

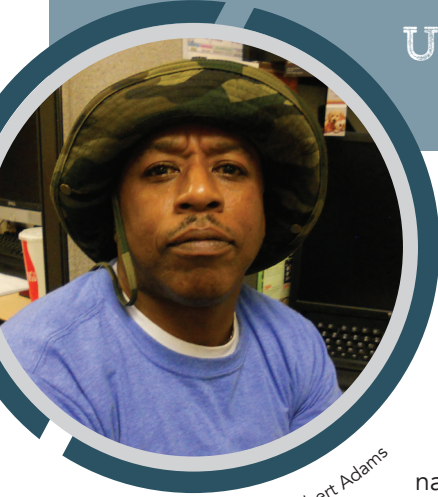


POETIC JUSTICE

VOLUME 13 ISSUE 2 SUMMER '16

STORIES OF PHILANTHROPY AND HOPE FROM THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY OF CLEVELAND

U.S. VETERAN GETS A CLEAN SLATE AND A FRESH START



Sgt. Robert Adams

Sgt. Robert Adams walks through the Louis Stokes Veteran’s Administration complex with a purpose. He calls out a welcoming greeting for the veterans who are there for treatment or services. Most of the employees greet him by name, “Hey Robbie.”

Sgt. Adams struggled to clean up his record, he attended expungement seminars and submitted his paperwork, but without an attorney, prosecutors would ignore his pleas.

“It was all my own fault,” he says. “I wanted to see my kids, I wanted everything back the way it was.”

He was ready to make a change, spending time volunteering at the VA, pushing wheelchairs, attending job-training classes half-heartedly, knowing he wouldn’t be hired. Looking back, he realizes he had a team of angels at the VA who wouldn’t

let him give up. Russ Schafer, a veteran’s advocate and court liaison, sent him to Legal Aid. His Legal Aid lawyers Jami Altum-McNair and Deborah Dallmann contacted the Public Defender in California for help asking the California court to recall the warrant. The Legal Aid attorneys provided the court with character statements and a heart-rending apology from Sgt. Adams.

They don’t know that he lived as a fugitive for 30 years -- working underground in restaurants, construction and landscaping when he could find a job; hoping he wouldn’t be fired or arrested.

Sgt. Adams joined the Marines after a comfortable childhood in Bedford, with a paper route and a Catholic school education. Serving six years in San Diego and Los Angeles, he was promoted twice and left the service with an honorable discharge. With his new wife, he settled in Los Angeles and started planning a future, taking Lamaze classes in Beverly Hills to prepare for their first child. A few years later, his wife’s cousin introduced them to a new drug, which turned out to be crack cocaine.

It seemed glamorous at first, he says, “then it took hold of me,” and everything fell apart. He was in treatment but the marriage was over and he gave up. Sgt. Adams was sleeping in parks and empty apartments. He served six months in jail for trespassing; then he was arrested again for drug possession.

He called his sister for money – instead of sending it, she moved him back to Cleveland in 1988 where the family could take care of him. When he didn’t appear in court, California issued a warrant. Although he was never convicted on the possession charge, the outstanding bench warrant would haunt him.

He couldn’t get a job because he had a warrant and he couldn’t access any veteran’s benefits because of the VA’s “fugitive felon” rule.

.....
“[MY ATTORNEY] MADE ME FEEL LIKE I WAS INVINCIBLE.”
- SGT. ADAMS
.....

“She made me feel like I was invincible, like I could beat anybody,” he observed.

The court recalled the warrant and as a result, Sgt. Adams can now receive veteran’s benefits. With his can-do attitude, he was hired at the VA earning \$18 an hour. He bought a car and moved into a new apartment on Lake Erie. Best of all, he was able to renew his relationship with his daughters, ages 30 and 31, and spent Christmas with them.



Legal Aid attorney Deborah Dallmann

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MR. O'MALLEY IS WORKING AGAIN

with Legal Aid's help and Deaconess Foundation support

George O'Malley* was laid off from his job as a fork lift driver and he needed unemployment benefits to tide him over until he could find a new job.

He signed on as a substitute custodian for a local school district, but the 58-year-old found the work aggravated health issues with his back, and he asked for lighter work. Since no alternative job was available, he re-opened his unemployment case and his benefits resumed.

