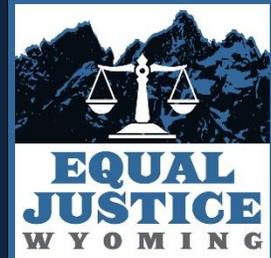


Equal Justice Wyoming

Annual Report to the Wyoming Supreme Court July 2020



*"It is not possible to be in favor of justice for some people
and not be in favor of justice for all people."*

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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Jessica Wales, Administrative Assistant
Henry Wisdorf, Staff Attorney/IT Project
Manager



Message from the Executive Director

Since its creation in 2011, Equal Justice Wyoming has grown to be a strong, reliable program that provides valuable services. Through outreach, education, and our collaboration with attorneys and community partners across the state, we have increased access to legal help for thousands of people in Wyoming who are unable to afford an attorney. Along with my staff and board, I am proud of what we have accomplished, and look forward to the future.

Things have dramatically changed since my last message, but the past year has highlighted, more than ever, the need for access to justice. Equal justice under law should be a right for each and every person in our country; and, although we recognize that we have a long way to go, we will continue to strive to achieve this goal.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to change the way we and our grantees deliver services, the dedication and passion to provide these services remain the same. The following report details the work of Equal Justice Wyoming, our grantees, and our volunteers for the year ending June 30, 2020.

As always, but especially in light of the current challenges, we thank the dedicated volunteers, VISTA members, staff of legal aid programs, and all of our pro bono attorneys who have generously provided critical services over the past year. We could not do it without you, and we thank you for your service.

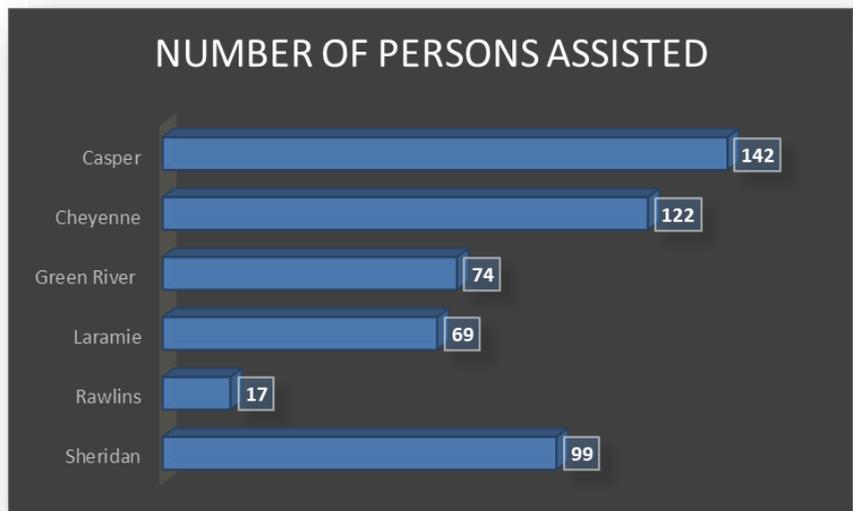
4,564 people received legal services and self-help assistance in FY 2020

- Angie Dorsch

Pro Bono Programs and Initiatives

Volunteer Reference Attorney Program

The Volunteer Reference Attorney (VRA) Program places attorneys in courthouses to provide legal information, explain court procedures, and assist litigants in completing pro se forms. It is often difficult for self-represented litigants to understand the complex civil justice system, and the VRA helps people navigate confusing court processes and procedures. The program has been welcomed by court staff, volunteer attorneys, and the public. EJW recruits volunteer attorneys to hold “office hours” 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 and Rawlins where an attorney is only available on the first Thursday of each month.



523 individuals assisted by 42 Volunteer Reference Attorneys

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, these in-person events, which are typically held in confined spaces in the courthouses, were cancelled from March through June. Nevertheless, we are proud that 42 Volunteer Reference Attorneys assisted 523 individuals from July 2019 until the cancellation of sessions in March 2020. We

are looking forward to resuming the in-person VRA sessions as soon as possible. In the meantime, we are referring self-represented litigants to services that are available remotely.

