

A Publication of Neighborhood Legal Services Association

Making a Home Safe Again



When water started flooding her basement a year ago last February, Melinda did what most of us would do, she contacted the water company. After an experience she describes as an “ordeal” reaching someone that could help her, the water company sent a workman to her home some ten days later.

“My basement was completely filled with water and at that point it was three steps from my first floor,” said the 69-year-old East Liberty resident. Finally, with the help of a neighbor, the water company located a shut-off valve, the flooding stopped but the fire department had to be called in to pump out the water. “I told them, ‘wow, my water bill is going to be really high,’ but they said it wouldn’t be, that the water didn’t go through my meter, and I wouldn’t be charged.” When July’s bill arrived, it was over \$1,000. Unable to pay, she contacted the water company where she was told she was responsible for the charges however she could appeal the bill if she chose.

It was at that point that Melinda turned to the Elder Law Project of NLSA. She met with NLSA staff attorney Kathryn McKee who accompanied her to the water authority to get her charges removed. But the water authority wouldn’t let McKee argue for her client. At that point, another NLSA attorney, Catherine Martin, took the case to Common Pleas court and it was there that Melinda’s charges were finally dismissed.

As a retired claims adjuster, Melinda knows better than most how difficult it is to get help in cases like hers but she’s extremely grateful for the support and professional services she received from NLSA attorneys Martin and McKee. “I don’t know what I would have done without them. They were on my side when I needed it most. You could tell that it was more than just a job for them, they were dedicated and hard-working on my behalf,” she said. ♣

Help our seniors live happier lives, free from legal concerns that might impact their health, housing and finances.

Words from Penn



As most of us who live in Southwestern Pennsylvania know, we are blessed with a greater percentage of our population who are senior citizens than any region in the U.S. except for South Florida. That's a part of our strength and part of our challenge.

When the mills collapsed and jobs disappeared, so did younger working age adults. Many never came back and while that helps explain why we have such a large population of older adults, it does not answer the question of what we can do to help our seniors live happier lives, free from legal concerns that might impact their health, housing and finances.

NLSA has stepped in to do its part by providing staff and volunteer attorneys to its Elder Law Project, a county-wide initiative that offers free civil legal aid to seniors at senior centers, community centers and other locations through Allegheny County. At these centers, seniors come to our attorneys with almost every kind of challenge imaginable. Some are urgent like Melinda's dangerously flooded basement that, though not her fault, she was unable to get help. Read in this issue how NLSA attorneys helped her when no one else would.

Perhaps even more common than flooded basements are problems with health care, housing or debt, to name a few. For many seniors with little to no access to a computer, needing to use the internet makes it difficult if not impossible to get help. For seniors who distrust using the internet, having the opportunity to meet in person with an attorney is comforting and invaluable.

I've been practicing law for over 40 years and had been at the helm of NLSA for 36 years when I too needed legal advice when my own mother's health caused her to be in and out of hospital and care facilities. Even though I am an experienced attorney, many of the issues she faced were not part of my legal skill set, so being able to turn to those with specific training and experience was a relief for me and my family. From that personal experience, I value even more what our pro bono and staff attorneys accomplish on behalf of the older adults we serve everyday.

In this issue, you'll read about generous gifts from the funding community that has helped us upgrade our Legal Triage system so we are now able to serve more seniors than ever before, and do so faster and more efficiently.

Seniors are a vital treasure in our communities. We will continue to do all we can to ease their concerns, better meet their needs, and help them live happy, full lives.

Regards,

Bob Racunas, Esq., Executive Director

Critical Grant Help Supports NLSA Legal Literacy Outreach

Thanks to generous and more-critical-than-ever grants from the Mary Hillman Jennings Foundation, the Snee-Reinhardt Foundation, PNC Charitable Trusts and PCCD, NLSA can now begin working towards enhancing its Legal Literacy outreach program through improved technology and enhanced content. With improved service, NLSA is better able to provide helpful information to its clients, reduce the number of those who come to NLSA in crisis, and mitigate the need for costly litigation.

Legal Literacy is a critical and ongoing initiative for NLSA that has an exceptional reputation among those it serves. Legal Literacy sessions are provided at the Allegheny County Courthouse, senior centers, medical clinics and various other locations.

