



2005

Volume 2, Issue 1

Newsletter

The Year in Review

2005 Program Highlights

In 2005, the WLC continued to provide access to justice through free legal services, in both English and Spanish, to low-income residents of Santa Cruz, San Benito, and Monterey Counties. The ongoing **Barriers to Employment, Agricultural Workers' Access to Health, and Consumer Projects** prospered and the new **Economic Justice Project** was launched with success.

The Barriers to Employment Project

This past year the **Barriers to Employment Project** helped more than 70 clients address legal problems preventing them from obtaining or maintaining employment. The most common barriers the Law Center addressed involved credit/debt disputes, identity theft, criminal convictions, driver license suspensions, and family law issues.

Project Manager and staff attorney **Sara Lipowitz** initiated **Criminal Record Clearance Clinics** in collaboration with the **Santa Cruz County Public**

Defender's Office. The first clinic was an introductory session where community members were informed about the requirements and process of record expungement. At the following clinic participants met one-on-one with volunteers from the Santa Cruz County Public Defender's Office to discuss remedies for clearing their criminal records. Clinics will be held quarterly in 2006 in both Spanish and English, with locations in North and South County.

Because these clinics are the first organized outreach effort in the county they have attracted support from many, including the **Probation Department, Department of Child Support Services, the Public Defender's Office, CareerWorks, Friends Outside, Gemma, and the Superior Court.** The clinics will help community members build new lives after incarceration.

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2005 Fields of Justice Event

The Fields of Justice Event on October 20, 2005 was an inspiring evening. More than 100 attendees gathered to hear keynote speaker, **Honorable Cruz Reynoso.** Among participants were **County Supervisor Tony Campos, Watsonville Mayor Ana Ventura Phares** and **Watsonville City Councilmember Ramon Gomez.** Representatives from the offices of **Congressman Sam Farr** and **Assemblymember Simon Salinas, also attended.** Following a warm welcome by **WLC Board Chair Bob Katz,** and a moving introduction by

Jose Padilla, Director of CRLA, retired California Supreme Court Justice and Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient **Cruz Reynoso** spoke. Justice Reynoso shared his personal story, reminding the audience of the power that lies within us to make change, as well as lauding the importance of access to justice through community legal services.

Event awardees included **Mike Meuter of CRLA** for the **Darryel Nacua Award, Andy Ogilvie and Carol Brewer** for the **Outstanding Contribution Award** and **Evette Arellano** for the **WLC Client Award.** Live music by Orlando Castro made for a perfect evening!

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The Watsonville Law Center's Mission:

The Watsonville Law Center's mission is to provide low-income families and individuals equal access to the law by assisting them to understand, exercise and enforce their rights.

Serving a predominately low-income, agricultural community, the law center focuses on providing holistic services related to worker's compensation, consumer fraud, economic justice and barriers to employment. The Watsonville Law Center delivers its services through one-on-one consultations, drop-in advice clinics, and direct representation.

The Year in Review

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The Consumer Fraud Project

The Consumer Protection Project is a unique resource for the tri-county area. It works to ensure the local marketplace is safe for the most vulnerable community members through direct services to victims of consumer fraud, and outreach and education to the community. The project not only returns ill-gotten business gains properly into the hands of community members, but it also benefits legitimate local businesses by discouraging unscrupulous and predatory business practices.

Since late spring, Consumer Fraud Project Manager/Attorney **Henry Martin** counseled 52 clients who sought advice on automobile purchases and related matters. Additionally, Henry worked with 35 new clients as part of the Telecommunications Fraud Project. That project is a statewide effort to address telecommunications fraud through education, outreach, and advocacy, as well as through tracking and enforcing patterns of abuse.

The Economic Justice Project

EJP was initiated in January 2005 and has enjoyed a great start. EJP provides unique and vital collaborative services unduplicated by any other agency in the state. With our partners, **La Manzana Community Resources, the Santa Cruz Community Credit Union and Applied Survey Research** the WLC provides legal services in the areas of identity theft, debt collection, auto fraud, contracts for goods and services, and small claims judgments. The project also provides financial education and social and health service referral and support thereby enhancing the long-term effect on participants' lives. EJP Project Manager/Attorney **Sara Lipowitz** served 112 clients during the past year. New programs for the coming year will include clinics on debt collection and small claims court. The project saved clients \$700,000 over the last year.