Wyoming Free Legal Answers

The Wyoming Free Legal Answers (WFLA) secure online portal, wyoming.freelegalanswers.org, was launched in August 2016, in partnership with the American Bar Association, to offer free legal advice online. The website 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 can register as volunteers to answer questions on the site. Equal Justice provides the day-to-day administrative functions for the site, including ensuring that only Wyoming-licensed attorneys in good standing are permitted to answer questions. Equal Justice also sends weekly updates to the volunteer lawyers and provides resources for both lawyers and clients.



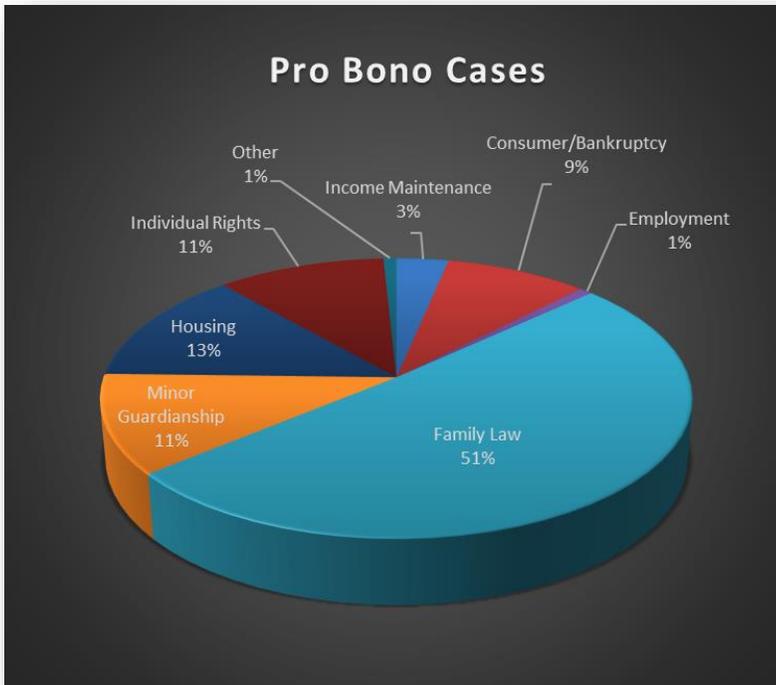
**284 legal questions answered by
18 volunteer attorneys
24% increase in questions answered**

The portal is a valuable resource that reaches Wyomingites in rural and underserved areas of the state, as well as those with limited access to transportation and childcare. During the pandemic, with in-person events cancelled, WFLA has proven to be particularly critical. This innovative tool also allows flexibility for busy attorneys because they can provide pro bono services when it is convenient for them. In FY 2020, pro bono attorneys assisted with 284 legal matters through the portal, representing a 24% increase over last year.

Volunteer Lawyers Program

Equal Justice manages the statewide Volunteer Lawyers Program (VLP) in partnership with the Wyoming State Bar. We provide resources and support to volunteer attorneys in order to encourage and facilitate the delivery of pro bono legal services to low-income clients. The type of assistance provided by the attorneys ranges from advice and brief services to full representation of clients.

A popular option for attorneys who want to volunteer is our legal advice clinics. Equal Justice Wyoming holds monthly clinics in Cheyenne and Laramie. The legal advice clinic in Laramie is held in



122 matters handled by pro bono attorneys

collaboration with the University of Wyoming College of Law’s Equal Justice Club and the Downtown Clinic, a safety-net healthcare provider. Additionally, clinics are held periodically in other parts of the state in collaboration with local bar associations, such as the Converse, Natrona, and Sheridan County Bars. The clinics expand pro bono service, provide vital legal assistance to clients, and offer a valuable learning opportunity for law students who volunteer.

The pandemic disrupted our ability to hold in-person legal clinics, which have been cancelled since March 2020. We hope to be able to resume in-person legal clinics in the near future. Until the clinics are able to resume, we continue to provide

services through our portal at Wyoming Free Legal Answers, and we are also planning to launch live remote clinics via phone or video in the coming months.

Although our physical office has been closed to the public since March, we continue to process applications and place cases. We are not able to place every case with a volunteer attorney because requests for assistance far outpace the number of available pro bono attorneys; however, 122 legal matters were handled by volunteer attorneys over the past year.

“We owe our lives to Equal Justice and [our attorney]. We would never have been able to afford to complete this very necessary [case] without you.”

