



The Court Help Reporter

Fall 2015

COURT HELP PROGRAM RECEIVES GENERAL BUDGET PERMANENT FUNDING

After one-time-only funding since its inception in 2008, the Court Help Program will now continue operation through permanent funding under House Bill No. 2 which contains a substantial portion of appropriations supporting the ongoing functions of state government.

The biennium appropriation funds staff and operations in six full-time self-help centers in six counties. Centers are located in Billings, Bozeman, Great Falls, Helena, Kalispell and Missoula. In addition, the Court Help Program maintains self-help stations throughout Montana.

Chief Justice Mike McGrath said, I am pleased and grateful that the 2015 Legislature recognized the long-term benefit of permanent funding for the Court Help Program. Every day, Montanans turn to our courts for life's basic necessities – a safe place to live and support and protection for themselves or their families, often without the help of a lawyer. Access to the resources and information provided by the Court Help Program provides a much needed service to those with nowhere else to turn and advances our long-term vision of justice for all."

Appropriated funds are leveraged through effective utilization of AmeriCorps volunteers through the Justice for Montanans program (*see page 3*).

Click [here](#) to learn more about Court Help, or download the [brochure](#).

WELCOME TONEW COURT SERVICES DIRECTOR



In May, the Office of the Court Administrator welcomed Kay Pace as the new Court Services Director. Kay is a native of Idaho and has recently returned to the west after living in Phoenix and Dallas. Kay brings more than 18 years of human resource management experience and enjoys brainstorming and collaborating in the areas of human resources and business processes. Kay has a strong interest in employee engagement and on-boarding. Kay will be overseeing the Judicial Human Resource activities, Court Help Program, and Education/Board and Commissions.

In her personal time, Kay is all about family and trying to explore every nook and cranny of Montana and the surrounding states. Kay echoes the memorable words of her mother "it's not the things I bought, it's the places I have seen, that meant the most to me."

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CHIEF JUSTICE MCGRATH SWEARS IN AMERICORPS MEMBERS



The newest members of Montana's AmeriCorps team were sworn in by Montana Supreme Court Chief Justice Mike McGrath in September.

Established by the Montana Legal Services Association, in partnership with the Court Help Program of the Montana Supreme Court Office of the Court Administrator, the State Bar of Montana's Modest Means Program, and the Montana Office of Consumer Protection & Victim Services, the project places 18 members throughout Montana to help provide and expand intake, legal information and referral services for Montana's low-income residents seeking legal assistance.

Eight of the new AmeriCorps will serve under the Supreme Court's Court Help Program. We encourage you to stop in and introduce yourself to the new AmeriCorps in your area.

- **Tierce Bauer** from Montana, will serve in the Great Falls Self-Help Law Center
- **Toni Marie Castellanos** from Montana, will serve in the Great Falls Self-Help Law Center
- **Louise Jackson** from Montana, will serve in the Missoula Self-Help Law Center
- **Dana Flink** from Colorado, will serve in the Missoula Self-Help Law Center
- **Rob Belle** from Wisconsin, will serve in the Kalispell Self-Help Law Center
- **Austin Gee** from Montana, will serve in the Billings Self-Help Law Center
- **Alex Ames** from South Dakota, will serve in Bozeman Self-Help Law Center
- **Christine Hutchinson** from Montana, will serve in the Helena Self-Help Law Center

EIGHT YEARS OF SELF HELP SERVICE

It's been eight years since first Self Help Law Center opened its doors. Since that time, the Court Help Program has provided services statewide more than **47,000 times** and experienced an incredible 400 percent increase in customer contacts over the last four years alone.

- Almost 70 percent of services were provided to families earning less than \$24,000 a year, half of those earning less than \$12,000 a year.
- Approximately 20 percent of services were provided to the disabled or low-income elderly and Montana military veterans. In these populations, customers are twice as likely to have a legal issue relating to debt collection or landlord-tenant.
- Almost three-quarters of services related to family law

SELF-HELP LAW CENTER FRAMEWORK AROUND THE STATE

Kalispell

The Kalispell Self-Help Center, located in the lower level of the Flathead County Justice Center, is staffed by full-time facilitator Linda Frank, a full-time AmeriCorps member Rob Belle, and several RSVP volunteers. The Center aides in compliance with the 11th Judicial District Court standing order requiring unrepresented litigants to visit the Center for review of documents prior to appearing before the judge for hearing or finalization of a dissolution or parenting plan.



Missoula

The Missoula Self-Help Center, located on the second floor of the Missoula County Courthouse, is staffed by full-time facilitator Sheri Taylor, and two full-time AmeriCorps members— Dana Flink and Louise Jackson and enjoys substantial volunteering hours. The Center conducts outreach to Hamilton, Superior and Polson and receives guidance from an all-volunteer advisory board chaired by 4th Judicial District Judge Karen Townsend.

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SELF-HELP CENTERS AROUND THE STATE *CONTINUED*

Helena

The Helena Self-Help Center, located in the main Law Library arena, is staffed by a reference librarian Susan Lupton and AmeriCorp member Christine Hutchinson. The State Law Library Self-Help Center provides mobile services to Jefferson, Madison, Beaverhead, Anaconda-Deer Lodge, Granite, and Powell counties on an appointment basis. There are unstaffed self-help law stations in Anaconda/Deer Lodge, Beaverhead, Jefferson, Granite and Madison county courthouses.



