

LATINO ADVOCACY COALITION
OF HENDERSON COUN

YEAR 2024/25

ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025

LATEST INFORMATION AND UPDATES
ABOUT LATINO ADVOCACY COALITION OF
HENDERSON COUNTY (EL CENTRO)



Latino Advocacy Coalition
OF HENDERSON COUNTY

**PREPARED BY:
ANGIE PEÑA**



CELEBRATING A YEAR OF GROWTH AND COMMITMENT TO EL CENTRO

April marks one year since I officially transitioned into my role as Director of El Centro. When I first joined the organization as a board member, I could not have imagined the challenges we would face. Yet through those challenges, I have witnessed firsthand the strength, resilience, and dedication of this community. Looking back over the past two years, I could not be more proud of the work we have accomplished together—and I am even more inspired by the work that still lies ahead. In the year to come, I look forward to continuing to invest in this organization by bringing the knowledge and experience I have gained through years of nonprofit leadership and immigration advocacy. It is both a privilege and a responsibility to contribute to a mission that supports and uplifts so many in our community.

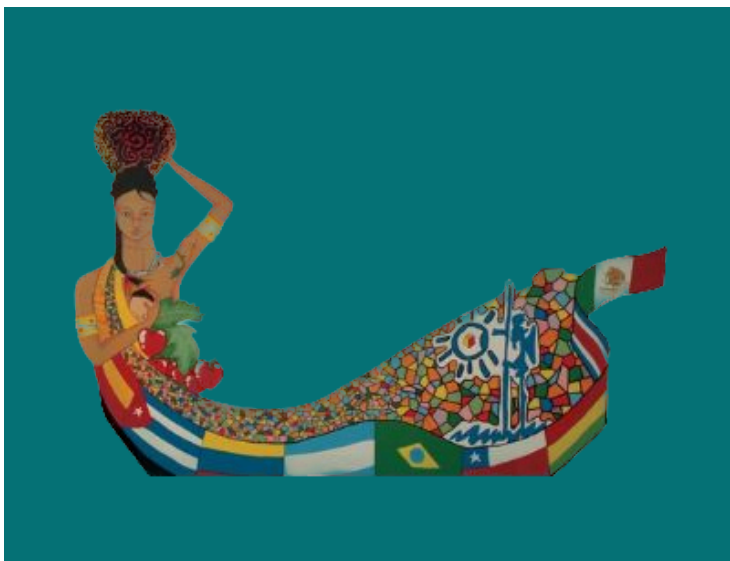
Growing up in central Florida as the daughter of farm working immigrants from Mexico, I never imagined that I would one day become an immigration attorney—especially during such challenging times. As a young person, I dreamed of becoming a doctor and joining Médecins Sans Frontières. Life, however, had a different path in store for me. Looking back now, I can see how each step led me here—to work that is deeply meaningful and that allows me to serve and advocate for people from all walks of life.

Today, I am grateful for the journey God put me on and honored to continue this work alongside a community committed to justice, dignity, and opportunity for all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Angie Peña".

ANGIE PEÑA

DIRECTOR





TROPICAL STORM HELENE (2024)

BY ANGIE PEÑA

In the aftermath of the devastation caused by Tropical Storm Helene, El Centro stepped up to support families during a time of urgent need. Our team and volunteers assisted nearly 300 families in applying for disaster relief through Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). While some households received assistance beyond the initial \$750 emergency payment, we estimate that at a minimum more than \$215,250 in FEMA aid was secured for Hispanic families impacted by the storm.

We also worked directly with families who lost their homes due to flooding and storm damage. We helped families secure alternate housing after their homes were destroyed or washed away. In addition, we supported several households in obtaining larger recovery awards—including amounts of \$8,000 and \$15,000.

This work reflects our ongoing commitment to ensuring that all families in our community, regardless of background or language barriers, have access to the resources and support they need to recover, rebuild, and move forward with dignity and hope.

These figures reflect only amounts that were reported back to us. We believe the total support secured for affected families is likely significantly higher than the estimated \$215,250, as not all households reported the final amounts they received.

In addition, families who lost their homes were supported in securing temporary housing FEMA. Several families were able to obtain weeks of hotel accommodations while they searched for more stable living arrangements. Once they transitioned into alternate housing, many also qualified for ongoing rental assistance from FEMA.

For these families, we estimate that El Centro helped secure between \$5,000 and \$10,000 per household in rental assistance, providing critical stability as they began the process of rebuilding their lives after Helene.