– Feedback from client who received legal assistance through the Volunteer Lawyer Program in 2020

Equal Justice Wyoming Board Member Receives Champion of Justice Award from Wyoming State Bar

Walter Eggers received the Wyoming State Bar’s Champion of Justice Award in October 2019 for his many years of service dedicated to access to justice. For more than a decade, Walter has provided pro bono legal services, volunteered at legal advice clinics, and served as a member of the Equal Justice

Wyoming Board of Commissioners, Equal Justice Wyoming Foundation Board of Directors, and Wyoming Access to Justice Commission. Walter has been, and continues to be, a truly valuable champion of this important work. We thank Walter for his many contributions that have advanced access to justice in Wyoming.

Online Legal Information and Resources

Equal Justice launched our website 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. The website is an important tool that allows the public to understand their legal rights and access legal information in plain language. In FY 2020, our website had 45,765 site visits by 33,625 different users.

**45,765 site visits and
33,625 unique users**

LiveChat

In order to remotely assist people and steer them to the information they need, Equal Justice's website has a LiveChat feature. This tool can help users navigate our expansive website to find what they need. The LiveChat is similar to a remote self-help center in that it does not provide legal advice, but instead helps guide people to appropriate information and trusted resources. In FY 2020, 344 visitors to the website received assistance from a trained LiveChat operator. The majority of the LiveChat volunteers are law students. An EJW AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) member provides training on the LiveChat software and manages the volunteers' schedules. Because online resources are even more important at this time, we hope to expand the number of LiveChat operators in the coming year.

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

Outreach and Public Awareness

Equal Justice engages in outreach to help people know their rights and to increase public awareness of available legal resources and programs. Staff and VISTA members routinely hold outreach events with social service providers and community partners. In FY 2020, we worked with numerous organizations, including CLIMB Wyoming, Dads Making a Difference, and the Homeless Veterans Stand Down. We also made presentations at public libraries and senior centers across Wyoming on topics including guardianship of minors, adult guardianship, powers of attorney and advance directives, wills and estate planning, and a special presentation to homeless youth living at the Unaccompanied Students Initiative house in Cheyenne. Our AmeriCorps VISTA members conducted regular outreach at the VA hospital in

Cheyenne each month to provide legal information and resources to veterans. We assisted 62 veterans through our VA outreach last year.

AmeriCorps VISTA Program

The past year was a busy and productive year for the Equal Justice AmeriCorps VISTA program. Over the course of the year, our VISTAs conducted outreach, engaged in fundraising, assisted with the statewide legal needs assessment, and drafted policy papers. Through these and many other crucial tasks, our dedicated AmeriCorps volunteers increased the capacity of their host organizations and improved life for Wyoming's citizens.



At the beginning of FY 2020, our program encompassed three subsites and six VISTAs. Their work was diverse and their goals varied, but all of these individuals were committed to serving full-time for a year to bring about positive change in their new communities. The interconnectedness of the people and their projects was readily

apparent. Our VISTAs found and maximized opportunities to collaborate, and their efforts benefitted not only their host organizations but other programs and service agencies as well. Derek (serving with the Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault in Fort Washakie) partnered with food security programs and was able to build new bonds and strengthen the Coalition's relationships in the Wind River community. Claire (serving with the Department of Health, Aging Division) determined through research, outreach, and in-person interviews that lack of access to legal services is a challenge faced by many of Wyoming's most vulnerable citizens; in response to these findings, the Aging Division provided \$70,000 in special funding to Legal Aid of Wyoming to provide legal services to seniors. The work done by Derek and Claire, and by VISTAs Anna, Gabe, and Kevin, had an immediate impact for underserved populations throughout the state; and the benefits will continue to be seen long into the future.

Of particular note over the course of this year was the service of Marissa Carpio. Having served as a VISTA Member with Equal Justice in 2018-2019, Marissa committed to a second year of service as

VISTA Leader for the entire cohort. Marissa worked tirelessly, and with grace and humor, to build strong bonds among those serving in our program. She organized outings, provided professional development opportunities, led trainings, produced newsletters, and conducted regular check-ins so the members of our cohort could feel supported in their endeavors and connected to the larger mission of public service. When the pandemic overturned everyone’s routines and expectations, Marissa took on the enormous task of keeping spirits high and motivation intact for all of our VISTAs.

