



CENTROLEGAL

Annual Report 2012

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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

Since 1991, Centro Legal has provided professional and compassionate legal help to Milwaukee individuals and families facing a legal crisis. We represent clients in family law and criminal misdemeanor defense cases and offer a program for survivors of domestic abuse. We also serve as court appointed counsel for minors in family and paternity courts.

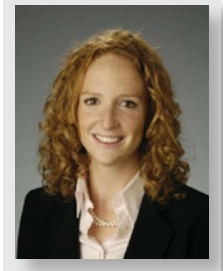
Our clients are mothers and fathers, children, veterans, domestic abuse survivors and individuals facing the criminal justice system. We help our clients navigate a complex legal system so that they can focus on their families, jobs and education. For our clients who experience domestic abuse or are in a period of transition, our programs empower them to achieve safety and independence.

Statement from the Director

Dear Friends,

I am delighted to share our outcomes and stories of lives changed by legal support through our Annual Report. Through the efforts of our staff, board of directors and funders we provided legal help to over 1,800 people this year, including:

- Legal advice to 50 veterans through a partnership with a local veterans support organization
- Representation of 133 survivors of domestic abuse in their family law cases
- Partnership with 8 different organizations to provide family law workshops reaching 217 participants
- Representation of the best interests of 468 children and minor fathers as guardians ad litem
- Brief legal advice and document preparation for 769 people through our weekly consultation program



Each of these people has a unique life story and legal concern. We see every day how the successful resolution of a legal problem can help a family achieve a more safe and stable future. This year, we expanded our partnerships to include work with a veteran's support organization. We also completed our first year as the legal services provider to the Milwaukee County Pathways to Responsible Fatherhood Project. We will continue to work alongside partners in the community to expand our reach and impact. Our work is only possible with the support of our volunteers, donors and partners. Thank you for your investment in Centro Legal and in the lives of our clients.

Sincerely,

Heather Ramirez
Executive Director, Centro Legal

*“Thank You,
Centro Legal.
After we finish this
case, I will be able to
live free of fear.”*

2012 Legal Services Summary

- 819 legal consultations were provided
- 217 individuals attended 14 family law outreach classes
- 817 clients served through complete representation in their cases
 - 262 family law cases
 - 87 criminal misdemeanor cases
 - 468 guardian ad litem cases

Client Demographics

Gender

	Criminal	Family
Female	18%	86%
Male	82%	14%

Age

	Criminal	Family
18 to 20	2%	1%
21 to 30	37%	26%
31 to 40	28%	35%
41 to 50	18%	25%
51+	15%	13%

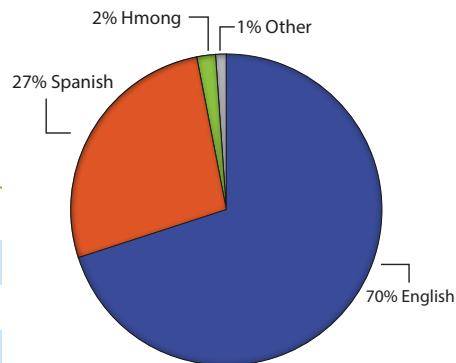
Household Income

(Percent of Poverty Level)	Criminal	Family
No income to <125%	80%	85%
126 to 200%	18%	10%
201 to 300%	2%	5%

Race/Ethnicity

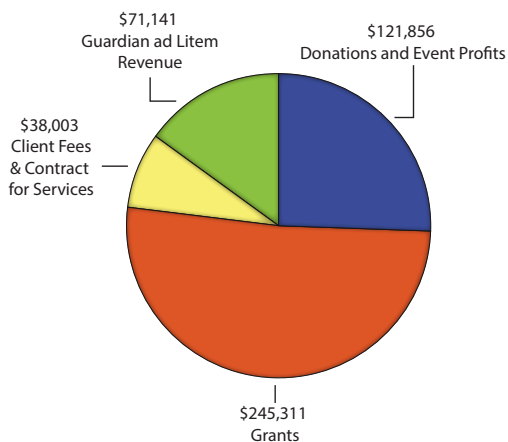
Asian	5%
Black or African-American	22%
Hispanic or Latino	45%
Native American	2%
White	25%
Other	1%

Primary Language

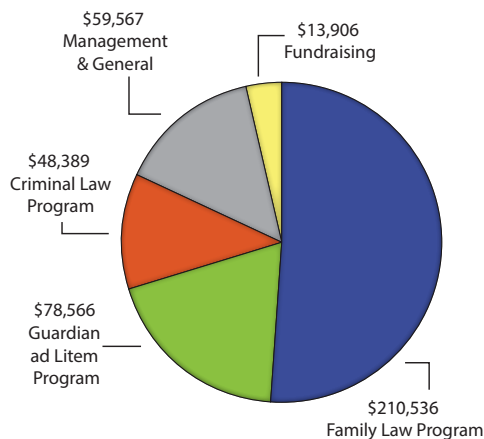


Financials

2012 Revenues: \$476,311



2012 Expenses: \$410,964



“Legal services helped me get my dignity back. I am able to enjoy life again.”

Family Law Program:

Centro Legal provides representation in all family law matters, including child custody and placement, child support, divorce, and the establishment of restraining orders. These cases involve serious issues regarding the safety and well-being of children, including where a child will live and who has the authority to make important decisions concerning the children's education and health. It is imperative that the parties understand their legal options.



