



RURAL JUSTICE

SUMMER 2021

magazine

CALIFORNIA RURAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE, INC.

Cruz Reynoso
A LIFE COMMITTED TO JUSTICE

COVID-19 Workers' Rights Helpline

COMMUNITY WORKERS:
The Key to CRLA's Success

DONOR PROFILE: *Mario Rosas*

Expungement Clinics in Ventura County

SPECIAL FEATURE: *Fellowships*

2020 Annual Report

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT:
Hon. Juan Ulloa



TABLE OF *contents*

1	<i>Letter from Executive Director Jose Padilla</i>
2	<i>Alumni Spotlight: Hon. Juan Ulloa</i>
5	<i>CRLA Fellowship and Internship Fund</i>
6	<i>Sponsor Highlight: Shartsis Friese</i>
7	<i>COVID-19 Workers' Rights Helpline</i>
10	<i>Sponsor Highlight: Kazan McClain Partners' Foundation</i>
11	<i>Expungement Clinics in Ventura County</i>
14	<i>Rural Justice Fellowships: Areyonna Keels</i>
15	<i>Fellow and Intern Thank You</i>
16	<i>Cruz Reynoso: A Life Committed to Justice</i>
19	<i>Community Workers: The Key to CRLA's Success</i>
23	<i>Donor Profile: Mario Rosas</i>
25	<i>Monthly Giving</i>
27	<i>2020 Donors</i>
36	<i>2020 Financials</i>

LETTER FROM

Jose



Dear Friends and Supporters,

A year ago at this time, our work at CRLA was deeply impacted by two major issues. The pandemic was changing how we provided legal services to low-income rural Californians. In addition, the murder of George Floyd and ensuing protests against police brutality sparked deeper conversations about structural racism, access, and equity, both in our client advocacy and within our organization.

Now, with the Delta variant again filling hospitals in the regions we serve, both issues are still informing our plan to return to “normal” legal services.

We know in-person services and outreach enable us to build trust with our clients in a way that phone or online services can’t and are vital for clients who don’t have personal computers or mobile phones. However, we are also mindful of long-standing health disparities in our state that mean communities of color have suffered disproportionately from COVID-19, especially in rural areas.

We are carefully considering and weighing possible health risks with the need for legal services. Finding a good balance is crucial since loss of income and housing—two of the most common issues for which clients seek our services—can profoundly impact a person’s health.

So the idea of a return to “normal” is instead an opportunity to see injustice with a new lens and address what is not working for the most vulnerable people in our communities.

One thing that is clear: we continue to need committed attorneys to join us and address the challenges faced by low-income communities in rural California.

That’s why we launched our new CRLA Fellowship and Internship Fund earlier this summer.

The Fund will enable more law students and recent graduates to work at CRLA and benefit from the unique opportunities and mentoring we offer. Our hope is that many will continue with or come back to CRLA—just as I and many others have done.

In this issue, you’ll read about some of our past and current fellows along with updates on our work.

I hope you’ll find inspiration in these pages to reconsider “normal” and join us in building a California where all people are guaranteed their fundamentals rights.

Forward Creating Light, Adelante Creando Luz,

Jose Padilla
Executive Director



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT:

Hon. Juan Ulloa

The Hon. Juan Ulloa is a judge for the Imperial County Superior Court. As Judge Ulloa shares in this interview, he first connected with CRLA through a summer internship at our El Centro office. After earning his J.D. at UCLA in 1975, Judge Ulloa returned to work full-time with CRLA, first as a staff attorney and then directing attorney, until 1982. He then entered into solo practice at his own law firm until he was elected to the bench in 1994.

HOW DID YOU COME TO JOIN CRLA?

I am from El Centro. I come from farmworkers and worked in the fields myself, so it made sense that I would intern at CRLA during a summer home from college and then again during law school.

During my first summer internship, I interviewed farmworkers about the short-handled hoe—“el cortito”—in preparation for the hearings and California Supreme Court case (*Carmona v. Division of Industrial Safety*, 1975) that led to a ban on the tool as an occupational hazard. Even though I didn’t work on that case as an attorney, it was deeply symbolic to me and a source of pride that I was a part of CRLA.

The CRLA El Centro office was the only place I applied for work after law school. I served as a staff attorney starting in 1975 and progressed to management roles, including Directing Attorney. Now I have a short-handled hoe in my chambers next to my gavel.

HOW DID WORKING AT CRLA IMPACT YOUR CAREER?

CRLA looks at the big picture and teaches you to keep your eyes on the bigger prize beyond the smaller individual case victories. It’s a systemic perspective that is not necessarily what most lawyers are trained to practice, and it has stuck with me.

Anatole France said, “The law, in its majestic equality, forbids rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal their bread.”

I’ve been on the bench for 27 years and have run in four elections. In that time, I’ve learned a lot about the public dialogue around not wanting judges who are “soft on crime”—which usually means “hard on the powerless.”

The dialogue CRLA promotes is a legal analysis that the Constitution means accountability for everyone. CRLA works to purposely address accountability for the powerful. That’s what impact litigation is all about.

At the same time, as a CRLA lawyer, I learned that litigation is not the point. The community is the point. It can be a hard lesson to learn because, as lawyers, we put so much energy into litigation. Even now I am mindful of the structural imbalance of power and do what I can to avoid taking issues out of the community.

For example, some government agencies can have a perception that the court is there to enforce their directives. I strive for my court not to be a voice for agencies, but rather a place of more mutual accountability, where agencies are held accountable for the impact they have in a community just as they seek to hold individuals accountable.

My role as a judge is to balance the law with justice; the two are not always aligned. Cruz Reynoso said lawyers and judges have to be guided by both their head and their heart, and the way to do that is by using their “justice bone”. I’ll always remember that.

WHAT ARE YOUR PROUDEST MEMORIES FROM YOUR TIME AT CRLA?

My proudest memories are team achievements. There were many victories, a lot of wins I was privileged to work on as an attorney.

One memory that sticks out was the work we did on our strategy and operations. At first, I thought I was being roped into working on administrative processes. But then I realized what made it necessary: CRLA was fighting to continue our work in the late 1970s and 80s.

We had been far more successful than anyone thought we would be, and our victories on behalf of those who for so long had had little power brought scrutiny from all levels of government. Our federal funding in particular was at risk. There were also internal struggles as a young firm.

