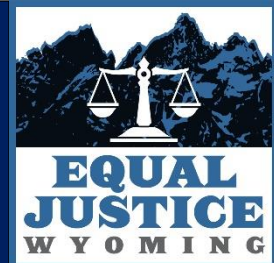


Equal Justice Wyoming

Annual Report to the Wyoming Supreme Court July 2021



"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

- *Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

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Message from the Executive Director

2021 was another challenging year due to the pandemic, but our pro bono attorneys and legal aid providers continue to step up to the challenge and serve some of the most vulnerable individuals in the state. I am grateful for all the wonderful work that has been done in Wyoming over the past year supporting and providing assistance to those most in need. The following report details the work of Equal Justice Wyoming, our grantees, and our volunteers for the year ending June 30, 2021.

- *Angie Dorsch*

**3,992 people received legal services
and self-help assistance in FY 2021**

Pro Bono Programs and Initiatives

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.

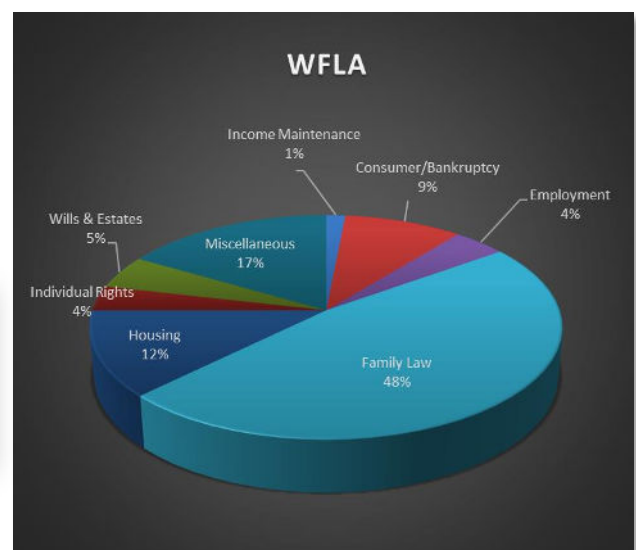


"I was needing help in developing strategies to deal with an unemployment benefits issue. The attorney that helped me was outstanding and insightful. I am very grateful and appreciative to [the attorney] and for this site. I don't yet know the resolution of my issue but I am much closer now than I was before. Thank you!"

– Feedback from WFLA client in FY 2021

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. WFLA has been a particularly important resource during the pandemic.

**332 legal questions answered by
19 volunteer attorneys
17% increase in questions answered**



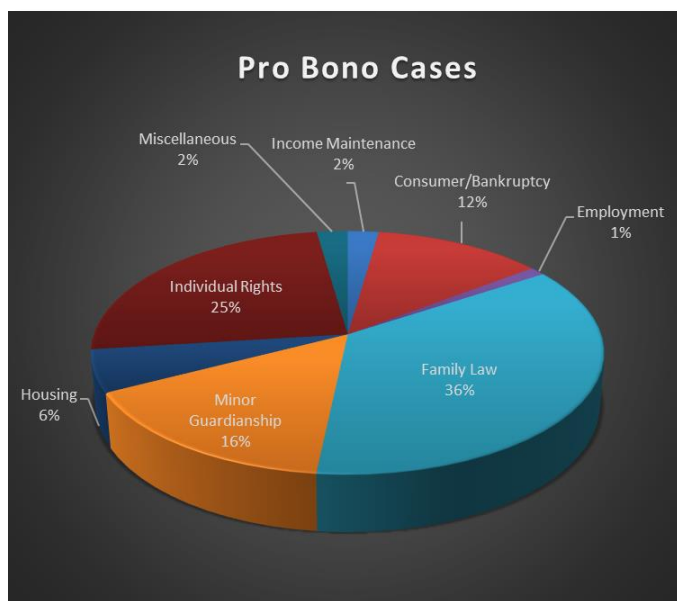
Volunteer Lawyers Program

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.

"I am very pleased with all the support Equal Justice WY has given me...Thank you so much!"

"[The legal help] worked for me so well! Changed my life."

– Feedback from clients who received legal assistance through the Volunteer Lawyers Program in FY 2021



The pandemic has disrupted our ability to hold in-person legal clinics and other pro bono events, but we hope to be able to resume in-person legal events in the near future.

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, 89 legal matters were handled by volunteer attorneys over the past year.

