Philadelphia Nursing-Legal Partnership

Impact Report
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Health, Education and Legal assistance Project:
A Medical-Legal Partnership
at Widener University Delaware Law School

Contents

Executive Summary

The Philadelphia Nursing-Legal Partnership (NLP), a collaboration between the National Nurse-Led Care Consortium's (NNCC) Philadelphia Nurse-Family Partnership and Mabel Morris Family Home Visit programs (NFP/MM) and the Health, Education, and Legal assistance Project: A Medical-Legal Partnership at Widener University Delaware Law School (HELP: MLP), aims to improve the health and wellness of mothers, children, and families in Philadelphia by providing integrated evidence-based home visitation and legal services.

Between January 1, 2021 and December 31, 2021, the NLP resolved **449 legal matters for 224 unique clients**. A total of 289 consultations and 160 cases were addressed across a range of legal issues.

The NLP team's collaborative advocacy efforts resulted in significant outcomes for families, including:

- At least 20 participants accessed unemployment benefits. The total amount of unemployment benefits obtained was $231,942.
- At least 15 families were connected to the Family Emergency Fund through the NLP providing $14,021 in rapid response grants to prevent crises.
- At least 8 families successfully obtained or retained Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. The annual SNAP benefit ranged from $4,154 to $5,508 for families.
- Prevented or delayed eviction for at least 8 families.
- At least 6 families received rental assistance in amounts ranging from $3,637 to $8,000. A total of $36,266 in rental assistance was obtained for families.
- One participant had $12,000 of student loan debt forgiven by their institution due to NLP advocacy efforts.
- One participant obtained short term disability benefits in the amount of $4,000.

In addition to direct legal services, the NLP provided education and training to project partners and community members and engaged in a range of policy advocacy efforts to improve community-wide health and wellness.

Overview

Established in 2016, the Philadelphia Nursing-Legal Partnership (NLP) is a collaboration between the National Nurse-Led Care Consortium's (NNCC) Philadelphia Nurse-Family Partnership and Mabel Morris Family Home Visit programs (NFP/MM) and the Health, Education, and Legal assistance Project: A Medical-Legal Partnership at Widener University Delaware Law School (HELP: MLP). The NLP aims to improve the health and wellness of mothers, children, and families in Philadelphia by providing integrated evidence-based home visitation and legal services. HELP: MLP attorneys, embedded within NFP/MM, work alongside nurse home visitors to:

1) Increase the identification of unmet legal and social needs;
2) Provide direct legal, health care, and educational services to families in their homes;
3) Strengthen the advocacy capacity of nurse home visitors to address social determinants of health; and
4) Improve community-wide outcomes through systemic advocacy and policy change.

To measure the NLP's success at reaching its goals, an evaluation plan was implemented. A program evaluator measured processes, participant outcomes, staff outcomes, and financial impacts of the project. Quantitative and qualitative data collected from participants and staff informed evaluation findings and quality improvement efforts. This evaluation report focuses on the project's impact on participants and families.

Methodology

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from nurse home visitors, attorneys, and program participants through several evaluation activities. To track process and outcome measures related to cases and consultations, information was entered in a secure electronic legal case management system by attorneys. To measure the impact of services on program participants, data was collected before and after legal services were delivered. Prior to the initiation of legal services, nurse home visitors administered the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), a validated tool to measure level of stress, with program participants. After a participant's case was closed, project evaluators administered a post PSS via telephone interview. Additionally, during the follow up telephone interview, project evaluators administered a satisfaction survey with clients. Due to the level of intervention, only participants who received assistance with a case (as opposed to a consultation) were included in the post-services follow up interview. In addition to direct legal services, training and education, policy advocacy, and dissemination activities were also tracked.

Findings

Evaluation findings are described below for the following types of activities: 1) legal services, 2) participant stress, 3) participant satisfaction, 4) policy activities, 5) training and education, and 6) dissemination activities.