FEMA TRAINING/OUTREACH (2024/25)

BY ANGIE PEÑA / NANCY DIAZ

In the wake of Helene El Centro was integral in training **10+** volunteers from the community and from local non-profit organizations in filing FEMA applications especially for families who are of mixed-status. The 290+ applications that we filed do not include those that were filed during partner events as those pictured below. We also do not count those that were filed by our volunteers after they returned to their normal jobs. The volunteers counted above do not include those that were trained during events held in partnership with other local non-profit orgs.

In the days following the storm, community leaders gathered at El Centro to provide direct relief to Latine neighborhoods across the county. We estimate that 20 volunteers shared food, water, basic needs supplies and information about resource sites near them to approximately 50 neighborhoods. Through this direct outreach we identified several storm-damaged homes that would not be eligible for repairs through government assistance. Just days after the storm, with the help of local businesses, visiting relief teams, and area nonprofit partners we were able to assist two damaged homes complete roof repairs so they could safely remain in their homes. The direct relief outreach spearheaded at El Centro also led to generators, dehumidifiers, alternate heat sources and other big ticket relief items being distributed to surviving households.



Above: Sandy Pena (El Centro Staff) with Pisgah Legal Staff at a partner event organized with True Ridge at First United Methodist Church

Below: Board Member, Nancy Diaz, pictured with Sisters of Charity conducting outreach to Helen affected family





IMMIGRATION PROGRAM (2024)

BY ANGIE PEÑA

Recognizing that there is a need for low-cost immigration assistance, El Centro sought to implement an immigration program that could serve the low-income immigrant community in Henderson County. The program started in the spring of 2023 and has grown over the years.

In 2024 alone we estimate we saved low-income Victims of Domestic Violence over \$5,000 each.

We were able to save immigrant applicants who lived out of the county 1 to 2 hours per appointment by providing virtual appointments as well as save them fuel.

We saved low-income immigrant applicants who needed to file for Employment Authorization Documents (EAD) cards approximately \$1000 in attorney's fees.

El Centro has become a low-income option for immigrants who want to petition for their families. Per immigrant petition we estimate a person can save over \$1000 or make the process accessible.

El Centro is one of the only organizations serving WNC that provides free or low-cost immigration services to Asylum seekers.

\$7,500 saved by the Hispanic women who were given a free consultation by El Centro.

\$23,000 saved by the low-income Hispanic Community who received a low-bono consultation from El Centro.

On average an Asylum case with a private attorney can cost an immigrant upwards of \$8,000 with some applicants paying up to \$15,000 or \$20,000 if there is removal defense in immigration court.

We estimate we have saved over \$100,000 for asylum seekers in Henderson County in some cases providing representation when they otherwise would not have been able to afford it.

Over half of El Centro's Immigration cases are humanitarian case: Asylum, T-visas (for victims of trafficking, U-visas (for victims of crimes), VAWA (victims of domestic violence).

IMMIGRATION PROGRAM (2025)

BY ANGIE PEÑA



\$1250

Amount saved per US citizenship application filed by low-income individuals. Applicants save in high attorney's fees and in USCIS application fees with fee waivers filed by El Centro.

\$3000+

Amount saved per U-visa application filed by low-income individuals. Applicants save in high attorney's fees that can range from \$5000-\$10,000.

25

Free Consultations given to Women in 2025. Of those free consultations given at least 1 resulted in the discovery of a T visa for victims of trafficking

22

Low Bono Consultations given in 2024 (Prices range from \$45-\$75)

92

Free / low Bono Consultations given in 2025 (Asylum Consultations - Free) (All others range from \$45-\$75)

1000+

Red Card distributed to the Immigrant Community



2024/2025 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Immigration Program

El Centro's Immigration program will be three years old this year and it has doubled in size in the last year under the direction of the new executive director.

Revenue brought in by the immigration program accounted for a quarter of the income for El Centro.

Housing Program

Aside from Disaster Relief and the Immigration program El Centro is developing a housing committee to help educate and find resources for people who are wanting to buy a home.

Disaster Relief

El Centro is still helping with Disaster relief doing FEMA appeals and helping affected families find resources. We are a key partner in the creation of the Disaster Recover Partnership and language access programs with local governments.