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*"Thank you for helping me when I needed it the most. I couldn't have done it without you!
(Barriers to Employment participant)"*

Message from the Director

There is much to celebrate as we reflect upon the preceding year. Clients have achieved victories and the staff has labored to serve almost a thousand community members

WLC's outstanding volunteer Advisory Board has worked diligently to further the goals established in a three-year financial sustainability plan and to foster the WLC's legal work. The WLC continues to benefit from the ongoing direction and support of Community Bridges and its dedicated Board of Directors.

Without the commitment of over fifty volunteer attorneys and student interns, as well

as the collaboration of our community partners and our funders, WLC's accomplishments would not have been possible.

We are extremely grateful to those who dedicate time and financial support to the law center. Please see the appreciation list on Page

5 of this newsletter for names of the generous individuals, businesses and foundations that support us through funding and volunteer assistance.

It continues to be a privilege and an honor to work with such enthusiastic and committed people. I thank you all for your interest and partnership in the Law Center's work and I look forward to updating you on the many new accomplishments in the coming year!

Best wishes for the holiday season and very warm regards-

Dori Rose Inda, Center Director

Recent Successes

2004/2005 Notable Success Stories

Ms. C worked for a sports equipment manufacturing company. Over time she developed carpal tunnel syndrome, which she complained about to her employer. Her employer refused to file an injury report with workers' compensation but paid for some initial medical treatment. When Ms. C advised her employer that the pain had spread to her shoulder, her employer refused to provide her with more treatment. Ms. C came to our office seeking legal advice regarding how to obtain medical treatment for her work injury.

Through the **Agricultural Workers Access to Health Project**, Staff Attorney **Andrea Anapolsky** was able to refer Ms. C to collaborative partner **Salud Para La Gente** for medical treatment. The Law Center filed a complaint with the California Department of Insurance for the employer's failure to have workers' compensation insurance. With this background work done, the WLC was able to refer Ms. C to a private attorney, even though private attorneys often will not accept cases in which the employer is uninsured. Through AWHP, Ms. C, who otherwise would have had no care or benefits, was able to enforce her rights following her work injury and access medical treatment. ❖❖

Mr. G. came to the Law Center because a towing business had made threats regarding his immigration status to pressure him to pay towing and storage fees for a vehicle he had never owned. Despite his not owning the vehicle, Mr. G had already made payments to the towing company for the unlawful debt because he was intimidated by the threats. **Consumer Project Staff Attorney Henry Martin** assisted the client in preparing for small claims court where Mr. G triumphed over the unscrupulous tow truck operator and the court affirmed the debt was unlawful. ❖❖

Mr. M, an elderly client was sued for \$10,500 by an auto finance company. The complaint alleged Mr. M owed money on a truck he had never purchased. Several years before, Mr. M, who had good credit, had helped some friends by co-signing a car loan that was eventually paid off. However, these "friends" then purchased a new truck using the client's personal information without his knowledge. This truck was not paid off and the finance company pursued Mr. M for the balance.

Economic Justice Project Staff Attorney Sara Lipowitz helped Mr. M file an answer to the complaint stating he had been a victim of identity theft. The finance company dismissed the complaint against Mr. M. ❖❖

When Ms. A first came to the WLC, she suffered from a drug addiction and had recently lost her Certified Nursing Assistant license. A few months earlier, the police found drugs in her possession during a routine traffic stop. Ms. A did not want to lose her four children, so despite her drug addiction and the loss of her livelihood, she vowed to turn her life around.

She gave up using drugs and enrolled herself in a 28-day treatment program and came to the WLC for assistance. With **Sara Lipowitz's** help, her Certified Nursing Assistant license was reinstated and her criminal record was expunged. She went back to school to be a Medical Assistant, graduating with top grades. She found a good job working in the medical field and began accomplishing things she never thought she could.

Now Ms. A has been in recovery for four and a half years. She feels better about herself and has regained her family's trust. She continues to care for her four children. Ms. A's courage and success made her the recipient of the Fields of Justice 2005 Client Award. ❖❖



On the Web

Visit the WLC online at: www.communitybridges.org/watsonvillelaw

Interested in supporting the Watsonville Law Center? Send your tax-deductible donation in the enclosed envelope or contact us at (831) 722-2845.

