

## Community Dialogues - Final Report

August 2020

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The Community Dialogues project is a strategic priority for LABC in 2019-20 and 2020-21.

The Community Dialogues were designed to assist LABC, justice system stakeholders and other agencies to:

- understand community perspectives on the barriers and challenges to accessing legal aid services, including the perspectives community workers, clients and users of services, and
- help LABC identify solutions that will improve accessibility.

Community feedback, study findings and recommendations are now provided to the LABC Board of Directors to assist it in planning future directions for legal aid services.

The project included in-person focus groups in communities around BC, online discussion boards (ODBs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) with clients and intermediaries covering different regions of BC and legal topics. We summarize the project objectives, methodology and results below.

### Project Description

The Community Dialogues engaged organizations, community workers and legal aid clients in a conversation to help us better understand their service needs, current barriers and service gaps, and how LABC can help to improve access in their communities.

The project set out to gather community perspectives on issues including:

- Current needs (legal and non-legal) in the community and the “big picture” issues and problems that members of the community face
- How LABC can ensure that services are highly accessible to every community, and to Indigenous people in BC particularly those located in rural and remote communities
- How LABC can ensure that legal aid services are delivered with - and perceived to offer - a high level of quality
- Community priorities for services
- How service delivery could be modified to ensure greater coordination across different sectors or across different types of services (e.g., legal, social, health)
- What types of agencies or service providers people in the community approach for help with problems that may have a legal solution, and why they approach these sources of help
- How LABC can raise awareness of services so that more people use services in a timely way to resolve problems or prevent problems from becoming more serious.

### How this study will help increase access to justice in BC

This study is important to LABC. We know that lack of access and limited awareness, along with negative perceptions about legal aid, continue to be significant and troubling barriers for many low-income people in BC.

The research increases access to justice in BC by enabling LABC to design and deliver services so that limited resources are used as effectively as possible and services reach as many people as possible. It helps us to better understand a range of non-technical barriers to services, as well as aspects of services that need improvement or present obstacles to resolving legal issues, and identify promising and innovative solutions.

The study informs LABC – and others in the justice sector – about the views of communities on the barriers, gaps and solutions, and the best ways to improve existing services and create new legal aid services. This information is critical to understanding clients’ and users’ needs so that new services are designed appropriately with accessibility front and centre in the design.

Study results will be used to:

- a. help the LABC Board of Directors to plan for the future of legal aid services in BC
- b. guide improvements to how we deliver legal aid services to address the barriers that prevent some people from using them
- c. identify opportunities to work with other sectors to deliver the services people need to prevent and resolve their legal issues
- d. improve training and outreach activities, and
- e. build knowledge within the justice sector regarding the needs of communities, barriers and potential solutions to increase access to justice.

The study is qualitative research, based on the views and opinions of ordinary BCers who have valuable insights to share about their experience of legal aid services. The views expressed by participants were based on their own experience of legal aid services, or their experience helping others. The results provide signposts for directions to take in improving or designing future services by offering ideas and deeper insights into needs. We did not expect to produce quantifiable data that could be projected to all clients or communities.

This project was led by the Public Legal Information and Applications Division at LABC, in collaboration with Strategic Policy & Planning and Indigenous Services.

## Background

LABC has engaged in structured community dialogues in the past, for example with Indigenous leadership in communities around BC a few years ago. This formed the basis for developing our Reconciliation Action Plan. We also held dialogues in the course of developing our community engagement strategy, which led to our successful Community Partners program.

Community dialogues offered an opportunity for reflection and deeper consideration of issues facing communities. This approach gave a nuanced understanding of community needs. It does not replace other survey methodologies. However, it does provide insights that other formats cannot duplicate.

## Methodology

We carried this work out between June 2019 and June 2020. We contacted community workers and clients who previously consented to being contacted about legal aid services. Participation was voluntary. There was a small honorarium for participating in the online research and phone interviews. Participants in focus groups did not receive an incentive as there were already participating in our free regional workshops or conferences.

The study looked at how people access legal services, what barriers prevent them from accessing legal services, and what steps could be taken to improve services. Methods consisted of:

- 6 in-person focus groups held with more than 169 community workers in communities around BC. The focus groups were held in conjunction with regional legal aid conferences in Cranbrook, Abbotsford, Hope, Port Hardy and Fort Nelson. We also held a focus group at the Provincial Advocate's Conference, an annual event in Vancouver co-funded by the Law Foundation and LABC, which draws participants from around BC.
- 6 ODBs with 53 community workers (two specifically designed for Indigenous communities). These ODBs were organized as regional events. The ODBs were specific to criminal, family and child protection issues.
- 3 ODBs and additional IDIs totalling 40 clients. The client ODBs and individual interviews were also topic-specific.

The intent was to gather input from a representative group of clients and community workers from all regions of BC and experiencing or addressing a range of legal issues. We cannot be certain that the breakdown of participation by community was representative of community workers or clients as a whole. However, the fact that more than 260 BCers participated – from all areas of the province - is significant.

The study was not specific to Indigenous communities, but engaged these communities through participation in focus groups, ODBs and IDIs. Two of the focus groups – Port Hardy and Hope – were designed specifically for an Indigenous audience, and drew a total of 39 participants. Others such as Fort Nelson, while not specifically designed for Indigenous communities, also attracted significant representation. Indigenous ODBs on criminal law issues were held for the Williams Lake region, drawing 8 participants. In the Northern region, 7 clients and 8 community workers participated in an ODB on child protection issues.

## Challenges and Learnings

We encountered some challenges during the study, particularly after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Though we carried out our planned number of in person focus groups before the “stay at home” measures were introduced, we lost the opportunity to hold more of the focus groups during the spring and summer of 2020. It also proved difficult to contact clients for participation in ODBs. Some clients had moved or did not respond or attend ODBs as expected. We switched from ODBs to in-depth client interviews, one on one, in the later stages of the project.

With community workers, focus groups and ODBs were equally successful. ODBs are more flexible for workers to access when they are ready to participate and are more cost-efficient. However, focus

groups may lend themselves to higher participation rates as the workers are already gathered to attend a workshop or conference, and face-to-face meetings are qualitatively different experiences.

The project was dependent on the existing knowledge base in the community, which was variable. Experienced advocates tended to be more familiar with legal aid service delivery, but other participants were sometimes less well-informed. Views expressed sometimes revealed limited experience accessing particular services or knowledge about legal aid in general. We provide context to address these gaps where appropriate in the ODB report.

Although not specifically addressed in this study, lack of awareness of legal aid services is a chronic issue in communities around BC, in spite of continuing efforts through trainings (such as our conferences and workshops); and public legal information (in print, online or through social media). High turnover among frontline workers and the social impacts of poverty on clients contribute significantly to the knowledge gap.

Finally, given differing formats and delivery methods used to meet the requirements of in person vs online dialogues, the feedback is not easily merged into one set of results. As noted earlier, the study was seeking qualitative feedback, not quantifiable information.

