

Nursing-Legal Partnership



Impact on Nurse Home Visitors

Findings from Qualitative Interviews

9 March 2017

Executive Summary

The Nursing-Legal Partnership (NLP) is a collaboration between the Nurse-Led Care Consortium's Philadelphia Nurse-Family Partnership and Mabel Morris Family Home Visit Programs and Health, Education and Legal assistance Project: A Medical-Legal Partnership. NLP works to improve the health of low-income pregnant women, children and families by providing holistic services to address root causes of poor health. This model focuses on integrating civil legal aid services into evidence-based home visiting models. Attorneys work alongside nurse home visitors to resolve a range of social and legal issues including poor housing, access to public benefits, access to health care, protection from abuse, and consumer issues, among many others.

The NLP model is a unique partnership transforming the delivery of health care services. The NLP aims to 1) identify unmet legal and social needs of clients, 2) provide direct legal representation and services to clients, 3) engage in systemic advocacy efforts and 4) evaluate the project's impact for replication and scalability.

In an effort to measure the impact of the project on nurse home visitors telephonic interviews were conducted with voluntary participants. Ten nurse home visitors participated in the interviews representing 37% of the total nurse home visitors. Interviewees were asked ten open-ended questions regarding the project's impact on their efficacy and efficiency, the impact on their clients, their satisfaction with the project, and areas needing improvement. Data was then analyzed extracting common themes across the respondents.

To date the NLP has identified over 350 legal needs among clients. Attorneys have opened cases for over 60 clients and have provided numerous consultations to nurses on a wide-range of issues. Nurses and attorneys have also developed and participated in joint trainings on a range of issues. Nurse home visitors provided rich qualitative data throughout the interviews. Common themes emerged including:

- High satisfaction with the project by nurse home visitors
- Increased knowledge and confidence to advocate on behalf of clients
- Increased knowledge and understanding of legal issues
- High satisfaction with the project by clients
- A need exists to integrate additional attorneys to the project

Overview

The Nursing-Legal Partnership (NLP) was established in January 2016 and is a collaboration between Health, Education and Legal Assistance Project and the Nurse-Led Care Consortium. This innovative project integrates civil legal aid attorneys into the Philadelphia Nurse-Family Partnership and Mabel Morris Family Home Visit Programs in an effort to improve the social and legal conditions that impact pregnant women, children and families. Attorneys and nurse home visitors work together to provide holistic services to clients addressing a wide-range of social and legal needs including securing stable income and public benefits, obtaining safe housing, ensuring family stability and protection from abuse, among many others. The NLP is supported by funding from Rita & Alex Hillman Foundation, Oak Foundation, the Public Health Fund, and the Pennsylvania Children's Trust Fund.

The NLP model works to achieve the following goals:



The NLP model focuses on practice transformation and collaboration as opposed to providing a referral to services. To this end, attorneys are fully integrated on site alongside the nurse home visitors. In addition to providing direct legal services to clients, attorneys and nurses engage in consultations, participate in collaborative advocacy efforts, conduct and participate in trainings on specific topics and develop written materials on a variety of legal and policy issues to increase the advocacy capacity of all staff.

NLP attorneys were integrated on site beginning in March 2016. To date, over 350 legal needs have been identified among NFP and MM clients. Attorneys have opened cases for over 60 clients. The legal issues addressed include preventing eviction, resolving landlord-tenant disputes, securing public benefits, protection from abuse, resolving custody and other family stability issues, and consumer law issues.

Methodology

In order to assess the impact of the project activities on the nurse home visitors, qualitative data was collected from nurses through telephonic interviews. Twenty-seven nurses received an email invitation to voluntarily participate in a confidential interview with the evaluator. Ten (37%) of the nurses participated. Nurses were asked ten open-ended questions regarding the project and how it has impacted their jobs and their clients. Data was then analyzed specifically identifying key themes or issues across interviewee responses.

The following questions were asked of interviewees:

	Question
1	How has the NLP changed the way you do your job?
2	Has the NLP made you less effective or more effective at your job?
3	Do you feel less or more knowledgeable about advocating on behalf of your clients?
4	Do you feel less or more knowledgeable about advocating on behalf of your clients even when attorneys are not directly involved in a matter?
5	Do you feel more or less equipped to address social determinants of health since this project has began?
6	How effective is the referral process to the attorneys?
7	What's working well with the NLP?
8	What areas of the NLP need improvement?
9	In which ways, if any, has the NLP impacted your clients?
10	Is there anything else you would like to share?