A Year in Review

(Continued from page 2)

The Agricultural Workers' Access to Health Project (AWAHP)

In collaboration with California Rural Legal Assistance, Salud para la Gente and Applied Survey Research, AWAHP provides outreach and education, legal and medical clinics, and direct representation to agricultural and low-wage workers in the tri-county area who have experienced a work injury or illness. During 2005 the project served 132 clients.

The project has worked closely with **Salud para la Gente** to ensure that Pajaro Valley workers are able to access medical treatment when they experience a work injury. In the coming year AWAHP hopes to expand its collaboration to include **Clinica de Salud del Valle de Salinas** to increase coverage to the Salinas Valley.



What's New

WLC is pleased to introduce new staff attorneys, **Andrea Anapolsky** and **Mona Gonzales**. Andrea will be managing the **Agricultural Workers' Access to Health Project**, and Mona will be supporting the work of the **Barriers to Employment** and **Consumer projects**. In addition the WLC welcomed **Monica Pereira**, who oversees the front office and coordinates our student interns.

We also bade a sad farewell to **WLC Office Manager/Paralegal Melissa Foraker** who relocated to Bakersfield and continues to serve low-income clients through her work with Greater Bakersfield Legal Aid. Melissa's three years with the WLC contributed greatly to its success.

WLC Advisory Board

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Santa Clara University
School of Law

Vilma Guerrero
Law Office

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Law

AWAHP continues to collaborate with the **California Department of Insurance** and the **Offices of the District Attorney** by reporting illegally uninsured employers. In 2006 it will initiate an **Employer Education** component through educational workshops held at the **Employment Development Department**.

AWAHP has maintained strong collaboration among local physicians and attorneys to better serve agricultural and low-wage workers. Through a partnership with **Applied Survey Research**, AWAHP is the only project in the state that tracks the effects of SB 899 (California's 2004 workers' compensation legislative reform bill) on agricultural and low-wage workers. In the coming year AWAHP will focus on analyzing data collected through the project to develop policy recommendations.

Balam Letona opened his own consumer and bankruptcy practice in Santa Cruz.

After receiving an Equal Justice Fellowship, **Vanessa Alvarado** moved to Los Angeles to work in a Family Advocacy project run out of the L.A. Children's Hospital.

Sara Lipowitz successfully initiated **Expungement Clinics** to address one of the most prevalent barriers to employment, past criminal records.

The Economic Justice Project had a great start this year ensuring low-income individuals are able to obtain or maintain income rightfully theirs while providing social service intervention, financial education and savings incentives.

Agricultural Workers' Access to Health Advisory Board

Cosimo Aiello
Jim Gonzalez
Keith Lesar
Bob Taren
Todd Mc Farren

Our Sincere Thanks

The Watsonville Law Center would like to thank its many donors. Support from contributors allows the WLC to continue its current projects and expand its services.

Government Agencies

City of Watsonville
Human Resources Agency, Santa Cruz County

Foundations

The California Endowment
The California Wellness Foundation
The California Consumer Protection Foundation
The Community Foundation for Monterey County
The Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County
The Foundation of the State Bar of California
The S.H. Cowell Foundation

Law Firms

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Developmental Learning Solutions, Inc.
El Pajaro Community Development Corporation

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Staff Attorney, Project Manager
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Sara Lipowitz

Staff Attorney, Project Manager
Barriers to Employment & Economic Justice Projects

Henry Martin

Staff Attorney, Project Manager
Consumer Project

Mona Gonzales

Staff Attorney/Office Manager

Rafael Albarrán

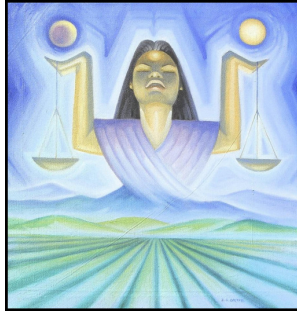
Legal Assistant, Agricultural Workers' Access to Health
Project Coordinator

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Receptionist, Office Assistant



Warmest Wishes for a Wonderful
Holiday and a Happy New Year!



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