## The Feedback: A Snapshot

Detailed notes from the in-person focus groups, and the Sentis report on the ODBs and IDIs are attached. There were striking similarities in the needs expressed, regardless of the platform provided for giving feedback. Common themes are summarized below:

- **greater awareness and increased exposure to legal aid services is needed** – both clients/users of services and community workers would benefit from more knowledge, so that they can access and use legal aid services
- **client-centric services adapted to the needs of the client are needed**, to be considered highly accessible – looking at transportation needs of clients, available hours for service, flexible intake processes, problem types covered, availability of interpreters, the emotional state of clients who are often traumatized, training community workers to provide more process guidance and to be culturally competent, and other hallmarks of highly accessible legal aid services.
- **navigation and guidance and step by step assistance are needed** – simple, easy to follow instructions supported by personal assistance of a knowledgeable person who can help people take next steps, providing seamless access to a range of services that can help to resolve a legal issue. The legal aid intake process needs to be transparent and consistent, with more ways to give feedback, including complaints.
- **Balanced online and in person assistance are needed** - assistance takes many forms, and there is a particular need for more “hands-on”, in person, or individualized support. Cellular service and Internet are increasingly available but still not universally accessible to clients.
- **Guidance to holistic services is needed**, that can help them address their related issues that may or may not have a legal remedy, like lack of housing –the best approach may be to provide the legal services needed, and guide people to other services or resources that can meet those related needs.

## Next Steps

After review by LABC, the Community Dialogues project report will be made publicly available through the LABC website. LABC will circulate the research report to the Law Foundation, and to other BC justice system stakeholders who may have an interest. The report may also be presented at conferences or circulated by other means.

Attachments:

A: LABC Community Dialogues Final Report (Sentis Research)

B: Consolidated Feedback Notes – in person focus groups



# Legal Aid BC Community Dialogues on Legal Aid

PREPARED FOR

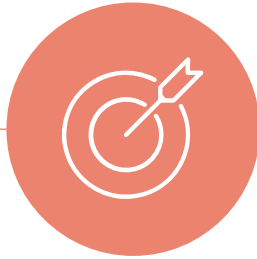
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August 7, 2020

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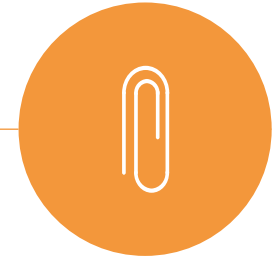
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# Objectives & Approach



# BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVES

Legal Aid BC partnered with Sentis to help establish future service priorities by engaging with clients and community workers (i.e. intermediaries). Legal Aid wants to better understand service needs, current barriers and how it can help reduce these barriers in the community.

Specific goals of the research included gaining a better understanding of:

- ➔ Current **needs** (both legal and non-legal) in the community and the **biggest issues and problems** that members of the community face
- ➔ How Legal Aid can ensure services are highly **accessible** and delivered with a high level of **quality**
- ➔ How service delivery could be modified to ensure **greater coordination** across different types of services (e.g., legal, social, health)
- ➔ What agencies or service providers people in the community **approach for help** with problems that might have a legal component, and **why** they choose these sources of help

In July 2019, Sentis was enlisted to conduct a pilot wave for this research project. Two online discussion boards were conducted – one with family law clients living in Metro Vancouver, Surrey or Fraser Valley and one with intermediaries (community workers) who provide support to people with family and related issues living in the same region.

Sentis was enlisted again in early 2020 to conduct an additional 5 sets of discussions among clients and intermediaries in other regions of British Columbia and across other areas of law.

This report contains the combined findings from both the 2019 pilot wave and the discussions conducted in 2020.

# APPROACH

## Clients



### **In-depth telephone interviews with clients who applied for representation**

*(\*Note: the July 2019 pilot and sets 1 and 2 in 2020 were conducted via online discussion boards (ODBs). However, due to the difficulty with achieving high participation from clients in the discussion boards, the methodology was changed to in-depth interviews (IDIs). Please see slide 7 for more details.)*



Interviews lasted about **25 to 30 minutes**



Participants received a **\$50 Save-On-Foods gift card** as a thank you for their time

## Intermediaries



### **2-day online discussion board**



Participants spent around **20 minutes** answering the questions each day



Participants received a **\$50 Save-On-Foods gift card** as a thank you for their time

# SUMMARY OF DIALOGUES

	Region / Area of Law / Client Type	Clients	Intermediaries
<b>Pilot</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Metro Vancouver / Surrey / Fraser Valley</li> <li>&gt; Family law</li> </ul>	ODB: July 16 - 18, 2019 6 participants (+ 2 partials)	ODB: July 10 - 12, 2019 8 participants (+ 3 partials)
<b>Set #1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Williams Lake</li> <li>&gt; Criminal law</li> <li>&gt; Focus on Indigenous clients / services</li> </ul>	ODB: February 23 & 24, 2020 1 participant	ODB: February 18 & 19, 2020 6 participants (+ 1 partial)
<b>Set #2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Southern Vancouver Island</li> <li>&gt; Family law</li> </ul>	ODB: March 16 & 17, 2020 6 participants (+ 1 partial)  IDIs: March 24 - 26 3 participants	ODB: March 9 & 10, 2020 9 participants
<b>Set #3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; North</li> <li>&gt; Child protection cases</li> <li>&gt; Focus on Indigenous clients / services</li> </ul>	IDIs: March 30 - April 3 7 participants	ODB: March 23 & 24, 2020 7 participants (+ 1 partial)
<b>Set #4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; North / Northwest</li> <li>&gt; Criminal law</li> </ul>	IDIs: April 20 - 24 6 participants	ODB: April 14 & 15, 2020 9 participants
<b>Set #5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Interior / Okanagan / Kootenays</li> <li>&gt; Child protection cases</li> </ul>	IDIs: May 11 - 15 8 participants	ODB: May 4 & 5, 2020 8 participants (+ 1 partial)
		<b>Total of 40 clients interviewed</b>	<b>Total of 53 intermediaries interviewed</b>

*Note: Due to the low participation rate in the Client ODBs for Set #1 and Set #2, the remainder of the client research was conducted via in-depth interviews (IDIs). For Client Set #2, IDIs were also conducted to supplement the ODB responses; however, there were no additional clients available to contact for Set #1.*

# METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES & LEARNINGS

The original methodology for this study consisted of conducting online discussion boards with both intermediaries and Legal Aid BC clients. This methodology proved successful in the pilot with Lower Mainland/Fraser Valley family law clients and intermediaries. However, in the first client online discussion board in February 2020 with Indigenous, criminal law clients in the North, only one client participated. Note that Sentis recruited these criminal clients without major challenges and confirmed their attendance prior to the discussion. Sentis and Legal Aid BC felt that the transient nature of criminal law clients may have been a contributing factor to the non-participation.

Since the second client online discussion board was scheduled to be with family law clients (and the pilot study had good participation from this group), Sentis proceeded with recruiting for the next online discussion, which was scheduled for March 16 and 17, 2020. Unfortunately, that turned out to be the start of the 'Shelter in Place' response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of 15 clients recruited and confirmed, a total of 6 clients participated in the online discussion (plus one who participated one day out of two).

Hence, because of the uncertainty COVID-19 brought to the situation and the lack of participation in the first online discussion, Sentis and Legal Aid BC decided to be prudent and switched the methodology for the clients and conducted in-depth telephone interviews instead for the remaining three sets of discussions.

*...continued on the following slide*

# METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES & LEARNINGS (cont'd)

For future research, Legal Aid BC will want to consider the following learnings:

- ➔ **In-depth interviews provide a better communication forum for clients for a variety of reasons.**
  - Many clients like to 'tell their story' and that often needs to be addressed before clients can turn their attention to questions about Legal Aid service quality, etc. Online discussion boards tend to be more linear – question posed, question answered – and do not provide the same opportunity to 'get the story'.
  - Sentis' recruiting team found it easier to schedule client in-depth interviews rather than online discussions because clients could pick a day and time that worked for them rather than having to commit to the days Sentis had scheduled for the online discussions.
  - Additionally, the time commitment with an in-depth interview is shorter - 25-minutes on the phone versus 2 separate days of 20-minute online discussions.
  - Lastly, while some clients were interested in participating in the online discussions, they opted out because they did not have reliable internet and/or were uncomfortable to commit because they felt they did not have the technical or computer skills to participate.
  
