

Spring 2016



# Points of Interest

POINTS OF INTEREST is the newsletter of the Tennessee Bar Foundation and IOLTA program (Interest On Lawyers' Trust Accounts)

## Abuse Alternatives director brings 28 years of service

By Tammy Childress, adapted with permission from the *Bristol Herald Courier*

**D**onna Mix started her career at Abuse Alternatives as a part-time secretary. Today, she serves as executive director of the agency, which serves both domestic violence victims and their abusers in Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia.

"When I began part-time there weren't a lot of people on staff," she said. "The agency began to grow and with that so did my responsibilities."

Mix said she didn't go into her part-time position 28 years ago with her eye on becoming the executive director; it was more of a natural progression of events that put her in the role.

From part-time secretary, she moved into the role of administrative assistant.

"Shortly after that, the Batterer's Intervention [Program] coordinator resigned," Mix said. "I stepped into that job as interim, because at the time I was the only person who had any knowledge about the program and how it was run. The program grew, so I was offered the permanent position."

Mix worked as the coordinator until May of this year when the executive director's position opened and she was asked to fill the spot as interim. In September, the board asked her to permanently fill the executive director spot and she accepted.

Mix said that over the years she has held almost every position at the non-profit, but one of the most challenging



was when she worked as the batterer's intervention program coordinator.

The Batterer's Intervention Program is a state-certified group counseling program that lasts for 24 weeks. People either come to the program voluntarily or come into the program through the court system as part of their sentencing.

"I had to change my mind-set about batterers — I had to learn that they really can change," she said. "We give them the tools they need, but it's up to them to use those tools to make the necessary

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**Editor's note:** Grants from the Tennessee IOLTA program are awarded to organizations that provide services in one of two categories, either for direct, civil legal assistance to the indigent or for work to "improve the administration of justice." Among the latter are those organizations that focus on rehabilitation. Abuse Alternatives, Inc., provides an array of services to victims of domestic violence and provides community education in Bristol and upper Sullivan County (and southwest Virginia). Since 1990, Abuse Alternatives has also operated a state-certified Batterers Intervention Program (BIP) serving the Bristol and Kingsport courts.

A BIP is a 24-week, structured, educational group that focuses participants on

learning alternatives to violence and accepting responsibility for abusive behavior. Men and women are served in single-sex groups and may be court-ordered to attend or self-referred. A BIP's goal is to interrupt the cycle of violence by teaching new, appropriate skills in relationship negotiation. A BIP provides courts with a sentencing option that is an active alternative to the enforced idleness of jail.

The BIP uses a "challenge model" where participants are confronted at each class about abusive behaviors and value systems. Attendance fees are charged on a sliding scale based on income. When a participant is unable to pay any fee, he/she is still allowed to attend the class and is given additional time to pay. Abuse

Alternatives has determined it is more important to provide the class, as an alternative to violent behavior, than to turn away a batterer without means. Many participants begin the program just to avoid jail time and only later come to a point of understanding the material. It is routine for defendants to be court-ordered to attend the BIP a second time as part of sentencing.

State and federal government funds are available through a variety of sources for domestic violence victim assistance. It is much more difficult to find grant funds to support programming for perpetrators. For that reason, the IOLTA program has granted \$79,000 since 1996, to help make the Abuse Alternatives Batterers Intervention Program possible.

# Legal History Project

The Foundation's Legal History Project is charged with preserving the history of the profession in Tennessee. Five interviews were added to the collection during 2015, for a current total of 95 recordings of senior attorneys.

The latest histories began with births in Memphis, Dixon Springs, Kodak, Chattanooga and Honolulu. These five interviewees (pictured below) hold law degrees from either Vanderbilt University or the University of Tennessee, but their varied professional paths are evidence of the many choices in a legal career. Among the group is a trial court judge, two "courtroom" lawyers well-known for personal injury work and criminal defense, a former Supreme Court justice and the founder of a publicly-traded corporation that operates correctional facilities.

Each reminisced about people, places and events that shaped his life, profession and community.

In addition to the individual interviews, a tenth entertainment-oriented video "collage" was completed. *Tennessee Legal Traditions 2015 – Part II* is a 31-minute compilation, with music and titles, of additional stories, quips and advice from the interviewees of 2013 and 2014.