So what did we do? We talked about case work and case supervision, what was working, what wasn’t, and how we could strengthen our internal processes to be even more effective in our justice work. We also came up with the accompanying strategy to spin off the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation (CRLAF) to do work that we couldn’t do as a recipient of federal funds, a strategy that succeeded dramatically.

HOW DO YOU STAY CONNECTED WITH CRLA?

One way I've re-connected has been through collaborations between our courts and CRLA. This is especially important to me because I've observed that CRLA has long been seen as an adversary by some courts.

I'm especially proud of our collaboration between Imperial County courts and CRLA around education because it has informed strengthening services to kids in need.

For our first joint education rights outreach, we brought education advocates, child protective agencies, and probation officers together with CRLA and court representatives. The agencies had not considered the importance of school when they are seeking to hold kids accountable. They take kids out of their homes and expect the kids to then be responsible for their own rehabilitation in an unfamiliar environment.

This outreach underscored that we have systems that are very good at punishment but building up is what's hard. School can provide an important structure for many kids to be built up and to build themselves up. So, for example, we talked with agencies and probation officers about including a list of "thou shalt" along with the usual list of "thou shalt nots." We're also seeing a shift to need-centered services that address underlying causes of behavior.

We're even seeing more agencies that serve adults shifting to the same approaches because they are effective. Of course, the agencies see in that effectiveness a way to streamline their budgets, but still it is a positive change.

There's also now a partnership between CRLA and our courts that helps both tenants and landlords understand their rights and responsibilities. Here in Imperial County, landlords are very near being CRLA clients themselves—we have many landlords who are seniors renting out a room in their home for income, for example. A lot of the cases I see are misunderstandings that happen when a landlord doesn't understand their responsibilities, or vice versa. Thanks to outreach and education from CRLA more people can avoid reaching court. In fact, it's a great example of what I mentioned earlier: litigation is not the point, the community is the point.

Want to suggest a CRLA alum for a future Alumni Spotlight feature? Email us at development@crla.org.

CRLA Fellowship and Internship Fund

THANK YOU TO OUR INAUGURAL SPONSORS

The CRLA Fellowship and Internship Fund enables more law students and recent graduates to work at CRLA and address the challenges faced by low-income communities in rural California.

We thank our inaugural sponsors for their investment in the next generation of public interest attorneys and advocates.



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CRLA THANKS FELLOWSHIP AND
INTERNSHIP FUND INAUGURAL SPONSOR :

Shartsis Friese LLP

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In 2004, Shartsis Friese founded the Shartsis Friese LLP Public Interest Fellowship, which for a two-year period subsidizes a staff attorney position at a selected organization providing legal services to San Francisco Bay Area community members who cannot afford legal services. In the past, the Fellowship has been awarded to the Sword to Plowshares, Open Door Legal, East Bay Community Law Center, Bay Area Legal Aid, Centro Legal de la Raza, Legal Aid Society-Employment Law Center, and the Family Violence Law Center.

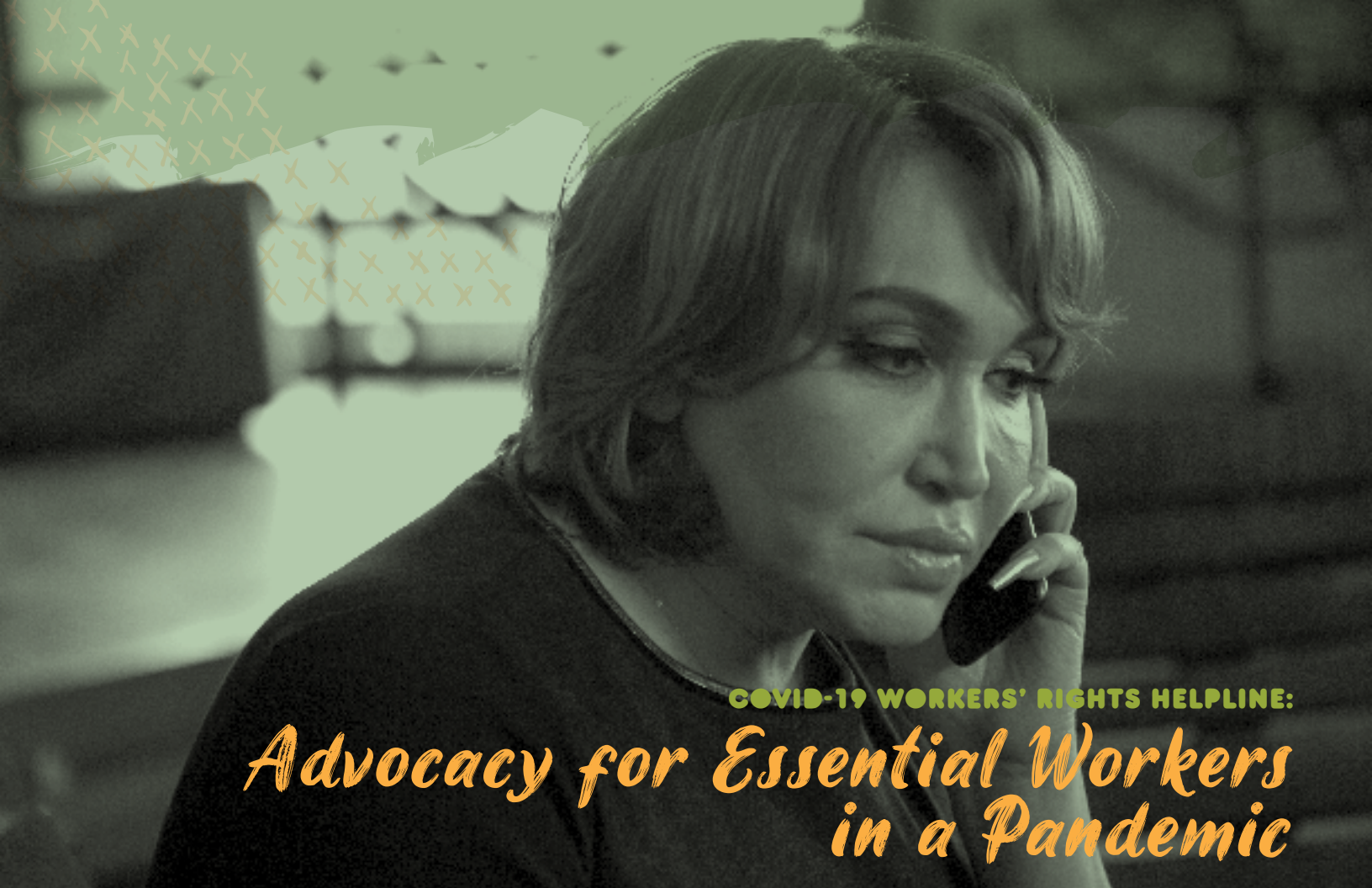
The Firm has awarded the 2021 Shartsis Friese LLP Public Interest Fellowship to California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc. (CRLA). CRLA has selected social justice attorney and community advocate Stephen Zollman to join their Santa Rosa office as a staff attorney for the 2021-2023 fellowship term. Mr. Zollman brings extensive experience representing low-income youth and families and clients with mental health and developmental disabilities, both in private practice and the San Francisco Public Defender's Office. We congratulate Mr. Zollman and CRLA on this fellowship.

