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Montana Legal Services Association



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protecting and enhancing access to
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Sitte to Step Down as Executive Director of MLSA



After more than eight years at the helm of the Montana Legal Services Association, Klaus Sitte is stepping down as the Executive Director. Before his appointment to that position, Sitte was the Managing Attorney of the MLSA Missoula office for more than 28 years, as well as Deputy Director for six years. Sitte currently serves on the Montana Supreme Court's Equal Justice Task Force and the State Bar's Access to Justice Committee.

The Board of Trustees of MLSA announced the appointment of Alison Paul, currently Deputy Director, to the ED position, effective January 3. Sitte will become Litigation Director that same day. Sitte will remain in the Missoula office where he has trained and mentored hundreds of new lawyers, interns and volunteers, many of them through his involvement with the University of Montana Law School.

"MLSA has not really engaged in serious transition planning in the past," said Sitte. "This time, we did it right. We presented the BOT with a plan that was carefully considered, thoughtfully evaluated and thoroughly vetted with the BOT and the Management Team in advance." Speaking on behalf of the Board, President Terry Youngworth from Great Falls reflected on the Board's unanimous decision: "Klaus has done such a fine job over the last several years. There is no doubt we'll miss him as ED. On the other hand, the Board recognized that a transition was inevitable and this time we planned for it. As a bonus for MLSA and those we serve, we keep Klaus's skills and experience."

In his new position as Litigation Director, Sitte will mentor MLSA's advocates and casehandlers. He will provide supportive services and co-counseling assistance, especially to new advocates. "What I really missed as Executive Director was the direct advocacy opportunity with clients. I've missed clients more than I ever thought I would. I'm looking forward to that challenge once again," said Sitte. "I've imposed my presumptions and prescriptions on MLSA long enough. It's time for some new leadership," commented Sitte. "My new job is not a retirement position. I expect to be actively engaged with our staff and our clients for several more years," added Sitte.

MLSA is the statewide civil legal services provider for Montanans living in poverty. Incorporated by the Montana Bar Association - the State Bar's predecessor - more than forty years ago, MLSA provides advice and

represents eligible clients in civil cases. Clients must meet income and case type restrictions in order to receive services. MLSA advises and represents clients throughout Montana. MLSA is funded in part by grants from the Montana Justice Foundation, the Department of Justice VAWA office and the Legal Services Corporation.

MLSA Starts Using LegalServer Case Management System

MLSA staff began using the LegalServer case management system on December 5 to track data about cases and other activities. LegalServer is a web-based system that allows a legal services program to customize features to match that program's needs. MLSA Program Administrator Tracie Poindexter has worked extensively with the LegalServer company in preparing MLSA's system, and also arranged for and conducted several training sessions for MLSA staff. To date, staff members have reacted positively to the new user friendly system, and many look forward to exploring some of the functions that will be new to MLSA. MLSA's purchase of the LegalServer system is funded by a generous grant from the Sample Foundation, Inc., as well as funding from the Legal Services Corporation.

MLSA Relaunches Website, Gears Up For Competition to Get Funding for Phones



MLSA redesigned its www.mtlsa.org website and relaunched it in November. Thanks to AmeriCorps VISTA member Scott Crooks, the website now has a new look and some features the prior site's template could not accommodate. We invite you to visit the site when you have a chance. We appreciate the efforts Scott and other staff members made in the conversion process, and we plan to continue updating content on the site as events occur.

For example, MLSA has submitted an application to enter a competition to get funding from the Pepsi Refresh campaign for a much-needed telephone system. The Pepsi Refresh campaign allows nonprofits and individuals to submit project ideas each month, and the top vote-getters in each money category are funded. Nearly anyone can vote, but each person is limited to 10 votes per day and cannot vote for one project idea more than once per day. In other words, a person could vote for MLSA's idea and up to nine other ideas each day in January. MLSA's

application is currently under review, and Pepsi will inform us whether we made it through to the January competition on January 1, which is also the first day to vote. You can see a video MLSA submitted in support of the application on www.youtube.com/MLSA. Starting on January 1, check www.mtlsa.org to see if MLSA is in the running, and please vote for MLSA's project every day you can in January. We appreciate your support!

