

**Kinna-aweya Legal Clinic  
Board Meeting Report  
Coordinator of Legal Services – Claire Littleton**

**Meeting Date: January 19, 2023**

**Client Service**

We continue to provide the full array of clinic services throughout the District, including travelling to most First Nations and smaller communities. We continue to have many hearings at the Landlord and Tenant Board and at the Social Benefits Tribunal. We continue to assist clients with First Nations Drinking Water Class action claims. Most of our summary advice relates to eviction prevention and tenants' rights.

**Statistics**

For the period from October 1, 2023 to December 31, 2023:

- We opened 550 cases (477 summary advice matters and 73 files). During the same quarter last year, we opened 500 cases. We therefore opened 50 more cases this year than we did last year in the same quarter.
- We continue to assess the impact of our new intake and caseworker specialization model and the significant staffing changes that we have had over the past year.
- We had 79 Social Benefits Tribunal, 33 Landlord and Tenant Board, and 2 Social Security Tribunal hearings scheduled. We had 8 Early Resolution Sessions at the Social Benefits Tribunal. This is an increase of 17 hearings over the previous quarter.
- We also assisted and offered limited representation to many clients at the Landlord and Tenant Board through the Tenant Duty Counsel program.
- We closed 535 matters (409 summaries and 126 files).

**Personnel**

- Kelly started in her role as the new intake worker at the beginning of December. Prior to December, our placement student from the law school was filling this role. Kelly is adjusting very well to this new position and her strong work ethic and commitment to our clients and community is evident. The rest of the legal workers in the Thunder Bay office are providing her with support and mentorship through this transition.
- Terri Zeleny started as our new receptionist in the Thunder Bay office in November. She is kind and thorough and brings a great deal of experience to her role at Kinna-aweya Legal Clinic.

- Molly MacDonald started her parental leave at the beginning of January as her baby is due at the beginning of February. We wish her all the best and look forward to her return in May 2025.
- We hired Elizabeth Garofalo as a contract lawyer to cover Molly's leave. Elizabeth started at the beginning of January and she has jumped into the work of the clinic with enthusiasm.
- Caycie Soke has announced that she is expecting another baby and plans to start her leave at the beginning of June so we will be hiring another contract staff lawyer in the coming months.
- Matthew Jollineau, our placement student from the law school, has returned to school and we have a new placement student, David Spies, with us for this term. David has previous experience working in a law office and has already proven to be a reliable and very competent student.

## **Casework**

Staffing changes are both exciting and challenging. Every time a case worker starts work with the clinic or leaves for a period of time, there is a great deal of work involved in supervising, wrapping up files, distributing open cases, assigning ongoing work to other legal workers, training new staff, etc. We are working hard to make sure that everyone feels supported in their new roles and that the work of the clinic carries on without too much disruption.

We have now worked through many of the bumps in our new intake model. Work is being assigned and completed in a timely way and we have noticed an increase in our casework. For example, we opened 166 more cases in 2023 than we did in 2022. Placement students from the law school have thus far been instrumental in the functioning of this new model and we hope to have the opportunity to continue to work with students in the future. It would be ideal to have enough space to host more than one law student per term.

So far staff seem pleased with the new intake model. More seasoned caseworkers are enjoying taking on more complex cases. There are some administrative pressure points in the process, which we will continue to work on in the coming months. We plan to conduct a thorough review of this new model in September 2024.

The downloading of hosting hearings onto legal clinics is a significant pressure for our office. Neither the Social Benefits Tribunal nor the Landlord and Tenant Board have in-person hearings anymore and clients are expected to participate remotely via Zoom. Many of our clients can only access their hearings by attending our office. We sometimes have up to three or four hearings at the same time and we simply do not have adequate space to host them all.

We currently have one appeal before the Divisional Court and one appeal before the Federal Court. A client who we represented at the Landlord and Tenant Board in a successful claim was recently notified that her Landlord has appealed the decision to the Divisional Court. We are currently assessing this case.

