

# Equal Justice Wyoming

## Annual Report to the Wyoming Supreme Court July 2016

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### Message from the Executive Director

On behalf of the Board of Commissioners and the Staff of Equal Justice Wyoming, I am pleased to submit this annual report covering the 2016 fiscal year ending June 30, 2016.

Over the past year, Equal Justice Wyoming continued to build on existing projects while working to develop new initiatives that advance access to justice in our state. Our partnerships with other legal services organizations, the private bar, the leadership of the Wyoming State Bar, the courts, and countless community partners and social service agencies, make it possible for us to leverage our limited resources in order to serve more Wyoming citizens. Even as we reflect on this successful year, we also look forward to expanding projects, such as the Volunteer Reference Attorney Program and online video library, over the next year. We also thank the many volunteers and attorneys working for legal service programs across the state for their dedicated work to bring equal justice to all.

- *Angie Dorsch*

“If we are to keep our democracy, there must be one commandment: Thou shalt not ration justice.”

- Learned Hand

## **Introduction**

In 2016, a total of **3,453** persons received assistance from Equal Justice Wyoming (“Equal Justice”) and the programs we fund. Of that, 476 received self-help assistance and 2,977 received legal services from an attorney. There is a great demand for services.

During the past year, Equal Justice launched two new programs, the Self-Help Center located adjacent to our office, and the Volunteer Reference Attorney pilot program, placing volunteer attorneys in the Laramie County Courthouse to assist pro se litigants through the court process. We recognize that the current level of funding for legal services in our state is not adequate to provide an attorney for everyone in the civil justice system. The majority of applicants applying for legal services are turned away because there are simply not enough legal services and pro bono attorneys available to satisfy the need. The launch of the Self-Help Center and Volunteer Reference Attorney Program are in response to that unmet need. These resources help connect self-represented litigants to appropriate information, forms, and resources and foster an understanding of the court system and court procedures by self-represented litigants.

In addition to in-person assistance, we have also launched online resources to help connect the public with legal information. Our website now has a LiveChat feature where volunteer law students and an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer help people navigate the website to get them to the appropriate online resources and forms. We have also added more content to our website, including videos that explain some common legal issues and tips on representing yourself in court. We have begun work to build an online classroom to provide information, forms, videos, and other resources to self-represented litigants to address a variety of legal issues. The videos we are adding to the website will also be utilized in the online classroom, which we hope to launch in the coming months. Online resources are important in order to reach all areas of the state, including rural areas hours from a legal aid program’s office. We will continue to utilize technology to expand the reach of information and resources and look forward to building on the foundation of these new programs over the next year.

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## **Self-Help Resources and Legal Information for the Public**

### **Self-Help Center**

In March 2016, the Equal Justice Wyoming Self-Help Center (the “Center”) was launched. The Center is located in space adjacent to the Equal Justice Wyoming office, which the Wyoming Supreme Court made available for this purpose. The Center is staffed by an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer who assists people in-person by providing handouts on various legal topics, helping patrons navigate Equal Justice Wyoming’s website as well as

the Wyoming Judicial Branch website, and helps court users find the information, forms, and self-help resources they need, as well as providing information about legal service providers and other sources of legal assistance. There are two computer kiosks at the Center available to the public to search online legal resources and complete court documents. The Center is open 1:00 – 4:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday each week for walk-in assistance.

A computer kiosk was also placed in Laramie this summer at the University of Wyoming Hopper Law Library. The library provides space for the kiosk and reference librarians are on hand to assist patrons in accessing the legal resources.

### **LiveChat**

Although the Self-Help Center is located in Cheyenne, it also provides remote assistance to persons across the state through the online LiveChat feature on our website at [www.legalhelp.wy.gov](http://www.legalhelp.wy.gov). The LiveChat feature allows staff and volunteer operators to remotely help users navigate the website to find the online resources that are available to address a user’s legal issues. This is often necessary when a visitor to the site is not sure where to locate forms or information to address a particular problem. LiveChat operators do not provide legal advice, but they may refer users to legal service providers or the Wyoming State Bar’s Modest Means Program and Lawyer Referral Service when appropriate. University of Wyoming College of Law students began to provide some evening coverage of the LiveChat during the spring 2016 semester and our summer externs are helping to expand the number of law students volunteering in the fall.

220 users received assistance either in person or through LiveChat.

