

Minnesota Justice Foundation

# THE PEOPLE WE SERVE

Annual Report 2014



Photo Credit: Adam Przewoski



Minnesota  
Justice  
Foundation



# 32 YEARS OF SERVICE

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Since 1982, the Minnesota Justice Foundation (MJF) has made it our mission to transform how Minnesota's legal community engages students in public service. By working with students from all four law schools and more than 200 organizational partners, MJF has expanded the reach of public interest and *pro bono* legal services throughout the state.

Nationally, our model is unique and our impact unmatched. We partner with local nonprofits, government agencies and law firms to connect them with law student volunteers, who in turn, contribute tens of thousands of hours of free legal services. Together, our actions provide affordable legal services to thousands of low-income individuals each year. 2014 was no different.

**MJF strives for justice by creating opportunities for law students to perform public interest and pro bono legal services.**

Our most basic goal and the driving philosophy behind it is to link volunteer law students with opportunities to assist attorneys in meeting the legal needs of the low-income community.



# MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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**Janine Laird** is a 1974 graduate of the University of Minnesota and a 1979 graduate of William Mitchell College of Law. Janine practiced law for several years before moving into public policy and nonprofit management.

Since 2004, Ms Laird has served as the Executive Director of MJF, leading the staff and working with the board of directors. In addition to her executive duties, Ms Laird is responsible for directing the Summer Clerkship Program. Ms Laird serves on a number of bar association committees and working groups, as well as on three nonprofit community boards. She has been Co-Chair of the Legal Assistance to the Disadvantaged Committee of the Minnesota State Bar Association since 2012.



To all MJF's friends,

Thank you for your support of MJF's mission to increase access to justice by providing law students with public interest and pro bono opportunities. This year has been an exciting one.

With your support, law students from Hamline University School of Law, the University of Minnesota Law School, the University of St. Thomas School of Law and William Mitchell College of Law filled 1,300 volunteer placements this year.

Students volunteered at legal aid and public defender's offices, and at a multitude of other nonprofit organizations. Law students provided assistance to 14,500 low-income and disadvantaged individuals working on behalf of youth, seniors, the disabled, the homeless, veterans, new Americans, Native Americans and others who are underrepresented in the justice system.

In addition to their hours in the classroom and the library, these dedicated law student volunteers provided more than 40,000 hours of service to the community. We salute them for their commitment and dedication.

Our twenty summer clerks provided ten weeks of full-time assistance at legal aid programs across the state from Duluth to Alexandria to Mankato and the Twin Cities. These agencies were able to significantly increase their client services in the summer of 2014 thanks to the efforts of our summer clerks.

Our board, staff and supporters are committed to our mission because access to justice is in short supply. In the past few years, the number of eligible low-income clients has increased 20% while the number of legal aid attorneys has declined 16% due to funding cuts. Two out of every three clients are turned away from legal aid programs because there are not enough resources to meet their needs. Volunteer law students leverage staff attorney time, allowing the attorneys to serve more clients and to focus their attention on more complicated cases.

As we look forward to the next year we will be working closely with the soon-to-be-created Mitchell | Hamline Law School. We are excited to continue offering the Law School Public Service Program in the context of an ever-changing environment. As reduced law school enrollment stabilizes, we continue to seek ways to increase law student volunteering in order to meet the legal needs of our state's most vulnerable citizens.

With your ongoing support and the hard work of our board and staff we can do just that.

Sincerely,

Janine Laird  
Executive Director  
Minnesota Justice Foundation

*Students from the University of Minnesota's Indian Services Project, and MJF Staff Attorney Brock Berglund organized a free legal clinic for members of the Upper Sioux Tribe.*

