

2011 Annual report

Contributors:

Mayank Jain - Chair

Sirkku Laakkonen - Communication Working Group Coordinator

Teresa Sola - Welcome Working Group Coordinator

Special thanks to all our volunteers and UN HR focal points who have helped make NYLESA's first year a success and helped to strengthen the Dual Career and Staff Mobility Programme.

Strengthening Dual Careers in New York

Every year, hundreds of newly recruited international staff members arrive in New York to serve in the United Nations system. Many of them arrive with their spouses, who are also often highly skilled professionals. The ability of UN families to build dual careers is a critical factor in determining whether to stay in a duty station or to seek other work opportunities.

UN spouse associations, active in over 40 duty stations, are a central part of the Dual Career and Staff Mobility Programme of the United Nations. In 2011, a new milestone was reached in this work by the establishment of a strong UN spouse association in New York, the New York Local Expatriate Spouse Association (NYLESA).

With over 100 members in its first year, NYLESA has built an active community of spouses. Through its various programmes and a pool of volunteers, NYLESA responds to the needs of UN families as they settle into the new duty station, and assists expatriate spouses in maintaining their careers. NYLESA has also strengthened linkages with the United Nations system, including by working with HR focal points to improve the availability of information on employment and career development opportunities.

As NYLESA enters its second year, it continues to develop its links with its UN partners and information channels, including its website www.nylesa.org. The objective of NYLESA is to contribute to the retention of international UN staff in New York as well as to build a pool of highly qualified and experienced professionals for the organization to tap into.

Activities & Accomplishments

Establishment of NYLESA in New York State

- Registered with the Department of Internal Revenue Service to enable the collection of membership fees and sponsorships.
- Research was made on how to register the association with the Attorney General of New York State and apply to Internal Revenue Service for the non-profit status.
- Decided that registering NYLESA in New York State and as a non-profit would put NYLESA officially outside of UN system. It is better of NYLESA to be a part of the Dual Career & Staff Mobility Programme and leave this decision to the future steering committee.
- Created bank accounts with UNFCU with the help of UNDP.
- Created PayPal account to simplify the procedure of accepting membership payments online and reducing the administrative tasks of accepting payments manually

Advocacy

NYLESA was introduced to new comers to new York through Info Sessions held at UN Secretariat Career center. Two introductory sessions were conducted to recruit more members and make NYLESA a stronger association for advocating its objectives in UN.

Initiative to distribute Temporary Vacancy Announcements from the iSeek intranet system that is accessible only to the staff members.

Meetings were organized with UN Women and UNICEF introducing NYLESA and proposals were made on how NYLESA and UN system can work together in making helping UN and its staff families.

Meetings were held Dual Career and Staff Mobility (DC & SM) representative in Geneva advocating on how Global Expatriate Spouse Association (GESA) can be constructed.

Comments were also made (in support of other LESAs) on the first proposal of GESA and strong emphasis was made on how the recent proposal by GESA Initiative Committee on creating GESA was not beneficial for the LESAs around the world.

Fundraising and benefits for NYLESA members

Fundraising events including Halloween Bake sale were organized with the help of enthusiastic volunteers.

Special offers like provision of furnished apartments at low costs and special waivers on use of facilities and other amenities are negotiated with Waterside Plaza for NYLESA members.

Other fundraising initiatives like sponsorship of website maintenance and printing costs brochures, hand-out cards etc. are being discussed and will soon be implemented.

Implementation of digital tools for NYLESA

Google apps was configured and is used as a tool for collaborative working, document sharing and data repository for NYLESA. Domain name www.nylesa.org was obtained and all the tools were migrated under nylesa.org domain.

MailChimp email marketing tools is used to keep an updated list of all important contacts and member lists

Working Groups' reports

Career Support Working Group (CSWG)- Coordinator: Ravi Kumar Gandham

- Participated in creating the initial draft of professional roster form for NYLESA website
- Participated in the initiative taken with UN Spouse Support to procure Temporary Vacancy Announcements (TVAs) to NYLESA members

Communication Working Group (CWG) - Coordinator: Sirkku Laakkonen

Communication Working Group organized three meetings where all the action plan 2011 issues have been introduced and discussed. CWG meeting dates are; August 29, September 7 and October 3.

- Reviewing and updating NYLESA communication tools, and creating new tools
 - Brochure updated and sent to UN System Focal Points in NY in June
 - Unstaffmobility.org pages are cannot be updated by DC&SM anymore.
 - Hand out visiting card was designed and printed to be used specially by SC members, but any active NYLESA member can distribute them among UN spouses and partners.
 - Power Point Presentation of NYLESA was created to be used at UN System presentations and also at SSP info-session.
 - PowerPoint Presentation proposal text for UN Women and external meeting to present NYLESA
 - NYLESA hand-out cards created
- Website reconstruction process began since June 2011, but at the same time many existing pages have been reviewed and updated or fully rewritten. Blog categories have been organized. Subscriber list cleared of double registering and unknown subscribers. User categories established for easier administration. Following changes were made on the website
 - Members' area on the website
 - Reconstruction of website structure
 - Main navigation restructuring
 - New discussion groups

Developing efficient procedures to monitor, publish and update the website

The responsibilities were given to CWG members according to their skills and professionalism. CWG has at the moment volunteers for the maintenance technical work, for editing, and layout work, but we are still looking for someone who could do the very fundamental programming and debugging. CWG is looking for assistance to write new information on the site from the whole membership but especially from other WGs. Leisure Team in WWG is eager to use the website for their informational purposes through “Living in NY” pages and discussion forum.