- ➔ **Online discussion boards work well for intermediaries and, also for certain client groups.** Community agency workers or intermediaries tend to be passionate individuals who are generally forthcoming with their experiences, opinions and recommendations. The online discussion format works well with this group as they can log on and respond to the daily questions at their convenience during their workday. Some client groups (such as family law or CFCSA clients) also tend to respond moderately well to this methodology with detailed responses and opinions as was evidenced in the pilot and in the second discussion held in March. The issue of anonymity during online discussions needs to be clearly communicated during the recruitment process, as this was a common area of questioning during recruiting.

# In-Person Focus Groups

Legal Aid BC also facilitated a series of in-person focus groups with representatives from community agencies throughout BC.

Location	Number of Participants	Date
Richmond	12	October 2019
Fort Nelson	22	June 2019
Cranbrook	38	July 2019
Hope	20	January 2020
Abbotsford	60	January 2020
Port Hardy	17	February 2020
<b>Total</b>	<b>169</b>	

Community agencies from the surrounding area participated at each location. The topics and questions covered in these sessions are very similar to those covered in the consultations with intermediaries and clients that Sentis conducted. The findings were also largely similar, but there were a few additional findings that emerged from the in-person focus groups. In the report, the findings from the in-person focus groups with community agencies are referred to as the findings from the 'community agencies'.

# Important to Keep in Mind...

## As with any qualitative research, there are some things to be aware of:

- ✦ Views can't be quantified or projected to all clients / intermediaries. This doesn't make the qualitative research "unreliable" – it simply has a different purpose than quantitative research. The purpose is to gain a deeper understanding of the client journey as they seek assistance with their legal issues, *how clients and intermediaries perceive Legal Aid services*, and the ideas they have for the role Legal Aid BC can play in the future. Hence, this report is aimed at highlighting service areas where greater communication, additional focus and/or improvement would likely be beneficial for Legal Aid BC clients.
- ✦ Further, with this study, only clients who had applied for Legal Aid representation were interviewed because of practical considerations (Legal Aid had contact information for these clients). Therefore, their perceptions and experiences do not always represent all Legal Aid BC clients, but do provide insights that can be beneficial to all or most clients.
- ✦ On select slides (15 and 18) findings from other Legal Aid BC research (i.e. 2018 Client Survey and the 2018 Everyday Legal Problem Survey with low income British Columbians) have been presented. The goal of providing these findings is to provide greater context to some of the areas explored in this research initiative, rather than to make direct comparisons to these other studies (since the sample compositions are different).



Findings



## Sentis identified five factors that can shape clients' experiences with Legal Aid BC

Through our discussions with clients and intermediaries, we identified five factors that can shape how clients experience Legal Aid BC services and provide context for this report's findings 1) the **emotional state** of many clients, 2) **lack of awareness** of Legal Aid BC services, 3) **eligibility requirements** that exclude those who need legal help but can't afford a lawyer, 4) **not allotting enough hours** to resolve many family law cases, 5) and **accessibility**.

- 1. Client Emotional State.** Given the seriousness of the issues many clients are dealing with (e.g. violence in the home, removal of a child, facing a criminal charge, etc.) they are often in a highly emotional state – they are stressed, feel alone, sometimes embarrassed, and in some instances, even frantic. This can make it hard for these clients to process even relatively straightforward information and instructions. **This reinforces the need for extremely simple communication. Intermediaries and clients note that communication needs to be free of legal jargon and framed as a series of steps - e.g., first this will happen, then this, etc.** Also, Sentis recommends that framing communications in an inclusive manner will help clients feel supported and less alone in the process – e.g., instead of saying “you need to get X”, saying “we need to get you X”.
- 2. Lack of Awareness of Services.** It was clear from our discussions that a **significant barrier to accessing legal aid services is a lack of awareness of what services are available** – or not knowing what services would be most appropriate to access in a particular situation. Therefore, we recommend that priority be placed on outreach activities and awareness-raising efforts.
- 3. Eligibility Requirements.** The current eligibility requirements for legal aid are structured such that many individuals who want legal help but can't afford a lawyer don't qualify for legal aid. What this means is that many individuals who turn to legal aid for help don't get the help they came to Legal Aid BC for. **This initial 'rejection experience' can negatively colour how individuals view legal aid generally and may lead them to assume that Legal Aid BC does not have other resources that can help them address their legal issue.**

## Five factors that can shape clients' experiences with Legal Aid BC, cont'd.

- 4. Limit on Hours.** Even though Legal Aid BC recently increased the number of hours a lawyer can work on family representation cases, some family law clients continue to feel that the time available to tariff lawyers is not enough to see their cases through to resolution. As a result, some family law clients feel they are left hanging once tariff lawyer hours run out, or, tariff lawyers are delivering services beyond what they are being compensated for. Some clients noted that they were surprised to learn that their hours ran out. Therefore, at minimum, **it is important for Legal Aid BC to ensure that expectations regarding the number of hours that clients are approved for is clearly communicated at the outset.**
- 5. Accessibility.** Accessibility is a reoccurring barrier among many of the intermediaries and clients in the Interior and Northern areas of the province. Sentis found that **the challenges clients raised when it came to accessibility tended to center around two components – 1) available transportation to reach Legal Aid BC offices/agencies and 2) hours of operation of the offices/duty counsel.** While Legal Aid BC phone service is available to these clients, transportation and hours of operation tended to be where they felt challenges still remain.

When it comes to transportation, many clients reported that they do not have access to a private vehicle and must rely on others or use public transportation. The challenge with the latter is that in many Interior and Northern regions of the province public transportation service is infrequent and/or does not always sync up with Legal Aid BC office hours. A number of intermediaries and clients mentioned that transportation has become particularly problematic given that Greyhound no longer services their area.

While Legal Aid office hours are understandably more limited in the less populous areas of the province, **it would be helpful for those offices to review and possibly revise their hours of operation to better sync with available transportation.** Another option to address these accessibility challenges is to **further increase the focus on outreach services**, which is a common recommendation from intermediaries. One solution is to **find a neutral location partway between a Legal Aid office and nearby smaller communities / Indigenous communities where outreach services could be provided.** Another is to have Legal Aid BC coordinate transportation for clients or provide some funding to cover client transportation.

## Key Finding

# For Legal Aid BC to be considered highly accessible, services need to be client-centric

Financial eligibility is only one layer of Legal Aid access. Making legal aid highly accessible means adapting services to meet the needs of the client, and not always making the client the one who must adapt to the way the organization has structured the delivery of services.



