



BROOKLYN A NEWSLETTER

Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A

SPRING 2018



BROADWAY TRIANGLE COALITION SETS HISTORIC PRECEDENT

This past December, the Broadway Triangle Community Coalition (BTCC) celebrated a landmark settlement agreement with the City of New York—effectively ending the Broadway Triangle rezoning case. The culmination of nearly a decade of litigation and community activism, the agreement brought nearly 400 units of permanent and truly affordable housing to this area of Brooklyn, as well as much-needed fair housing services aimed at educating and representing local at-risk residents.

This precedent-setting case established that the City of New York “cannot plan without input from the community.” BTCC was represented by Brooklyn A attorneys, alongside counsel from Emery Celli Brinkerhoff & Abady and the New York Civil Liberties Union.

Brooklyn A is extremely proud of the determination and perseverance showed by everyone in the BTCC throughout this arduous process, and we eagerly await the benefits these developments will bring to the Broadway Triangle residents of nearby neighborhoods.



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Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A

**SAVE
THE
DATE**

*50th
Anniversary
Celebration*

Thursday,
November 1
2018

.....
Marriot New York at the
Brooklyn Bridge, 6-9PM

ANNUAL PARTNERSHIP AWARDS BENEFIT 2017



“The struggle for justice is neverending, but each of us, every day, we move the ball a little closer to a better world.”

- JERRY GOLDFEDER

2017 HONOREES

JERRY H. GOLDFEDER

Special Counsel
Stroock & Stroock & Lavan LLP
Recipient of the Judge
Harold R. Tyler, Jr. Award

NEIL STEINKAMP

Managing Director
Stout
Recipient of the Denis Berger Award

JUAN RAMOS

Executive Director
Southside United HDFC - Los Sures
Recipient of the
Sargent Shriver Award



ANNUAL PARTNERSHIP AWARDS BENEFIT 2017



“From the moment that you walk through their doors, they give you a neighborly hello...educate you on what your rights are and let you know that you’ll never walk alone again.”

- JUAN RAMOS



“Brooklyn A’s dedication every single day is unparalleled and is a true inspiration...to all of those who are looking to make a difference.”

- NEIL STEINKAMP



ANNUAL PARTNERSHIP AWARDS BENEFIT 2017



“Each and every one of you who are sitting here, you contribute every day—making life a little easier and a little better for women and men, for families, for communities, for the people of New York.”

- JERRY GOLDFEDER

“The work that Brooklyn A does on a daily basis on behalf of our community is second to none.”

- JUAN RAMOS



MEET OUR NEW STAFF



Sarah Block

Development and Communications Associate

Prior to joining Brooklyn A, Sarah worked in fundraising and communications with Ayuda, a non-profit serving low-income immigrants with legal, social and language access services and the Smithsonian Institution's Office of Policy and Analysis. Sarah earned a bachelor of arts in cultural anthropology and master's degree in public anthropology from American University. Sarah sits on the board of directors for Trabajadores Unidos DC, and is a founding member of the grassroots community organizing groups Sanctuary DMV and the DMV Coalition in Support of Children Fleeing Violence in Central America.

Eliseo Cabrera, Esq. *Staff Attorney, Preserving Affordable Housing Program, Individual Representation Unit*

Eliseo Cabrera joins Brooklyn A with broad public service experience. Here in New York, he has worked with CUNY Citizenship Now, Make the Road, and Main Street Legal Services. He has also worked with Housing Rights Inc. in California. Eliseo earned his law degree from CUNY and bachelor's degree in history from UC Berkley. He is also skilled in video production.



Dana Christensen, Esq. *Senior Staff Attorney, Preserving Affordable Housing Program, Individual Representation Unit*

Dana started her legal practice in Minneapolis Housing Court and represented clients in rural Minnesota and New Mexico before settling into city life in New York. She has extensive litigation experience in private and public housing matters, as well as in domestic violence advocacy and family law practice.

Chris Colón *Community Outreach & Intake Specialist, Preserving Affordable Housing Program, Group Housing Unit*

Christopher Colón is a Community Outreach & Intake Specialist, working to empower residents and connect them to the resources and services they need. Christopher was born and raised in Bushwick, Brooklyn and received his B.A. in sociology with a research focus on gentrification from The City College of New York. Outside of the office, Christopher pursues filmmaking.