About Shartsis Friese

Shartsis Friese was founded in 1975. Our goal was to offer clients an alternative to large national law firms. We are client-focused and solution-driven by design. We specialize in high-quality practice areas that serve the needs of businesses and sophisticated individuals. Our careful growth, minimal turnover and low partner/non-partner ratio are all designed to provide efficient and cost-effective legal services of the highest caliber.

Shartsis Friese is proud to have been listed among the Top Corporate Philanthropists in the Greater Bay Area by San Francisco Business Times each year since 2007, ranking #70 in 2020. Our lawyers and staff continue to support numerous organizations throughout the Bay Area and nationally with their contributions of time and money.

Learn more at www.sflaw.com



COVID-19 WORKERS' RIGHTS HELPLINE:

Advocacy for Essential Workers in a Pandemic

Regulations around workplace safety and relief options available to workers have evolved and changed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, frequently resulting in confusion at every level.

Understanding their rights in the workplace and what support they can access is vitally important for low-wage essential workers to care for their health or that of their families. Low-wage workers—who are disproportionately Black, Indigenous, or other people of color—have seen higher rates of infection and illness from COVID-19.

The pandemic has prompted more and more people in search of information about workplace safety, job-protected leave, and replacement income like Unemployment Insurance. As with other disasters such as wildfires, the COVID-19 pandemic created a surge in the need for civil legal services in California's rural areas.

But how could CRLA meet that need when our offices were closed to walk-ins to protect the health of our staff and clients?

A SOLUTION FOR A SURGE IN NEED FOR LEGAL SERVICES

Two CRLA legal fellows, Shane Cray Ross and Aaron Voit, led the creation of a devoted helpline that workers could call for answers to their COVID-19 legal questions.

The COVID-19 Workers Rights Helpline launched in July 2020, giving clients a safer way to access legal services during the pandemic and helping divert some inquiries and cases from our field offices.

Agricultural workers in any California county are eligible to receive services through the Helpline. Low-wage, non-agricultural workers are also eligible if they live or work in 24 California counties: Colusa, Fresno, Imperial, Kern, Kings, Madera, Mendocino, Merced, Monterey, Napa, Riverside, San Benito, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tulare, Ventura, Yuba, Santa Clara, San Diego, San Joaquin, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Santa Cruz Counties.

The Helpline team handled 1,134 cases in its first year. In many cases, simply having someone talk through their rights and provide a form they can use to request time off can make a huge difference for a caller.

About two-thirds of callers to the Helpline have legal issues that can be addressed by phone. For everyone else, Helpline staff can make referrals to a CRLA field office for longer-term support, or to another community organization better suited to their situation.

INFORMING CHANGE CONDUCTED A SURVEY OF CALLERS TO CRLA'S COVID-19 WORKERS' RIGHTS HELPLINE AND FOUND THAT:

- 75% of Helpline callers expressed that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the assistance they received.
- 45% of callers recovered a financial benefit thanks to advice and counsel from Helpline staff, with an average of \$2,444 recovered.
- Approximately \$744,108 in total financial benefits were recovered by callers to the Helpline between July 2020 and February 2021.

WORKERS' RIGHTS HELPLINE SUPPORTS PUBLIC HEALTH

Early in the pandemic, CRLA offices heard numerous reports of workers going to work in spite of feeling sick because they didn't realize they had a right to time off to get tested or to recover. Others wondered if it was legal for employers to charge them for personal protective equipment (PPE) on the job or to require them to work, live, or travel in employer-owned facilities without social distancing.

As vaccines have become widely available in 2021, it is important for agricultural and other low-income workers to know they have the right to paid time off to get the vaccine, or to recover from vaccine-related side effects.

While social media posts can raise awareness, getting legal advice or resources from a trusted source like CRLA can give a worker a lot more confidence when they request time off from an employer who may not fully understand or may want to ignore their legal obligations.

Getting help over the phone is also an important way to reach people who may have limited literacy or comfort with technology. Interpretation services provided by CRLA at no cost to callers further enhances access: 75% percent of intakes are Spanish-speaking callers and staff promote the Helpline with materials in Punjabi, Hmong, Triqui, Mixteco, and other languages.

VOLUNTEERS POWER HELPLINE SUCCESS

Volunteers have been a key factor in the success of the helpline. Undergraduate students searching for opportunities to get involved with pandemic relief, social justice, and real-world applications for their classroom learning found a particularly great fit with Helpline volunteer shifts.

Teaming volunteers with attorneys for training and ongoing guidance made it possible to quickly grow capacity for covering phone lines Monday through Friday.

“Many legal aid attorneys wish we could be in multiple places helping multiple clients at once,” Helpline Supervising Attorney Shane Crary-Ross points out. “By combining the motivation of our volunteers with the expertise of our legal staff, we’ve come as close as we can to making that wish come true.”

KEEP THE HELPLINE GROWING

As more Californians have been vaccinated, infection and hospitalization rates have thankfully dropped. However, we anticipate need for legal services will continue long after public health concerns resolve. The most relevant issue for the Helpline: millions of Californians need assistance with suspended payments, denied claims, overpayment, or other issues with Unemployment Insurance administered by the Employment Development Department (EDD), which still had a backlog of over a million claims as of July 2021.

