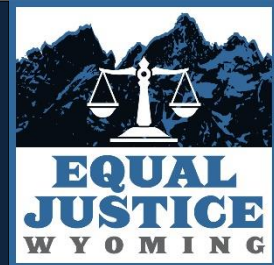


Equal Justice Wyoming

Annual Report to the Wyoming Supreme Court July 2023



*"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

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Leora Hoshall, VISTA Supervisor
Jessica Wales, Administrative Assistant
Henry Wisdorf, Staff Attorney/IT Project
Manager

**5,096 matters addressed
through legal services and self-
help assistance in FY 2023**



Message from the Executive Director

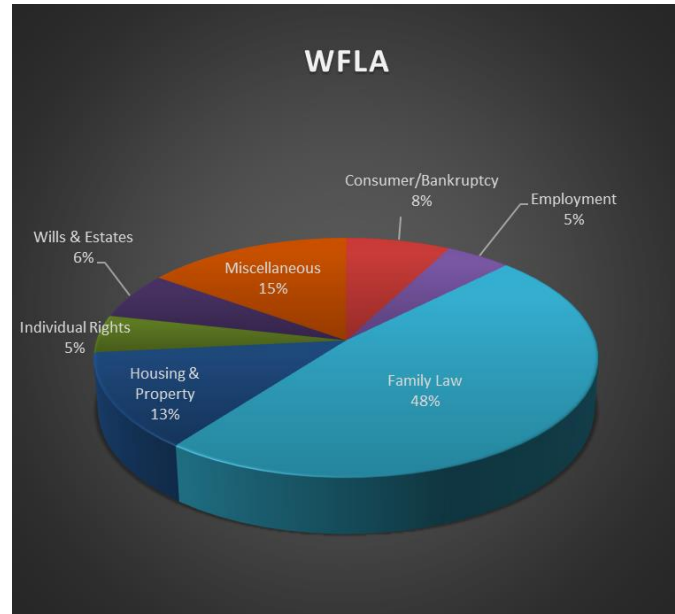
The following report summarizes the work of Equal Justice Wyoming, our grantees, and our volunteers for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023. As we continue to face challenges in maintaining adequate funding, we are grateful for the many people who contribute their time and talents to support access to justice for the people of Wyoming. As always, we thank all of our volunteers and pro bono attorneys, legal aid staff, VISTA members, and all of the individuals who make this important work possible. FY 2023 was the first year that Equal Justice Wyoming and the Equal Justice Wyoming Foundation jointly determined grant awards. This streamlined the grant process for our grantees, and it also allowed the boards from both organizations to consider gaps in services and funding to take a comprehensive view of where and how resources were being utilized. The joint grant making was successful, and we look forward to the continued partnership with the Equal Justice Wyoming Foundation.

- Angie Dorsch

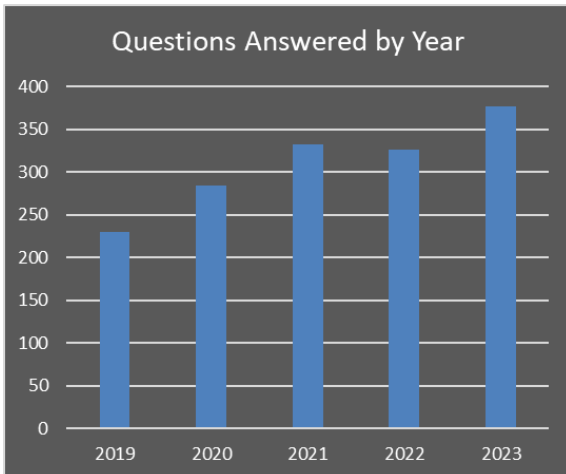
Pro Bono Programs and Initiatives

Wyoming Free Legal Answers

The Wyoming Free Legal Answers (WFLA) online portal, wyoming.freelegalanswers.org, was launched in August 2016, in partnership with the American Bar Association, as a virtual legal clinic. The website screens applicants for eligibility and allows eligible individuals to submit civil legal questions and relevant documents via a secure portal. Attorneys licensed to practice law in Wyoming can register as volunteers to provide pro bono services through the site. Equal Justice provides the day-to-day administrative functions for the site. This includes ensuring that only Wyoming-licensed attorneys in good standing are permitted to respond to user submissions, and moderating questions, for example by removing questions about criminal issues. Equal Justice also sends updates to the volunteer lawyers and provides resources for both lawyers and clients.



