

Legal Aid BC Update

From the desk of Mark Benton, QC
Chief Executive Officer, Legal Services Society



The Year Ahead at the Legal Services Society

It's going to be another busy year at LSS. Here are some of the things I'm hoping we can accomplish in 2016:

- Work with justice system partners like Provincial Court Chief Judge Thomas Crabtree and the Law Society to engage with Aboriginal communities to develop a shared vision for serving the needs of indigenous communities better.
- Renew our efforts to involve the federal government in developing and funding more effective legal services for Aboriginal communities.
- Launch the interactive MyLawBC website, which will be the only public legal information site of its kind in the province.
- Continue to make our justice innovation projects as effective and efficient as we can in an effort to secure the funding needed to grow the successful ones into province-wide programs.
- Continue to work towards improving our new lawyer billing portal, LSS Online, so that it is closer to our original vision for what it would be.

How Family LawLINE is Making a Difference in People's Lives

LSS's Family LawLINE service is the subject of a new feature on the LSS website called "Our stories." In the first story, Lead Lawyer Amber Van Drielen talks about "the audible sigh of relief" she heard from a client after she was able to provide them with family law advice over the phone. You can find out more about the work of Family LawLINE lawyers **on our website**. We'll be adding more stories about how legal aid makes a difference in people's lives in the months ahead.



Family LawLINE lawyer Amber Van Drielen at her office

Clients are Satisfied with Justice Innovation Services

Independent evaluations of the implementation phase of five LSS justice innovation pilot projects show they are heading in the right direction. (For background about the projects, see the **Justice Innovation and Transformation Initiatives fact sheets here.**)

The preliminary results show that:

- the **Expanded Criminal Duty Counsel** project results in earlier resolutions (a 96% resolution rate for cases closed in the first three months), and increases access to criminal legal aid (of the 74 clients admitted in the first three months, 56 would not have been eligible for legal aid representation).
- the **Expanded Family Duty Counsel** project is making strong efforts to maintain continuity of counsel and most clients are satisfied with the services.
- the **Expanded Family LawLINE** project is improving clients' knowledge of family law process and legal options and about 43% are accessing the service before court proceedings or before they have a written agreement.
- the **Mediation Referral** project is helping clients feel supported but only longer term data will determine whether there has been an increase in access to mediation.
- the **Parents Legal Centre** has had an observable impact on the use of a collaborative approach to Family Case Planning Conferences at the court, and has the potential to increase the productivity of court appearances for clients and for making more effective use of other service providers and justice services.

The evaluation reports are on the **Service and program evaluations** page of the LSS website. Scroll down to the heading "Justice Innovation and Transformation Initiatives."

"...They were very helpful, treated me like a normal person and not a criminal. I was happy with how they talked to me."

Expanded Criminal Duty Counsel client

"It is difficult to deal with Justice. This was my first time and I had lots of questions....they helped me understand how the Justice system works."

The process evaluations were completed in October 2015. The final evaluations are underway and should be completed in June 2016.

Parents Legal Centre client

The BC Ministry of Justice is funding the projects until March 31, 2017.



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