Clients, intermediaries and community agencies are generally aligned regarding how Legal Aid BC can improve access. The starting point is eligibility – all groups would like to see the eligibility requirements expanded to include those who may not be at the poverty line, but cannot afford to hire a lawyer. **Access also means the following:**

- › Assistance with **transportation** to Legal Aid BC offices/agencies
- › **More time** with lawyers / duty counsel / Legal Aid BC staff
- › **Longer and better hours** of service – being able to seek help outside of standard business hours and at times that work better with available transportation
- › **Faster service and decisions** – given the extreme nature of many clients' situations (e.g., family violence, child protection cases) it can be traumatic to wait an extended period of time for a decision or for help
- › **Continuity of service** – having the same person(s) helping a client throughout the life of his or her case eases the burden on the client (who doesn't have to re-explain their case) and builds trust.
- › **Multiple service channels** – continuing to provide (more) services such as outreach programs/workers, Skype meetings, telephone meetings
- › **Language/cultural assistance** – having staff onsite / available by phone to translate and who understand various cultural issues/barriers (*While interpreter services are provided by LABC, it would seem that awareness of these services is not widespread.*)



*"Representation for family law cases is difficult to access in my community. Given rental prices alone, some who are in need of legal representation are ineligible based on their monthly income but are also working multiple jobs to make ends meet and are spending the vast majority of their income on living expenses." - Intermediary*

*"As for different cultural groups, I have had a number of clients from the Islamic Community who would prefer a lawyer from their community, particularly with understanding the laws in their marriage." - Intermediary*

*"Yes, we always hope to have legal clinic in our school where we work, we would like to set up a clinic in one of our schools where a lawyer can come on scheduled basis." - Intermediary*

*"I just kept going to duty counsel, you get a different lawyer each time, different wisdom. Sometimes helpful, sometimes not because they contradict sometimes." - Client*

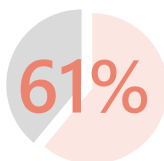
*"Provide more time than the allocated 6 hours [refers to LawLINE and the expanded FDC limit] to allow for any validation of final paperwork etc." - Client*

## Side Bar #2

# Previous research supports the need for more hands-on support by Legal Aid BC

The Everyday Legal Problems survey conducted in 2018 with low income British Columbians for Legal Aid BC and the 2018 Legal Aid BC Client Survey both support greater individualized and in-depth service by trained staff.

Over 60% of low-income BC residents who resolved their problem *without* legal assistance, but think they would have had a better outcome with assistance, agree that **what would have helped is to have someone to explain the legal aspects/help with forms or documents.**



Top 3 reasons low income individuals experiencing a serious problem did not take action

- 1 I didn't know what to do
- 2 I thought nothing could be done
- 3 I thought it would be too stressful

It is not a stretch to assume that 'going the extra mile' includes following up with clients, providing step-by-step assistance and generally providing more individualized support.

From a list of 8 service aspects clients assessed in the 2018 Legal Aid BC Client Survey, 'legal aid staff going the extra mile' was rated the least positively. However, it is one of the aspects that most impacts how clients feel about the service they receive from legal aid.

Legal aid staff went the extra mile to make sure I got what I needed



## 'Navigation' and 'guidance' should be central service delivery principles

Legal issues are rarely straightforward, especially when children and families are involved. The level of assistance that is needed for a legal aid 'transaction' can be high – and in some cases, the assistance of a knowledgeable person who can help clients navigate the system can be critical to clients seeing their legal issue through to a resolution.



Navigating the legal system and the supporting service network can be challenging. Again, add to the mix a client who is in a highly emotional state, and it multiplies the need for one-on-one assistance through every step of the process. While the need for one-on-one assistance is not a new insight, the depth of that need, and the level of support that clients actually require is something we heard repeatedly in the discussions.

In more remote communities, where reliable access to phones and the internet is by no means a given, providing access to someone who can help navigate and guide the client is all the more important. This assistance (or access) could come in the form of public legal information resources, in print or online, that clients can access with assistance from a knowledgeable individual to help guide them and to answer any questions they may have.

Community agencies also emphasized the need for assisted navigation, noting that a system of having many siloed services that currently don't work collaboratively makes navigation that much harder – even for advocates. **They suggested that anything that can be done to reduce the steps required to get services would be beneficial**, and noted that some clients can be re-traumatized by having to go to multiple agencies to seek help.

Consistent follow-up is another part of the process. Clients often receive guidance, hit a roadblock of some kind, and need further instruction on where to go/what to do next. **Follow-up by someone who knows their case is a key part of successful legal resolution and reduces the likelihood that clients will give up and abandon their case.**



*"If we had something where people could access a computer and someone be there, with experience, to help them through the process it would be more effective and empowering for the client." - Intermediary*

*"I find youth tend give up quickly if they can't talk to someone right away or find information with a simple google search." - Intermediary*

*"It would be great to have a step by step brochure and some examples to know the correct paper you need to file and how to word it, also letting you know the time period in between each step." - Client*

*"Have the legal aid lawyer contact the person needing help within 24 hours not 2 or 4 days later." - Client*

*"I still have ongoing legal challenges that need to be resolved and my feeling is that my lawyer and case worker are not able help me or give instructions for what specific actions I need to start and complete to get them resolved." – Client*

## Key Finding

# Legal Aid BC should balance online services with a human touch

Online resources are relied upon by clients, intermediaries and community agencies – and they recognize the role these resources will continue to play in legal aid service delivery in the future. However, online resources don't eliminate the need that clients have for guidance from Legal Aid BC staff and community partners. In fact, the rapid increase in online resource options probably makes the availability of those who can assist the client with their journey toward resolution all the more important.



As noted earlier, navigating the legal system can be tricky and time consuming. Online resources have the potential to guide clients toward the help they need. However, clients, intermediaries, and community agencies are clear that there still remains a **need for human guidance**.

**The 'step-by-step' help that clients frequently mention is just as relevant in the context of navigating the online environment as it is when filling out a paper form.**

Further, many clients seeking help are highly anxious and stressed. Directing these clients online – without providing guidance on how to navigate online – may increase anxiety further, and may lead these clients to abandon their search for help.

Also, clients aren't always computer savvy and may not have a computer and/or internet access – or access to a smart phone. Therefore, they need to rely on Legal Aid and/or supporting service organizations to provide access, and a person who can lead the way when it comes to navigating online resources. (Note that clients are hesitant to use computers in public locations like libraries and community centres if those locations don't have a way for clients to maintain privacy while they are going online.)



*"...but they [LABC] do a good job providing the information to clients, but majority of clients cannot do the work on computers, whether it be access to computers, or the client not understanding the process and terminology."*  
- Intermediary

*"Some clients feel they are always referred to computers to find guidance, and they don't have much experience with computers, and still find it hard to follow the instructions when they don't understand the language being used. It is already a stressful situation and becomes only worse when they are not familiar with the process."* - Intermediary

*"I always felt rushed and because I was inexperienced on the computer it took me three or four times longer than people who were computer savvy."*  
- Client

*"I would need someone to walk me through the initial way how to use online effectively and a brochure wouldn't hurt either. I am a visual person. I like to hear, see and then have hands-on practice."* - Client

# Side Bar #3

## Previous research supports a mixed approach to providing Legal Aid services

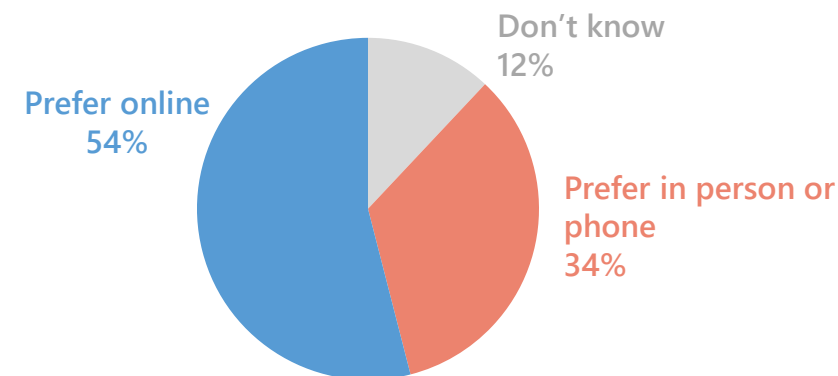
The 2018 Legal Aid BC Client Survey makes it clear while the world is going digital and most Legal Aid clients own a cell phone, there still remains some clients who are not online. Further, whether or not they own a device, some clients prefer to talk to a person rather than go online.

