

Director of Administration - Beth Ponka
Report to Board of Directors – for the Board meeting January 23, 2021

Administration

- A very successful training session was held with Diane Walker at our last board meeting at the Valhalla Inn. Diane provided copies of her informative presentation and is available to return in future. Most board members are registered for the governance training series which she delivers. The next session in that series is Wednesday, January 20 at 6:30 p.m. via zoom.
- The vehicle leases for Geraldton and Marathon are expiring in January. A Request for Quotation was sent out in November and we received several quotes. Marostica Subaru was selected with the best safety package and other features, for the lowest price. The vehicles will be exchanged mid-January.
- An intercom and buzzer system were installed in our Thunder Bay office and installation for a similar system for our Geraldton office is pending. In Thunder Bay this system works very well by allowing clients and other visitors to enter the vestibule in between the two doors and use the intercom to speak to the receptionist who can screen for COVID and then use the buzzer to permit access. The exterior door is unlocked while the inner door is kept locked. Staff feel safer maintaining distance while screening visitors and preventing access to visitors who do not pass the COVID screening.
- The provincial government announced an enhanced lockdown effective December 26. When the office re-opened on January 4, 2021, most staff continued to work from home. The subsequent shutdown effective January 14 means that most staff will continue to work from home until at least February 11. We do have at least one support staff and one legal staff member in the office each work day and our intake services continue to be available by telephone. In extenuating circumstances services can be provided in person. A client interview room with phone and video technology has been set up to manage client visits to the office more effectively. The separate room enables staff to provide service from their own office and maintain distance.
- The office was closed December 23 until January 4 – the staff really appreciated getting the additional half day off for Christmas Eve day and the gift cards from Superstore. Miigwech!

Financial

- Thank you very much for approving salary increases for the staff. The increases were distributed before Christmas. We have come a long way in improving the internal and external fairness of our salaries and continue to work on this using the Hay Group framework and our pay equity plan.
- The funding application for 2021-22 is due at the end of January and a draft will be presented at the January 23 Board meeting.
- An administrative error made by CIBC resulted in some of our payments being returned. We worked with the bank to resolve the issue as quickly as possible.
- The December quarterly report will be available soon and I will be able to provide an update on the clinic's financial position and projections for the remainder of the fiscal year.
- We've submitted a funding application to the Ontario Trillium Foundation's Community Resilience Fund in the amount of \$150,000, to support the evolution of our ID services program in the context of the pandemic. We expect to hear around mid-March whether or not we will be funded for this project.
- We were deemed ineligible for reimbursement through the summer student program due to our candidate being age 31 – the cut-off for "youth" is 30. This is unfortunate but won't create a hardship for the clinic.

- We were not funded for the short-term (January to March) \$25,000 project that we applied for through an Indigenous special pandemic fund to hire a worker to assist with tenant duty counsel services.
- We are in the process of obtaining laptops for board members. There have been delays due to suppliers being out of stock and the lockdown. Funds are available to support board members in the work they do for the clinic – please let me know if you need anything to help you fulfill your duties more effectively. We can supply or reimburse for office supplies and we can help with internet costs – please just ask!
- The annual funding application for Tenant Duty Counsel services was submitted to the Advocacy Centre for Tenants in Ontario (ACTO).
- All payroll and required remittances have been paid.

Human Resources

- Claire McDowell, who was hired as a staff lawyer in September to replace Claire Littleton during her maternity leave, has resigned effective January 18 so that she can be closer to her family in southern Ontario. We offered the position to Molly MacDonald and she will be starting on February 8. Caycie will be going on maternity leave in April; we will be posting for her position shortly.
- Our IPC law student, Katrina Langevin, finished her placement in December. We've interviewed a candidate for next year's IPC placement but we won't know for a few weeks whether or not we will be matched with him.
- In the new year Danika Goshulak rejoined the clinic as a student through the Pro Bono Students Canada project. Danika was one of our PBSC students last year. She has experience working with the Awenen Niin ID services program and will be a great asset to our office. Darien Doblej/Basketwang is a third year law student at Queen's who is also volunteering in our office with the ID services program.
- Nokiiwin hosted their annual Mawmowenchige Health & Safety training conference over zoom the week of December 7. Several staff members were able to participate in a variety of webinars and courses, including health & safety committee members' training, spirit builder training, and cultural teachings.
- Cindy and Pat were working together every Friday for training and knowledge transfer. We have identified areas where training is necessary and are continuing to work on this project.
- Angie Lynch's contract as our ID Services Coordinator is expiring at the end of March and we're planning for the end of her project.
- Our group benefits are renewing on March 1. I've requested a quotation from a non-profit benefits company and have asked our benefits representative to gather information for a comparative analysis.
- Pam Leblanc, our admin assistant in the Geraldton office, is having surgery on her shoulder at the end of January. She will be off work possibly until the end of May. We won't be hiring anyone to replace her and will scale our services accordingly. Chantal is confident that she will be able to continue to provide the full range of services, including income tax, but her capacity will be more limited.

Community Development, CD, PLE & Partnerships

- Our SHIW worker, Esma, delivered a zoom presentation on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace (SHIW) in partnership with the Northwestern Ontario Women's Centre legal education project. She is very

composed and the information she presented was organized and informative. She's doing a great job.

- We are in the process of winding down the LPRF Awenen Niin ID Services project which expires at the end of March. We met with Maureen Brophy, the project manager. Angie and the LU academic team are working on the final report. An application was submitted (referenced above) for one-year transitional funding for the project. We are projecting a surplus and are hoping to disperse funds to our MOU partners to assist in their work providing ID services.
- We are working with one of our local MPPs to develop a Private Member's Bill on ID fee waivers.

Other

- Sally and I participated in a Northern ED meeting that was attended by Lenny Abramowicz, Executive Director of the Association of Community Legal Clinics of Ontario (ACLCO) who gave us an update on the Clinic Modernization project. The ACLCO has been working on behalf of all of its member clinics to update the funding agreement, MOU and other foundational documents that govern the relationship between Legal Aid Ontario and community legal clinics. The documents must be in place by April 1, 2021. We expect to receive copies of drafts soon.
- We had a wonderful seasonal feast celebration the week before Christmas, with teachings by Nathaniel Moses.
- It's been very challenging for Sally and the legal staff dealing with the hearings crisis and trying to provide Tenant Duty Counsel services. It's been very stressful for the legal staff and they have done an incredible job to meet the needs of our clients during COVID and the disastrous way that the Social Justice Tribunal of Ontario has been dealing with the backlog of hearings.

Thank you and happy new year! I look forward to "seeing" you at our board meeting on January 23.

Respectfully submitted,



Beth Ponka