

## **Director of Administration - Beth Ponka**

### **Report to Board of Directors – for the Board meeting January 29, 2022**

#### **Administration**

- The staff sincerely appreciated the thoughtfulness and consideration of the Board of Directors at Christmas. Staff have asked me to express their thanks and gratitude for the gifts they received and for the kindness and support that they receive from the Board. The support of the Board helps create a positive work environment and contributes to the ability of our staff to provide high quality legal services to the District of Thunder Bay. Chi miigwech.
- I was on vacation for most of December and spent time at home putting and restoring my wellness. It was very helpful and I felt refreshed coming back in the new year.
- I updated our Pandemic Policy prior to going on holidays in December. There were some significant changes to the policy to reflect updated public health guidelines and our office practices. The policy will need to be updated again and I have asked the Health & Safety Committee to review it as well.
- A sub-committee meeting was held in early January to plan for our upcoming Annual Board & Staff Strategic Planning Session. We are hoping to meet in person at the Delta Waterfront Hotel in March although that may not be possible due to the ongoing pandemic. Diane Walker has been retained as the facilitator for the session and a draft agenda has been completed. We will be doing a teambuilding personality exercise as well as reviewing our current strategic plan and updating our SWOT analysis.
- Several staff are working from home during the existing lockdown. We have a schedule for legal staff and support staff. The good news is that many of us are used to working from home and have the equipment to do so. However it's been several months that we've been working in the office so inevitably we've had some technical difficulties during a period of adjustment. Clients have been able to continue to access our services by phone and in person when they do not have access to a phone or are in crisis. Most of our staff have had their third booster.
- Our front reception area was re-arranged to better utilize the space and improve work flow. It looks great! The pile of file boxes outside of my office for shredding were dealt with by Enviro-Shred and the office looks neat and tidy once again.
- We haven't received any news about the computer update that is being rolled out by Legal Aid Ontario. We expect to receive new computers in the next couple of months. We will be migrating to Windows 10 and Office 365 and will be receiving new email addresses. The old email addresses will be valid for one year after the change – more information will be shared when that starts happening.

#### **Financial**

- We have a significant surplus due to the impact of COVID and the budgeted contingency fund. I have retained a contractor for a much-needed kitchen renovation in our Thunder Bay office and am looking at other options to allocate the surplus where it is most needed. One of the projects under consideration is addressing our pay equity liability.
- We are managing a few different project funds in addition to our regular LAO funding: Tenant Duty Counsel, Sexual Harassment in the Workplace, and the Eviction Prevention Project, each with their own reporting requirements. These projects enable us to deliver a wider range of services.
- We had our first "Mid-Year Dialogue" with the Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre with respect to the Eviction Prevention Project. The meeting went well and TBIFC is encouraging us to request a "roll-

over” of our surplus project funds to extend the project to June 30, 2022. A request will be submitted with our Q3 report, which is due mid-January.

- After meeting with the Ontario Trillium Foundation, I've decided to wait until OTF offers their GROW grant funding application. The Community Resilience Fund was only for one year and is specific to the impact of COVID. The OTF coach advised that our project was a better fit with the GROW grant.
- We have ordered new board room chairs and office reception transferred seamlessly to the DBPlus/CAAT Pension Plan November 1, 2021. Everyone is extremely appreciative of the opportunity to have a true pension plan and thanks the Board very much for supporting this initiative.
- All payroll and required remittances have been paid.

### **Human Resources**

- Jennifer Fenton joined our office in December as a Paralegal Placement Student. Her placement will be completed in January.
- We posted for the Legal Worker position to replace Molly when she goes on Maternity Leave in January. Jennifer, our Paralegal Placement Student, was the successful applicant and will be joining us on contract in January, after her placement is completed.
- Claire, Sally and I interviewed candidates for an IPC (3<sup>rd</sup> year law student) for the 2022-23 academic year. Hopefully we will match with a candidate and we will encourage them to apply for the LFO summer student funding so that they can extend the length of time they are with us.
- I wasn't able to attend the winter solstice feast but I received very positive feedback from staff about it. It sounds like Nathaniel Moses did a great job and shared a wonderful teaching about the winter feast.
- Julia Michano has started a gradual return to work program in our Marathon office. She will be working part-time and increasing her hours to get back to full-time employment for the end of February.
- Allister McGillivray's contract has been extended to June 30, 2022.
- Molly McDonald had her baby! We just found out that Molly had her baby on Friday, January 21, 2022.
- We will be organizing our semi-annual internal training session for March 11. Potential topics include information gathering, plain language writing, and a review of some of our HR policies to help ensure all staff are aware of their rights and responsibilities.
- Megan Belluz, the Housing Intake Support Worker, had her baby on December 28. We have seconded Jessica to the EPP to provide part-time support to Lauren, the Housing Social Navigator.
- Caycie is expected to be back from her maternity leave in July 2022 and I expect we will hear from Larissa in the spring whether she plans to return to her job at the clinic or not.
- The ACLCO's Pay Equity Committee and consultants held a second information session for managers.
- The northern EDs met a couple of times to organize a Northern Regional Training session in person in Thunder Bay. Unfortunately we had to cancel the plan and we will revisit this next fiscal year.

- I met with Jennifer Fenton for onboarding and orientation and have set up training sessions for her with the legal staff in our substantive areas of law.
- The annual evaluation process is under way. Staff and management Annual Progress Reports are due at the end of January.
- Ann McGuire, a former placement student from the Aboriginal Community Advocacy Program, is going to be joining us part-time until the end of March, to help advance the reconciliation and de-colonization work of the clinic.

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

- The Office of the Registrar General, similar to our other provincial government partners, is switching to an online portal for applications and communications. I organized a training session in partnership with ORG for several of our staff to become familiar with the new process and procedures.
- I've been hearing great feedback about the work that Lauren Aho has been doing through the Eviction Prevention Project, which is funded by the federal government through *Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy*. We hope to be able to extend funding for this project and plan to submit a funding application to the LSPC through their housing funding stream.
- Esma Haider is the CLW responsible for the Sexual Harassment in the Workplace project. She completed a staff report that is included in the board packages.
- The ID Action Group has been meeting regularly and we are looking at additional ID clinics once the pandemic passes. The LU research team, Dr. Sanders and Dr. Burnett, have completed an advocacy document with Calls to Action by the provincial government to address barriers to accessing ID. It will be professionally printed by Lakehead University press. Kinna-aweya Legal Clinic is one of the presenting partners. I will share copies once they're available. We have also struck a sub-committee to advocate for changes to ORG requirements around legal custody – we are advocating for them to acknowledge kinship agreements. Many Indigenous families are unable to obtain ID for their family members because ORG doesn't accept kinship agreements.
- The legal staff are actively involved in a number of community development and law reform projects and committees, and deliver a variety of PLE workshops. With Molly leaving the clinic, other staff will be taking on additional committee work.

Respectfully submitted,



Beth Ponka