Findings

Each of the ten interviewees answered all of the questions asked of them. Several themes emerged throughout their collective responses providing valuable insight on the impact the project has on nurse home visitors' efficacy and efficiency, the impact on clients, and recommendations for improvements.

Impact on Nurses' Efficacy & Efficiency

Questions were asked of the nurses related to the impact the project has had on their ability to carry out their jobs effectively and efficiently. Several questions were directly related to the impact the project had on the nurse home visitors' ability to perform her job duties.

Has the NLP made you less effective or more effective at your job?

When asked whether the NLP has made them less or more effective at their jobs, five nurses reported that it had made them more effective, zero nurses reported that it made them less effective and five nurses reported "both" or "neither." All ten nurses provided an explanation for their answers.

More Effective

Nurses that reported the NLP made them more effective at their job focused on several reasons for this. The themes that emerged from this question included:

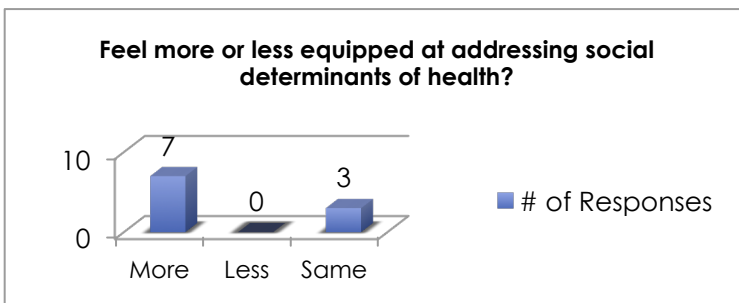
- **Empowerment to address complex issues**
- **Increased knowledge on social and legal topics**
 - “Definitely more effective. I didn’t realize how much that we as nurses could do about these issues ourselves. Definitely learning a lot from talking to them [attorneys]. I’ve learned form the presentations. I know a lot more about the resources and what the laws are and how to counsel them [clients] myself.”
 - “For sure more effective. I have a better understanding of clients’ rights and the ways they can advocate for themselves.”
- **Greater confidence**
- **Increased resources and connections to services**
 - “More effective. We are not a clinical nursing program, really. Our main focus is more global and holistic and so that is the point of it. One of our goals is to help people become more self sufficient. One of those things is having things settled in your life like housing and financial problems. It does help to do the job more effectively and more efficiently.”
- **More time to devote to other issues instead of grappling with complex matters outside of scope of work**
 - “More effective because I have more time to do what we are supposed to be doing instead of finding answers by myself.”

More and Less Effective/Neither

When asked if the NLP has made them more or less effective at their jobs, five nurses responded “both.” They then went on to explain why they felt that way. All five nurses reported that when the project first started it took up more of their time and therefore made them feel less effective. Other statements include:

- “I don’t think it’s made an impact on my job itself. It’s a great additional resource to have, but hasn’t impacted how I function as a home visitor.”
- “I wouldn’t say it affected my job a great deal. It definitely hasn’t made me less effective. It hasn’t really affected me negatively and it’s only benefited me having the extra support in an area I know nothing about.”
- “There’s two parts to this. In the beginning, I felt like it was taking much more of my time because I think the lawyers were trying to go through the nurses. We weren’t sure how it was going to work out. Not only did I have extra paperwork to do, but I felt like questions were going through me. I wanted lawyers to go to clients themselves. My email was piling up. That part made it more difficult. It was something new and something extra to do. As it went along it got easier.”

- “It has made me more effective in some areas of the job and less effective in others. Sometimes it's more challenging to get to program content because we are spending so much time on NLP. Especially for the screening.”
- “Initially I felt less effective because it was something new I had to learn and opening up issues I didn't know about. Now I'd say more effective.”



Do you feel more or less equipped to address social determinants of health since this project has begun?

When asked if they felt more or less equipped to address the social determinants of health, seven nurse home visitors reported that they felt more equipped. Three home visitors reported that they felt “about the same” and zero reported that they felt less equipped.

