

JUSTICE MATTERS

A PUBLICATION OF NEIGHBORHOOD LEGAL SERVICES



NEIGHBORHOOD
LEGAL SERVICES

WINTER 2020

SUPPORTING RESIDENTS OF ALLEGHENY, BEAVER, BUTLER AND LAWRENCE COUNTIES

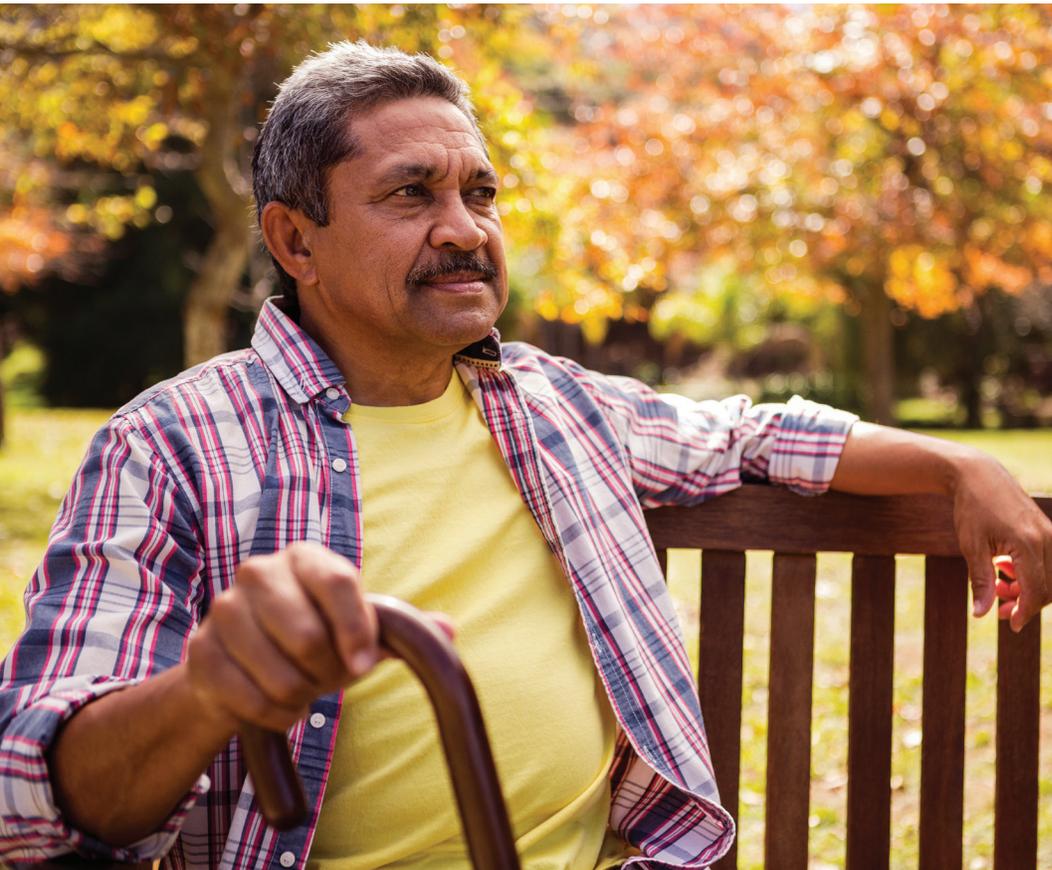
Social Workers Help Lift the Work of Neighborhood Legal Services

A close collaboration between a civil legal aid lawyer and a social worker can yield positive benefits for the client beyond the resolution of the legal problem. Legal aid clients often have more than just legal issues. Clients seeking legal services often have complex problems with health, housing, and social environments, along with a multitude of other challenges. Social workers at NLS work with their clients on

areas that include housing, mental health, substance abuse, communication, benefit applications, medical care, transportation, utility assistance and others. The benefits of working with social workers can vary from client to client, but in general, social workers are able to help clients work more effectively with attorneys, often resulting in a better chance at stability and security.

Like almost all aspects of daily life, the pandemic has made the challenges NLS attorneys and social workers face even more difficult.

According to Rebecca Graban, MSW, an NLS staff social worker, after almost a full year of a global pandemic, the organization has seen client needs shift from short term to long term.



“We may have a family who is not just one month behind on rent but is now six months behind, with zero income coming in because of a job loss,” said Graban.

For some families, housing and unemployment issues are compounded by the need to oversee virtual learning for children, which makes the lack of resources for helping families even more overwhelming. “With the support of our dedicated advocates and volunteer attorneys, we are doing everything we can to meet the greater needs of the communities we serve. It’s a challenge, but one we welcome,” said Graban.

NLS is More Than Legal Help

As a young, single mom, Amber* reached out to NLS for help in getting a Protection from Abuse (PFA) order against a man she was dating who had begun harassing her, making her feel unsafe in her home and community. After successfully securing a PFA, Amber began experiencing health problems including difficulty breathing for more than a month. While her primary care physician suspected COVID, all her subsequent tests were negative.

