



SEOLS *briefly*

Southeastern Ohio Legal Services

In This Issue

This issue features the Newark office of Southeastern Ohio Legal Services (SEOLS). The office is located at 15 West Locust Street, Suite A, Newark, Ohio.

- SEOLS Newark clients
- Volunteers helping in Licking County
- SEOLS Newark staff

Where to Find Legal Help

Each SEOLS office has a service area which includes two to five counties. Address and phone information for the SEOLS offices, and the counties they serve, are located below.

The staff of SEOLS not only work in the office, but also:

- make visits to senior centers in areas of Ohio where SEOLS has received grants to help senior citizens;
- host open clinics for legal help (see page 3); and
- keep information on the SEOLS website: seols.org



and the statewide Ohio Legal Services website: www.ohiolegalservices.org



Equal Justice for All, Not Just the Well-Funded

by James M. Daniels, Director

- In Frazeyburg, Ohio, a father with multiple DUI and drug convictions refuses to return his baby to its mother after visitation.
- Another father in Mt. Vernon, who physically abuses his baby's mother, unlawfully keeps the infant after visitation. Law enforcement will not help return the children.
- In Somerset, Ohio, a disabled 55-year-old veteran and his wife

living on Social Security use their tax refund to buy a "certified" used car that breaks down on the way home from the car lot. The dealer refuses to fix the car or refund their money.

- Another disabled 55-year-old husband and wife in Heath, Ohio, are in the same fix, but neither are veterans, though they lost a son in Iraq.

Both mothers, their infants, and both couples in the examples above need help. But only the DV victim and the veteran get an attorney to help because there is special funding to help DV victims and veterans. The other mother and couple get a "do-it-yourself" packet. Is this the future of legal aid in Ohio? Is this equal justice under the law?

In January 2014, SEOLS closed three of its field offices: Lancaster, Marietta and Zanesville. The counties served by those three offices are now being served by SEOLS' six remaining offices. As a result, our Newark office, which serves Licking and Knox Counties, has taken on two more counties: Muskingum and Perry. Based on the 2010 Census, more than 34,000 financially eligible clients live in Licking and Knox Counties. Muskingum and Perry Counties add—in addition to more courts, more administrative agencies and more travel time—26,000 poor individuals eligible for help.

The sustained drop in general funding for legal aid since 2008—both at the state and national level—requires SEOLS to adapt. SEOLS is seeking grants to fund legal help for the poor and community partnerships to help maximize the impact that SEOLS can have with less staff. Until recently, SEOLS has worked to provide the same services for the poor and seniors in each of its 30 counties. But with sharply reduced general funds, the range of services available in each county will increasingly differ, influenced by grants obtained and community partnerships formed. Our Newark office reflects this change.

Funding was successfully obtained for Newark to have an Equal Justice Works Fellow focused on children and families, involved in juvenile court, and a Veterans Legal Corps Fellow focused on helping veterans at risk of homelessness. Both of the [Fellows' projects](#) are described in this newsletter. Our Newark office has partnered with the [Licking County Coalition for Housing](#) in its successful application for a federal grant to help county veterans *(continued on page 5)*

SEOLS serves 30 counties in southeast Ohio:

Athens, Gallia, Meigs, Morgan, Noble, Vinton, Washington

964 East State Street
Athens, OH 45701
740.594.3558, 800.686.3669

Fairfield, Fayette, Hocking, Jackson, Pickaway, Pike, Ross

11 East Second Street
Chillicothe, OH 45601
740.773.0012, 800.686.3668

Coshocton, Guernsey, Holmes, Tuscarawas

332 West High Avenue
New Philadelphia, OH 44663
330.339.3998, 800.686.3670

Knox, Licking, Muskingum, Perry

15 West Locust Street, Suite A
Newark, OH 43055
740.345.0850, 888.831.9412

Adams, Lawrence, Scioto

800 Gallia Street, Suite 700
Portsmouth, OH 45662
740.354.7463, 800.837.2508

Belmont, Carroll, Harrison, Jefferson, Monroe

100 North Third Street
Steubenville, OH 43952
740.283.4781, 800.837.4781

Interview with Deb Tegtmeier, Executive Director, Licking County Coalition for Housing

What is the Licking County Coalition for Housing, and what do you do?

