



# Montana Legal Services Association



Fighting  
Poverty



Achieving  
Justice



Improving  
Lives



► CLIENT STORIES

**“Karen” took beatings over the course of her entire relationship with “Rick.”** His several convictions of partner family member assault did not slow his violence. After a particularly brutal attack on Karen, he was convicted of a felony and served several years in prison. When Rick was sent to a pre-release center, he began calling Karen’s phone and leaving messages for her. Afraid, Karen applied for an order of protection prohibiting Rick from having contact with her or her children. The court would not enter an order of protection for Karen’s children because she had no parenting plan. Afraid and frustrated, Karen needed help to quickly draft a parenting plan but she had no money to pay for an attorney.

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**Karen called MLSA for help.** An MLSA attorney drafted a petition and proposed parenting plan, and ultimately succeeded in helping Karen obtain a parenting plan that protected her and her children from an extremely dangerous situation. Having a life free from fear will take some time. Meanwhile Karen and her children have the full

## Who We Are

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Montana Legal Services Association is a private, non-profit law firm that provides free civil legal aid to low-income Montanans. With support from people like you, civil legal aid at Montana Legal Services Association assures fairness for all in the justice system, regardless of how much money a person has.

## What We Can Do Because of You

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Your commitment to MLSA allows us to directly represent individual clients primarily in the areas of consumer, housing, domestic violence family law, and public benefits. For example, MLSA advocates help domestic violence survivors and their children live lives free of violence, help keep veterans from becoming homeless due to unfair enforcement of housing laws, and help prevent disabled Montanans from unfairly losing benefits that pay for food and housing.

Your generosity allowed MLSA to help over 6,000 Montanans in 2013, including 2,759 children. Intake staff fielded an average of 465 service requests per month. Your generosity provides access to legal help—including easy-to-understand forms and legal self-help, for



## The Need

MLSA generally represents people with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty rate. Over 14% of Montanans live below the federal poverty level, trying to make ends meet with \$23,550 per year for a family of four.

Over 33,000 low income households in Montana have at least one civil legal need. Over 75% identified a need for legal assistance but reported being able to do nothing to address that need. Unattended legal matters can cause events devastating to the family and costly to our community.

Unfortunately, the demand for civil legal aid in Montana far outstrips the supply. MLSA had over 10,984 requests for help in 2013 and provided assistance in 2,622 cases. So for every client MLSA takes, it must turn away many more.

If you believe in justice for all, then you believe in programs like civil legal aid at MLSA to ensure that the very principle our founding fathers envisioned remains alive: justice for all, not just the few who can afford it.

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## ► CLIENT STORIES

**“Taylor” is an 8-year-old with a severe form of epilepsy** which places her at risk for brain damage and death. Unfortunately, the best medicine to treat Taylor’s symptoms is not labeled for her syndrome, so Medicaid would not pay for the expensive medication. Taylor’s grandfather dipped into his retirement funds to pay for the medication, but these payments were not sustainable for the family.

**Taylor’s mom called up MLSA**, and our attorney contacted experts all over the country to find evidence to support use of the medication for her syndrome. Taylor’s treating physicians confirmed that Taylor’s seizures were greatly reduced in number and severity since she began taking the off-label medication. Using the information compiled, Taylor’s MLSA attorney was able to convince Medicaid that the denial of coverage should be reversed. Taylor’s family can now afford her treatment and she has better future ahead of her. Taylor and her mom brought their attorney a batch of homemade chocolate chip cookies in gratitude—he says they were the best cookies he

## ► CLIENT STORIES

**“Ernest” received a letter early in the winter** informing him that his monthly rent amount would double, effective the next month. As a 74 year old disabled Veteran living in federally subsidized low-income housing, the doubled rent would take up over 70% of Ernest’s social security income, leaving him very little for his other basic necessities. Ernest knew he couldn’t afford the doubled rent, and was afraid he would be evicted and homeless in the middle of Montana’s harsh winter.

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**Ernest contacted MLSA to ask for help to keep a roof over his head.** An MLSA attorney requested a reasonable accommodation for Ernest at the housing authority. With MLSA’s help, Ernest now pays an affordable rent of 30% of his income. Grateful for his attorney’s assistance, Ernest wrote a thank you: *“The Case settled in my favor and I don’t have to worry about being homeless. I am a 74 year old Veteran and I could not move if had wanted to. Your service was terrific.”*

## Statewide Services

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MLSA provides legal services in all 56 Montana counties, and on all Montana tribal reservations with 13 attorneys and 35 total staff based in offices in Missoula, Billings, Helena, and the Crow reservation.

## A Gift for Collaboration

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We don’t try to do everything ourselves. Instead, we team up with other non-profits and government agencies to leverage our collective resources. For example, MLSA partners with the Montana Supreme Court Help Program to offer legal kiosks across the state which have provided 45,000 instances of legal information to people throughout Montana.

## Broad Based Advocacy

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Your support allows MLSA to utilize a systemic approach to help more than just one client access justice (1) by selecting cases with issues which adversely impact many people; and (2) by offering programs like clinics that reach entire groups of people.



## Volunteers

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Your donation to MLSA encourages private attorneys to volunteer services to help people in need and build stronger communities. In 2013, MLSA's statewide pro bono coordination efforts resulted in over 295 private attorneys taking on free or reduced fee clients, donating over 7,000 hours of legal work.

