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Montana Legal Services Association



A statewide law firm providing, protecting, and enhancing access to justice

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Justice for Montanans Issue

In this issue of our newsletter, MLSA is proud to highlight the AmeriCorps State Justice for Montanans Project. The Justice for Montanans (JFM) Project is a partnership of MLSA, the Montana Supreme Court Office of the Court Administrator, and the Montana Department of Justice Office of Consumer Protection & Victim Services (OCPVS). JFM members placed with MLSA primarily assist the HelpLine with processing applications for MLSA services. Other members serve at court-based self-help law centers, assisting people in finding legal information, forms, and other resources. And one member provides services with the OCPVS consumer protection hotline and other projects. In addition to providing these direct services, JFM members also conduct outreach and recruit volunteers. Visit www.justiceformontanans.org to learn more.



Welcome to New and Returning JFM Members

By Riley Relfe, JFM Team Leader



On September 14th, 2010, thirteen AmeriCorps members serving within the Justice for Montanans Project were sworn in by Montana Supreme Court Chief Justice Mike McGrath. These thirteen AmeriCorps members will serve throughout Montana to increase access to justice and empower low to moderate income Montanans to advocate for their legal rights. Six members will serve within

the Montana Supreme Court Self-Help Law Program (SHLP), six will serve with MLSA, and one member will serve in the Montana Department of Justice Office of Consumer Protection & Victim Services (OCPVS). We are excited to welcome the following individuals to the Justice for Montanans Project:

Alana Brown: Great Falls & Hi-Line Self-Help Law Centers
 Ann Broaddus: MLSA Billings Office
 Catherine Armstrong: MLSA Helena Office
 Danielle Stiff: MLSA Billings Office (returning member)
 Erina Waring: Bozeman Self-Help Law Center (returning member)
 John Malsbary: Billings Self-Help Law Center (returning member)
 Latefa Abdel-Khaleq: Eastern Montana Self-Help Law Center
 Miriam Barberis: Kalispell Self-Help Law Center
 Richard Toomey: MLSA Missoula Office (returning member)
 Riley Relfe: MLSA Helena Office (team leader)
 Ryan Schwochert: MLSA Helena Office
 Shaunagh McGoldrick: OCPVS in Helena
 Stefan Kolis: Great Falls & Hi-Line Self-Help Law Centers

New JFM Member Describes Role Serving With OCPVS

By Shaunagh McGoldrick, JFM Member, OCPVS, Helena



When I began searching for service opportunities with AmeriCorps, the idea of driving over 2,000 miles across the country to live in Montana for a year never crossed my mind. That was, until I read about the chance to increase access to justice for Montanans with the Justice for Montanans Project. So off I drove into the mountains to begin this exciting work. I was born and raised in a beach town and had never climbed more than a sand dune in my twenty-two years of East Coast living. When I first had to stop my car to let some cows cross the road (I am pretty accustomed to geese), I almost ran all the way back to the Atlantic. However, accepting a position with Justice for Montanans Project is possibly the best decision I've ever made.

I have a unique role in the Justice for Montanans Project, one that is evolving on a daily basis. Different from my colleagues who serve at either the Montana Legal Services Association or at one of the Self-Help Law Centers, I serve within the Department of Justice for the Office of Consumer Protection and Victim Services (OCPVS). Within my project at OCPVS, I not only provide support to the Office of Consumer Protection and the Crime Victim Compensation Program, I am developing ways in which resources and services can be expanded to not only support consumers who contact our office but also provide links between our office and other valuable resources within MLSA and the Self-Help Law Centers. My unique position will enable the OCPVS, MLSA, and the Court-Help Program to provide more comprehensive services to consumers across Montana, an innovative strategy to service delivery that is unique approach to addressing the needs of consumers.

Although I've barely gotten my toes wet, my efforts will open doors and allow Montanans access to justice in several different yet intersecting ways, from protecting consumers to protecting the rights of victims of violent crimes. I have already come to see how easily consumers can become victims, and I am proud to try to prevent such injustice. The amount that I have already learned and the opportunities I have been given keep me chugging down 11th Avenue every day to help provide Montana consumers with access to service and a much needed voice. It is inspiring to know I am part of something bigger than myself, and that my actions contribute to the expansion of access to justice in the Montana.

Returning JFM Member on MLSA "Front Lines"

By Richard Toomey, JFM Member, MLSA Missoula Office



My position as a Justice for Montanans Member in the Montana Legal Services Association's (MLSA) Missoula office is a rather unique and thought provoking position. I serve within an area of MLSA that many have lovingly termed "the front" or "the front lines." I find the term (minus the blood and guts that some may associate with the notion of "the front") to be quite accurate.

"The front" consists of MLSA's Intake Specialists and Justice for Montanans members. My experience has led me to call it "the front," mainly because it seems to be a pretty constant struggle to assist all of the people who need our assistance. With thousands of requests for services each year and only 14 case handling attorneys, MLSA is constantly challenged with meeting the civil legal needs of low-income Montanans. By supporting the MLSA HelpLine and Self-Help Law Units, JFM members provide another avenue by which people can access MLSA services. Our role on "the front" is much more than just providing entry into MLSA's law firm. It also encompasses troubleshooting client issues, making outside referrals, and giving some level of reassurance and an ear for clients in crisis.

My experience during my first year of service on "the front" inspired me to reenroll for another "tour of duty." My decision to stay in my position was quite simple. I enjoy being able to provide some assistance, even if very minimal, to those Montanans struggling with legal needs that are often keeping them in poverty. This position has opened my eyes to the importance of equal access to justice. What I am learning about the system, as well as myself, will prove instrumental as I continue to serve within the Justice for Montanans Project and decide my next steps in life. It may be law school. It may be another avenue of social service. Regardless, serving within the Justice for Montanans Project has provided me with valuable insight into how I would like the world to be, and ideas on how I could become involved in making that happen.



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 Self-Help 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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