

New leaders at Legal Aid

New managing attorneys, deputy announced

Community Legal Aid has shifted a couple key leadership roles, in order to better serve clients and community partners.

The nonprofit law firm recently announced attorneys Rachel Nader as its new Volunteer Legal Services Program (VLSP) Manager, and Jeanne Charles as its new Legal Assistance to Victims Manager. The two new managers replace Jennifer van Dulmen, who previously oversaw both teams, and is stepping up as the organization's first Deputy Director.

"The decision to rethink some of our leadership structure really came from a place of how we can best serve our clients and the community," explained Executive Director Steven McGarrity. "These two women represent some of the best Legal Aid has to offer, and I'm confident that they will help take us to the next level."

Nader takes the pro bono reins

Nader, a Trumbull County native, has been with Legal Aid since 1999. As an attorney with the nonprofit law firm, she represented clients in housing matters, including foreclosures, evictions, land contracts, landlord-tenant, public housing, and fair housing matters. She also handled bankruptcies, consumer litigation, predatory lending, debt collection, utility shut-offs, and other financial legal matters for both Legal Aid and for a private firm in Akron in the 1990s.

"Rachel is a true lawyers-lawyer," McGarrity said. "She is well respected within the legal community. She is the perfect person to continue building strong partnerships with our pro bono volunteers."

Nader is excited to work with this audience.

"Aside from our clients, our volunteers are our biggest constituent base that Legal Aid serves," she said. "These are folks who have dedicated themselves to the profession of preserving democracy, and are choosing to do that for free by donating their time to those who can't afford to pay for private representation. It's really an honor to get to work with them."

Charles takes helm for victims' program

Charles began her career in Chicago, where her first legal experience was as an intern for a legal aid clinic. Throughout her career, she sought opportunities to work with underrepresented populations, including her time working at The Law Offices of Al Hofeld Jr. in Chicago, where she represented homeowners in predatory lending cases.

"I guess you could say I was a legal aid lawyer from the start," Charles shared. "I feel this work is so important. After seeing where our clients are when they come to us versus where they are when they walk out the door, you can see the real difference Legal Aid is making in their lives."

Charles joined Legal Aid in 2014 as a staff attorney. A member of the family law team, she primarily represented victims of domestic violence before being named the team's new manager at the end of last year.

"Jeanne was a natural choice," McGarrity said. "She's passionate, a talented attorney, and has the respect of her peers. But in the world of nonprofit administration, our managers have the added pressure of managing grants and tracking funder requirements. Jeanne has handled this with ease."

Charles' team represents survivors of domestic violence, obtaining protection orders to keep abusers away from victims, and helping survivors establish permanent independence through custody and divorce work.

"Our team is wonderful," she said. "You won't find a more dedicated, passionate group of people."

van Dulmen steps in as Deputy

Filling a new role, van Dulmen is transitioning from managing Legal Aid's VLSP program to Deputy Director. In this role, she will be responsible for oversight of all client services, as well as day-to-day administration of legal programs.

McGarrity said this role is filling a void he's felt in the organization's leadership since he took over as Executive Director.

"We were really lacking a sense of cohesion in managing our client programs," he said. "For the success of our legal services, all our managers each are focused on their specific subject areas. The addition of Jen's role will help bind our teams together and make sure that we are looking for ways to address things from a systemic level."

van Dulmen is looking forward to working with her colleagues in this new capacity.

"We have some amazing managers at Legal Aid," she said. "I see my new role as being a resource to them, as someone who can help bring the right people together and resolve issues impacting our work and our clients."

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