### **Wyoming Interactive Self-Help Center**



While the forms are automated by Equal Justice staff, the work to build the portal for the public to access the program is done by

Equal Justice continues the work of creating automated, interactive pro se form interviews. The project is an extensive undertaking that also relies on the support of the Wyoming Supreme Court’s IT department.

**Wyoming Interactive Self-Help Center**

- 458 new users created an account
- 182 used an automated interview
- 89 users completed and printed forms generated from the interview

the Wyoming Supreme Court IT staff. Both staff are currently working to upgrade to the newest version of HotDocs, the software used to automate the forms. Both the Divorce Without Children and Divorce With Children automated interviews have been completed in the new version of HotDocs. Once Court IT staff complete the portal to launch the new platform, this will add two new automated packets to the two that are currently available.

## Online Legal Resource Development

Equal Justice first launched our website in November of 2012. The site serves as the central online source of legal information and self-help resources in Wyoming. Since its launch, the amount of information and resources on the site has continually grown. In the past year we added information and videos about new topics, such as Social Security Disability Insurance, Supplemental Security Income and handling overpayments, forms and instructions for filing a notice of appeal to the Wyoming Supreme Court, tips for representing yourself in court, and much more.



The website averages 2,240 visits per month, receiving over **26,000 visits annually.**

Staff of Equal Justice Wyoming were also part of the Wyoming Supreme Court team that helped redesigned the Wyoming Judicial Branch website this year. This collaboration helped develop a user-friendly website where the public can easily navigate between the Judicial Branch website and Equal Justice website to more easily locate legal resources. As part of the redesign, additional pro se forms and instructions were also added to the Judicial Branch website with new sets of forms to be added in the coming months.

## Partnership with University of Wyoming College of Law Legal Education and Outreach

Although Equal Justice has had a partnership with the University of Wyoming College of Law for the past several years, during the last year we utilized that partnership to hold joint outreach events to the public. Educational programs provide valuable information that help individuals understand their legal rights and responsibilities.

The law school clinical programs, including the Civil Legal Services Clinic, the Family and Child Legal Advocacy Clinic, and the Estate Planning Practicum, participated in the Legal Resource Fair held in Cheyenne during National Celebrate Pro Bono Week the last week

of October 2015. Each of the clinics presented topics of interest to our target audience. Presentations were held on Wills and Estate Planning, Expungement of Criminal Records, Landlord Tenant Law, and Small Claims. After the presentations, the attendees that qualified financially were also able to meet with a lawyer for one-on-one legal advice to help address their individual legal issues. Over 20 people attended the legal fair, 14 attended the presentations, and 14 attended the legal advice clinic. UW's Law Students for Equal Justice club also assisted us in holding a legal advice clinic at the law school during National Celebrate Pro Bono week in October 2015. Ten individuals attended the legal advice clinic at the law school.

Gillette is an area of the state hit particularly hard by the current economic downturn. In June 2016, Equal Justice partnered with the Civil Legal Services Clinic to conduct an outreach event in Gillette. The event was held during lunch service at the Council of Community Services. Law students, under the supervision of their faculty supervisor, gave presentations on expungement of criminal records and veterans' benefits and then individuals were able to meet with the students for consultations. Ten individuals participated.

The Legal Services Clinic also partnered with Equal Justice to hold the same event at the Salvation Army in Cheyenne during a lunch service in June. Nine people attended the seminar on expungement or consulted with a law student at the event regarding various legal issues.

These outreach events not only assist the public who attend, but also help students gain hands-on experience. We hope that law students who participate in these events will gain a better understanding of the importance of pro bono service to low-income clients.

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## **Pro Bono Programs and Initiatives**

We continue our work to increase pro bono legal services over the past year. We strive to provide the necessary resources and support to enable attorneys to undertake pro bono legal services for low-income clients.

