

Wyoming Center for Legal Aid



Wyoming Center
for Legal Aid

Annual Report to the Wyoming Supreme Court

July 2014

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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

On behalf of the staff and Board of Commissioners of the Wyoming Center for Legal Aid, it is my pleasure to present our 2014 Annual Report. This report provides a benchmark of our progress and accomplishments for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2014. It also serves as the platform upon which we will continue to build.

The work of the Center in our three years of existence has helped to create, support, and expand Wyoming's network of legal aid and *pro bono* programs and initiatives. However, the accomplishments of the Center would not be possible without the collaborative partnerships we have with our grantees, community organizations, the Wyoming State Bar, and the Wyoming Access to Justice Commission, and the tremendous support we receive from the Wyoming Supreme Court. I am very lucky to have the opportunity to work with so many talented and passionate people who share the vision of equal access to justice for the people of Wyoming and I look forward to continuing our unified work towards those ends.

*There can be no equal justice
where the kind of trial a man
gets depends on the amount
of money he has.*

-Hugo L. Black
U.S. Supreme Court Justice

- Angie Dorsch

CENTER'S HISTORY

The Wyoming Center for Legal Aid (the "Center") was created by the Wyoming Supreme Court on April 19, 2011, and is authorized and funded by the Wyoming Civil Legal Services Act, Wyo. Stat. 5-2-121 et. seq. The Center is governed by a Board of Commissioners appointed by the Supreme Court.

The Center is Wyoming's first state-sponsored civil legal aid program and is charged with developing and sustaining a statewide program for improving access to justice and providing civil legal services to low-income individuals in Wyoming. The Center provides a variety of legal resources for the public and helps connect individuals with information and legal services.

In its third year of operation, the Center continued to create and expand the availability of legal services and resources throughout the state. Utilizing our collaborative efforts, the Center is in the best position to facilitate, coordinate, and support the network of statewide legal services.

The Center continues to focus our efforts on working with stakeholders to leverage resources in order to have the greatest possible impact throughout the state.

HIGHLIGHTS

Over the past year, the Center once again made significant progress in expanding legal services and resources throughout the state. The number of individuals receiving direct legal assistance from an attorney increased by 22 percent.

Long-term projects began to bear fruit as the Center launched the much anticipated Wyoming Interactive Self-Help Form Center. The Center continued work on many other ongoing projects while also launching new initiatives and programs, including launching the I'll Do One *pro bono* campaign and setting up five remote access sites to deliver legal assistance to low-income individuals in rural Wyoming communities.

Due to funding from the Center, legal services were again greatly expanded to previously underserved areas of the state. In September 2013, Gillette saw the arrival of its first legal aid attorney. This was also the first year that the Rock Springs office was fully up and running. These two offices serve a total of eight counties that previously did not have regular access to legal aid.

In total, 3,497 low-income individuals received direct legal services of an attorney from the Center and Center funded programs.

Many more individuals benefited from the Center's projects and resources. The Center's self-help website received 19,660 visits. In addition, the Center and our grantees provided legal information and *pro se* assistance to an additional 266 individuals.



A total of 3,497 individuals received direct legal assistance through the Center and Center funded programs over the past year, a 22 % increase from FY 2013.

Self-Help & Technology Projects

LEGAL RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The Center launched a legal information and self-help website, www.legalhelpwy.org, in November of 2012. In the past fiscal year, the Center has seen a fourfold increase in the number of visitors to the site. The website saw **19,660 visits** in the past 12 months.

A significant amount of new content has been created and added to the site during the past year, with contributions from all three Center attorneys and a few outside attorneys. The site now contains information on 11 areas of law and **180 pages of valuable legal information and resources**.

Of particular interest to individuals representing themselves in court, the Center has established a **forms library** containing downloadable, fillable forms for the types of cases that frequently affect low-income clients. Each set of forms has detailed instructions to assist the user. The forms have proved popular with litigants, clerks and judges.

www.legalhelpwy.org

- ⇒ 19,660 site visits
- ⇒ 180 pages of legal information and resources
- ⇒ Legal self-help forms with detailed instructions
- ⇒ Pro Bono Portal for volunteer attorneys

A training regarding the Center's website and resources was also offered to the District Court Clerks Association at their annual meeting.

The Center's new Pro Bono Portal provides a variety of resources to assist volunteer attorneys.

