

# **Director of Administration - Beth Ponka**

## **Report to Board of Directors – for the Board meeting April 30, 2022**

### **Administration**

- Congratulations to Alta, who was recognized for 10 years of service as a volunteer on our Board of Directors! A virtual ceremony was organized by the provincial government to recognize volunteers in Ontario. Thank you for your years of service, dedication, and commitment, Alta.
- The kitchen in our Thunder Bay office was renovated during March and April and is now completed. It looks amazing! It makes such a difference, especially with the pony wall removed. The construction project went very smoothly and resulted in only minor disruptions in the office. Thank you for approving this project out of surplus funds. The new kitchen makes our office more functional, pleasant, and comfortable.
- The computer upgrade is scheduled for May 11-13. Our computers will be upgraded to the Windows 10 operating system in preparation for a migration to Office 365 sometime in the future. Our clinic email addresses will be changing in May to a new name format along with a community legal clinic system and clinic acronym identifier. LAO has designed a process to help with the switch-over and our old email addresses will continue to receive our emails for 13 months. I will provide more information when the change occurs.
- Our annual Board & Staff Strategic Planning Session was held in March, facilitated by Diane Walker. In addition to leading us through a SWOT analysis, Diane had everyone complete a personality test that resulted in some interesting and insightful group activities. It is incredibly valuable for board and staff to get together in person a couple of times a year. The Delta was a great venue.
- Despite the provincial mask mandate being lifted for most industries, our office is continuing to follow a mandatory masking policy. Public health officials recommend continuing to use masks and that is the best strategy for our office at the present time.
- A complaint was received from a client who is unhappy about the length of time that has passed before her application being submitted for her Indian Day School claim. It is understandable that people want to receive their compensation as soon as possible. However, we have many competing priorities and the deadline to submit IDSCA claims isn't until July. Unfortunately, that deadline is far less pressing than the numerous other demands on our legal workers' time, such as sheriff's notices or people being cut-off of social assistance. I've reached out to the client and hopefully she will continue to want us to represent her, although she could choose to obtain alternate representation if she wishes. A copy of the clinic's complaints policy has been mailed to her.

### **Financial**

- The Board made a great decision by choosing to address the clinic's pay equity liability using the clinic's surplus. Now that LAO is no longer explicitly funding the required 1% of payroll adjustment every year, it is more urgent than ever that we try to achieve the targets identified in our pay equity plan. The recent adjustment helps to significantly reduce the liability.
- The Eviction Prevention Project has strict quarterly reporting requirements. We submitted our Q3 and Q4 reporting and are in the process of developing a work plan to continue the project activities through to March 31, 2024. This project generates a substantial amount of revenue for our non-LAO fund/reserve fund - approximately \$2,200 per month in "project administration".
- We've received confirmation that we will be receiving a 2% increase in funding from Legal Aid Ontario. This amount will be reflected on our projected revenue for our 2022-23 budget. LAO is also now providing

funding for the Knowledge Now project directly to clinics, which we will then flow back to ACLCO.

- All payroll and required remittances have been paid.

### **Human Resources**

- There are several upcoming changes that we are planning for. Sally, Claire and I met to develop a plan to manage the upcoming changes and continue to provide services; the proposed budget reflects that planning process.
- Julia Michano resigned from her position as the Admin Assistant in the Marathon office. We've gone through the hiring process and Amber Devereaux is the successful candidate. She is projected to start on July 11.
- We had our semi-annual internal training session for March 11. Topics included a review of our Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination Policy and a session on gender pronouns. We also discussed professionalism and reviewed staff rights and responsibilities.
- We had a baby shower for Megan Belluz and Molly MacDonald, both of whom recently had babies – a girl for Megan and a boy for Molly! Both healthy and all are doing great.
- Caycie is expected to be back from her maternity leave on July 11, 2022
- The consultants working with the ACLCO's Pay Equity Committee have drafted a pay equity manual for clinic managers. The committee has met to review the manual and provide feedback. The final version should be released soon. I've learned a lot while working on this committee and will be following up with a review and update of our clinic's pay equity plan.
- I successfully completed all of the requirements and I am now a Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP). Thank you for your support while I've worked on this! I've learned so much that is directly applicable to my day-to-day work at the clinic.
- The annual evaluation process is nearing completion and most of the staff will have evaluations completed by the end of the month.
- Ann McGuire has agreed to stay on part-time, working 10 hours per week. Ann has been providing cultural support in the office and is assisting the clinic in moving forward on our reconciliation strategy.
- Ann also led our seasonal feast for the spring equinox, in partnership with Alta. Miigwech!

### **Community Development, CD, PLE & Partnerships**

- The Awenen Niin ID research team at LU have drafted an advocacy document highlighting the barriers to accessing ID. The document is being printed with professional graphics and looks amazing as well as being a Call to Action to address the barriers that people experience trying to access ID.
- I travelled with Miriam, the Marathon CLW, to Netmizaaggamig Nishnaabeg (Pic Moberg) for an ID clinic/legal clinic services clinic. 21 people signed up to see us and others had questions. The main issues were birth certificates, SINs, status cards, health cards, income tax, and Canada Child Benefits.

- The provincial government released a press statement on fee waivers for birth certificates. Unfortunately it was misleading by implying that birth certificate fees are being waived for all vulnerable people, which isn't true. I have been trying to correct the record by sharing information and presenting at meetings of service providers.
- Our application to the LSPC to extend funding for the Eviction Prevention Project was denied, however, we are hopeful that funding under the existing program (administered by the Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre) may be extended until March 31, 2024.
- The ID Action Group has been meeting regularly and we have struck an advocacy sub-committee that is looking at developing an ID strategy for the District of Thunder Bay. We are hoping to build partnerships with First Nation communities, tribal councils, and treaty organizations, to improve access to ID, income tax services, and Canada Child Benefits.
- Jennifer Fenton delivered two PLE workshops to the Children's Aid Society of Thunder Bay and we are hoping to partner with them to offer an opportunity for kids who are aging out of care to sign their valuable ID into our ID bank.
- Our clinic has been invited to participate in two additional research projects: one is a research project on the digital divide and access to justice, and the other is a research project on the impact of surveillance on social assistance recipients. More information on the second project is available through our "Correspondence" report.
- Our Fee Waiver Program agreement for birth certificates was renewed for 5 years, to April 1, 2027.
- I participated in a workshop organized by Elections Ontario about increasing access to voting for vulnerable people. Unfortunately legal clinics aren't recognized as an agency that can vouch for our clients who may not have ID for voting. However, Elections Ontario was receptive to the suggestion that we be added to the list for next election.
- Sally and I participated in managers' meetings organized by the ACLCO, including sessions on the new ONCA. My understanding is that we will have to make some changes and we will need to spend some time looking at that more carefully to determine what we need to do. We have until 2024 to align with the new ONCA requirements.

I look forward to seeing you all in person this weekend! Safe travels.

Respectfully submitted,



Beth Ponka