### **National Pro Bono Week**

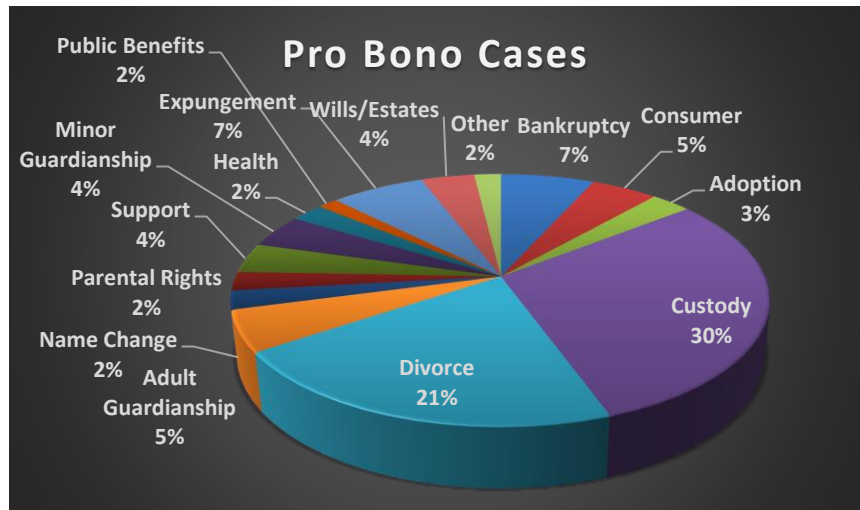
October 25 – 31, 2015 was National Celebrate Pro Bono Week. This was the third year Wyoming held a statewide celebration with events across the state. Governor Mead held a formal proclamation signing ceremony declaring the week Pro Bono Week. There were law nights and events sponsored by local bar associations across the state in

**CELEBRATE**  
**PRO BONO**

addition to the legal advice clinics hosted by Equal Justice. This was the first year we held a Legal Resource Fair in Cheyenne, which supported a range of outreach, education, and legal advice services. We hope to expand on this successful Pro Bono Week in October 2016.

### Pro Bono Legal Assistance

Equal Justice holds monthly walk-in legal advice clinics in Cheyenne and periodic clinics in Laramie where volunteer attorneys provide free legal consultations and assistance preparing and reviewing court documents for the clients. Beginning in May 2016, Equal Justice began partnering with the Wyoming State Bar in order to expand services. Individuals between 200% and 300% of the federal poverty level can speak to an attorney through the



In the 2016 fiscal year, our pro bono program **served 93 individuals at legal advice clinics**. Equal Justice opened **177 new cases** during the year, and of those, 31 are currently pending placement with a pro bono attorney.

State Bar’s program and be referred to the State Bar’s Modest Means Program if they need further assistance. We also receive direct applications outside of clinics and attempt to connect applicants with pro bono attorneys or self-help resources.

### Volunteer Reference Attorney Program

In March 2016, Equal Justice launched the Volunteer Reference Attorney pilot program in Cheyenne. Volunteer attorneys take “shifts” at the Laramie County Courthouse to assist self-represented litigants by answering questions, assisting with pro se forms, and explaining court procedures. The attorneys also answer questions about and assist litigants with pro se forms. A reference attorney is available on the first and third Thursday of each month from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Since the launch of the program, **35 self-represented litigants have received assistance** from a Volunteer Reference Attorney. The program has been very well received and we are working with the Access to Justice Commission to expand the program to other areas of the state over the next year.

## Training and Support for Volunteer Attorneys

Equal Justice holds free CLEs on areas of law that are the most common among our target population. The CLEs are held via webinar to reach attorneys across the state. The number of attendees increased significantly this year. We had a total of 1,725 attendees on our webinars. The average attendance was over 280. The webinars are archived on our online Pro Bono Portal for volunteers to access at any time. In addition to the CLE archive, there are a variety of resources on the Portal for volunteers, such as sample pleadings. Volunteer attorneys also have a pool of mentor attorneys who are willing to provide mentorship to attorneys taking on a pro bono case.

## Volunteer Attorney Receives Pro Bono Award

Ken McCartney, a solo attorney who is an active volunteer with Equal Justice Wyoming, received the Wyoming State Bar's 2015 Pro Bono Award for Legal Services Work for Indigent Clients. McCartney has handled a number of bankruptcy cases through the Volunteer Lawyer Program since signing up for the I'll Do One campaign.