LCCH is a 501(c)(3) founded in 1993 in Licking County, Ohio, committed to providing a community forum for the discussion and resolution of housing issues, the assessment of housing resources—particularly for low- and moderate-income persons, and the provision of a variety of housing services to residents of Licking County. As such, we're very involved with our local, regional and statewide Continuum of Care homelessness planning organizations.



Deb Tegtmeier

On a daily basis, we provide Transitional Housing (temporary housing coupled with intensive case management and supportive services) to 43 households—both families and adults. Our Project Homeline program provides homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing services, as well as personalized technical assistance. Project Homeline also provides access to a variety of housing information through our website, www.lcchousing.org.

LCCH also provides free income tax preparation services through our VITA program. As of mid-March 2014, our IRS-certified volunteers have prepared taxes for over 420 hard-working households. Their efforts have helped taxpayers obtain over \$500,000 in refunds, including Earned Income Tax Credits.

In 2007, LCCH began a partnership with the Licking County Board of Developmental Disabilities to provide housing to adults with developmental disabilities who can live independently with supports. As of 2014, LCCH owns and manages eleven properties in Newark and Heath, and we're looking to acquire at least one more before year-end.

How did you get into this line of work?

I had the great fortune (misfortune?!) to be in the right place at the right time. Back in the early 1990s, I was a grant writer for the City of Newark's Community Development office. At the time, working with a number of faith-based, social services and local government groups, I had finished

drafting and submitting a five-year HUD housing plan, and found that the group wanted to continue to meet in order to address the issues of homelessness they had identified and articulated. When you have that kind of enthusiasm and "can-do" attitude available, you can't NOT act! So we continued to work on the issue, and within a couple of years established what would become LCCH in order to open a four-unit Transitional Housing program to serve homeless families. In 1995, the Clinton Administration put out a \$1 billion challenge to communities to seriously address homelessness, and we applied. LCCH received a \$1.8 million grant for three years...and I was asked to become the first executive director.

Why do you feel housing issues are of particular importance?

One cannot truly be the best person he or she can be without having a safe, affordable place to call home. We cannot expect adults to achieve their potential, and families to thrive, without a roof over their heads. Consequently, we cannot begin to truly solve all the other challenges our society faces without addressing the continuing need for good quality housing options that are affordable for all Americans.

Tell me about your relationship with other groups in the community.

LCCH cannot do what it does—successfully, anyway—without the support and strong relationships of other social (*continued on page 5*)

Volunteers are not always attorneys

by Madison Mackay, Denison University

For several years, Denison University has maintained a partnership with the Newark SEOLS office that has allowed students to provide their voluntary services in exchange for a great experience. Generally, five or six Denison students volunteer for about two hours on a weekly basis each semester, executing jobs ranging from filing court documents, providing research support, to communicating with current and potential clients of the office. In our eyes, and hopefully in those of the attorneys, no task is too small and every bit helps.

Through my three years of volunteering with the SEOLS office, I have gained a tremendous set of life lessons. First, I learned that legal services are not readily available to all who need it. By getting a glimpse into the everyday work of the attorneys, the students are able to see the hardships many people face in the surrounding communities. Given Denison's geographical positioning on a hill, it becomes easy

for students to isolate themselves from reality, and volunteering with the office affords us the ability to be brought back into that reality while helping to better it.

Moreover, volunteering in the office allows the students to get a feel for work demeanor and relationships. Although everyone in the office is friendly and approachable, the students learn how to behave in a work environment. This has been a great skill for me personally, as I plan on attending law school in the upcoming fall. The attorneys and office workers of SEOLS have helped guide me as a pre-law student and the value of those relationships I have built in the office is invaluable. I hope this symbiotic relationship between Denison and SEOLS can continue for years to come so that others may benefit as much as I have.