We were able to launch the helpline thanks to grants and individual donors’ contributions. Now, we are inviting our allies and supporters to grow the Helpline with us. Your support would be invaluable!

PRO BONO: Private attorney involvement is an important resource for our staff and clients. If your firm would like to support the Helpline or other CRLA offices with COVID-19 related cases, please contact Pro Bono Coordinator Jeff Ponting at probono@crla.org.

DONATE: Your financial support of our legal services can change lives. **Donate quickly and securely at www.crla.org** or contact Individual Giving Director Susana Rodriguez at srodriguez@crla.org or (510) 267-0762 ext. 1028 to discuss other ways to give.



CRLA THANKS FELLOWSHIP AND INTERNSHIP FUND INAUGURAL SPONSOR :

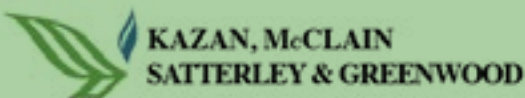
Kazan McClain Partners' Foundation



The Kazan McClain Partners' Foundation has disbursed over \$25 million in grants to a wide array of community and civic organizations. Our mission is to benefit the public through grants to organizations and individuals in order to:

- Support research into causes of, treatment for, and prevention of occupational and environmental diseases.
- Increase and improve public awareness about workplace health and safety, and public health.
- Enhance access to, participation in, and education about the legal system and governmental processes.
- Advance programs that provide services which lessen the burdens of government and/or provide relief to the poor, distressed, or underprivileged.
- Combat community deterioration and lessen neighborhood tensions.

Our Foundation funds organizations supporting immigrants and their families, including California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc. (CRLA), California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation, Center for Gender & Refugee Studies, Centro Legal de la Raza, and Central American Resource Center, among others. Our attorneys sit on the Boards of several non-profit legal services organizations providing legal support to immigrants.



Over the last five years, Kazan McClain Satterley & Greenwood, a Professional Law Corporation, has provided pro bono representation to Central American immigrants seeking asylum in the United States to escape from persecution in their home countries fraught with violence and corruption. KazanLaw's decades-long mission for justice and advocacy on behalf of individuals wrongly injured was the catalyst for founding the Kazan McClain Partners' Foundation in 1994, and for the law firm's more recent commitment to provide pro bono representation for asylum seekers, along with the firm's ongoing trial litigation work.

Both the Kazan Firm and the Kazan Foundation have been committed to protecting the rights and health of all people. www.kazanlaw.com



EXPUNGEMENT STORY:

New Clinics Enable Ventura County Residents to Clear Their Records and Access Opportunities

An estimated 50,000 Californians return home from prison or jail every year. Most face significant barriers to reintegration in community life due to their criminal record.

When a formerly incarcerated person applies for a job and must disclose their criminal history, their application is often discarded immediately. Likewise, formerly incarcerated people face significant barriers finding safe housing once a prospective landlord learns of their record.

If a person returning to the community cannot find employment or housing, the risk of criminal behavior reoccurring grows exponentially.

Clearing a person's criminal record through the legal process of expungement is crucial to their successful reintegration. Unfortunately, many people may not realize they are eligible for expungement. Even when they are aware, the process is difficult to navigate successfully without professional legal help, which can cost anywhere from \$600 to \$1,000 per conviction—another barrier for many people.

CRLA's Oxnard office has created a clinic model that can support more people through the expungement process. The growing success of their reentry services is also a standout example of the impact both pro bono partners and law fellows can have.

PARTNERSHIPS KEY TO LAUNCH OF EXPUNGEMENT CLINICS

Though expungement is a process that concerns a person's criminal record, it is a civil action. CRLA's Oxnard office had been thinking about effective ways to offer expungement services when, in March 2019, Bank of America inquired about pro bono opportunities in Ventura County.

Bank of America and the law firm McGuire Woods, their pro bono partner in Southern California, provided 20 attorneys and paralegals as well as tech support for the first expungement clinic on October 3rd, 2019.

With pro bono support in place, attention turned to getting clients to the clinic. Partnership from the Ventura County Public Defender's Office was key—not only did they refer clients, they also sent law clerk Jocelyn Havens, their expert in post-conviction relief, to support the clinic.

After a successful first clinic serving 23 applicants and preparing 60 petitions for dismissal, Oxnard staff began planning a second expungement clinic. Ms. Havens again provided crucial support by pre-screening and referring clients as well as preparing detailed client summaries, which simplified the work of the pro bono legal team. The January 2020 clinic ended up serving another 25 clients by preparing another 135 petitions for dismissal of their criminal convictions.

SERVICES EVOLVE IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Then the COVID-19 pandemic required a shift to remote service delivery. When it came to the unique challenges of transitioning an in-person clinic to a virtual setting, we were fortunate to have legal services innovation experts from OneJustice join the expungement clinic collaboration.

With OneJustice on board and continued support from the Ventura County Public Defender's Office and Ms. Havens, we have been able to offer expungement clinics virtually since August of 2020.

Just as with in-person clinics, applicants at virtual clinics have their criminal records assessed and the expungement paperwork completed for free by trained volunteers who are supervised by attorneys. CRLA provides full legal representation related to criminal expungements including appearances at possible hearing dates for clients seeking to reduce felony convictions to misdemeanor convictions.

To date, both the in-person and virtual expungement clinics have resulted in over 350 petitions for dismissal filed on behalf of Ventura County residents. These clinics have saved our clients at least \$210,000.00 in legal fees they could not afford to pay.

CLIENTS GAIN HOPE AND OPPORTUNITY FROM CLINICS

Even before a person's record is fully cleared, expungement services can have an impact. As clinic client David explained, "People don't want to hire people with criminal records... Getting the majority of my cases expunged has helped me greatly."

“When I applied to the current job I have, I was able to let them know that getting my record expunged was in the works and I think that spoke loud and clear to them that ‘This person is trying. He’s been sober, he’s trying to get his life together.’ And without this [clinic], it would be very hard to do the footwork, so I’m very appreciative.”

Many clients amplify the positive impact of the clinic by telling others. Clinic client Andrea told us, “Now that I’ve gone through the clinic, I feel like there are so many possibilities for me. I’ve always wanted to do so much with my life, and for so long my record held me back.

