

**Director of Administration - Beth Ponka**  
**Board of Director's Report**  
**January 26, 2019**

**Financial**

The Funds Reconciliation (Balance Sheet) for the period ended December 31 shows total assets of \$238,796 and Commitments/Liabilities of \$267,325, for a funds balance of (\$28,528). Our commitments include the vacation accrual as of March 31, 2018 and an accruing amount for potential salary increases. The Salary Committee should meet again soon to review the figures and determine what is available for staff salary increases in this fiscal year.

We have a deficit in Personnel of (\$7,841), which is a reflection of the three-month period when Claire returned from her maternity leave and before Rick retired, and we kept Caycie and Larissa employed through that period. Rick has now retired and the numbers projected to March will be in surplus. We have also changed our group benefits provider resulting in significant cost savings that will continue to improve the clinic's bottom line each month. We have a significant surplus right now in Operating, due to FEG money that is sitting in Operating. We will incur expenses for our upcoming Board & Staff Planning Session and we will have other expenses, but we are projecting a surplus to the end of March. My recommendation is that any surplus funds from FEG should be considered for assisting with salary increases for staff.

We received the reconciliation for the December deposit, which included a clawback due to the vacation accrual. Proactive measures have been put in place to ensure that we minimize our vacation accrual this year. Staff have been very cooperative in scheduling their accrued vacation time. It's really a win-win situation, because it helps ensure that they are taking time off to recharge their batteries too.

I was surprised that Legal Aid Ontario also clawed back the \$3,500 contingency fund that is advanced to all clinics on the assumption that there will be a clinic surplus. Since we did not have a surplus, they have scooped back that amount. I don't remember if the clinic has ever completed a year with a deficit so this is something that's not happened before.

Legal Aid Ontario provided funding for a salary increase and we have been accruing that amount separately on our financial statements. The Salary Committee has met a couple of times to review the funding for this year and to monitor the personnel expenses. The Salary Committee agreed to meet after the December quarterly financial statements were available, to assess the clinic's financial position and determine if salary increases can be approved this year. All staff who are covered by the clinic's Pay Equity Plan and who have not achieved pay equity, will receive a pay equity increase. The amount available for the pay equity increase will be known once the bookkeeper has prepared the T4 summary. There will be significantly more money if it isn't possible for further salary increases to be made in this fiscal year, so that salaries for the current fiscal year can be set. We have not received any new information on LAO's compensation review.

Caycie is the Treasurer for the provincial Legal Clinic's Housing Issues Committee (LCHIC), with an annual budget of approximately \$1,700. This was discussed at the last Board meeting and a funding agreement was signed. We are required to develop an Anti-Harassment Policy as a condition of funding, and that is in progress.

The cost for the Northern Regional Training session in November, hosted by our clinic, was \$51,000, which is approximately a \$12,000 increase over the last time that we hosted the conference. This reflects the increased numbers of staff and students in the northern clinics as well as increased costs overall.

All mandatory remittances for staff wages have been made. The bookkeeper has prepared the year-end reports and T4s will be issued soon.

**Administration**

The response to the LAO internal auditors was drafted and submitted, pursuant to our last Board meeting.

The computer upgrade project is complete for each of our offices. For the most part everything went smoothly. Unfortunately the computers don't seem much faster, at least not in our Thunder Bay office.

It was wonderful to see most of the Board at the Anishnaabek Christmas party on December 14 in Thunder Bay. There were some big winners in our group, including Mary Day winning an iPad!! The branch office staff and Board members also held their annual Christmas dinners. in Geraldton and Marathon at the Slovak Legion. Everyone is welcome, along with a guest.

LAO recently released an update for CIMS We are continuing to incorporate CIMS into our daily work and are becoming more proficient. However, extracting reports continues to be a challenge – although we are getting better and we are able to extract more information than before.

Claire and I are working together to further develop our Operations Manual.

### **Personnel**

The annual staff evaluation process is underway. Staff are working on their Annual Progress Reports and the meetings with the Board are scheduled for April 26. As a result of the feedback received last year, I have updated some of the forms.

We hosted an Open House for Rick Atkinson's retirement on December 14. It was well attended by friends and colleagues. Thank you to Alta for her words of wisdom and thank you to everyone who was able to attend. The committee did a great job organizing the event. Rick seemed really happy. It is hard to imagine him not being here in the office.

We now have two permanent positions to be filled: one to replace Monique, who took a one-year leave of absence in 2017 and then resigned from her position as staff lawyer in September 2018; the other to replace Rick. Larissa and Caycie's contracts have been extended for six months, to the end of May. Evaluations will be completed for them as part of our annual evaluation process. We will then be in a position to determine if an internal hiring is appropriate. My expectation is that we will utilize the internal hiring policy, since we have two smart, capable and competent candidates who have experience in clinic poverty law, are dedicated to our clients and the work we do, have Indigenous ancestry, and are familiar with our office policies and procedures.

Melanie is planning to take a six-month leave of absence starting in July 2019. Rick has indicated that he is interested in coming back to do that contract.

Sherry Abotossaway joined us in September as an IPC student from the Bora Laskin Faculty of Law. She completed her placement in December.

We have two first-year law students working in our office with our ID services program, through Pro Bono Students Canada: Erin Chocla and Justis Danto-Clancy. They are both very capable and very excited to be working in our office as volunteers. We're very lucky to have them. They will be with us for the remainder of the academic year.