A bureaucratic mistake was a near catastrophe for Mr. O'Malley: while a doctor confirmed he couldn't do repetitive bending and lifting, the paperwork seemed to say he couldn't work at all. The Unemployment Commission issued two negative determinations on his case: His benefits were denied *and* he was assessed an overpayment.

Mr. O'Malley feared he would have no income and still have to pay back the benefits he had already received. Soon he found Legal Aid and attorney Anita Myerson represented him at two appeal hearings. Eventually, the overpayment debt of \$1570 was removed and Mr. O'Malley received \$1310 in back benefits. But the best outcome was that Mr. O'Malley found a new job just as he exhausted his 26 weeks of benefits.

"Legal Aid a great help to me and I was very happy with the way everything was handled," says Mr. O'Malley. Thanks to Legal Aid, he went from not having enough money for groceries to a new job that pays \$17 an hour.

* Client name was changed to protect privacy. Legal Aid is grateful to the Deaconess Foundation for their support of Legal Aid's work to remove barriers to employment.



LEGAL AID STAFF NEWS



Katie Feldman, Esq.



Howard Strain, Esq.

Katie Feldman was promoted to Managing Attorney of Legal Aid's Health-Education-Work-Income and Immigration Practice. Ms. Feldman assumed the role after long-time Legal Aid attorney Stephanie Jackson retired. Ms. Feldman previously worked with the New York firm Kelley Drye & Warren and joined The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland in 2007.

Howard Strain and Deborah Dallmann were promoted to Senior Attorney. Mr. Strain has played a leadership role in building collaborations and engaging in advocacy in the eastern counties, and been a leader in the use of technology for the Family Law Practice Group. Mr. Strain has also been a leader in the statewide on-line forms project, and serves on Legal Aid's Advocacy Committee and Litigation Committee. Ms. Dallmann has great expertise in public benefit and veterans issues. She has also

advocated for low-income clients' rights with Consumer Protection and the ADAMHS Board. Ms. Dallman is also a leader of Legal Aid's Persons with Disabilities Vulnerable Population Committee.

Legal Aid welcomed new attorneys in recent months, including:

Jessica Baaklini, a lawyer who will be part of Legal Aid's medical-legal partnership team with the MetroHealth System, **Dan Natalie**, a supervising attorney in Legal Aid's Intake and Volunteer Lawyers Program, **Arcola Whatley**, an attorney who will focus on legal work related to barriers to employment for low-income clients, and **Eric Zell**, an attorney focused on consumer rights.

Legal Aid also welcomes new support staff who join various departments to help Legal Aid fulfill its mission to the community. The new staff include: **Elizabeth Callam** (Volunteer Lawyers Program), **Rachel Riemenschneider** (ACT 2 and the Volunteer Lawyers Program) and **Amy Vavra** (Development & Communications).

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VOLUNTEERS AT RECENT LEGAL AID BRIEF ADVICE CLINICS



Above: Attorneys from Thompson Hine LLP and General Electric volunteer at a brief advice clinic at the East Cleveland Public Library. The clinic is funded, in part, by the Cleveland Foundation. Middle: Michelle Johnson Tidjani, Esq. (Cleveland Clinic) and Ricky Gurbst, Esq. (Squire Patton Boggs) Top right: Attorneys from University Hospital volunteer at a brief advice clinic at the East Cleveland Public Library.

ACT 2
Late-Career & Retired Attorneys
Volunteer Program

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Attorneys often use their transition from full-time work as an opportunity to volunteer. Whether they are scaling down their practice or retiring, Legal Aid's ACT 2 program allows attorneys engage in pro bono work by providing a number of diverse volunteer opportunities.

Upcoming Clinics (Limited time commitment)

General Brief Advice Clinics: Saturday, October 15th 9:30-11:30am, Fulton Branch of CPL
ACT 2 Brief Advice Clinic: Thursday, October 27th 2:30pm-4:30pm, CPL, Downtown

In-House Volunteering

These opportunities involve working directly with Legal Aid staff on Volunteer Lawyers Program projects or in substantive practice groups. The time commitment for these roles varies, but most require several days a month. Email probono@laslev.org for details.