*TLT 2015 – Part II*, along with its nine predecessor collages, may be viewed on the Foundation's website. The collages are also perfect for use at a local bar association or civic group meeting. Copies of the Project's full-length interviews and the collages may be borrowed or purchased from the Foundation. Contact the Foundation staff to make arrangements. ■



**JERRY H. SUMMERS,**  
CHATTANOOGA  
Interviewed by  
William M. Barker



**WILLIAM C. KOCH, JR.,**  
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Frank G. Clement, Jr.



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KNOXVILLE  
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Charles W. Swanson



**THOMAS W. BEASLEY,**  
BURNS  
Interviewed by  
Charles W. Bone



**WILLIAM B. ACREE, JR.,**  
UNION CITY  
Interviewed by J. Steven  
Stafford/Joe G. Riley, Jr.

## IOLTA grant awards truly appreciated by the ultimate recipients of service

Each calendar quarter, organizations that receive an IOLTA grant award must submit a report to the Foundation on the use of the funds. Client evaluations are often included. Reprinted below are verbatim expressions of thanks, with strongly-felt emotions. The lawyers or advocates being addressed (and the organizations behind them) provide assistance that is life-changing.

“ I’m hoping that by my case being settled in a positive outcome others can see that the underdog doesn’t always lose because we’re poor. The best part is knowing I had a good attorney. (Legal Aid of East Tennessee) ”

“ I want to thank Prince Chambliss (pro bono attorney for Memphis Area Legal Services) for investing his time and efforts on today to help me better understand this process and work towards a result. ”

“ The Community Legal Center helped me in my domestic violence case. Now I don’t feel afraid. If someone hits me or attacks me I know I can call the police. They also helped me obtain my residency. I am so thankful to Kerry Krauch (Staff Attorney – Memphis). ”

“ I was at a loss as to help my mom keep her services. I tried calling many places for help and went in circles being sent back and forth. I took off work, drove to Chattanooga hoping to get to talk to a human (not more recordings like on the phone). I met and talked with Emilie Fauchet (Client Advocate, Tennessee Justice Center – Nashville). That was the first peace I’d had in weeks. I appreciate all the follow ups I received. Thank you for staying with us in an overwhelming time and not letting us slip through the cracks. ”

“ I’ve been renting for 40+ years, never been evicted ‘til this. I went to the hospital three times for anxiety and depression. It took a huge toll on me and my grandson. He had to tell the school he was homeless! Polly Peterson (Staff Attorney, Legal Aid of East Tennessee – Johnson City) went way beyond being our attorney. If it weren’t for her, I truly believe we’d still be homeless. ”

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# Tennessee IOLTA Grant Recipients & Awards 2016

(Arranged by location of recipient's *main* office. Many organizations serve a broader geographic area.)

## Bristol

Abuse Alternatives, Inc. – \$3,000

## Chattanooga

Community Reconciliation, Inc. – \$2,500  
Southeast Tennessee Legal Services – \$2,500

## Clinton

Community Mediation Services – \$2,500

## Columbia

Center of Hope – \$3,000

## Cookeville

Aging Services for the Upper Cumberlands, Inc. – \$7,000

## Crossville

Avalon Center – \$5,250  
VORP/Community Mediation Center, Inc. – \$4,800

## Hohenwald

Mid South Mediation Services – \$5,550

## Jackson

West Tennessee Legal Services, Inc. – \$25,519

## Knoxville

Catholic Charities, Office of Immigrant Services – \$2,000  
Legal Aid of East Tennessee – \$88,451  
YWCA Knoxville – Victim Advocacy Program – \$4,200

## Lawrenceburg

Kid's Place/A Child Advocacy Center – \$2,000

## Madison

Morning Star Sanctuary – \$3,750

## Madisonville

Monroe County Health Council – \$1,950

## McMinnville

Families in Crisis, Inc. – \$4,500

## Memphis

Community Legal Center – \$13,800  
Exchange Club Family Center of the Mid-South, Inc. – \$7,500  
Memphis Area Legal Services, Inc. – \$52,294  
YWCA of Greater Memphis, Immigrant Women's Services – \$2,500

