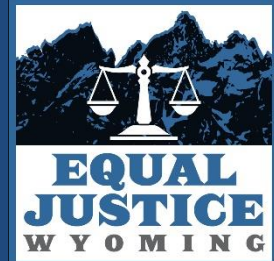


Equal Justice Wyoming

Annual Report to the Wyoming Supreme Court July 2018



"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

- *Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

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Message from the Executive Director

We have made great progress over the past year, and on behalf of the Board of Commissioners and Staff of Equal Justice Wyoming ("Equal Justice"), I am pleased to report on our program's developments over the 2018 fiscal year (FY) ending June 30, 2018.

Volunteers continue to be at the center of our efforts to expand services. Attorneys volunteered their time over the past year in a wide variety of ways, but their volunteer efforts share one thing in common – they made a difference for someone in need who otherwise couldn't afford an attorney.

Notably, the Volunteer Reference Attorney (VRA) Program has quickly grown over the past year. In total, the program

assisted 684 people in 2018; a 203% increase over FY 2017. We look forward to the continued expansion of the program.

We also received additional funding from new sources to launch two new programs: 1) a free Access & Visitation Mediation Program to help parties resolve custody and visitation disputes, and to assist in the development of parenting plans, and 2) a new project to expand legal services to victims of crime.

3,538 people received legal services and self-help assistance in FY 2018

In FY 2018, 3,538 persons received assistance from Equal Justice and the programs we fund. Although we have expanded legal assistance, information, and advice through our programs, we still have a long way to go. The

limited resources that are available meet only a fraction of the need. We must ensure a continued commitment to providing access justice for all, even in tight economic times. The fairness of our justice system depends on that commitment.

Because of our limited resources, we rely heavily on volunteers. We would like to extend a sincere thank you to all of the dedicated volunteers and staff of legal aid programs and to all of our pro bono attorneys who volunteered for Equal Justice in the past year. It takes everyone working together to make justice for all a possibility.

- *Angie Dorsch*

Wyoming Among Top States for Attorneys Providing Pro Bono

In 2017, Wyoming was one of 24 states that participated in a national pro bono survey conducted by the American Bar Association. The survey was distributed to all licensed Wyoming attorneys. The ABA pro bono report was released in April 2018, and Wyoming was among the top states in terms of the percentage of attorneys undertaking pro bono and the number of pro bono hours provided.

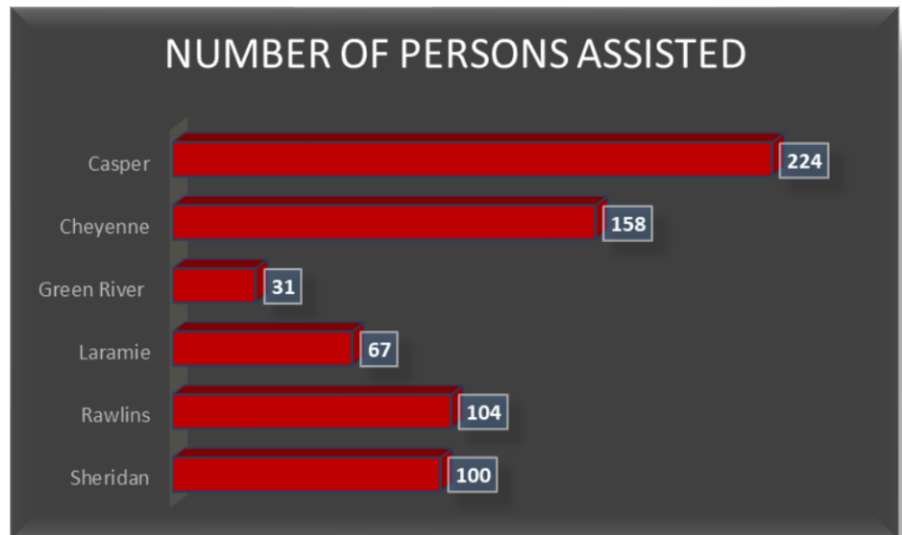
Of the 24 participating states, Wyoming ranked third highest in the number of hours of pro bono work attorneys reported. Over 70% of attorneys reported having completed some pro bono in the previous year, and those attorneys averaged 65.4 pro bono hours. Wyoming was a leader in providing pro bono services to individuals - 94.3% of the attorneys who provided pro bono in the previous year provided services to individual clients. Among the states, Wyoming also ranked third in terms of public service activities. Seventy-six percent of Wyoming attorneys reported having done some type of public service activity in the previous year.

