

# Legal Aid BC Update

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



As we continue along our steady course at the Legal Services Society (LSS), we are pleased with our progress on increasing services to clients, largely made possible by the BC government's increase in legal aid funding.

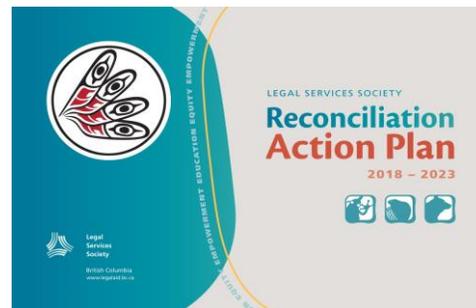
We are busy improving family and criminal law services, as well as enhancing Indigenous client services. More on that, below.

## Taking action towards reconciliation

We recently announced our new [Reconciliation Action Plan](#) (RAP), which will guide LSS's work both in advancing reconciliation and ensuring that legal aid services better meet the needs of Indigenous peoples in BC.

The plan aligns with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and guiding principles, the articles in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the recommendations in a report on Indigenous child welfare in BC prepared by Grand Chief Ed John. It contains concrete, measurable actions, and reflects LSS's commitment to reconciliation as an organization and as individual staff members.

The RAP's goals are to advance reconciliation through education, and by fostering equity and



empowering Indigenous peoples. To move these goals forward, we are increasing resources to support Indigenous justice initiatives in BC, and have already provided cultural competency training for most staff.

We will also be including Indigenous people, culture and knowledge in the development of LSS strategic priorities, policies, processes, and services.

## More Parents Legal Centres added

We're pleased to announce that we've opened three more Parents Legal Centres (PLCs) for child protection matters in Kamloops, Victoria and Williams Lake. This brings the total to nine PLCs across the province, adding to the new centres LSS recently opened in Campbell River, Duncan, Prince George, Smithers, and to the existing PLCs in Surrey and Vancouver. LSS's regional office in Terrace will also soon offer PLC services.

Staffed with a lawyer, advocate and legal assistant at each location, the centres' focus is to assist Indigenous communities with child protection matters, although anyone eligible can apply for services. PLCs provide early and collaborative services to parents (and people standing in for the parents) when a child is at risk of removal.

Read about how PLCs work in this [client story](#).

## Nova Scotia Legal Aid visits Vancouver and Surrey PLCs

In late April, LSS hosted Nova Scotia Legal Aid staff lawyers Alisha Brown-Fagan and Greg Englehutt, who visited our head office and PLCs in Vancouver and Surrey to learn how to create a similar PLC service of their own. Englehutt and Brown-Fagan, centre, are pictured here with PLC Vancouver staff.



## New services extend eligibility

We have just rolled out new [criminal early resolution services](#) across BC to help people who wouldn't normally qualify for legal aid.

Under relaxed eligibility rules, the new province-wide service makes legal aid better for both clients and courts by allowing lawyers to help a wider range of people, and it improves efficiencies in the justice system. Benefits include increased accessibility for clients, early resolution of cases, and the elimination of unnecessary court appearances. Lawyers can now help more legal aid clients who might otherwise have to represent themselves in court on matters that don't require a trial. The service will help clients resolve cases that are appropriate for resolution within 90 days and before trial dates are set.

In addition, for a trial period, we recently began providing family law services for people facing financial security issues. Those eligible can receive [unbundled lawyer services](#) for parts of a case involving financial issues resulting from a separation or divorce, such as child and spousal support, and the preservation and/or division of family property. Legal aid clients can get help to be able to negotiate a settlement or represent themselves in court – help for which they would not otherwise qualify.

## Board elects new chair

LSS board members elected a new chair on May 15. Long-time board member Jean Whittow, QC, replaced Celeste Haldane, who remains on the board's executive committee. Jean is associate counsel with the Vancouver firm Sugden, McFee & Roos LLP. Her practice is focussed on administrative law and professional regulation. You can read more about LSS's new chair, and our other board members, on the [LSS website](#).

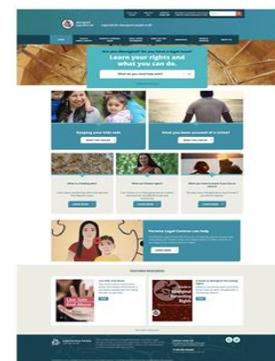


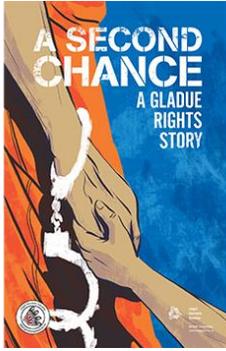
## Websites improved with users in mind

Our [Family Law in BC](#) website got a fresh new look through a redesign unveiled in May. We believe that changes made to the site, first created in 2002, make it easier for users to find the content they need and to use the information efficiently and effectively to address their legal issue.

We also recently refreshed our [Aboriginal Legal Aid in BC](#) website, offering new features and easier navigation to help people more easily find legal information and resources.

The site refresh is an important part of our [Reconciliation Action Plan](#), designed to increase access to justice for Indigenous people, by aligning with the goals of education, equity and empowerment.





## **New publication sheds light on Gladue rights of Indigenous peoples of BC**

LSS's newest graphic novel, *A Second Chance*, uses engaging storytelling, illustrations and plain language to explore the Gladue rights of Indigenous peoples in BC.

The publication tells the story of Myra, a wife and mother who is charged with assault with a weapon, who learns about her legal rights and gets a Gladue report for her sentencing hearing.

*A Second Chance* is [available online](#), in print and on [video](#).