376 legal questions answered



“From the bottom of my heart, I truly appreciate your help, thank you! You have been so helpful.”

“Thank you so much! My case is before a judge in seven days and I’m much more confident about my rights. Thank you.”

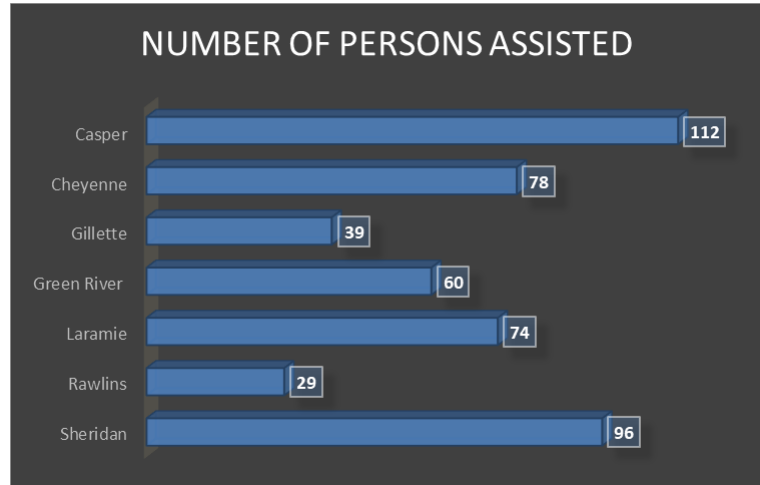
“Thank you for your reply! This is very helpful!”

– Feedback from clients who received legal assistance through WFLA in FY 2023

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 or childcare. The portal can be accessed from the user’s home computer or cell phone, any time of day. In FY 2023, twenty volunteer attorneys provided legal advice and assistance through WFLA to address 376 questions submitted on the site, resulting in a 92% answer rate.

Volunteer Reference Attorney Program

The Volunteer Reference Attorney Program (VRA) places attorneys in courthouses and libraries across the state 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. Equal Justice recruits volunteer attorneys to hold “office hours” in the participating

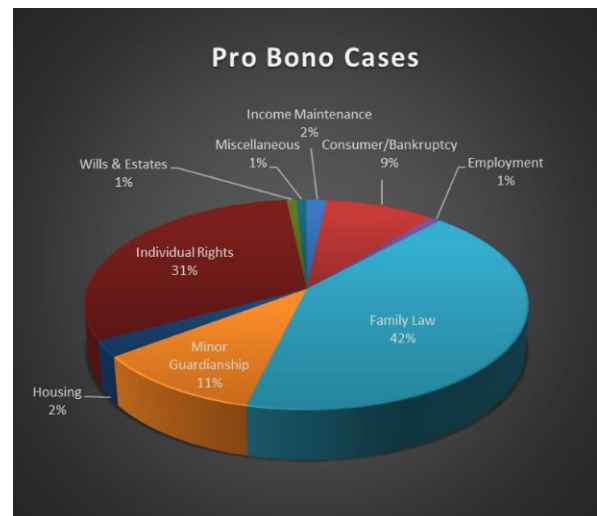


488 individuals assisted

courthouses and libraries on the first Thursday of each month. The consistently-high volume of court users attending the VRA in Casper over the past year necessitated increasing the frequency to two VRA sessions per month in that location, beginning in June 2023; and we are reviewing the need to add a second session each month in other locations as well. There are currently seven VRA locations across the state. The VRA sessions are held in the county courthouses in Cheyenne, Green River, Laramie, Rawlins, and Sheridan. Sessions are held in the county libraries in Casper and Gillette. In total, 488 individuals were assisted by 48 Volunteer Reference Attorneys in FY 2023.