PRO SE ASSISTANCE AND OUTREACH

The Center staff provided legal information and self-help services to 161 individuals in the past year. The staff conducted eight outreach events, ranging from presentations on employment law, to providing information to caregivers who required assistance with the *pro se* guardianship forms.

PORTAL LAUNCHED TO AID PRO BONO ATTORNEYS

The Center launched a **new Pro Bono Portal** to support *pro bono* attorneys in their work. The portal contains downloadable resources, resource links, and sample pleadings. The portal currently contains six topic areas including: family law, housing, consumer law, public benefits, trusts & estates, and expungements. Additional resources on the website include a CLE archive, litigation toolkit, and a limited scope toolkit. The Center plans to add significantly more resources in the coming year. Since launching the portal in April 2014, 139 *pro bono* and legal aid attorneys have been provided access to the portal.

WYOMING INTERACTIVE SELF-HELP CENTER

After two years of planning, preparation and programming, the Center has completed the first in a series of interactive *pro se* form interviews based on the Family Law *Pro Se* packets currently available from the Wyoming Supreme Court. This was a time intensive project that finally saw fruition when the Center, in collaboration with the Wyoming Supreme Court and Court Technology department, launched the portal in June 2014.



Litigants can access the interactive interviews at the new **Wyoming Interactive Self-Help Center**, available at <https://wise.courts.state.wy.us>. The first packet in the series to be automated was the Divorce Without Children packet. Remaining form packets are also near completion. A Divorce With Children interview is planned to be released this fall, and will be fol-

lowed by interviews for modification, enforcement or establishment of a child custody order.

The portal enables litigants to create an account, save their information and return later to complete the forms, at their convenience. The automation process, using a document assembly software called Hot-docs, walks the litigant user through a series of question and answer interviews while collecting their essential information.

At the end of the interview, the litigant is presented with complete and accurate family law forms, ready for printing and filing.

Wyoming Interactive Self-Help Center

- ⇒ <https://wise.courts.state.wy.us>
- ⇒ **Users can create an account, save information and print forms that are ready for filing**
- ⇒ **User-friendly plain language format**
- ⇒ **Increases efficiency for users and Courts**

CENTER'S BOARD PRESIDENT RECOGNIZED

Patrick Day, President of the Center's Board of Commissioners, was recognized for his leadership role in shaping the Center when he received the 2013 Community Service Award from the Wyoming State Bar in September 2013. Pat was nominated for the award by the Hon. James Burke, Chief Justice of the Wyoming Supreme Court. Pat's vision and dedication has been instrumental to the Center's progress and accomplishments.

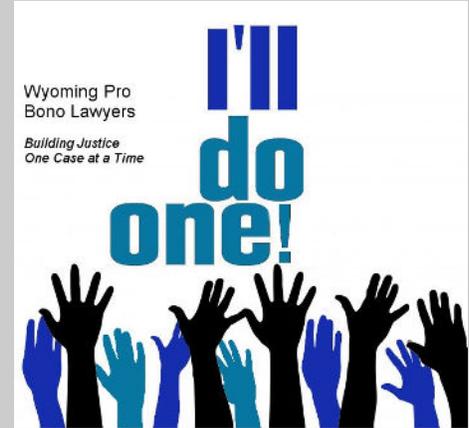
PRO BONO PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

During the past year, the Center began to build a formal *pro bono* program to attract and retain volunteer lawyers who are willing to donate their time and talents to provide legal services to low-income individuals.

The Center, in partnership with the Wyoming State Bar, launched a *pro bono* recruitment campaign in the fall of 2013, entitled “I’ll Do One”. A total of 27 attorneys have formally signed up under this initiative to undertake a *pro bono* case, however, many more attorneys who have not signed up have also agreed to take a case.

Additionally, and also in conjunction with the Wyoming State Bar, the Center launched what was a national initiative to recruit *pro bono* attorneys to assist veterans through the Army One Source program. A total of 60 attorneys from across the state have signed up to provide legal services to veterans.

In March of this year, the Center received support from the statewide bankruptcy bar. Five bankruptcy attorneys volunteered to take *pro bono* bankruptcy cases. The Center works with the clients to gather the majority of the documents required to file a bankruptcy petition before placing the case with a *pro bono* attorney. This method has been highly favorable amongst the volunteer attorneys and has been an efficient and effective way to get legal assistance to those facing financial hardships.



