



Montana Justice Foundation Newsletter

Volume 1, No. 5

Winter 2009

In This Issue

Feature Grantee: [CASA](#)

[IOLTA Struggles](#)

[Meet our new VISTA](#)

Board of Directors

OFFICERS

President

Mark Williams

Vice President

Michelle Bryan Mudd

Secretary/Treasurer

Ashley Burleson

DIRECTORS

Elizabeth Baker

Robert M. Carlson

Michael D. Cok

Damon Gannett

Don MacIntyre

Christopher Manos

Robin Meguire

Robert Minto

Amy Randall

Molly Shepherd

Patrick Sherlock

Emeritus Directors

Thomas H. Boone

George Bousliman

George Dalthorp

Alexander A. George

Dear Friend:

This indeed has been a long, hard winter. I will not rehash the woes of the world economy and the plethora of grim statistics that accompany; however, I would be remiss to not mention some critical details regarding the current state of legal aid today.

Many of you may have heard about the \$40 million funding increase Legal Services Corporation (LSC) is scheduled to receive for fiscal 2009; [LSC press release](#). And while we greatly appreciate the hard work of those who made this increase possible, I believe LSC itself summed up the reality of our current situation best:

"While this increase will provide much needed relief to legal aid programs struggling to serve their increasingly embattled clients, it will not be enough to compensate for the shortfalls in other sources of funding that are crippling programs across the country. Revenue from Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts (IOLTA) programs, the second largest source of funding for legal aid after LSC, is in freefall following the Federal Reserve's interest-rate cuts, and funding from state legislatures is in jeopardy due to massive budget deficits in many states."

We are in a climate where small victories are quickly eclipsed by the rising numbers of those in need. Here in our own state, legal aid organizations have been forced to eliminate programs, lay off vital members of already meager staffs, and in some cases are faced with no other alternative than to close their doors.

This is why it is no cliché when I say that we need your support now more than ever. I am not referring to only financial support, but also your voice.

Talk with your friends and colleagues about the difference legal aid makes in the lives of individual Montanans and in our communities. Call your local members of the House Appropriations Committee and ask for their support of the amendment to add funding for the Supreme Court's Self Help Law

William E. Hunt Sr.
Kathleen Richardson
Ward Shanahan
Carol Williams
Douglas J. Wold

MJF Thanks the following Leadership Banks

for their support and
commitment to making
the IOLTA program a
success in Montana:

PRIME PARTNERS

Bitterroot Valley Bank
Community Bank
Valley Bank
Yellowstone Bank

HONORABLE MENTION

Bank of Bozeman
Bank of Glacier
County
Missoula Federal
Credit Union
Ravalli County Bank

Make a Donation

Quick Links...

[Our Website](#)

[More About Us](#)

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

Program to [HB645](#). Let your financial institution know that you care whether or not your IOLTA account is being paid a favorable rate of interest. And finally, if you haven't done so already, log onto www.MontanaProBono.net to learn about volunteer opportunities best suited to your time and talents.

Many of you are already doing these things, and we thank you. If you have not yet had the opportunity to do so, we want to help in any way we can. Please contact us: MJF@mtjustice.org or 406.523.3920. Thank you for your commitment and support.

Together, we can make a difference.

All Best,

Amy Sings In The Timber

MJF Feature Grantee: CASA/GAL of Eastern Montana:

Volunteer Elaine Scheiffer

Elaine Scheiffer is one of 31 dedicated Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers serving eastern Montana. Elaine has served as a CASA for five years and has advocated for 13 children over the course of her tenure. Elaine worked as an educator for 35 years, in this time she witnessed



first-hand the tremendous need for child advocates. Elaine and her husband opened their home as foster parents and this commitment bolstered her belief that every child deserves a voice. So when a CASA staffer came to her church circle to speak about volunteering, Elaine "went in with both feet."

Elaine has grown very close to the children she advocates for; paying monthly visits to several of her in-state permanent placements and continuing to have contact with out-of-state placements by phone.

In some cases, it is a fact that children will not be in the same home again. In cases where siblings have been separated among one or more foster homes, Elaine has made sure that the children stay in contact with each other. She mentors them through their separation and gives them hope for a new beginning.