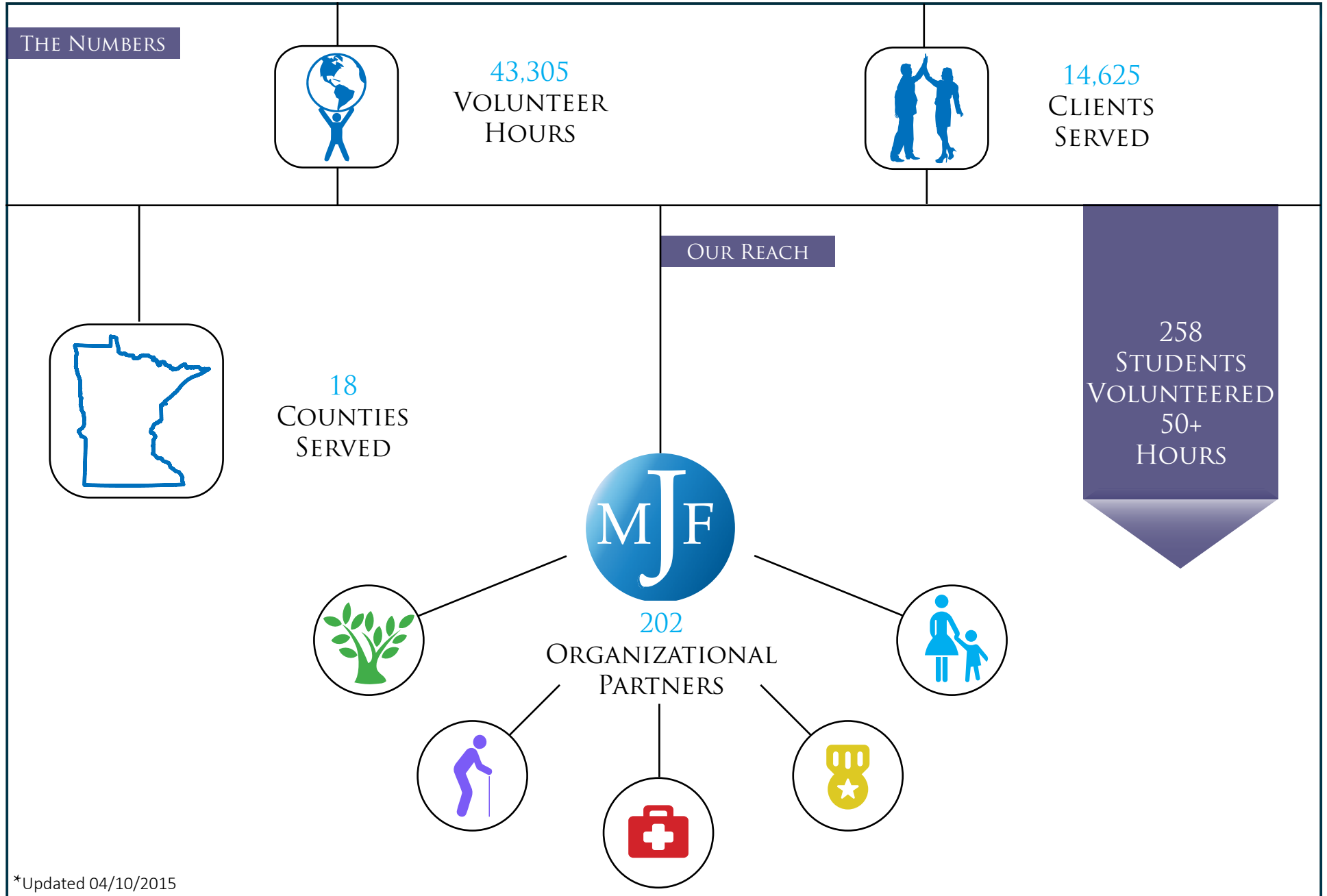
# VOLUNTEERS IN ACTION

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MJF could not do its work without its dedicated force of law student volunteers. The collective impact of these volunteers is quite astounding. In 2014, their efforts have provided over 14,500 low-income Minnesotans with affordable legal services; and the over 40,000 volunteer hours served in the last year has tremendously increased the capacity of our partner organizations.



# 2014 ACCOMPLISHMENTS



\*Updated 04/10/2015

# STREET LAW

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Each year, MJF places law student volunteers into local classrooms to teach middle school and high school students about their legal rights. This program is designed to equip the students with the practical skills and knowledge to effect positive change for the rest of their lives. In 2014, fifty-four law student volunteers taught at fourteen Metro area schools, volunteering a total of 1,029 hours.



**Natalie Netzel** taught Street Law to students at the Shady Oak Learning Center.



**Natalie Netzel** is a 3rd year student at William Mitchell College of Law. Prior to starting school at William Mitchell, Natalie earned a master's degree in school counseling. Natalie's first volunteer experience with MJF was participating in Street Law during the spring semester of her 1L year.

