

SERVICES

INCLUDE:

- Individual representation
- Information
- Referral
- Advice through telephone and helpline
- Community legal education
- Support for those clients who will be taking responsibility for handling some or all aspects of their cases
- Call
1-877-9-LEGAL-0

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Appeal for Justice

SPRING 2010

Luzerne County Campaign For Legal Aid

Raises over \$35,000 in pledges and contributions

In January, North Penn Legal Services (NPLS) kicked off its new annual campaign--the Luzerne County Campaign for Legal Aid. The Campaign Co-Chairs are Joseph D. Burke, Esq. and Eugene C. Kelley, Esq. Together, with the Campaign Committee, they are working to raise funds that will help low-income people with their civil legal problems.

In Luzerne County, poor people are denied basic legal services. There are 35,058 people in Luzerne County living below the poverty line—many of them needing legal help. Despite the overwhelming need, 4 attorneys and 6 support staff provided services to 2,000 low-income people last year. Funds raised by The Luzerne County Campaign for Legal Aid will help people who would otherwise go without services.

Participation in the Campaign will enhance access to justice for more low-income people in our community. The goal of the Campaign is to raise \$70,000 in 3 years. To date, the Campaign has raised \$35,000. The commitment of law firms and individuals will help make it possible for NPLS to assist 200--seniors, those with disabilities, the homeless, indigent families

with children and the working poor--with their critical legal needs.

Poor families continue to need NPLS for access to our justice system. They need legal help to save their homes from mortgage foreclosure, to protect themselves from domestic violence, to make sure their children with special needs receive necessary services. NPLS has just one attorney for every 7,011 poor individuals.

NPLS lacks the resources to meet the growing need for legal help. Each year, 1,400 individuals in Luzerne County who need our help are turned away. At a cost of less than \$350 per case, NPLS provides desperately needed legal help to the most vulnerable members of our society. With the support and partnership of our friends in the Luzerne County Bar Association, we can succeed in our effort to strengthen the services available to our clients.

To make a donation, visit NPLS' Web site at www.northpennlegal.org or call the Development Office at 610-317-5314.

Donations are 100% tax-deductible.

The Luzerne County Campaign For Legal Aid Committee:

Co-Chairs:

Joseph D. Burke, Esq.
Burke Vullo Reilly Roberts

Eugene C. Kelley, Esq.
Kelley & Polishan LLC

Committee:

Mark W. Bufalino, Esq.
Elliott Greenleaf & Dean

Kevin Grebas, Esq.
Marshall, Parker and Associates

Basil G. Russin, Esq.

John T. Zelinka, Esq.
Rosenn Jenkins & Greenwald

Carbon County Bar Association Makes Donations to NPLS

NPLS received a \$5,000 donation from the Carbon County Bar Association at the end of 2009. We appreciate this support for the work our Jim Thorpe office does.



If you need help with your housing issues, call our helpline at 1-877-9-LEGAL-0.

NPLS congratulates Jack Moody and Susan Evans on their PLAN Excellence Awards. They exemplify what it means to be a volunteer.

To view the award recipient's videos, visit PLAN'S Web site at www.palegalaid.net

FAIR HOUSING LAW for Rental Properties in Pennsylvania Seminar Held in Lehigh County

NPLS' Bethlehem office organized a Fair Housing Workshop: for Rental Properties in Pennsylvania in Allentown on April 22. The day long seminar was designed to help staff from local organizations, housing providers, attorneys and advocates understand consumer's rights regarding discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, family composition, and physical disabilities and the basics of landlord/tenant law in PA.

Sessions included Fair Housing and Disabilities: Accommodations of Disabilities in Rental Housing, Fair Housing Complaints: When and How to File a Discrimination Complaint, Fundamentals of Landlord-Tenant Law in Pennsylvania, Fair Housing Issues, Warranty of Habitability and the Right to a Safe and Sanitary Rental Unit, Housing Resources in the Lehigh Valley.

The workshop was developed in conjunction with the County of Lehigh's Community &

Development Block Grant program.

NPLS would like to thank presenters: Angela McIver, Executive Director of Enforcement Fair Housing Rights Center in Southeastern PA, Sharon Lane, Esq., PA Human Relationships Commission, Patricia McGarvey Knebel, Esq. HUD Civil Rights Attorney, Michael Santanasta, Esq. King, Spry, Herman, Freund & Faul and staff from NPLS.

John J. Moody and Susan K. Evans receive PLAN Excellence Awards

The PLAN Excellence Awards were held on March 23 at the Harrisburg Hilton & Towers. Two NPLS supporters received awards during the night's festivities.

John J. Moody (Jack) was nominated by NPLS' Bethlehem office for his volunteer work. Jack is a full time volunteer at the Bethlehem office. In fact, most staff will tell you that Jack is "on staff" at the Bethlehem office. He keeps regular office hours—volunteering two full days each week and is currently handling 50 cases. Jack's efforts paid off for clients. Last year, clients that Jack assisted received \$163,957 in benefits and \$9,711 in monthly benefits.



