



Montana Justice Foundation 2016 Program Grants Summary

Grantee Organizations and Awards

Total grant budget: \$220,000 (does not include Bank of America grant award to MLSA)

Organization	Grant Amount
MLSA	\$150,000
CASA for Kids, Inc.	\$5,000
CASA of Lake & Sanders Counties	\$3,500
CASA of Missoula	\$3,500
CASA-CAN	\$6,000
Eastern Montana CASA GAL Inc.	\$9,500
CASA of Yellowstone County	\$6,000
Cascade County Law Clinic	\$4,000
SAFE Harbor	\$5,000
YWCA of Billings	\$5,000
HAVEN	\$4,000
Community Dispute Resolution Center	\$1,500
Community Mediation Center	\$6,000
Montana Mediation Association*	\$1,500
Montana Innocence Project	\$3,000
Montana Fair Housing, Inc.	\$6,500
TOTAL	\$220,000

Accomplishment Highlights

Montana Fair Housing

With the help of MJF funds (grant amount \$6,500), Montana Fair Housing successfully pursued an investigation of housing discrimination and the Human Rights Bureau issued a charge of discrimination based on marital status, age, and familial status. The ruling resulted in changes to policies and practices, posting and distribution of educational materials on nondiscrimination laws, and a payment of \$10,500 to help Montana Fair Housing cover fees and costs of the investigation.

Montana Fair Housing also produced a video that advocates use to share information about housing discrimination with clients. The video is available at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSQ805RFm_0

YWCA Billings

YWCA Billings, a first-time grantee organization, created a new legal services program that focuses on providing free civil legal advocacy, representation, and referrals for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. YWCA Billings has long addressed the non-legal needs of domestic violence victims by providing emergency shelter and advocacy services. The new program is intended to address multiple needs of clients as those experiencing domestic violence and sexual assault are also frequently in need of additional civil legal services. One client, for example, came to YWCA Billings for help obtaining an Order of Protection after she was sexually assaulted. In addition to the YWCA Billings attorney helping the client secure a permanent Order of Protection, the client received free counseling from the YWCA Billings therapist to help her cope with the trauma of sexual violence, and YWCA Billings assisted in getting her case referred to the County Attorney's office for possible prosecution. YWCA provided direct services to 57 clients and 146 hours of direct legal assistance during the first 6 months of the grant period.

CASA Programs

Of Montana Justice Foundation's sixteen grantee organizations, six are Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) programs. Many funding requests are for the purpose of recruiting and training new volunteer advocates. With MJF funding, CASA programs across the state have been able to recruit and train over 70 new volunteers throughout the grant funding period. New volunteers have resulted in advocacy for hundreds of new children.

CASA for Kids Kalispell, for example, trained 24 new advocates (9 more advocates than their initial goal) and served 113 new children (their goal was to serve 50 new children). In the last six months of the grant period, 83 advocates served 229 children.

Domestic Violence Programs

With Montana Justice Foundation funding, HAVEN, an organization dedicated to easing the legal, financial, and emotional burden of survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse, trained staff to provide limited scope legal services to survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse in Montana's immigrant communities. HAVEN staff completed necessary trainings and served 13 immigrant survivors. Overall, four staff members provided services to 115 clients during the six month reporting period.

MJF funds also helped SAFE Harbor provide services to survivors of domestic violence. MJF funds were used to pay for secure audio-visual communication to allow survivors to testify remotely. Funds were also used to pay for expert witnesses to testify on the dynamics of domestic violence, childhood exposure to domestic violence, and traumatic stress disorder. Additionally, MJF funds were used to cover the costs of training fees for SAFE Harbor's new attorney and filing fees for clients unable to afford the costs of serving the adverse party.

MLSA

MLSA used MJF funds to provide direct legal services to help clients with housing, public benefits, domestic violence, and consumer and creditor-debtor issues. During the entire grant year, MLSA used MJF funds to handle 1,996 cases, helping 3,524 people, including 1,495 children.

MLSA also achieved the major goals identified in their original grant proposal, including securing more diverse funding sources, increasing pro bono involvement, diversifying and increasing services to Native Americans as well as to rural areas, and to implement broad-based advocacy activities. MLSA has increased pro-bono involvement through two limited scope initiatives, one of which allows attorneys to take phone advice shifts for clients statewide and another that provides attorneys with a secure online platform for giving advice to clients. MLSA has provided broad-based services by providing extended services to 155 clients, placing clients with pro bono attorneys, and hosting and upgrading online forms and a law help website with over 46,000 visits during the grant year.