Volunteer Lawyers Program

Equal Justice manages the statewide Volunteer Lawyers Program 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. The pro bono program processed 119 cases in FY 2023.



119 cases in FY 2023

“You all were fantastic. I appreciate all of your help, and [my attorney] was simply wonderful to work with. Thanks again!”

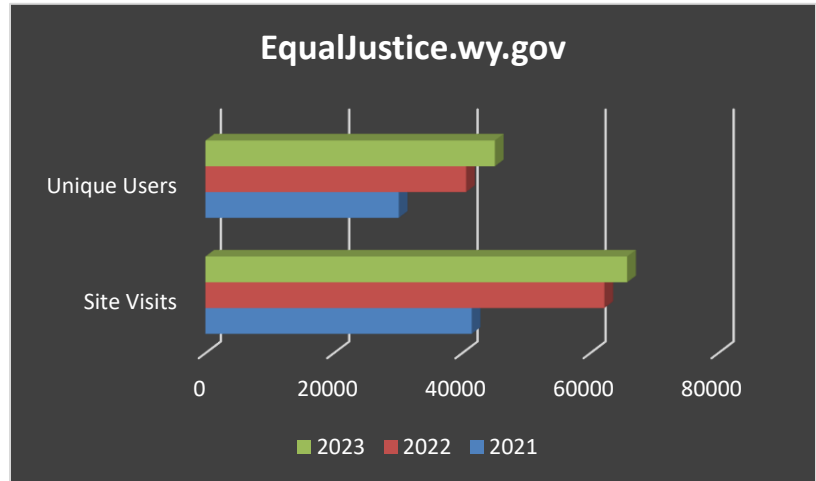
– Feedback from client who received legal assistance through the Volunteer Lawyers Program in FY 2023

Online Legal Information and Resources

Equal Justice launched our website, <https://equaljustice.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. The website is an important tool that allows the public to understand their legal rights and access legal information in plain language. In FY 2023, our website had 65,761 site visits by 45,091 unique users.

"I'm finding things on the website to assist me. Great, well-organized, and easy to navigate website. Thanks."

– Feedback from website visitor



65,761 site visits and 45,091 unique users

LiveChat

In order to assist website visitors and direct individuals to the information they need, Equal Justice’s website has a LiveChat feature. This tool helps users navigate our expansive website to find appropriate resources to address their needs. The LiveChat is similar to a remote self-help center in that it does not provide legal advice but instead helps guide people to relevant information and trusted resources. In FY 2023, 218 visitors to our website received assistance from a trained LiveChat operator. The majority of the LiveChat volunteers are law students at the University of Wyoming College of Law. An Equal Justice AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) member recruits law student volunteers, provides training on the LiveChat software, and helps manage the volunteer schedule. Over the next year we hope to increase the number of LiveChat volunteers.

218 visitors to the website received assistance from a trained LiveChat operator

AmeriCorps VISTA Program

The Equal Justice Wyoming AmeriCorps VISTA Program continues to attract inspiring individuals who want to serve Wyoming communities while learning about the importance of access to justice. Three VISTA Members committed to spending the 2022-2023 service year in our program. Mathias Lang served in the Equal Justice office. Miranda Host served with Cheyenne Regional Medical Center's Wyoming Institute for Population Health, and Frances Jacobson served with Habitat for Humanity of Laramie County. All three brought compassion and enthusiasm to their roles and had tremendous impacts.



Mathias carried on the essential work of community outreach. He visited libraries, state agencies, and social service providers around the state and on the Wind River Reservation to share information about free legal resources and events. As a result of Mathias's efforts, we saw increased attendance at events in Casper, Gillette, and Fort Washakie. Mathias also assisted the College of Law's Civil Legal Services Clinic and Estate Planning Practicum in organizing, advertising, and hosting several outreach events and a legal resource fair.

Frances's service with Habitat for Humanity of Laramie County focused primarily on in-depth research for and production of a Legal Barriers to Affordable Housing study. Frances brought patience, perseverance, and professionalism to this lengthy project. She produced a report that has already become a valuable tool for organizations and academics working in the field of affordable housing. Her report served as the basis for the senior capstone project in a University of Wyoming Construction Management course. Frances also translated Habitat documents into Spanish to ease housing processes for non-native English speakers.