Natalie describes Street Law as an “incredibly influential part of my time in law school.” Through her involvement in Street Law, Natalie realized that having knowledge of the law is an “incredible gift and responsibility.” Street Law changed how she felt about law school, helping her to see how important the subject matters of her classes were, and motivating her to continue teaching. Natalie went on to volunteer with the Marshall Brennan Project at William Mitchell, through which law students teach constitutional law to high school students in the St. Paul Public School system. Natalie's experience culminated with her coaching a team of students at the National Marshall Brennan Moot Court competition in Washington, D.C.

Due in part to Street Law, Natalie has found a passion for informing people about the law, especially those who may not otherwise have access to this information, to help empower them. Her ideal career is to serve as a juvenile public defender while volunteering to teach students about their rights and responsibilities. Last summer, while she was externing for a Federal Magistrate in Duluth, she also volunteered at the Sixth Judicial District Public Defender's Office.

This year, Natalie is an Assistant Editor for the William Mitchell Law Review and serves as the treasurer for the MJF Student Chapter at William Mitchell. She wanted to give back to the organization because, as she says, “I recognize how much MJF has done for me—allowing me access to amazing, career-shaping volunteer opportunities!” Next year, Natalie will clerk at the Minnesota Court of Appeals.

*“It was exciting to connect to high school students with practical legal knowledge. I was surprised by how engaged they were in the material. I think this was because what they were learning had a direct impact on their lives.”*

# SUMMER CLERKSHIPS

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As MJF's oldest initiative, the Summer Clerkship Program raises funds for law students to work full-time at legal service agencies throughout the state. In the summer of 2014, MJF contributed a total of \$93,000 to fund twenty grants—fourteen in the Metro Area and six in Greater Minnesota. Additionally, the MJF student chapters, located at each of the four law schools, raised enough money to fund a total of eight additional summer grants for students working in public interest.

Photo Credit: Tim Rummelhoff



**Angelica Ramirez** (photographed on previous page) is a 3L at the University of Minnesota Law School. In 2014, she received funding from MJF's Summer Clerkship Program to work at the White Earth Tribal Court in Northwestern Minnesota. Below, Angelica describes her experience at White Earth and its impact on her future.

MJF helped secure my first paid legal experience at a time when funding shortages in public interest organizations made it difficult for first-year students to find summer jobs. I clerked for the White Earth Nation Tribal Court and Judicial Services in Northwestern Minnesota. Working for White Earth was an exciting experience. I worked closely with the Tribe's Chief Legal Counsel Joe Plumer and Chief Judge Robert Blaeser (formally a Hennepin County trial court judge and one of the First Native American judges in the state). They brought a wealth of experience to the tribe and shared many insights with me.

Working with the tribe reminded me of the reasons I decided to attend law school—because I was passionate about public service and wanted to help shape policy in favor of the most vulnerable. I began working at White Earth Nation as the tribe was rewriting a decades-old constitution formulated in the Era of Reorganization—a time when the U.S. government sought to reorganize tribes. White Earth recently adopted the new constitution, for which I provided research on voting procedures and on the bounds of tribal sovereignty.

At White Earth, I was also exposed to a variety of other research projects, attended hearings regularly, helped draft court orders and helped prosecute minor traffic violations on behalf of the tribe. Much of the work was just like the work of any government, plus the added responsibility of being a major employer and managing the tribe's major enterprise, the Shooting Star Casino.

Since my clerkship, I have externed in a Hennepin County Trial Court, clerked for the Department of Justice Minneapolis Office and interned for the Chicago Transit Authority. As the Vice President of the Indian Services Project for Greater Minnesota, I worked with MJF to organize a free legal clinic for the community at Upper Sioux in Southeastern Minnesota. When I graduate in May 2015, I hope to continue working in government. My experience at White Earth helped catapult my interest in that arena.

# A LASTING IMPACT



*MJF's work benefits more than the community at large. It is the most accessible way for law students to gain experience and improve their skills. For many students, such as Colleen Kelly (left), these volunteer experiences set them apart from other candidates when applying for post-graduate employment.*

**Colleen Kelly** is a 2014 graduate from the University of Minnesota Law School, and currently works as an Equal Justice Works Fellow for the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans (MACV).

While in law school Colleen volunteered with several organizations through MJF placements, including Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services, Central Minnesota Legal Services and MACV. The connections she made with organization leaders and the stories she heard from clients played a crucial role in her decision to pursue a career in public interest. Colleen believes the knowledge and skills she acquired in these positions were invaluable and set her apart from other Equal Justice Works applicants. She further asserts that “all attorneys and law students, even those who are not going to work in legal services, government or nonprofit organizations, need to understand the value of volunteering and assisting underrepresented individuals.”