More Equipped

Seven nurse home visitors reported that they felt more equipped at addressing the social determinants of health since the project began. Nurses reported:

- “Definitely more equipped. But like I said before, I am realizing how complex everything is and how much more I need to learn.”
- “I think I feel better, because I know more. I can advocate for them [clients] and they can advocate for themselves knowing what they can and cannot do about things.”

The Same

Three of the nurse home visitors responded that they felt their ability to address social determinants of health remained the same since the program started. In their explanations about what this meant to them a common theme emerged among the respondents- that due to the increased knowledge about social determinants of health they realized how complex the issues were and how much more they had to learn in order to effectively address them. One nurse home visitor commented, “I feel more equipped at handling them [social determinants of health] and more overwhelmed by them.” None of the interviewees reported that they felt less equipped at handling the social determinants of health.

Advocacy Capacity

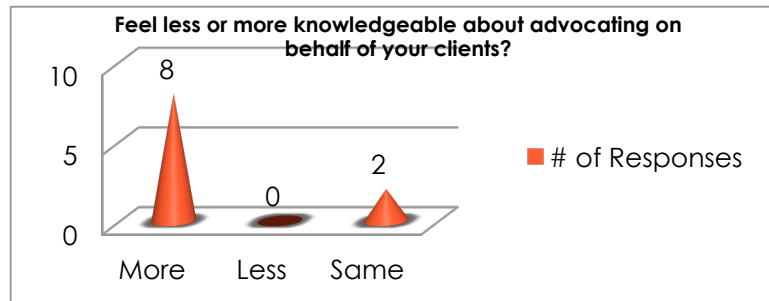
A main objective of the NLP is to increase overall advocacy capacity through trainings, consultations, and other learning opportunities. Bidirectional learning and communication is a key component of the project facilitating an environment in which attorneys and nurse home visitors capitalize on their shared knowledge and experiences. As mentioned above, the NLP sets itself apart from other multidisciplinary projects in that the lawyers and nurses work together as a team

rather than in a referral agreement, truly transforming the care provided. This strengthens the team's ability to advocate on behalf of clients on the individual and systems levels.

In order to measure the impact the project has had on nurses' advocacy capacity and knowledge they were asked two questions related to this. One is directed to nurses' knowledge of advocacy the other is directed to the nurses' confidence in working with clients without the attorneys being directly involved. The latter question is meant to assess the nurses' own growth and confidence in her ability to advocate for clients even when an attorney might not yet be involved.

Do you feel less or more knowledgeable about advocating on behalf of your clients?

Eight of the ten nurses reported that they feel more knowledgeable about advocating on behalf of clients. Two nurses reported that they felt the same or neutral. No nurses reported that they felt less knowledgeable.



More Knowledgeable

The eight nurses who reported that they felt more knowledgeable about advocating on behalf of clients shared several reasons for this. These include:

- Having awareness about laws and how to approach them
- Increased confidence in their knowledge of issues
- Trainings are effective at increasing knowledge
- Having increased level of comfort with the legal issues clients are facing

When asked this question, one nurse home visitor shared a unique perspective having experienced another model of Nurse-Family Partnership that did *not* have a legal partnership. She reported that she felt, "Much more knowledgeable. I can compare NFP to another state's project and the way it is here is phenomenal. To utilize NLP on top of having NFP in place you learn a lot. This is hugely helpful."

Same Level of Knowledge

Two of the respondents reported that they had the same level of knowledge about advocating on behalf of clients. Explaining this, one nurse home visitor stated, "It's a huge learning curve. Sometimes I feel like I have a handle on things and sometimes I don't. But I know where to go when I have questions as far as advocacy. There's just so much information to try to assimilate and put into practice. I would say I'm in the middle." Similarly, another nurse home visitor reported that she felt better equipped at identifying issues and triaging them, but at the same time is learning more about issues everyday. She said, "Thank god we have lawyers because I know how to refer to them. Minor cases I am definitely more knowledgeable and I'm learning when I'm out of my realm." This sentiment of learning how much one doesn't know was echoed in several of the interviews.

Do you feel less or more knowledgeable about advocating on behalf of your clients even when attorneys are not directly involved in a matter?

As mentioned above, one aim of the project is to increase the advocacy capacity of nurses independent of whether an attorney is directly involved in an issue. To date several formal trainings have taken place on specific legal and policy matters and numerous consultations have occurred between lawyers and nurses. The purpose of this is not to have the nurse replace the attorney or to have nurses provide legal representation which would violate professional responsibility ethics and rules, but to maximize the nurses' ability to advocate on behalf on clients in matters where it is appropriate to do so. One case example would be a nurse's ability to identify when a client might be entitled to a public benefit and helping the client apply.