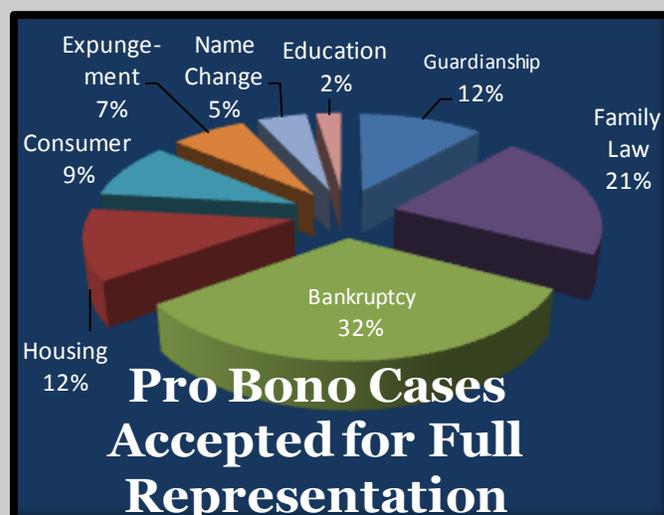
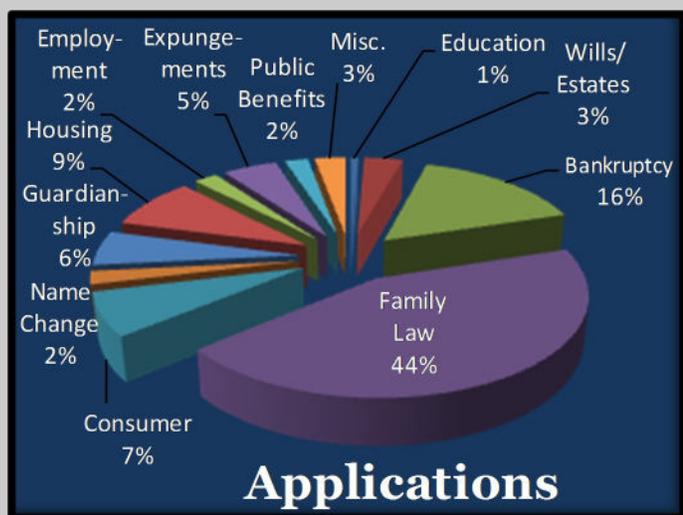
- ⇒ **118 clients received legal help from a *pro bono* attorney**
- ⇒ **30 attorneys accepted a *pro bono* case**
- ⇒ **45 attorneys volunteered at legal advice clinics**
- ⇒ **4 clients received legal representation from a reduced-fee attorney paid by the Center**



PRO BONO CASE STATISTICS

During the 2014 fiscal year, **118 clients received some form of legal assistance from a pro bono attorney** through the Center's *pro bono* programs. Of those clients, **43 client's cases were accepted for full-representation by a volunteer attorney**. The remainder of the clients received either advice or limited scope representation from a *pro bono* attorney.

The majority of the Center's applicants needed assistance with a family law matter. Fifty percent of the applications received last year were in the areas of family law and guardianships. Although family law was the highest need, it remains the area of law that the Center has the fewest volunteer attorneys. One of the highest priorities of the Center's *pro bono* program in the next year will be to recruit and train more attorneys who are willing to accept family law cases.



REMOTE ACCESS SITES

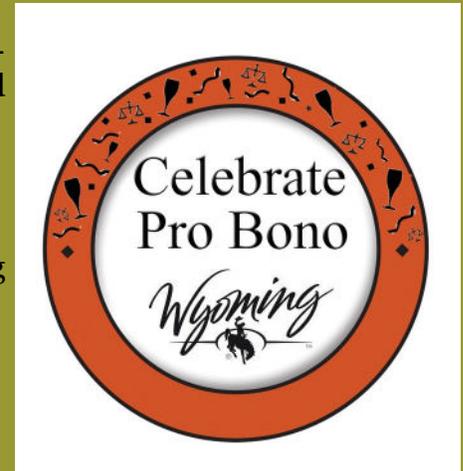
In 2013, the Wyoming Access to Justice Commission received an Access to Justice Innovations Grant from the American Bar Association. The Commission, in collaboration with the Center, developed a plan to place remote access sites in five underserved rural communities in Wyoming. The Center identified community partner organizations in each of the communities who volunteered to provide space for the sites and their staff to man the sites. The Center equipped each site with computers with Skype capabilities. The computers were used to host Skype clinics in order to match the need for legal advice and assistance in rural areas with *pro bono* attorneys willing to meet with the client remotely using Skype.

