

Foundation Focus

Michigan State Bar Foundation



Funding and Leadership for Justice Since 1947

Spring 2005

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The Michigan State Bar Foundation provides leadership and grants to improve access for all to the justice system, including support for civil legal aid to the poor, law-related education, and conflict resolution.

MSBF Makes a Difference

Since 1947, MSBF has made more than 400 grants totaling over \$70 million to provide our communities with essential legal services, legal education, or conflict resolution alternatives. These grants make a difference for many people and for the justice system.

MSBF makes a difference for seniors.

The Foundation's largest grant program supports civil legal aid for low-income families. Many of the Foundation's legal aid grantees assist seniors with legal problems. Below are two examples.

An elderly husband and wife both had serious medical conditions, and insurance did not cover all their bills. Medical expenses soon depleted their meager income. When a creditor attempted to garnish their homestead property tax credit, they sought help from a legal aid agency which quickly discovered another financial problem. Because of their medical bills, the couple could not pay the property taxes on their long-time home and were facing foreclosure.

A legal aid program helped them obtain a hardship exemption as well as a city loan with a reduced annual interest rate and low payments enabling them to pay off the taxes and save their home. (Legal Services of South Central Michigan)

A disabled senior citizen struggled to subsist on a small fixed income. It was especially difficult meeting her living expenses because insurance did not cover all the prescription drugs she needed. Receiving food assistance benefits made it possible for her to have money for both the food and medicine.

When food assistance was incorrectly stopped, the elderly woman could not afford both medicine and groceries. A legal aid program educated the woman's case worker about policies under the law that require taking into account necessary medical costs when calculating food benefits. The process was corrected without having to go to court, and this senior was able to receive critically-needed hunger relief and also obtain the medicine she needed to survive. (Center for Civil Justice)



Recent MSBF grants help seniors.

Non-profit organizations such as Elder Law of Michigan (ELM) received MSBF grants in 2004

that helped seniors. ELM's grant supported a "seniors helping seniors" pro bono mediation project for callers to the Legal Hotline for Michigan Seniors. The project trains members of the Senior Lawyers Section of the State Bar of Michigan to help callers resolve disputes without litigation.

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To see more stories about people for whom legal aid providers are making a difference, see the MSBF JUSTICE FOR ALL report at www.msbf.org.

Bringing People and Resources Together

MSBF plants seeds that take root and continue to bloom even after grant funds are used.

Michigan State Bar Foundation grants frequently bring people and resources together, resulting in collaboration, leveraging resources, promoting partnerships, and reducing duplication of services. Often, success fostered in an MSBF grant project continues beyond the funding period, preserving needed services to many clients and even attracting additional funding.

The Pro Bono Domestic Violence Project, began as a pilot project under the leadership of the State Bar of Michigan in 2001.

The Pro Bono Domestic Violence Project, the first of its kind in the nation, sought to train and recruit large numbers of pro bono lawyers across the state in domestic violence and family law issues. A start-up grant from the Michigan State Bar Foundation supported the development of materials and attorney training through a simultaneous broadcast to 8-10

sites across the state. After an instructional session in the morning by satellite, local sessions followed at each broadcast site in the afternoon. Attorneys were taught by experts in the field.

In the first year, the Pro Bono Domestic Violence Project enlisted over 200 attorneys who, in exchange for the training, pledged to take domestic violence cases pro bono. This was a major accomplishment in an area of law in which there is a great need for pro bono attorneys.

In 2003, the project successfully continued under the leadership of the Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence through a grant awarded to MCADSV by the U.S. Department of Justice Violence Against Women Office. In addition, the project received the prestigious Community and Educational Outreach Award sponsored by the National Association of Bar Executives and Lexis Nexis at the 2003 ABA annual conference.

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MSBF Distributes over \$48,000 in AOJ Grants

Administration of Justice grants help many nonprofits.

The Foundation's Administration of Justice (AOJ) Grants Program awards funds to non-profit entities to educate about legal rights and responsibilities, the American justice system and resolving problems through conflict and dispute resolution. See the MSBF 2004 President's Report at www.msbf.org for a description of all of last year's grants. AOJ grants are awarded three times a year. In the first grant cycle for 2005, recipients include:

University of Michigan Law School Clinical Program Pediatric Advocacy Initiative to support a Fellowship position working with hospitals to help ill children and their families improve the children's health by resolving legal issues;

Michigan Center for Civic Education toward expenses of the regional and state high school mock trial tournaments;

Criminal Defense Attorneys of Michigan to help defray the costs of the Criminal Defense Trial College for attorneys who represent the indigent;

Michigan Lawyer's Auxiliary for the Law Day School Essay Contest for children to provide education about and promote the principles of law;

Neighborhood Reconciliation Center to purchase technology to enable staff and law students to network with the mediation Center while conducting mediations at court;

Oakland Livingston Legal Aid to pay the final costs of the closure of the program; and,

Historical Society for the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan toward costs of a documentary on the 1953 Detroit Smith Act to be used by public television and distributed to educators.

Pro Bono Project for Domestic Violence Victims Wins Award



Photograph by Doug Elbinger
Courtesy of the State Bar of Michigan

Project leaders seated left to right: Hon. Harold Hood; Hon. Patricia Micklow; Hon. Marilyn Kelly and John Berry. Standing from left to right: Linda Rexer, Gregory Conyers, Evanne Dietz, Lorraine Weber, and Kathleen Conklin

Over \$371,000 in AOJ Grants were Awarded Last Year



For information about MSBF grant applications and deadlines see: www.msbf.org/grants

Foundation Gives First Founder's Award to Dennis W. Archer



(L to R) Scott S. Brinkmeyer, 2003-2004 President of the State Bar of Michigan; Margo Nichols, MSBF President; First MSBF Founder's Award Winner Dennis W. Archer; and Linda Rexer, MSBF Executive Director

Michigan State Bar Foundation Fellows Converse at Annual Reception



(L to R) Chief Justice Clifford W. Taylor, James Erhart, and Scott Brinkmeyer

Of Special Interest

Dennis Archer receives the Foundation's inaugural Founders Award.

