



NEIGHBORHOOD  
LEGAL SERVICES, INC.

# INSIDE NLS

News from the front lines of Neighborhood Legal Services

June, 2019

## NLS To Welcome The Justice Bus!

On May 17, 2019, NLS Executive Director Lauren Breen, Deputy Director Grace Andriette, and partners from The Volunteer Lawyers Project, WNY Law



Center, UB School of Law and the Seneca Street Community Development Corporation spoke to a group of community members at the Martha Mitchell Community Center to announce the The Justice Bus Project. Generous funding from the James H. Cummings Foundation has allowed NLS to purchase a twelve-seat van to transport advocates directly to the communities where our services are needed most.

*More pictures from the event and a reprint of an article published in the Buffalo Law Journal, Business First can be found on page five.*

*“Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are.”*

*- Benjamin Franklin*

**NLS does not use the actual names of clients in *Inside NLS*.**



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# NLS WISHES JOE CLARK GOOD LUCK!



It is with sadness, but also best wishes for great success, that we report the imminent departure of Joe Clark, NLS Regional Supervising Attorney, Disability Rights and Health Care Law Unit. At the end of June, Joe will leave NLS to assume the role of Supervising Attorney for the Representative Payee Program at Disability Rights New York in Rochester.

Joe started at NLS in the spring of 2019, having come from a fast-paced Social Security Disability Law position in private practice. Soon after, Steve Brooks, Senior Attorney for the Disability Advocacy project, joined NLS.

Here are some of comments from Joe's unit:

"When Joe started I was in Batavia trying to teach myself social security disability work. Joe brought the unit together made us a team. Joe is also extremely supportive; he makes people want to do their jobs and be the best. He will be really missed."

*Darlene Westphal, DAP Paralegal, Batavia*

"Joe is one of the most experienced, skilled attorneys ever to be my supervisor. I have learned so much more about DAP from him with respect to DAP strategy, procedure, advocacy skills, and mentoring. He made us feel like a family, not just a unit or a group of people who happen to work on the same legal issues. Joe made me want to be a better advocate, and showed me ways to do that. I will miss him. And one last thing, I will have to find someone else to talk baseball, hockey, etc... with... who knew a Boston Red Sox fan and Yankee fan could be friends?"

*JoAnn Lewandowski, Senior DAP Paralegal, Buffalo*

"Joe was good for a laugh provided it wasn't about mayonnaise on his sandwich. He was inquisitive about new legal areas and liked to discuss different strategies for cases. I wish him the best of luck in his future endeavors."

*Marge Gustas, Health Care Law Paralegal, Buffalo Office*

"Joe brought a fresh vision to the DAP unit. He raised the bar for how the advocates look at and handle cases, teaching strategy and thought processes that have resulted in more victories for our clients and, at the federal court level, receipt of unrestricted funds for the benefit of NLS. Joe's leadership raised awareness of NLS throughout the state and brought our agency to the attention of lawmakers in Albany, with present and future positive results. His energy and enthusiasm will be missed."

*Lynn Urquhart, Administrative Secretary, Disability Rights and Health Care Law Unit*

*Good Luck*

## NLS Good News!

A sad farewell to our outgoing Receptionist Eva Perez who's 27 year tenure with NLS made her one of our longest serving staff members. Eva's dedication to the work and her cheerful demeanor will be missed.

And now we bid a warm welcome to our new Receptionist Uve Baez (she tells us it's pronounced U-Vee). Uve is off to a great start bringing her own cheerfulness and willingness to help to our front desk. Best of luck Uve!

## The Stans Make Memorable Showing at LFL Bowling Tournament

On May 16, 2019, the NLS Bowling Team, The Stans, participated in the 2019 Lawyers for Learning Bowling Tournament at Airport Lanes in Cheektowaga. The team, made up of staff members, management and board members did not win any trophies but succeeded in raising money to benefit LFL programs providing educational and summer camp opportunities to children in underserved communities in WNY.



Front: L-R Darcy Bakowski, Stan Steele; 2<sup>nd</sup> Row: Tamar Rothaus, Debbie Mancuso, Dennis Ziolkowski, Pat McGrath, Karen Hawkes, Jackie Rivera, Kelley Culmer; Last Row: Dr. Danny Galvin. Not Pictured: Kristin Flick (behind the camera).



## The Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Project (WIPA): More than Just Benefits

In April Inside NLS featured a story on the Disability Advocacy Project which helps people who are unable to work because of a disability or disabilities. This month, we thought we would show the other side of the coin by featuring the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Project (WIPA).

WIPA works with recipients of Supplemental Security Income, Social Security Insurance and Medicaid who have concerns about possible loss of SSI or SSD due to work and wages. Funded by the Social Security Administration (SSA), WIPA seeks to enable beneficiaries with disabilities to receive accurate information that they then can use to make a successful transition from disability benefits to work. WIPA provides free services a 20-county area of Western and Central New York.

