



JUSTICE MATTERS

A PUBLICATION OF NEIGHBORHOOD LEGAL SERVICES



SUMMER/FALL 2018

Stories of Justice

Reaching A Goal Is Not Always Easy

For some NLS clients, living what most people would call a normal life can seem like an insurmountable challenge.

As a 24-year-old woman with Asperger's Syndrome, depression, PTSD and anxiety, Jennifer came to NLS for help with a Social Security disability case. As her staff attorney Katy McKee explains, "Jennifer is very smart and articulate, with goals for her future, but at the same time was clearly struggling with the symptoms of her conditions."

While waiting for her Social Security hearing to be scheduled, Jennifer decided to take the first steps toward pursuing her goal of becoming a mortuary cosmetologist, by enrolling in cosmetology school. Her experiences after enrolling, according to McKee, encapsulate why Jennifer may never be able to maintain a full-time job.

"The judge agreed that the severity of Jennifer's health conditions met Social Security's criteria for someone who is disabled"

"She has been in therapy for the last three years which has helped to stabilize her, but even with regular therapy, she still struggled," said McKee. Jennifer's therapist wrote to the school to seek accommodations for her and worked with her during their sessions on interpersonal skills techniques and mindfulness to try to decrease her anxiety and help her process her social interactions.

Even with the help of NLS and her therapist, Jennifer continued to struggle with the demands of school, dealing with the classmates, instructors and clients the program required. Instead of cosmetology school taking the usual nine months to complete, it took Jennifer 21 months, because she needed to take two leaves of absence.

Overall, her dream of attending cosmetology school ended up being much more stressful than Jennifer anticipated. After gathering

her records and a letter from her therapist, the judge agreed with NLS' legal argument that the severity of Jennifer's health conditions met Social Security's criteria for someone who is disabled and approved her disability claim without making her testify, which would have been difficult for her.

"Jennifer was so grateful to NLS she made a donation to the organization as a way of paying it forward," said McKee. "We're proud we could help, but most of all, proud of Jennifer for the hard work and effort she put forth to invest in her future."

To support NLS visit www.nlsa.us/donate.



NEIGHBORHOOD LEGAL SERVICES

Because Justice Is For All

A New Look for Neighborhood Legal Services

In this issue of the NLS newsletter, you'll notice a new look. Like many non-profit organizations, the bulk of our funding goes toward our mission. In the case of Neighborhood Legal Services, that is to provide free civil legal aid to those in need. However, to speak more effectively to our different constituents, we embarked on a rebranding effort aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of our organization's advocacy. Through that process, we learned that we enjoy a level of brand awareness and trust among key supporters including the region's legal and client communities.

We also learned that while there was strong support there was also some confusion. Through our research we recognized that Neighborhood Legal

Services had strong brand equity but that the NLSA acronym caused confusion, especially the letter "A" which some mistook as us being the local bar association. While we considered new names, we came to realize we did not want to abandon the brand equity that we had nor did we want to make huge investments in marketing and advertising that would be required to promote a complete name change.

Thus, we opted for a brand refresh – dropping the Association from our name, and designing a logo that is colorful, appealing and emphasizes the practical identity of a community, neighborhood, or specific geography area where services can be easily accessed. More important than any new logo is our continued

commitment to the principle that everyone, including the poorest and most vulnerable among us, deserves justice and quality legal representation. This is now depicted in our new logo which captures the essence of a neighborhood with the houses uniquely arranged to resemble the scales of justice.



NEIGHBORHOOD
LEGAL SERVICES

Words From Penn



Whether you're a Fortune 500 company or a non-profit like Neighborhood Legal Services, a logo serves as your visual identity and an important way that customers, stakeholders or the public in general recognize who you are or what you do.

We're debuting our new logo in this edition of the NLS newsletter. Created by talented Pittsburgh designer Joe-Cooper Silvis, our re-designed logo is an opportunity to revisit and refresh what we're communicating about our organization. You'll read more about the design and the

process inside these pages and we hope you like what we've done.

It used to be that non-profits looked at branding to communicate to audiences, which in turn might translate into greater recognition or fundraising success. But there's been a shift over the last decade or so among non-profits, and now organizations like ours must think broader and more strategically about branding, its purposes, methods and values. How can branding serve our mission, or as in an article Stanford Social Innovation Review suggests, "build operational capacity, galvanize support and maintain focus on the social mission"?

