



## **AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION CHILD CUSTODY AND ADOPTION PRO BONO PROJECT ANNOUNCES 2005 GRANTS AND SEEKS ATTORNEY DONATIONS FOR GRANT ADVOCATE PROGRAM**

The Child Custody and Adoption Pro Bono Project (the "Project"), co-sponsored by the ABA Family Law Section, is pleased to announce the award of \$50,000 to enhance the connection between legal advocacy for children in custody cases and critical mental health and social services. Five programs from around the country will share the award. These grants will address (1) the need for more mental health and social service training, mentoring, partnering, consulting and cross-education of legal professionals with mental health or social service professionals; (2) ways for children's attorneys to tap into free or low-cost mental health and social services for their clients; and (3) development of local mental health and social service resource materials for children's attorneys and their clients.

This is the third year of grants by the Child Custody and Adoption Pro Bono Project. The Project is jointly sponsored by the ABA Family Law Section and the ABA Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service, and administered by and housed at the ABA Center for Pro Bono. The Project was established in February 2001 through a grant from Bill and Melita Grunow, in memory of their niece, Ann Liechty, a dedicated child law advocate. The mission of the Project is to design and implement programs and policies that foster children's well-being, development, and safety during custody matters, including in divorce, guardianship, adoption, parentage, and civil protective order cases.

The funds for these grants were made possible through the ABA Child Custody Grant Advocate Program. Child Custody Grant Advocates made a five-year pledge or an upfront contribution to this grant program. All donations are made to the Fund for Justice and Education and are tax-deductible as a charitable donation. Almost \$130,000 has been raised thus far, with an ultimate goal of raising \$300,000. The Project is actively seeking additional Grant Advocates to make future grants possible. The grants will fund a different directed topic for each of five years. The newly raised funds are being supplemented by the project's current funds, to allow the project to maintain its continuing efforts while adding the grant program as a new feature. Brochures describing this program in more detail are available through the Project's Director, Linda Rio Reichmann, at [Lrio@staff.abanet.org](mailto:Lrio@staff.abanet.org).

The five grants for 2005 are as follows:

**New Orleans Pro Bono Project, Children's Law Program- \$16,000:** The Pro Bono Project ("PBP") was established in 1986 to provide free civil legal services to the poor through the use of pro bono attorneys. The PBP recently launched a Children's Law Program to train and support volunteers to represent children in abuse and neglect cases, and expanded that representation to custody cases in 2004. The ABA grant will fund a social worker consultant to research and develop a referral tool and referral resources for mental health and social services for children in custody cases. The social worker will also support the PBP in expanding and training the volunteer attorney pool for custody cases, and will develop partnerships with social work and psychology programs and universities to support the pro bono volunteers. The social worker will produce educational materials for staff, volunteers, judges, parents and children regarding mental health and social service issues and resources.

**Children's Legal Services of Houston- \$15,000:** Children's Legal Services of Houston ("CLS") provides legal advocacy to children in dependency cases. They serve as Attorneys Ad Litem for children, and provide resource information, legal research, and holistic services to lawyers and child welfare organizations. The ABA grant will be used to expand these services to custody cases in the Harris County Family Courts. CLS is partnering with the University of Houston Psychology Clinic to provide mental health evaluations and services to children in these cases for free or very minimal cost. The clinic will consult with the attorney on each case to develop a treatment plan, and will either provide services or make referrals for appropriate services for the children. CLS and the UH Clinic will set up a network of social service referral sources, including assistance with housing, education, day care, transportation, social security and other government benefits, health care and insurance.

**Montana Legal Services Association- \$10,000:** Montana Legal Services Association ("MLSA") is a statewide agency providing access to justice for low income individuals in need of civil legal assistance. Many of the cases handled by MLSA involve family law custody disputes. MLSA locates and assigns pro bono attorneys for children in custody cases when requested by the court, including divorce, parenting plan and civil protective order cases. The ABA grant will be used to develop information packets for Montana attorneys who volunteer to represent children in custody and parenting plan actions. MLSA will convene a team of professionals to design a Co-parenting Child Assessment Tool, which pro bono attorneys will utilize to determine the mental health and social service needs of the children they represent. A videotape training on the use of the assessment tool will be produced for use by the pro bono attorneys. AWARE, a statewide mental health agency, will provide clinical psychiatric consultation and assist with referrals to other providers.

**Community Justice, Inc., Wisconsin- \$5,000:** Community Justice, Inc. ("CJI") is a non-profit public interest law firm providing legal services to low-income individuals. Approximately half of CJI's caseload involves family law and custody matters. CJI is partnering on this grant with the Rainbow Project, a non-profit mental health agency serving children who have been victims of child abuse, sexual abuse, or witnesses to domestic violence. The ABA grant will be used to provide legal services to children who disclose abuse during the divorce process and to children seeking civil protective relief, and to provide mental health training and support to attorneys representing these children. The Rainbow staff will provide individual case consultation to the pro bono

attorneys and will develop resource materials on the issue of child abuse disclosures for use by attorneys, GALs, parents and community members.

**Kansas Legal Services- \$4,000:** Kansas Legal Services (“KLS”) is a statewide non-profit legal services provider that was formed in 1977. In 2001, KLS opened the Guardian Ad Litem Support Center, as part of its Children’s Advocacy Resource Center. The ABA grant will be used to develop an interactive sourcebook for youth aged 6 to 14, to encourage youth to work through emotional and mental health issues that may arise from their experiences in court proceedings. The sourcebook will include activities to familiarize children with court personnel; “how-to” activities on dealing with anger, confusion and other emotions; education on expectations and accepting feelings; and ways to express themselves in the legal process. KLS will then run four training sessions for Guardian Ad Litem, attorneys, and mediators on how to use the sourcebook with children involved in custody cases and how to help youth access services and information. A mental health professional will assist with creating the workbook, and law students will help develop the trainings and place the sourcebook on the KLS web site.

The grants are for the period May 2005 through May 2006. Since a major goal of the Child Custody and Adoption Pro Bono Project is to identify successful projects that can be replicated by other groups, all grant recipients will provide the Project with an extensive report and relevant materials at the end of the grant period.

For more information about the grants, the Project, or becoming a Grant Advocate, contact project Director Linda Rio Reichmann, [lrio@staff.abanet.org](mailto:lrio@staff.abanet.org) or 312-988-5805, or visit the Project’s web site at [www.abachildcustodyproject.org](http://www.abachildcustodyproject.org).