In 2004 the Foundation created the Founder's Award to honor the vision of those who founded the Fellow's Program. Fellows are a distinguished group of attorneys who are selected only by nomination and who demonstrate outstanding contributions to the profession and the community.

In September 2004, then State Bar President Scott Brinkmeyer presented the Founder's Award to Dennis Archer on behalf of the Foundation. Dennis Archer was one of the 32 distinguished attorney leaders who founded the Fellows Program in 1984. Mr. Archer is the chairman of the firm, Dickinson, Wright and is currently President of the National Bar Association. He is a past President of the State Bar of Michigan and the American Bar Association, former Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court, and past Mayor of the City of Detroit. Accepting the award, Mr. Archer stated that he was pleased to receive the first

Founder's Award and praised the Fellows for their support of the important public interest work of the Michigan State Bar Foundation.

Founders of the MSBF Fellows Program:

Dennis W. Archer, Stephen C. Brandsdorfer, Daniel M. Clark, Hon. Avern L. Cohn, Julia Donovan Darlow, Stuart J. Dunning, Jr., Elliott S. Hall, Joseph L. Hardig, Jr., Hon. Charles W. Joiner, Hon. Cornelia G. Kennedy, John A. Krsul, Jr., Dean S. Lewis, Lawrence B. Lindemer, Wallace D. Riley, Charles R. Rutherford, Norman Otto Stockmeyer, Jr., Brian Sullivan, and Fred L. Woodworth.

Founders In Memoriam:

Joel M. Boyden, Frederick G. Buesser, Jr., George E. Bushnell, Jr., John S. Clark, Hon. Mary S. Coleman, Kenneth O. Doyle, Emmett E. Eagan, Leo A. Farhat, Michael Franck, Nathan B. Goodnow, William T. Gossett, Robert E. LeMire, A. De Vere Ruegsegger, and Robert G. Russell.

YOU... Are Our Foundation

Many Fellows are ATJ Fund donors.

Fellows have donated more than \$1 million in general membership contributions to the Michigan State Bar Foundation since 1984. These resources have been essential in support of the Foundation's overall public interest efforts. Yet, the generosity of Fellows goes beyond their Fellows membership and community work. Many Fellows are also donors to the Access to Justice (ATJ) Fund which assists civil legal aid for those in need.

The Foundation receives, manages, and distributes donations to the ATJ Fund which are raised through the Access to Justice Campaign led by the State Bar of Michigan. More than \$5 million in cash and pledges have been raised since 1998.

To date, the Foundation has awarded more than \$166,000 for 19 innovative projects and distributed more than \$2.4 million in gifts designated by donors to named programs.

Supporting the ATJ Fund is consistent with the steadfast leadership Fellows have always shown to help increase resources for vulnerable citizens. Generous ATJ donations help nonprofit agencies meet essential civil legal needs including; protection from family violence, recourse from unscrupulous contractors, access to medical care, support for children, and other critical civil legal needs. The need is great, but Fellows and other ATJ Fund donors make a difference to so many families who have no where else to turn.

If you have not yet become a donor to the ATJ Fund, please call us at 800-968-6723 or go to www.atjfund.org for more information about gift options and possible tax benefits.

Bringing People and Resources Together

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The collaborative partnerships forged during the pilot project still continue today. Lead organizations such as the MCADSV and the State Bar of Michigan closely collaborate and benefit from a variety of volunteers and funding sources to support the Pro Bono Domestic Violence Project. The 2001 MSBF funding was a critical catalyst that allowed this innovative project to demonstrate the success needed to attract future funding.

Funding and Leadership for Justice

Joseph Cunningham, JD, CPA, Joins Foundation's Finance-Audit Committee.

MSBF is fortunate to have many attorneys and other professionals donating their time and talent to its Board and Committees. One such person is Joseph Cunningham who is with Plante & Moran in Southfield.

Mr. Cunningham lends his expertise to oversight of the financial aspects of the Foundation by serving on the MSBF Finance-Audit Committee. Mr. Cunningham was the winner of the 2004 State Bar of Michigan Cumiskey Pro Bono Award and is a frequent writer and lecturer on tax, pensions, and valuation matters.

Mr. Cunningham is also very involved in state and national bar committees, having served at both levels on Tax and Family Law Sections.

The 3rd Pro Bono Domestic Violence Project training will be held on August 25, 2005.

Training for an anticipated 200 attorneys at 6 sites across the state will bring additional crucial pro bono legal services to survivors of domestic violence.

For more information or to register for this event, please go to: www.michbar.org.

In Other News...

MSBF President Margaret Nichols is currently serving her second term as a member of the American Bar Association Commission on IOLTA (Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts). IOLTA is the second largest funder of civil legal aid for the poor, providing approximately \$125 million annually to support legal services.

Additionally, MSBF Executive Director Linda Rexer has been appointed to a 15 member ABA task force to revise the 1986 ABA Standards for Providers of Civil Legal Services to the Poor.

Foundation Officers, Trustees and volunteers are important to the success of the Foundation and ensure that the Foundation continues its significant work in leadership and funding to improve the justice system.

**Michigan State Bar
Foundation**
www.msbf.org
1-800-968-6723

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