Legal Services

Legal assistance was provided through cases and consultations. Cases are defined as issues in which the attorneys provide direct legal assistance to participants, including counsel and advice, filing applications and appeals, and representing participants at hearings, among others. Consultations are interactions in which attorneys provide information and advice to nurse home visitors who then pass that information on to participants. NLP attorneys address a wide range of legal issues across five categories: 1) income and insurance; 2) housing and utilities, 3) education and employment, 4) legal (immigration) status, and 5) personal and family stability.

Between January 1, 2021 and December 31, 2021, NLP attorneys addressed a total of 449 legal matters for 224 unique participants (Table 1). A total of 289 consultations and 160 cases were resolved. Many participants received legal assistance with more than one legal matter. The number of legal matters per participant ranged from 1 to 12 and the average number of legal matters per participant was 2.

Table 1. Legal services delivered between January 1, 2021 and December 31, 2021

	Income & insurance	Housing & utilities	Education & employment	Legal (immigration) status	Personal & family stability	Total
Consultations	130	68	18	2	71	289
Cases	72	65	5	1	17	160
Total	202	133	23	3	88	449

The most common types of legal matters addressed were issues related to income and insurance, representing nearly half of all legal matters (45%). Housing and utilities matters were the second most common issues (29%), followed by personal and family stability matters (20%). Five percent of matters were related to education and employment and 1% were related to legal (immigration) status (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Legal services delivered between January 1, 2021 and December 31, 2021
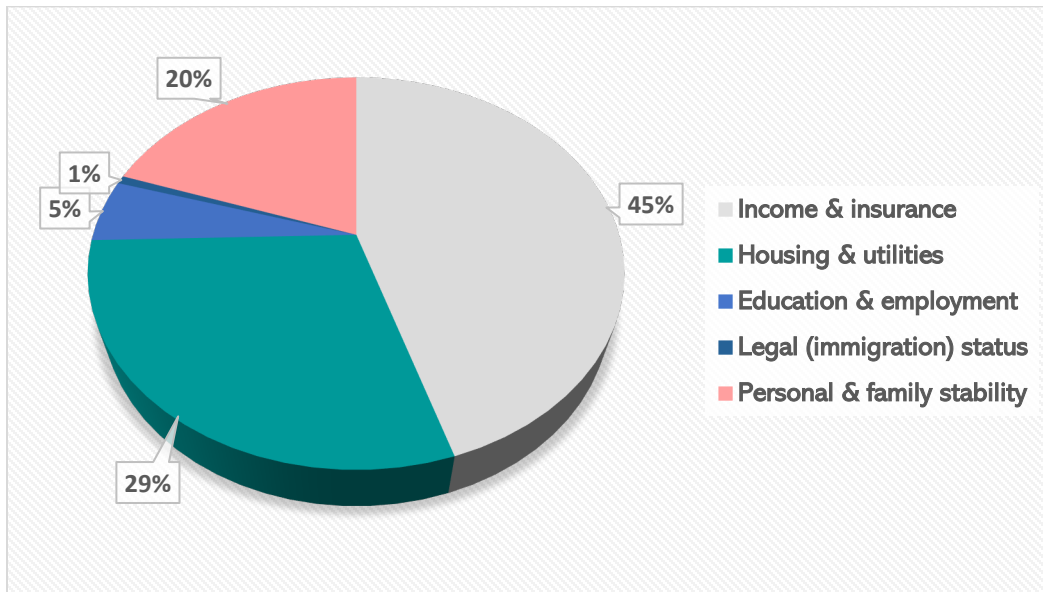
Legal Services Outcomes

During 2021, the NLP team's activities directly impacted families' outcomes resulting in improved income, housing, and personal and family stability. Examples of legal services outcomes are below.
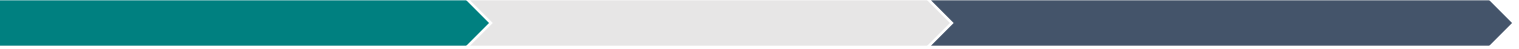
Income Stability

The NLP team resolved a range of legal cases related to income, including securing public benefits, such as the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), obtaining unemployment benefits, addressing tax matters, and resolving consumer matters, including related to debtors' rights.

