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For immediate release

Press Release

ACFLS Foundation Makes \$10,000 Grant to Sonoma County Legal Services for Supervised Visitation Project

Grant to be presented to Executive Director Toni Novak in San Francisco on December 1, 2018

The Association of Certified Family Law Specialists (ACFLS) Foundation has announced that the Sonoma County Legal Services Foundation Supervised Visitation Project will receive a \$10,000 grant on December 1, 2018 at the ACFLS Holiday Dinner event at the Sir Francis Drake hotel in San Francisco. The grant is the third \$10,000 award made by the ACFLS Charitable Foundation, a recently created California non-profit corporation.

According to President Joseph J. Bell, the Foundation was formed in 2016 “to provide direct and substantial financial support to programs and individuals who are working to improve access to justice, to provide family law education and to improve the California family law process for affected persons, families or groups in need.”

The Foundation was created by certified family law specialists: those attorneys who have worked on such matters for at least ten years, completed specified education courses and who have been certified by the California State Bar as specialists after taking a second bar exam. The ACFLS been in existence since certified specialization began in 1980, providing continuing education seminars and law practice skills to its more than 600 members statewide. The Foundation raises money in several ways including donations of the value of one billable hour made by members of the Association of Certified Family Law Specialists [ACFLS].

President Bell will present the check to Toni Novak, Executive Director of Sonoma County Legal Services Foundation, Inc. (SCLSF) Bell stated that “the ACFLS Foundation Board of Directors unanimously chose the SCLSF Supervised Visitation Project for this grant, over other worthy applicants, based on its innovative and successful “community based” programs helping families in crisis in both the fire stricken areas of Sonoma County, as well as in Mendocino and Lake counties.”

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SCLSF was founded in 1972, according to Ms. Novak, “to assist the Sonoma County Bar in providing affordable legal services.” The Supervised Visitation Program, she said, provides “supervisors who work with the same family over time and have the opportunity to observe problems and progress.”

In addition, “supervisors attempt to role-model appropriate discipline, good nutrition and hygiene, initiating child-oriented activities and discussions and to provide appropriate feedback.” Dedicated funds for these services are not readily available. Moreover, the SCFSF Program faces many challenges such as many mothers not just fathers receiving services, substance abuse, mental health problems such as personality disorders, and clients from diverse backgrounds with communication barriers.

The parents pay their supervisors an hourly fee on a sliding scale based on income and family size. Supervisors prepare reports as requested by either parent. Currently the Program serves about 120 families a year with more than 200 hours of visits a month.

Los Angeles Family Court Presiding Judge (and ACFLS adviser) Thomas Trent Lewis applauds such grants. He commented that “Sadly, when the court orders supervised visitation (usually dads) they don’t visit because of the cost. Many of us would find it cost prohibitive to visit for 8 hours per week or 32 hours times some hourly rate. When a dad disappears, the children suffer...Let’s hope for the day when the Legislature decides this issue needs to be resolved for the benefit of children. Except in extremely toxic situations where no visitation is actually better, children do better with some contact. Someday.”

In the meantime, grants such as this one from the ACFLS to the Sonoma Supervised Visitation Program will allow providers to substantially increase the services they can provide to parents and children in dire need.

For more information regarding SCLSF, call 707-546-2924 or email to sclsf@sonic.net. For information about ACFLS, contact Joseph J. Bell, at 530-272-7477 or visit the website at www.acflsfoundation.org

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