

Industry Watch

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Center on Law and Poverty Picks New Chief

By Anat Rubin
Daily Journal Staff Writer

Syd Whalley may not seem like the most obvious choice for the Western Center on Law and Poverty's next executive director.

She began her legal career just several years ago after 15 years as a pediatric oncology nurse. But for Whalley, the connection between her work in health care and her new career in the law is clear.

"Nurses are taught to be patients' advocates," she said. "I was interested in advocacy, and I thought the way to do that was to get a legal education."

Whalley, the center announced April 24, will take over for Pegine Grayson, who leaves her post in June.

After five years as executive director of the organization, Grayson has decided to focus on her family.

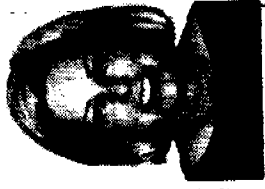
"I'm leaving for purely personal reasons," she said. "In a nutshell, this job is and has been very demanding and has taken its toll on my availability to my kids. I can't keep up this pace anymore."

Grayson said the decision to leave was a difficult one.

"I have never had a job I have loved as much as this one," she said.

But she said the timing was right.

"Western Center is in a good, strong place right now," she said. "And I am just thrilled to be turning this wonderful organization over to Syd. She is someone who you can't help but like. She's warm and magnetic, and you want to be around her."



Whalley

and Policy at UCLA, from which she graduated in 2001.

While there, she worked with a team of law students to assist the American Civil Liberties Union with the filing of *Williams v. California*, a much-publicized lawsuit accusing the state of failing to provide public-school students with adequate facilities and other bare essentials.

After externing for U.S. District Judge Christina Snyder, Whalley joined Arnold & Porter as staff attorney, where she spent a year and a half working on a large product-liability case.

She has long been active in the Women's Political Committee, where she served as co-chair for two years, and has experience in political fundraising and candidate endorsement from her time as a board of directors member for Planned Parenthood. She also served on the board of directors of the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles.

Whalley received an award for her work assisting California women seeking elected offices and has been recognized as a distin-

guished alumna of UCLA's School of Nursing.

In 2005 she joined the Western Center as a foster care benefits advocate.

"UCLA really held the Western Center in high regard," she said. "The opportunity to work with these lawyers — I looked at it like a great learning experience."

She is excited to begin working at the center in a new capacity and said her work is important "now more than ever, with the increasing divide between the wealthy and the poor."

"Pegine has moved the organization in a very positive direction," she said. "I really just want to take it to the next step, to strengthen where we are."

Grayson said she will be taking some time off to relax and spend time with her daughter "before she is in high school and won't want it any more."

After that, she looks forward to "reinventing" herself.

"A door's going to open for me," she said. "I don't know what it is yet."