

## ANNUAL REPORT 2021

### **Our Mission:**

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.

### **Our Vision:**

Families will achieve stability and build a successful future for themselves and their children.

### **Our Background:**

For over 30 years, Centro Legal has provided free and low-cost legal assistance to thousands of Milwaukee low-income individuals and families facing a crisis. Our holistic approach helps our clients resolve complex issues, overcome obstacles and ultimately transition to a more stable and healthy family environment. We primarily provide family law and criminal misdemeanor defense services, both of which are areas that are highly personal, emotional, and with high stakes, particularly when children are involved. Our goal is to help our clients successfully navigate the legal system and obtain a successful resolution so that they can maintain employment, stabilize their families, and continue moving forward towards financial independence and self-sufficiency.

### **Summary:**

#### 2021 Legal Services Summary

- 718 legal consultations provided
- 376 cases served with full legal representation
  - 172 family law cases (115 cases involved domestic violence)
  - 186 guardian ad litem cases
  - 18 criminal misdemeanor cases

### **Who We're Helping:**

#### *Gender*

Female: 85%

Male: 15%

#### *Age*

18 to 25: 6%

26 to 30: 14%

31 to 40: 36%

41 to 50: 28%

51 to 60: 9%

61+: 6%

\*Adds to 99% due to rounding

#### *Income*

No income to <125% FPL\*: 62%

126 to 200% FPL: 25%

201 to 300% FPL: 11%

300+% FPL: 2%

*FPL refers to Federal Poverty Levels, which differ depending on the size of household. For example, annual income of 125% of the 2021 FPL is \$16,100 for a single-person household and \$33,125 for a family of four.*

*Race/Ethnicity—this adds to 99% due to rounding*

Asian: 5%

Black or African-American: 27%

Hispanic or Latinx: 43%

White (Non-Hispanic): 19%

Other: 6%

*Primary language:*

English: 67%

Spanish: 26%

Other: 7%

## **Financials**

*Revenues:* \$617,235

Funding Sources:

- Donations and Events - \$228,169 (donations - \$111,126) + (event net - \$117,043)
- Grants - \$240,219
- Paycheck Protection Program - \$80,167
- Client & GAL (GAL fees primarily paid by Milwaukee County) Fee Revenue - \$66,494
- In-kind - \$2,186

*Expenses:* \$586,619

- Total program expenses – \$400,822
  - Family Law Program - \$269,457
  - Guardian Ad Litem Program - \$111,823
  - Criminal Law Program - \$19,542
- Management and General - \$99,612
- Fund Development – \$86,185

**AUDIT:** See pages 3 and 4 of our audit for the Statement of Activities and the Statement of Financial Position.

## **PROGRAMS:**

### *Family Law Program:*

Centro Legal provides complete legal representation in family law matters, including restraining orders, child custody and placement, child support and divorce. These cases often involve serious issues regarding the safety and well-being of children. Over 60% of our family law clients are survivors of domestic abuse. In these cases, we provide specialized services and partner with domestic abuse advocates to ensure that our clients receive all the support they need during a transitional and emotional period in their lives. In 2021, we provided representation in 172 family law cases for clients who are parents to 287 children in their households.

### *Domestic Violence Family Law Program:*

Over the last fifteen years, we have developed a particular specialty in providing legal advice and representation to survivors of domestic abuse. In fact, the majority of our family law clients have experienced abuse. In this program, we are able to provide free legal assistance to resolve all the family law issues beyond a restraining order. These issues are critical for the family to establish a new family

foundation that is safe, strong and consistent. Within this program, we work collaboratively with several domestic abuse shelters and programs so that our clients receive holistic support to support the transition from abuse to independence. In 2021, we provided free representation to 115 domestic abuse survivors and consulted with many more to give legal advice and guidance.

*Criminal Law Program:*

Centro Legal represents individuals who do not qualify for public defender representation but cannot afford to hire a private attorney. To qualify for public defender representation, the income requirements are set at 115% of the federal poverty guidelines, leaving a significant gap in legal support for those with low and modest incomes. In most cases, we represent our clients in diversions or deferred prosecution agreements. Our legal support can help these individuals remain in the community, stay employed and address substance abuse or other concerns during their cases. In 2021, we provided representation in 18 misdemeanor cases.

*Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Program:*

The courts appoint Centro Legal to represent the best interests of children and minor parents in family 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 children in custody and placement cases. In 2021, we represented the best interests of children and minor parents in 186 cases.

*Consultation Program:*

In addition to our full representation services, we provide legal advice and information through our consultation program. Centro Legal provides in-depth legal consultations for people with family law concerns. We help individuals understand their court orders and complete their paper work, prepare individuals to represent themselves, deter inappropriate or ill-timed claims and provide referrals to community resources. Since most people must face the family court system without an attorney, we seek to prepare as many people as we can to represent themselves effectively. In 2021, we provided 718 legal consultations.

**Annual Event – Centro LeGala**

Centro LeGala  
June 10, 2021

The challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic led us to host our second virtual gala in 2021, where we celebrated the impact of our services with a virtual program, silent auction, and wine pull. We are deeply grateful for the generosity of our sponsors, supporters, and community—through this event, we raised nearly \$120,000 to support our programs and services.

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Maricela Paredones, *Legal Assistant*

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