Katelyn Vis has joined our office as a social worker placement student through the HBSW program at Lakehead University. Kim Facca is a Registered Social Worker and she will be supervising Katelyn. The work done by social workers fits very well with the work we do at legal clinics - many legal clinics have social

workers on staff.

Chantal 's knee surgery went well and she returned to work in mid-December.

There have been some bumps with the new group benefits regime but issues seem to be getting worked out.

### **Training**

The staff have participated in numerous webinars and training opportunities. We met with Hollee George, the Gladue services worker for the southwest regional legal clinics. She has been writing reports for clients in the southwest, using the Gladue principles to support Indigenous clients in obtaining ODSP benefits. Legal clinics are looking at using Gladue reports within all of the administrative tribunals that we appear before, such as LTB and CICB. Hollee is being invited to the NRT session in May to explore this further.

Madeleine Hebert, the Elder & Senior Law lawyer, came to Thunder Bay to attend an elder abuse conference. She used that opportunity to meet with our staff to talk about Powers of Attorney and Community Treatment Orders. We also scheduled a session for her at the Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre, with their elders program. Her session provided an overview of the services that she is providing through Advocacy North. There was a great turnout and a lot of interest in the project. She has been invited to do another session with them in March.

The support staff will be having their annual training session in Toronto April 3 – 5, 2019

### **Advocacy North**

All of the projects are running effectively and providing services to clients. We host the Speakers' School and Peer Support Organizer position, Angie Lynch, and she has been busy developing curriculum for the speakers' schools that will be held throughout the north in the new year. She has also been involved in organizing activities in response to the cancellation of the Basic Income Pilot Project.

I'm really happy to announce that the Indigenous Legal Needs Assessment project has been granted funding from the Law Foundation of Ontario and LAO, for a total of approximately \$268,000. A call for proposals is underway and the project is scheduled to begin in April 2019.

### **Board**

Alta, Cindy and I participated in a conference call hosted by the ACLCO on December 20, about the recommendations made by the provincial auditor about LAO. In particular, there is concern about recommendation #14: *To help community legal clinics achieve their legislative mandate and intended objectives cost-effectively, we recommend that the Ministry of the Attorney General work with Legal Aid Ontario to conduct a comprehensive review of the service delivery model and identify areas for improvement.* A copy of an excerpt from the report dealing specifically with legal clinics, will be available at the Board meeting under "Correspondence". The ACLCO has indicated that another call will be scheduled soon for Board and staff.

Alta, Cindy and I also met to begin planning for the upcoming annual Board and staff strategic planning session, which will be held at the Marriott TownePlace Suites in Thunder Bay, February 22 and 23.

### **Legal Aid Ontario**

Legal Aid Ontario recently released their 5 year strategic plan. A copy will be available at the Board meeting under "Correspondence". We will have copies available at the Board & Staff planning session.

On January 1, the new Clinic Law Services Division of LAO became operational. There hasn't been a lot of interaction with their office so far but they've been quick to provide information and respond to our inquiries.

### **Community Development/Outreach**

The first progress report for the ID services project was submitted this month to the Ontario Trillium Foundation, part of which is attached to this report. The project has been very successful and Fabienne has obtained a huge number of birth certificates for clients. We also have the Pro Bono students, Erin and Justis, working in our office a half day each per week, to provide ID services. Fabienne is organizing an ID clinic in partnership with the Friendship Centre in February. We recently decided that Larissa will now supervise Fabienne, as often the clients have legal issues. Fabienne gave a presentation at the NRT session on the ID services provided through the Awenen Niin program which she's been asked by the ACLCO to present as a webinar for the provincial clinic system, in conjunction with the evaluators from Lakehead University.

The legal staff have been presenting numerous public legal education sessions on a variety of topics. The staff are also involved in a number of committees and partnerships. Tracey was recently elected Chair of the Thunder Bay Urban Aboriginal Advisory Committee. Sally has submitted an application to be on one of the DSSAB's advisory committees and Kim is working with our social work student, Katelyn, to gather information on housing arrears policies.

Nokiiwin Tribal Council is hosting an Access to Justice Forum next week and several staff members are planning to attend some of the sessions.

### **Other**

I sent an email to Beth Boon, the Special Advisor to Chief King, to inquire about the status of the service protocol that they indicated that they were drafting. She indicated that we should hear from them soon.

I am continuing to work on my human resources management diploma. I recently completed a course in *Employment Law for HR Professionals* and have now started an *Industrial Relations* course.

The ACLCO AGM will be April 26 and 27. This is unfortunately the same weekend that we've scheduled the evaluation meetings. I'm not sure if the Board would want to consider changing the dates for the evaluations. Our clinic is able to send a Board member and a staff member. Claire will be attending from our staff and may join the ACLCO executive committee.

Sally and I met with Mary Bird and Jeff Roberts, the management team at NAN legal services. We meet every couple of months to share information about our programs and services. As a result of that meeting, Sally and Fabi will be attending their staff training session to talk about ID services and Child Tax Benefits.

We met with Michael Gravelle and his constituency assistant, Crystal Caputo, to talk about some of our concerns with respect to provincial issues. As always, Michael is very supportive of the work we do and will continue to be an important ally even though his party is no longer in government and he has far fewer resources and staff compared to when he was a Minister.

Respectfully submitted,