During her year with Cheyenne Regional, Miranda was instrumental in establishing policies and protocols for the Overdose Fatality Review Panel. She worked cooperatively with stakeholders from very diverse disciplines. Miranda was able to establish common ground as the association of professionals focused on their objective of reducing overdose fatalities and the stigma associated with substance use. Miranda also worked on the wrap-up of the Emergency Rental Assistance Program, and she helped Cheyenne Regional prepare to do essential work in the arena of affordable housing.

Equal Justice Wyoming is grateful to Miranda, Frances, and Mathias for dedicating a year of their lives to serving the people of Wyoming.

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. In FY 2023, Equal Justice and the Equal Justice Wyoming Foundation provided a total of \$1,611,654, including \$651,321 in Equal Justice state funds, \$248,293 of Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds from the Division of Victim Services to increase civil legal services to victims of crime and \$448,497 in Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) funds to provide legal services to support housing stability. This year the Equal Justice Wyoming Foundation, a separate nonprofit with an aligned mission, jointly made grant awards and contributed \$125,000 in funds to the amounts awarded. In addition, the Foundation helped fill gaps in services in Laramie County by providing \$138,543 in funds received from the Laramie County Commissioners from the American Rescue Plan Act (Laramie County ARPA). In total, 3,895 clients received legal services through the grant programs we fund and administer.

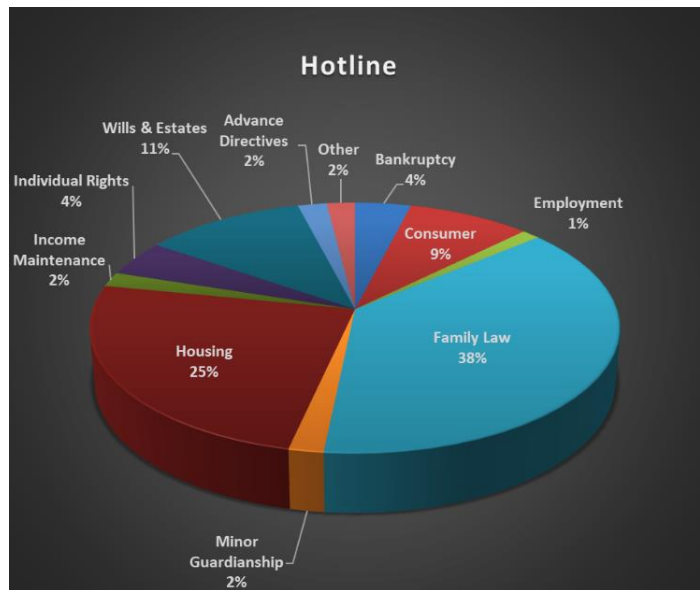
\$1,611,654 provided in grants
3,895 clients received services

Equal Justice Wyoming Grantees

Legal Aid of Wyoming, Inc.

Statewide Legal Advice and Intake Hotline

Equal Justice has partnered with Legal Aid of Wyoming to ensure individuals across the state have access to legal advice through a telephone hotline. The hotline allows individuals to receive advice in real time and to apply for legal services over the phone. Legal Aid of Wyoming operates the hotline Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The hotline is vital for many people in rural areas with limited access to a physical legal aid office. The hotline number is widely distributed by court clerks and librarians to individuals who are looking for legal advice and assistance.