Ask an Attorney • Upcoming Open Clinics:

Belmont County – sign up at 5:30 pm/clinic at 6 pm-8 pm

5/14, 7/9, 9/10, 11/12 Webster Hall, Martins Ferry

Knox County – sign-in at 5:30 pm, 888-831-9412

4/21, 7/21, 10/20 Mulberry Street United Methodist Church, Mount Vernon

Licking County – sign-in at 5 pm, 888-831-9412

4/16, 8/20 Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Newark

5/21, 7/16, 12/17 First Presbyterian Church, Newark

6/18 Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Granville

9/17 Johnstown United Methodist Church, Johnstown

10/15 Utica Church of Christ, Utica

11/19 Hebron Christian Church

Muskingum County – sign up at 5 pm/clinic at 6 pm-8 pm, 888-831-9412

Second Thursday of each month except December, Domestic Relations Court, Zanesville

Perry County – 4 pm-6 pm, 740-342-1118

First Tuesday of each month, Perry County Courthouse, New Lexington

Tuscarawas County – 4:30 pm registration/clinic at 6 pm-8 pm

4/22, 6/17, 8/5, 10/7, 12/2 Emmanuel Lutheran Church, New Philadelphia

People We Serve

Standing Up For Your Rights

My name is Jerry Jones, and I am a disabled person living in USDA subsidized housing in Pataskala, Ohio. Recently, there was a bedbug infestation in my building. The landlord treated the building several times and after the second treatment, presented me with a bill for the services. I was advised that I would have to make a payment



Jerry Jones

arrangement for a several-hundred-dollar bill, which I could not afford, or I would be evicted. In addition to this, my landlord indicated I would have to sign a bedbug addendum to my lease agreement, which would involve great expense to me in order to comply with it. Living on a fixed income of less than \$800 monthly, I simply could not afford it. Again, I was told I would be evicted.

I came into contact with Legal Aid attorney Sara Wheeler. Sara took my case at the very beginning and helped me through the process. Although Sara is a brand new attorney, she was very professional, patient and took the time to work with me to help me understand my rights in this situation and my choices on how to handle it without losing my housing. She met with my landlord and tried to make an arranged agreement without much cooperation from my landlord. Eventually, since my lease said the landlord had to pay for all exterminations, with Sara's help I made the decision not to sign the addendum or pay the additional charges for the extermination. I was served with an eviction notice for this same issue, but was later served with an eviction notice for being unclean.

Miss Wheeler maintained constant contact with myself and my friend who was helping me with the issue, and worked with me to fight the eviction. In February 2014, I had my hearing in court. Sara and her supervisor were both there to represent and support me. The judge dismissed my eviction, stating that my lease clearly stated that the landlord was responsible for the extermination charges and that I could not be evicted for these reasons or for being unclean.

I would like to thank Sara and Legal Aid for all their help in this situation. I do not know what I would have done without their help and legal advice. I could have easily lost my housing if not for them. Several other tenants in my community signed agreements unknowingly and paid funds their lease did not require them to pay, or moved out because they never asked for help. I just wanted to tell someone how happy I am with the results of my case, and how good it is to know that I can turn to Legal Aid for help when I need it. Thank you so much for all your effort, hard work and patience in dealing with this issue for me. It's good to know that the system really does work.

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Profiles: New Attorney Fellows Join SEOLS Staff

The Newark office of Southeastern Ohio Legal Services recently became host to Veterans Legal Corps Fellow **Robert Abdalla**. A veteran himself, Robert empathizes with the problems many veterans face—complicated problems stemming from physical and mental injuries sustained during military service.

“My ultimate goal as an attorney and a Veterans Legal Corps Fellow is to improve the lives of veterans. We ask a lot of veterans. We ask that they endure the austerity of war, and then we expect them to pivot and transition straightaway into civilian life. When service-related injuries go unresolved, they can multiply and snowball into one crisis after another. As a soldier, I (and the other soldiers I served with) internalized the mantra ‘leave no one behind.’ I believe that creed carries the same weight here in civilian life that it did overseas. These are our brothers and sisters, and we owe them our best efforts.”

The Veterans Legal Corps provides free legal assistance to low-income and homeless veterans. Robert provides assistance with issues related to disability benefits claims, criminal record expungement, barriers to housing and employment, debt, family law and other civil legal issues. “I am also developing working relationships with local and state agencies that provide service to veterans. My hope is our collective effort will better assist our veterans reintegrate and become successful community members.”

Robert is a 2013 graduate of Vanderbilt University Law School. He received his Bachelor of Arts in philosophy from Ohio University, graduating *summa cum laude*. Robert (Sgt.) deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom with 1/36 Infantry in 2003 and with 1/22 Infantry in 2006. Robert is admitted to practice law in Ohio.