## Murfreesboro

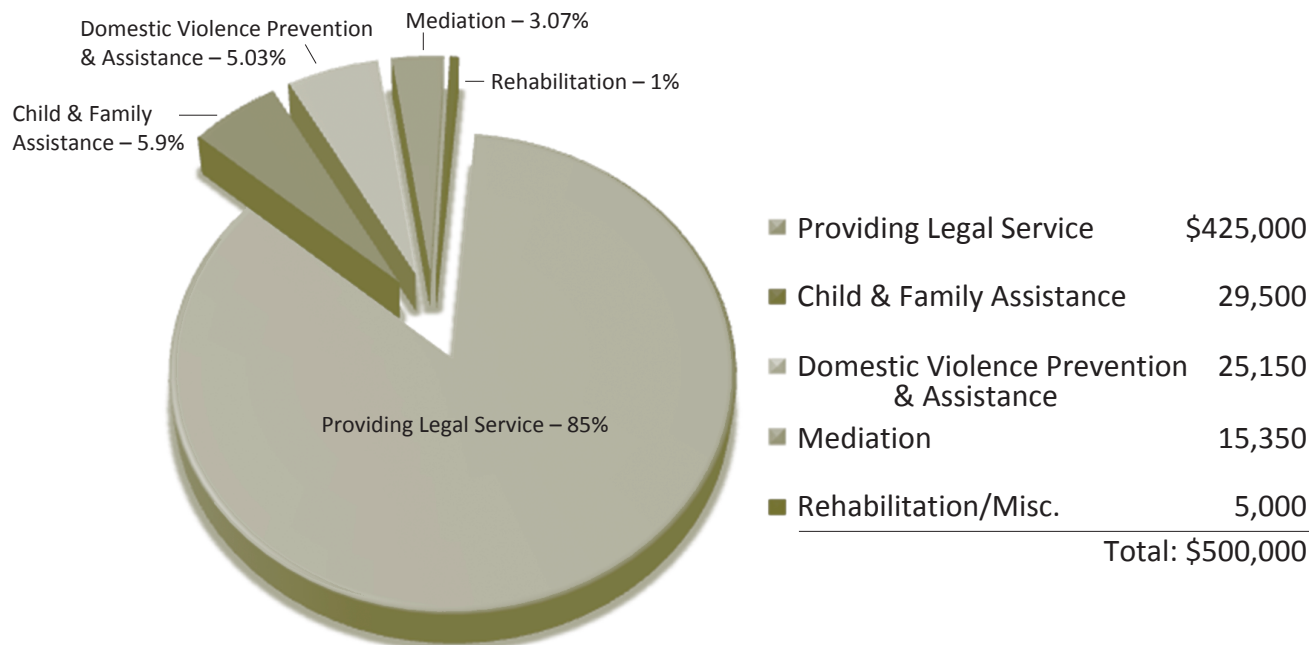
Domestic Violence Program, Inc. – \$4,750  
Tennessee CASA Association, Inc. – \$20,000

## Nashville

Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberlands – \$112,936  
Tennessee Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence – \$13,000  
Tennessee Justice Center – \$100,000  
Tennessee Justice for Our Neighbors – \$4,750

**Total Awarded: \$500,000**

## 2016 IOLTA Grants





**The Tennessee Bar Foundation publishes *Points of Interest*.**

Letters, comments or questions should be addressed to: Tennessee Bar Foundation, 618 Church Street, Suite 120, Nashville, Tennessee 37219-2456 615/242-1531 • 800/634-2516 Fax 615/255-0306 info@tnbarfoundation.org www.tnbarfoundation.org

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**Abuse Alternatives director brings 28 years of service**

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changes. I also had to learn that a lot of batterers aren't aware of what abuse is. Often times batterers don't understand that if they put their hands on someone, or make another person fear for his or her safety, it's abuse. They think they have committed abuse only if they've bruised or hospitalized someone. Once I got my head around that I found the position both interesting and rewarding, in that I got to work with individuals and help families who were dealing with domestic violence. When I began working in the batterer's program there were only six participants — now there are almost 100 at any one time."

Abuse Alternatives offers a variety of programs for those who suffer from domestic violence but Mix said she is very excited about a new program that will be up and running by February [2016] called Lethality Assessment.

Lethality Assessment provides an effective method for law enforcement to identify victims of domestic violence who are at the highest risk of being seriously injured or killed by their intimate partners, and immediately connect them to the local domestic violence

service program.

"We will be using the program in conjunction with the Washington County, Virginia, Sheriff's Department," she said. "My hope is that the other police forces will opt in. With the officers using this tool, it's our belief that we'll be able to help more people who live with domestic violence."

Mix also said she's glad that the agency is here for the community but one day she would love to be out of work.

"I have found that both in my personal and professional life I'm a caregiver," she said. "I care a lot about people in general. So many folks don't understand that it's hard for someone to get out of an abusive relationship. It's easy for someone to think they would just leave if they were being abused, but I'm a firm believer that no one knows what they would do in a given situation until they've walked in those shoes. Right now Abuse Alternatives is very much needed in the community, but honestly, I am hopeful that one day I'll find myself standing in the unemployment line." ■

**IOLTA Grant Awards appreciated**

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“When I received the notice in the mail regarding the company taking me to court due to a bill not being paid, I was nervous and scared. I decided to call Legal Aid to see if I would be able to get any assistance. From the beginning until the end, I knew every step that was going to take place because **Kevin Fowler (Managing Attorney, Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland – Clarksville)** called me and sent me the information by mail. He took a huge load off of me, and I'm truly *grateful*.”

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