



SPOTLIGHTS

Jose Barajas – 2021 Hispanic Heritage Month Pro Bono Feature

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When massive federal budget cuts forced the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles (LAFLA) to close its family law center in the early 1980s, Ethel Levitt and Ziva Naumann, two retired grandmothers who had been volunteering with LAFLA for years, established Levitt & Horne to take over LAFLA's 400-plus open family law cases. Just four years later, Levitt & Horne would become [Levitt & Quinn Family Law Center](#), a nonprofit family law firm primarily serving members of L.A.'s working class that could not otherwise afford legal representation in family court.

The work of the nonprofit is premised on providing accessible and meaningful legal services and fostering a safe and loving home for children in an effort to create responsible, sociable adults. In doing so, the social benefits of LevittQuinn's work extend well beyond the individual child and family unit.

Way back in 2012, I sent off a chance email to LevittQuinn, asking if they were interested in taking on a new volunteer. My goals were both to benefit from the legal experience, but also to enhance my resume prior to applying for law school. During my stint at LevittQuinn, I learned that while there is a right to representation for indigent defendants before the criminal courts, the same right does not exist for indigent children and their parents or caregivers when appearing before the family courts.

This pre-law school experience bolstered my resolve to attend a top-tier law school, despite my non-traditional background, but more importantly, truly showed me the impact a well-intentioned and well-placed person can have on a family in crisis and the most vulnerable children in our society.

My commitment to LevittQuinn and its mission was forged after

experiencing first-hand the heart-wrenching decisions some caregivers, often grandparents, had to make, during the course of navigating the family courts while attempting to keep their loved ones from entering the “system” as wards of the state. Pay for needed life-sustaining medicine or pay the lawyer who can help keep their grandchild(ren) safely in their care? Through in-person legal consultations, preparation of pleadings, assembly of filing packets, and even in-court representation when warranted, LevittQuinn has stood as the vanguard for scores of Los Angeles’ working families seeking to establish, or safeguard homes for minors that simply cannot afford private representation. Through LevittQuinn’s mobile clinics, I have been able to provide pro bono services to the center’s clients, such as legal assessment of walk-in clients’ matters or referrals to other agencies, or to book appointments with LevittQuinn for further assistance.

In 2019, LevittQuinn staff invited me to apply for a seat on the Leadership Council, the primary function of which is the promotion of the organization amongst our respective legal communities, while also spreading the word to potential clients that could benefit from its services. Shortly thereafter, I was honored when the board of directors approved my application and offered me the seat I currently occupy on the Leadership Council. As this organization impacts the formational years of so many at-risk youth in communities I know very well, I can see clearly now that my commitment to LevittQuinn and its cause will be life-long.

[Watch this video](#) to learn more about LevittQuinn and see their impact on individuals and families in Southern California.