

CLASS OF 2011 FELLOW UPDATE – ADRIANA RODRIGUEZ
SPONSORED BY TEXAS ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOUNDATION
TEXAS RIOGRANDE LEGAL AID – Laredo, TX

PROJECT: Provides legal representation and access to services for undocumented Southwest Texans who are victims of intimate partner violence and who suffer from mental illness, including those struggling with substance abuse.



HIGHLIGHTS TO DATE:

- In her first year, Adriana provided full representation to 44 clients, from assisting women in obtaining divorces or protective orders to helping victims adjust their immigration status or receive VAWA relief. She also provided more limited legal advice to an additional 14 women.
- Adriana recruited local attorneys to help with uncontested divorces at the Social Justice Night Court in Laredo, a program to help indigent Laredoans access legal services.
- Adriana is currently working with local judges to create a pro se divorce docket in Webb County.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- Adriana is establishing a comprehensive infrastructure that will allow private bar attorneys from all over Texas to represent her clients in immigration matters using videoconference technologies. She is also working on recruiting and training these attorneys.
- Adriana will be hosting a weekly *charla*, or chat, at the local shelter to empower survivors. Attendees can expect information on protective orders, divorce and custody, and immigration relief.
- Adriana is working to unite a team of service providers to offer client sensitivity trainings to local law enforcement and others who work with intimate partner violence and mental illness.

***GREAT CLIENT STORY:** The focus of Adriana's project has always been to provide holistic support to clients with complex needs. One client, "Kelly", has received a great deal of support from Adriana's office and their community partners to help her achieve stability after leaving an abusive relationship. Adriana says: "we first helped Kelly with a protective order; then we helped her acquire a divorce and sole managing custody of her five children. In the midst of Kelly leaving her abusive spouse and attaining a more independent life, her eldest son began to manifest symptoms of mental illness and severe emotional distress. Our office has worked to help Kelly find services for her son, and also helped Kelly find counseling for herself at the local women's shelter, a committed community partner." This client is a prime example of how indigent survivors of domestic violence can encounter so many obstacles on their paths to independence. "I'm so glad our office is committed to helping Kelly and others like her who are looking for peace and stability for their families," says Adriana.*