Over half of our family law clients are survivors of domestic abuse, many of whom are referred to us from local domestic abuse advocacy agencies and shelters. We partner advocates from these organizations throughout our clients' cases to ensure they receive the holistic support they need during a transitional period in their lives.

In addition to our complete representation services, we provide legal advice and information through a consultation program and family law classes.

Consultation Program: Centro Legal provides in-depth legal consultations for people with family law concerns. We help people understand their court orders and complete their paperwork, prepare individuals to represent themselves, deter inappropriate or ill-timed claims and provide referrals to community resources. This year we started a partnership with the Center for Veteran's Issues, Inc. to provide a consultation service for veterans at their facility. Twice a month, Centro Legal provides an attorney on-site to provide legal advice and referral for veterans involved at the Center.

Family Law Class: Centro Legal's staff attorneys teach a family law information class at local non-profit agencies across the county. The class teaches participants about family court processes and procedures and informs attendees about the resources available to them at the courthouse. We have partnered with over 30 agencies to deliver the class.

Centro Legal also participates in the Milwaukee County Pathways to Responsible Fatherhood Project. This project joins together public and private organizations across the county to provide comprehensive support to men seeking to improve their parenting skills, education, job readiness and health with the goal of enabling fathers to establish stable relationships with their children. Centro Legal provides legal support to the program participants and partner organizations.

Client Story

"Many client stories share a common thread, but for me Stephanie's is extraordinary. Married for 18 years, Stephanie was continuously abused by her husband, even during the pregnancies of her three children. Finally fleeing, Stephanie's husband tracked her down at a friend's house. He attacked her in front of the children, shattering her orbital socket and causing a head wound that required over 30 stitches. Upon leaving the hospital, Stephanie and her children took refuge at a local women's shelter.

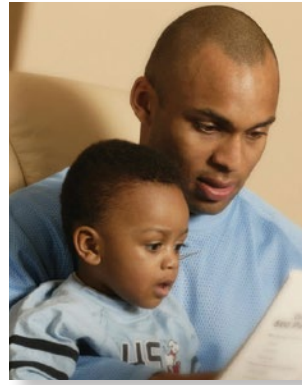
An advocate from the shelter referred Stephanie to me, and I successfully secured orders for custody, placement, child support and a divorce judgment. Today her ex-husband is incarcerated, the children are in school, and Stephanie has maintained employment. They live in a new apartment and have reconnected with family. Guiding Stephanie through this process, I watched her become a self-sufficient, confident mother and member of the community. Helping women like Stephanie is why I love what I do."

Jessica Marquez Murphy
Staff Attorney, Centro Legal

"Centro Legal representing me through this rocky time in my life has proven to me that all things are possible and I can get through any obstacle with great representation."

Guardian ad Litem Program:

The courts appoint Centro Legal to represent the best interests of children and minor fathers in family law cases and paternity cases. We are appointed as GALs for most of the minor fathers in Milwaukee County who must interact with the court system to establish paternity and parental rights. We also represent the best interests of hundreds of children each year in custody and placement cases.



Criminal Law Program:

Centro Legal represents clients who do not qualify for public defender representation, but are too poor to hire private counsel. The income guideline to qualify for public defender representation is set at 115% of the federal poverty guidelines, leaving a significant gap in legal support for those with low and modest incomes. In many cases, Centro Legal represents clients in diversions or deferred prosecution agreements. In these cases, the defendant enters an agreement with the district attorney to complete programming to address areas of need such as substance abuse treatment or mental health services. When a participant is successful, charges are dismissed or never issued. The district attorney's office cannot extend opportunities for diversions or deferred prosecution agreements to individuals without legal counsel. The defendant must have an attorney to negotiate the terms of the agreement. We provide this service so that more individuals with low-incomes have this opportunity.

Client Story

Natalie was arrested for possession of a prescription drug without a valid prescription. She was booked into custody where she met with an intake attorney from the Public Defender's Office. However, because Natalie was collecting unemployment, she did not qualify for a public defender. She was told that the District Attorney's Office was considering a diversion agreement as an alternative to prosecuting her case.

A public defender referred her to Centro Legal. During the interview process, Centro Legal learned that Natalie had lost her young daughter and had been struggling with drug use and maintaining employment since her daughter's death. Natalie expressed a desire to change her life and asked that Centro Legal represent her in pursuing a diversion agreement. Centro Legal negotiated the diversion agreement and supported Natalie throughout the duration of the case as a support and advocate.

With the help of other community agencies, Natalie addressed her drug use and the depression she suffered as a result of her daughter's death. Natalie was able to find seasonal employment, and as result of the diversion agreement, she will not have the stigma and barriers to employment that often result from having a criminal record.

Michelle Velasquez
Staff Attorney, Centro Legal



turn hope into action

“You help people who are in need of expert advice. Without this we would be lost. Thank you for helping us with our dreams.”

Events

Centro Legal Annual Luncheon

March 15, 2012

Italian Conference Center

Over 220 guests attended this annual event. Through the generous support of our sponsors and supporters, we raised critical funds to support our programs and services.

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Centro LeGala

August 15, 2012

Discover World at Pier Wisconsin

Over 240 guests attended our signature event, making it our most successful fundraising event to date. A survivor of abuse shared her story of achieving safety and independence.

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“My attorney helped me keep my family together and take the pain away.”

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