We look forward to the coming year with great optimism. Our VISTA program has grown; it now includes, in addition to WCADVSA and the Aging Division, new subsites at Wyoming Children’s Law Center, Cheyenne Regional Medical Center, Habitat for Humanity of Laramie County, and Legal Aid of Wyoming. We look forward to meeting new challenges and reporting new successes in 2021.

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 nonprofit legal service organizations. We are the largest single source of funding for civil legal services in Wyoming. In FY 2020, we provided a total of \$1,112,153 in grants.

Equal Justice received \$480,000 of VOCA (Victims of Crime Act) funds from the Division of Victim Services to increase civil legal services to victims of crime. We granted the funds to the Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault and Legal Aid of Wyoming to expand legal assistance to victims of crime.

In total, 3,291 clients received legal services through the grant programs we fund and administer.

\$1,112,153 provided in grants
3,291 clients received services

Equal Justice Wyoming Grantees

Legal Aid of Wyoming

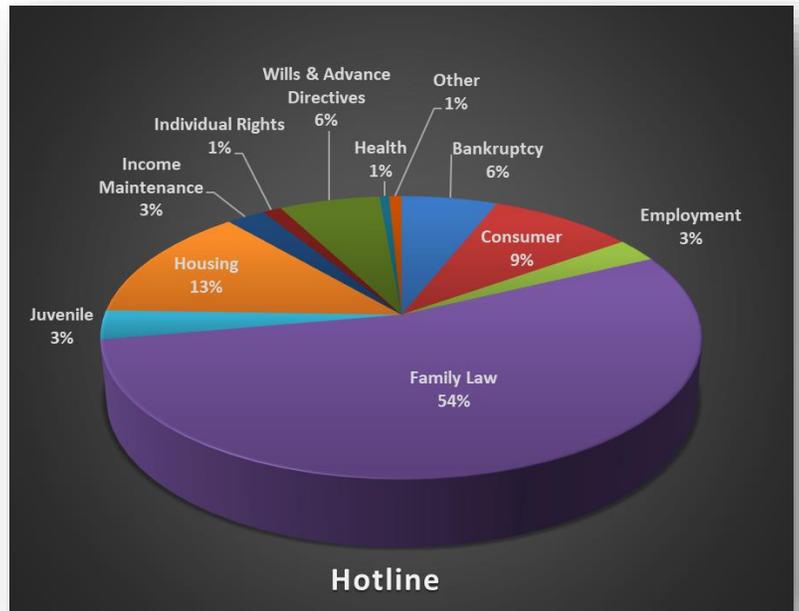
Legal Aid of Wyoming is a statewide legal service provider with offices in Casper, Cheyenne, Cody, Gillette, Lander, and Rock Springs. In addition to funding the general provision of civil legal services, Equal Justice Wyoming also funds Legal Aid of Wyoming’s statewide legal hotline.

Statewide Legal Advice and Intake Hotline

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 with limited access to a legal aid office. The hotline number is widely distributed by court clerks and librarians to people who are looking for legal advice and assistance.

Especially now, as people need to be able to access legal assistance remotely, the hotline is an effective and efficient way to provide legal advice and to process applications for people across the entire state, including rural and underserved areas.

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. The hotline provided services to 2,323 callers in FY 2020.

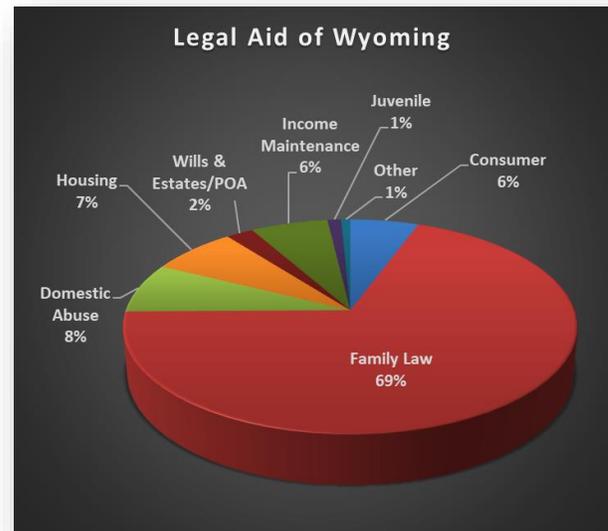


2,323 callers received legal help over the hotline

Legal Aid of Wyoming Cases

Beginning in June 2013, Equal Justice partnered with Legal Aid of Wyoming, awarding grants to expand services throughout the state by opening additional offices. Since that time, Equal Justice has continued to provide the necessary funds to operate offices in Rock Springs, Gillette, and Cody. These communities had never before had a legal aid office. Legal Aid of Wyoming staff attorneys handled 266 legal matters under the grant in FY 2020.

