

Legal Aid BC Update

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



LSS turns 35 years old

LSS recently celebrated **35 years of operations**. On October 1, 1979, we began serving British Columbians who faced barriers to accessing justice. The society is both the product of legislation – the Legal Services Society Act – and the merger of two organizations – the Legal Services Commission and Legal Aid Society.

LSS is a much different organization than it was 35 years ago. In 1979, we had 14 members on our board of directors; now we have a more efficient 9. When we began, the LSS Act said the society must ensure that the services ordinarily provided by a lawyer were available to poor and otherwise disadvantaged people. Under that Act, LSS was routinely sued when clients were refused services. The budget simply wasn't large enough to cover the demand. Throughout much of the 1980s, LSS faced fiscal problems, as funding was routinely increased and decreased.

We have a smaller mandate now, and while we still struggle to meet the demand for our services, we continue to find creative ways to respond to those who most need our help.

Family law programs launched at Victoria Justice Access Centre



LSS Board Chair Tom Christensen, BC Attorney General Suzanne Anton and Lead Family Duty Counsel Margaret Payne

LSS is launching two pilot programs in October: expanded family duty counsel services are being introduced at the Victoria Justice Access Centre (JAC), and Family LawLINE, our province-wide phone advice line, will now be able to offer up to six hours with the same lawyer.

Lead Family Duty Counsel at the JAC will provide on-site management to increase operational efficiency and the quality of duty counsel services. The new program will provide clients with legal coaching to empower them to take the next steps in resolving their case. It will also cover areas of the law that are not eligible for legal aid representation, such as divorce, child and

spousal support, and parenting issues.

Family LawLINE, already a proven success, will soon offer additional unbundled services, such as drafting documents, settlement preparation, and preparation for court.

Both programs are funded for three years out of the Ministry of Justice's Justice Transformation Initiative, by which time we will have evaluated their effectiveness. Three more pilot projects under this initiative will begin in 2014/15.

For more about the launch of these two family law programs, read the **Ministry of Justice news release**.

LSS Board considers best ways to measure success

The LSS Board of Directors recently held its annual strategic planning session. This year, the focus of the session was key performance measures. The board and LSS managers heard from Glenn Wong, a Vancouver-based consultant, who described the difference between measures that managers need versus what a board needs. This was followed up by a dialogue with Dr. Yvon Dandurand, a criminology professor at the University of the Fraser Valley, who shared his thoughts on measuring the efficiency and effectiveness of BC's justice system. He noted that it is often difficult to get the statistical data needed to measure the success of justice reforms.

The future of online legal services

LSS had two special guests in September. Representatives from HiiL (Hague Institute for the Internationalization of Law) visited the society to demonstrate the second release of its groundbreaking Dutch online diagnosis and triage tool **Rechtwijzer** ("Signpost to Justice"). The new separation and divorce tool was aptly described in a recent **Vancouver Sun article**.

Rechtwijzer is the inspiration behind MyLawBC, the interactive website LSS will develop in 2014/15. HiiL met with LSS staff to share its experiences and help our Community and Publishing Services team map out a development process for creating MyLawBC.

Our next visitor was Roger Smith, OBE, a leading legal commentator and researcher based in England. He spoke about the digital delivery of legal services as "exciting, developing, and unpredictable." Some developments he noted were online unbundled legal services, aggregator sites, videos, and the use of avatars to guide people to online information.



Smith described a new frontier where online services will move away from information towards advice and resolution, and from static to dynamic interaction. While he sees a future where websites will incorporate personalized assistance, for some individuals it will still be necessary to integrate a face-to-face component.



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