In order to assess the nurses' knowledge and confidence in this area we asked the nurses directly about this. The answers to this question contained similar themes and reasoning to the general question about knowledge and confidence of advocating on behalf of clients. Nurses reported that in some ways they felt more knowledgeable and in others less so. Themes that emerged from this question include:

- **Feeling more knowledgeable and confident on topics that have been addressed through trainings**
 - “Usually at this point I will use the education we received through our trainings to guide clients as far as possible in a process before making a referral.”
 - “I feel more confident about the topics they did trainings on. I feel more comfortable on topics that have been covered.”
 - “Yes, I feel more confident in particular areas like public benefits, SNAP, health insurance. Even housing now I know things that I didn't know before so sometimes we figure it out before referring clients [to the attorneys].”
- **Gaining confidence and knowledge through consultations with the lawyers**
 - “I'm feeling more confident since having talked over issues with the lawyers. At first I was going to them for everything and they've been really good about explaining follow up questions to screen and triage. Just from those little bits of feedback I feel more confident about going through the IHELP with clients.”
- **Feeling supported because there is backup by the lawyers**
- **Gaining confidence over time**

Impact on Clients

Nurse home visitors made comments throughout the interviews regarding the impact the project has had on their clients and the ways in which they feel the project will continue to impact their clients. These responses were interwoven throughout as well as prompted by a direct question regarding client impact. Interviewees spoke generally about the project's impact on clients as well as provided specific examples of cases and outcomes.

In which ways, if any, has the NLP impacted your clients?

All of the nurse home visitors described some type of impact the project has had on clients. Through the range of responses gathered key themes emerged:

- **Clients value getting information from the attorneys**
 - “Getting direct information from the attorneys makes me more confident in giving that information to clients. Clients love hearing that we got information from lawyers. Clients really value this.”
 - “It’s benefited my clients in being able to have that consultation and get basic questions answered for them, nothing I’d be able to answer for them without the lawyers help.”
- **Clients are satisfied with the services from the lawyers**
 - “For clients that have gotten the help- it’s really great for them. They all said positive things about Rachel.”
 - “The people who have had direct help have been very happy with it.”
- **Clients feel supported and empowered by knowing the attorneys are available to help them**
 - “One client needed Jordan’s help sporadically, but saw that just the fact he was there empowered her to advocate for herself. She lives in a place that was really substandard, building falling apart, mold, rats, outside of building crumbling, needed to use a net to catch falling bricks. She fought the Public Housing Authority and now has a beautiful place.”
 - Just having a lawyer to talk to can be really helpful for the clients to know where they stand on these legal matters.
 - “I have a client whose dad was using her identity to get food stamps and cash assistance. Rachel has been able to help out with this. My client is very frustrated with the County Assistance Office so anything that helps to move along the process, she will be grateful.”
- **The services clients receive from the NLP have resulted in positive outcomes**
 - “It has had meaningful, measurable huge life differences for them from retaining custody of their children to having a roof over their head to being able to successfully leave a domestic violence issue and know what their rights are to getting their security deposit back.”
 - “One client received a denial of benefits that I couldn’t get for her, but Rachel was able to.”
 - “I’ve had families go months without food and food stamps and end up getting kicked out of family members’ homes because they couldn’t contribute -- all because of a missing piece of paper. It’s really life changing for a lot of families and a lot faster.”

Overall Impact on Job

Nurses were asked to explain how the NLP has impacted that way in which they do their job. This question elicited a range of responses from the nurse home visitors in which the following themes emerged:

