



AmeriCorps State Justice for Montanans Project

Presentation to
Montana Commission
on Community Service
October 4, 2010

Overview

- The goal of the Justice for Montanans Project is to expand access to justice throughout Montana
 - Civil (not criminal) issues
 - Primarily serving low-income people
 - Empowering people by providing legal information and other self-help legal services so litigants can clearly present their positions to courts and other people involved
 - Engaging members to consider future service, including service in access to justice issues

- 13 full-time members currently serving

Oath administered by Chief Justice Mike McGrath



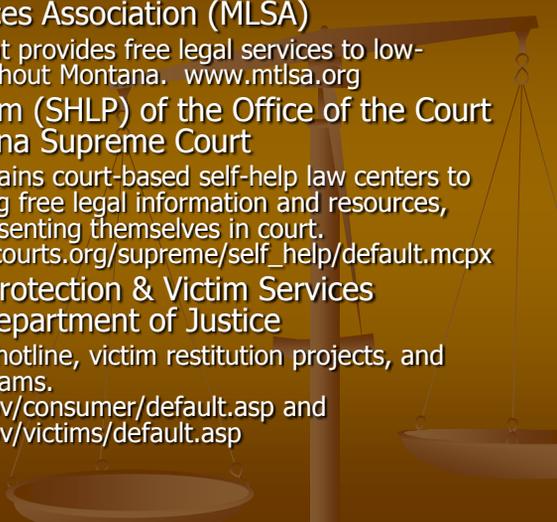
2010-2011 Members: Sworn in September 14th



Placements

- Members are based in the following communities:
 - Helena (4)
 - Missoula
 - Billings (3)
 - Bozeman
 - Kalispell
 - Great Falls (2)
 - Sidney
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Project Partners

- Montana Legal Services Association (MLSA)
 - Nonprofit law firm that provides free legal services to low-income people throughout Montana. www.mtlsa.org
 - Self-Help Law Program (SHLP) of the Office of the Court Administrator, Montana Supreme Court
 - Establishes and maintains court-based self-help law centers to assist people in finding free legal information and resources, especially those representing themselves in court. http://www.montanacourts.org/supreme/self_help/default.mcp
 - Office of Consumer Protection & Victim Services (OCPVS), Montana Department of Justice
 - Includes a consumer hotline, victim restitution projects, and other consumer programs. <http://www.doj.mt.gov/consumer/default.asp> and <http://www.doj.mt.gov/victims/default.asp>
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What do members do? MLSA

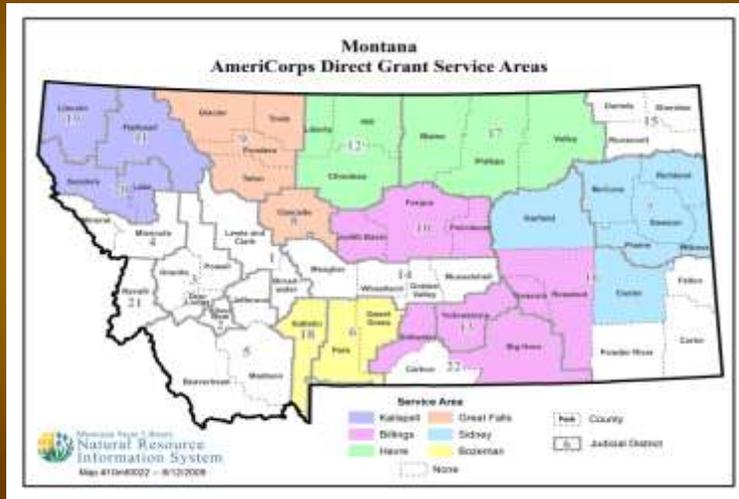
- MLSA members' main function is to help with statewide intake, the processing of applications for services and scheduling of appointments with advocates
 - HelpLine members assist with processing applications over the phone
 - Intake & Outreach members primarily process written applications, including "walk-ins" who need assistance
 - Members also help with clinics, such as MLSA's bankruptcy clinic, by communicating with clients before each clinic, proctoring the clinic sites, and developing and processing surveys
 - One member will serve with the Native American Unit, by going to reservations on "circuit rides" and processing applications onsite for people who do not have telephones, computers, or the ability to travel to an MLSA office

What do members do? OCPVS & SHLP

- The OCPVS member(s) will primarily serve on a consumer hotline and participate in victim restitution programs and other projects.
- SHLP members serve in court-based self-help law centers
 - Designed to help people find legal information and resources
 - Especially focused on self-represented litigants
 - No income restrictions, but many served are low-income people who cannot afford an attorney, especially in family law cases

SHLP Service Areas

(Sidney position not filled to date)



Other Member Activities

- Recruiting volunteers, including pro bono lawyers and law students
- Outreach
- Serving as LiveHelp Navigators, to assist people in finding legal information online

MontanaLawHelp.org and LiveHelp



Members Building Relationships

- State and Local Bar Associations
- Judges, including supervisors
- Clerks of Court
- Librarians
- Local Service Agencies (ex. Offices of Public Assistance, Human Resource Councils)
- Low-income People

Why are relationships important?

- The access to justice community frequently collaborates on projects, and strong relationships assist in that process.
- Example: Technology Initiative Grant from the Legal Services Corporation, recently awarded to MLSA and others including SHLP
 - To expand existing LiveHelp program to set up virtual self-help law centers in communities (to be determined) where there is no physical presence
 - Members' presence throughout Montana will assist in this effort

Contact Information

- www.justiceformontanans.org
- Director, Michelle Hauer
 - 616 Helena Ave., Suite 100, Helena, MT 59601
 - (406)442-9830 x 18, fax (406)442-9817
 - mhauer@mtlsa.org