Our benefits advisers, sometimes referred to as Certified Work Incentives Coordinators, assist our clients in understanding SSA rules and navigating through the intricate SSA system. Our benefits advisors help our clients:

- Obtain and/or retain Medicaid and Medicare health insurance while working,
- Use work incentives, in some cases, to keep SSI or SSDI benefits as work activity increases,
- Obtain funding for vocationally-related items such as tuition, a vehicle, or a computer,
- Determine eligibility for other government benefits, such as special food stamp eligibility,
- Avoid and/or reduce rental subsidy decreases while first working, and
- Avoid overpayment(s) of disability benefits.

At NLS, Krista McDonald, Diana Alvira and Simone Grande are Certified Work Incentive Coordinators. Jessica Abbott, while not on the WIPA grant, provides similar help to clients through Adult Career & Continuing Ed Services-Vocational Rehabilitation referrals. The help they provide is invaluable in helping their clients establish independent lives, often without the need for SSI/SSD benefits. Indeed, it is not uncommon for NLS DAP clients to take advantage of the WIPA program when they are able.

## Have a Story to Share?

Email your story to  
Jim Morrissey at  
[jmorrissey@nls.org](mailto:jmorrissey@nls.org)

## GIVING HELP GIVING HOPE

The mission of Neighborhood Legal Services, Inc. is to provide a full range of free civil legal representation to low income and disabled people residing in Erie, Niagara, Orleans, Genesee, and Wyoming Counties, in matters involving their financial security and the legal rights which affect the stability of families and individuals. Our goal is to create the greatest access to the justice system for those low-income and disabled people without the means to pursue their rights. Our mission also includes providing outreach and training services to underprivileged populations and the community agencies which serve them.



NEIGHBORHOOD  
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Presents

# THE JUSTICE BUS



The Justice Bus initiative is made possible through generous financial support from the James H. Cummings Foundation, and the New York State Legislature, and in collaboration with the Volunteer Lawyers Project, WNY Law Center, University at Buffalo School of Law, Seneca Street Community Development Corporation, and California's "OneJustice" Program.

## ‘Justice Bus’ will soon be rolling throughout Western New York

By [Patrick Connelly](#) – Editor/Reporter, Buffalo Law Journal, Buffalo Business First, 6/4/2019

A unique pro bono initiative in California caught the eye of [Lauren Breen](#) and Neighborhood Legal Services Inc. so much so that they’re taking it for a spin here.

“What we are doing in Western New York is something much more modest, but we’re really excited,” said Breen, executive director of NLS.

The Justice Bus will soon make its way through Erie, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans and Wyoming counties to provide legal assistance to the impoverished and disabled. The concept was originated by the West Coast-based OneJustice, whose Justice Bus Project brought attorneys and volunteers to rural California areas to host free legal clinics and provide counsel. NLS will soon have a custom-decorated van to transport volunteers to individuals who need assistance.

“We have been working with OneJustice for about a year (to establish it),” Breen said. “They are looking to replicate this in about 25 sites across the country. We’re excited that we got in at the ground level to be able to be one of the first.”

The project was financed locally by a grant from the James H. Cummings Foundation. The vehicle, which seats 12, is expected to be ready this summer. Legal services will start soon after. Breen said she wants to fill the van with four volunteer attorneys, four law students and four legal services staff who will visit rural and urban areas.

Access to justice for people without transportation is a problem nationwide, said Breen and [Grace Andriette](#), NLS deputy director and supervising attorney of the housing unit.

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*The Justice Bus, continued from previous page*

“Buffalo leads the nation in terms of people who lack transportation,” Andriette said statistics have shown. “The goal of the program overall is to increase access to justice ... and bridge the transportation gap that we have here in the city and in our rural communities.”



NLS said the uniqueness of the Justice Bus may help in recruiting volunteers and serve as a way to inform qualifying people who need legal help that they can find it through NLS and other local legal services groups.

“The bus is going to enable us to reach people in those counties who may never find their way to (one of our offices),” Breen said. “There aren’t a lot of attorneys (in some of the counties where the bus will operate) and a lot of our clients can’t afford an attorney, so it’s really critical that we are able to serve our rural areas better.”



NLS assists individuals with housing, public benefits services, disability, social security and family legal issues. In 2018, a total of 7,100 cases were handled that benefited 15,900 people. Thirty attorneys are on staff.

“If our bus is driving through communities, people will see it and see Neighborhood Legal Services and what we do,” Andriette said. “It’s sort of like a moving billboard for our services.” Supportive partners in the initiative include the state Assembly and Senate, Volunteer Lawyers Project, WNY Law Center, University at Buffalo School of Law and Seneca Street Community Development Corp.