Jack is very helpful and willing to offer not only his expertise but help with research. He is very efficient at doing that especially when time is crucial. Jack's unique perspective offers different viewpoints for staff to consider when assisting clients. He is a true client advocate. Jack takes his "volunteer job" seriously; but uses his humor to encourage staff with their cases.

Susan K. Evans who works as a Disability Advocate Program (DAP) caseworker,

was the second honoree from NPLS. NPLS' Williamsport office nominated Susan for a PLAN Excellence Award because of her client advocacy and her "social work" approach to her job. She not only works with her clients to help them navigate the Social Security system, but she makes sure that her clients are receiving all benefits through the Department of Public Welfare to which they are entitled. She keeps abreast of changes in cash assistance, food stamps, the LIHEAP program, and advocates for her clients both within the Welfare Office, with the Social Security Administration, with Legal Services, and with any other agency which her clients come in contact.

Marc F. Lovecchio, Esq. Receives Honorable Thomas Wood, Jr. Equal Access To Justice Award from Lycoming Law Association



NPLS' Paralegal Danna Rich-Collins presented the Honorable Thomas Wood, Jr. Equal Access To Justice Award from the Lycoming Law Association to Marc F. Lovecchio, Esq.

When Danna and the staff at

NPLS' Williamsport office learned that Attorney Lovecchio was this year's recipient, they were thrilled. Unless Marc has a conflict of interest, he always takes the call from NPLS and then accepts the referral. He has been the Williamsport office's go-to person for many years. Marc not only takes individual cases, but was one of the first and only to volunteer to spend a day at legal

services and handle the calls that came in on that particular day.

Over the years, he has been available for mentoring, as well as case handling. After his election to Judge, he accepted referrals until the end. We wish Marc the best as he moves on to another legal career. Congratulations on a well-deserved award.

In 2009, NPLS' Stroudsburg Office helped 1,079 low-income people with their civil legal needs.

Monroe County Bar Association

On January 12, the Monroe County Bar Association offered a CLE Lunch Learn Seminar. Presenters included Lori Molloy, Esq., Managing Attorney at NPLS' Bethlehem office (Defending Credit Card Collection), David Trevaskis, Pennsylvania Bar Association's Pro Bono Coordinator, and Sam Milkes, Executive Director of Pennsylvania Legal Aid Net-

work. David and Sam updated the group on resources available online to pro bono attorneys. Finally, Tim Smith, Esq.—brand new attorney in NPLS' Stroudsburg office—joined a panel discussing landlord-



tenant issues in Magisterial District Court.

The CLE seminar was offered at no charge to attorneys who agreed to accept two pro bono cases during the year 2010. Referrals for pro bono cases are made through NPLS. With these new volunteers we hope to provide attorneys to at least 20 more applicants for service, who would otherwise be turned away.

Attorney Glenn Smith Receives Pro Bono Award from Northampton County Bar Association

NPLS Executive Director Vicki Coyle presented a pro bono award to Attorney Glenn Smith for his efforts. One of our clients provided the following testimonial her experience with Attorney Smith. "Attorney Smith helped me with my case and continues to be available by phone and e-mail when I need him. He's a good attorney who really does a great job." Congratulations to Glenn Smith, Esq. for his much deserved award.

Lycoming Law Association's Foundation Awards NPLS \$11,000 Grant

In February, the Lycoming Law Association awarded NPLS a grant to continue providing legal services to low-income people. We appreciate Lycoming Law Association's Foundation on-going support!



To access the Guardianship Petition, go to www.PALawHelp.org.

Interested in

Joining NPLS'

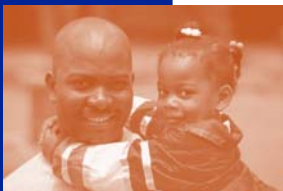
Board of

Directors?

Contact Vicki

Coyle at

610-317-5308.



NEW Guardianship Petition is Online

Do you need to become a guardian for the children in your care? The good news is that you don't need a lawyer to assist you in this process. NPLS' new automated Petition for Guardianship of a Minor form is now available online at www.palawhelp.org.

NPLS' newest automated form helps grandparents or other relatives prepare a "Petition for Guardianship" on their own, which will be ready for filing at their local court. All they need to do is answer a series of simple questions over

the Internet, and the completed forms (with instructions) can be printed out. This automated form was designed to help our clients during stressful times of family crisis.

This service is made possible through a Technology Initiative Grant (TIG) through Legal Services Corporation (LSC).

NPLS plans to offer another automated form to help clients who are faced with credit card collection lawsuits. The release date for this form is December 2010.

Outgoing NPLS Board Members Recognized for Years of Service

Long-term members of NPLS' Board of Directors were commended for their years of service at a recent Board of Directors meeting. NPLS Board President Ray Vernon recognized four board members for serving three consecutive three-year terms. Those board members are: **Jonathan Butterfield, Alan Shaw, Marc Kranson, and Karen Skorski**. These board members have

been strong supporters of legal services in northeast PA for many years and began a new commitment to NPLS when the agency came about by the merger of four programs. We appreciate their commitment during the last 9 years as well as their vision in leading a program with a service area of 20 diverse counties. We wish them well with their future community activities.