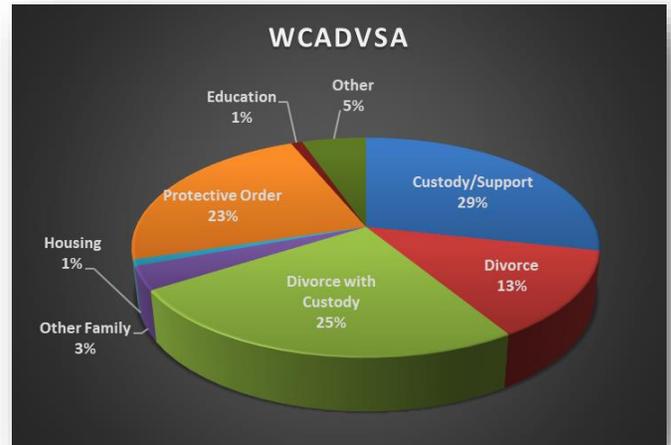
266 legal matters handled in 2020



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 and other crimes. The services the Coalition provides are vital for protecting victims from further harm. The Coalition’s services go beyond getting protective orders. They provide holistic services to help victims with all issues related to abuse; for example, the Coalition represents victims seeking divorce or custody.

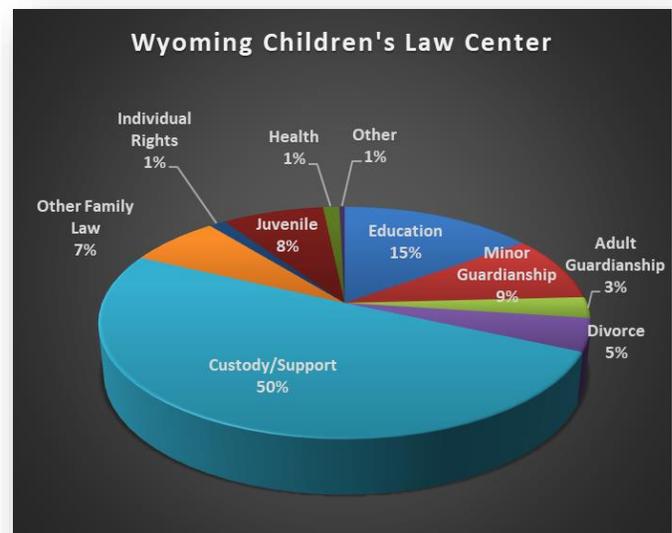
Equal Justice has provided substantial funding to support the work of the Coalition since 2012. The funds have expanded the availability of legal services and have allowed the Coalition to open satellite offices in Casper, Cody, Gillette, and Lander, in addition to maintaining their primary office in Laramie. The Coalition handled 320 cases in FY 2020.