By being a constant in the lives of the children they advocate for, CASA volunteers establish a relationship of trust. For many of these children, the relationship they share with their CASA may be the first reliable relationship in their lives. Elaine and her peers are committed to advocating on behalf of all of these children until the last child has a permanent placement.

Serving as a CASA "is really an awesome responsibility...it requires a strong sense of compassion and a clear understanding of commitment."

Eastern Montana CASA/GAL, Inc. (EMCASA) is located in Miles City, Montana and serves twelve surrounding counties. In 2008, EMCASA was able to provide over 700 hours of one-on-one and small group training to CASA volunteers in twelve counties; an area spanning more than 16,000 miles. In the same year, these trained volunteers advocated 1500 hours in court for 130 children. EMCASA's current volunteer retention rate is 100%. EMCASA attributes these successes in large part to grant funding from the Montana Justice Foundation which allows the organization to reach its volunteers.

IOLTA Funding Continues to Struggle

In the past year we have watched our economy swiftly crumble, with an estimated 600,000 jobs lost in the United States in the past month alone. In an effort to protect our economy, federal fund rates have plummeted causing a leveling of Interest on Lawyers Trust Account (IOLTA) funds and sending reverberations throughout our national and local legal aid communities.

While many legal aid providers are currently faced with the challenges of limited funding and staff cuts, the need for civil legal aid has never been more necessary. During periods of recession, jobs are threatened, evictions loom, health care coverage is lost, and incidents of domestic violence increase. There is no better time to advocate for legal aid and access to justice.

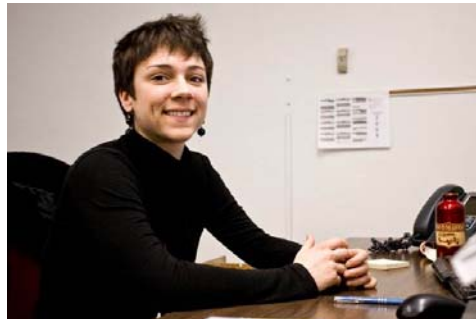
The challenges we face here at the Montana Justice Foundation are real. In the past fiscal year alone MJF has lost 52% of its funding as IOLTA interest rates have hit a staggeringly low monthly average of .002%. The overwhelming drop in our funds will be felt deeply by Montana's legal aid providers, their staffs

and their clients. In the past week, the Montana Legal Services Association (MLSA), Montana's largest legal aid provider, was forced to lay off eight employees. That is eight fewer individuals who are able to help Montana's population in need of civil legal aid. If we are not able to bridge the chasm in IOLTA funds, many of our grantee organizations will face additional layoffs and possible office closures.

We continue to work on diversifying our funding sources. We recently supplemented our mail appeals with online fundraising efforts, increased our community outreach through speaking engagements and participation in the 2008 Access to Justice Forum Series, and continue to actively advocate for legislative funding of the Supreme Court's Self Help Law Program (SHLP) and Statewide Pro Bono Coordinator. In the fall of 2008, the MJF hosted the first in a series of special events which highlight our annual fundraising campaign. The event was a great success and we will continue these efforts into 2009.

Finally, despite the recent interest rate downturn, IOLTA is still a valuable and viable source of funding for civil legal aid in Montana and throughout the nation - second only to federal funding. With this in mind, the MJF is developing an IOLTA Education and Outreach Campaign geared toward statewide financial institutions and attorneys. It is our goal to raise awareness among these stakeholders of the many programs and people that IOLTA contributions aid and to impress upon them the powerful capacity that IOLTA partnerships have to make a positive difference in our communities.

MJF Welcomes New VISTA; Zoe Zulakis



The MJF welcomes our new AmeriCorps* VISTA, Zoe Zulakis.

Zoe is a recent graduate of Albion

College in her native Michigan.

She spent the past summer serving on the Montana Conservation Corp and was stationed near Kalispell. Zoe is excited to stay on in beautiful Montana working

for a cause that is important to her. Welcome Zoe! If you need to contact Zoe she can be reached at: 406.523.3929 or at: zzulakis@mtjustice.org.

Thank you for being a partner in the access to justice cause!