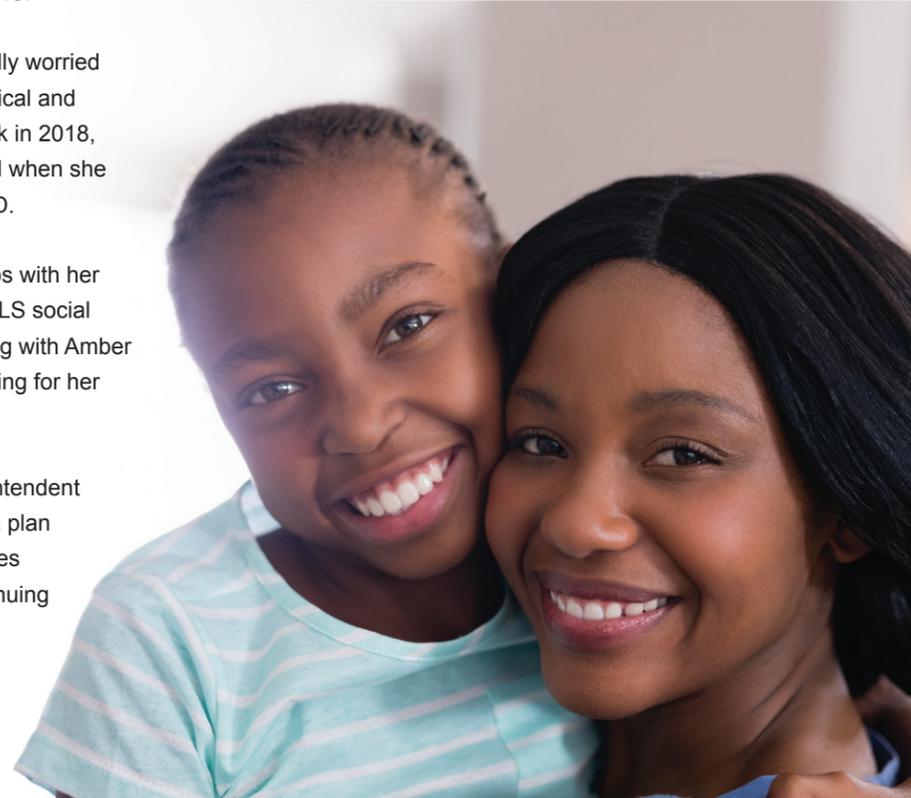
However, during this stressful time, Amber was especially worried about her 10-year-old daughter Madison* who has medical and developmental needs requiring Amber's daily care. Back in 2018, Madison spent six months in the foster care system and when she was returned to her home, she was suffering from PTSD.

When NLS became aware of Amber's ongoing hardships with her health and her daughter's needs, they reached out to NLS social worker Rebecca Graban for help. Graban began working with Amber to address safety, her need for appropriate medical testing for her and her daughter and to help with Madison's school.

Graban was able to organize a meeting with the superintendent of the online charter school Madison attends to create a plan to help including the support of behavioral health services and completion of a 504 plan to assist Madison in continuing her education while addressing her medical needs.

"I don't know where I would have turned for help with my daughter's education and medical needs, I was just overwhelmed. I'm so grateful to everyone at NLS for all they've done for us," said Amber.

**Names have been changed to protect client's safety and privacy.*



Words From Penn

As we begin to close out 2020 and welcome, hopefully, a brighter 2021, I'd like to take a step back to look at what Neighborhood Legal Services has achieved this year.

While we are still in the midst of a global health crisis, rays of hope can be found. Now more than ever, neighbors have reached out to support each other. Family and friends have found creative ways to stay connected, something we all need right now.

Throughout this challenging time, Neighborhood Legal Services has continued to provide critical support

through free legal aid. One of the most important ways we do this is through the dedicated efforts of our staff social workers. In this edition of *Equal Justice Matters* you'll read about how NLS social workers leverage their training, patience and professional experience to help clients navigate the often-complicated world of legal and court systems. Another way we are working to serve our communities is through the Pittsburgh Pardons Project. In partnership with the Allegheny County Bar Association's Pro Bono Center, the Pittsburgh Pardons Project was a pilot program we helped launch aimed at assisting individuals with gaining access to pardons, paving the way for better access to job and housing opportunities.

We know we still face many challenges ahead as we continue to struggle with the impact of the pandemic. But with your support and generosity, we will work to ensure that no matter what someone's circumstances, they have equal access to the important protections we all enjoy.

Wishing you all a safe, healthy and happy holiday and a brighter New Year.

Best,

Bob Racunas

Giving Matters Because Justice Matters



Final 19 - 20 Infographic



ROI
According to studies, in PA each dollar invested in civil legal aid yields an \$11 return.



Neighborhood Legal Services' [Equal Justice Campaign](#) is an annual fundraising campaign where the entire legal profession comes together around a common cause — helping to ensure that the neediest members of our community have access to civil legal help.

