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BLACK HISTORY MONTH

From the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee

In the words of Yvette Clark, "We must never forget that Black History is American History. The achievements of African Americans have contributed to our nation's greatness." Black History Month is a reminder to all Americans that their country would not be as prosperous and sustainable today if it were not for the innovation, hard work, intellect, and courage of Black Americans that came before us. Celebrating this occasion helps our staff and clients understand that Black History is not separate, but a part of American history that has too often been overlooked. The month-long celebration for Black History offers an opportunity to reimagine what possibilities lie ahead.

As part of that reimagining, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (D.E.I.) Committee is endeavoring to improve our practices at the Center for Elder Law & Justice. An anonymous survey has been completed to help the agency understand what changes are necessary to create the most welcoming environment we can to staff from all backgrounds. Some of the changes will take the form of developing new initiatives and trainings for staff. Another part of this work will be to ensure that all staff know they are welcome to join the D.E.I. committee and their insights or thoughts on how we can improve are welcome and encouraged.

In recent years, we have also made strides in delivering our services to diverse and underserved communities through our Mobile Legal Unit (MLU). Our MLU delivers free educational presentations on legal topics and legal consultations to seniors in the community, allowing our agency to meet those who would benefit from our services the most directly. We're always looking for new venues and new ideas to open up inroads between our agency and the many vibrant Black communities in Buffalo and Western New York.

Lastly, it's important to remember during this month that the work is far from over. Systemic racism is a rampant issue that leads to worse health and life outcomes for Black Americans. Learning about and discussing these disparities with our own communities is a critical step in one day creating a more just and equitable country.

To learn more about these disparities, visit:

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthequity/racism-disparities/index.html>

2022 Jonathan Lippman Pro Bono Award: Don Shonn



Daniel Shonn Esq.

The Center for Elder Law & Justice is pleased to share that one of our volunteer attorneys, Daniel "Don" Shonn, was recognized for his incredible dedication to serving those in need. The Jonathan Lippman Pro Bono Award is given out by the New York State Bar Association to senior attorneys who give their time in a volunteer capacity. "This award has been created to recognize dedicated senior members of our profession who have generously provided pro bono service in New York and to inspire other senior attorneys to use their legal knowledge and experience to provide assistance to underserved members of the community."

Don is a solo practitioner in Akron, New York. He has worked with the Center for Elder Law & Justice since the Fall of 2018, when he began volunteering for the newly opened Erie County Surrogate's Court Help Center. Ever since then, Don has consistently and reliably provided limited scope advice and counsel to low income unrepresented clients with Surrogate's Court matters through that program. Help Center clients are often overwhelmed, grieving, or immersed in family turmoil. Don offers them a calm and empathetic demeanor, a thorough but clear analysis of their issues and options, and an honest assessment of their next best steps.

Don is almost always willing to fill unexpected openings in our schedule, and to assist with overflow calls. To date, he has assisted **63 clients**, and devoted approximately **45 hours** of pro bono to **46 clients** in 2021. While most of those clients were served through the Help Center, Don has also represented clients in a full scope capacity, at times proactively asking to be appointed as pro bono counsel for clients who are struggling to navigate the Surrogate's Court on their own, despite having legal consultations through the Help Center. Don credits his passion to his experience volunteering with Hearts & Hands, a nonprofit in Akron connecting frail or vulnerable individuals in underserved communities with needed services. We truly can't thank you enough for all that you do Don!

Client Stories:

Deborah Irvin* was confused when she started receiving **daily calls** that she owed her landlord **much more money** than she thought. They refused to give her an account in writing and she would no longer be able to move if she owed the monies they said she did.

After Deborah contacted our office for help, we were able to identify these calls as **an imposter scam**. The calls were coming from Miami. We encouraged her to contact her normal caseworker and helped Deborah avoid losing money to a scammer.

Cheryl Farnham* was facing down a difficult situation. Her mobile home had been **condemned** and she would have nowhere to go.