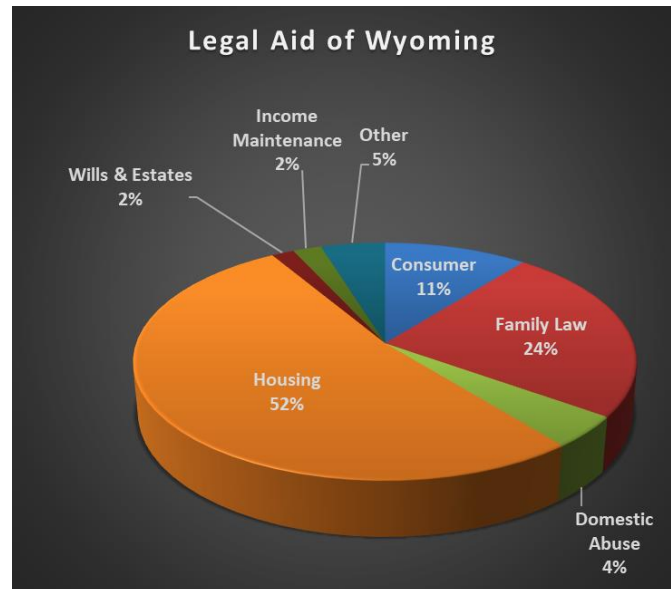
2,365 callers received legal help

As people increasingly need to access legal help 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 may then be taken.

The hotline assists people from every county in Wyoming and provided services to 2,365 callers in FY 2023.

Legal Aid of Wyoming Cases

Beginning in June 2013, Equal Justice partnered with Legal Aid of Wyoming by awarding grants to expand services throughout the state, which supported the addition of three new offices. Since that time, Equal Justice has continued to provide funds to operate the additional offices in Rock Springs, Gillette, and Cody. These communities previously had not had a legal aid office. Unfortunately, due to budget cuts, Legal Aid of Wyoming plans to close the Gillette office to reduce costs. Services to that area of the state will continue to be provided. Legal Aid of Wyoming staff attorneys handled 898 legal matters through Equal Justice and ERAP grants in FY 2023.

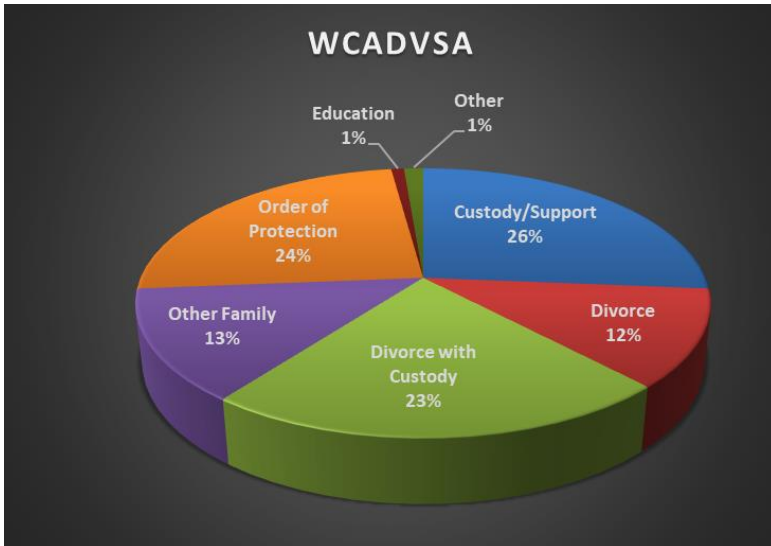


898 legal matters handled in 2023

In addition to the Equal Justice state funds, Legal Aid of Wyoming received a grant of Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) funds through Equal Justice. These funds were used to provide civil legal services with the aim of helping ERAP-eligible clients obtain or maintain safe and stable housing. The ERAP funding has been instrumental in addressing the legal issues that many individuals who were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic continue to face. In June 2023, ERAP financial assistance for rent and utilities ended in the state of Wyoming after the state expended the available funds. The ERAP funds supporting ongoing civil legal services will end, as mandated by the State of Wyoming, on September 30, 2023. As individuals face skyrocketing housing costs and the loss of financial assistance, we anticipate an increase in evictions and housing matters.

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 to help protect victims from further harm. The Coalition’s services go beyond getting protective orders. Holistic services are employed to address many issues related to abuse. Many of the Coalition’s cases are complex and time-consuming; however, these services are vital to help stabilize families and individuals who have experienced domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking.



