



EBCLC News

December 2016

Edition





Think Nationally, Give Locally

We enter the holiday season as we enter an unprecedented time of uncertainty and fear. It is an unsettling mix. For many of us, December is a time of celebration and reflection and giving. This year, for many of us we are also asking ourselves, "What can I do to address the challenges ahead? What can I do to support equity, fairness, inclusion and justice in the face of threatened attacks on the principles and people I hold dear?" If this season is always a time to take stock, recommit to best intentions, and demonstrate generosity, then we are faced with the need to dig deep, redouble our efforts, and stretch our capacity to be of service. That is what is required.

At EBCLC, this means increasing the work we have already been doing for over a quarter century - protecting housing, healthcare, jobs, finances, and education rights for our communities. For many of our immigrant clients - mothers, fathers, children, workers, students - these basic rights, and their ability to lawfully stay in the county, are under imminent threat. In response, EBCLC has pivoted to direct resources to address the increased need for our services. We are using our multimodal, collaborative, holistic approach for community education, direct representation, and coalition-building to better engage in policy advocacy and impact litigation strategies. We are taking more law students and volunteers to leverage our staff time and expand our reach. We ask you to join us however you can, and one meaningful way to support EBCLC is to invest financially in our work.

One positive impact of this election is that it has served as a wake-up call to lawyers that there is much work to do to make real the promise of justice for all. This was, of course, true long before this election, but for many this is a clarifying moment of epic proportions. Donations to national advocacy organizations have skyrocketed, demonstrating the broad understanding that we need legal advocates for the battles ahead, battles that will span from coast to coast and will be waged federally, regionally and locally. In California, our most vulnerable populations will face threats to their basic rights and safety nets. EBCLC needs support to be there to answer that need. And in California, we have the opportunity to make real the promise of progress that our electorate overwhelmingly voted in this November. EBCLC will continue to push for local and state-wide policies that reflect our values of inclusion, equity and fairness. Please support our efforts.

In gratitude,



Tirien Steinbach
Executive Director



Searching for Space

How does one best comport oneself when passing a tent city? Is it best to avert the gaze, so as to respect whatever privacy the growing homeless population may possess? Or is it better to look the displaced in the eye, in a silent acknowledgement of our shared humanity? Is a reach for the wallet in order?

Such questions are increasingly considered by the Bay Area's bleeding hearts as the wave of gentrification continues to wreak havoc on the less well-off.

For Osha Neumann, a staff attorney and clinical supervisor with the East Bay Community Law Center, the question of how to engage the homeless has been a lifelong subject of contemplation. The son of German intellectuals who fled the scourge of Nazism has devoted much of his life to representing the concerns of the unfortunate. To Neumann, direct action is the answer.

Neumann represents homeless clients in a variety of matters. Most recently, he has grown interested in the mistreatment of the homeless by entities like Caltrans, which post warnings of ensuing raids on tent cities just a few days before clearing out whatever possessions the homeless have gathered.

According to Neumann's clients, promises by Caltrans to simply move possessions with the possibility for recollection have not been met. Instead, warnings are issued three days in advance. And once Caltrans shows up, possessions are often tossed straight into dump trucks.

During a recent visit to the tent city located near the corner of Brush and Fifth streets, where 20 or so homeless people congregate below an overpass, Neumann discussed recent raids with clients Ronald Boykins and Chris Craner.

"They say we're going to get 90 days to collect our stuff, but I've seen them throw my clothes, tents, sleeping bags and tools straight into a truck," Craner said. "It's not right. Every time they do it, I have to start over."

Calls to the number posted by Caltrans for recollection are never answered, Craner said.

"They're not interested in us," Craner, 44, said.

Craner's neighbor Boykins agreed.

"They desecrate our property," Boykins said while sitting in his tent, surrounded by toiletries, snacks and an impressive DVD collection. "I don't cry often, but I've cried a couple times after they came through."

Homeless for 20 years, Boykins can recall an easier, less crowded time on the streets.

"It used to be that if we didn't bother the businesses and kept to ourselves, we'd be left alone. But I'm on the move a lot more now."

~~Such stories are documented daily by Neumann. "Caltrans has been sued before for trashing people's property," says Neumann. They agreed to mend their ways, but they haven't. "Sandy looks like they're going to need to be sued again."~~

Osha Neumann



Tell us about yourself.

I am 77 years old. I became a lawyer when I was 48 years old. I had gotten too old to run from the police, and thought it was time to find another mode of defying the repressive apparatus of the state. As I did before I was a lawyer, so now I continue to paint and draw and write what I think and feel about the world.

Who has inspired you in your life and why?

My fathers, Franz Neumann and Herbert Marcuse, intellectuals who, in the face of fascist irrationality, continued to struggle to make sense of the world and to believe that reason could be a tool of liberation. And the water protectors at Standing

Rock, who in these terrible times show us the courage and community we will need to defend the planet.

One of my favorite places in the Bay Area is...

Wherever homeless people are finally left alone to assemble together and have a little community, given that they ain't going to get no housing anytime soon.

Foundation Focus

WALTER & ELISE HAAS FUND

For the past seven years, the Walter & Elise Haas Fund in San Francisco has provided crucial support to EBCLC as we help low-income individuals and families cope with the economic stress of income inequality in the Bay Area. The Fund collaborates with partners whose work provides access and opportunity, building a more equitable community by supporting programs that facilitate upward mobility and initiatives that increase opportunity for those facing barriers to their economic security. From 2010-2014, the Fund's "Safety Net" program helped support EBCLC's work with Housing Program clients in the wake of the mortgage foreclosure crisis. Over the past two years, with the guidance of Walter & Elise Haas Fund Senior Program Officer Elena Chávez Quezada, support from the Fund has been directed toward our Housing and Economic Security & Opportunity (ESO) programs. Together, and with the help of the Fund, these programs have assisted thousands of clients achieve housing and economic justice.



Elena Chávez Quezada, Senior Program Officer

Alumni Alley

Where are they now?

Hon. Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers
University of Texas School of Law, '91



Tell us about your time at EBCLC.

As a law student, I worked with the Housing Group primarily and tried a case for a low-income person being evicted. I also spent some time at the GA office helping people navigate the benefits process.

How did your time at EBCLC influence the work you do now?

My work with EBCLC gave me a deeper appreciation for the complexity of the problems of the clients faced, many of which were not legal. Also, I learned that

sometimes people need an opportunity to be heard, regardless of the outcome.

What's one thing you know now that you wish you knew while you were still in law school?

"IRAC" matters in real life and mastering that approach to legal thinking and writing/advocacy is the first step in being a successful lawyer. Quickly spotting all of a client's potential issues matters. Knowing the legal rule cold allows a lawyer to determine how strong the client's case is, and if not, begin the more difficult task of arguing why the client's facts are distinguishable from those in the case(s) establishing the rule. Only after mastering the law in a particular area (including its evolution), can a lawyer then proceed to the more global issues of advocating where and how the law should continue to develop in a particular case. Practicing this kind of analytical thinking will not only help with law school courses, but will begin to create the brain muscle memory to do it in practice.



Advance Justice Today!

Your investment helps EBCLC advance justice and expand opportunity to low-income community members in the areas of housing, health, income support, civic participation and economic development.