Dennis Donnelly *Legal Advocate Fellow, Preserving Affordable Housing Program, Group Representation Unit*

Dennis Donnelly is incredibly excited to return to Brooklyn A after working as a legal intern/extern in the summer and fall of 2016. Dennis is in his last semester at Fordham University School of Law. During law school, he restarted and led a student group called the Housing Advocacy Project, and got involved with the legal observer program of the National Lawyers Guild NYC. He did two semesters with the immigration law clinic at Fordham, and worked last summer drafting a treatise supplement with one of the partners at a plaintiff's-side medical malpractice firm.

Francis Taveras *Paralegal Preserving Affordable Housing Program, Group Representation Unit*

Fran attended New York City Technical College. Before coming to Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A, Fran worked as a paralegal for 15 years for a personal injury law firm in New York City. Fran was born and raised in Williamsburg, Brooklyn so it brings a great deal of personal and professional satisfaction to her to be able to serve the community where she was born and raised.



MEET OUR NEW STAFF



Angela Escobar, Esq. *Senior Staff Attorney,
Small Business Support Project, Community & Economic Development Program*

Prior to joining Brooklyn A, Angela was an associate at Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP, where she advised clients on cross-border transactions involving the Latin American region and provided pro bono support to Legal Services NYC's Bankruptcy Assistance Project. She served as a New York Cares volunteer team leader at the Northeast Brooklyn Housing Development Corporation's Golden Harvest Food Pantry and provided pro bono assistance at the New York Legal Assistance Group's immigration clinics and mobile legal help center. Angela received her J.D. from the University of British Columbia, Faculty of Law in 2009.

Bruno Garcia *Community Outreach & Intake Specialist,
Preserving Affordable Housing Program, Group Housing Unit*

Prior to joining Brooklyn A, Bruno served as a community organizer for Churches United for Fair Housing, working on several community campaigns including accountability on the Rheingold rezoning. He sits on the steering committee of the Brooklyn Anti-Gentrification Network (BAN) and is a founding member of the anti-gentrification art project, Mi Casa No Es Su Casa. He has also worked as a paralegal in civil rights law and as an organizer at Equality for Flatbush. He received his B.A. from Hunter College in Political Science and English Literature.



Caitlin Gillies, Esq. *Staff Attorney,
Preserving Affordable Housing Program, Group Representation Unit*

Prior to joining Brooklyn A, Caitlin was an Agency Attorney with the City of New York's Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings. She has extensively focused on economic justice issues through her previous fellowships and externships with the Children's Law Center, the Welfare Law Unit of Greater Boston Legal Services, the National Center for Law and Economic Justice, and Northeastern University's Poverty Law Clinic. Caitlin received her J.D. from Northeastern University School of Law in 2015 with a concentration in Poverty Law and Economic Justice.

Blair Hill, Esq. *Staff Attorney,
Preserving Affordable Housing Program, Individual Representation Unit*

Blair graduated in 2015 from Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra University. She was recently working with Miller & Milone, PC as a law clerk in their Elder Law Department. She also worked for two years with the Nassau Suffolk Law Services, Inc. in the Veterans Rights Project and Mental Health Law Project as a law graduate. She developed and maintained the unit and appeared in Family Court, Surrogates Court, Supreme Court and District Court.



Ashley Kaplan Marullo, Esq. *Staff Attorney,
Preserving Affordable Housing Program, Group Representation Unit*

Ashley joins Brooklyn A from Legal Services of Central New York Inc. where she helped low income individuals with their housing needs in public, subsidized, and private tenancies. Previously, Ashley held positions with Olinsky Disability, Barth Sullivan Behr, and Lynch Law Office/Lynch Schwab, PLLC. Ashley received her J.D. from Syracuse University School of Law in 2011 with Honors through Exemplary Commitment to Pro Bono and Community Service.

Lillybeth Ventura *Assistant
Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic*

Lillybeth first started working for BKA back in 2014 as an intern. Now, she is an assistant at BKA's Low Income Taxpayer Clinic and is hoping to advance her career in the legal field by attending law school in the near future.



MEET OUR NEW STAFF



Samantha Rauer, Esq. *Staff Attorney,
Small Business Support Project, Community & Economic Development Program*

Samantha most recently was a staff attorney at Mobilization for Justice (previously MFY Legal Services) before coming to Brooklyn A. She also previously worked at Legal Assistance of Western New York and held internships at the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights, the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, and Washington Lawyers for the Arts in Seattle. Samantha graduated from Boston University School of Law in 2013.

Kenrick Ross *Program Manager,
Small Business Support Project, Community & Economic Development Program*

Kenrick has extensive leadership experience in the non-profit sector, helping to launch new organizations and initiatives, acting as liaison with government funders, and building relationships amongst diverse clients, stakeholders and community partners. He has a Masters in Urban Policy from Hunter College. Among his prior work experience, he served as the Executive Director of the Indo-Caribbean Alliance in Queens, as the Director of Education and Career Services at the YWCA of Queens, as the Associate Director of Professional Development and Quality Assurance at The Leaguers in New Jersey, and as a Development Officer at Diaspora Community Services in Brooklyn. He is also the Founder and President of Urban+Out.