320 cases handled in 2020

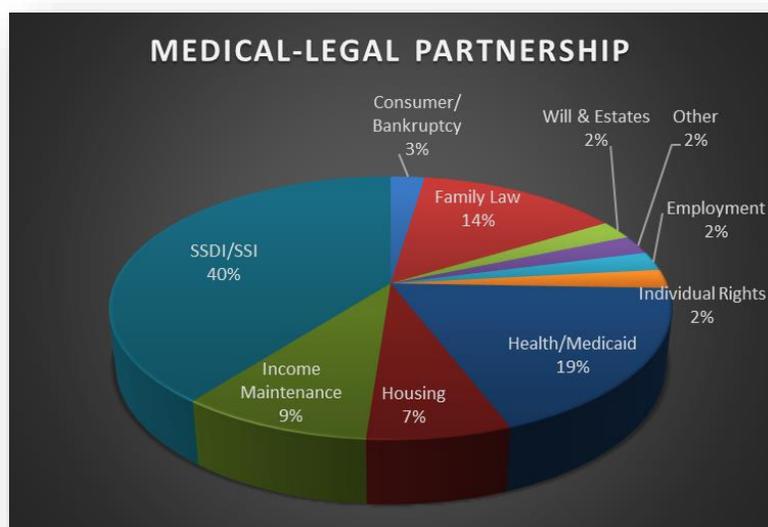
Wyoming Children’s Law Center

The Wyoming Children’s Law Center (WCLC) provides legal services in cases involving children and families; these matters include, but are not limited to, traditional “family law” cases. For example, the WCLC provides advocacy to ensure children receive special education services to which they are entitled. 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. The WCLC handled 240 cases in FY 2020.



240 cases handled in 2020

Medical-Legal Partnership at Cheyenne Regional Medical Center



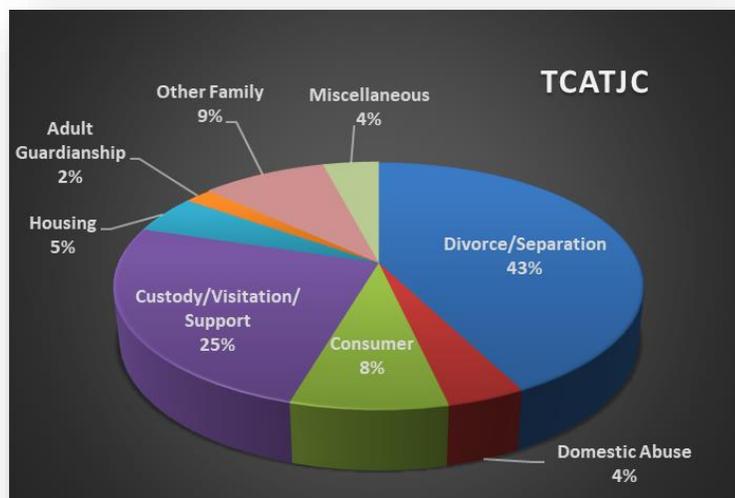
43 cases handled in 2020

Cheyenne Regional Medical Center received a grant from Equal Justice to operate a Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP). MLPs are quickly expanding across the country to address health-harming legal issues. Cheyenne Regional’s MLP addresses various legal issues ranging from landlord-tenant matters when mold is causing asthma attacks to helping clients receive benefits under their private health insurance to assisting individuals who are entitled to public benefits so they can afford necessary medications.

The MLP places a lawyer into a medical team to identify and address patients’ legal needs in order 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. In FY 2020, the MLP attorney handled 43 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 individuals in 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. In FY 2020, the TCATJC provided legal assistance in 99 cases.



99 cases handled in 2020

Financial Summary

The revenue generated from filing fees that fund Equal Justice has declined significantly over the past four years. We have been able to offset some of the decreased revenue through new sources of funding and by reducing our staff. We have not filled the vacant Staff Attorney/Pro Bono Coordinator position in our office. We have enough funds in reserve to meet our obligations, but we are also aware of the reality that we may need to make additional cuts in the next year.

Additional Revenue

In 2015, Equal Justice began receiving additional funding from the increase in pro hac vice fees paid by out-of-state attorneys. One hundred dollars of each pro hac vice fee goes to Equal Justice Wyoming to help support civil legal services. The fees are used to supplement our grants. We appreciate the State Bar's support for access to justice.

We also continued to receive VOCA (Victims of Crime Act) funds in 2020; however, we are facing a \$50,000 reduction in VOCA funding for FY 2021 and have been notified that there will be further cuts in FY 2022. As we are faced with decreases from several sources of revenue, we will continue to explore additional ways to support the important work of our program and our grantees.

Summary of Expenditures

Salaries and Benefits	\$316,745
Office Expense and Travel	\$20,121
Telecommunications	\$3,596
Grants*	
Legal Aid of Wyoming	\$339,040
Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault	\$556,397
Wyoming Children's Law Center	\$77,042
Teton County Access to Justice Center	\$81,356
Cheyenne Regional Medical Center	\$58,318
Special Services	\$18,435
Total*	\$1,471,050

*Includes the June 2020 grant expenditures which were paid in July 2020.

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