success! Over 160 guests attended the event as we raised \$21,942 to support our services for women and families.

### “Noche de Ninos”

December 3, 2009  
 Osteria del Mondo

#### Event Sponsors:

Davis & Kuelthau, s.c.

Centro Legal partnered with the Hispanic Professionals of Greater Milwaukee (HPGM) to collect donations of toys and books for local families.

## 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  
Claudia Villarreal, Administrative Assistant

*“Lawyers can profoundly impact peoples’ lives. I have seen clients use Centro Legal’s services as a tool to improve their lives and the lives of their children. My experience at Centro Legal has been one I would not trade for anything.”*  
– Jason Mishelow,  
Senior Attorney & CFO,  
Centro Legal

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Wisconsin Athletic Club

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