* * *

Equal Justice Works Fellow **Sara Wheeler**’s pursuit of a legal education was driven by her passion for working with children and a desire to learn to advocate for children in the legal system. During law school, Wheeler participated in efforts to advocate for and secure children’s legal rights in the community through many different employment and student organization opportunities. As she finished her law school career, the pursuit of justice for children and other vulnerable groups remained at the top of her list of professional aspirations.



Robert Abdalla and Sara Wheeler
of the SEOLS Newark Office

That’s when Sara was presented with the opportunity to work at Southeastern Ohio Legal Services through an Equal Justice Works fellowship on a special project related to juvenile justice. Her fellowship is sponsored by the Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation.

“The goal of my project is to provide children and families of children involved in the juvenile justice system with holistic, civil legal representation. Children in the juvenile justice system often have a range of other issues that are causing or exacerbating their juvenile court involvement,” Sara explained.

Families of children in the juvenile justice system are often struggling with housing, domestic, public benefits, health care, and other issues commonly affecting low-income families. During the first six months of her project, Sara has assisted 30 low-income clients and their families with these types of issues. Sara has also worked to educate schools about the educational rights of students and parents through direct representation of clients. By addressing educational issues and other legal problems causing additional stress for the family, Sara hopes to promote family stability and improve children’s chances of getting out of the juvenile justice system sooner and staying out for good.

Sara completed her undergraduate education at Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio, where she graduated *summa cum laude* with a degree in management in 2010. Sara then attended The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law to pursue her law degree, graduating *cum laude* in 2013. Sara was admitted to the practice of law in Ohio in November 2013.

MEET MORE OF OUR STAFF . . .

Dennis Harrington joined SEOLS in February 1991 as a staff attorney. Previously, Dennis was a staff attorney at the Rural Legal Aid Society of West Central Ohio, starting there after his graduation from Case Western Reserve University’s College of Law in 1986. Dennis has been the managing attorney of SEOLS’ Newark office since November 2009. He grew up in Cincinnati, and currently lives in Granville with his wife and their two teenage sons.

Melissa Will started working at the SEOLS Newark office as a staff attorney in 2008, transferring there after a two-year tenure as an Equal Justice Works Fellow at OLSA’s State Support unit (now the Ohio Poverty Law Center, LLC). Homelessness prevention is a primary interest of Melissa’s. She grew up in Dayton and attended The Ohio State University’s Moritz College of Law. Melissa lives in Newark with her husband and their two sons.

Chuck Gordon started working for SEOLS as a staff attorney in the SEOLS Lancaster office in 1998. Before that he had served as a staff attorney for the Central Ohio Legal Aid Society for ten years. Chuck lives in Berwick with his wife. They have a daughter in college. Chuck was featured in the May 2013 issue of *SEOLS briefly*, so you can read more about him by going to [that issue's Staff Section](#).

Reid Haddick has been the bankruptcy specialist for SEOLS since July 2008. He is a graduate of The College of Wooster in 1981 and The University of Dayton School of Law in 1984. Reid began to focus his career in bankruptcy, collection and

creditor's rights in the late 1980s while he was a staff attorney for Bank One, Dayton, N.A. In 1992, he left the bank and entered private practice in the Dayton area, where he focused on bankruptcy while also doing some domestic relations. He works with SEOLS' six local offices to file bankruptcy petitions, and consults with local attorneys when bankruptcy issues arise in their general practice of poverty law. Reid lives in Pickerington.

Equal Justice for All *(continued from page 1)*

who are at risk of homelessness. Our Newark office also receives Title III funding to serve seniors, and VAWA and VOCA funding to help DV victims.

SEOLS recently received approval for a program assistance grant (from the Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation) to pay for technology that will link the six field office phone systems for greater efficiencies in the use of dispersed staff serving its client population. We have been invited by the Osteopathic Heritage Foundation to submit a grant for work by the Athens office with community partners to help at-risk pregnant mothers in Jackson, Meigs and Vinton Counties. SEOLS is seeking funding from the Ohio State Bar Foundation for a self-help center in Lancaster, funds to expand the Athens

project to other counties and, in the next round of funding, a partnership with Behavioral Health in Portsmouth to help its clients overcome barriers to employment and legal problems that complicate their recovery. SEOLS will be seeking a federal fair housing grant this spring. These are just a few examples of SEOLS' efforts to stretch its resources further through grants and community partnerships.