These figures demonstrate the tremendous amount of pro bono work that Wyoming attorneys are providing. However, the number one factor that attorneys reported as discouraging them from pro bono work was a lack of time. This is understandable; attorneys are under incredible time pressure. In recent years, Equal Justice has launched programs that offer alternative pro bono opportunities so that busy attorneys can still provide pro bono services.

Pro Bono Programs and Initiatives

Volunteer Reference Attorney Program

In March 2016, Equal Justice launched the Volunteer Reference Attorney (VRA) pilot program in Cheyenne, placing pro bono attorneys in the Laramie County Courthouse to assist self-represented litigants. The attorneys provide legal information, explain court procedures, and assist litigants completing pro se forms. The program has been a huge success, and Equal Justice has worked, in cooperation with local bar



associations, to greatly expand the program to other counties. In FY 2017, the program had sites in Casper, Cheyenne, Laramie, Rawlins, and Sheridan. In October 2017, Equal Justice launched the sixth VRA program site in Green River. A reference attorney is available in the courthouses of each of the six counties on the first and third Thursday of each month from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m., except in Green River where an attorney is only available on the first Thursday of each month. The VRA program assisted 684 individuals in FY 2018, more than doubling the number of persons assisted last year.

**684 individuals assisted by
69 Volunteer Reference Attorneys
271 volunteer hours recorded
203% increase in persons served**

Wyoming Free Legal Answers

The Wyoming Free Legal Answers (WFLA) portal, found at wyoming.freelegalanswers.org, was launched in August 2016, in partnership with the American Bar Association, to offer free legal advice online. The online platform screens applicants for income eligibility and allows eligible individuals to submit civil legal questions via a secure portal. Attorneys licensed to practice law in Wyoming are able to register as volunteers on the site. The volunteer attorneys then log in and can answer legal questions that have been submitted by low-income individuals. Equal Justice provides the day-to-day administrative functions for the site, including ensuring that only Wyoming licensed attorneys in good standing are given access to answer questions on the site and ensure that only civil questions are asked. Equal Justice also sends weekly updates to the volunteer lawyers, including supplemental resources for both lawyers and clients.



**178 legal questions answered by
15 volunteer attorneys on
wyoming.freelegalanswers.org**

"Thank you so much for the fast response. This has helped me make some sense of what was an overwhelming process. I forgot to thank you when I got this [response] yesterday and had to let you know how much this means to us. This site is a blessing for those that need it." – Client who received legal advice on Wyoming Free Legal Answers

The portal is an important resource that reaches Wyomingites in rural and underserved areas of the state as well as those with limited access to transportation and child care. It is also an innovative tool that allows flexibility for busy attorneys to contribute pro bono services anytime, anywhere they have an internet connection. In FY 2018, pro bono attorneys answered 178

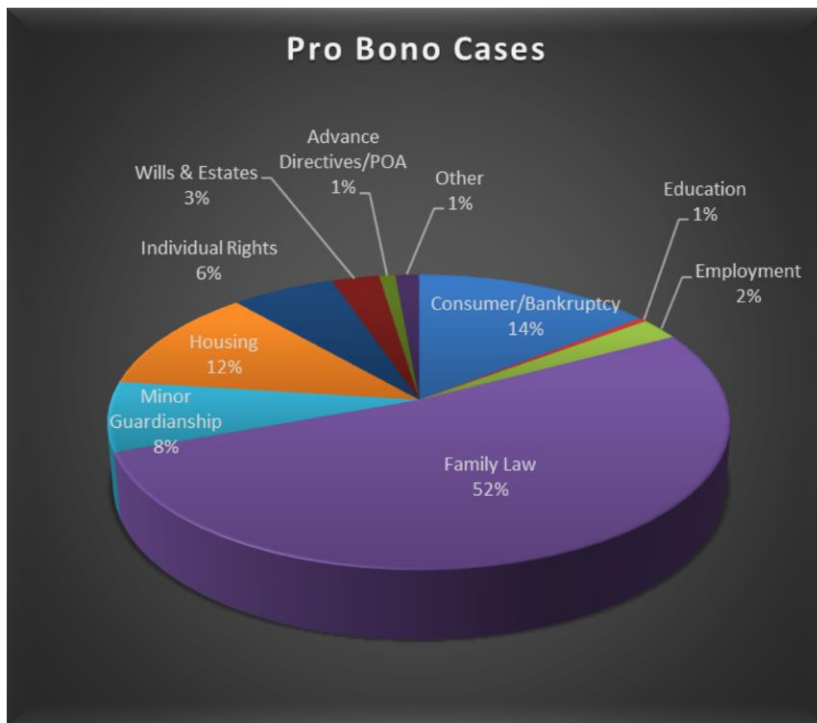
questions submitted on the portal, a 16.4% increase over last year.