## Fiscal Urgency

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Support from the government funded Legal Services Corporation have been dwindling nearly every year. Due to 2010 Census changes, MLSA's 2014 federal funding has decreased by 14%. Past funding cuts resulted in layoffs, decreasing the number of cases closed from 4,771 cases in 2011 to 2,622 cases in 2013. Your gift means more people have access to the justice system, and help for their day in court. Your gift today ensures fairness for all in the justice system. Your gift today strengthens the rule of law, creating a more secure society for us all.



## Reliable Leadership

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Most of our top staff have been on board for over a decade, showing a remarkable commitment to demanding work. Volunteer leadership comes from every level and walk of life, including community Board members representing our client population. Highly respected community members serve on our Board of Trustees, carefully managing your investment in MLSA.

*“There can be no equal justice  
where the kind of trial a man  
gets depends on the amount  
of money he has.”*

—U.S. Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black,  
*Griffin v. Illinois*, 351 U.S. 12 (1956)

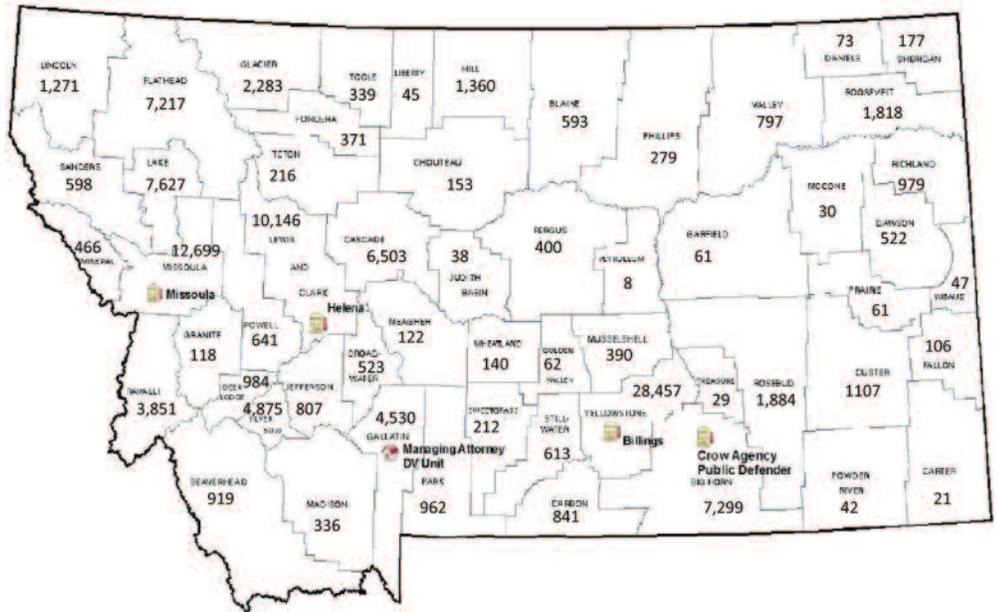
► CLIENT STORIES

“Mary” arrived as a mail-order bride from China who had survived Mao Zedong’s cultural revolution by working in the fields. She later attended engineering school. Years after settling in Montana, she was in the last stages of abdominal cancer. A survivor of domestic violence by her husband, who was incarcerated for the violence he inflicted upon his family, Mary wanted to make sure she transferred her portion of her home only to her daughter. She was adamant that her daughter have enough resources to attend college. Mary wanted to write a will to give her child a future away from the man who had brutalized them, but she did not have any money to pay an attorney.

The attorney who prosecuted Mary’s husband sent her to MLSA. An MLSA volunteer attorney drafted and executed her will less than two weeks before she died. They transferred Mary’s portion of the house to her daughter, setting the strong mother’s mind at ease about her daughter’s future. Our MLSA volunteer continued advising Mary’s family on how to close the estate. Mary’s daughter now attends college with some financial assurance thanks

## Montana Legal Services Association assists Montanans in need all across the state.

Number of people helped by county, 2003-2013:



## Respect for the Individual

People who need civil legal help are not statistics. They are real people with very individual problems. Your gift to MLSA is a gift of compassion.

## Who Benefits from Your Gift?

Our clients and their families come from all walks of life: survivors of domestic violence, veterans, seniors, people with disabilities, Native Americans, the working poor, and persons with mental illness. A fair justice system for all strengthens society's rule of law. This cornerstone supports things we all hold dear: security, safety, education, civic participation, improved public health, and overall improved quality of life. A gift to MLSA is a gift to us all.



**The time has come to meet the civil legal needs of Montanans living in poverty. Together, we can ensure justice for all.**



Total Number of Persons  
Helped in 2013:.....6,074  
Disadvantaged Children: .....1,362  
55 and Over: .....480  
Domestic Violence Survivors:...1,311  
Native Americans: .....646  
Veterans: .....135

For more information contact:

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**MLSA has primary offices in Helena, Billings, and Missoula.**

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Funded in part by  
Montana Justice Foundation  
and Legal Services Corporation



All data collected for and reported in Legal Services Corporation Progress Reports by Montana Legal Services Association.

Because we receive a grant from the federally funded Legal Services Corporation, we are required to notify you that all funds we receive may not be used in any manner inconsistent with the Legal Services Corporation Act of 1974, as amended in 1977 (42 U.S.C. §§ 2996 et. seq.), its implementing regulations (45 C.F.R. § 1600 et seq.), and other relevant law.

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