

OUR MISSION: To strengthen the whole community by actively enhancing the healthy integration of immigrants **OUR STRATEGY:** Educate, Empower, Employ

Neighbors Link Welcomes Pace Community Law Practice to Better Serve Client Needs

To serve the growing legal needs of our client community given the current climate of uncertainty around immigration issues, Neighbors Link recently merged Pace Community Law Practice (PCLP) into our organization to become the Neighbors Link Community Law Practice. We are pleased to welcome lead attorneys Karin Anderson Ponzer, Esq., and Elizabeth Mastropolo, Esq., to the Neighbors Link staff.

Since 2014, PCLP has consulted with over 250 Neighbors Link clients on a variety of immigration matters during legal clinics offered every Friday at the Mount Kisco center. Common immigration issues PCLP has handled include family based petitions, visas, travel documents, asylum, renewal of Legal Permanent Resident Cards, and applications for U.S. naturalization and deferred action. In addition, PCLP helped with 30 urgent cases to defend people who were being deported, many involving vulnerable children.

Specializing in providing legal services to immigrants, Ms. Anderson Ponzer and Ms. Mastropolo have become experts on cases involving unaccompanied minors; a developing area

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—Karin Anderson Ponzer



of the law in which expertise is critically needed due to the large numbers of children arriving in Westchester County from Latin and Central America.

“Elizabeth and I are excited to build upon the proven track record of results between PCLP

and Neighbors Link,” said Karin Anderson Ponzer. “There is a tremendous need for quality legal services to the immigrant community in Westchester and we are here to provide it.”

Carola Bracco, Executive Director of Neighbors Link, said of the newly formalized partnership, “We are excited about expanding our legal services to integrate with and support Neighbors Link’s overall mission to strengthen the whole community by actively enhancing the healthy integration of immigrants.”



Attorneys Karin Anderson Ponzer and Elizabeth Mastropolo will lead the Neighbors Link Community Law Practice, providing clients with legal support on immigration issues.

A Word from Our Director, Carola Bracco

At the end of 2016, we experienced something remarkable at Neighbors Link: a dramatic increase in the number of community members contacting us daily to offer their assistance to support and protect the immigrant community we serve. This outpouring of concern was exactly what we needed to get energized for 2017 because the climate in our country concerning immigrant rights is clearly slipping backwards.

Neighbors Link program participants are very fearful for themselves and their family members about what may happen to immigrants in the United States—documented or undocumented—in the coming years. At the very least, many people feel that they may no longer be welcome here.

But we know that people have always migrated to the U.S. from all different parts of the world. Like our parents and grandparents, recent immigrants are looking for opportunities to work, educate their children, and pursue their dreams. Some are escaping violence and persecution. They all bring a rich cultural diversity that makes our communities stronger.

With all of you who support the mission of integration and share a commitment to justice, the Neighbors Link immigrant community will continue to thrive. In 2017, you will see our programming reaching new communities, serving even more people, and meeting new demands for legal services and citizenship. You will have opportunities to advocate for immigrant rights, whether you are an immigrant yourself or you can stand up for others who don't have a voice.

Thank you for all your emotional and financial support, and for the love you've shown the immigrant community. You will carry us forward into this new year.

Proud to be a Nonprofit Excellence Award Winner

It was a proud moment for Neighbors Link as we received a top honor at the 10th annual Nonprofit Excellence Awards in December. The silver prize was awarded to Neighbors Link by the Nonprofit Coordinating Committee of New York (NPCC), which recognizes exceptional management practices of nonprofits in New York City, Long Island and Westchester.

An expert 32-member selection committee chose the three winners, also including The Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services (gold) and Per Scholas (bronze), after an intensive application and vetting process that identified excellent management practices. The trio of winners receives a total of \$60,000 in grant money as well as scholarships to the Columbia Business School Executive Education Programs in Social Enterprise.

"NPCC congratulates the winners. These organizations exemplify innovative nonprofit management practices with great results," said Sharon Stapel, President of NPCC.

"We are so grateful to be recognized for our management practices that support the mission of Neighbors Link," said Carola Bracco, Executive Director. "It is a privilege to be part of this team and we are humbled by this award."





Above, Neighbors Link Board of Directors Chair Cynthia Brill (left) and Love Wooten (right)

Below (left to right), Neighbors Link Executive Director Carola Bracco, Catalina Cruz from the NYS Governor's Office and Board Member Mary Weiss



FOOD CHAINS

As part of its Latin Links film series, Neighbors Link supporters gathered to view the award-winning documentary film "Food Chains" at the Jacob Burns Film Center.