Volunteer Lawyers Program

Equal Justice manages the statewide Volunteer Lawyers Program (VLP) in partnership with the Wyoming State Bar. Over the past year, we continued our work to increase pro bono legal services. We strive to provide resources and support to encourage and enable attorneys to undertake pro bono legal services for low-income clients. The type of assistance available through the VLP ranges from advice and brief services to full-representation of clients.

In September 2017, Equal Justice launched a new monthly legal advice clinic in collaboration with the University of Wyoming College of Law's Equal Justice Club and the Downtown Clinic, a healthcare clinic in Laramie. The clinic expands pro bono services and provides a great benefit to the community as well as a valuable learning opportunity for the students who volunteer.

"I attended yesterday's consultation with volunteer attorneys. Please know that I appreciate this service and found my attorney to be respectful, knowledgeable, considerate, and perfectly professional. Your service does it well and is celebrated by me. What an asset to the Laramie community." – Client who received legal assistance at a Laramie advice clinic



212 matters handled by pro bono attorneys

Monthly legal advice clinics are held in Cheyenne and Laramie with periodic clinics held in other locations throughout the state in collaboration with local bar associations.

Equal Justice receives many applications for pro bono representation. Not all applications accepted by Equal Justice can be placed with an attorney. The requests for assistance far outpace the number of available pro bono attorneys. However, 212 legal matters were handled by a volunteer attorney over the past year.

Volunteer Attorney Receives Pro Bono Award from Wyoming State Bar

Lee Dickinson received the Wyoming State Bar's Pro Bono Award in September 2017. Lee has accepted many cases from Equal Justice and goes above and beyond for his pro bono clients. Each time Lee closes a pro bono case with our office, he asks what he can help with next. He has helped with cases ranging from debt collection defense and enforcing a judgment to helping a client receive his rent security deposit when it was wrongfully withheld and helping another client escape a lease when the home was unsafe for the client and her children. We are grateful to work with such an outstanding volunteer attorney.

Training and Support for Pro Bono and Legal Aid Attorneys

Equal Justice provides support to pro bono and legal aid attorneys in several ways. Equal Justice holds free CLEs to provide training on the areas of law that are the most common among our target population. We also offer some trainings specifically for legal aid attorneys. The webinars we host are archived and available on our Pro Bono Portal for our volunteer attorneys and legal aid attorneys to access at any time.

The Pro Bono Portal is a valuable tool. There are a variety of resources on the Portal, such as sample pleadings and toolkits. These resources allow attorneys to take pro bono cases in areas of law they do not regularly handle.

Equal Justice also has a pool of volunteer mentor attorneys who are willing to mentor less experienced attorneys taking a pro bono case. In addition to these resources, Equal Justice provides professional liability insurance to cover our volunteers for any case or activity they undertake through our program. These resources and support make it easier for attorneys to provide pro bono legal services.

New Mediation Programs

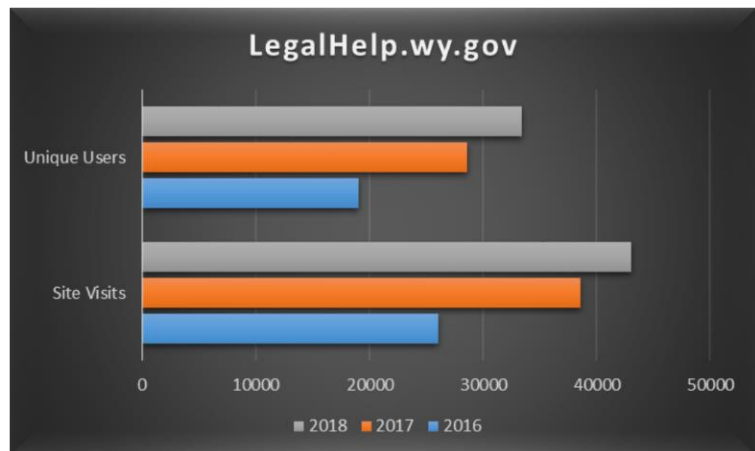
In 2018, Equal Justice launched two new mediation programs. The Access & Visitation Mediation Program provides free mediations in cases that involve custody or visitation issues and helps parents create parenting plans. The second program, the Volunteer Mediation Program, is in partnership with the Ewing T. Kerr American Inn of Court. Members of the Inn have signed up to provide volunteer mediation services in Laramie County family law cases. Through these programs, six individuals received mediation services to help them resolve their family law cases. We are currently piloting these programs in Cheyenne. We hope to expand these services in the future.