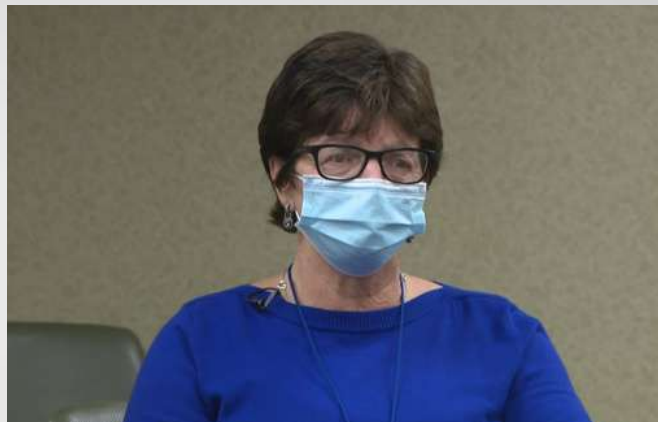
After connecting with our office, a staff paralegal was able to advocate at an in person inspection. As a result, the condemnation was **lifted** and the county agreed to construct an **accessible ramp** for Cheryl. She no longer had to fear homelessness.

*All names changed to protect the identity of our clients

CELJ Social Worker Helps

Start Long COVID Support Group

Staff at the Center for Elder Law & Justice will be quick to tell you that Kathy Kanaley knows how to roll up her sleeves when she sees a need in the community. In her 22 years working with the agency, that attitude has shined as a social worker in the guardianship unit, as the lead on numerous community projects and initiatives, and as the supervising social worker for the entire firm. Kathy doesn't limit herself to office hours, however, as she lends her time and expertise to many other roles aimed at improving the community, including in her role as a patient advocate at Kenmore Mercy Hospital.



Kathy Kanaley describing the project to WGRZ

It was in this role that Kathy found an emerging community issue that needed quick action. Millions of Americans are discovering that, after a COVID infection, some symptoms don't go away. Long COVID is the phenomenon of long-lasting symptoms after a case of COVID that vary greatly in severity and type of symptom.

"So we thought, you know, what the heck, we're going to throw it against the wall and see what sticks"

Kathy and other members of the palliative care team at Kenmore Mercy Hospital were discussing stories of long COVID in the community. That's when the idea for a support group surfaced. As Kathy describes, "So we thought, you know, what the heck, we're going to throw it against the wall and see what sticks."

The result is a new community tool that some group members describe as life changing. The free COVID Support group meets on the third Thursday of each month from 4 to 5:30 pm. Anyone can sign up by calling the Kenmore Mercy Patient Care Services line at **716-447-6211**. Amazing work Kathy!

Romance Scams Webinar Recap

Earlier this month, technology-based legal services attorney Erin Riker and Erik Mattoon from Erie County Adult Protective Services delivered a webinar breaking down what a Romance Scam is and how to avoid losing money to one. Below are some of the top tips!



Top Tips:

1. A **Romance Scam** happens when a bad actor pretends to have a romantic interest in their victim in order to gain access to their trust and, most importantly, financial favors.

2. A common tool of romance scammers is **Love Bombing** whereby they shower victims with attention and flattery and attempt to move the relationship along much faster than legitimate relationships.

3. Scammers may mention their financial struggles well in advance of asking for financial support. When they do ask for financial support, they will often request it in forms that are **difficult or impossible to recover** such as gift cards, wire transfers, or cash transfer apps.

4. It can help to try to verify the identity of the individual with a google search to look for social media profiles or a digital footprint, or to use a reverse image search to see if their profile photo belongs to them or somebody else.

Watch the Webinar Here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxlzPLBc-pU>

Sign Up for Future Webinar Reminders Here:

<https://tinyurl.com/36dz956s>

Upcoming Events



Details:

**March
17**

12:00 - 3:00pm

Mobile Legal Unit and Scams Presentation


Hamburg Senior Center (Enter Door #1)
4540 Southwestern Boulevard Hamburg, NY 14075

Learn how to avoid losing money to scammers! Followed by **free** legal consultations for seniors. Thank you to event sponsors Assemblymember Jon D. Rivera and Senator Sean M. Ryan.

**March
19**

11:00am - 1:00pm

Mobile Legal Unit and Scams Presentation

 Westminster Commons
419 Monroe Street, Buffalo, NY 14212

Join us for a free presentation on avoiding common scams and the services available at the Center for Elder Law & Justice. Followed by free legal consultations for seniors. Thank you to event sponsor Evans Bank!

Family Guardian Support Project Training Series:

There's a lot to learn when you become a guardian but we can help with our new **FREE** training series. Learn helpful tips on how to be a guardian, such as how to complete your Annual Report to the Court! Attend one of **three** free sessions:

Thursday, **March 17, 2022** at 2:00PM
Online Training via Zoom
Register at: tinyurl.com/FamilyGuardian

Thursday, **April 21, 2022** at 4:00 PM
Cheektowaga Senior Center
3349 Broadway Cheektowaga, NY 14227

For More Information or to Request Accommodations
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