## Board Member Presented with Champion of Justice Award

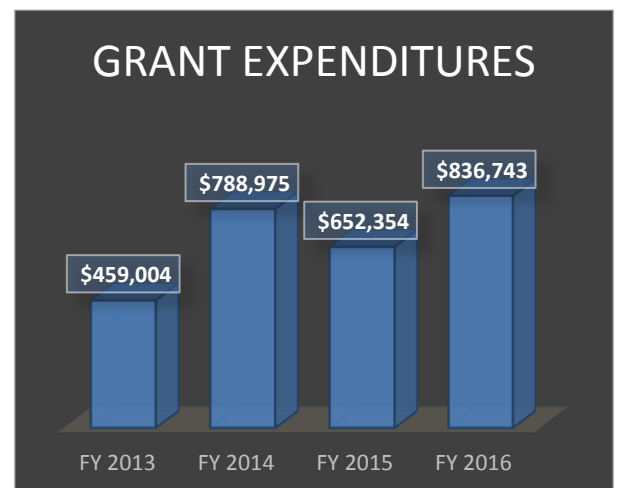
Stuart Day received the Wyoming State Bar's 2015 Champion of Justice Award for his extensive work to increase access to justice in Wyoming. Day is an inaugural member of the Equal Justice Wyoming Board of Commissioners, inaugural President of the Board of Directors for the Equal Justice Wyoming Foundation, and an active member of the Access to Justice Commission. Day and his firm, Williams Porter Day & Neville, accept pro bono cases from Equal Justice on a regular basis. This is the first year that the State Bar has presented a Champion of Justice Award.

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## Grants

### Supporting Statewide Civil Legal Services through Grants

Equal Justice's mission to establish and maintain a statewide delivery system for civil legal aid is also carried out through our grants to legal service providers across the state. Our grants greatly expand the availability of legal services in the state. In fiscal year 2016, we awarded over \$900,000 in grants and actual **grant expenditures totaled \$836,743.**

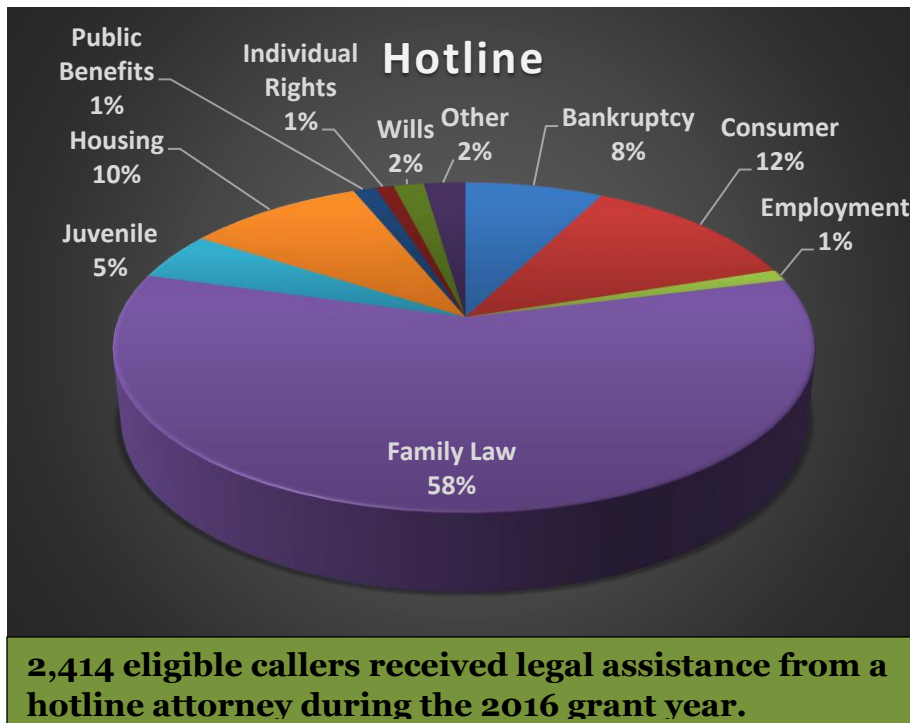


## Legal Aid of Wyoming

Legal Aid of Wyoming is a statewide legal service provider. Equal Justice provides funding for three different grants that have greatly expanded the number of people that Legal Aid of Wyoming is able to serve. The funding from Equal Justice has focused on expanding services to underserved areas of the state.

### Statewide Legal Advice and Intake Hotline

Equal Justice works in partnership with Legal Aid of Wyoming to maintain a statewide advice and intake hotline, which began operation in November 2012. We provide the funding for the hotline through a grant to Legal Aid of Wyoming, who operates the hotline utilizing two full-time attorneys. The hotline is available Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.