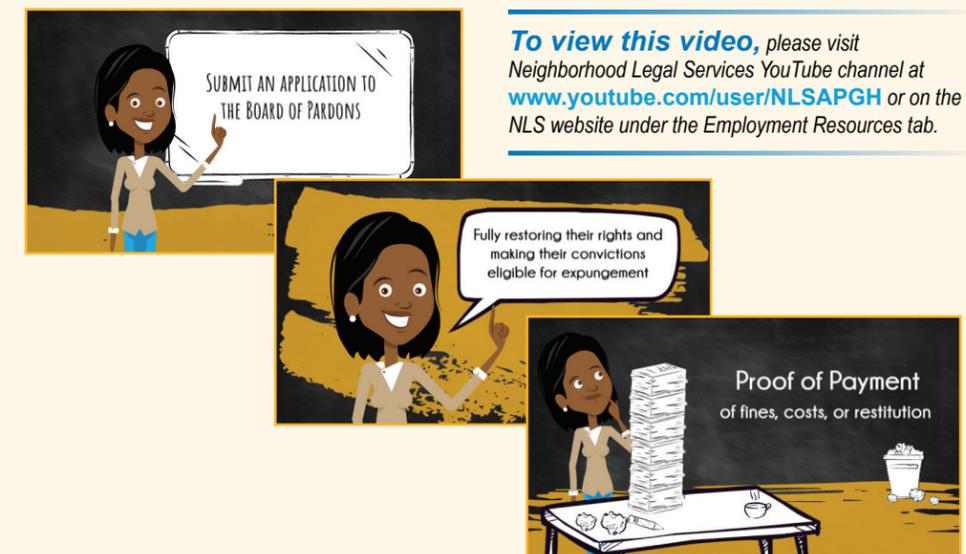
Contributions to the Equal Justice Campaign are more important now than ever.

Civil legal aid is a vital component of the public response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Communities throughout our region have been impacted. The economic hardships caused by business closures, resulting in lost jobs, missed rent payments and people wrongly denied benefits that could keep their families afloat are just some of the challenges our clients face.

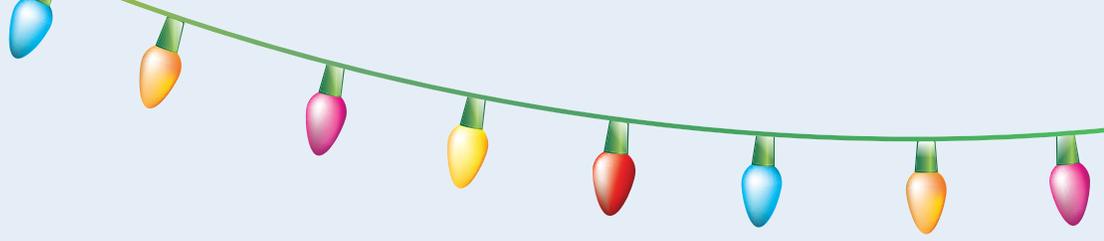
Please consider [making an annual gift](#) to NLS' Equal Justice Campaign today to ensure that even the most vulnerable in our communities have access to free civil legal aid. For more information, please visit our campaign website www.equaljusticecampaign.org or contact Christine Kirby, Development Director at kirbyc@nlsa.us.

Pittsburgh Pardons Project

Neighborhood Legal Services, in collaboration with the Allegheny County Bar Foundation's Pro Bono Center and the Bar Association's Homer S. Brown Division, recently piloted the Pittsburgh Pardons Project to help people apply for pardons and clear their criminal records. NLS created a short video that explains what a pardon is, how someone applies, how long it takes and who is a good candidate. Based on strong demand and community interest, NLS is working to secure funding to continue this project.



To view this video, please visit [Neighborhood Legal Services YouTube channel](#) at www.youtube.com/user/NLSAPGH or on the NLS website under the Employment Resources tab.



NLS Staff Make their Mark

The Mon Valley Initiative recently recognized **Edward Van Stevenson Jr.**, Neighborhood Legal Services Managing Attorney, with a Regional Partnership Award during its “Beyond 2020” virtual award presentation. The Mon Valley Initiative (MVI) honored Ed and NLS for its two-decade long partnership with the MVI’s Workforce Development & Financial Coaching program. For over 20 years, NLS has partnered with MVI’s Workforce Development & Financial Coaching program to teach classes on employment law and expungement of minor criminal offenses that can present a barrier to people attempting to re-enter the workforce and rebuild their career.



Doreen Mitchell, Intake Specialist at NLS, was a presenter in a virtual PA Workforce Development Conference this past October along with representatives of Butler CareerLink. The topic “Legal Literacy: Working with a Criminal Record” was developed to give county and community partners information on how to help individuals with a less than perfect background and give them knowledge and tools to “clean up” their records and make themselves more marketable to employers.



This holiday season will be like no other, but that doesn’t mean children in need won’t get gifts. **Angela Melton**, NLS staff attorney in Beaver, helped wrap and deliver Christmas gifts to Beaver County Children and Youth Services locations, and **Amber McGee** and **Alyssa Pietropaolo** helped spearhead a toy drive for homeless children as members of the Allegheny County Bar Association’s Young Lawyers Division.

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!



NLS’ United Way Contributor Choice number is #2761 and our Equal Justice Campaign Contributor Choice number is #534.



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.