

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

### **Report to Board of Directors – for the Board meeting November 26, 2022**

#### **Administration**

- It's amazing to see all of the work and contributions that our staff and board members make to our clients and communities. Some of this work was showcased in our Annual Report, a draft of which was released at our AGM. A final version will be sent out to our community partners along with our season greetings.
- The computer upgrade project for our three offices is now completed. The old computers are still in our Board Room but hopefully will be picked up soon to free up space. IT issues continue to absorb a disproportionate amount of our time and energy.
- I attended all of our Area Community Meetings which were held in September throughout the District. There were some changes on the Board of Directors. Welcome back to Cindy Whittington and Larry Wanakamik, who have both been previous Board members, as well as Robyn who was re-elected for another term. Welcome also to Theresa Ray, who will be representing Marathon now that Michael Deschamps has decided to step down. We also say goodbye to Jamie McGinnis and Audrey Achneepineskum. Candace Davies and Alta Fenton's terms continue until next September.
- An orientation session was held for new Board members and a separate session was organized for the new (returning) Treasurer and Claire on Kinna-aweya Legal Clinic's "Significant Financial Events" that occur each fiscal year.
- We had a successful in-person AGM at the Valhalla Inn. It was great to welcome our delegates from the communities and spend time together. Kinna-aweya Legal Clinic fleece blankets were given to everyone as a token of appreciation. Jamie's presentation on delivery of services to Indigenous people in the human rights context was well-received. Sally was touched by the Board's thoughtful gesture to make her an honorary member and present her with a clinic skirt made with love and care by Alta. Chi miigwech, Alta.
- The staff have been working on making their own traditional skirts in the clinic colours, with help from Alta and Ann McGuire. I finished mine this week and I feel so proud! Chi miigwech to Alta for working with me patiently to teach and guide me on this project.
- The leases for our multi-function devices (print/scan/copy/fax) expired last year and we have been on month-to-month leases through Lowerys due to global supply chain issues. Recently we have been having increasing issues and are working with LAO IT to access new machines through the Vendor of Record. We hope to have new leases in place by the new year.
- We recently updated the equipment and lease for the postage machine in the Thunder Bay office.
- Lease negotiations with the Geraldton landlord have recently been finalized and I'm hopeful that a new 5 year lease will be in place in by the end of this calendar year.
- I met with Diane Walker to discuss the interaction of the organizational operating policies with the new Board and Governance policies. A framework should be developed to help separate, integrate, and develop policies where needed. Diane is willing to participate in a meeting to determine a plan of action.
- The Document Management Committee meets on a regular basis to make recommendations and develop best practices for information management in our offices.
- A draft of the 2023 clinic calendar of events has been developed and will be circulated to the Board for their input.

## Financial

- Legal Aid Ontario has already announced that we will receive a 2% increase for fiscal 2023-24. A draft budget has been prepared and will be presented at the November Board meeting.
- We've received the application for a Service Proposal for 2023-24 (formerly known as our annual funding application), which is due by January 31, 2023.
- I've reached out to Mary Turan, the senior consultant at the firm that was retained by the ACLCO for the provincial Pay Equity Committee, to determine cost and if we should retain her services to assist us in assessing where we are at with our Pay Equity Plan.
- I've sent a request to Wayne Brown regarding last year's surplus retention/reallocation. If we are able to keep our surplus, I have some recommendations for projects that will benefit the clinic.
- ACTO has requested additional information about the TDC funds that we receive. I've consulted with Cindy Whittington and have followed up with ACTO.
- We are scheduled to have a "Mid-Year Dialogue" with the Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre in December, as part of the reporting framework for the Eviction Prevention Project. An EPP team meeting is scheduled for next week to review the work plan and accomplishments to date.
- I am working with CIBC to try to update our signing officers.
- All payroll and required remittances have been paid.
- All project reports have been submitted as required.

## Human Resources

- We have been busy planning a retirement Open House for Sally, which is scheduled for Friday, November 25. In addition, Sally was recognized at the AGM and presented with an Honourary Membership by the Board of Directors.
- I assisted the Board hiring committee for the recruitment of a replacement for Sally. An internal posting resulted in Claire Littleton being selected as the Incoming Coordinator of Legal Services. Claire officially assumed her new title in October and will overlap with Sally until the end of December, when Sally will officially retire.
- Brandi DeJonge was hired in July as the new Admin Assistant for our Marathon office. We have decided to recommend that all staff start wearing masks again in public areas of the office. Ontario's medical officer of health and other health care leaders have issued dire warnings about the hospital system being overwhelmed with COVID, flu, and RSV, particularly among children. Although a mask mandate hasn't been reinstated, public health officials strongly recommend wearing masks when possible.
- Since the last meeting, Jennifer has become the Housing Social Navigator for the Eviction Prevention Project. She was originally hired under the ID Services Coordinator under the TBDSSAB/KINNA ID project, but once we received extended funding for the EPP project, that was a much better fit in terms of length of contract as well as a better utilization of her skills. Megan Belluz also rejoined the clinic following her maternity leave and she is working as the Housing Intake Support Worker for the EPP.