Self-Help Resources and Legal Information

Legal Help Website

Equal Justice launched our legal information website, www.legalhelp.wy.gov, in November 2012. Since then, we have continually expanded the site and updated the content to provide information, resources, videos, online classrooms, and pro se forms that address the most common civil legal issues faced by low-income individuals.

Traffic on the website continues to steadily increase. In FY 2018, there were 42,996 visits to the site, compared to about 26,000 in 2016 and 38,549 in 2017. This was an 11.5% increase in traffic to the site from 2017 and a 65% increase from 2016. The site was visited by 33,394 unique users in 2018, compared to about 19,000 unique users in 2016 and 28,558 in 2017.



42,996 site visits and 33,394 unique users

The website is an important tool that allows the public to understand their legal rights and access legal information in plain language and is a frequently used resource.

LiveChat

Although there are a growing number of self-help services and Volunteer Reference Attorney locations where people can get help finding appropriate legal resources in person, many in Wyoming do not have access to in-person assistance. In order to help people find the information they need remotely, Equal Justice’s website has a LiveChat feature that can help people navigate our expansive website to find the legal resources they need. The LiveChat is somewhat like a remote self-help center in that it doesn’t

187 visitors to www.legalhelp.wy.gov received assistance from a trained LiveChat operator

offer legal advice, but instead helps people navigate to appropriate information and resources. In FY 2018, 187 visitors to the website received assistance from a trained LiveChat operator. The majority of the LiveChat volunteers are law students. We also utilize an AmeriCorps VISTA

(Volunteers In Service To America) member to help provide training on the LiveChat software and manage the volunteers’ schedules.

Outreach

The Equal Justice Staff engages in outreach to help people know their rights and to increase public awareness of available legal resources and programs. Staff held outreach events at various organizations, such as CLIMB Wyoming, Dads Making a Difference, Homeless Veterans Stand Down, and presentations at public libraries. Staff also conducted outreach to social service providers and community partners.

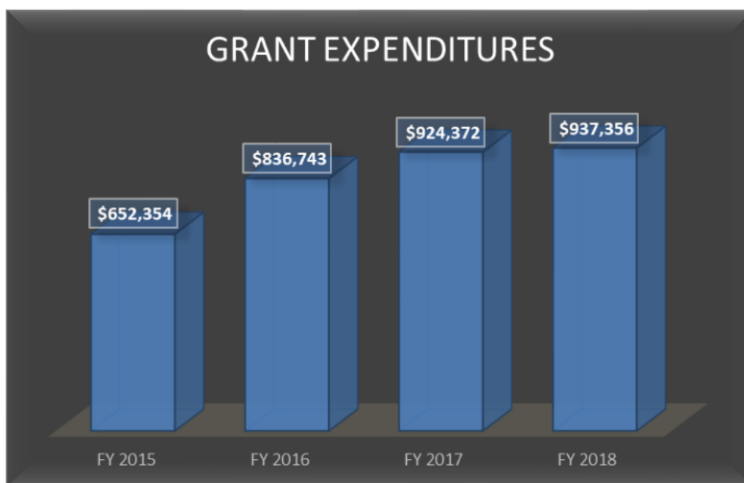
In September 2017, Equal Justice began conducting regular outreach at the VA Hospital in Cheyenne. Our AmeriCorps VISTA member and staff set up a resource table at the VA hospital twice per month to provide legal information and resources to veterans. We assisted 75 persons through our VA outreach. Our VISTA member also provided resources and information to the VA Staff so they can make appropriate referrals to available legal resources when necessary.

**75 persons assisted
through VA outreach**

In addition to our outreach at the VA, we have also partnered with the Vet Center to assist veterans. Equal Justice held a joint outreach event with the UW Civil Legal Services Clinic and the Vet Center to provide information and legal assistance to veterans regarding discharge upgrades.