“Every time I talk to people who are struggling with their record, I’m constantly telling them, ‘Call Jocelyn, call the clinic, they can help you!’ Whether they do or not, I just want them to know there is a way to get your record expunged and there is hope.”

LAW FELLOWSHIP ENSURES CONTINUED SUPPORT

Another positive outcome of the expungement clinics has been Jocelyn Havens joining CRLA’s Oxnard office as a 2021 Summer Law Fellow, with a special focus on expanding reentry services.

Ms. Havens told us, “My experience participating in a CRLA fellowship has been amazing. I’ve been familiar with expungement work and was already doing expungement work, however, I had no idea what all was entailed on the back end with this work. I didn’t know anything about how these organizations receive their funding so they’re able to do the work, how they coordinate and team up with other organizations so that they can help as many people as possible. I’ve learned a lot about all of that, the networking [and] everything else that goes into it.”

Oxnard Directing Attorney Bill Figueroa added, “Without a fellowship program, we would be severely limited in the amount of work we can do and the amount of services we can provide. Fellowship partnerships are a tool that our office relies on to be able to help as many people in our community as possible.

“Without the collaboration of Jocelyn Havens and the Public Defender’s Office, CRLA’s reentry services would not have been as developed and as successful as they are now.”

Providing reentry services for people returning from incarceration increases family and community stability and decreases crime. But as with other legal services, reentry services are limited in rural California. We aim to change that by bringing the reentry practice model established by our Oxnard office to other CRLA offices across the state.

GROW CRLA’S REENTRY SERVICES IN RURAL CALIFORNIA

- Donate to CRLA’s Fellowship and Internship Fund at www.crla.org. Your gift will bring more talented young advocates like Jocelyn Havens to CRLA and the rural areas we serve.
- Join us as pro bono partners to support future clinics. Contact us at probono@crla.org to discuss current opportunities.

RURAL JUSTICE FELLOWSHIPS:

Areyonna Keels



Fellowships with CRLA provide law students and recent law graduates an opportunity to develop legal expertise in the areas of housing, employment, environmental justice, education, health, or civil rights.

We sponsor law graduates applying to law foundation or law school fellowship programs and offer our own CRLA Rural Justice Fellowships.

Areyonna Keels began her 16-month Rural Justice Fellowship in May 2021 working as a Staff Attorney at CRLA's office in Delano, California.

Areyonna told us, "It's been great so far, a little bit of a learning curve because I went to law school in South Carolina, but everyone at CRLA has been super welcoming and open to answering my questions and also showing me the procedures of CRLA and also the procedures of California law."

"The main goal of my career is to help people...so my goal as a fellow in this fellowship program is to fill in any gaps the Delano office needs from me, whether that's in the housing unit or working with unemployment benefits and helping [clients] get those benefits back or get started—really just assisting this already great team that I've joined and advocating for our clients to the best of my ability.

"But the learning doesn't stop with the fellowship and I feel like, as my law career continues and progresses, I'll only get stronger."

"My favorite thing about working with CRLA is the collaboration and the sense of community. My specific area, the Rural Justice Unit, we work in the rural areas of the community [and] it's really, in my opinion, similar to grassroots initiatives. We care about the people, we care about the workers, we care about the tenants' rights. That's something that is really important to me, it's something that I really align with: supporting individuals and the communities we serve. I'm really glad that I have this opportunity."

Prior to relocating to Delano, Areyonna worked in community advocacy in rural South Carolina. While she notes that "what's small-town here is big-town where I'm from," there are key qualities that translate to rural California.

"Being confident in what you're doing and confident in your knowledge is number one. In rural areas, there's usually not a lot of resources or you're really searching for resources so being creative in your thinking is important. And with creativity you also need to have flexibility...you need to be responsive and also open to different collaborating opportunities. So I think with confidence, creativity, and flexibility you can go really far."

We are thrilled to have a talented and committed advocate like Areyonna join us as a Rural Justice Fellow. For more information about joining CRLA as a law fellow, please visit crla.org/law-fellowships.

Thank You Law Fellows, Interns, and Helpline Volunteers!

Law fellows, interns, and volunteers have long played a vital role in winning justice for our client communities. Thank you to all who supported our offices and Helpline in 2020-2021, including:

Michael Adams
Elias Aguiniga
Krista Arellano
Kristine Avena
Santos Ayala
Tess K. Bartlett
Valentina Sacchi Beccarini
Daniela Block
Sarah (Sarz) Brown
Rocio Casillas
Beycy Castillo
Lindsay Chong
Nancy Cornejo
Evelyn Daniela Correa
Kate Alexandra Curcio
Jonathan Armando Donis
Emilio Espinal
Abel Salvador Flores
Emma Garcia
Adele Giraud
Chloe Hassenfratz
Brenna Hatcher
Jocelyn Havens
Viridiana Hernandez
Claire Emma Hillier

Christine Hulsizer
Vicky Issarraras
Meghan Xuying Jin
Areyonna Keels
Maneesha Kunuhuntla
Esther Bejar Leal
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Jody M Stella
Nicole Stemet
Jocelyn Tapia
Alexander Tron
Vasmer Vang
Diego Alejandro Villamizar
Khalil Waddell
Rebecca Wilson
Lindsay Marie Young

Your gift to CRLA's Fellowship and Internship Fund will directly support law fellows and interns in CRLA's 17 offices statewide to conduct litigation and legal education for our clients, including farmworkers, people with disabilities, immigrants, school children, LGBTQ+ people, seniors, veterans, and people with limited English proficiency.

Donate online at www.crla.org or contact Susana Rodriguez, Director of Individual Giving, at (510) 267-0762 x1028 or srodriguez@crla.org.

Thank you for your support!



Cruz Reynoso

A LIFE COMMITTED TO JUSTICE

CRLA, Inc. Executive Director Jose Padilla shared this reflection following news of the May 7, 2021 death of the Honorable Cruz Reynoso (pictured above), former Associate Justice of the California Supreme Court, law professor, and CRLA Executive Director from 1969-1972.

ENTRE LOS PRIMEROS...AMONG THE FIRST CHICANO HEROES

Cruz Reynoso exemplified a lifelong commitment to the betterment of our communities in the manner he practiced social justice—as a rural private attorney, as attorney and Executive Director of CRLA, as a jurist, and as a law school professor.