Partner Meetings

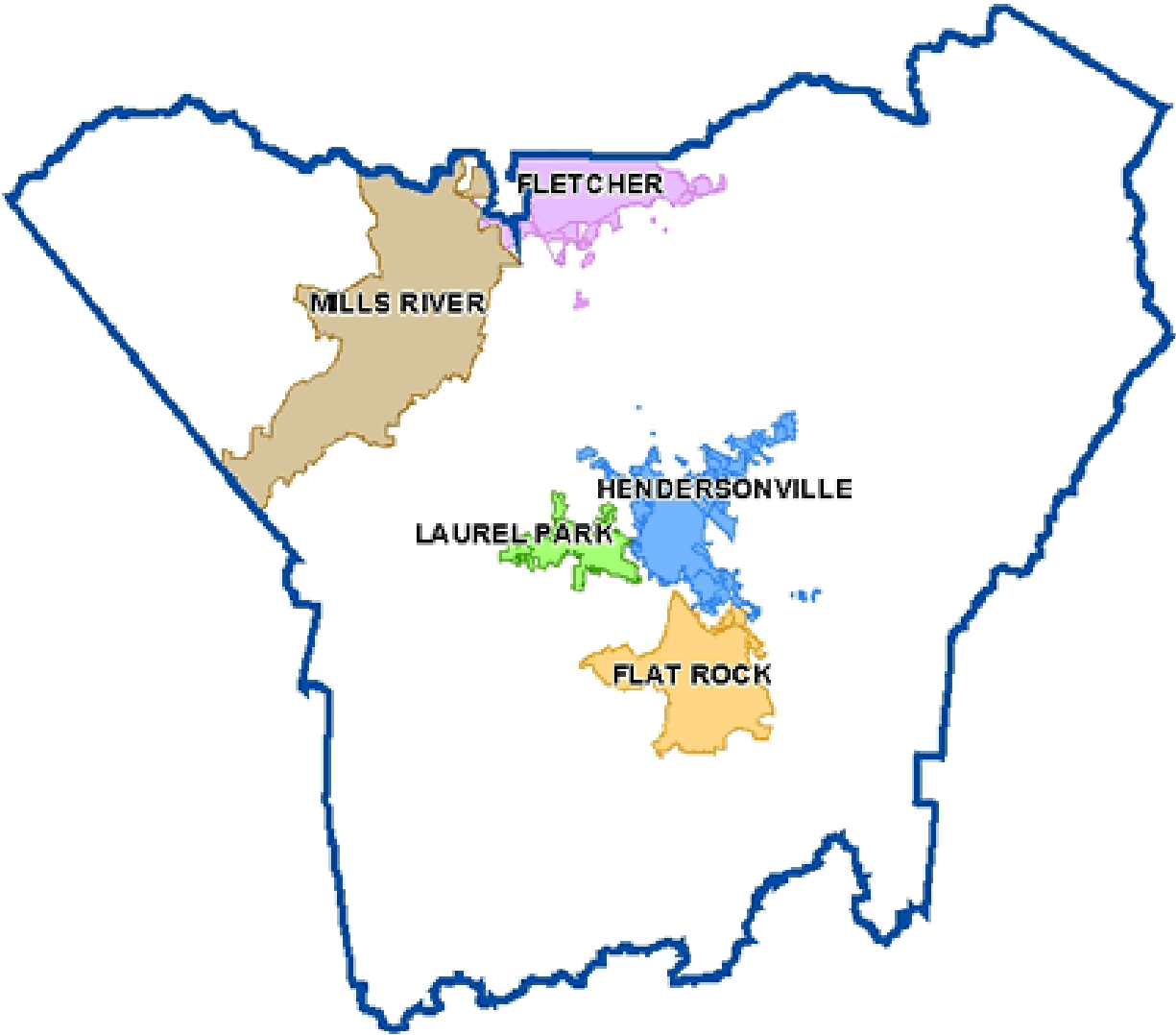
El Centro has initiated monthly partner meetings that seek to reconnect with partner organizations in 2026 to increase its impact in the community.

Community Defense Organizing

Supporting grassroots leaders and volunteers with trainings and programs to better protect Immigrant communities In the face of heightened violent unlawful enforcement, in partnership with other agencies and regional coalitions.



Building grassroots Latine leadership, one meal at a time!

