

JUSTICE MATTERS

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NLSA Launches Innovative Medical-Legal Collaborative for Children



Sometimes remedies to health problems challenging low-income children are not always solely medical. Social determinants can create barriers that prevent children living in poverty from achieving the good health that everyone deserves. Last July, through the generous support of the Heinz Endowments, NLSA established a unique collaboration with Children's Primary Care Oakland (part of Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh – UPMC) to work towards better health for children through legal advocacy.

Pairing a family in need with a legal aid attorney who can advocate for a child on legal issues which, if resolved, could improve the child's health, is an innovative approach to improving health outcomes. As part of an integrated healthcare delivery team, attorneys in this medical-legal partnership work to address and improve outcomes, engaging in "preventive legal care" alongside "preventive health care."

NLSA attorney Katy McKee is onsite at the clinic on a weekly basis and works closely with the medical staff to impact a child's health. Thus far, the partnership has received 66 referrals and opened 23 cases. "In just a few months, the medical-legal collaborative has helped families stabilize utility service, provide access to affordable housing, and even help resolve a school related issue resulting in a student being unable to attend school because of harassment and fear of shootings," said McKee. These are big accomplishments for such a short amount of time and ones that NLSA and the Children's Primary Care Oakland team hope to build on moving forward. 



Neighborhood Legal Services Association

NLSA Attorney Katy McKee

Words from Penn



Dear Friend,

At NLSA, we refer to them as “special projects,” but really this newsletter is all about the people and partnerships we form that help us deliver critical services to those in need.

Partnerships, like those we have undertaken with Operation StrongVet, the Primary Care Center of Children’s Hospital in Oakland, PAServes – Greater Pittsburgh, and the Women’s Empowerment Initiative help us to enhance and expand the services we provide to reach those who might not otherwise get the help they need.

In this winter edition of NLSA’s newsletter, we’ll introduce you to attorney Morgan Jenkins who joined NLSA as an MLK Fellow to focus on veteran’s legal issues. We help hundreds of veterans each year and are dedicated to ensuring that those who’ve served our country have safe places to live, access to care and the opportunity to be vital members of the community. Morgan hails from a family with a strong military background and is excited to be a part of making lives better for veterans and military families in southwestern PA. In addition to Morgan’s story, you’ll read about the partnerships we have

with Operation StrongVet and PAServes, dedicated entities that do the important work of supporting military families and veterans.

Also in this newsletter, we’ll tell you more about the partnership we’ve established with the Primary Care Center of Children’s Hospital in Oakland. The world of modern healthcare delivery can be an intimidating one, especially if you don’t have resources or access to be an effective advocate for your own care or a loved one’s. The Children’s Medical Legal Collaborative seeks to address this issue by offering doctors the opportunity to partner with an attorney on behalf of a patient. We believe that the help of an attorney can sometimes address disparities in patient care and when that happens, everyone benefits - because ultimately, it’s more cost-effective, and humane, to take good care of someone than not.

Finally, we have an article on our Lawrence County office, located in New Castle, PA, a great example of how dedicated individuals and organizations came together to solve a problem.

A few years ago, the Lawrence County office of NLSA was in danger of being shut down due to budget cuts. Through

the hard work of state and local leaders of the Bar Association and the Lawrence County Commissioners, along with civic, community and individual support, we were able to keep the office open and continue to service residents in need.

For us, these partnerships are all about helping us fulfill our mission to provide free legal services and most importantly, access to justice, one of the most basic rights that so many of us take for granted.

Fortunately for us there are many generous individuals and organizations that recognize the importance of what we do. We have been fortunate enough to be able to deliver services to people in Allegheny, Beaver, Butler and Lawrence counties for 50 years. For that, I want to take this opportunity to say thanks for helping to make our special partnerships a success.

Regards,

Bob Racunas, Esq.
Executive Director

Helping Vets & Military Families

NLSA is proud to partner with several organizations dedicated to serving military families and veterans throughout the region. We are a founding partner

in PAServes - Greater Pittsburgh (www.paserves.org) the region’s first coordinated network of public, private, and non-profit organizations working



together to serve veterans, transitioning service-members, and their families. We also collaborate with Veteran’s Leadership Program (www.vlpwpa.org), an organization that provides comprehensive human services solutions focused on veterans and their families in western Pennsylvania, including temporary and permanent housing, employment, supportive services, qualified referrals, and intensive case management services. Finally, we support the efforts of Operation StrongVet (www.strongvetwpa.org), whose worthy mission is to help veterans leverage their education, leadership qualities, decision-making abilities and their competitive spirit to build stronger communities here in southwestern Pennsylvania. Please visit www.nlsa.us to learn more about how you can help military families and veterans in your own community. 🇺🇸



MLK Fellow Has Passion for Veterans' Rights

Throughout law school, attorney Morgan Jenkins positioned herself for a career in public interest law, believing that every individual should have access to justice regardless of their ability to pay.