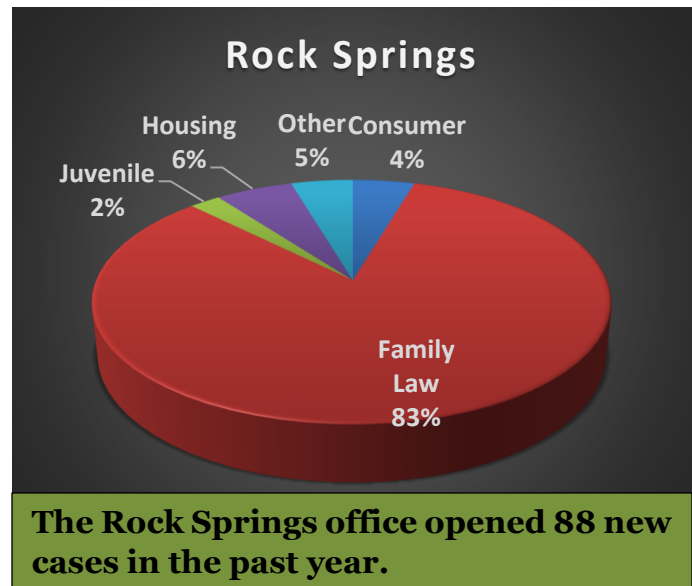
The hotline serves an important function in providing legal services to individuals throughout our state, including very remote and rural areas. Without the hotline, many individuals would simply not have access to legal advice. In addition to providing legal advice, the hotline also acts as a central point to apply for services.

Clients are screened for eligibility before any advice or services are provided, and an application is taken. This is an efficient way to screen and accept applications from all over the state. The hotline assists people in every county of Wyoming.

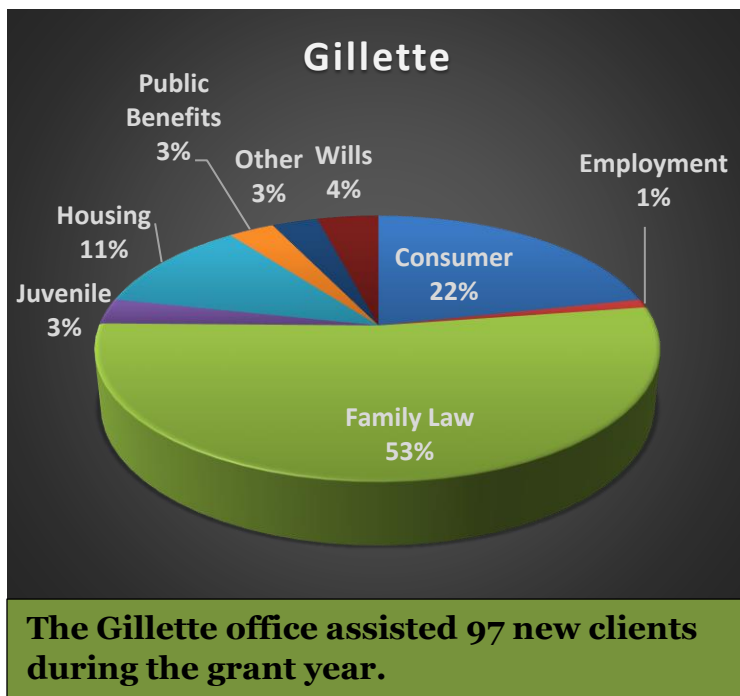


## Rock Springs Project Grant

In June 2013, Equal Justice partnered with Legal Aid of Wyoming to expand legal services to the southwest corner of the state for the first time. Equal Justice provides the necessary grant funds to Legal Aid of Wyoming to employ a full-time attorney. The space to house the attorney is donated by the Sweetwater County Family Justice Center, which is a one-stop help center for victims of family violence. The full-time attorney provides legal services to Sweetwater, Lincoln, and Uinta Counties.