Unemployment Benefits

- At least 32 families received assistance related to accessing unemployment benefits. **At least 20 clients successfully obtained unemployment benefits with the assistance of NLP attorneys. In total, families obtained at least $231,940 in unemployment benefits with individual amounts ranging from approximately $6,000 to $22,500.**

Public Benefits

- At least 17 families received assistance with an issue related to accessing SNAP benefits and 8 families successfully obtained or retained SNAP benefits. The annual SNAP benefit ranged from $4,154 to $5,508 for families.
- At least 5 families received advice and counsel related to accessing TANF benefits.

- At least 3 families received advice and counsel related to accessing subsidized childcare.

Other Income Stability Matters

- One participant had $12,000 of student loan debt forgiven by their institution due to NLP advocacy efforts.
- One participant obtained short term disability benefits due to post-partum related issues in the amount of $4,000.

Housing Stability Matters

- At least 12 families received legal assistance resolving an eviction-related matter and legal services resulted in prevented or delayed eviction for at least 8 families.
- At least 6 families received rental assistance funding in amounts ranging from $3,637 to $8,000. **A total of $36,266 in rental assistance was obtained for families.** Rental assistance funding prevented homelessness and provided safe housing for families.

Personal and Family Stability Matters

- At least 4 participants received warm referrals to specialized family law clinics for assistance with matters, such as custody, child welfare, and protection from abuse.
- At least 2 families received assistance with obtaining vital records, including a child's Social Security number and card.

Family Emergency Fund

In May 2020, NNCC created the Family Emergency Fund to provide critical financial support to families in the form of low-barrier, rapid response grants. The goals of the Family Emergency Fund are to ensure safe and healthy housing, maintain family stability and ensure children's safety, and support education and health care access. The NLP attorneys work closely with nurse home visitors to quickly identify potential crisis situations among families that can be resolved or alleviated through rapidly applying Family Emergency Fund grants. These grants also often help support participants' wellbeing while they are waiting for legal matters to be resolved.

In 2021, the NLP connected at least 15 families to at least $14,021 in rapid response grants to prevent crises. Grants ranged in amounts of $216 to $2,610 and addressed a range of critical issues among families, including:

- Rental payments to prevent eviction for at least 5 families.
- Utilities costs to prevent heat and electricity shutoff for at least 2 families.
- Mortgage payments to prevent foreclosure for at least 1 family.
- A security deposit to prevent homelessness for at least 1 family.

- Funds to support food access while SNAP benefits were temporary disrupted for 1 family.
- Funds to purchase an air conditioner for at least 1 family.
- Funds to purchase cribs and other furniture for at least 1 family.
- Funds to temporary house a participant in a hotel who was at risk of interpersonal abuse.

Participant Stress

Evidence supports that stress is an important factor related to maternal health and birth outcomes. Stress was measured among participants who received assistance with a legal case through pre- and post-services PSS surveys. In addition to the PSS, clients who participated in a follow up telephone interview were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that their level of stress had changed following receiving services.

Since the project's start in January 2016, a total of 62 clients participated in a follow up interview. Among the 62 that participated in a follow up interview, 43 completed both the pre- and post-PSS.

Among the 43 participants that completed pre and post PSS assessments, 65% (n=28) showed a reduction in stress following receiving NLP services. One participant showed no change (2%) and 33% of clients showed an increase in stress (n=14). The PSS rates perceived stress levels in three categories (low, moderate, and high) based on scores that can range from zero to 40. The overall number of participants in the low stress category increased after receiving legal services. Table 2 shows participant stress levels pre and post services.

Table 2. Participant stress levels pre and post NLP services

Level of stress	Low Stress (0–13)		Moderate Stress (14–26)		High Stress (27-40)	
Pre/Post PSS	# Pre	# Post	# Pre	# Post	# Pre	# Post
Number of clients reporting	7	22	26	16	10	6

In addition to the PSS, respondents were asked whether they felt the legal services decreased their stress by responding to a Likert-like scale (responses included disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree or disagree, somewhat agree, or agree). Eighty percent of clients who responded to this question reported that they agree the services decreased their stress. Eight percent reported that they somewhat agree, 5% neither agreed or disagreed, and 7% of clients disagreed that the services decreased their stress.