SEOLS will pursue grants, use technology and form strategic partnerships to continue to help as many people as possible. But, to prevent our society's stated commitment to "equal justice for all" from becoming only words, access to justice cannot be based on whether one is a member of a group targeted by funders.

Interview with Deb Tegtmeier *(continued from page 2)*

service, faith-based, service providers, and other groups in the community.

What can you say about Southeastern Ohio Legal Services and your partnership with them?

It has been a real pleasure working with the Newark Office staff over the past several years. I have a very high regard for Dennis Harrington and Melissa Will, both as people and as professionals. They are actively involved in the community, and bring a high level of expertise to the conversation at hand. And while staff members have changed over the years as SEOLS offices have consolidated, the level of effort here in Licking County remains high. I look forward to continuing the good work, and to getting to know and working with the new staff members!

Could you talk about the SSVF veterans grant and your interaction with other groups, including SEOLS, in that project?

In 2011, LCCH convened the Veterans Housing Roundtable to work with key organizations who serve veterans in Licking and Knox Counties—Licking County Veterans' Service Commission, Knox County Veterans Service Office, SEOLS,

Opportunity Links, Licking/Knox Goodwill Industries, Columbus VA, American Red Cross, local shelters and others—in order to better coordinate existing services and seek additional funding to assist homeless and at-risk veterans.

A successful outcome of the Veterans Housing Roundtable efforts, Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) is a new program funded by the Veterans Administration. LCCH officially began working with homeless veterans and their families in late November 2013. With a one-year, \$303,100 grant, LCCH expects to assist 80 Veteran households in Licking and Knox Counties in partnership with SEOLS and the members of the Veterans Housing Roundtable.

SEOLS is a key partner in this effort, promptly providing "legal check-up" services to eligible veterans and any other legal services that can assist the veterans and their families to maintain housing stability.

Is there anything else you want to say?

Thanks for the opportunity to share a little bit about LCCH and what we're up to in Licking (and now Knox) County!

Pro Bono Opportunities at Southeastern Ohio Legal Services

Each year, we create a [Private Attorney Involvement Plan](#). Our pro bono projects are crafted to allow volunteers to provide services to our low-income clients in a manner that is compatible with the volunteer's available time commitment, his or her substantive areas of legal practice, and the needs of the local community. SEOLS offers pro bono opportunities that range in scope from brief advice at a clinic session to full representation. We strive to tailor options to meet your skills, expertise and availability. We provide services in consumer, domestic, housing, public benefits, tax controversies and utilities cases. You can designate the type of work you would like to do, and we work with your schedule. Our attorneys are available to provide support and answer your questions as necessary. If you, a local bar association, or courts have an interest in volunteering but do not see an opportunity described in the Plan that meets your interests, time, or needs, let us know.

If you are interested in learning more, please contact your local SEOLS office or pro bono coordinator Melissa Skilliter at mkilliter@oslsa.org.

Ohio Attorney CLE Update:

Did you know? Beginning January 1, 2014, your pro bono service hours can count toward your CLE requirements—six hours of pro bono legal services is required to earn one hour of CLE credit.

Yes! I want to help SEOLS advocate for equal access to justice and human dignity.

The hourly cost of placing and supporting an attorney in one of our offices is about \$120 per hour. More people need our services than ever before.

You can help us serve more people by making a voluntary, tax deductible contribution. Contributions may be in the form of money and/or time volunteered. You may use this coupon or visit seols.org and click the PayPal donation link.

I want to help SEOLS advocate for equal access to justice and human dignity.

Name _____

Address _____

Contribution enclosed:

\$120 (one hour) \$240 (two hours) Other: \$ _____

Optional:

I would like to designate my contribution (e.g., in memoriam, domestic violence, senior citizens, ...):

*If you would like information about volunteer opportunities at **Southeastern Ohio Legal Services**, please list your email address:*

≡ Contributions are tax deductible. ≡

Southeastern Ohio Legal Services
555 Buttles Avenue
Columbus, OH 43215

Thank you!