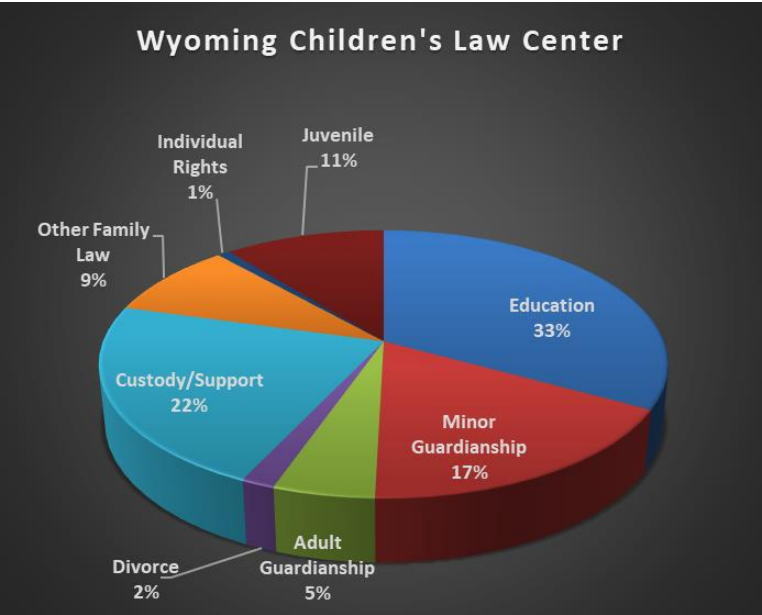
232 cases handled in 2023

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, Fort Washakie, and Gillette, in addition to maintaining their primary office in Laramie. In FY 2023, the Coalition determined that they needed to close the physical offices in Cody and Gillette in order to lower operating costs. The Coalition continues to serve clients in the Cody and Gillette regions by maintaining local staff attorneys who work without a traditional brick and mortar office

building. The organization is committed to providing statewide services to victims. The Coalition handled 232 cases in FY 2023 with the Equal Justice, VOCA, ERAP, and Laramie County ARPA funds that they received.

Wyoming Children’s Law Center

The Wyoming Children’s Law Center (WCLC) provides legal services in cases involving children and families. The WCLC’s services include traditional family law cases as well as other matters that are vitally important to children’s well-being. 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 grants from Equal Justice and Laramie County ARPA funds support a wide variety of civil legal services, which allowed the WCLC to handle 121 cases in FY 2023.



121 cases handled in 2023

Medical-Legal Partnership at Cheyenne Regional Medical Center

Cheyenne Regional Medical Center received a grant from Equal Justice to operate a Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP). MLPs are being developed across the country to address health-harming legal issues. Cheyenne Regional's MLP handles various legal matters ranging from landlord-tenant cases where safe housing is at issue to denials of public benefits that leave individuals unable to afford healthcare. The MLP incorporates a lawyer into a medical team to identify and address patients' legal needs in order to improve their health. The MLP partners with HealthWorks medical clinic

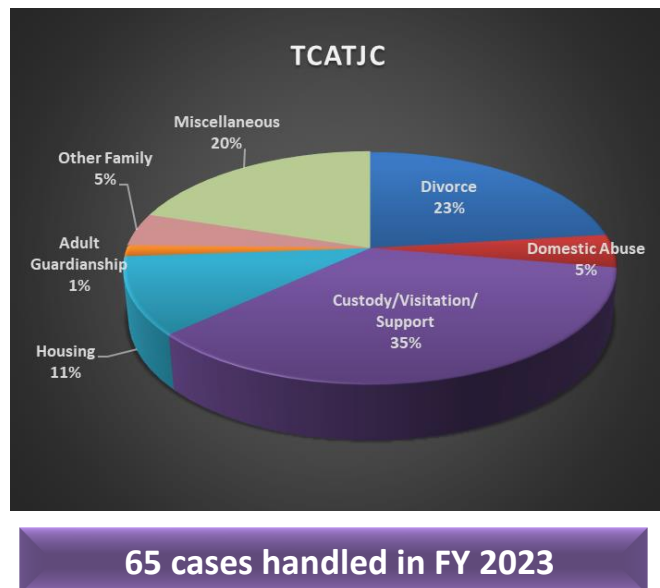


in Cheyenne, and also receives referrals from other health care providers. With funding from ERAP and Laramie County ARPA funds, in total, the two MLP attorneys handled 140 legal matters in FY 2023.