Although he was less in the public eye than Cesar Chavez and others at the time, Cruz also was a civil rights hero and mentor, introducing many of us to civil rights causes and how to be a public servant.

THE IMPERIAL VALLEY: A PERSONAL CONNECTION

Before I met Professor-Justice Reynoso, I knew of him because the local community where I was raised in the 1950s came to know him as the area’s first Spanish-speaking attorney with a *Mejicano* last name.

Like Cruz, I went to UC Berkeley School of Law (he graduated in 1958, I graduated in 1978) and began my practice in the Imperial Valley, 30 years after Cruz. With me coming from the Valley where Cruz started his practice in the 1950s, the Reynoso connection was more personal. It is and was about family roots and how serving the Mexican communities in rural places related to the immigrant origins of our parents.

Like Cruz, my upbringing was itself a social justice education. Reynoso’s story includes the discrimination suffered in rural La Habra, where mail service was different for *Mejicanos* compared to service provided their white neighbors. I too learned the racism of railroad tracks that divided small towns and about “knowing your place”—even without hearing words to that effect.

THE IMPERIAL VALLEY'S "LEGAL AID"

Before legal aid came into the Imperial Valley in 1966 with the opening of the El Centro CRLA office, Cruz Reynoso was "legal aid." Cruz was CRLA before CRLA even existed!

Cruz made himself available on Sundays to dispense law from the home he shared with his wife, Jeannene. The Mexican folk of *las colonias*—the neighborhoods in the segregated east sides of El Centro and Brawley, where we lived when I was 7-15 years of age—went to the Reynoso home to get their "legal aid" and bring community issues to his attention.

At the time, people like my family had a limited image of "lawyer" as a person of the law. Not the police, yet someone who mediated between you, your family, and the criminal justice system—the criminal lawyer only. Never the lawyer who assisted in other legal matters, in civil life.

But Cruz showed those communities, in those early years of private practice with the Duddy-Reynoso Law Firm, that civil law could be a "friend" of people in poverty, a tool for that segregated community, a voice in the political and public discussion affecting their lives.



AGENT OF CHANGE

Cruz was an early sign of more change coming to the Valley. My generation came to believe that higher schooling was for us too. In high school, two of my friends spoke of becoming "an attorney." (I admit today that, even though I was a high-achieving student, I had to look up "attorney" in the dictionary, not realizing it was the same as "lawyer.")

For my friends, the next sentence would include "Reynoso," because at that time CRLA came to represent us in litigation against our high school, which had failed to respect our First Amendment rights to free speech when we wore "Chicano Liberation" buttons during the school day. Of the three friends, I became the lawyer. It was another Chicano Movement social justice impact, affirmative action, that sent me to Stanford in 1970.

EL SEÑOR CRUZ REYNOSO

When I asked my parents about this man "Reynoso," they would say "Ah, el Señor Reynoso..." and then they would speak to his local reputation. "Señor" in this context was the same word of respect as if it had been "Don Cruz" in another generation. "Señor" as in "gentleman"—for Cruz, it truly meant a gentle man, a gentle soul. Señor Reynoso was an "hombre de palabra... de valor," a person of his word and a person who lives by values learned from life, not learned from a book. Or, as my abuela would say, "un hombre educado."

Now I know, from my own friendship with and the mentorship I received from Cruz, that the nature of his humility was the indelible gift that set him apart from other persons of his generation.

In the Teachings of *Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* there is a definition of the “humility of a warrior.” A warrior does not humble others but is himself not dominated. He is no better than another nor is another better than he.

Cruz’s was this humility of a warrior. He never let accomplishments like becoming the first Latino on the California Supreme Court change this quality that characterized how he interacted with lawyers, professors, and farmworkers alike.

RURAL ADVOCACY AND POLITICS

Cruz joined CRLA as Deputy Director in 1968 and served as our second Executive Director from 1969-1972, following our founder Jim Lorenz. Cruz stepped into leadership at the height of political opposition during CRLA’s Office of Economic Opportunity / War on Poverty period.

Wins like challenging Governor Reagan’s Medi-Cal program cuts before the California Supreme Court (*Morris v. Williams*, 1967) generated much local opposition from rural bar associations, local welfare departments, and the State Bar. Political opposition from Big Ag soon followed when CRLA litigation halted the bracero program (*Williams v. Wirtz*, 1967).

Governor Reagan exercised the veto authority granted under the Economic Opportunity Act to cut CRLA’s funding. Cruz was at the forefront of CRLA’s defense and the federal Office of Economic Opportunity supported CRLA and overruled the veto.

Just as the CRLA of Cruz’s time faced rural political backlash because of its successful advocacy, so did CRLA during part of my tenure when the California dairy industry challenged CRLA’s successful litigation. I was called to testify before Congress in 2004, supporting CRLA’s work with the CRLA Foundation and its litigation that allowed 17,200 people class relief through the use of state law.

We are still here, fighting for the rights and dignity of California’s most exploited and vulnerable communities.

UN BUEN HOMBRE DE GRAN CORAZON

For me and many other CRLA staff, Cruz Reynoso’s legacy showed that CRLA’s rural clients, including farmworkers, deserved the most aggressive advocacy that we could bring in the defense of their labor, health, education, and public benefit rights even at the political risk of losing critical funding.

For all of us, if we continue to give back through whatever measure we decide—pro bono, donation, or other public service—and we undertake it selflessly so that others can reap the benefit of justice, then Cruz has served us well as a Justice Teacher. He was a gift to those of us blessed to be taught by his example.

Compañero, fuiste un buen hombre de gran Corazon. ¡Que en paz descanses!

Jose Padilla / Executive Director / California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc.



COMMUNITY WORKERS:
*The Key to
CRLA's Success*

When CRLA founder Jim Lorenz sought funding to launch our firm in 1966, he was motivated by observing the many farmworkers in rural California who needed legal representation—and the relationships between their grower employers and local attorneys that often prevented them from getting that representation.

One thing Jim Lorenz and the first cohort of CRLA attorneys quickly realized was that they needed people on staff who could serve as liaisons with the farmworker communities they were trying to reach. In searching for people to join CRLA under the newly coined job title “Community Worker,” they sought those who not only spoke Spanish but also had strong connections and wide respect within the communities CRLA served.