While the majority of Legal Aid BC clients report having a computer/laptop/tablet, **younger clients, and especially Indigenous and immigration clients are less likely to own one**

Clients Who Own a Computer, Laptop or Tablet	
<b>70%</b>	All clients
<b>62%</b>	Clients 18 to 34
<b>53%</b>	Indigenous clients
<b>52%</b>	Immigration law clients

**88% of clients own a cell phone and over half report having wifi & a data plan**

Preference for Applying for Legal Aid Online rather than in person or by phone



Prefer communicating about my case...





# Opinions are mixed when it comes to the role Legal Aid BC should play in helping clients with their related issues



While almost all Legal Aid BC clients have issues that are related in some way to their legal problems, intermediaries and clients have mixed views as to how deep a role Legal Aid should play in helping with these issues



Of all the issues faced by Legal Aid clients, housing, family issues, income security, substance abuse, and mental health/trauma top the list. Most clients face numerous, interconnected issues that tie directly to their legal problems. Intermediaries and community agencies feel that Legal Aid BC should play a role in helping clients address these issues, but there is no clear consensus as to what that role should look like. Some of the more common suggestions include:

- More one-on-one help with navigating the justice system so that clients can access the exact services they need quickly and 'red-tape' and multiple steps can be minimized
- More training of Legal Aid BC staff and lawyers so that they can better recognize and identify issues that clients are facing and direct them to the appropriate help/services

Among clients, having Legal Aid BC help with clients' associated issues draws mixed reactions. Some think Legal Aid BC should be involved – particularly in areas that often may have legal components like housing and employment. Others don't think that Legal Aid BC should be involved. Some of these clients already have a central hub for accessing services in their community so they see Legal Aid BC providing this kind of service as redundant. Others express worry that the focus on their legal problem or case may suffer if Legal Aid's attention is divided.

**Sentis' recommendation is to try to find the middle ground – having Legal Aid place clients' legal problems at the forefront, but as a secondary role, guide clients to resources that can help with their related issues.**



*"I'd like to see a dedicated Legal Aid BC staff member integrated into the centre as the go-to person for those individuals with unmet needs in the legal system. This would allow the Legal Aid BC staff member to collaborate with other service providers to map out a comprehensive, individualized plan of support that takes into account the greater context and circumstances of the individual." - Intermediary*

*"It'd probably be helpful in the future. It's just the way things are going now, the band is slowly cutting back on services, especially the patient travel. So if the Legal Aid can provide me the option for time to obtain counselling service, that would be very helpful." - Client*

*"So I would have to say no I'd just have to leave Legal Aid out of it on that aspect of it, you know, through treatment or housing ... very good at what they do, you know, with helping people out in the justice system. So with that being said to take it to another level and try to expand their services any further than what they do, I've got a feeling people would fall through the cracks." - Client*

*"I feel like especially with legal cases I feel like, especially if somebody is struggling with addiction, I think that the lawyers should, and Legal Aid should help the clients to access those so that they don't have all of that stress load on themselves." - Client*



## Key Finding

# Continued training can help Legal Aid BC staff and tariff lawyers interact with clients with more empathy

Suggestions elicited around training were aimed at helping Legal Aid BC ensure that it continues to refine its understanding of clients' contexts and challenges



Intermediaries, community agencies, and some clients, see more training as a way of continually improving the quality of Legal Aid BC service. They mention more training as part of the solution when it comes to building trust between Legal Aid BC and clients, offering more culturally appropriate services and when it comes to addressing the non-legal issues that are often related to clients' legal problems.

The types of training mentioned by intermediaries and community agencies included:

- Cultural sensitivity training
- Trauma-informed practice training
- Training in Indigenous cultures
- Cultural safety training
- Training in the dynamics of domestic violence
- Gender diversity awareness training
- Training for working with people with mental health issues and addiction

**Legal Aid BC does provide training in these areas. Continued training in these areas, and increasing awareness that Legal Aid BC provides this training, will illustrate that Legal Aid BC is committed to ensuring that staff and tariff lawyers gain a deeper understanding of their clients and can avoid the use of biases when interacting with them.**



*"Provide education to court administrative staff and Legal Aid lawyers on local Indigenous communities and history."*

*"I think all people who work for Legal Aid BC should be trained in Trauma Informed Practice."*

*"By knowing that Legal Aid advocates are trained lawyers and know a lot about social services and needs of marginalized people."*

*"Community training for service workers."*

– Intermediaries

## Experiences with tariff lawyers can be highly variable

### Key Finding

There is a great deal of variability in how clients perceive their lawyer's service – some have highly positive experiences while others feel they haven't been well served at all.



Clients' perceptions of service standards tend to be focused on the service basics – e.g. Is my lawyer keeping in regular contact? Did he/she arrive on time on my court date? etc. Clients – perhaps in part because they are getting a 'free' service – generally do not have high expectations when it comes to service – but they do have some standards.

When speaking with clients, the variability in service provided by tariff lawyers is notable. For some clients, this variability is considered 'the norm', and that it is luck that determines whether or not a client gets a Legal Aid lawyer committed to the client's case.

#### **More frequent communication is what stands out as needing the most attention when it comes to improving service quality from their lawyer.**

Clients need to know where their case stands (even if the answer is 'no change') and need the regular re-assurance that a call/contact from one's lawyer can bring.

One suggestion that community agencies made is for Legal Aid BC to allow clients to provide feedback about their experience in a more informal, anonymous manner. The current complaints process can be viewed as 'scary' because some clients worry that a formal complaint may lead to some kind of recrimination from the lawyer.

*"That's your lawyer, that's your person and I think that there should be more advocacy. Because again, in my experience, having Legal Aid, it has that taboo of "you're guilty". I don't know if that's just me. I've just spoken to other people and they're given like the bare bones. But again, that could be an individual thing. Like again, I got lucky with my particular lawyer."*

*"Personally my lawyer that I got for, from Legal Aid, he went above and beyond. And even before and after court, he sat down with me and he went through absolutely everything with me, which not a lot of people would have done."*

*"My experience has been completely positive, like I really like the lawyer that I have, she's really nice and knowledgeable as to what I should do or giving me the different options as to what to do and stuff like that, and it's overall very positive."*

*"Yeah, somebody who you feel has your back and is supporting you to be, this is what we've got to do. This is what we're going to do. And instead it's like I had to defend my situation to her. Which I felt like, I'm like, I'm not a lawyer, how am I, I don't – it didn't feel right."*

*"So he really has done nothing, and my boys have been gone for six months now. He hasn't fought for me. He hasn't done a damn thing for me like at all. He hasn't even stood up for me yet."*

*"Just getting a hold of the lawyer a lot. I had to phone him 100 times, and he just phones me when he feels like it. It just goes direct to voicemail. If he's going to be my lawyer, what's going on? Because I got his number and it seemed like months for him to answer."*

– Clients

# Key Finding

## Clients would benefit from greater awareness and increased exposure to legal aid services

Both intermediaries and clients feel that Legal Aid BC needs more exposure and advertising of its services in the community beyond directing people to services and/or websites



More community-based initiatives and general advertising are what intermediaries, community agencies and clients feel would benefit those requiring help with their legal issue and/or problems related to their legal issue.

Because of the wide range of issues that are being dealt with, the unique situation of each client, and the emotional state of clients (it is tough to take in information when a person is stressed, worried, etc.), there is a need for more, and a wider variety of, legal aid communication/advertising/exposure.

