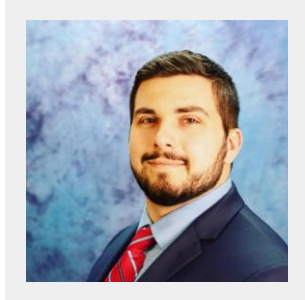




## Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** Jonathan Churchill Veres

**Law School:** Duquesne University School of Law

**Organization:** Neighborhood Legal Services

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### Week of June 15th

For my first EJA Fellow update, I wanted to share a unique, positive experience this past week. Last Thursday, I led a webinar for residents of Butler County, explaining to them the basics and necessary information to file expungements. Those in attendance sought expungements for themselves, loved ones, or clients. Albeit hosted from my living room, we still engaged the community, and its residents, in a positive way. The challenges we face today might seem insurmountable, but the small act of hosting a webinar for people to learn more about changing their lives for the better creates a rippling effect of optimistic outcomes. I am reminded of my favorite author, J.R.R. Tolkien's words: "I have found that it is the small everyday deed of ordinary folks that keep the darkness at bay. Small acts of kindness and love." In that spirit, I am proud and eager to work alongside NLS, performing small acts of kindness and love, to help our communities get a fresh start and a new life.

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### Week of July 6th

For my second EJA Fellow Update, I wanted to touch upon an important aspect of expungement work for my internship: we can't help everyone. In the office today, I sent numerous closing letters to clients – some informed them of their expungements being approved, and others detailed why Neighborhood Legal Services could not help them at this time.

Working at NLSA puts me in contact with numerous, disadvantaged individuals trying to clear their records for a fresh start. I want to help as many clients as I possibly can – all of them. But, the difficult reality is that, sometimes, we can't help everybody. We can only be the voice that lets them know they tried everything they could. I am reminded of Mother Teresa's words, "We can do no great things, only small things with great love."

I am blessed every day to work for an organization that is devoted selflessly to representing those who need legal help the most. Even on days when we can't help everyone, I am reminded that as long as we do small things with great love, we can still change the world.



## **Week of July 27th**

Another week, another EJA Fellow Update! This week, I helped lead another webinar to help people learn more about expungements, sealing, and pardons for themselves, clients, or close family and friends. One gentleman told us, "I feel like 12-thousand pounds was just lifted off of me." What lifted that weight off of him? Hope. Hope that he could finally remove the stains of his past mistakes. We are much more than our worst mistakes. I am so proud to work alongside NLSA and help people take the weight off their shoulders. For some of these people, they've carried this weight for most of their lives. No matter how long, it's never too late to start fresh.

This work keeps this quote moving through my mind constantly: "We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures, we are the sum of the Father's love for us and our real capacity to become the image of His Son Jesus."- St. Pope John Paul II. I am not ashamed to say that I carry my faith with me in my professional life, and I'm just so, so deeply happy to help as many people as I can- regardless of who they are, where they come from, or (especially) how much money they have. I sincerely doubt I'm going to change the world, but I want to do whatever small part I can to help change our neighbor's lives. Neighborhood Legal Services helps me do just that.

Have a wonderful weekend!

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## **Week of August 10th**

For my final EJA Fellow Update, I wanted to share a couple lessons I've learned from this summer of working with NLSA.

As a future defense attorney, this internship taught me to approach each client's situation with the future in mind. For many clients, the offenses on their record came about from a rushed plea – hoping to just put the issue behind them.

What too few know is that, without expungements, the issue is *\*never\** behind you. Employers, landlords, and others who run background checks can always see the issue. Regardless of how much a client has grown since then, their mistake stays.

I will approach each client holistically. I will think not of just the present situation, but I will think of how the charges affect the client's future. Interning with NLSA also taught me the value of representation for those underprivileged and marginalized in society. Justice is for all – not just those who can afford it. I am forever blessed to have this internship. The lessons I've learned thus far, and those in the future, will stay with me and shape my professional career.