Hiring people to build relationships and trust with our client communities was unusual for legal services at the time, but it has been key to CRLA’s success since day one.

LUPE QUINTERO: COMMUNITY WORKER, KNOWLEDGE KEEPER

Building relationships takes time, so perhaps it’s no surprise that the current CRLA employee with the longest tenure is Director of Community Workers Lupe Quintero (pictured above), who marked her 50th year with CRLA on October 6, 2020 and is halfway through her 51st year this summer.

Lupe joined CRLA's El Centro office in 1970 as a community worker focused on employment and labor rights. "In the early years of CRLA," she recalls, "people said 'you won't last more than a few years, you'll have opposition, the powers that be don't want their workers learning about their rights, or having access to anyone who can help or defend them.'

"It has been a struggle throughout the years when I've gone into the fields and have been kicked out because I was there to talk to workers about their rights. But I always took immense pleasure in saying to the workers that I was leaving not because I wanted to but because I had to, and I wanted them to know that they had someone in their corner, that CRLA was trying to help. I felt that was important to do in that moment, a little thing I could do to spark change even as others were trying to stop me."

THE POWER OF LISTENING

Seeing a CRLA community worker risk an employer's ire to provide "know your rights" education can certainly encourage people to put their trust in the organization. But the skill that really wins people over? Listening.

"When you listen and give someone the opportunity to speak, they'll start trusting you," Lupe points out. "I had a client involved with a case say to me recently, 'thank you for listening to the workers.' Because workers' opinions, experiences, and ideas aren't taken into consideration. They're yelled at if they complain."

In addition to in-person outreach in the fields or towns, workshops like the Heat Stress Prevention trainings held by CRLA community workers statewide are powerful opportunities to listen and build trust. A community worker might start by sharing different scenarios, such as a lack of shade or insufficient water for the number of workers, and ask "have you ever seen this or has this happened to you?" Hands go up and people start talking.

Often, the presence of older or retired farmworkers can amplify the effect, because they can speak to what they experienced in the fields before legal protections were put in place. Some may even have contacted CRLA in the past or benefitted from actions we have taken on behalf of other people who worked under the same grower or contractor. Hearing stories like this can foster trust in younger or shyer workers that speaking out can change things.

"What's really key is that we community workers, in our workshops and trainings, we're the ones who learn and are educated by the workers. Because they've been in the fields, they've been exploited, they know what that's like.

"We make sure people know 'what you say here stays here.' We're not asking people to speak up so we can be critical of how they handled a situation. We're there to hear from them so we can give better information and workshops. What they share helps us become more effective in our service."

COMMUNITY WORKERS AND ATTORNEYS: A JUSTICE DREAM TEAM

Community workers take what they learn about needs in their area back to their offices to prioritize and inform the legal action CRLA attorneys undertake. This is especially important for impact litigation—cases that can positively change the lives of hundreds, thousands, or even millions of our clients, and which remain a hallmark of CRLA’s work.

One community worker who exemplified the role was the late Hector De La Rosa, who was a highly respected figure in the farmworker community of Soledad and worked in CRLA’s Salinas office. (Like Lupe, he also held the distinction of reaching 50 years with CRLA before his death from cancer in 2020.)

“Hector De La Rosa was key in one of our most important cases—the ending of the short-handled hoe [*Carmona et al. v. Division of Industrial Safety* (1975)],” Lupe remembers. “He learned about the short-handled hoe from the community. He took that to the attorneys to say ‘what can be done about this? The community is being physically hurt by this. We say we help farmworkers so how do we change this?’”

Hector’s community work was also vital to another landmark CRLA victory in *Diana v. State Board of Education* (1970), a case that ended the racially discriminatory practice of California schools assessing Spanish-speaking students as intellectually disabled because they failed an IQ test given only in English. Hector worked tirelessly to gather information on which the case was built and persuaded impacted families to speak with attorneys.

“That’s the beginning of the relationship that continues to this day, with community workers and attorneys collaborating on many cases. Community workers also handle administrative hearings with legal supervision from attorneys.

“Now of course we also have attorneys who can go into the communities and work side-by-side with the community workers there, too. We’ve even had clerks become community workers and then attorneys. It’s a unique part of professional development at CRLA and a source of strength for our work.”

WE ALL RISE TOGETHER

For many attorneys who are new to CRLA or in the early stages of their career, a community worker with years of experience can be an invaluable mentor. Lupe definitely made an impression on one attorney in particular.

Executive Director Jose Padilla remembers, “In September 1978, when I joined the El Centro office as a law clerk, Lupe was one of the two CRLA community workers we had. In that early period, it was Lupe who I consider a first teacher. From Lupe I learned that justice work, when it is about the community that raised you, is never a job, rather it is a cause, a purpose.”

Jose is hardly unique among CRLA attorneys in citing community workers as pivotal influences on their legal practice and careers. Listen to Lupe talk about being a community worker for 50 years and you can understand why: community workers embody a community-led justice that is a far cry from the unequal legal landscape that sparked CRLA's founding.

“People say ‘Lupe, how is it that you’ve done this work for so long? What’s kept you going?’ What’s key of course is the clients and the cases. On a daily basis I help somebody who is hungry, or on the verge of being evicted, or being discriminated against in some form. It does make you feel good to be able to help.

“But it’s more—you try also to educate and have that person feel like, ‘Okay next time I’ll have a better idea of what to do, or there won’t be a next time, because I’ll be able to handle it before it even gets to that point.’ I think that’s important for us to keep in mind about why we do what we do.

“The idea is for us to all work together and to be at the table together, to be inclusive. That inclusion is key. CRLA is not about keeping people outside. It’s about all of us working together to build strong communities, all of us rising together.”



HONOR COMMUNITY WORKERS STATEWIDE

As with so many 2020 milestones, we missed celebrating Lupe’s 50th anniversary at CRLA in person. But we hope to make up for it with an outdoor celebration in Fall 2021, pending public health guidance. Subscribe to our email updates at www.crla.org to be the first to know about upcoming events.

CRLA boasts incredible community workers in every one of our 16 field offices. **Donating in honor of any one of them would be an excellent way to recognize their work.** Simply select “I would like to dedicate this donation” when you donate at www.crla.org.



