

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

Meeting Date: July 23, 2022

Client Service

We are still screening clients before they come in to the office, but wearing masks is no longer mandatory and we will be discussing unlocking the office door at our staff meeting next week.

Statistics

Our statistics are still less than pre-pandemic numbers but we are busy and responding to all requests for service in our core areas.

Personnel

Caycie has returned from parental leave and hit the ground running with an intake day, the deadline for IDSCA claims bringing a surge of last-minute applications, and an LTB hearing all in her first week.

Claire has been off for medical leave and has recovered uneventfully from her surgery. She will be back at work next week. Larissa was here part-time in June to help with TDC and supervision while Claire was off.

As I reported in April, I am planning to retire at the end of the calendar year. Beth has taken that into consideration in establishing the budget for the rest of the fiscal year.

As the Board considers the process to fill the position of Coordinator of Legal Services, I would like to emphasize how important it will be to have someone in the position who is completely familiar with the work that we do at the clinic. The job description includes carrying a caseload and providing direct supervision.

Legal Aid Ontario

Legal Aid Ontario is downsizing their office space at the provincial office with the expectation that many staff will want to continue to work from home. It is possible that there will be some pressure on clinics to also “right-size” their physical space, and we will have to be clear that the offices we currently have are the right size for our clients’ needs.

Beth and I plan to reach out to the regional LAO management to ask for an opportunity to meet with them.

Casework

The dysfunction at the LTB continues to increase, with significant delays in hearings being scheduled, and unprecedented delays in decisions being released. A number of adjudicators have resigned without writing decisions for hearings that have been held, and in some cases new hearings are being scheduled.

For more than a year the LTB was scheduling northern hearings in the same blocks on Mondays and Thursdays. They have changed their scheduling process again and we are back to hearings in multiple blocks four days a week. The week of July 18th there are fifteen hearings in thirteen different blocks over four days, morning and afternoon, with as many as three blocks at the same time. I have written to the Associate Chair of the Board asking them to schedule all the hearing for our catchment area on the same day, as they did for years, but have not received a response.

There was a webinar organized by ACTO and the CRO about the new Tribunals Ontario Portal, which is currently being used by the LTB.

We have had numerous SBT hearings rescheduled, often at the last minute, because an adjudicator was not available. They don't tell us why; possible because they have also had a number of recently-appointed members resign, or maybe just that people are sick in this seventh wave of COVID.

The files that were open when the housing social navigator position became vacant have been transferred to the legal staff who referred the client to the project. It has been a tremendous help to our clients to have the project in our office.

Training

The northern clinics are reinstating the Northern Learning Committee to organize training for northern clinic staff. LAO has not replaced the funding for training that was cut from their budget in 2019 but we may be able to manage one in-person training session with contributions from all of the clinics. We are optimistically holding dates in late November.

The CRO organized training on examining and cross-examining witnesses with lawyers from a prestigious Bay Street firm providing the training. Many of our staff were able to attend the three sessions on Zoom. They were also recorded and I have encouraged everyone to watch them.

We are organizing training for the new staff member in the Marathon office who started this week.

Ann has been teaching us a word of the week in Anishinaabemowin, and we also review and discuss one of the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report at our weekly staff meeting.

Community Development

1. Bora Laskin Faculty of Law

We have had a law student express an interest in a doing his IPC placement here in the 23/24 academic year, so hopefully we will have at least one student that year. The Dean has advised me that they are not going to offer Poverty Law this year, and we are going to meet to discuss whether our staff can teach it the following year.

2. SHIW Project

Esma is working with other SHIW staff in other clinics to develop electronic materials to share through social media, and presenting public legal education sessions. I attended a meeting of the SHIW Advisory Committee.

3. Public Legal Education

Melanie was a presenter at a PLE organized by the Newcomer Legal Clinic at Lakehead University. The topic was social assistance issues for newcomers.

4. Aboriginal Community Advocacy Advisory Council

I am a member of the Advisory Council for this course at the College. I attended an Advisory Council Meeting in May. The program is undergoing program review and I have been invited to a focus group meeting as part of that process.

5. TBDSSAB Indigenous Engagement

Blue Sky Community Healing Centre has held several focus groups for Indigenous people who are tenants of the TBDSSAB or receive social assistance administered by the TBDSSAB.

6. Schreiber Emergency meeting

Our office was invited to a meeting of a number of agencies who were assisting vulnerable tenants in Schreiber when the fire marshal made an order that the motel they were living in wasn't habitable. It was a great example of the community working together to solve a problem.

Other

1. Indian Day School Class Action

The deadline to file a claim for the IDSCA was July 13th, and there was a surge of requests for assistance in the last few days. They have announced a process for people to request an extension of time, but it is an individual request and there aren't clear criteria

as to how they will make decisions about the extension requests. We encouraged everyone that we spoke with to file a claim before the deadline, but we will no doubt be getting many requests for help in requesting an extension.

2. NOSM Student Placements

We hosted a student from the Northern Ontario School of Medicine for a day in May; they are making up for missed community placements during the pandemic.

3. CLEO research

I was interviewed by the consultant who is working with CLEO on a project about evaluating the impact of PLE activity.

4. Computer upgrade

We received and installed the upgraded computers with Windows 10. It was a challenging process to manage without any on-site tech people. We had many issues ranging from monitors not being recognized to problems opening documents in CIMS. They have now decided that they will change the project going forward and provide new computers and on-site tech support.

5. Clinic Resource Office Caseworker Advisory Committee

I am the northern representative on the CRO-CAC. The ED of the CRO left unexpectedly in May, and we are hopeful that the position will be filled permanently soon. We have written to the senior management at LAO about their plans to move to a “hoteling” system for staff in the provincial office, including the CRO, which is not at all appropriate for the CRO.

6. Other

I attended a number of meetings including a case management meeting, and various staff meetings and file reviews.

Respectfully submitted,

Sally Colquhoun,
Coordinator of Legal Services.