With essential foundation support, NLSA can now bolster its availability to deliver effective Legal Literacy presentations by purchasing Microsoft Surface Pros and other related technology, which will be used by attorneys to increase efficiency and create standardized, more engaging and memorable presentations on an expanded variety of topics. This will also eliminate the cumbersome "paper file" system previously used, allowing attorneys to help clients fill out, sign and file necessary documents on-site and online.

This proactive delivery of information for clients and providers is designed to equip them with the knowledge and strategies needed to prevent litigation and avoid crisis situations. 📄

New Legal Triage App Now Live

NLSA is proud to announce that the online Legal Triage assessment system is now live.

Easily found by going to www.nlsa.us and clicking on the "Get Legal Help" tab at the top right corner of the page, this assessment tool is designed to help users determine if they are eligible to receive assistance from NLSA without first having to call in and go through the intake process. The system was created to direct users to the most appropriate legal aid provider or resource, reduce wait times and allow for clients to more efficiently be served.

The online app was made possible through a partnership with Five Star Development and by investments of the Legal Services Corporation, the Forbes Funds, UpPrize BNY Mellon Social Innovation Challenge, and Steel City Codefest. 📄

Legal Aid for Seniors in their Own Communities

Senior citizens are a vital part of our communities, but often older adults are confronted with special challenges when it comes to accessing civil legal aid. Obstacles to accessing legal help include health problems, lack of transportation, and lack of access to a computer. Without what most think of as basic means of communication, getting help can be daunting.

To ensure seniors have adequate access to civil legal aid, NLSA offers its services through the Elder Law Project, which is housed in senior and community centers throughout Allegheny County and helps hundreds of senior citizens each year.

According to Katy McKee, a NLSA staff attorney who works primarily with seniors, older adults can have a wide

variety of issues for which they need help including powers of attorney, health care advance directives, debt issues, property tax problems and landlord-tenant issues. "Through the Elder Law Project, which serves older adults (60 and above), we are able to help seniors, who are often faced with health and general aging challenges, get the assistance they need," she said.

NLSA recently upgraded its website to better serve its clients, but some seniors lack access to computers or simply are not comfortable using them or the internet for help. "We understand this, and respect their desire to get help in person, in their own community, with someone they can trust taking them through a process and explaining things along the way," says McKee. ♣



For more information on NLSA Elder Law Project, visit <https://nlsa.us/about-nlsa-2/what-we-do/our-services/>



NLSA on KDKA Sunday Business Page



In May, Bob Racunas and Antoinette (Nette) C. Oliver, a member of the law firm Meyer, Unkovic & Scott and the current chair of the Pittsburgh Pro Bono Partnership's administrative board, appeared on KDKA's *Sunday Business Page* program with host Jon Delano. The on-air discussion focused on how proposed budget cuts would limit access to free civil legal aid. The program aired the same week as the ABA/NLADA Equal Justice Conference in Pittsburgh, marking the first gathering of legal aid advocates since the budget cut announcement. 🏛️

Dalton-Arlotti Honored with 2017 PLAN Excellence Award

Last April, Pamela Lynn Dalton-Arlotti, Esq., NLSA Director of Program Performance and Compliance, received a 2017 Excellence Award from the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, (PLAN).

Dalton-Arlotti was honored among several other individuals, groups and a corporation for demonstrating excellence in their efforts to expand access to justice for those who have nowhere else to turn for help.

Dalton-Arlotti has been a key part of NLSA's management team, safeguarding program integrity, satisfying reporting requirements of multiple funders, and ensuring that NLSA is in strict compliance with all regulatory mandates. In fact, at the end of the Legal Services Corporation's last program compliance

monitoring visit, the team leader called the review "extraordinary and amazing." Pam received accolades for meticulous attention to detail and her diligence in ensuring advocates complied with LSC requirements.

Among the initiatives Dalton-Arlotti has spearheaded for the organization is the implementation of the new LegalServer case management system, upgrading NLSA's website, helping to create the Women's Empowerment Initiative, establishing medical-legal partnerships, moving the program towards the use of a paperless system, development of centralized intake, development of several pro bono projects, outreach to those with Limited English Proficiency, as well as successful collaboration on many of NLSA's fundraising initiatives.



According to Bob Racunas, "Among our very dedicated staff, Pam is a standout. Her leadership and advocacy on behalf of those we serve inspires us everyday." 🏛️

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

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