## Gillette Project Grant



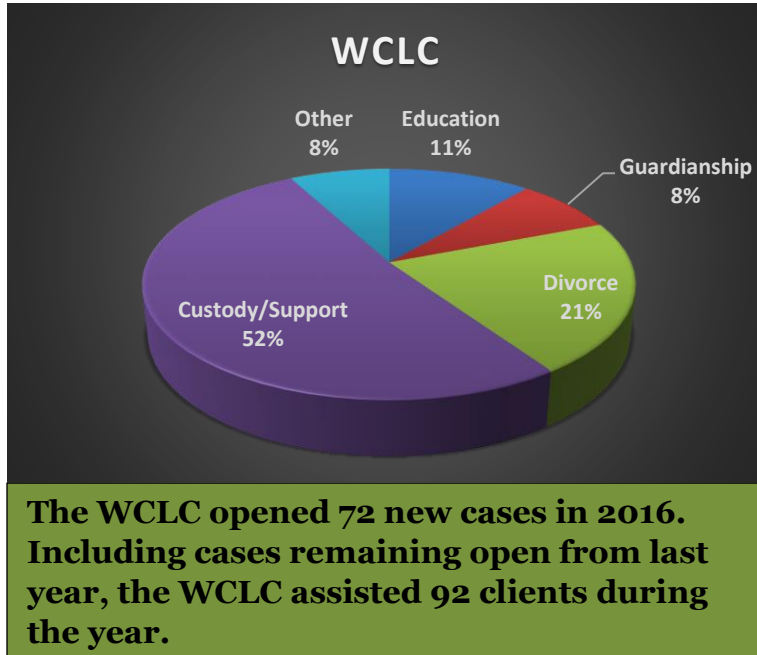
Grant funding from Equal Justice made it possible to open a legal aid office in northeast Wyoming for the first time in September 2013. Based on the successful model of the Rock Springs expansion, the same model was used to launch an office in Gillette. Equal Justice approached the Council of Community Service in Gillette, who agreed to donate the space for the attorney's office. Equal Justice provided a grant to Legal Aid of Wyoming to cover the cost to employ a full-time attorney for this expansion project. The Council of Community Services is a one-stop-shop for a variety of

social services for low-income persons. The addition of an attorney on site helps to provide a comprehensive set of services to address the needs of the low-income. The attorney serves Campbell, Crook, Johnson, Sheridan, and Weston Counties.

## Wyoming Children’s Law Center

The Wyoming Children’s Law Center provides legal assistance to children and families. These services help protect children’s and families’ rights. The WCLC provides

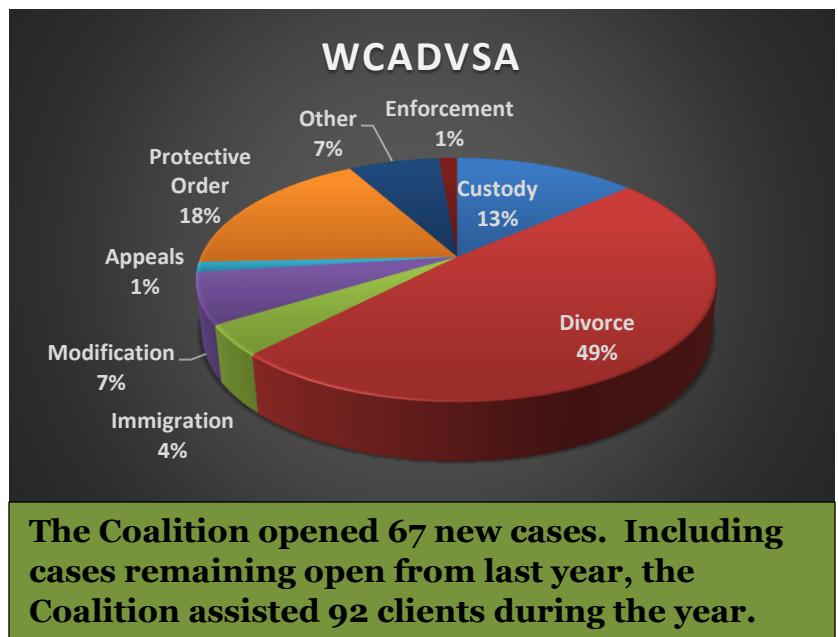
representation in a variety of areas that affect children, such as providing advocacy to ensure children receive special education services to which they are entitled, representing children or parents of children with disabilities, along with many other types of assistance.



The WCLC added an additional full-time attorney with the grant from Equal Justice. This increased the number of cases that the WCLC was able to handle over the past year, opening 72 new cases.

## Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

Equal Justice has provided grants to support the work of the Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (the “Coalition”) since 2012. The funds have helped expand the reach of the Coalition, which is a statewide legal aid provider serving victims of abuse. These services are vital to victims, helping not only with protective orders, but also helping victims with related issues, such as divorce or custody matters.