Right, "Food Chains" writer/director, Sanjay Rawal, with Neighbors Link Director Carola Bracco, discussing the harsh reality of exploited agricultural laborers who toil at the bottom of the corporate grocery food chain



Neighbors & Friends

ANA NAVARRO

A Nicaraguan-born American Republican strategist and political commentator for CNN, Ana Navarro spoke just days after the November election to a full house at the Neighbors Link Latin Links luncheon at Old Oaks Country Club in Purchase, NY.



Above, Ethan Fedida, Dr. Cindy Fedida, Ana Navarro and Dr. Andre Fedida



Above, Cynthia Brill, Ana Navarro, and Meredith Brokaw
Below, Friends of Neighbors Link meet and greet the luncheon speaker



Neighbors Link and Local Police Team Up to Build Community Dialogue and Trust



“Trust building” was the shared objective as local police and Neighbors Link families participated in a ground breaking six-week program to proactively address the youth and police tensions that have emerged across the country, particularly in communities of color. Nine families, with children ages 11-15, participated in the recent pilot program that culminated in December.

Partnering with the North American Family Institute and the Westchester County Public Safety Department, the Families & Police Initiative breaks down stereotypes to create a “new” picture of police and community relations,

“It is important to establish the trust necessary so that law enforcement and community members can work together.”
—Deputy County Executive

using exercises and activities to open lines of communication. For example, one session involved role playing where the children played police officers pulling over a car with an immigrant family in it. The immigrant family was played by the police officers. By sharing their pre-conceived notions and personal stories, participants explored common ground and built mutual respect.

Deputy County Executive, Kevin Plunkett attended the program's graduation and said, “The County Executive is very pleased to see our Public Safety officers work in collaboration with Neighbors Link and NAFI. It is important to establish the trust necessary so that law enforcement and community members can work together.”

Also attending the graduation was Joseph Yasainski, Deputy Commissioner Westchester Public Safety; Susan Ostrofsky, Principal Fox Lane Middle School; Kevin McGuire, Commissioner of Westchester County Department of Social Services; and Paul Stasaitis, Captain, Westchester County Public Safety.



Community members and police officers came together to find common ground in a six-week trust-building program.



Citizenship Days Help Immigrants Who Dream of Becoming New Americans

In September of 2016, Clara Rodriguez decided to attend a citizenship drive at Neighbors Link.

“The moment I walked in, I felt like it was my home,” she said. Originally from Chile, Clara lived for 45 years in Larchmont, Mamaroneck and Mount Kisco, raising her son with her husband, a U.S. citizen, who passed away three years ago. A social worker in her home country, Clara worked a variety of jobs in Westchester with one goal. “I wanted my son to have a good education.”

Clara had taken a computer class at Neighbors Link years prior, and she remembered her experience at the center as a positive one. So, when she saw an article this past fall about the citizenship drive, she called. Clara recalls being warmly greeted by Neighbors Link staff member Ramiro Rincon who assisted with her application and related paperwork.

Clara is one of 130 immigrants who have attended the center's citizenship drives since New York State designated Neighbors Link as one of its official ONA (Office of New Americans) Opportunity Centers in 2016. The citizenship initiative is made possible by legal expertise from the Neighbors Link Community Law Practice and 40 community volunteers.

“It’s nice to be involved in something so upbeat and positive,” said volunteer Nancy Bauer. She described the events as a huge undertaking for the staff as well as the applicants who come in well-prepared, sometimes with their families. “They are very appreciative of the help



Neighbors Link provides, and they are very motivated to go through the process of becoming American citizens.”

Applying for naturalization can take anywhere from four hours to a couple of months depending on the complexity of the case.

To do so, an individual must be a green card holder and meet certain eligibility requirements. The government review process can take six to eight months, during which time an applicant prepares for an interview that includes English language and civics tests.

“While it is their decision to apply, we do our best to set them up for success,” said Ramiro, the center’s Workforce Development Manager. “If their English or civics could use some improvement, we encourage ESL and citizenship prep classes at the center.”

Clara feels well-prepared for her Manhattan interview and test, and she looks forward to taking the Oath of Allegiance to America at a naturalization ceremony in the next several months. “I told my son, I want to live the rest of my life as an American. This is my country.”

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—Clara Rodriguez





Thank you to the many community members who donated new unwrapped toys and gift cards, and who volunteered their time for the Neighbors Link Holiday Mercado. Client families who attend this popular annual event can select and wrap presents for their children. We are also grateful to those who donated meals, coats, work boots and gloves over the cold winter months.

WORKERS AVAILABLE AT NEIGHBORS LINK

Skilled and general labor available: House and Yard Clean-Up, Moving Help, Housekeeping, Snow Shoveling, Painters, Home Companions, Carpenters, Masons, Party Help and more



Neighbors Link Worker Center is open 365 days a year, 7am-10pm
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Workers available throughout Northern Westchester!

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