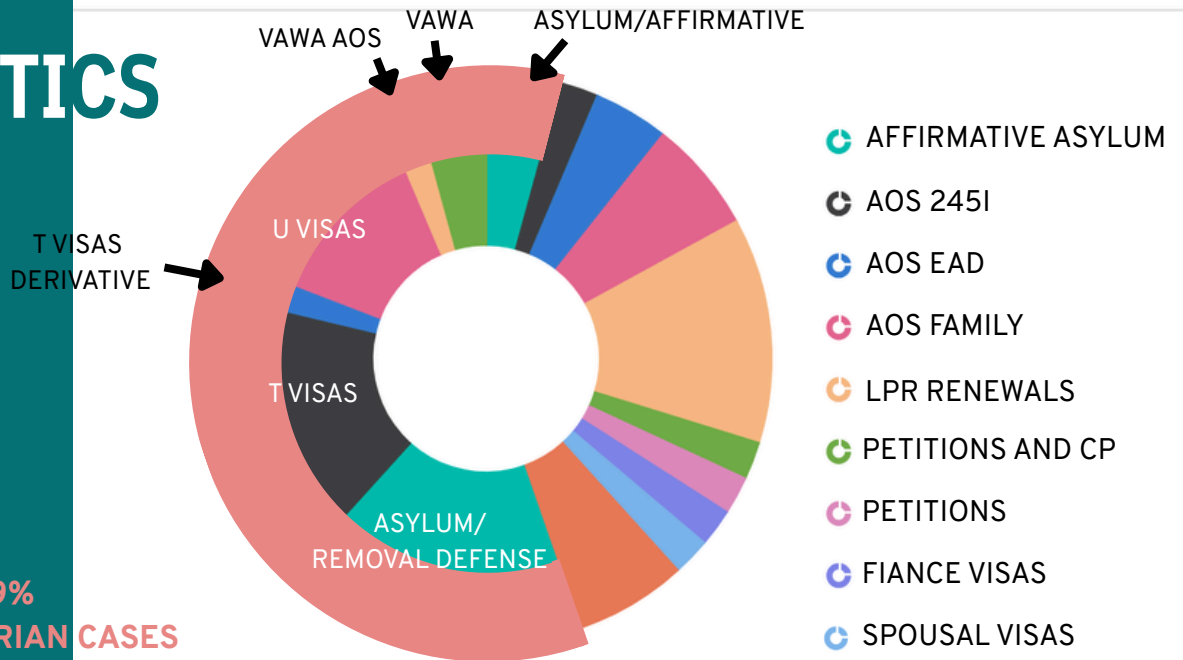


A COUNTY VIEW

At least 12% of the population in Henderson County is Hispanic. That number could be up to 13.5%, approximately 15,000 to 15,500 (according to the Federal Reserve Economic Data). In 2024 and 2025 El Centro assisted approximately 10% of the Hispanic population in Henderson County. El Centro’s Facebook page has over 5,700 followers and gets close to 30,000 views per month. We are able to distribute emergency information in Spanish through our social media platforms.

STATISTICS

Cases by Process Type



59%
HUMANITARIAN CASES

- Over half our caseload are Humanitarian based cases.
- Humanitarian based cases include:
 - Asylum
 - T visas for Victims of Trafficking
 - U visas for Victims of Crimes
 - VAWA for victims of Domestic Violence.
- Currently we have 47 active cases. Of those 47, 28 are Humanitarian.
 - 10 total Asylum cases
 - 9 T visas cases
 - 6 U visa cases
 - 3 VAWA cases
- The rest of the cases include:
 - Adjustment of Status
 - Green Card renewals
 - Naturalization
 - Petitions
 - Fiance / Spousal Visas

5%

Percent of Non-Hispanic immigrant
Who received immigration assistance
through our immigration program



America Moreno (current board member of El Centro) volunteering with another volunteer at El Centro in the days after the storm.

\$400,000

Through its various programs, cost savings, FEMA Filings and other work in the community we estimate that El Centro was able to help low-immigrant families hold on to, save, obtain or receive upwards of \$400,000 in monetary value.

2 YEARS

These are the estimated numbers over 2 years. Major contributors to these numbers were assisting families file FEMA applications and cost savings through the immigration program.

90%

Percentage of the individuals who go to El Centro for assistance who are low-income and qualify for immigration services on a sliding scale.

95%

Percentage of individuals seeking immigration Services who are hispanic.

FUNDERS

- Blueprint
- Democracy NC
- Dogwood Health Trust
- Community Foundation of Henderson County
- Community Foundation of Western North Carolina
- Four Seasons Rotary Club
- Hispanic Federation
- NC BLOC
- NC Center for Nonprofits
- NC Counts Coalition
- NC Latinx Collaborative
- United Way of Henderson County
- Western Womens' Business Center
- Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation

THANK YOU

IN APPRECIATION OF 10 ANONYMOUS GENEROUS DONORS,
OUR DEDICATED AND EXCEPTIONAL BOARD MEMBERS, AND
NUMEROUS COMMUNITY PARTNERS & ALLIES



Board Member, Nancy Diaz,
collecting donations for Latine
Impacted households from
students at Mountain Community
School.