In addition to assessing the impact services had on stress, evaluators asked participants to respond to whether the legal services improved their quality of life and positively impacted their family. Table 3 shows that most respondents agreed that the legal services decreased their stress (80%), improved quality of life (73%), and positively impacted their families (76%).

Table 3. Participant perceived impact of services on stress, quality of life, and family

	The legal advice or services provided decreased your level of stress. (n=60)	The legal advice or services provided improved your quality of life. (n=60)	The outcome of the legal issue positively impacted you or your family. (n=59)
% who Agree	80%	73.3%	76%
% who Somewhat Agree	8%	8.3%	7%
% who Neither Agree nor Disagree	5%	8.3%	2%
% who Somewhat Disagree	--	--	2%
% who Disagree	7%	10%	13%

Participant Satisfaction

Satisfaction was assessed by asking participants to rate their satisfaction among several satisfaction domains on a scale from zero to 10. A score of zero represents "the worst" or "not at all" and a score of 10 represented "the best" or "completely." The domains assessed related to legal services satisfaction included effort of the attorney to understand goals and interests related to the issue, experience communicating with the attorney, respectful treatment, responsiveness, level of trust, how well the attorney attempted to resolve the legal need, satisfaction with outcome related to legal issue, and satisfaction with overall services.

The average response in all but one satisfaction domain was above a nine. The percent of individuals rating the satisfaction domains as a 10, or the best, was above 60% across all domains. The domains with the highest levels of satisfaction included respectful treatment by attorney (9.9), overall satisfaction with services (9.6), and responsiveness by the legal provider and trust in legal provider (9.4 for each domain). The domains with the lowest level of satisfaction were outcome related to legal issue (8.7) and communication (9.1). Table 4 details the average response among participants and the percentage of participants who rated the satisfaction domain a 10 for each of the domains.

Table 4. Client satisfaction ratings across domains

Satisfaction domain	Average response (0-10)	% Rating "10"
1. Rate how well the legal provider put effort into understanding your goals and interests related to legal issue. (n=61)	9.3	72%
2. Rate your experience communicating with the legal provider. (n=61)	9.1	62%
3. Rate the respectful treatment by the legal provider. (n=60)	9.9	88%
4. Rate the responsiveness of the legal provider. (n=60)	9.4	70%
5. Rate your level of trust in the legal provider. (n=60)	9.4	73%
6. Rate how well the legal provider attempted to address your legal need. (n=61)	9.3	74%
7. Rate your overall satisfaction with the outcome related to your legal issue. (n=60)	8.7	62%
8. Rate your satisfaction with the overall services provided. (n=61)	9.6	77%

Policy Activities

In addition to direct legal services, the NLP team engaged in a range of policy advocacy and education activities, including developing a policy agenda, hosting an annual Community Action Day, and working collaboratively with other advocates to pass laws and policies that will protect Philadelphia residents.

Policy Agenda

The NLP team developed its 2020-2021 policy agenda with direct input from families and nurse home visitors. The NLP policy agenda identifies priorities and action steps that promote the health and well-being of Philadelphia families living in low-income neighborhoods. For each of the identified policy priorities, the NLP team conducted corresponding activities identified in Table 5.