We strive to increase awareness of the legal resources available to low-income individuals. We will continue our outreach efforts to expand the reach of our programs.

Supporting Statewide Civil Legal Services through Grants



Equal Justice's mission to provide a statewide delivery system for civil legal aid is largely carried out through our grants to legal service organizations. We are the largest single source of funding for civil legal services in Wyoming. In FY 2018, we provided \$937,356 in grants.

**\$937,356 provided in grants
2,196 clients received services**

Equal Justice received VOCA (Victims of Crime Act) funds from the Division of Victim Services to provide civil legal services to victims of crime. These new funds

were awarded as a pilot project in 2018, and we granted the funds to the Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault and the Laramie County Community Partnership Medical-Legal Partnership. The grantees utilized \$58,368 in VOCA funds to increase legal assistance for victims.

In total, 2,196 eligible clients received legal services through the grant programs we fund.

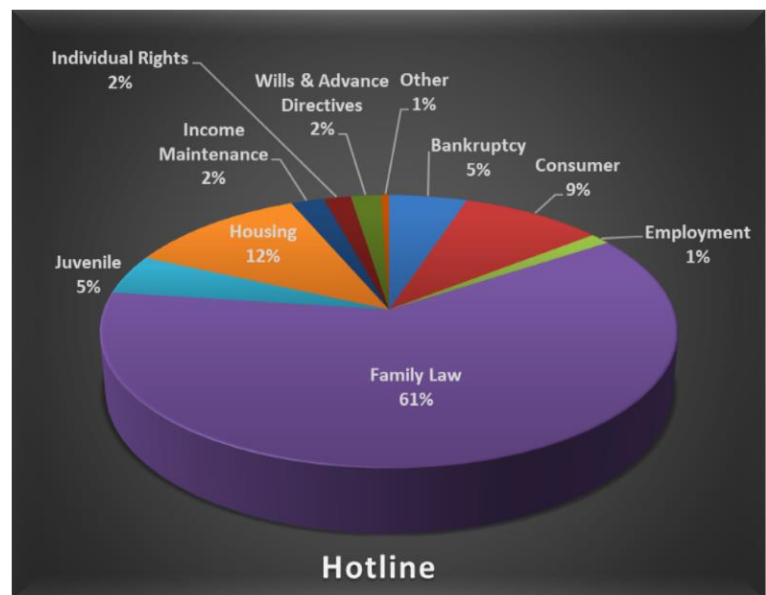
Legal Aid of Wyoming

Legal Aid of Wyoming is a statewide legal service provider. Equal Justice awarded three grants to Legal Aid of Wyoming that have expanded legal services to underserved areas of the state.

Statewide Legal Advice and Intake Hotline Grant

Equal Justice has partnered with Legal Aid of Wyoming to ensure individuals across the state have access to the advice of a lawyer through a hotline, which has been in operation since November 2012. Legal Aid of Wyoming operates the hotline Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The hotline is a lifeline for many people in rural areas that have limited ability to go to a legal aid office in person. The hotline number is widely distributed by court clerks and librarians to people who are looking for legal advice and assistance.

The hotline is an effective and efficient way to provide advice and answers to legal questions across the entire state, including rural and underserved areas. In addition to providing legal advice, the hotline is also a central point to apply for legal services. Clients are screened for eligibility before any advice or services are provided, and an application is then taken. The hotline assists people from every county in Wyoming.



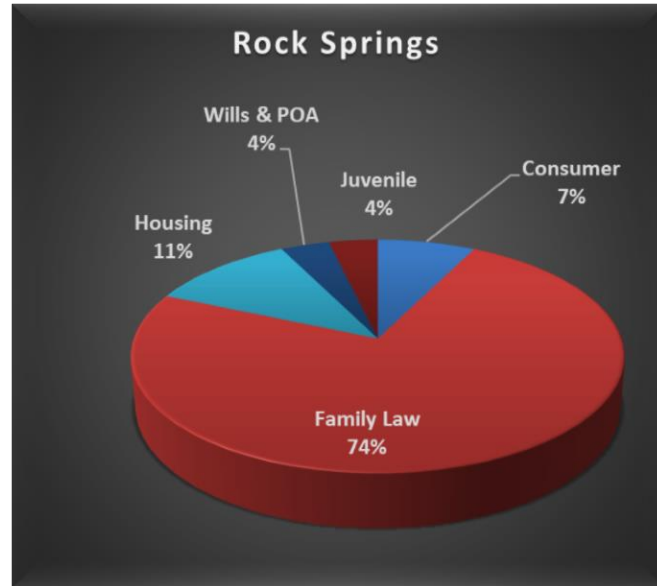
1,575 callers received legal help over the hotline

The number of callers served by the hotline significantly decreased in 2018. Although we do not know the reason for the decrease, it is likely that as we have expanded other programs, such as the Volunteer

Reference Attorney Program and the Wyoming Free Legal Answers website, persons looking for legal advice and assistance are utilizing these other avenues for legal help.