Yaa. S. Sarpong, Esq. *Staff Attorney,
Preserving Affordable Housing Program, Group Representation Unit*

After graduating from Columbia Law School in 2016, Yaa served as the Theodore Koskoff Litigation Fellow at Koskoff, Koskoff & Bieder in Bridgeport, CT, where she worked on matters ranging from personal injury to Fourth and Eighth Amendment civil cases. Prior to law school, Yaa worked as a Coro Fellow in Public Affairs in St. Louis from 2012-2013 and worked with math education company Reasoning Mind from 2010-2012 in Houston, Texas. Yaa graduated with honors from Brown University in 2010 with a dual concentration in Latin American Studies and Africana Studies.

Randi Lynn Veenstra, Esq. *Simpson Thacher Extern,
Community & Economic Development Program*

Randi Lynn graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 2015 and is in Simpson Thacher's corporate bankruptcy and restructuring group. Randi Lynn has worked on numerous pro bono projects while at Simpson, including a research project on national criminal justice debt, representing immigrants filing U-visa and asylum applications, and assisting in a working group with the ACLU. In law school, Randi Lynn participated and served on the executive board of UPenn's Prison Education Advocacy Project, which focused on educating prisoners about current legal issues.



Kevin Worthington *Legal Advocate,
Preserving Affordable Housing Program, Group Housing Unit*

In his capacity as a third-year law student, Kevin is involved with affirmative litigation ranging from HP actions seeking repairs and stopping landlord harassment to fair housing rights complaints. Kevin is expected to graduate in the summer of 2019 as part of the first Part-Time Class at CUNY School of Law. This law degree complements two Master's degrees in Community Development and Political Science, as well as several years of community organizing for NYC Council Member Antonio Reynoso and human rights advocacy in Mexico and Bolivia with organizations such as the United Nations Agency for Refugees and Amnesty International.



“The Commercial Lease Assistance Program builds on 45+ years of experience and commitment in representing non-profit Community Based Organizations (CBOs) in transactional matters to the small business community. We are excited to partner with SBS and our collaborating legal service providers and CBOs in this ambitious and impactful program. Together, we hope to usher in a new day where the playing field for small businesses in commercial lease related matters is more level.”

– JESSICA ROSE, Director
Community & Economic
Development Project

BROOKLYN A LAUNCHES NEW COMMERCIAL LEASE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Brooklyn A recently expanded its Community & Economic Development Program to include a Small Business Support Project (SBSP). The project’s initial focus is the development and launch of a **Commercial Lease Assistance Program (CLA)**. This program provides free legal services on non-litigation commercial lease matters to all income-eligible small business owners throughout New York City. In partnership with Volunteers of Legal Service (VOLS) and the Community Development Project at the Urban Justice Center (CDP), CLA attorneys provide legal services on commercial lease-related matters, including *but not limited to*:

- lease review, amendment, assignment, and/or terminations
- negotiating new and renewal leases
- formalizing oral/unwritten agreements
- handling landlord harassment/breach of contract.

Commercial Lease Assistance Program supports the creation and protection of small businesses, jobs, and vibrant communities across New York City. They bridge access to opportunities for immigrants, people of color, women, veterans, and others who have been historically overlooked or pushed out of retail spaces they have occupied for decades.

Each month in New York City, about 1,200 small businesses close. While it’s true that some businesses open too, this doesn’t occur at a sufficient rate to fill the growing number of empty storefronts in many neighborhoods. New business owners who could stimulate the local economy and create a substantial number of jobs are often kept from certain storefronts and neighborhoods by exorbitantly high rents in wealthy and gentrifying neighborhoods. These rental rates are such that only larger national chains like banks and fast food restaurants can afford them. This leads to homogenization and a breakdown of the character and familiarity desired by many neighborhood resident.

Making retail spaces more accessible to business owners could provide additional economic opportunities in many communities of color. With 403,812 minority-owned small businesses in New York City—roughly 43% of which are small businesses—the city has the highest number of minority-owned businesses in the country. By keeping storefronts empty or steering businesses into precarious agreements, people of color are often deprived of opportunities to bring jobs and revenue directly into their communities. Brooklyn A is excited to provide support to small business owners as another avenue to furthering economic and social justice in New York City and beyond.