Thanks to a grant from the Hughes Charitable Foundation to the Equal Justice Wyoming Foundation, the EJW Foundation has taken exciting steps to expand MLP services to additional areas of the state, with the hopes of eventually having a statewide network of MLP services. We look forward to reporting on these additional developments over the next year.

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 cost to the client. Those services are paid by TCATJC at a reduced rate using the Equal Justice grant funds. In FY 2023, the TCATJC handled 65 cases.

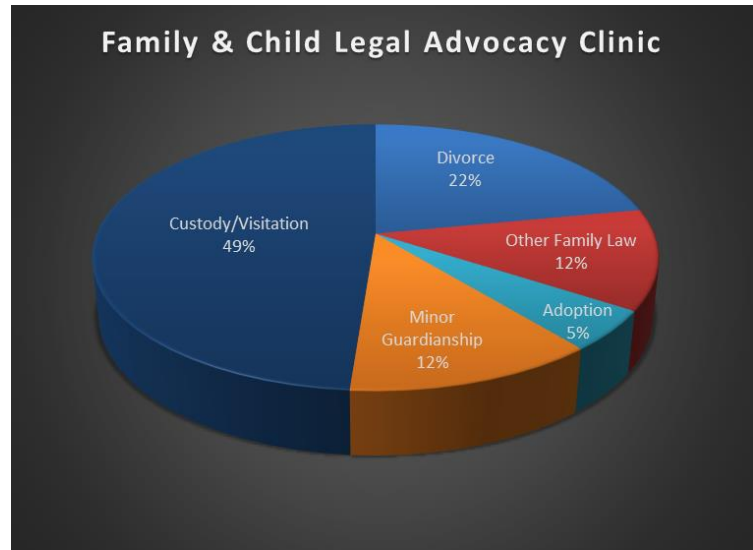


University of Wyoming College of Law

The University of Wyoming College of Law operates several legal clinics that provide experiential learning for law students. Law students assist low-income individuals under the supervision of a law school professor. Equal Justice provides financial support for the Family and Child Legal Advocacy Clinic and the Civil Legal Services Clinic.

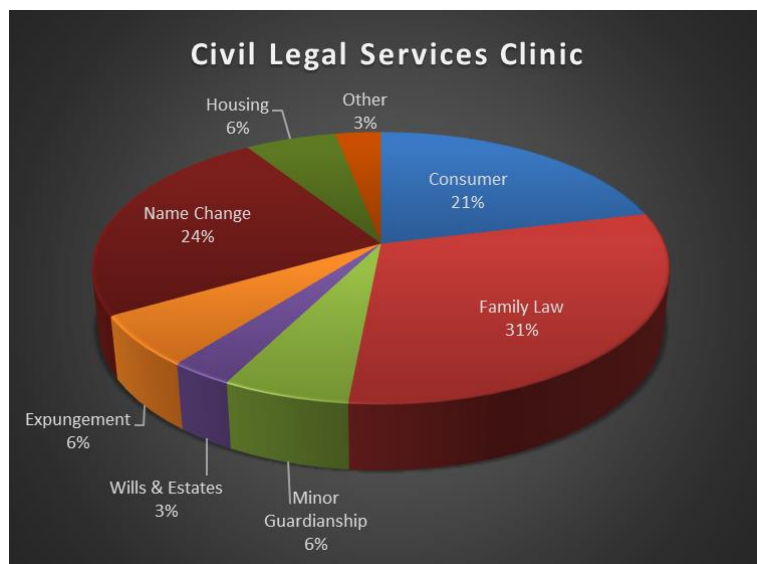
Family and Child Legal Advocacy Clinic

The Family and Child Legal Advocacy Clinic handles a wide variety of cases, including divorce, child support, adoption, paternity, child custody, modifications, domestic violence, stalking and sexual assault protection orders, guardian ad litem appointments in juvenile and child custody cases, representation of parents in juvenile court, termination of parental rights, and other civil actions involving children. In FY 2023, the clinic handled 41 cases.