- Matthew Jollineau has been hired part-time as an ID Services Coordinator under the TBDSSAB/KINNA ID services partnership.
- We've posted for the Staff Lawyer permanent job to replace Claire and will be doing interviews this upcoming week.
- A second series of mini-training sessions on the clinic areas of law was held for our new Pro Bono Students Canada placement students, Aundrea and Crystal. They will be working with us for the academic year with the Awenen Niin ID Services program.
- Zachary Ekman has joined the clinic as a co-op placement student. He is in grade 12 at Hammarskjold High School, in the High Schools Specialist Major program for Law. He will be with us for the rest of this semester, finishing in mid-January.
- We had an internal training and wellness session for all staff which included the Kairos Blanket Exercise facilitated by Lakehead University's Indigenous Initiatives department. Our wellness session was a group art project using materials foraged from the outdoors. Feedback on both events was very positive.
- Our fall seasonal feast was held, led by Ann and Alta. Some of our old and new Board members joined, which is so much appreciated by the staff.
- I arranged a presentation and Q&A session for staff on our group benefits.

### **Projects & Partnerships**

- The Awenen Niin ID Services project is very active and busy. In addition to the funded project in partnership with DSSAB, two PBSC students from BLFL recently joined the clinic and needed onboarding and orientation. We are actively involved in the ID Action Group, including the Advocacy sub-committee which organized a press conference on International Identity Day (September 16) to release the "Barriers to Accessing ID" research report completed in conjunction with Lakehead University. I helped organize and deliver a training session for agency staff on best practices to apply for birth certificates. We are working on a newsletter to update our ID MOU partners and we are planning an ID clinic in partnership with TBDSSAB in January 2023. I'm arranging meetings with our MPPs on behalf of the IDAG for the new year.
- I continue to sit as the legal clinic's representative on the New Directions Speakers' School Board of Directors and have been elected as the Secretary of the Board. We regularly host meetings at our office. Our legal staff are featured guest speakers for the participants – Caycie recently delivered a presentation about the legal clinic's services to the current class.
- Our clinic is organizing and hosting a Northern Regional Training event which will be held at the Valhalla Inn November 29, 30, and December 1.
- Miriam and Chantal have been participating in meetings organized by Canada Revenue Agency to bring together government and community partners to address barriers to accessing ID. The CRA convened the group because they noticed that a lot of participants in the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) couldn't obtain Social Insurance Numbers because they don't have birth certificates. CRA is proposing to organize ID clinics with Service Canada, Service Ontario, and other partners to obtain ID for vulnerable people. After the first meeting Service Ontario said that they couldn't participate and weren't able to offer any travelling services to communities. Miriam and Chantal continue to attend the meetings and work with CRA to try to improve access to ID in the District.

**Professional Development**

- I participated virtually in the Human Resources Professionals Association's (HRPA's) annual Law Conference in October.
- Since my last report, I've attended training sessions hosted by the HRPA on "Addressing Racism and Racial Discrimination in the Workplace"; "Standards for Conducting Workplace Investigations", and "HRPA Ethics and Professional Guidance".

**Other**

- Alta, Claire and I attended the ACLCO Management Training session held in Toronto at the end of October. In addition to an update from Lenny, the Executive Director of the ACLCO, we spoke about the Clinic Staff Engagement Project and participated in a number of break-out sessions. There was a session on leadership and a dinner for all of the clinic Board and staff members from around the province.
- I sit on the ACLCO's Knowledge NOW Steering Committee. We haven't met since before the pandemic but a meeting is scheduled for next week.
- I participated in LAO's Town Hall meeting and drafted our clinic's response to LAO's proposed "Risk Level Determination Policy for Community Legal Clinics".
- Sally and I met with the two new MPPs for Thunder Bay, Kevin Holland and Lise Vaugeois, to provide an overview of our services, the Awenen Niin ID services program, and mutual referrals.

I look forward to seeing you all next week at the Board meeting. Safe travels.

Respectfully submitted,



Beth Ponka