

PROFILE – WASHOE LEGAL SERVICES , RENO, NEVADA

History -

Washoe Legal Services (WLS) was incorporated in 1965 as Washoe County Legal Aid Society by the Washoe County Bar Association. Its purpose was to serve as a means of mobilizing members of the bar to assist poor clients by operating a screening and referral service.

WLS has continued to implement programs that reach underserved populations and has provided increased access to justice for the disenfranchised. Over the past 10 years, WLS has provided legal counsel and representation in over 46,000 individual and family legal matters. It employs 13 lawyers and 16 support personnel.

Direct Services

1. *Child Advocacy Program* - Legal representation for abused and neglected children living in foster homes.
2. *Inmate Assistance Program* - A Federal District Court judgment in 1993 ordered the Sheriff of Washoe County to provide sufficient legal assistance to jail inmates in non-criminal legal matters to ensure that civil legal rights were not lost by reason of their incarceration. WLS fulfills this requirement under a contract with Washoe County.
3. *Family Law/Domestic Violence* - Divorces involving domestic violence, child custody cases involving child abuse, and enforcement and/or extensions of Temporary Protective Orders;
4. *Consumer/Housing/Tenants' Rights Advocacy* - Violations of the Fair Debt Collection Law and wrongful repossession, violations of the Fair Housing Act, and issues involving private landlords (such as illegal lockouts, failure to refund deposits, failure to make repairs or provide essential services, eviction and termination of the rental contract); and
5. *Immigration Assistance* for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and other crimes.

Legal Information Clinics

Domestic Violence Clinic - A staff attorney conducts a bilingual, quarterly education clinic about divorce and custody issues in the domestic violence setting.

Debt Collection and Bankruptcy Clinic - A bilingual, monthly legal education clinic about bankruptcy.

WLS Pro Bono Project

Recruits attorneys to provide *pro bono* services to address unmet legal needs in the community, especially in the areas of family law, *e.g.* divorces involving domestic violence, child custody cases involving child abuse, enforcement and/or extensions of Temporary Protective Orders and bankruptcy.

Externship Overview & Description of Field Work

This semester-long externship will provide the student with exposure to a wide range of legal issues and the opportunity to conduct legal research and draft memoranda, pleadings and a variety of other legal documents; interview clients and assist in preparing their cases for hearing or trial; and assist attorneys in classes, clinics and court proceedings.

WLS will specifically devote the externship experience to one substantive area of law. WLS divides their work into “projects.” The **Consumer Rights Project** primarily assists persons with consumer related matters including unfair debt collection, scams involving purchases of used cars, landlord-tenant issues and deceptive trade practices. The **Domestic Violence Project** represents victims of domestic violence by helping them obtain protective orders against their abuser, divorce and custody orders as well as assists immigrant victims of domestic violence and other crimes under the Violence against Women Act. The **Child Advocacy Project** represents children who are in the foster care system due to abuse and/or neglect.

Externs will assist in interviews of clients and assist the attorneys in drafting pleadings for court and with hearings. The extern would accompany the lawyer to interviews and hearings with the client. The extern will attend “case reviews” for the “project” they are assigned to in which clients are evaluated for services and case strategy is discussed. The externs will present any client intake they have handled. Students are eligible for certification under the Nevada Sup. Ct. R. 49.5.