**Legal Aid is already on the right track with its communication – using a variety of different formats to promote its services** (drop-in/outreach services at community centres, podcasts, YouTube videos, posters at public spaces like supermarkets or coffee shops, representatives at info booths at cultural events, social media, promotional materials, training and community engagement activities). The challenge is that some clients, intermediaries and community agencies are simply unaware that this is currently being done. **Legal Aid BC would benefit from developing an engagement strategy that addresses all levels of engagement.**



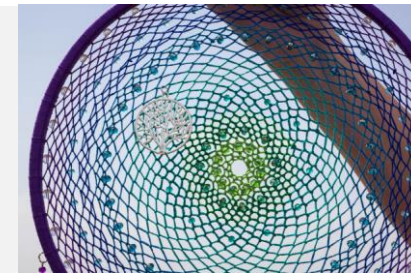
*“Advertisement in clients' language & ads on TV with case scenario on how LABC can help them. Increase the exposure of LABC (helps promote a positive image and re-ensure confidentiality about the service provided).” - Intermediary*

*“Perhaps something like outreach in the community or a weekly drop-in clinic that is well advertised and accessible by transit.” - Intermediary*

*“Have a suggestion box that is easy to access online and in person. Have these suggestions read weekly and bring these suggestions up at board meetings or Legal Aid meetings. Have free training classes for people going through different things legally so they can feel confident in what they are doing. Example divorce, domestic abuse case: how a single woman can find out what her rights are so she can get child support. If they did classes to teach people what to do and how to do it.” – Client*

## While Indigenous clients are similar to other Legal Aid BC clients in many ways, they face some unique challenges

Unique to Indigenous clients are the challenges faced by those living on versus off-reserve, the lack of privacy associated with on-reserve services, and their different perspective than intermediaries on Legal Aid offering culturally appropriate services



Indigenous clients living off-reserve sometimes find that some resources (including legal resources) are unavailable to them – because they do not live with their band. Meanwhile, those who live on-reserve sometimes express concerns around privacy and/or confidentiality. They don't want others to find out about their legal issues if they seek on-reserve help. **This is where outreach services could again be effective if a neutral and easier-to-access location could be established.**

When asked about Legal Aid BC's effectiveness at providing culturally appropriate services, intermediaries and community agencies tend to feel that more can be done and offer a multitude of suggestions (e.g. artwork displayed in offices, offering healing circles, involving Elders, trauma-informed training, etc.). The most common suggestions though are having more translators/translated materials and more staff training on Indigenous culture.

However, when Indigenous clients are asked about the cultural appropriateness of Legal Aid BC services, most have little to suggest and often say they feel things on this front are fine. This could be in part because they cannot envision what would make things better/easier. **The reality likely lies somewhere between the two views – more could be done, but Legal Aid BC has made efforts that Indigenous clients recognize and are benefitting from.**



*"I mean like our band doesn't help with anything because we live off reserve and there's really no other resources out there for anything else." – Indigenous Client*

*"Knowledge of cultural practices of the Indigenous people in the specific area." – Intermediary*

*"Encourage Elders to provide a team of support for people facing criminal matters, child protection matters and family law matters." – Intermediary*

*"Community training for service workers." – Intermediary*

*"Yes. I remember last – one of the times that I was there, they asked if I wanted to talk to someone that knew a lot about the band systems and what they could provide. And it just was kind of, it came as a surprise because I didn't think that it mattered that much. But no, they were prepared for absolutely everything." – Indigenous Client*

When specifically asked, most Indigenous clients would like to have more services specifically aimed at their legal issues and associated challenges. That said, having staff that are well-trained in Indigenous culture is not a substitute for having a person with strong Legal Aid knowledge who can help clients navigate the system, fill out forms, etc. **When that person can be both Indigenous and knowledgeable about the Legal Aid system it is a winning combination; however, a well-trained, knowledgeable, culturally-sensitive non-Indigenous staff member is a better solution than someone whose only credential is that they are Indigenous.**



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*"Right beside her is an Aboriginal court clerk, who does the same thing. And they're paying lots of money for these Aboriginal court clerks, right, which have no legal experience. I mean...I know her....Why would they put somebody with no court experience at all in a position like this that knows nothing about the legal system? I just don't understand it."*  
– Indigenous Client

*"I don't know. I just think that from my own perspective, being a First Nation's woman, I think there should be more services for Indigenous people. People like me that need legal help, legal questions, how can I go about this and that? Even if it's just personal matter or how to deal with family law. Because that would have been helpful for me, those kind of services for Indigenous people, yeah."*  
– Indigenous Client

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# Conclusions

# Meeting the Research Objectives

Legal Aid Wanted to Better Understand...	What We Learned
<p>Current <b>needs</b> (both legal and non-legal) in the community and the <b>biggest issues and problems</b> that members of the community face?</p>	<p>Clients want...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› To know what is out there and available to them</li> <li>› Help navigating the legal aid system and supporting service</li> <li>› Better and easier access to the system (this includes transportation, longer hours of operation, faster decisions, more allotted hours, etc.)</li> <li>› To be listened to and to have someone take the time to understand the client as a person not just a legal problem</li> <li>› More timely communication from Legal Aid lawyers without legal jargon</li> </ul> <p>Outside of Legal Aid, clients also need...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Help with housing. This is the issue that most often exacerbates their legal problems <u>and</u> is one of the main predictors of continuing legal problems</li> <li>› Support with addictions/substance abuse and mental health issues; the latter tends to be one of the most needed supports and often, the most lacking</li> </ul>
<p>How Legal Aid BC can ensure services are highly <b>accessible</b> and delivered with a high level of <b>quality</b>?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Maintain in-person service – online systems cannot replace clients’ needs to talk to a person for advice, emotional support and guidance</li> <li>› When possible, apply a service model that ensures clients stay with one person throughout the life of their case. The building of a relationship between Legal Aid staff and the client is how trust is earned. To paraphrase one intermediary ‘people tend to trust people, and are less inclined to trust the system - courts, governments, etc.’</li> <li>› Accessibility likely starts with broadening eligibility to include the ‘working poor’ and then follows with a mix of channels at the community level. Community level access must include a range of services to meet the wide variety of client circumstances and needs (e.g. outreach services, help with transportation, flexible office hours, etc.)</li> <li>› Focus on standardizing service levels – especially among tariff lawyers</li> </ul>





# Meeting the Research Objectives (cont'd)



Legal Aid Wanted to Better Understand...	What We Learned
<p>How service delivery could be modified to ensure <b>greater coordination</b> across different types of service (e.g., legal, social, health)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› Almost all clients had turned to at least two or more different agencies/organizations for help in the recent past. It is worth re-stating that support to find stable housing is a particularly acute issue, because the need stems from both financial circumstances and family circumstances (e.g., fleeing an abusive relationship)</li><li>› The key to coordination is centralization, and it was suggested that Legal Aid could serve as a centralized hub/initial point of contact. This would also help reduce feelings of rejection among clients, as they would see Legal Aid as a key referral point that would still be viewed as helpful even if the client did not receive legal representation from the organization</li></ul>
<p>What agencies or service providers people in the community <b>approach for help</b> with problems that might have a legal solution, and <b>why</b> they choose these sources of help?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› Given the highly emotional state of many clients during their journey for legal assistance, they are often looking for help in a number of places, but at the same time can be reticent to reach out due to shame or embarrassment about their situation</li><li>› The starting point has to be raising the awareness of Legal Aid, the services it provides and the different places people can go to get help. Variety in media, channels and messaging is critical to reaching potential clients. Examples are mobile legal aid workers, Skype meetings, advertising at community centres</li></ul>



