

Our Grantees Are What We Are All About

By Susan B. Shields

We are well into 2013 and have all (hopefully) fully recovered from the end of 2012, with our holiday and year-end festivities, the dangers of the fiscal cliff and the debt crisis still to be addressed.

Another “crisis” said to be facing our country is the enormous need for pro bono service from lawyers. It is estimated that the legal needs of more than 80 percent of Americans with limited income are currently unmet. That is a crisis that the OBF, and every OBF supporter, directly helps to improve.

OBF Fellows dues and other sources of financial support provide funding each year for pro bono domestic violence

intervention services and for victim advocates who help Oklahomans live safely and free from abuse. OBF grantees, the Family Shelter of Southern Oklahoma and Domestic Violence Intervention Services of Tulsa and Creek Counties (DVIS) are several successful programs.

OBF grants also support programs, such as the YMCA Youth and Government Program, that encourage Oklahoma students to learn more about the American democratic process. Through funding from the OBF, these projects designed to aid students in learning more about the laws and our legal system have proven beneficial to students across the state.

Each new year, the Oklahoma Bar Foundation looks forward with optimism and enthusiasm to the work that will be accomplished. A new year is also, however, a time to reflect upon past successes and to remind ourselves about the purposes of our Bar Foundation. The financial support of Oklahoma lawyers and others is so very important in helping to meet the funding needs of OBF grantees. These people work every day to achieve access to justice and to advance legal education and the science of jurisprudence. Thank you for your support!

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SUCCESS STORIES...

Rena¹ is a 30-year-old mother of three, a cancer survivor and a victim of numerous incidents of domestic abuse. In 2010, Rena became involved with an abusive and vicious man, Stanley. One day, Rena woke from a nap to find Stanley standing over her with a knife laughing uncontrollably. He had locked the children outside before waking her. This same man

had previously abused other women. The Victim Advocate from the Family Shelter of Southern Oklahoma worked with Rena and continued to work with law enforcement and all of Stanley’s victims. Thanks to the services provided by the Family Shelter and the funding provided by the Oklahoma Bar Foundation, Rena was able to develop a safety plan, find a

home and find a job; and Stanley’s parole has now been revoked. He is facing incarceration for up to 30 years. Rena is receiving counseling for herself and her children and has been able to return to school. Rena now speaks at candlelight vigil ceremonies to encourage other victims to seek legal action that will bring changes to their lives.

SUCCESS STORIES cont.

Sally came to the DVIS office after her husband beat her. Ken “just snapped” one evening and attacked her in their home while she held their young child. After the attack, Ken went into another room and sat on the couch until the police arrived and took him into custody. Ken pled guilty on the criminal charges and agreed, as part of his sentencing, to consistently take his prescribed medication and to be monitored by the courts. This monitoring provided great comfort to Sally, and after settlement negotiations between the DVIS office and the husband’s attorney, the parties were able to reach an agreed settlement. An Emergency Protective Order was in place while this case was pending and the client has reached a point where she now feels safe and is willing to dismiss her protective order with the resolution of the divorce.

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Mark suffers from Cerebral Palsy. He came to DVIS Legal Services for a divorce in 2009 after being battered by his wife, Patty. He and his wife have a young child. For months Mark had been staying with Patty in hopes of protecting his only child from the convicted child molester that Patty was associating with. After learning of this, the DVIS attorney contacted a probation officer and informed her that a convicted molester was around a child. That problem was solved. DVIS was able to get temporary orders that gave Mark child custody and to establish supervised visits for the mother. The case is still ongoing, but this was a giant victory for Mark.

1. All names have been changed for confidentiality.

YMCA YOUTH AND GOVERNMENT PROGRAM TESTIMONIALS FROM CHEYENNE MIDDLE SCHOOL

“ This program is key in teaching children about government. It teaches you how to write and review bills. You also learn how it feels to be patient, work in legislature, and keep composure. I was honored to attend and compete to pass a bill my partner and I wrote. All the debating and open discourse in such little amount of time was exciting! Thank you again, and please keep the program running! – Jayzen ”

“ My Youth and Government experience is one I will remember forever. I really enjoyed going to the capitol and working in the small committees. We learned about our legislature, voted in small groups to eliminate bad bills and learned about motions. After voting away the poor bills, we recessed, ate lunch and then proceeded to the Senate Chamber. Here, we debated all of the bills that advanced through the committees. It was amazing. – Cameron ”

“ April 1, I had a chance to be a senator. Youth from all over Oklahoma came to announce the bills they had written, which all covered different topics: from healthy food in schools to protecting endangered animals in Oklahoma. Youth and Government gives you a chance to be a senator and teaches respect, maturity and how to make new friends. My experience at Youth and Government was amazing. I would recommend it to everybody. – Jason ”