89 matters handled by pro bono attorneys

Volunteer Reference Attorney Program

The Volunteer Reference Attorney Program (VRA) 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. EJW recruits volunteer attorneys to hold “office hours” in the participating courts each month. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, these in-person events, which are typically held in confined spaces in the courthouses, were cancelled. We have resumed VRA sessions in two counties and hope to get all of our pre-pandemic VRA sites back up and running in the coming months. In the meantime, we continue to refer self-represented litigants to services that are available remotely.

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 2021, our website had 41,478 site visits by 30,111 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 in FY 2021

**41,478 site visits and
30,111 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 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 appropriate information and trusted resources. In FY 2021, 299 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.

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

AmeriCorps VISTA Program

We anticipated new challenges and new successes over the past year, and we were not disappointed. The Equal Justice Wyoming AmeriCorps VISTA program remained strong and inspiring throughout. Seven VISTAs and a VISTA Leader served with us, including three serving at our first-time subsites, Wyoming Children's Law Center, Cheyenne Regional Medical Center, and Habitat for Humanity of Laramie County. At a time when the future was entirely uncertain, these individuals left their homes and moved west to help make the future brighter for the citizens of Wyoming.

During their year of service, our VISTAs managed successful public awareness campaigns, created staff training materials, adapted resources for the virtual world, and launched a podcast that connected non-profit organizations around the state. We are proud of the ingenuity and optimism that our VISTAs

brought to their work, and we are grateful for the impact they had on their adopted communities. In 2021-2022, we will have seven new VISTAs serving with us, including a third generation of VISTAs at the Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault and the Department of Health, Aging Division. We're confident that these seven volunteers will be valued additions to their host organizations and will increase capacity for bringing needed services to people all across the state.

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 2021, we provided a total of \$1,284,583 in grants, including \$421,008 of VOCA (Victims of Crime Act) funds from the Division of Victim Services to increase civil legal services to victims of crime. In total, 3,272 clients received legal services through the grant programs we fund and administer.

\$1,284,583 provided in grants
3,272 clients received services

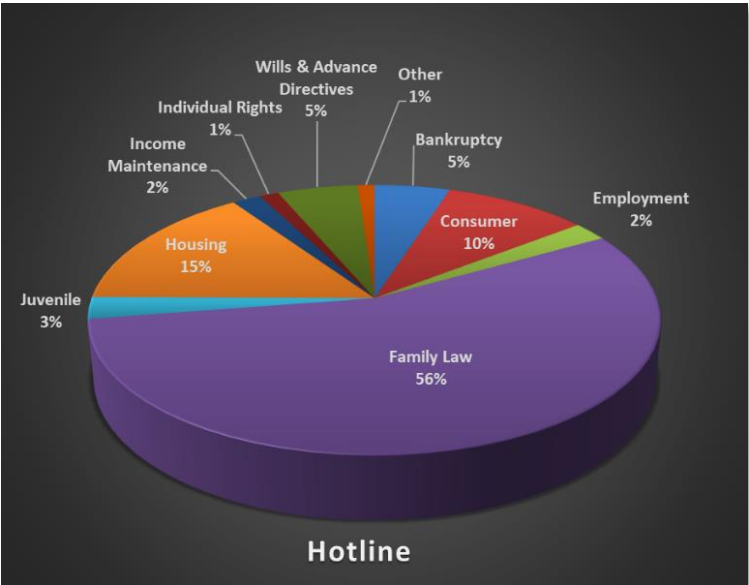
Equal Justice Wyoming Grantees

Legal Aid of Wyoming, Inc.

Legal Aid of Wyoming is a statewide legal service provider with offices in Casper, Cheyenne, Cody, Gillette, Lander, and Rock Springs. In addition to providing funding for 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.



