

**Kinna-aweya Legal Clinic
Board Meeting Report
Coordinator of Legal Services
Sally Colquhoun**

January 26, 2019

Statistics

Our statistics indicate a reduction in file openings in the last year. It is my understanding that is the case in many general service clinics as the number of ODSP files has dropped throughout the province. That may change now that the provincial government has announced that it intends to make it harder to qualify for ODSP. There may be a push for people on Ontario Works to apply for ODSP under the current rules. It appears that we were retained on 126 ODSP denial matters in 2018, which is approximately 20 fewer than in the previous two years and 50 fewer than five years ago.

It has been helpful for us to have a reduction in file openings as we have been training new staff in the last year. It also offers an opportunity to expand our services into some of the new areas of law that are being provided through Advocacy North, such as elder/senior law and employment law.

Personnel

Monique has formally resigned, and Rick has retired. In the short term we decided to fill those positions by extending the contracts of the two staff lawyers and contract. We will include them in the performance review process, while we make a plan to fill those positions permanently.

Melanie plans to be off for six months and Rick has indicated that he is interested in doing that contract.

Northern Transformation Project (Advocacy North)

The projects are well under way. Angie Lynch has been doing amazing work in helping set up new Speakers' Schools in several other clinic communities and developing curriculum. The Speakers' School in Sudbury has started. Angie has also been working towards other peer support activities.

Our staff and Board members have attended many Working Group, sub-committee, and Steering Committee meetings supporting these collaborative projects.

Funding has been offered for the Indigenous Needs Assessment and the Request for Proposal has been issued inviting proposals to carry out the project.

Our staff had an opportunity to have some training from Madeleine Hebert, the elder/senior lawyer hosted in the Sudbury Community Legal Clinic. She was in Thunder Bay to attend a conference about elder abuse and she met with several agencies. She provided training to our staff about Community Treatment Orders and about Long-Term Care admissions. She and Beth also did a session for the Elders Program at the Friendship Centre about Powers of Attorney.

Legal Aid Ontario

Legal Aid Ontario has restructured their senior management structure as a result of a strategic planning process. All of the clinic service staff have been gathered into one Division and Jayne Mallin, a former Clinic ED is the Vice-President of the Clinic Services Division. We are optimistic that it will be a positive move for clinics to have our resources centralized at LAO in Toronto.

We computer installation is complete. We are adjusting to having Office 2013 and other changes to our operating environment.

Casework

We have made some changes to the intake process in Thunder Bay to address the decrease in file openings and ensure that everyone who contacts our office about an automatic file opening matter is offered service.

There are shortages of adjudicators in both the SBT and the LTB and we have had hearings cancelled and longer waits than usual for hearings to be scheduled. The delays at the LTB should be alleviated somewhat now that one of the former members in the north has been reappointed. The SBT has advised that they will be scheduling video conference hearings for all hearings in the north. We have agreed to do SBT hearings through Adobe Connect in our Board room for the next few months.

Tracey Lasook has been doing TDC on a regular basis and has had good success in helping clients negotiate payment plans to pay rent arrears and avoid eviction.

Training

The support staff training is scheduled in Toronto the first week of April and the next caseworker training will be at the beginning of May in Sudbury.

Community Development

1. Steering Committee on Social Assistance

Claire has resumed her role as one of the Northern representatives on the SCSA. The quarterly Practice Advisory Committee meeting at the SBT was cancelled, and we don't have any new information about providing evidence and submissions electronically. The

government has announced that it intends to make significant changes to the provincial social assistance programs but we have no details about their plans. We are concerned about the impact on our low income clients.

2. Bora Laskin Faculty of Law

We interviewed two second-year students who applied to do their placements at our office. That will not be until next fall or winter.

We have two students through Pro Bono Students Canada until April, who are working with Fabienne in the ID services project.

3. Nokiiwin Tribal Council

We have been invited to send staff members who are interested to the Nokiiwin Tribal Council Access to Justice Forum. It will be held next week and unfortunately we have LTB and SBT hearings on the two days of the forum. However, there are some staff members who are available and interested in attending. We need to schedule a meeting with the staff at Nokiiwin who are dealing with access to justice to coordinate the service that we provide to their communities and make sure they are making appropriate referrals.

4. Housing and Homelessness Coalition

I took our social work student to the most recent meeting of the Thunder Bay Housing and Homelessness Coalition and there were four other students at the meeting who are doing their placements at other agencies who are part of the coalition. The Homelessness Prevention Strategy funding from the federal government will end at the end of March as a new program called Reaching Home will replace it. We should be able to use funds from Reaching Home to continue to support the projects that have been funded through the HPS such as the social navigator position at the John Howard Society and the Kwae Kee Win managed alcohol program at Shelter House.

Other

The legal challenge to the early cancellation of the Basic Income Pilot Project will be heard in Toronto next week. It would be so wonderful if the participants in the project were able to continue to receive the income for the promised three year period. However, it is unlikely that the litigation will be successful, and we will be assisting clients in transitioning back to social assistance as necessary.

Respectfully submitted,

Sally Colquhoun
Coordinator of Legal Services.