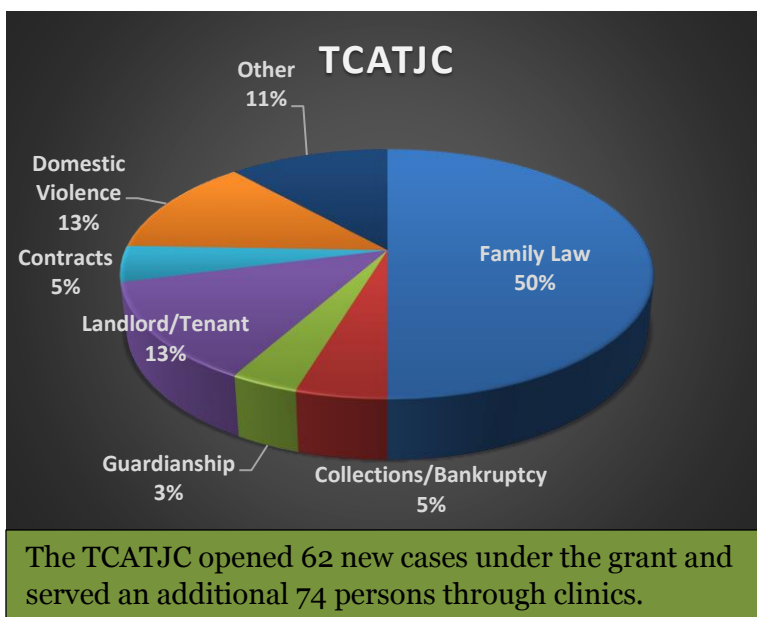
During the 2016 fiscal year, Equal Justice’s grant increased the number of attorneys at the Coalition. In the 2015 fiscal year, we provided grant funds to allow the Coalition to maintain two full-time attorneys.

Our grant covered one full-time position and roughly 30 percent of the second attorney’s salary.

In 2016, our funding added a third full-time attorney to the Coalition and a new satellite office in Cody. The addition of a satellite office allows the Coalition to more easily cover the entire state. The Cody office was only open for part of the grant year. We anticipate that services will continue to increase as that office is fully up and running.

### **Teton County Access to Justice Center**

The Teton County Access to Justice Center (“TCATJC”) was launched in 2012 with a grant from Equal Justice. It 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 County and the surrounding area. Clients that are eligible may also submit an application for legal representation. Eligible clients may be placed through the panel of private contract attorneys who provide legal services at no charge to the client. The services are paid at a reduced rate with the grant funds from Equal Justice.



### **Laramie County Community Partnership**

The Laramie County Community Partnership (“LCCP”) received a grant to launch Wyoming’s first Medical-Legal Partnership (“MLP”). MLPs are quickly expanding across the country to address the legal needs of patients who have legal issues that are adversely affecting their health. This can range from legal help to have a landlord address mold that is causing asthma attacks to helping clients receive the public benefits to which they are entitled in order to obtain and pay for medical care or medication they need. MLPs place a lawyer in the medical team to identify and address patients’ legal needs.

MLPs usually take 12 to 18 months to set up, working with the medical team to put in place appropriate policies for referring clients to the attorney. LCCP began setting up the MLP in January 2016 and has entered into an agreement to partner with HealthWorks clinic in Cheyenne to begin laying the groundwork to launch the MLP.

## Financial Summary

The funding generated from the filing fees continues to remain stable and generate revenue to cover all expenses of Equal Justice and our authorized budget.

The largest change in spending from the 2015 fiscal year was an increase of \$184,389 in grant expenditures. This accounts for the majority of the increased spending in the 2016 fiscal year.

### Additional Revenue

In the past year we 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. We project the fees will generate approximately \$30,000 per year. We sincerely appreciate the State Bar's commitment to supporting access to justice. As we continue to add new resources, programs and initiatives, we will also continue to explore additional sources of revenue to support our work.

## Summary of Expenditures

Salaries and Benefits \$360,344

Office Expense and Travel \$44,452

Telecommunications \$1,994

### Grants

Legal Aid of Wyoming \$322,942

Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault \$339,162

Wyoming Children's Law Center \$58,000

Teton County Access to Justice Center \$82,344

Laramie County Community Partnership \$34,295

Professional Services \$15,147

**Total\*** \$1,258,680

\*Total includes the June 2016 grant expenditures which were paid in July 2016..

## 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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