Responsibility issue introduced to CWG members in two CWG meetings. CWG has three technical volunteers, one editor, one graphic designer for layout and five other members

Active interaction with the new Leisure Team to start publishing leisure time information on the “Living in NY” –pages and discussion groups

- Harmonizing different mailing lists
Definitions and harmonization of different emails and emailing –lists including NYLESA SC members’ official email addresses, Regular Members’ email –list in MailChip (Google Docs), Associate Member email –list, Monthly Coffee Gathering email –list, Website subscriber categorized email –list, discussion forum groups’ subscriber email –list and also emailing through UN System Focal Points to all the spouses in NY, like UN HQ SSP email list, the use of UN staff members’ emails and also NYLESA mailing list maintained by the www.unstaffmobility.org website in Geneva.

Decision has been made that later only Regular Members can subscribe to the website and use the discussion forums. The following actions were taken:

- Categorizing the subscribers on the website; administrators, members, subscribers and free; only 43 out of our 70 members are subscribing
- Deciding with steering committee members that only regular members of NYLESA can access restricted sections the website
- Ensuring that all UN organizations have NYLESA information readily available in their induction programs. Actions taken in ensuring NYLESA information delivered at UN organizations induction programs in 2011

The brochure was sent to all the Focal Points with friendly request to make it available to all the newcomer staff members and also in their induction programme. There is interest in making it available but it is not yet fully happening.

The brochure was sent to UN Focal Points to be included into their induction programmes and given to all the new staff members

Communication Group Coordinator has also participated actively in the discussions about creating new GESAs and the new information and networking global website TeamWorks where UNDP has created own space for all the spouses and LESAs.

- Other Actions by CWG Coordinator
 - Final Proposal for Rules of Procedure for NYLESA Steering Committee
 - Final Proposal for Rules of Procedure for NYLESA Working Groups
 - Google Docs MailChimp email list update;
 - Proposal for how to approve documents on the Google Docs
 - Initiating the release of external TVAs from UN HQ/Secretariat by SSP
 - Comments on GESAs proposal paper and active participation in the Skype conference
 - Working group tasks and volunteering posters for SGM / Professional Event
 - Participation in DC&SM Programme's assessment of the new website TeamWorks
 - Participation to the first TeamWorks (TW) introduction session via conference call
 - Comments on the use of TW and some proposals how to include GESAs and DC&SM

Welcome Working Group (WWG) - Coordinator: Teresa Sola

Monthly Coffee Gatherings

During the second semester of 2011 the Welcome Group continued organizing monthly coffee gatherings. Attendance to the coffee gatherings rounded usually 20-30 people. The

main purpose of this event was to welcome new UN spouses, exchange experiences and socialize.

The coffee gatherings have been organized in different venues on the East Side of Manhattan and Waterside Plaza. We continue to look for space that offers more privacy and opportunity to address participants at quieter venues.

Professional Events

The Welcome Group has started to organize other professional events oriented to existing members, such as professional seminars. The first professional seminar was organized in November 2011, with the participation of two speakers covering issues related to taxes, finances, pension plan, G4 visas and work permit. The second seminar was in January and it was dedicated to spouses seeking employment, with two speakers specialized in recruitment and human resources in US Job market. Both seminars attracted an audience of approximately 35 spouses.

Fundraising Events

The Welcome Group has also organized a successful Halloween baking event at the DCI cafeteria, which proved to be a great opportunity for fundraising and raising awareness. We will have a second bake sale February 14th.

Maintaining members' database and volunteer recruitment

The group is still recruiting volunteers and finding new venues for its activities. The group has taken over the maintenance of the members database, including collection of membership forms and fees and updating the distribution email list with new members.

The way ahead

- Strengthen the connections with UN system's Human Resources (UN HR) to advocate for spouses' interests
- Increase the membership to make a NYLESA strong in numbers
- Create a channel in partnership with UN HR through which NYLESA is known to every staff member before they arrive in New York

- Collaborate with staff associations of UN organizations and work together in furthering the interests of spouses
- Create channels with each UN agency to procure TVAs
- Establish stronger links with LESAs from other duty stations around the world and advocate the continuation on DC&SM programme
- Advocate the concept of GESA as a network of LESAs within the DC&SM programme and not an organization outside of UN

Annex

NYLESA Steering Committee 2011

Chair: Mayank Jain

Co-Chair: Lora Davis & Dorian Lacombe(December 2011 to February 2012)

Treasurer: Elsa Begne

Career Support Working Group Coordinator: Ravi Kumar Gandham

Communications Working Group Coordinator: Sirkku Laakkonen

Welcome Working Group Coordinator: Teresa Sola