- **Additional resources have led to saved time**
 - "A lot of the legal challenges fall under our scope of practice even though we're not lawyers just because we are seeing them every day and they impact our clients and their lives. It has been really helpful."
 - "I've always spent a lot of time doing research on issues and background on complex areas. Having people to help is a big time saver in a lot of ways. Once you learn the process of problem solving through specific challenges, you get to keep that process."
 - "It's definitely made it a bit easier. I just want to be a nurse and do nurse stuff, not be a social worker. It has definitely made it easier to handle welfare, food stamps, etc."
 - "These are big complex issues to deal with. In a case that could become very serious very fast it's nice to have our own resources and be able to walk into their office. Much better than playing phone tag with other organizations."
- **Nurse home visitors had to invest more time and resources into the NLP especially at the beginning of the partnership**
 - "When we run in to social and legal issues, it can tie up a lot of our time."
- **The project has led to increased understanding and knowledge of legal issues and policies**
 - "I have a much deeper understanding of certain policies."
- **Increased knowledge has led to increased confidence and empowerment to guide and advocate on behalf of clients**
 - "It makes me feel more secure in offering information to clients. I appreciate the backup. I have more to offer in terms of supporting my clients where they are."
 - "Some conversations with clients in the past I didn't ask as many questions because I felt uncomfortable and there wasn't much of a point in asking if there wasn't anything I could do about them. I feel more empowered to ask the questions I previously felt uncomfortable asking."
 - "Knowing that we have legal support and expertise has made me be more willing to jump in to certain experiences with clients because I know that I can get them more help than I normally thought I could."
- **Increased ability to recognize when there is an issue that otherwise would go unnoticed**
 - "I am now able to recognize when my clients' efforts are not enough."

Recommendations

The NLP is committed to continuous quality improvement. To that end, the Philadelphia Nurse-Family Partnership and Mabel Morris Home Visit program routinely engage in Plan Do Study Act cycles to test change for improving practice and processes. A key component of this study was to identify recommendations for improving the project as well as to identify processes and practices that are working well and should remain the same or be enhanced. Nurse home visitors were asked two direct questions to gather information regarding continuous quality improvement.

What's working well with the NLP?

Nurse home visitors shared common opinions about the parts of the project that work well. These include:

- **Trainings**
- **Having in-house experts**
- **The immediate availability and accessibility of the lawyers**
 - "I love that Rachel and Jordan are available almost immediately if not immediately."
 - "Our work is very time sensitive and we're always in need of information right when we need it. It's always helpful to have real time advice and help and access to answers in real time."
- **The "open door" policy of the lawyers**
 - "I really appreciate that I don't have to feel weird just walking into the office and asking them a question."
 - "I love that they have an open door policy and you can come in with a question on the spot."
- **The lawyers "fit in" and contribute to the culture**
 - "They are really great people and work really well with our team."
 - "They have similar mindsets and goals that we do. They want to be involved, it is great to have them fit in so well with our team."
- **The revised spacing of the screening and referral processes**

What areas of the NLP need improvement?

Nurse interviewees provided a range of recommendations for improvement. These include:

- Increase the number of attorneys
- Increase the number and topics of one-page handouts and other informative brochures
- Clearly communicate the referral process to nurse home visitors
- Provide more education and training on how to appropriately prioritize and triage cases
- Lawyers should conduct more home visits
- Legal interpreters for Spanish speaking (and other non-English speaking) clients should be hired
- Clients should be able to call attorneys directly
- Clients should have more opportunities to be directly involved with trainings and other opportunities to have their voices heard and questions answered

- A need exists for nurses to measure the amount of time they are contributing to NLP activities and follow up

Other Findings

Several nurse home visitors provided additional information or feedback during the interviews. Two themes that emerged from this additional information was 1) the impact the project has had on nurses' personal lives and well-being and 2) that it is critical that the project be sustained.

Personal Impact

One nurse home visitor commented on the ways in which learning about housing law has helped her be a better advocate in her own personal life. Another nurse stated that the project has, "Decreased the amount of emotional stress on me."

Sustainability

All of the nurses interviewed reported that they would like to see the project sustained. One nurse stated, "I cannot imagine going back to not having support in this area." Another nurse commented, "We [nurse home visitors] all have an extreme depth of recognition of social determinants of health and our program is focused on steering this and giving people information and resources and as far as helping people to advocate on their behalf this has been the biggest most positive move in the years I have been."

Other statements from interviewees include:

- "I would love to see this become an evidence based model that could be replicated across the country. If there are 2-3 lawyers at every Nurse-Family Partnership it would be a huge impact."
- "It's a great program. We are very lucky to have them here to help us and for our clients."
- "I know for a fact that having the lawyers and the education have impacted the nurses' lives as well. It has not only changed our clients' lives, but ours as well. For myself, I felt empowered to take care of my issues and through the experience of advocating for myself I can empower my clients because I've done it myself. It's been really powerful that way."