41 cases handled in FY 2023

Civil Legal Services Clinic



The Civil Legal Services Clinic assists clients with a wide range of civil legal needs. This includes housing, expungements, consumer rights, education, veterans' service-connected disability benefits, and other public benefits. The clinic handled 33 cases in FY 2023.

33 cases handled in FY 2023

Supporting Access to Justice

In addition to Equal Justice's work supporting legal and self-help services, our staff also contribute to projects that advance other access to justice initiatives. Over the past year, our staff members served on several committees and working groups, including Access to Justice 2.0 (ATJ 2.0) committees.

The Wyoming Access to Justice Commission's ATJ 2.0 Pro Se Forms Committee is a small group consisting of court clerks, judicial staff, practicing lawyers, and other interested stakeholders and experts. Over the past year the Committee made necessary updates and revisions to six of the family law pro se packets. The Committee also researched the processes that other states utilize to create and maintain pro se forms. The Committee ultimately compiled the information gathered from this research and submitted a proposal and recommendation to the Wyoming Judicial Council (WJC) to create a Permanent Standing Committee for Pro Se Forms, which has now been formed. Equal Justice staff will provide support to the WJC's Pro Se Forms Committee.

The ATJ 2.0 Multistakeholder Court Navigator Committee spent the past year researching navigator programs in other states and the use of non-lawyers to assist self-represented litigants. In its 2023-2024 Strategic Plan, the Wyoming Judicial Branch prioritized creating a court navigator program. The Committee compiled research and submitted a proposal in support of the plan to establish a court navigator program. The WJC is now in the process of developing a pilot program.

The ATJ 2.0 Pro Bono Committee was formed to identify and examine obstacles that prevent attorneys from providing pro bono legal services. The Committee consists of Equal Justice and Wyoming State Bar staff, private attorneys in larger firms and solo practice, judicial staff, and other stakeholders. The Committee is exploring ways to encourage and expand pro bono services in Wyoming.

Ongoing Projects

Equal Justice continues to work on projects aimed at improving the effectiveness of our program operations, our services, and our grantees. In FY 2023, work was undertaken to develop uniform outcome measures for civil legal services to help improve data collection and analysis across grantees and programs. That work is nearly complete, and the uniform outcomes will be implemented in FY 2024. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds received by Equal Justice are also being used to move our grantees onto a common case management system to increase efficiency and the quality of data reporting. We now have five programs, including Equal Justice, on the common case management system with a sixth program in the process of getting set up. Also using ARPA funds, a redesign is planned for our website to improve its usability. Additionally, we are working to automate the pro se packets in order to simplify the use of the court forms by self-represented litigants. We look forward to reporting on the progress of these projects in the coming year.

Financial Summary

The revenue generated from filing fees that fund Equal Justice continues to significantly decline. 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 a vacant Staff Attorney/Pro Bono Coordinator position due to the reduced revenue.

Access-to-justice programs across the country are faced with challenging economic outlooks. We will continue to explore additional ways to support the important work of our program and our grantees.

Additional Revenue Sources:

Pro hac vice fees paid by out-of-state attorneys. Used to supplement our grants.

Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds. Used to provide civil legal services to victims of abuse and other crimes.

Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) funds. Used to supplement grants that provide civil legal services to help individuals obtain or maintain safe and stable housing.

Support grant from the Corporation for National & Community Service. Used to manage our AmeriCorps VISTA program.

Summary of Expenditures

Salaries and Benefits	\$375,694
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Office Expense and Travel	\$16,782
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Telecommunications	\$3,608
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Grants*

Legal Aid of Wyoming	\$530,793
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Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault	\$676,216
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Wyoming Children's Law Center	\$121,180
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Teton County Access to Justice Center	\$60,000
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Cheyenne Regional Medical Center MLP	\$213,349
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UW College of Law Legal Clinics	\$10,116
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Total*	\$2,007,738
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*Includes the June 2023 grant expenditures paid in July 2023. Includes EJW, VOCA, ERAP, EJW Foundation and Laramie County ARPA grant payments.

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

2300 Capitol Ave. 1st Floor, Cheyenne, Wyoming 82002

<https://equaljustice.wy.gov>