Table 5. Policy agenda priorities and activities completed

Policy priority	Activities completed
Improve housing stability and quality for families.	• Participated on local and statewide coalitions to improve housing conditions for families. • Submitted comments to the Public Utilities Commission which improved guidance related to medical certificate guidelines for preventing utility shutoffs.
Ensure access to public benefits for parents and children.	• Continued to develop relationships with county assistance office staff to improve services. • Participated on statewide coalitions aimed at improving public benefits in Pennsylvania.
Fight racism and advance health equity for Black parents.	• Engaged the Pennsylvania Attorney General's office Healthcare Section on racial disparities in health care. • Hosted listening sessions and provided direction for work of legal interns now working with the Attorney General's office.
Improve job stability and employment conditions for low-wage workers.	• Co-authored Ease the overwhelming burden on families during pregnancy and early parenting, a Philadelphia Inquirer article to increase awareness of the need for employee protections, particularly among pregnant women and mothers.
Advance food security and food justice and improve access to healthy food.	• Participated on statewide coalitions aimed at improving public benefits, including SNAP and food access, in Pennsylvania.
Expand access to high quality early childhood education.	• Provided education and training to nurse home visitors and community partners on education rights.
Advance policies that support lactating students.	• Continued to lead the Coalition for Lactation Friendly Schools.
Protect environmental health and combat the climate crisis.	• Continued to engage in policy advocacy efforts to improve housing and environmental conditions of families in Philadelphia.
Promote community revitalization and active civic engagement.	• Hosted an annual Community Action Day to identify families' policy priorities and strengthen families' advocacy efforts.
Broaden access to mental health services and educational support.	• Participated in the Pennsylvania Older Youth Advocacy Workgroup Session. • Collaborated with the Education Law Center to provide staff and partner training on Educational Rights in the Era of Remote Learning. • Integrated mental health services for home visitation families and identified policy priorities related to mental health.
Advocate for economic security measures for families impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.	• Hosted discussion on the Social Safety Net: How Nurses and Lawyers Collaborate to Support Mothers and Families for the At the Core of Care podcast. • Worked with local and state agencies to improve public benefits processes and policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. • Participated in numerous public press interviews to increase awareness of issues faced by families during the COVID-19 pandemic, including Many pregnant workers and new mothers were left out of COVID-19 aid (Philadelphia Inquirer).

Community Action Day
The NLP and NNCC hosted its 5th Annual Community Action Day event on July 25-27, 2021. This year's Community Action Day was hosted as a virtual event over multiple days in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Numerous community partners, including Health Promotion Council and The Health Federation, offered resources and services to attendees. In response to this year's theme, "Grow as we go," families discussed legislative policies and issues that impact their lives and had the opportunity to hear directly from an elected official, Philadelphia Councilmember Helen Gym.

Training and Education

The NLP team hosted and conducted numerous trainings and educational opportunities in 2021 to improve the advocacy capacity of nurse home visitors, community partners, and providers nationwide. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, trainings took place virtually.

Staff Training
To support nurse home visitors, the NLP attorneys hosted seven staff trainings during 2021. Training topics included:

- Educational Rights in the Era of Remote Learning (in collaboration with the Education Law Center)
- Tax Law: Stimulus and Tax Credits (in collaboration with Philadelphia Legal Assistance)
- NLP 101 Training
- Child Welfare System Lunch n' Learn (in collaboration with Penn Interdisciplinary Child Advocacy Center and Community Legal Services)
- Ethical Storytelling
- IRS Child Tax Credit Portals (in collaboration with CLS)
- Housing Chat n' Chew with NLP Lawyers

Dissemination Activities

In addition to serving the Philadelphia community, the NLP promoted adoption of its model within maternal and child health programs nationwide. Between January 1, 2021 and December 31, 2021, dissemination activities included presenting to local, state, and national audiences, and disseminating information via web-based newsletters, webpages, and social media.

Presentations

The NLP team presented to several state and national audiences to disseminate best and promising practices related to meeting the social and legal needs of families to improve health, including:

- Nursing-Legal Partnership: An Innovative Tool for Addressing Social Determinants of Health (presentation to Community College of Philadelphia nursing students)
- Health Justice: Supporting Patients with Unmet Legal Needs (part 1 of a 3-part webinar series)
- Social Determinants of Health for Family Support Professionals (Children's' Trust Fund annual conference)

Mass Communication Reach

The NLP team hosts several mass communication platforms and dissemination vehicles, including:

- A web-based newsletter, which currently has 630 subscribers.
- Social media accounts, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.
- Webpages, including the HELP: MLP webpage, which had 5,017 visitors and 7,526 views between January 1, 2021 and December 31, 2021.