That belief has led her to NLSA where she is now a Martin Luther King, Jr. Fellow focusing on veterans' legal issues. The two-year fellowship is funded in part by the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network. The Martin Luther King, Jr. fellowship program was established in 1991 to promote cultural and ethnic diversity in legal services and to honor Dr. King.

"I knew in my heart that the MLK fellowship position was meant for me. I couldn't think of a better way for me to begin my legal career than by giving back to a group of individuals who have given so much, not only to this country, but to me as well," Morgan explained.

Morgan holds a JD from the University of Pittsburgh School of Law and a bachelor's degree in English from the College of William & Mary. Prior to her current position at NLSA, Morgan held the Gismondi Fellowship, various judicial internships/externships, and participated in family law clinic experiences. But

it was the opportunity to work with veterans that she was most excited about because being brought up in a military family, as she explains, "I was raised by soldiers."


Her paternal grandfather served in WWII and the Korean War, her maternal grandfather served in Korea as well, her father's two eldest brothers both served in Vietnam, and Morgan's father, Christopher Edwin Jenkins, Sr. served during the Gulf War and retired from the Army after 30 years of service.

"I was raised by soldiers."

- MORGAN JENKINS

In her position as an MLK fellow, Morgan has already identified housing and family law related issues (primarily private landlord/tenant evictions and custody cases) as fundamental areas of legal concern although she also recognizes the need for access to mental health and substance abuse treatment as being extremely important.

Although she hasn't made a final decision on what type of law she ultimately hopes to practice, she believes that her passion for family law and her interest in veterans may direct her choices.

"Right now while I have the chance, I'd like to learn as much as I can, beginning with veterans benefits. I'm eager to bring my family law background to the veteran community, but to also learn how other areas of law intersect with the needs of our veteran clients." 

Morgan, age 11, pictured with her father, U.S. Army LTC (Ret) Christopher E. Jenkins, Sr.

NLSA

Neighborhood Legal Services Association

3rd Annual NLSA Spring Sports Roundup

NLSA Celebrates 50 Years With Five Decades of Sports Excellence

The Gridiron Gold production team is back in action for the 3rd Annual NLSA Spring Sports Roundup to be held on April 28, 2016, at the Wyndham Grand Pittsburgh. For this special NLSA anniversary, we will also be recognizing an exceptional athlete or event related to Pittsburgh sports for each of the five decades that NLSA has been serving western Pennsylvania including, of course, several of our championship teams.

Join our Honorary Co-Chairs Ralph Cindrich and Morgan O'Brien, along with Event Chairman Rich Boyd and Emcee Ellis Cannon, for another can't-miss evening for any Pittsburgh sports fan.

Table sponsorships are available, and individual tickets are \$250.00 each. For more information and details about the Spring Sports Round-Up, please contact Diane Balcom at balcomd@nlsa.us or 412-600-6176. 

A Community Speaks Out to Save NLSA's New Castle Office

NLSA's Lawrence County office, located in New Castle, PA serves low income individuals and families, many of whom are challenged by problems of unemployment, lack of adequate housing, and mental health issues. Despite the need for its services, NLSA's Board of Directors made the difficult decision to close the office in 2014 in order to reduce operating costs and balance NLSA's operating budget.

With the threat of closure looming, the Lawrence County Bar Association, its leadership and membership, mobilized to act. The Lawrence County Court of Common Pleas, the Lawrence County Commissioners, and the City of New Castle joined the effort to save NLSA's local office, all recognizing how devastating the closing would be to the community.


Frequent coverage in the *New Castle News*, as well as editorials and letters to the editor helped keep the issue in front of the community. Many interested stakeholders joined forces to keep the office open including the NLSA's landlords

in the Temple Building, private donors, several local attorneys, and Lawrence County Board of Directors' members Paul Ward and Jonathan Solomon, Esq.

In the end the efforts succeeded. Not only has the New Castle office remained open but its attorneys have been honored for their outstanding efforts on behalf of those in need in Lawrence County. Last October, New Castle NLSA office staff attorney Nikki Christopher received the "Making a Difference Domestic Violence Award" from the Crisis Shelter of Lawrence County, the first year the recognition has been given.

Her colleague Mark Krochka will also be honored for his exceptional service on behalf of the residents of Lawrence County with a Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network 2015 Excellence Award which will be presented in a ceremony on March 15 in Harrisburg. In nominating Krochka for the honor, NLSA executive director Bob Racunas described him as a "hard-working, tenacious and an aggressive advocate," for his

clients, while being ever mindful of the importance of "civility" in all his efforts.

As for the long term security of the New Castle office, Michelle DeBord, managing attorney, is cautiously optimistic. "There is plenty of need for our services in this community and we're working hard to make sure we're able to stay here and help those who need it the most," said DeBord. 



NLSA Attorneys Nikki Christopher & Mark Krochka

Contact
Us

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

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

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

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 Association 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 NLSA require that we notify all donors that no funds can be expended by NLSA for any activity prohibited under P.L.104-134 or otherwise prohibited by 45 C.F.R. § 1600 et seq.