The remote access sites are also available for any of the Center's grantees or the legal clinics at the University Of Wyoming College Of Law to meet remotely with clients in those communities. The goal of the project is to provide clients in rural areas with "face-to-face" legal help from an attorney without the travel time and expense.

WYOMING CELEBRATES NATIONAL PRO BONO WEEK

October 20-26, 2013, the Center joined with the Wyoming State Bar, legal aid programs and local bar associations across the state to hold *pro bono* events in recognition of National Celebrate *Pro Bono* Week. This was the first year that Wyoming organized state-wide participation in the event. Sixteen *pro bono* events were held throughout the state with 50 attorneys volunteering at these events. Governor Matt Mead signed a proclamation declaring the week *Pro Bono* Week in Wyoming in recognition of the contribution and impact volunteer attorneys have in their communities. *Pro Bono* Week was a success and we have already begun planning for the 2014 celebration.

- ⇒ **120 Individuals received free legal services**
- ⇒ **50 Attorneys volunteered at *Pro Bono* Week events**
- ⇒ **16 *Pro bono* events held throughout Wyoming**



LEGAL ADVICE CLINICS

The Center began hosting monthly walk-in legal clinics in September, 2013. In addition, a clinic was held in Rawlins, and three walk-in clinics specifically targeted to veterans were held in Laramie and Cheyenne. A total of 72 clients were served, and 45 attorneys volunteered their time. The Center



plans to continue the Laramie County clinics on a monthly basis, and hopes to assist more county bar associations in holding clinics in their respective counties. The Center offers assistance to the local bars to help get these started.

- ⇒ **45 Attorneys volunteered at clinics**
- ⇒ **72 Clients received assistance**
- ⇒ **3 Veteran specific legal clinics**

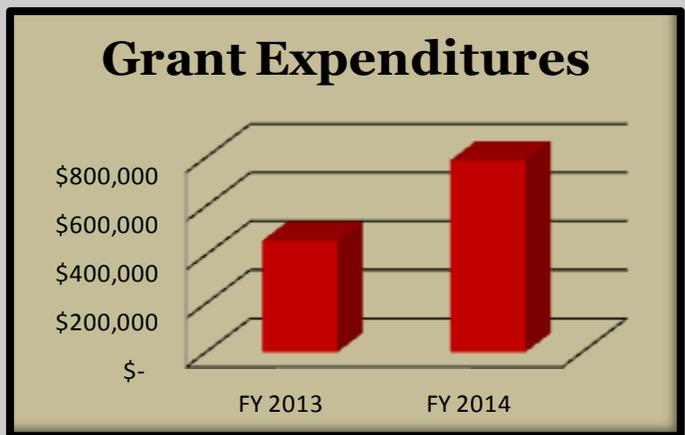
FREE TRAINING AND CLE FOR PRO BONO ATTORNEYS

In the past year, the Center began offering regular, monthly CLEs statewide, via webinar, on topics that are often encountered by low-income clients. The goal is to encourage attorneys to take on a *pro bono* case in an area of law they may not typically practice. The Center will continue to offer these training opportunities in the upcoming year, with four CLEs already scheduled for the next four months.

GRANTS AND CASE DATA

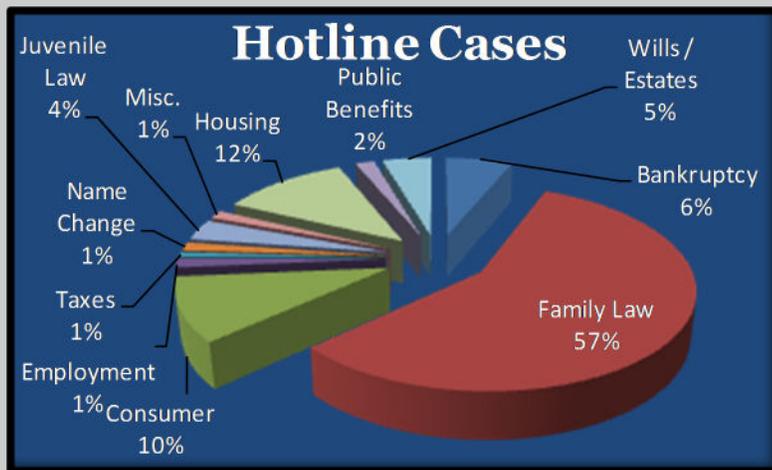
STATEWIDE DELIVERY OF CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES

The Center’s mission to establish and maintain a statewide delivery system for civil legal aid is made possible through our partnerships with community organizations and *pro bono* attorneys, and also through the services provided by the Center’s grantees. Funding from the Center has greatly expanded the availability of legal services across the state over the past two years. Although the Center awarded \$750,000 in grants in fiscal year 2013, because many of the grantees’ programs were new, it took some time to get the new projects off the ground and only \$459,000 of grant funds were expended in 2013. During the 2014 fiscal year, the Center provided **\$789,000** in grant funds to our four grantees. This was a **71 percent increase** in grant expenditures over fiscal year 2013. The Center’s grant funds helped expand the services offered by our grantees.



LEGAL ADVICE AND INTAKE HOTLINE

The Center worked with **Legal Aid of Wyoming, Inc.** to establish a statewide advice and intake hotline which began operation in November 2012. The Center provides the funding for the hotline, and the hotline is operated by Legal Aid of Wyoming. The hotline is available Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The hotline plays an important role in increasing access to legal services in our large, rural state. The hotline allows applicants to call and speak to an attorney and make an application for legal services over the phone, making legal help accessible to any eligible applicant, no matter how far they live from the nearest legal aid office.

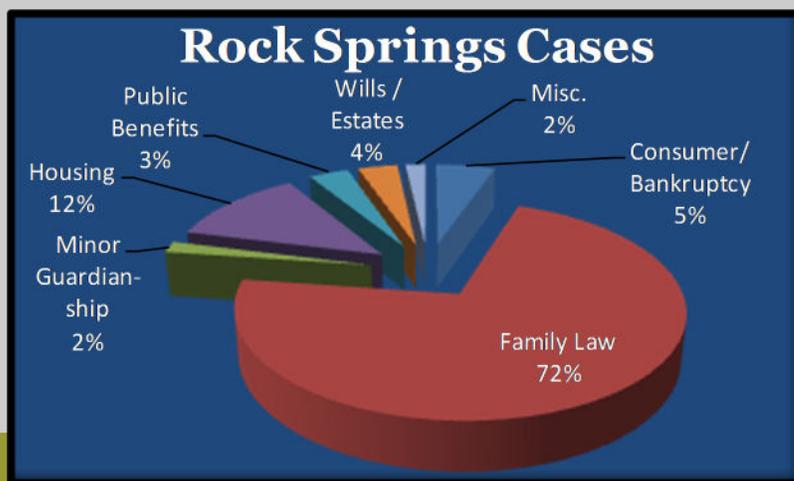


3,105 eligible callers received legal assistance from a hotline attorney in FY 2014.

ROCK SPRINGS PROJECT

June 2013 saw the arrival of Rock Springs' first legal aid attorney. Since last fiscal year saw only one month of this project, in reality, this was the first year for the project. A collaboration between organizations has made this expansion of services possible. The Center provides the necessary funds to **Legal Aid of Wyoming** to employ a full-time attorney in Rock Springs. The **Sweetwater County Family Justice Center** has donated the space and overhead. This collaborative relationship between organizations has made it feasible to open the Rock Springs office.

Prior to the Center's grant, Legal Aid of Wyoming had opened only three cases in Rock Springs and the surrounding area. **In FY 2014, the Rock Springs office opened 57 cases.**