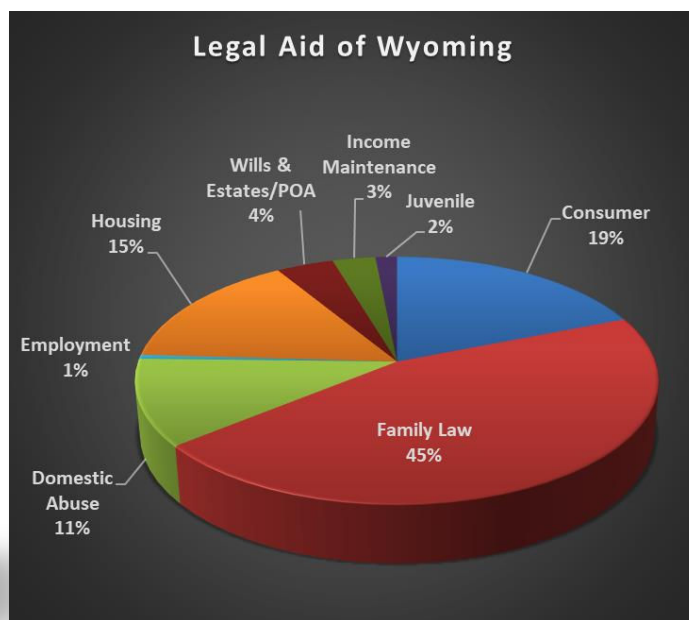
Especially now, as people increasingly need to access legal assistance remotely, the hotline is an effective and efficient way to provide legal advice and to process applications for people across the entire state, including rural and underserved areas. Clients are screened for eligibility before any 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 2,435 callers in FY 2021.

2,435 callers received legal help over the hotline

Legal Aid of Wyoming Cases

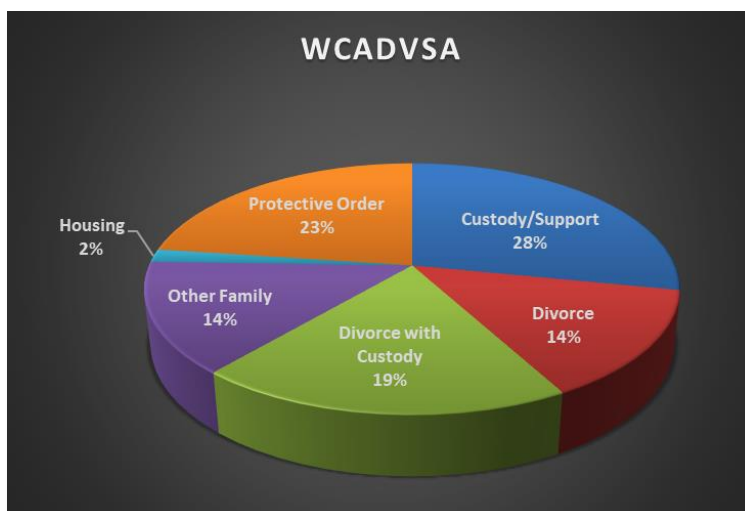
Beginning in June 2013, Equal Justice partnered with Legal Aid of Wyoming by awarding grants to expand services throughout the state with the addition of three new offices. Since that time, Equal Justice has continued to provide the necessary funds to operate offices in Rock Springs, Gillette, and Cody. These communities previously had not had a legal aid office. Legal Aid of Wyoming staff attorneys handled 196 legal matters under the grant in FY 2021.

196 legal matters handled in 2021



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.



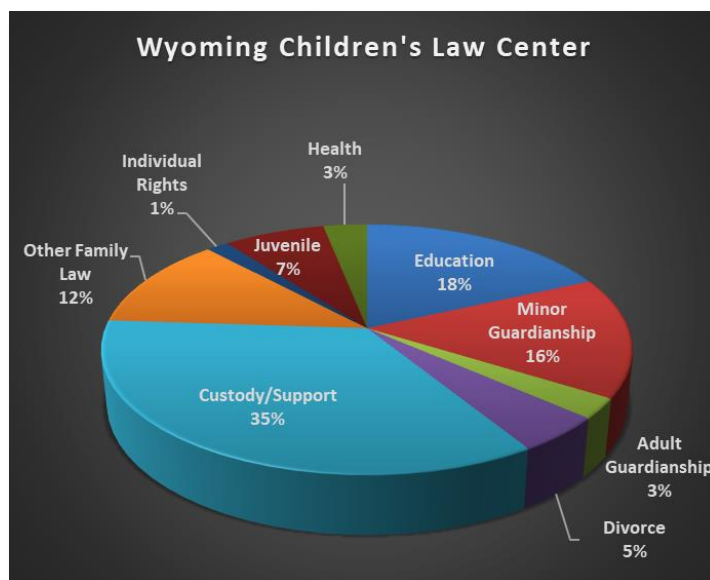
Equal Justice has provided substantial funding to support the work of the Coalition since 2012. The funds have expanded the availability of legal services and have allowed the Coalition to open satellite offices in Casper, Cody, Fort Washakie, and Gillette, in addition to maintaining their primary office in Laramie. The Coalition handled 303 cases in FY 2021.