We have set aside drop-in hours on Mondays and Fridays to assist clients in completing and submitting First Nations Drinking Water Class Action cases. These drop-in clinics have proven to be very popular and we continue to process many claims for clients. We are also aware of other upcoming and ongoing Indigenous justice class actions, including the Ralph Rowe class action and foster care class action.

We continue with regular visits to most of the communities in the District of Thunder Bay, including Thunder Bay staff travelling to Nipigon, and Armstrong/Whitesand. Our Marathon and Geraldton staff continue to travel extensively throughout the District to provide in-person service. I have a meeting next week with representatives from Gull Bay First Nation/Kiashke Zaaging Anishinabek to discuss how to move forward with our cases from that community. I am hopeful that this is a positive step in rebuilding our relationship with leadership in that community.

### **Training**

We have started monthly training sessions for all staff. We completed a training in January about a Microsoft product called One Note and about the ODSP application and appeal process. At our session in February, we are planning to do a training about how our clients can access Legal Aid Ontario services. We will do a webinar and have invited LAO staff lawyers to come and meet with us.

We remain hopeful that our in-person regional training will be funded by Legal Aid Ontario. We are hoping to hold a week-long training session in Sault Ste. Marie in May.

LAO has made an online program called "The Path" available to all clinic staff. It is an excellent program about Indigenous justice issues and reconciliation, and we have encouraged all staff to take advantage of the opportunity to complete the program.

Three of our staff members attended a housing conference in Halifax in November. They made important connections and learned a great deal about housing programs and policy.

### **Community Development/Law Reform/PLE**

#### 1. Committees and Community Organizations

Our staff continue to be actively involved with various committees, including the Housing and Homelessness Coalition, the Low Income Energy Network, Diversity Thunder Bay, Aboriginal Community Advocacy Program Advisory Committee, New Directions Speakers' School, and the Urban Aboriginal Advisory Committee.

2. SCSA and LCHIC

As the co-chair of the Provincial Steering Committee on Social Assistance, I have regular meetings with the Social Benefits Tribunal and high-level bureaucrats that the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services. I regularly advocate for better processes for our clients, with a focus on the needs of Indigenous people in Ontario who access social assistance programs and the Social Benefits Tribunal.

Caycie Soke is the regional representative on the Legal Clinic Housing Issues Committee, which advocates directly with the provincial government around housing issues. Caycie is also a caseworker advisor to the Clinic Resource Office.

3. Reaching out to Community Partners

We conducted several Public Legal Education sessions in the last quarter, including sessions at: Nipigon Public Library, TBDSSAB Ontario Works, North of Superior Counselling Programs, and the Thunder Bay Addiction Centre. We continue to offer regular PLE sessions for community partners.

4. Bora Laskin Faculty of Law

Caycie has started teaching a course in Poverty Law at the Bora Laskin Faculty of Law. We have the expertise in this area and it is a good opportunity to expose law students to clinic law issues facing our client population.

We have a placement student this term from the Bora Laskin Faculty of Law and recently completed interviews for placement students for next year. We have worked hard to improve our orientation and training processes for placement students and have successfully integrated them into our new intake model.

5. Association of Community Legal Clinics of Ontario (ACLCO)

I continue to be a staff representative from the Northern Region on the ACLCO board. We are actively working on a variety of issues, including the LAO funding model for clinics and issues related to clinic obligations under the French Language Services Act.

**Other – Ontario Not-for-Profit Corporations Act (ONCA)**

We have retained a lawyer to assist with the necessary updates to our articles of incorporation and amendments to our bylaws. We expect to have this work completed by the end of March 2024 and will be in a position to amend our bylaws at our next Annual Meeting.

The lawyer has provided us with a draft amended bylaw and related documents, which are in your Board package and will be part of our discussion at the upcoming board meeting.

I look forward to meeting with you all to share more about the work of the clinic and to answer any questions that you might have.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Littleton', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Claire Littleton,  
Coordinator of Legal Services