



NMLA's new FREE intake phone numbers are up and running!



NM Legal Aid Fights for Land Grant Rights

Attorney General Hector Balderas has announced his office's plan to fight for the rights of the Land Grant, Merced de Los Pueblos de Tierra Amarilla. In 1989, an unlawful transfer of title of property belonging to Merced de Los Pueblos de Tierra Amarilla was made to Al Frente de Lucha, a Colorado corporation. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo Land Grant Division of the Office of the Attorney General filed a complaint arguing that the court should declare the deed as void, and that the land in Rio Arriba County should be recovered by Merced de Los Pueblos de Tierra Amarilla, and held in a trust for their benefit.

"It is the responsibility of the Office of the Attorney General to review important issues concerning land grants in New Mexico," said Attorney General Hector Balderas. "My office will fight to preserve the history and culture of land grants throughout New Mexico. This land must be returned immediately, and placed in a trust for the benefit of Merced de Los Pueblos de Tierra Amarilla."

The Office of the Attorney General worked collaboratively with the New Mexico Land Grant Council, New Mexico Legal Aid and the UNM School of Law Natural Resources and Environmental Law Clinic in preserving the land grant's rights.

NMLA is Breaking Ground With New Medical-Legal Partnership

New Mexico is on the cutting edge of a medical-legal partnership called Partnering for Native Health. New Mexico Legal Aid is one of six legal aid organizations partnering with 14 tribes to place AmeriCorps legal fellows on site as part of a tribal health center team addressing Native Americans' health inequities.

Medical-legal partnerships are a growing trend across the country with 373 operating in 47 states, but our *Partnering For Native Health* project is a first-in-the-nation initiative serving American Indians and Alaskan Natives.

AmeriCorps fellow Katy Almond has been completing intake and seeing clients at First Nations Community HealthSource's main Albuquerque location every Monday and at its satellite location at the University of New Mexico Truman Health Center on Tuesdays. Most of Almond's clients are homeless and are challenged with a variety of legal issues that are adversely affecting their health. First Nations primarily serves Albuquerque's urban Indian population, but no one is turned away. Katy has helped clients retain custody of their children, obtain public benefits they had been denied, and avoid being evicted from their homes.

Katy works with NMLA's other Native American Program attorneys under the direction of Director Cindy Aragon. Aragon and Almond have made presentations to City of Albuquerque officials, judges and court personnel, and community groups like United Way to explain the tremendous benefits of the collaboration with First Nations. Having an attorney on site and immediately available removes barriers for clients who may lack transportation, have no telephone or other means of communication, and who benefit from First Nations' navigators who make sure patients are supported every step of the way to access referrals and complete visits.

"Katy's AmeriCorps role is a new position for New Mexico Legal Aid, and all of her attention is focused on providing legal services to the health institution's patients who otherwise might not have been able to access our services. This is a model we would love to deploy in other locations," said Ed Marks, New Mexico Legal Aid's Executive Director. "Katy's AmeriCorps fellows in *Partnering For Native Health* from Alaska, Nebraska, Utah, Arizona and Oklahoma use technology like Skype and annual boot-camp training to share ideas and problem-solve as they work in mostly remote rural areas with Native Americans seeking medical care and most in need. Contributions from caring individuals, community organizations, and medical partners match the AmeriCorps grant to make this project possible."

**VAP
CORNER**



A note from Kathryn Rubi, our distinguished VAP Volunteer



My practice of law started as an assistant Public Defender in New York where I worked for several years until a law firm in Charlotte, North Carolina made me an offer I couldn't refuse and I relocated. In 2006, my husband Dr. G. Michael Schum, a native New Mexican, was offered a position with LCF Research in Albuquerque. We moved to New Mexico. Shortly after I passed the New Mexico bar exam, a congenital aortic valve stenosis required immediate open-heart surgery and replacement of the valve with a porcine valve. Cardiac rehabilitation and all the psychological stuff that goes along with that kind of life event ended my legal career. Or so I thought. That is, until I meet Sandi Gilley. She was teaching Poverty of Law. I was taking it as a CLE. She introduced me to Law Access and from there I discovered New Mexico Legal Aid's Volunteer Attorney Program (VAP) and the work Dina Afek and her staff do. While my heart physically limits the amount of work I can do, it doesn't limit the number of people I can reach by phone or through conversation. There are VA clinics, District Court and Metro Court Clinic, Homeless Clinic and Legal Aid clients all of which I enjoy. There is another volunteer attorney, Susan Page who is always at legal clinics; she's the first one there, and often the last one to leave. One of the most rewarding moments I've had at VAP is from a recent case and email I received from the VAP client. Due to circumstances beyond both of our control, there wasn't anything I could do to help her, but she nevertheless thanked me for my efforts and for caring enough to take the case.

Here is my message to everyone: "It doesn't take a lot to help a lot."

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