Bankruptcy Clinics on Hold Pending Review

MLSA's pro se bankruptcy clinics are temporarily on hold so that staff may address a backlog of cases and study how to offer the clinic in a sustainable manner given resource limitations. To date, the bankruptcy clinics have been wildly popular and successful, and MLSA is receiving more applications than staff can effectively handle. MLSA has no new clinics scheduled at this time, so we can evaluate the clinics' processes and prioritize helping clients who are awaiting follow-up services from past clinics. MLSA will also consider how to improve the clinics to use existing resources to better serve clients. MLSA appreciates the patience of our clients and project partners during this time, and apologizes for any inconvenience.

Free Tax Filing Services Available Through Montana Free File

MLSA is participating again this year in the Montana Free File project, which promotes the www.MontanaFreeFile.org website offering information about free tax filing services throughout the state of Montana. Project partners include the Montana Department of Revenue, Montana's Credit Unions, Opportunity Link, Inc., Rural Dynamics, Inc., and AARP Tax-Aide Montana.

Most communities in Montana, both small and large, have options for people who make less than \$49,000 to get their taxes filed for free. MontanaFreeFile.org helps taxpayers to decide which free tax filing option is best suited for them based on their location, age, and financial status.

Options include Tax Counseling for the Elderly programs, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance ("VITA") operations, and a free online tax filing program called I-CAN!™ E-File which was used by over 6,400 Montanans in 2010. The MontanaFreeFile.org site also includes a LiveHelp chat feature allowing visitors to ask questions that are answered by a real person.

The Montana Free File project has brought millions of dollars back into the hands of low- to moderate-income Montanans and the communities in which they live. In recent years, this program has become a significant form of financial relief for Montanans living in poverty, and during these trying economic times, will be a critical resource for many Montanans. Last year alone, \$14.1 million in refunds were returned to Montanans who used the program, including \$4.1 million in the form of the Earned Income Tax Credit.

Montana communities continue to be vital partners in providing information about free tax filing options. If you are interested in participating in community education and outreach efforts or receiving flyers or brochures regarding MontanaFreeFile.org and free tax filing services, please contact Michelle Hauer at 1-800-4429830, ext. 18 or by email at mhauer@mtlsa.org.

MLSA Welcomes Two New

Staff Members



Anna Saverud, left, and Ariane Wittman

MLSA is pleased to announce the hiring of two new employees.

Anna Saverud works in the Butte office as a n attorney with MLSA's Domestic Violence Unit. Born and raised in Kalispell, Anna earned a B.A. degree in Sociology and her J.D. from the University of Montana. She has worked in Glacier Park for seven summer seasons, and has spent most of her life exploring the trails, peaks, rivers and lakes of northwest Montana. A former intern with the Bozeman City Attorney's Office, Anna is excited and proud to join MLSA.

Ariane Wittman works in the Billings office as a paralegal with MLSA's Domestic Violence Unit. Ariane was born in Billings, and has spent most of her life in Reno, Nevada. In Reno, Ariane worked as a clerical assistant for the Washoe County School District Police Department, earned her associate's degree in Paralegal Studies at Truckee Meadows Community College, interned with a family law attorney, and also interned with the college's self-help law center. Ariane characterizes most of her legal work experience as associated with family law.

Welcome, Anna and Ariane!



MLSA is Montana's statewide law firm providing civil legal services to clients living in poverty in Montana and on Montana's Indian reservations.

MLSA's HelpLine serves as the entry point to information, advice and referral.

MLSA 's specialty units include SelfHelp Law, Domestic Violence Law, Consumer Law, Native American Law, Migrant Farmworker Law, Housing Law, Public Benefits and Employment Law. MLSA is committed to making "justice for all" a reality in Montana.

Want to learn more? See our websites at www.mtlsa.org and www.montanalawhelp.org.

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