



EL CENTRO HISPANOAMERICANO

SERVING OUR COMMUNITIES SINCE 1984

**Working for
dignity, respect
and justice for
immigrants
and refugees
in New Jersey**

El Centro Hispanoamericano

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Silvia Hernández
Executive Director

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Accountant



Fall / Winter, 2007

Dear Friends:

On behalf of the thousands of hard-working immigrants served by El Centro over the past two decades, I bring you a hearty "**Gracias!**" With the support of compassionate New Jerseyans like you and me, El Centro has grown beyond its roots assisting Central American refugees fleeing civil war. Together, we've enabled El Centro to expand its services to meet the needs of the growing immigrant community in Plainfield and surrounding areas.

Today, as the issue of immigration has become front page news, El Centro is hard at work, providing critical legal services, education and social service referrals to immigrants from all over Latin America and beyond (see page 2). Working with the El Centro board members at left, Executive Director Silvia Hernández continues to ensure **El Centro remains a source of hope, help and justice for immigrants in our community.** Turn to page 3 to read about Silvia and her work.

As you read about the work and people of El Centro inside, we hope you will be moved to **join us.** Perhaps you'll consider **volunteering your skills** (see the next page for opportunities) or **offering financial support** (page 4). However you choose to help, we again say "**Gracias!**" There's plenty of work to do!

Working for justice,

Erik Werfel

MISSION STATEMENT

El Centro Hispanoamericano is a registered 501c3 non-profit agency which promotes the rights and helps meet the needs of immigrants and refugees in New Jersey through affordable legal services, advocacy, social service referral, community education and organizing and cultural programs. El Centro is committed to dignity, respect, and justice for those we serve.

We serve the underserved

www.elcentronj.org



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How we serve:

El Centro is seeking Volunteers – Join us!

Do you have a passion for helping immigrants and refugees who have come here for a better life? Would you like to work alongside others who share your passion?

We are currently seeking volunteers with these skills:

- Attorneys and paralegals
- Grant writing
- Auditing
- Teaching ESL
- Office work
- Non-profit leadership & board development

Knowledge of Spanish is helpful, but not necessary.

Interested in volunteering?

Email us at info@elcentronj.org or Call us at (908) 753-8730

You'll be glad you did!

Do you know someone who needs our services?

Refer them to us! El Centro is located at 525 East Front Street behind the United Presbyterian Church. We are always ready to listen and help.



Educational

Services: We offer English as a Second Language classes on Saturdays. Our beginner classes are held from 10 am to 2 pm. We also hold advanced ESL and Citizenship classes, computer classes and community workshops on immigration issues as needed and requested.



Community Events:

We work with the Hispanic and other local immigrant communities in New Jersey to present social, educational and cultural events to unite the community and maintain the cultural richness and diversity of each country. Check our Events page at www.elcentronj.org for upcoming events!

Are you part of a faith community?

We'd be grateful if you would share this newsletter with your pastor / rabbi & friends. **Thank you!**



Immigration Services:

We help clients file Family Petitions and secure Temporary Protected Status (TPS) rights. We also help clients secure their rights to protection under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), and we help them prepare and submit applications for Permanent Residency, Asylum, Work Authorization, Naturalization, Green Cards & more.



Social and Emergency

Services: We help clients navigate the social services system by referring them to the most appropriate private and public agencies which can provide the services /resources for which they may be eligible. This might mean helping them locate providers of food, clothing, shelter or other services, including health and children's services, mental health services, job training and location, food stamps, benefits, rent and utility assistance.

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People & Issues:



Staff Profile: Silvia Hernández

Silvia Hernández, El Centro's Executive Director, provides effective leadership and paralegal expertise at El Centro. Her personal, educational and professional background make her especially well-suited to her position. ***"I emigrated to the United States from El Salvador as a teenager," she said recently, "This experience has given me a deep compassion and understanding of the challenges and hardships faced by our clients at El Centro. I've been in their shoes."***

Silvia's lifelong interest in legal advocacy led her to pursue a degree in paralegal studies at Essex County Community College. The board, staff and clients of El Centro all welcome her tireless commitment to building trust with our clients and pursuing solutions that are in their best interests. Married to Juan Tulio, she is a resident of nearby Edison, and the proud mother of two young daughters, Eryn and Jasmin.

"Silvia's first-hand understanding of our clients' circumstances and her sound legal guidance are always gratefully received by those we serve."

- Erik Werfel, Chair, Board of Directors

Client Profile: Daniel

At age 16, Daniel came to the United States to escape the life-threatening circumstances in his native Honduras. Abandoned by his mother and having witnessed the murder of three of his uncles in the past year, Daniel sought security and a semblance of family life living with his grandmother. But violent intimidation by gang members prompted Daniel to flee to the US where he hoped to reunite with his father. On the way, Daniel was detained by Immigration officials and sought assistance at El Centro. Executive Director, Silvia Hernandez, helped transfer Daniel's case from Texas to NJ and is currently helping him apply for asylum. We are optimistic that Daniel's application will be granted.

Immigration Reform:

Where El Centro Stands

We need to ACT. Over the 23 years of El Centro's existence we have seen the number of immigrants in central New Jersey increase rapidly. Tensions surrounding the immigration issue create front page headlines in both local and national news. This summer, we have even witnessed unprecedented and ugly street protests in Morristown, spurred on by the vicious ideological backlash which underlies attempts to further restrict immigrants' rights. **We at El Centro are increasingly concerned for their welfare.**

We work with immigrants ever day. We know them to be some of the hardest working and most vulnerable members of our community. Further marginalizing their already tenuous existence is no answer to this issue, in our opinion. While we help immigrants secure their legal rights, we also work with our local, state and national officials and legislators to encourage real immigration reform: *balanced* reform that is characterized by *wisdom and compassion* and which will end the current insecurity constraining the lives and well-being of so many of our clients. **Won't you help us by volunteering your time or making a financial contribution?** You'll be glad you did!

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Consider helping El Centro Hispanoamericano improve the lives of immigrants like these!

Memorial / Honor Gift Program

Gifts made in memory of a deceased loved one or in honor of a living friend or relative will be listed in upcoming newsletters. **Thank you!**

El Centro Hispanoamericano

P. O. Box 989
Plainfield, NJ, 07060

The enclosed gift in the amount of:

\$10 \$25 \$50 \$100 \$200 \$500

Is in memory of or honor of (circle one)

Name: _____

City: _____ State ___ Zip ___

Please send gift notification card to:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State ___ Zip ___

This gift is made by:

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Relationship: _____

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