DONOR PROFILE:

Mario Rosas

Growing up in San Diego, longtime CRLA donor Mario Rosas started helping others at an early age. At the age of 11, he remembers collecting canned goods for farmworkers on strike in the Imperial Valley, following the lead of his best friend's older brother.

In his teens and twenties, Mario was influenced by the farmworker strikes and boycotts led by Cesar Chavez. As the son of Mexican immigrants, Mario was inspired to join the strikes in El Centro.

In the early 2000s, a former board member introduced Mario to CRLA and he became active among a community of San Diego supporters. One strong theme connecting this new chapter of philanthropy and his earlier experiences: the value of education.

“A LIFE-CHANGING EFFECT”

“Education, once obtained, no one can take it away. I believe education is one of the few avenues that can really uplift someone and provide them with security, knowledge, and opportunities,” he told us. “Discrimination in schools against farmworker children can have a long-term impact on their opportunities in life. Help from CRLA has a life-changing effect.”

Mario was the first in his family to go to college and obtain undergraduate and graduate degrees. He initially enrolled in a welding program at a junior college, but his eyes were opened to other opportunities after meeting a San Diego City College Chicano and Latin American Studies Professor, Ternet MacRenato, who became his mentor.

Mario earned a degree from Cal Poly Pomona in International Subsistence Agriculture followed by an MBA from UCLA. His early work included helping farmworkers get Farm Service Agency (FSA) loans. He went on to make his professional career with UBS Financial Advisors.

MONTHLY GIVING MAKES IT EASY

Mario has been a monthly donor to CRLA since 2003. Besides providing ongoing, reliable support for CRLA's work, monthly giving makes it easy for him to set up automatic payments. Mario also multiplies his giving through his employer's matching gift program and sponsors CRLA's annual Tardeada.

At donor events, Mario has enjoyed speaking directly with attorneys and clients about the broad range of issues CRLA takes on, from pesticides to workplace harassment to housing.

"That's why I started taking my children with me to CRLA events: it was important to me that they should also learn about and be informed on these issues. I believe it helped open their eyes to the inequities in our community and made them more community oriented. CRLA provided them with the encouragement to seek and complete their educational goals."

Thank you, Mario! We are honored to be a part of your family's learning, giving, and service.

Become a member of our Monthly Giving Community and support justice for all in rural California

California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc. provides legal services, community advocacy, and “know your rights” education to low-income people in rural California. With support from our monthly giving community, we help our clients get fair pay for their hard work, find and stay in safe housing, access healthcare, ensure quality education for their kids.

Monthly Donors are some of CRLA's most dedicated champions who help bring justice to rural California every day by providing recurring, reliable support that makes it easier for CRLA to plan ahead.

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To become a Monthly Donor to CRLA, please visit www.crla.org, click the “Donate” button, and select “Recurring Donation” when making your gift. You can change your gift amount or cancel at any time.

These are uncertain times, but our commitment to fight for the rights of low-income rural Californians will never change. Your monthly gift will enable us to meet the increased need for legal resources.

CONTACT: Susana Rodriguez, Director of Individual Giving, 510.267.0762 x1028, srodriguez@crla.org

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Hulett Askew
Esther Babawande
Laura Baedeker
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**In Honor of All the
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Hard to Provide Our Food**
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In Honor of Diane Barbosa
Peter Barbosa

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**In Honor of Bay Area
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Steven A. Zrucky

In Memory of Alexa Thais Portales

Claudia Martinez & Elias
Portales

In Memory of Rufino Torres

Noe Torres

2020 FINANCIALS

California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc.
Statement of Activities
For the Year Ended December 31, 2020

SUPPORT AND REVENUE	WITHOUT DONOR RESTRICTIONS	WITHOUT DONOR RESTRICTIONS	TOTAL
Grant Revenue	\$ 725,301	\$ 19,064,904	\$ 19,790,205
Contributions	\$ 487,973	--	\$ 487,973
Attorney Fees/Cost Recovery	\$ 399,252	--	\$ 399,252
In-Kind Contributions	--	--	--
Other Revenue	\$ 116,249	--	\$ 116,249
Net Assets Released from Restrictions	\$ 17,150,399	\$ (17,150,399)	--
Total Support & Revenue	\$ 18,879,174	\$ 1,914,505	\$ 20,793,679
FUNDRAISING EVENTS			
Revenues From Special Events	\$ 137,545	--	\$ 137,545
Less: Cost of Direct Benefits to Attendees	\$ (11,754)	--	\$ (11,754)
Total Fundraising Events	\$ 125,791	--	\$ 125,791
Total Support/Revenues/ Fundraising	\$ 19,004,965	\$ 1,914,505	\$ 20,919,470
EXPENSES	\$ 15,476,064	--	\$ 15,476,064
Program Services	\$ 2,523,288	--	\$ 2,523,288
Management & General Fundraising	\$ 746,544	--	\$ 746,544
Total Expenses	\$ 18,745,896	--	\$ 18,745,896
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	\$ 259,069	\$ 1,914,505	\$ 2,173,574
NET ASSETS - START OF YEAR	\$ 2,319,056	\$ 4,721,053	\$ 7,040,109
NET ASSETS - END OF YEAR	\$ 2,578,125	\$ 6,635,558	\$ 9,213,683

CRLA is funded in part by the Legal Services Corporation. As a condition of the funding it receives from LSC, it is restricted from engaging in certain activities in all of its legal work, including work supported by other funding sources. CRLA may not expend any funds for any activity prohibited by the Legal Services Corporation Act, 42 U.S.C. 2996 et seq. or by Public Law 104-134. Public Law 104-134 504(d) requires that notice of these restrictions be given to all funders of programs funded by LSC. For a copy of these laws or any other information, please contact Monica Yu, Chief Development Officer, at (510)267-0762.

For complete financial statements, please visit www.crla.org/financials



CALIFORNIA RURAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE, INC.

Mission Statement

To fight for justice and individual rights alongside the most exploited communities of our society.

Our Vision of Justice

A rural California where all people are treated with dignity and respect and guaranteed their fundamental rights.

Theory of Change

The legal system can either protect the rights of marginalized people or maintain and deepen control of the powerful. CRLA works with low-income communities in varying ways that utilize our legal system to create a more just society. We fight together to protect and expand rights, ensure access to resources, and create opportunities in rural California.

To learn more about our work, please visit www.crla.org.