Great Falls

The Great Falls Self-Help Center, in the lower level of 401 3rd Avenue North and across from the Cascade County Courthouse, is staffed by two AmeriCorps members, Tierce Bauer and Toni Marie Castellanos. Because of budgeting constraints, the Court Help Program is grateful for the on-site supervision of the Center by Chief Juvenile Probation Officer, Tim Callahan. The Center conducts outreach to almost half of Montana, traveling north to Havre, Malta, Glasgow, Shelby, Cut Bank, Conrad, Choteau and Fort Benton.

Bozeman

The Bozeman Self-Help Center, located in the Law & Justice Center of Gallatin County, is staffed by one half-time facilitator Lindsay Duckworth and AmeriCorps member Alex Ames with the help of a faithful volunteer. The Bozeman Center services a 100 mile radius and provides outreach to Livingston bi-weekly.

Billings

The Billings Self-Help Center is located at 3021 3rd Avenue North but is seeking a new home after sharing space with a local non-profit for the last several years. The Billings Center is staffed by full-time facilitator Patt Leikam—with the Court Help Program since its inception. Patt is assisted by AmeriCorps member Austin Gee with the added bonus of a regular volunteer. Billings provides self-help assistance across the entirety of eastern Montana, extending from Baker, Wibaux and Broadus to Wolf Point, Sidney and down to Miles city and over to Red Lodge, Columbus and Park City.



MONTANA SUPREME COURT ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION LAUNCHES ACCESS TO JUSTICE FORUM SERIES

The Access to Justice Forum Series is an effort of the Montana Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission with the support and assistance of others working within the framework of access to justice efforts. The series of regional public discussions about the need for civil legal services for low and moderate income Montanans will be held in seven different locations across the state.

Each two-hour forum will include a Listening Panel and Witnesses. The forums are open to the public. The Access to Justice Commission will use the testimony as part of the basis for recommendations to the Montana Supreme Court, the Legislature, and the State Bar of Montana to increase availability of legal assistance in civil matters.

The first Forum was held in Kalispell on Wednesday, October 21 at Flathead Valley Community College. The Listening Panel, lead by Justice James Jeremiah Shea, also included 11th Judicial District Judge Heidi Ulbricht, Justice of the Peace Daniel Wilson, Flathead County District Court Clerk Peg Allison, Senator Bob Keenan, Andy Huff, Chief Legal Counsel, Officer of the Governor and Access to Justice Commission member, Don Murray, Montana Justice Foundation board member, and Randy Snyder, Immediate Past President, State Bar of Montana and Access to Justice Commission Member.

The Listening Panel heard testimony from a wide range of programs and organizations with compelling evidence regarding gaps and barriers experienced by those they serve in accessing the justice system.

If you are interested in assisting with or attending a Forum in your area, please the point people listed below. Locations TBA.

Forum Series Schedule

Great Falls, Wednesday 11/18/15, 4-6pm
Contact: Matt Dale, 406-444-1907

Billings, Wednesday, 3/16/16, TBA
Contact: Patty Fain, 406-794-7824

Missoula, Wednesday, 4/13/16, TBA
Contact: Lisa Mecklenberg-Jackson
lmecklenberg-jackson@mt.gov

Bozeman, Wednesday, 5/18/16, TBA
Contact: Jennifer Brandon, 406-582-2165

Butte, Wednesday, 9/21/16, TBA
Contact: Michele Robinson
michele.robinson45@gmail.com

Helena, Wednesday, 10/19/16, TBA
Contact: Melanie Reynolds
mreynolds@lccountymt.gov

[Listen](#) to Montana Supreme Court Justice Beth Baker talk with MPR's Eric Whitney about the Access to Justice Forum Series.

[Listen](#) to Eric Whitney's broadcast about the Kalispell Access to Justice Forum

[Read](#) the about the Kalispell Forum in the Flathead Beacon

CHAMPIONS OF JUSTICE



Professor Hillary Wander Named Neil Haight Pro Bono Award Winner

Nominated by Senator Jon Tester, Professor Hillary Wander is the 2015 recipient of the State Bar's Neil Haight Pro Bono Award. In his nomination, Sen. Tester praises Professor Wander's passion for assisting Montana veterans, including creating and delivering the inaugural veteran's disability education for law students and in training volunteer attorneys. The educational effort evolved into the development of Montana Attorneys for Montana Veterans (MAMV), a partnership of Alexander Blewett III School of Law and the Montana Supreme Court Statewide Pro Bono Program.

Perhaps most importantly, since her involvement in veteran issues over the last decade, Professor Wander has represented many veterans pro bono before the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims and appeals before the Board of Veterans Appeals as well as assistance with other veteran related legal issues, often having multiple pro bono cases open simultaneously.

To read more about Professor Wander, read the full article in the October issues of *The Montana Lawyer*, or read the [Missoulian article](#) about her continued voluntary work on behalf of veterans while battling cancer

Judge Kenneth R. Neill, Recipient Karla Gray Equal Justice Award

For over 22 years the citizens of Cascade County have benefited from the Cascade County Law Clinic (CCLC) because of the vision and continued efforts of its founder, Judge Kenneth R. Neill, Retired.

CCLC was formed by Judge Neill in 1993 in response to the serious need for access to legal services for low-income individuals in Cascade County. Says Jason Holden in his nomination of Judge Neill "...he has personally done noteworthy and considerable work with the Law Clinic since its creation. Judge Neill was the instrumental force in ensuring local access to justice efforts in Cascade County. Since the mid-1980's the legal services community has been under attack due to a lack of adequate funding. This was especially true in Cascade County when the local office of the Montana Legal Services Association closed. Judge Neill did all that he could at that time to ensure that the Law Clinic would be able to fill the void and in personally recruiting volunteer lawyers to provide direct services."