As an organization, we're trying to address those questions in everything we do, especially our social mission, which is near and dear to us at Neighborhood Legal Services.

But all the branding refreshes, innovation and technical upgrades in the world won't take the place of the dedicated staff, attorneys and volunteers – and this summer – a group of energetic and dedicated law interns. It's our hope that their experience here will somehow shape them and their communities for the better, no matter what legal career path they choose to take.

So, we've tried to capture our story in our new logo; we'd like you to tell us your story. In the coming months we'll be launching a new online portal where people positively impacted by NLS can share their experiences and hopefully benefit others. Until then, you can email us at support@NLSA.us.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Racunas". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bob Racunas

Project Shape: Preventing Eviction through Community Partnerships

With funding from the United Way and the Pennsylvania Housing and Finance Agency's PHARE grant program, NLS will begin an innovative housing stabilization and homelessness prevention project. The project will attempt to address the critical and ongoing needs of low-income homeless and near-homeless individuals and families by providing critical legal services and essential connections to social services to alleviate housing instability and prevent evictions.

Through a combination of community-based direct legal aid and various partnerships, NLS will hire a social

worker to help high-risk clients facing eviction obtain the necessary social supports to maintain or secure housing. The services of certified law students will also be utilized to provide legal advice and representation to public and private housing clients during peak eviction periods.

NLS is partnering with the University of Pittsburgh's Community Engagement Center to establish a series of community legal clinics in the Homewood area while at the same time offering civil legal aid to those in the community facing legal problems impacting their housing.

"We have always served Homewood area residents, however this partnership provides an opportunity to increase our community engagement – sort of a return to the neighborhood," said Pam Dalton-Arlotti, Director of Performance and Compliance.

With Project Shape, NLS anticipates serving 125 households impacting up to as many as 375 individuals based on the average household size in Pennsylvania of 2.97 people per household.

NLS welcomes the contributions of volunteers in this program. To volunteer, please email support@nlsa.us.

Summer Law Interns: Learning by Doing

Written by Emilia Beuger



*Seated left to right: Prisca Tshibambe, Kaitlyn Tucker, John Ukenye, and Michael Wikoff
Standing left to right: Emilia Beuger, Logan Lewis, Josh Davis, and Lin Ding*

We all come from different places, whether it's from the West Coast, the Gulf Coast, or Pittsburgh itself. But what we have in common is that we all have the same mission: to represent individuals who need it most. Our work at NLS is giving us the opportunity to pursue this mission, on our own and as a group.

But why did we choose NLS specifically to explore our passions for public service? Because we believe that access to justice

should not be only for those who can afford it but for all who need it and because we want to help those people solve at least some of their problems and improve their lives. For the Pittsburgh natives in our group it is also the belief that they want to give something back to the community and home that has given them so much. Because gentrification is affecting many low income Pittsburgh residents, our role as advocates is more vital in our community than ever before.

NLS was the logical choice for us to see, firsthand, the impact that our services have on the lives of our clients as they navigate the often complicated workings of the legal process. And while we have only been working here for three months, our experiences have exceeded our expectations. There is nowhere else we would rather be this summer, and we are hopeful that we will be able to continue working at organizations like NLS upon graduation from law school.

NLS is appreciative of the support of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, the Allegheny County Bar Foundation and the Gismondi Certified Law Student Summer Fellowship program for making this internship program possible.

The 2018 Summer Intern Class hails from the University of Pittsburgh School of Law (Michael Wikoff, Prisca Tshibambe, Josh Davis, Lin Ding, and Logan Lewis), the Northeastern School of Law (Kaitlyn Tucker), Washington University School of Law (John Ukenye), and the University of Massachusetts Amherst (Emilia Beuger).

Won't You Be Our Volunteer?

The demand for civil legal aid continues to grow as does the need for quality pro bono legal assistance. NLS staff attorneys and volunteer attorneys help nearly 16,000 people each year. But, also each year, NLS turns away 10,000 others because of lack of resources to help everyone. Volunteer attorneys bridge the gap between those who need assistance and those who receive it directly from legal aid. Please consider connecting with NLS as a volunteer fighting for fairness and justice.