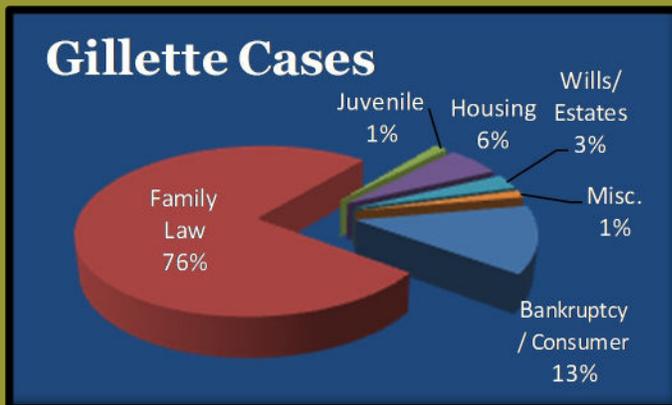
GILLETTE PROJECT

In September 2013, a grant from the Center made it possible to open a legal aid office in Gillette for the first time. Based on the success of the Rock Springs office, the Center used the same model in planning the Gillette office. The Center approached the **Council of Community Services** in Gillette and they agreed to donate the space to house the attorney. The Center provided the grant funds to **Legal Aid of Wyoming** in order to employ a full-time attorney for the position.

Prior to the grant from the Center, Legal Aid of Wyoming had only represented two clients in litigation and provided brief services, such as document review, to an additional 12 clients in the Gillette area.

After opening the Gillette office, 70 clients received legal assistance in the Gillette service area.

Having a full-time staff attorney in Gillette has greatly expanded services to Gillette and the surrounding area. The staff attorney provides services to Campbell, Crook, Weston, Johnson, and Sheridan Counties.



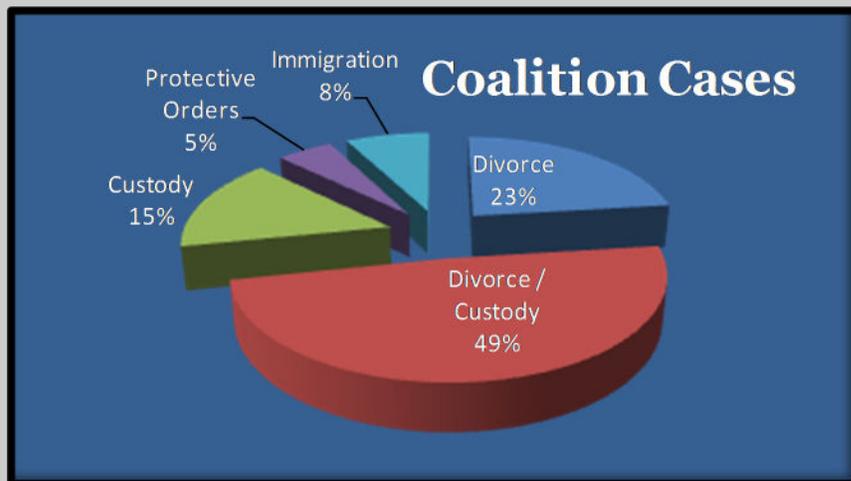
In addition to the hotline, Rock Springs, and Gillette grants provided to Legal Aid of Wyoming, the Center also provided a Private Attorney Involvement grant. However, no new cases were opened under the grant as Legal Aid of Wyoming moved away from this model of service delivery and the funds were used to complete cases remaining open from FY 2013.

COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

This was the second year the Center provided grant funds to the Coalition. The Center’s funds have allowed the Coalition to maintain two full-time attorneys to handle cases throughout Wyoming to assist victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. The Center’s grant pays 100 percent of one attorney’s position and a portion, roughly 25 percent, of a second full-time attorney position.

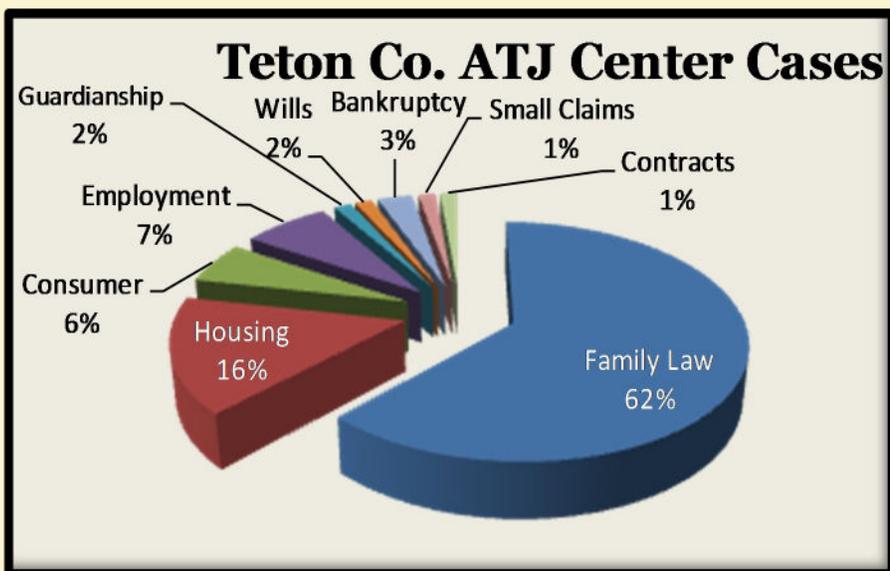
The Coalition provides holistic and comprehensive legal services to clients throughout the state. The Coalition currently has cases pending in 15 counties across Wyoming.