# Channel Preferences

Channel	Intermediaries Suggest...	Clients Would Like...
 <b>In Person</b>	<p>While intermediaries generally feel in person service is available to most of their clients, <b>what they feel is missing is greater infrastructure to support this channel</b>. Infrastructure includes transit access and funding, language assistance, virtual meeting options, after work hours, drop-in clinics and more time with lawyers/paralegals</p>	<p>Clients think in person meetings are suitable for all types of law and areas of assistance, but want to see better hours of operation, more transportation options, language assistance, and some childcare options (playroom, video games for older children, etc.). <b>For an in person meeting to be successful the information being communicated has to be clear and current and clients need a lot of reassurance from staff</b></p>
 <b>Live Phone</b>	<p>Again, intermediaries feel this channel is widely available to clients and appropriate for most services, but feel <b>it needs to be better supported</b> by after work hours, more and easier-to-find postings of the contact numbers, shorter wait times and language assistance</p>	<p>What clients feel is appropriate to handle over the phone is going over all the steps that need to be followed (for all areas of law). <b>Clients think that to be successful, telephone communication need to provide clear direction, follow-up and wait times have to be short</b></p>
 <b>Text/Instant Messaging</b>	<p>According to intermediaries, this channel is not widely offered, if at all. <b>Intermediaries do not generally recommend this channel</b> for several reasons – the cost (which could be a burden on the client side), lack of confidentiality and the difficulty communicating about something that is often complex</p>	<p><b>Clients think this channel has its uses – but it is narrow.</b> Setting/confirming appointments, relaying simple information (e.g. a phone number or name) are seen as the best applications. Some clients voiced concern over texting charges saying they would need assistance with that</p>
 <b>Online Services</b>	<p>Intermediaries report this channel is available to clients, but <b>what is needed is more computer and Wifi access, assistance due to lower computer literacy among some clients, language options and a focus on making sites extremely easy to navigate</b></p>	<p>Clients feel they need more information on the types of law online services are available for. <b>Also, to be helpful to them, online services need to be safe/secure, easy to navigate and there needs to be assistance available in case a person gets 'stuck'.</b> Offering computer and/or Wifi access was also mentioned</p>



# Appendix



APPENDIX

# Recruitment Screeners

## Client In-Depth Interview Screener

Good afternoon/evening, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm calling from Sentis Research on behalf of Legal Aid BC (also known as the Legal Services Society or LSS). May I please speak to [ASK BY NAME]?

Hi [NAME], Legal Aid BC (or LSS) is doing some research in the form of in-depth telephone interviews and we are inviting legal aid clients like yourself to participate. We recognize the difficult times the CoVid19 virus has created for everyone and Legal Aid is placing its primary focus on helping those with the most critical legal needs. However, it does not want to lose track of this important project aimed at helping improve access to legal aid services.

Can I give you a few details about the in-depth interview?

- › FOR INDIGENOUS ODBs: The interview will focus on how you think legal aid can better serve the needs of urban and rural Indigenous people in BC. When we use the term Indigenous, we are referring to First Nations, Métis and Inuit people in BC. Your feedback will be used to help shape the future of legal aid in BC.
- › FOR NON-INDIGENOUS ODBs: The interview will focus on how you think legal aid can better serve the needs of people in BC. Your feedback will be used to help shape the future of legal aid in BC.

READ TO ALL:

- › The telephone interview will only take 20 to 30 minute and can be scheduled on a day and time that works for you. A professional researcher from Sentis Research, the firm Legal Aid is partnering with on this project, will call you at decided time and have a discussion with you about Legal Aid and your experience.
- › To thank you for your time and feedback you will be given a \$50 Save-On Foods gift card.
- › All of the feedback you provide is strictly confidential and your personal identity will not be shared with anyone.

A1. Are you interested and available to participate?

A2. Are you available at any of the following days/times? RECRUITER-READ OUT AVAILABLE DAYS AND TIME SLOTS?

1. Yes – set up appointment.
2. No – [GO TO TERMINATE MESSAGE]

Great! We have a few questions to make sure the discussion will be relevant to you. It will only take a couple of minutes.

A3. How many times have you ever used any legal aid services? An estimate is fine.

\_\_\_\_\_ times [LIMIT 0-20]

21. Over 20 times

- 98. Can't recall number of times but have used legal aid
- 99. Don't know if the services I used were part of legal aid

[IF QA3=0 GO TO TERMINATE MESSAGE]

A4. Did you use legal aid services in [REGION]? Or do you currently live in that area, or did you live there at the time of your legal aid case?

- 1. Yes [SKIP TO A5]
- 2. No [CONTINUE TO A4b]

A4b. Unfortunately, we are looking to speak with people who live or used legal aid services in a certain area of BC. Although you're not eligible to participate in this particular research, would you like us to keep your name on our list in case other research may come up in the future?

- 1. Yes [CONTINUE TO A4c]
- 2. No [THANK AND END CALL]

A4c. Okay, that's great. Can you please confirm the city where you live and the best phone number to reach you at?

City:  
Phone Number:

A5. That's it – you qualify for the in-depth interview! Before we end our call, can I just confirm your contact details? [INTERVIEWER: CONFIRM NAME AND EMAIL ADDRESS. READ BACK EMAIL ADDRESS TO RESPONDENT TO ENSURE IT IS CORRECT]

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Last Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

END PAGE FOR ALL OTHER QUALIFIERS

Thanks! We'll send you an email after this call confirming the details so you can mark it in your calendar. It will also include a support email you can contact if you run into any problems or need to get hold of us for any reason. Before I hang-up do you have any other questions for me today/tonight? REFER TO FAQs AS NEEDED.

TERMINATION MESSAGE

Thank you for your interest. For this study we are looking for a specific type of legal aid client. We appreciate your time and feedback.

## Intermediary Online Discussion Board Screener

[IF CONTACT NAME IN LIST] Good morning/afternoon, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm calling from Sentis Research on behalf of Legal Aid BC (also known as the Legal Services Society or LSS). May I please speak to [NAME ON LIST]?

RE-INTRODUCE IF NECESSARY

[IF NO CONTACT NAME IN LIST] Good morning/afternoon, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm calling from Sentis Research on behalf of Legal Aid BC. Legal Aid BC (also known as Legal Services Society or LSS) will soon be doing some research in the form of online discussions about legal aid services and we are inviting individuals who work in organizations like yours to participate. Could I speak to a person in your organization who would be best to take part in that discussion?

IF RESPONDENT REFUSES: Thank you and have a nice day.

Legal Aid BC (or LSS) will soon be doing some research in the form of online discussions and we are inviting individuals who work in organizations like yours to participate. We recognize the difficult times the CoVid19 virus has created for everyone and Legal Aid is placing its primary focus on helping those with the most critical legal needs. However, it does not want to lose track of this important project aimed at helping improve access to legal aid services.

Can I give you a few details about the discussion?

- › FOR INDIGENOUS ODBs: The discussions will focus on how you think legal aid can better serve the needs of Indigenous people in BC communities. Your feedback will be used to help shape the future of legal aid in BC.
- › FOR NON-INDIGENOUS ODBs: The discussions will focus on how you think legal aid can better serve the needs of BC communities. Your feedback will be used to help shape the future of legal aid in BC.

READ TO ALL:

- › The online discussions happen over 2 days and over that time you would be expected to log in each day and answer some questions and provide your feedback. In total, across the 2 days, you will spend only about 1 hour responding to questions.
- › If you participate over both days, you will be given a \$50 Save-On Foods gift card to thank you for your time.
- › All of the feedback you provide is strictly confidential and your personal identity will not be shared with anyone.