303 cases handled in 2021

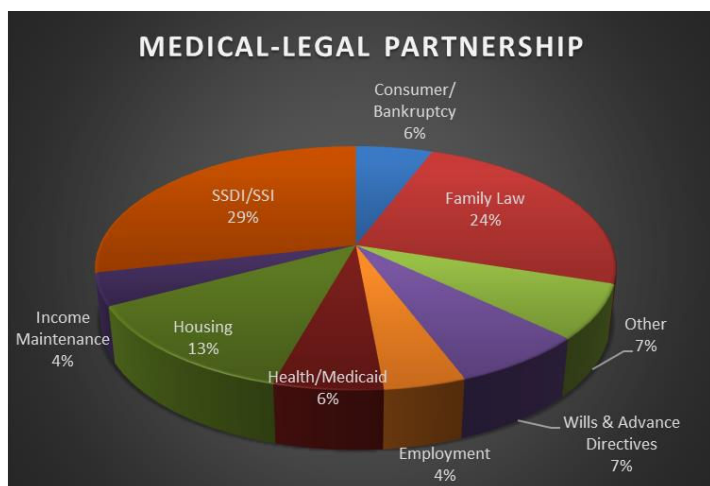
Wyoming Children's Law Center

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 grant from Equal Justice supports a wide variety of civil legal services, allowing the WCLC to handle 192 cases in FY 2021.

192 cases handled in 2021



Medical-Legal Partnership at Cheyenne Regional Medical Center



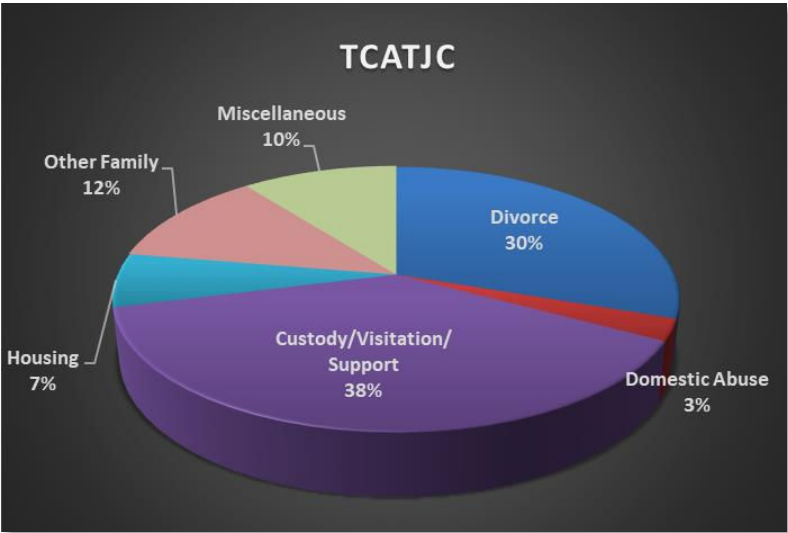
Cheyenne Regional Medical Center received a grant from Equal Justice to operate a Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP). MLPs are forming across the country to address health-harming legal issues. Cheyenne Regional's MLP handles various legal matters ranging from landlord-tenant cases where safe housing is 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. In FY 2021, the MLP attorney handled 70 legal matters.

70 cases handled in 2021

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 2021, the TCATJC provided legal assistance in 76 cases.



76 cases handled in 2021



Financial Summary

The revenue generated from filing fees that fund Equal Justice has declined significantly over the past several years. We have been able to offset some of the decreased revenue through new sources of funding and by reducing our staff. We maintain a vacant Staff Attorney/Pro Bono Coordinator position.

Additional Revenue

In 2015, Equal Justice began receiving additional funding from the increase in pro hac vice fees paid by out-of-state attorneys. The fees are used to supplement our grants.

We receive VOCA (Victims of Crime Act) funds; however, we received a reduction in VOCA funding for FY 2021.

We receive a grant from the Corporation for National & Community Service to manage our AmeriCorps VISTA program.

As access-to-justice programs across the country are faced with decreased 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	\$339,304
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Office Expense and Travel	\$8,825
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Telecommunications	\$3,550
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Grants*

Legal Aid of Wyoming	\$379,907
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Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault	\$672,551
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Wyoming Children's Law Center	\$84,000
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Teton County Access to Justice Center	\$62,395
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Cheyenne Regional Medical Center	\$85,731
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Special Services	\$15,670
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Total*	\$1,651,933
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*Includes the June 2021 grant expenditures which were paid in July 2021.

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

www.equaljustice.wy.gov