During FY 2014, 39 victims received comprehensive legal services from the Coalition.



TETON COUNTY ACCESS TO JUSTICE CENTER

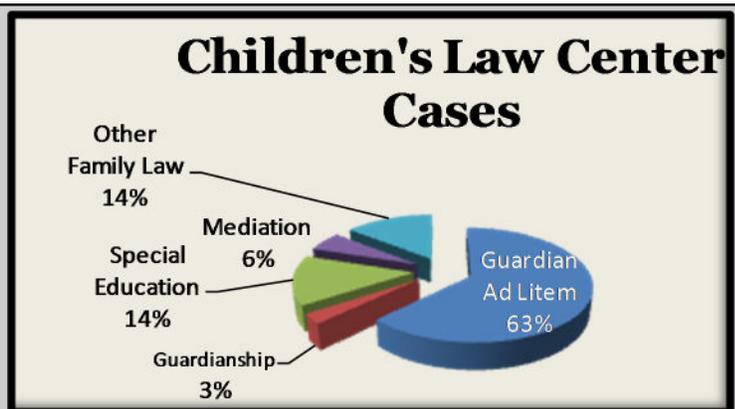
The Teton County Access to Justice Center was created in 2012 with a Center grant and has continued to expand its services since that time. The TCAJC is housed in the Teton County law library and provides legal information and self-help services in addition to providing legal representation through a panel of private contract attorneys. Eligible clients may be referred to a private attorney who provides service at no charge to the client. The services are paid at a reduced rate by the TCAJC using the Center’s grant funds.



The TCAJC provided an attorney for 69 clients and assisted an additional 105 *pro se* parties by providing legal information and self-help resources.

WYOMING CHILDREN'S LAW CENTER

The Wyoming Children's Law Center received a grant from the Center to provide assistance to children and families with legal needs. The WCLC continues to fill an important need by providing advocacy to ensure children receive special education services to which they are entitled. This helps ensure children with disabilities receive an appropriate education.



35 families received assistance from WCLC

CENTER FINANCIAL SUMMARY

The Center's financial position remains strong. The special revenue funding from filing fees has remained stable and continues to generate adequate revenue to cover the Center's authorized budget.

The Center's total expenditures for the 2014 fiscal year increased due to several of factors. The largest increase was in the amount expended on grants. Although in 2013 the Center awarded \$750,000 in grants, many of the projects and programs were new and took time to get off the ground, which resulted in grant expenditures of only \$459,004 during the 2013 fiscal year compared to \$788,975 in the 2014 fiscal year.

The Center reduced spending in other areas and re-focused resources. The Center has focused on increasing grant funds available for direct representation of clients as well as increased focus on *pro bono* programs. For these reasons, the Center's expenditures for private attorney contracts were also reduced.

The total expenditure for staff salaries and benefits was substantially higher than previous years due solely to the fact that this was the first year the Center was fully staffed for the entire year. All staff salaries remained unchanged from the previous year.

The Center spent slightly less than budgeted for the year, but as programs and services continue to expand, a growing demand for the limited resources will continue.

EXPENDITURE SUMMARY

Salaries and Benefits	\$350,043
Office Expenses and Travel	\$25,006
Telecommunications	\$3,482

Grants

Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault	\$267,216
Legal Aid of Wyoming,	\$347,825
Teton County Access to Justice Center	\$112,500

Wyoming Children's Law Center	\$61,434
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Professional Services

Private Attorney Contracts	\$10,290
Other Professional Services	\$529

TOTAL* **1,178,325**

*Total includes the June 2014 grant expenditures of \$65,032 which were paid in July 2014.



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www.legalhelpwy.org



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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.

Wyoming Center for Legal Aid
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