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### **Growing pains**

Clinic moves to larger location to better serve clients' needs.

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A legal clinic in Indianapolis recently moved for the second time since it was started in the early 1990s as it expands to help indigent clients, mainly with immigration and mortgage-foreclosure issues, along with other legal concerns. The Indianapolis-based Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic moved June 1 from 2401 N. Park Ave. to 3333 N. Meridian St. It's less than two miles, but following the closure of the Wheeler Mission's Community Center in January, where the **NCLC** had a satellite office, there wasn't enough room in the old office space.

"In both (old) locations we had two to three people in every office (room)," said Abby Kuzma, **NCLC** executive director since 1994. "We were already overpacked."

According to the organization's 2007 annual report, **NCLC** served a total of 6,185 people, a 25 percent growth over 2006. As far as legal representation/intake, **NCLC** served 3,557 people, a 29 percent increase over 2006; 2,459 new cases, or 32 percent increase over 2006; and 3,159 new and pending cases in 2007, a 38 percent increase over 2006.

**NCLC** also directly served 2,618 families through preventive law education workshops, an increase of 18 percent over 2006; **NCLC**'s Empowerment workshop series reached 780 homeless families; **NCLC** distributed 35,405 educational brochures in English and Spanish on 10 legal topics at local churches, community centers, shelters, and neighborhood events; 98 percent of **NCLC**'s workshop attendees felt the session was extremely helpful, very helpful, or helpful; and 91 percent learned about new resources for assistance.

They also noticed that 53 percent of the families **NCLC** served were immigrants; 1,804 Latinos attended one of **NCLC**'s live educational workshops, a 247 percent increase over 2006; and about a third of cases handled by **NCLC** were immigration issues.

There is also an ever-growing list of partnerships, including one with Wishard Memorial Hospital that has brought more foreclosure and immigration cases to the **NCLC**'s attention.

To accommodate the growing caseload and intake rates from 10 sites around Indianapolis, and before learning they would need to move from the Wheeler Mission, they started looking for new space in September 2007. Around the same time they heard about the availability of space on Meridian Street.

The building had been vacant for two years, but Trinity Episcopal Church, at 3243 N. Meridian St., which owned the building, let its congregation know in the fall of 2007 they wanted to rent the property to non-profit organizations.

**NCLC** representatives met with the church soon after to let them know of their interest, but it was too early to make a decision. When **NCLC** learned in January that they needed a new place by June 1, they started looking around at other spaces.

Ultimately, the church allowed them to move in June 1, but the downside is the building is undergoing renovations; something Kuzma said has been "wonderful and difficult at the same time."

The renovation includes installation of a new energy-efficient HVAC system and windows to make the building LEED certified - showing Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design according to standards set by the U.S. Green Building Council.

Down the road, Kuzma said there may also be plans of a roof garden.

Following the move, Kuzma said they now have a few extra expenses they didn't have at the old location.

For one, the phones are no longer subsidized. The rent was also subsidized at the former locations, but Kuzma added they still have a pretty good rent rate for a non-profit.

Another cost has been technology upgrades. With more people in one location, they needed a new server and new equipment to be accessible to all staff and volunteers.

Regarding volunteers, Kuzma said there are 10 legal interns for the summer, and the office will soon have eight Volunteers In Service To America/Americorps volunteers in the office. Two started in June and the rest are scheduled to start in the coming months.

To fill out the new office space, Kuzma and **NCLC** got some help.

"I'd love to thank Bose McKinney and Ice Miller," she said. "They donated wonderful old furniture - file cabinets, desks, chairs, bookshelves. It's wonderful and we're really in good shape for the new space we're in."

**NCLC** continues to apply for grants to offset costs, and The Indianapolis Foundation has awarded a grant to help with the technology upgrades. Another grant Kuzma is hopeful for will be for renovations of the office space, which would add a large conference room area.

Other than upgrades, Kuzma said the organization also had to consider the security of their clients' files.

She said the move was a good reason to go through, shred, and properly dispose of files that were old enough to be destroyed.

"You have to be very careful ... that information isn't accessible to the public at all and that you properly dispose of it," she said.

As for the more current files, **NCLC** staff traveled with the files during the move.

"And of course once you get to the new site, you have to be good about making sure that everything is secure," she added.

One more cost **NCLC** had to take on was simply updating their information - to everyone.

Kuzma said they sent about 3,500 change-of-address notices to individuals and organizations, and they continue to tell people of the new address and phone number. The Web site and e-mails have not changed.

Other than those who partner with **NCLC** or use their services, the **NCLC** also had to alert the courts where they had clients. Each client's file with the courts had to be updated, including the Immigration Court in Chicago where Kuzma does the majority of her legal practice.

"That was an ordeal," she said, adding, "Different courts have different requirements."

They also had to print new brochures with the new addresses.

But even with the new address, the clients still find them, and Kuzma estimates they will maintain the number of clients served.

And the staff appreciates the move, too.

"Watching our clinic grow has been a tremendous experience," said Noel McClain, an administrative assistant to

**NCLC.** "I've been with the clinic for over four years, and within that time we have outgrown our main office twice. Our move to 3333 N. Meridian St. was born out of necessity, but the way in which we came to this space can only be attributed to God's will and His timing. This new space gives us the opportunity to combine our offices and staff; provides us room for growth, and most importantly, I think it will help us serve our clients more effectively."

Kuzma agreed.

"Being in the new space is a tremendous blessing in a number of ways," she said. "First, we are still in one of our target neighborhoods - Mapleton-Fall Creek - but being on Meridian Street is tremendously accessible for our clients. Plus, we can easily partner with other neighborhood ministries supported by our landlord, Trinity Episcopal Church. The best part about the move is that we have enough room to combine our two office locations into one space so that we are all together. Our staff is really enjoying working together in the same location."

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