Extended Service to Individual Clients

Legal Aid is always looking for volunteers to help clients beyond brief advice. These matters are on a variety of civil legal issues with varying time commitments.



in part, by the McGregor Foundation. Top left: Harlin Adelman, Esq. (University Hospitals) Bottom left: Katie Collin, Esq. (Cleveland Foundation) Bottom right: Michael Meehan, Esq. (Cleveland Clinic)

OPPORTUNITIES: HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Please email probono@lascleve.org for logistics, including training information



ACT 2 Stories: Deborah Coleman

When Deborah Coleman left her position at Hahn Loeser & Parks in 2013, her next step was to open her own firm focusing on arbitration, mediation, and professional ethics. She also took this opportunity to dramatically increase her pro bono involvement. For over fifteen years, she had been a volunteer with Legal Aid, taking one case at a time, every once in a while. Since re-inventing her practice three years ago, Deborah has volunteered over 200 hours of her time – handling several cases at a time – to ensure shelter, safety, and economic security for the most vulnerable members of our communities.

“With just a few exceptions,” Deborah says, “the cases I’ve taken present familiar legal issues—breach of contract claims, dealing with an insurer, real estate disputes. My clients are typically the working poor, who lack the resources to unpack or readily resolve their problems.”

“I enjoy helping individuals understand their options, implement a strategy and, if possible, improve their situation,” she continued. In a recent matter, Deborah was able to assist clients in renegotiating their land contract, getting the land contract forfeiture case against them dismissed, and getting the property taxes reduced to reflect market realities. “My clients had poured four years of sweat equity into making the house they bought livable, and now have the prospect of being able to keep it affordably.”

Upcoming ACT 2 Training Event *Please RSVP at www.lascleve.org/registration*

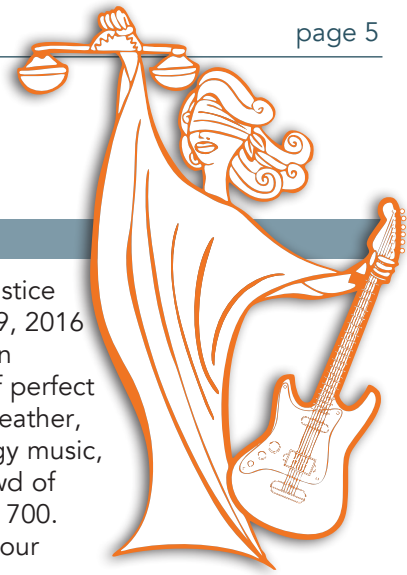
Free CLE: “What’s Your Next Step? ACT 2 Volunteering and the Emeritus Rule”

Thursday, September 29th, 12:00-1:00pm • In partnership with the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association

Questions? Contact: Rachel Riemenschneider at 216.861.5358 or rriemenschneider@lascleve.org.

LEGAL AID ROCKS THE FLATS

Enjoy Jam for Justice all year with the Jam 2016 CD



Jam for Justice on June 29, 2016 blended an evening of perfect summer weather, high-energy music, and a crowd of more than 700. Thanks to our bands:

- Gringo Stew
- Luke Lindberg and the Hung Jury
- The No Name Band
- Out of Order
- Faith & Whiskey.



New this year, thanks to support from The Happy Dog at the Euclid Tavern, Legal Aid hosted a preview party for Jam for Justice on May 5 featuring Rule 11 and the Sanctions.



Thanks to Presenting Sponsor Accellis, and numerous sponsors, individual ticket buyers and a new silent auction, Legal Aid raised more than \$70,000.



Enjoy Jam all year thanks to the Jam for Justice 2016 CD from the **Great Lakes Sports and Entertainment Law Academy**, led by Mark Avsec of Benesch. The CD is a sample of Cleveland music featuring: Gringo Stew, Luke Lindberg/Ryan Kennedy, Doug McWilliams of The No Name Band, Michael Stanley, Nate Jones, Carlos Jones Band and emerging Cleveland musicians.



All proceeds from the \$10 CD benefit Legal Aid – visit www.lasclev.org/2016Album to order a copy.

INVEST IN LEGAL AID TODAY!

2016 gifts to support Legal Aid's great work are due by December 31 – save Legal Aid resources by using the enclosed envelope to make your gift today!



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COMING IN OCTOBER - National Celebrate *Pro Bono* Week!

Not just a week anymore, but an entire month filled with recognition events for pro bono lawyers, opportunities to volunteer and collaborations with local bar associations and the judiciary!



The
Legal Aid Society
of Cleveland
Since 1905

For a full list of events in Northeast Ohio, visit:
www.lasclev.org/2016probonoweek