Mediation Centers

Three of MJF's grantees for FY 2017 were mediation centers. The Dispute Resolution Center of Missoula used MJF grant funding to revamp their parenting plan packet and organize effective distribution of the packet through community meetings. The Community Mediation Center requested used its MJF grant to fund volunteer mediator trainings to serve more individuals in family conflict. The Community Mediation Center served 115 families during the first six months of the grant period and began to train new volunteer mediators in order to take on even more cases. A third mediation grantee organization, the Montana Mediation Association, received MJF funding to implement a video-conferencing program in order to reach those in need of mediation services in rural areas. Montana Mediation Association worked with 15 counties across the state to understand how they could best reach those in need and best provide resources and services and has begun to tailor its video-conferencing program in response.

Obstacles

Serving Rural Areas:

Many organizations report that the rural nature of Montana and the distance between communities with services is a barrier to access to justice and a barrier to implementing programs. For instance, Eastern Montana CASA GAL reports that providing training to volunteers from several different counties, hundreds of mile apart, is challenging and expensive.

Change in Leadership:

Many of our grantee organizations report changes in leadership and staff of their organization or affiliate organizations. These changes take time and strain other personnel, create instability in the organization, and direct staff time and energy away from programs. Obtaining adequate funding to maintain stable leadership is a challenge for many of our grantee organizations.

Difficult Nature of Work:

Many of our grantee organizations serve populations struggling with some of the most difficult situations of their lives—child abuse and neglect, discrimination, sexual abuse and domestic violence, and poverty. Due to the difficult nature of this work, many organizations report high rates of attrition, both for staff and for volunteers. Strain on volunteers is an especially notable concern for CASA and mediation programs. The difficult nature of this work is a challenge for organizations as they spend additional time and funding to recruit and train volunteers and staff.

Growing Need and Limited Budget:

From CASA grantees to MLSA to mediation organizations, Montana Justice Foundation grantees report increasing need in their communities. Nearly every organization reports that increased need and constricted budgets make their work more difficult.

Federal Budget Cuts:

Many of our grantee organizations are directly or indirectly affected by potential cuts to the Legal Services Corporation budget. Though LSC funding has historically had strong bi-partisan support and LSC funding is currently included in both the House and Senate appropriations bills, funding is still precarious, particularly with the President's call to cut federal legal aid funding entirely. For example, MLSA reports that the organization will likely face reduced funding from LSC and other federal sources such as CNCS (AmeriCorps), and grants through the Office of Violence Against Women, Bureau of Justice Affairs, and Office for Victims of Crime.

The Value of MJF's Work

“MJF funds allow the SAFE Harbor Legal Program to provide truly holistic legal services, to purchase much-needed resources on domestic violence and sexual assault for staff and clients, and to cover case-related costs for clients that would otherwise not be possible. Being able to assist clients with courtroom technology costs, travel, postage, expert witnesses, filing, and service costs reduces clients' financial stress and improves their access to justice.”

—SAFE Harbor

“MJF funding is a cornerstone of MLSA's capacity to serve low income Montanans and helps ensure that MLSA meets the highest priority legal needs. Program-wide, MLSA received more than 2,700 requests for assistance over the 6-month period of this report, but had financial capacity to directly serve 687 of these clients. MLSA continues to see over 450 requests each month on average. MLSA recognizes that MJF has significantly less money than in the past and has made every effort to support the core services MLSA provides to Montana's poor. With MJF support, MLSA staff members can ensure that Montanans living in poverty have fair access to our justice system, help DV survivors and their children start new lives, assist low-income clients in preserving benefits for which they qualify, help low-income tenants and homeowners stay in their homes, and find pro bono attorneys to assist clients across the state with a wide variety of needs.” –MLSA

“As we continue to see a drastic increase in abuse and neglect cases, the generosity and support from Montana Justice Foundation and the community becomes critical to our mission. With funding and support from the Montana Justice Foundation, CASA of Missoula is able to better recruit, train and support our CASA volunteers. Thank you from our team!” –CASA Missoula

“YWCA Billings is deeply grateful for the support of the Montana Justice Foundation. The funding provided makes a critical difference in helping victims of domestic and sexual violence access the civil legal system. Adding the Legal Services Program has allowed YWCA to serve a new population of victims. When YWCA only offered emergency shelter and a help-line victims who didn't need shelter often went without help. Now they can come to YWCA and receive the help they need accessing the civil legal system and getting professional counseling to cope with the trauma of their abuse.” –YWCA Billings