Heating Assistance Matters

A client who was served by our Williamsport office staff sent a letter of thanks to us recently. An excerpt of the letter follows.

I wanted to take a moment and thank the staff at NPLS for all the effort put into helping me obtain a little support with this year's heating cost. I personally think they went above and beyond what was expected. Staff was patient in answering my questions,

quick to return phone calls and even sent a follow up letter to ensure that my claim, which was previously denied, was accepted.

NPLS is a great asset to this community and I am grateful for staff's dedication to service and willingness to be the voice to those who otherwise would have no one to stand up and speak on their behalf. I'd like to say thank you for a job well done!

*Best Regards,
John*

Social Security Launches New Open Government Web page and Adds 38 New Compassionate Allowances

Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner of Social Security, announced that the agency has a new Open Government webpage available to the public at www.socialsecurity.gov/open. The new webpage serves as the portal for all agency activities that support the President's

Transparency and Open Government initiative. Social Security has added 38 new Compassionate Allowance conditions that qualify for quick favorable disability decisions. This is the first expansion since the original list of 50 conditions—25 rare diseases and 25 cancers—was announced in October

2008. The new conditions range from adult brain disorders to rare diseases that primarily affect children.

Compassionate Allowances are a way of quickly identifying diseases and other medical conditions that clearly qualify for Social Security and Supplemental Security Income disability benefits.



To visit the official Social Security Web site, visit www.socialsecurity.gov.

Frequently Asked Questions for Legal Immigrants in their first 5 Years in U.S.

What has changed?

On June 30, 2009, the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) issued Operations Memorandum 090603. This memo states that many legal immigrants in their first five years as a legal immigrant cannot get federally-funded Medical Assistance (MA). Newer immigrants who are currently getting federally-funded MA will be reviewed within 60 days to see if they meet one of the exceptions to the new rules. If they do not meet an exception, they will get a notice cutting off their MA. Or if they qualify for a state-funded category of MA, they may get a notice saying they are being switched to state-funded MA.

What should immigrants do if they get a cutoff, denial or change notice?

Immigrants who get a notice cutting off, denying, or changing their MA should appeal right away! If they appeal a cutoff within 13 days of the date of the notice, the MA must continue while they wait for a hearing (about 2-3 months). In the meantime, the immigrant can go to a legal services office for help.

Appealing is easy: fill out the form on the back of the notice, make a copy, and mail or take it to the welfare office. Be sure to get a receipt showing the appeal was delivered or mailed within 13 days! If you miss the 13 day deadline, appeal anyway – it may not be too late. Then go to legal services for help.

What are the exceptions to the 5-year bar on new immigrants receiving MA?

The following legal immigrants are still eligible for federally-funded MA as soon as they enter the United States, if they otherwise qualify for MA:

- Children under age 21;
- Pregnant women (through 60 days post-partum);
- Refugees and asylees (even if they now have a green card);
- People in certain other immigration categories, including Cuban/Haitian entrants; trafficking victims; and immigrants whose deportation is being withheld;
- Certain veterans and their families; and some people who have lived in the United States continuously since before 8/22/96 who are now legal immigrants.



To read the complete "Frequently Asked Questions for Legal Immigrants" memo, please visit CLS' Web site at www.clsphila.org.

For more information call the DPW Helpline at 1-800-692-7462 or go online at www.dpw.state.pa.

Executive Director's Message



Victoria A. Coyle,
Executive Director

Despite the stagnant economy and life-altering problems that our clients face, I continue to be uplifted by the strength and dedication of our staff and community support.

As you read the spring edition of our newsletter, I am pleased to report that bar associations, funders, and the community-at-large are contributing their resources so that NPLS can help low-income people with their civil legal issues.

Members of the Wilkes-Barre Law & Library Association in Luzerne County have begun to

support our new annual campaign. I commend the committee of volunteer attorneys for their dedication and enthusiasm. The Lycoming Law Association continues to have 100% pro bono participation. The Carbon County Bar Association has made a contribution to NPLS for the second year in a row. Contributions from our local bar association—financial and volunteer hours make a difference.

As you can see from this newsletter, one of our Bethlehem volunteers received statewide recognition for his service, other volunteers—though not so recognized—are just as valuable. We have senior volunteers in several offices who help keep our offices afloat by assisting with daily operations functions.

As we head into the last quarter of our program year, clients continue to face mortgage foreclosures, consolidated debt abuses, denial of unemployment compensation claims, bankruptcies, to name just a few legal issues. Our advocates assist clients with one problem and almost always uncover multiple issues. In these complicated economic times, NPLS advocates continue to draw upon community resources and pro bono volunteers to provide quality legal services. The creativity and dedication of staff and volunteers is what keeps us vibrant as a critical asset for our clients.

To find out how you can help, please visit our Web site: www.northpennlegal.org.

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