*Michael Browne is an attorney at the Minneapolis Department of Civil Rights, and has worked with MJF volunteers for eight years.*

# WORKING WITH OUR PARTNERS

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**Michael K. Browne** serves as the Director of the Office of Police Conduct Review for the Minneapolis Department of Civil Rights (MDCR). Organizations like MDCR work with MJF because of our ability to connect with law schools and to recruit students interested in public service. These capabilities provide MJF partner organizations with a structure to execute a more efficient recruiting process.

Each year, MDCR benefits from the service of up to five MJF volunteers. The Department takes pride in creating authentic learning experiences for students in order to build the skills that will become a part of their lifelong educational journey. When asked how MJF volunteers have benefited his organization, Mr. Browne notes, “As a government agency and due to our everyday demanding priorities and workloads, we are always searching for a solution to the challenge of converting additional great ideas into accomplished tasks. It is in this space, through the contributions of MJF volunteers, that our services are enhanced, special projects are completed and goals met. Their work makes a significant impact.”





# TO OUR WONDERFUL SUPPORTERS

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Photo Credit: Ryan McGuire



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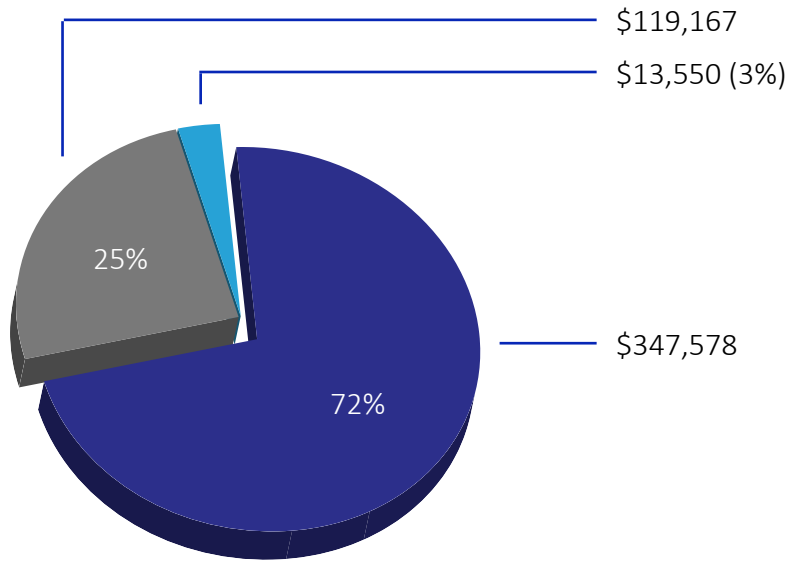
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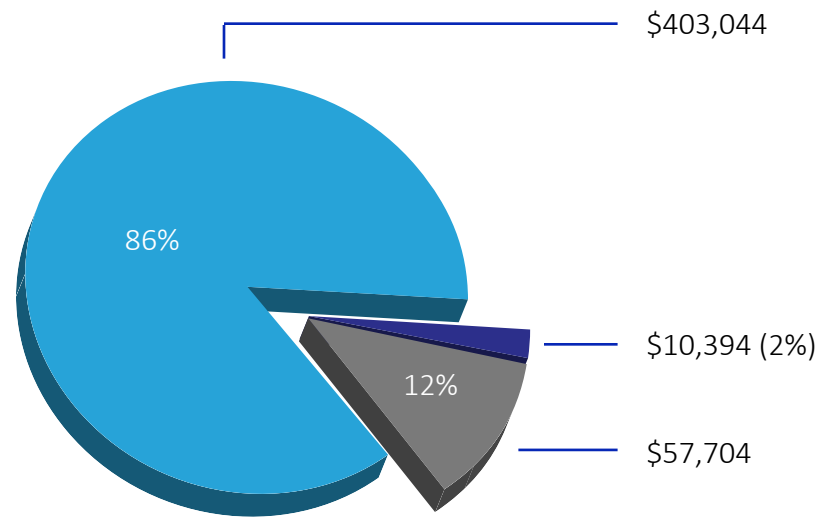
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**Total = \$480,295**

- Contributions from the Public
- Government Grants
- Other Income

FY 2014 OPERATING EXPENSES



**Total = \$471,142**

- Program Expenses
- Mgmt. & General Expenses
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