

PRESS RELEASE

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Ali Rabe
Executive Director, Jesse Tree
208-283-4010
ali@jessetreeidaho.org

Noelle Collins
Marketing and Communications Manager, University of Idaho College of Law
(208) 885-7115
dncollins@uidaho.edu



A local nonprofit, Jesse Tree, and the University of Idaho College of Law are partnering in eviction court to connect people to needed legal and social support and rental assistance to prevent evictions.

Two years ago, Jesse Tree and Concordia School of Law initiated a partnership in eviction court, where a supervisory attorney and law students worked directly with case managers to support tenants through the court process. With the closing of Concordia last summer, Jesse Tree reached out to University of Idaho College of Law to fill the gap.

Since then, Jesse Tree's work in eviction court has been supported by four legal interns who are in their second or third year of law school. Interns partner directly with Jesse Tree case management staff to contact landlords and tenants before court, mediate cases, advocate for the tenants' positions, and intervene with rental assistance. This year, Jesse Tree staff and University of Idaho interns have already worked together to serve nearly 20 households in eviction court. Last fall, a total of 30 households were served.

Despite the national eviction moratorium from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in place since September 2020, over 300 evictions were filed in Ada and Canyon County courts from September to December 2020. Despite an extension of the moratorium to March 31, 2021, eviction court cases continue. In 2021 so far, we have already seen over 200 eviction court hearings in the Treasure Valley alone.

Jesse Tree legal interns pull public court records from Ada and Canyon counties each week from Idaho's online court records system, icourts. Interns then pull the attorney-of-record and landlords' names and contact information directly from court documents. They call and email each party to see if the cases can be resolved. Legal externs also respond to tenants who call or submit a form on the Jesse Tree website.

In each case, interns act as an intermediary between tenants, landlords and their attorneys. They explain complicated laws to tenants using information approved by attorneys, and partner with pro bono attorneys in more complicated cases.. They work with Jesse Tree staff to negotiate payment and direct tenants to community resources. They also work closely with staff at Ada County and Canyon County court directly during eviction court hearings,

There are additional federal rental assistance resources available in the state of Idaho this year, but Jesse Tree will need philanthropic support to continue this program in 2021. Even when 15 million was available last fall, there were still over 300 eviction hearings in the Treasure Valley and over 650 in Idaho. Federal rental assistance, which contains numerous eligibility and documentation requirements, is not often accessible to tenants in a time crunch. Jesse Tree has been able to intervene in eviction court cases only with the support of more flexible, private rental assistance from the J.A. & Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation and other private foundations, corporations, and individuals.

A few stories from cases legal interns supported are below. The interns are willing to speak to the media about these stories:

- A single father in Canyon County lost his job due to COVID, and his roommate moved away and was no longer paying rent. As with many of our clients, he got along using savings for as long as he could but eventually ran out. After falling behind on rent he received a summons to eviction court. Because the eviction hearing fell on the first week of the month, the landlord added the coming month's rent onto the bill of unpaid rent. The tenant was able to scrape together money for the coming month's rent, but once legal fees were added he was behind again. Jesse Tree staff and Alex were able to intervene to negotiate a payment agreement with the landlord and allow the tenant to stay.
- Earlier this year, Canyon County temporarily halted funding for mediation in eviction court which meant Jesse Tree had to work twice as hard to try to contact landlords directly before court. Jessica went above and behind spending numerous hours outside of her scheduled internship time communicating with the landlord and tenant. After numerous calls back and forth with one landlord, we came to an agreement where the landlord would allow Jesse Tree to pay for the tenant's arrears and coming month. The catch was that we had to deliver the check by the end of that day. Our office is in Boise, their office was in Canyon county. Luckily, a case manager at Jesse Tree was able to hand deliver the check in Canyon County in time. Jessica said, "It was a joyful moment when all the dots connected and they were able to stay housed."

To contact legal interns directly for an interview please call:

Jessica Borders, Legal Intern (520-507-1829) Alex Paukert, Legal Intern (509-951-6141) Maverick Vitto, Legal Intern (775-513-3554)