Represent Victims of Domestic Violence in Protection from Abuse Hearings

Last year NLS staff attorneys and pro bono volunteers helped 1,745 victims of domestic violence secure a Protection from Abuse order. A PFA can be the first step toward freedom from domestic abuse for those who have nowhere to turn for help. Without an attorney to guide them through the process, survivors can feel re-victimized by the emotional and financial drain of obtaining a PFA. To volunteer, please contact Mary Ann Troper-Malley at 412-586-6134 or via email troperma@nlsa.us.

**CLE
OPPORTUNITY**

Represent Clients with Tangled Title Issues

There are an estimated 4,000 tangled titles in Allegheny County with many more in our region. Without title, residents cannot repair or weatherize the property or deal with tax and mortgage issues. **Be a part of the solution – learn how to assist clients with tangled titles on SEPTEMBER 25th from 8:30 AM – 12:15 PM at NLS' Tangled Title CLE.** Download registration form at <http://bit.ly/2PvMtzm>.

Join our Equal Justice Campaign Committee

The **Equal Justice Campaign** is the cornerstone of legal aid giving funding that ensures the delivery of legal services to the poor. Leadership volunteers are needed to develop campaign strategies and provide inspiration to a network of hundreds of attorneys, judges and individuals toward a common fundraising goal. To volunteer, please contact Christine Kirby at 412.586.6137 or via email at kirbyc@nlsa.us.

**LEADERSHIP
OPPORTUNITY**

Make a Difference by joining Justice Rising Advocates

As a group, **Justice Rising Advocates** for Neighborhood Legal Services engages the region's young professionals by broadening their understanding of civil legal aid why Neighborhood Legal Services' advocacy is crucial to the fight for access to justice for all. This is your opportunity to lead, network and make a difference. NLS invites you to share your knowledge, apply your skills, volunteer, and learn from legal, business and community leaders. As individuals, NLS Justice Rising Advocates are committed to advancing the mission of NLS as they rise in the community and their careers. Get involved on the ground floor of this exciting new initiative! For more information, contact Julia Marasco at 412-586-6140 or via email at marascoj@nlsa.us

DON'T DELAY! GET INVOLVED! VOLUNTEER TODAY!

NLS Awarded Impact Fund Grant

Neighborhood Legal Services is honored to announce we are a recipient of an investment made by the United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania's Impact Fund grant program. United Way invests Impact Fund dollars through a competitive selection process guided by teams of community leaders and volunteers. These volunteers work together, with United Way, to assess what services will have the greatest impact

on our community. Neighborhood Legal Services and other local human service agencies provide proposals for meeting these needs. Only the best, most innovative and

collaborative programs are selected. This rigorous process ensures that your

United Way contributions make a real difference in the lives of people whose needs would not be met without your help.



**IMPACT FUND
AWARD FOR
EXCELLENCE**

▶ **The United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania's Workplace Giving Campaign kicks off on September 1 and runs through April 30, 2019. NLS' United Way Contributor Choice number is #2761 and our Equal Justice Campaign Contributor Choice number is #534. Please support NLS through the United Way!**

UNITED WE FIGHT UNITED WE WIN

JOIN THE FIGHT TO SUPPORT OUR COMMUNITY



Please support Neighborhood Legal Services through an Impact Fund donation or designating your contribution directly to NLS.

BECAUSE JUSTICE IS FOR ALL



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Last spring at a ceremony in Harrisburg, The Honorable Dick Thornburgh was recognized with a 2018 PLAN Excellence Award in the Community Service Category, sponsored by the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN), for his lifelong commitment to equal justice under the law. Governor Thornburgh was one of the founding members of NLS and his advocacy, dedication and activism for the availability of civil legal aid continues to this day.

Pictured, left to right: PLAN, Inc. Board President Emeritus James P. DeAngelo, Esq., Gov. Thornburgh, and Samuel W. Milkes, Esq. PLAN, Inc. Executive Director.

Contact Us

NLS provides service to residents in Allegheny, Beaver, Butler and Lawrence counties.

Call toll-free: **1-866-761-6572**

Visit us online: **www.nlsa.us**

Sign up for more information via email!



Funded, in part, by the Commonwealth and through a contract with the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). The official registration and financial information of the Neighborhood Legal Services may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free within Pennsylvania 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement. Federal regulations applying to NLS require that we notify all donors that no funds can be expended by NLS for any activity prohibited under P.L.104-134 or otherwise prohibited by 45 C.F.R. § 1600 et seq.

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