

Legal Aid Attorneys Give Boost to Pro Bono and Youngstown Neighborhood Outreach

For Community Legal Aid Attorneys Rachel Nader and Ken Mirkin, developing and nurturing relationships with pro bono attorneys and serving clients holistically seem to come naturally. It's no surprise to find the duo taking on these challenges directly in their new roles with Legal Aid's Volunteer Legal Services Program (VLSP) and Neighborhood Law Project (NLP): Nader as manager and Mirkin as supervisor. Nader took over NLP when longtime Legal Aid Associate Director Christine Legow retired last month. Meanwhile, Mirkin assumed a newly created position to support the management of the two critical Legal Aid programs, both of which focus on community building and outreach.

The pair say they are excited about expanding Legal Aid's pro bono volunteer base through VLSP and helping residents of Youngstown's Taft Promise Neighborhood overcome legal obstacles through the NLP.

Legal Aid's VLSP matches community members with volunteer attorneys who help resolve their legal dilemmas so they can get on with their lives. Facilitating a court-ordered protection order for a domestic violence victim who no longer has to look over her shoulder or stopping a landlord from shutting off water to drive out a tenant have positive, rippling effects on the lives of those otherwise underserved. Likewise, through NLP, legal advocacy is being put to work to breathe new life into Youngstown's Taft Promise Neighborhood.

"We're really trying to transform a neighborhood. Sometimes you start with an individual. If you save one home, you save a block. If you save a block, you save neighborhood. We want to take an economically devastated area and put light back on it," says Nader, a lifelong Mahoning Valley resident, referring to the NLP, established in 2017 to revitalize the 40-block neighborhood in and around Taft Avenue.

Mirkin says that NLP, in collaboration with other social service organizations, is ultimately working to bolster education success among Taft Elementary School students by helping their parents and guardians around obstacles that get in the way of education, such as transportation to after-school activities or tutoring. Providing residents solutions to such problems through legal support will help give the Taft neighborhood the boost it needs and its residents, hope for its future, Mirkin says.

"We want to keep people in their homes and in the community so they begin to have that stability," says Mirkin, who grew up in nearby Liberty. "It feels good to be out in the community and helping people meet their legal needs."

Last updated on September 25, 2018.

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