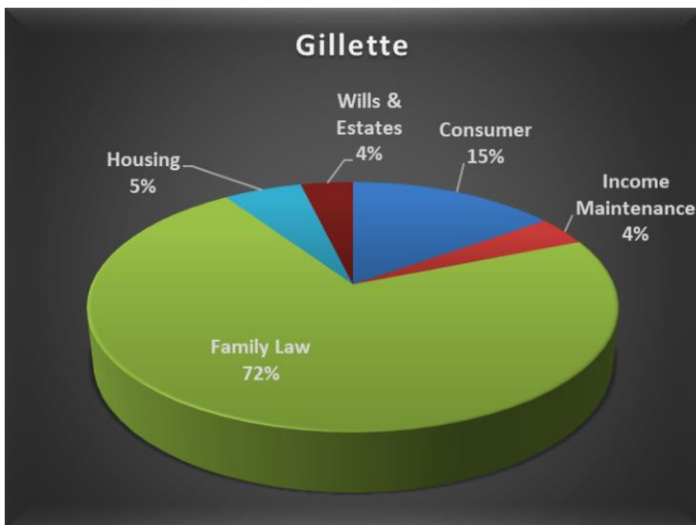
Rock Springs (Southwest Wyoming) Grant

In June 2013, Equal Justice partnered with Legal Aid of Wyoming, awarding a grant specifically to expand services to the southwest corner of Wyoming by opening a legal aid office in that area of the state for the first time. Since the launch of the program, Equal Justice has continued to provide the necessary funds to maintain a full-time attorney in Rock Springs to serve Sweetwater, Lincoln, and Uinta Counties. The grant from Equal Justice has made it possible to expand services to this underserved area of the state. In 2018, the Rock Springs attorney handled 44 legal matters.



44 legal matters handled in 2018

Gillette (Northeast Wyoming) Grant



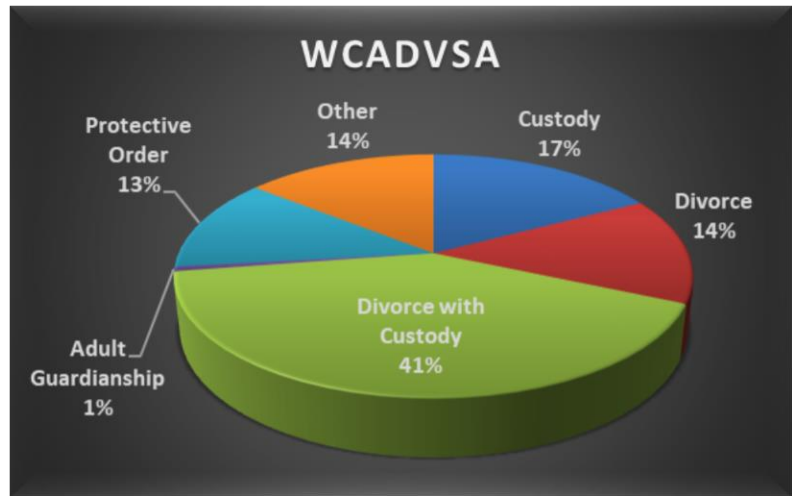
53 legal matters handled in 2018

The northeast corner of Wyoming had never had a legal aid office until September 2013, when a grant from Equal Justice provided the funding for a full-time legal aid attorney in Gillette for the first time. Equal Justice has continued to provide the funding to maintain a legal aid office in Gillette. The attorney provides services to a large service area covering five counties. The attorney provides legal services in Campbell, Crook, Johnson, Sheridan, and Weston Counties. The Gillette attorney handled 53 cases in 2018.

Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

The Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (“the Coalition”) is a statewide legal aid provider serving victims of abuse. The services the Coalition provides are vital to protect victims from further harm. The services they offer go beyond getting protective orders. The Coalition provides holistic services to help victims with all issues related to the abuse, including cases such as divorce or custody, which help protect victims and their children from further abuse.

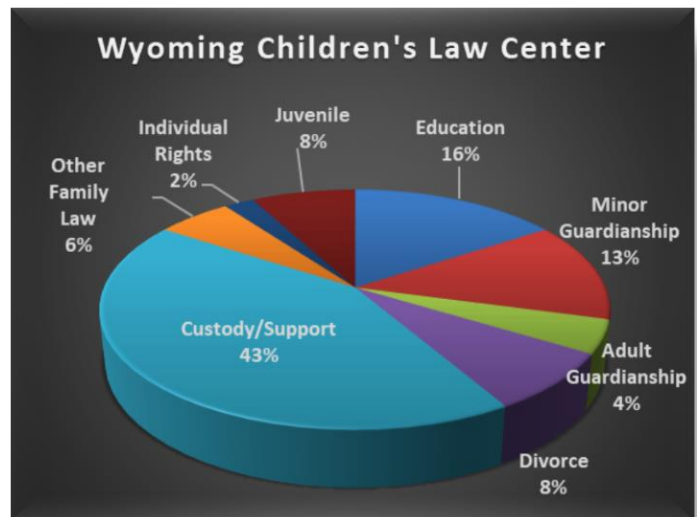
Equal Justice has provided substantial funding to support the work of the Coalition since 2012. The funds have expanded the availability of legal services and support a satellite office in Cody that was opened in 2016. Through a new award of VOCA (Victims of Crime Act) funds from Equal Justice, the Coalition also opened a new office in Lander in 2018. Equal Justice funds three full-time attorneys and a portion of a fourth attorney. The Coalition handled 201 cases in 2018.



201 cases handled in 2018

Wyoming Children’s Law Center

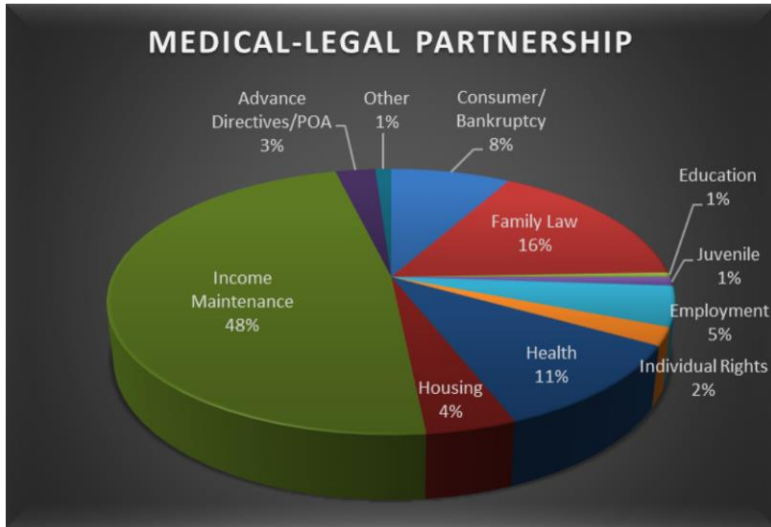
The Wyoming Children’s Law Center (WCLC) provides legal services in cases involving children and families in a variety of areas of law. For example, the WCLC provides advocacy to ensure children receive special education services to which they are entitled, represents children with special needs, and handles family law cases. The WCLC fills a great unmet need. The grant from Equal Justice supports a full-time attorney handling a wide variety of civil legal cases involving children. The WCLC handled 89 cases in FY 2018.



89 cases handled in 2018

Laramie County Community Partnership

The Laramie County Community Partnership (“LCCP”) received a grant from Equal Justice to launch Wyoming’s first Medical-Legal Partnership (“MLP”). MLPs are quickly expanding across the country to address health-harming legal issues. The MLP addresses a wide range of legal issues ranging from legal help to have a landlord address mold that is causing asthma attacks to helping clients receive benefits

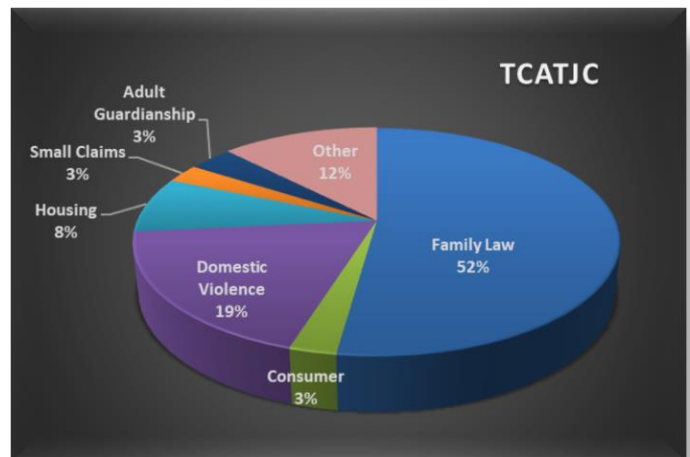


184 cases handled in 2018

under their health insurance or public benefits to which they are entitled in order to obtain and pay for medical care and necessary medications. The MLP places a lawyer into a medical team to identify and address patients’ legal needs to improve their health. The MLP entered into a partnership with HealthWorks medical clinic in Cheyenne, but also receives referrals from other health care providers. The MLP fully launched in September 2016 when they began taking cases. In FY 2018, the MLP provided services to address 184 legal matters.

Teton County Access to Justice Center

The Teton County Access to Justice Center (“TCATJC”) was launched in 2012 with funding from Equal Justice. The TCATJC is housed in space donated by Teton County and shares the space with the county law library. The TCATJC provides legal information and self-help services to Teton, Sublette, and Lincoln Counties. Eligible applicants may also apply for legal representation through a panel of private contract attorneys who provide legal services at no charge to the client. The services are paid at a reduced rate from the Equal Justice grant funds.



50 cases handled in 2018

Our grantees provide valuable services that help low-income clients who otherwise would be unable to get legal help from an attorney. We thank the dedicated staff of the programs we fund for their work and commitment to access to justice.

Summary

Equal Justice continually strives to leverage our limited resources to provide legal services to as many low-income individuals as possible. Over the past year, we have been successful in utilizing volunteers and additional funding to help expand services. But we are still meeting only a fraction of the legal needs of the low-income in our state. Too many people are forced to appear in court without an attorney because they simply cannot afford a lawyer. Although we hope to make it easier for self-represented individuals to navigate the civil justice system, we will also look for additional ways to expand services for more individuals.

We were successful in obtaining new sources of funding outside of the state special revenue funds we receive. After a six-month pilot project funded by federal VOCA funds, Equal Justice has been awarded an additional \$400,000 to expand civil legal services to victims of crime in FY 2019. We have granted those funds to the Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault and the Laramie County Community Partnership's Medical-Legal Partnership to continue to expand their assistance to victims. These are vitally important services and we hope to continue to expand these services in future years.

In the coming years, we will continue to look for innovative ways to bridge the divide in access to legal services. Creative solutions will be necessary to overcome the barriers to access to justice, but we are committed to finding solutions.



Financial Summary

The revenue generated from filing fees that provide the funding for Equal Justice has declined significantly over the past two years. In the coming years, Equal Justice will continue to closely monitor any changes in the special revenue that funds our programs. We currently have reserve funds available to meet our obligations and remain within our spending authority.

Additional Revenue

In 2015, Equal Justice also began receiving additional funding from the increase in pro hac vice fees paid by out of state attorneys. The Wyoming State Bar increased the fees by \$200 with 100% of the increased fee going to Equal Justice Wyoming to help support civil legal services. The fees generate approximately \$30,000 per year and are earmarked to be used for grants. We sincerely appreciate the State Bar's support for access to justice.

We expanded our grant program through additional VOCA funds in 2018 and as we continue to add new resources, programs, and initiatives, we will also continue to explore additional funding to support our work.

Summary of Expenditures

Salaries and Benefits	\$381,684
Office Expense and Travel	\$32,757
Telecommunications	\$2,442
Grants*	
Legal Aid of Wyoming	\$269,572
Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault	\$427,948
Wyoming Children's Law Center	\$69,500
Teton County Access to Justice Center	\$86,224
Laramie County Community Partnership	\$84,111
Special Services	\$14,932
Total*	\$1,369,170

*Includes the June 2018 grant expenditures which were paid in July 2018.

Vision - Equal access to justice for the people of Wyoming.

Mission - Serving the legal needs of low-income persons of Wyoming through community engagement, education, information, and expansion of legal services throughout the state.

Equal Justice Wyoming

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www.equaljustice.wy.gov