A1. Are you interested and available to participate? *Please note, as a participant you must have reliable access to a computer with internet and feel comfortable using email and an online chat platform.*

The online discussions are scheduled to occur on [INSERT ODB DATES].

1. Yes
2. No – [GO TO TERMINATE MESSAGE]

Great! We have a few questions to make sure the discussion will be relevant to you. It will only take a couple of minutes.

- A3. When it comes to legal issues, for which areas does your organization provide service?  
READ LIST. MULTIPLE RESPONSE. TO QUALIFY, THE RESPONDENT MUST PROVIDE SERVICE FOR THE AREA OF INTEREST (BUT CAN ALSO PROVIDE SERVICE IN OTHER AREAS AS WELL)

[QUALIFICATION TO BE ADJUSTED FOR EACH ODB SET]

1. Family issues
2. Child protection issues
3. Immigration
4. Criminal
5. Civil (landlord/tenant, welfare rights, debt, etc.)
6. Other services
7. Don't Know/Refused DO NOT READ

[IF TARGET AREA OF LAW NOT MENTIONED IN QA3 GO TO TERMINATE MESSAGE]

- A4. Do you currently work or provide services in [REGION]?

3. Yes [SKIP TO A5]
4. No [CONTINUE TO A4b]

A4b. Unfortunately, we are looking to speak with people who provide services in a certain area of BC. Although you're not eligible to participate in this particular research, would you like us to keep your name on our list in case other research may come up in the future?

3. Yes [CONTINUE TO A4c]
4. No [THANK AND END CALL]

A4c. Okay, that's great. Can you please confirm the name of your organization, the areas where your organization provides services, and your contact information?

Organization:  
Areas Provided Services:  
Name:  
Phone Number:  
Email:

[INTERVIEWER: READ BACK EMAIL ADDRESS & PHONE NUMBER TO RESPONDENT TO ENSURE IT IS CORRECT]

END PAGE

Thanks! We'll send you an email after this call confirming the details so you can mark it in your calendar. You'll also receive an email just prior to [OBD START DATE] that will provide you with instructions on how to

log into and participate in the online discussion. It will also include a support email you can contact if you run into any problems or need to get hold of us for any reason. Before I hang-up do you have any other questions for me today/tonight? REFER TO FAQs AS NEEDED.

TERMINATION MESSAGE

Thank you for your interest. For this study we are looking for individuals who work for a specific type of organization. We appreciate your time and feedback.



APPENDIX

# Discussion Questions



## In-Depth Interview Questions -- Clients

First, thank you again for taking the time to share your views with us. The discussion will focus on how you think Legal Aid BC (also known as the Legal Services Society or LSS) can better serve the needs of [Indigenous] people in BC. We may not be able to act on all of your suggestions but we will use your feedback to help shape our priorities for the future of legal aid in BC, and share it with the government and others in the justice system.

Please be assured that all of your feedback is confidential and will remain anonymous. Also remember that our goal is to get your thoughts and your opinions. We're not here to convince you to think one way or another about something. There are no wrong answers to our questions.

### WHERE DO [INDIGENOUS] PEOPLE TURN TO FOR SUPPORT SERVICES

Q1. We'd like to learn a bit more about your experiences with support services you have used to help you address important issues you have faced or are facing. These could be legal issues or issues other types of issues like employment, housing or family issues

Most recently, what types of agencies or organizations in your community have you turned to for help?

### SERVICES/SUPPORTS PROVIDED

Q2a. What services or support have you received recently from community agencies or other service providers?

Q2b. Were these services helpful? What made them helpful?

Q2c. What would have made them more helpful?

### GAPS IN SERVICES/SUPPORT

Q3a. Are there issues that you have needed support with but you have not been able to get the support you need?

Q3b. What types of issues are/were these?

Q3c. Did you try to get support for these issues? If yes, how did you go about trying to get support?

Q3d. Was there anything that made it hard for you to access the services and/or the support you needed? What made it hard?

Q3e. When you couldn't get the services/support you needed, did you try to resolve your issue in some other way? If yes, how?



### SUGGESTIONS FOR LEGAL AID BC

We'd like to learn how Legal Aid BC could best serve your needs.

What, if anything, could Legal Aid do to:

Q4a. Ensure you have a high level of trust in legal aid services

Q4b. Ensure services are culturally appropriate for [Indigenous] people

Q4c. Ensure services meet your needs

### HOW LEGAL AID BC (LSS) CAN HELP YOU WITH OTHER ISSUES YOU MAY FACE

Sometimes people experience both legal issues and other issues that might be related to their legal issue, like housing, financial issues, employment, and access to treatment.

Q1a. Do you think Legal Aid should play a role in helping [Indigenous] people with these other issues?

Q1b. In providing this type of help are there specific issues that Legal Aid should make "high priority"?

Q1c. Can you suggest specific ways that Legal Aid could provide this help or support?

Q1d. What benefits would this have [for Indigenous people]?

### ACCESSIBILITY OF LEGAL AID SERVICES

Q2a. Have you had challenges accessing Legal Aid services?

Q2b. What were the challenges?

### TIMELINESS OF LEGAL AID SERVICE DELIVERY

Q3. How could Legal Aid BC modify the way it currently provides services in order to make sure you can get the help you need in the most timely way?

### ACCESSIBILITY OF IN-PERSON SERVICES

There are different ways that people could access legal aid services, and we'd like to learn what your preferences are when it comes to accessing services using these different channels.

Q4a. What services would you prefer to get from Legal Aid in-person?

Q4b. What help would you need, if any, to use in-person services effectively?



#### ACCESSIBILITY OF PHONE SERVICES

Q5a. What services would you prefer to get from Legal Aid by speaking with a 'live person' on the phone at Legal Aid?

Q5b. What help would you need, if any, to use live phone services effectively?

#### ACCESSIBILITY OF TEXT/INSTANT MESSAGING SERVICES

Q6a. What services would you prefer to get from Legal Aid using text/instant messaging?

Q6b. What help would you need, if any, to use text/ instant messaging services effectively?

#### ACCESSIBILITY OF ONLINE SERVICES

Q7a. What services would you prefer to get from Legal Aid online?

Q7b. What help would you need, if any, to use online services effectively?

Thank you! Those are all our questions.



## Online Discussion Board Questions -- Intermediaries

### Introduction

This is Adam and [MODERATOR FROM LABC] and we'll be moderating this online discussion.

First, thank you again for taking the time to share your views with us. The online discussion will take place over the next two days.

The discussion will focus on how you think Legal Aid BC (also known as the Legal Services Society or LSS) can better serve the needs of Indigenous people in BC. We may not be able to act on all of your suggestions but we will use your feedback to help shape our priorities for the future of legal aid in BC, and share it with the government and others in the justice system.

Each day you'll be presented with a new set of questions and it should take about 25 minutes each day to share your feedback. Either myself or [MODERATOR FROM LABC] from Legal Aid BC (LSS) may follow up from time to time with some additional questions based on your feedback.

While other participants will be able to see your comments, please be assured that all of your feedback is confidential and will remain anonymous. Also remember that our goal is to get your thoughts and your opinions. We're not here to convince you to think one way or another about something. There are no wrong answers to our questions.

Also, for privacy reasons, we ask that you do not share any information that would identify you personally or anyone that was involved in your legal matter.

Please click on 'Day 1' on the right side of the screen to get started. Note that you must answer all questions to finish the day. We encourage you to review the responses from other participants and share your views and questions with them.

*Note: if you require technical support, please email [akendrick@sentisresearch.com](mailto:akendrick@sentisresearch.com)*

## Day 1

Welcome to Day 1 of our Online Discussion Board!

Today's discussion will focus on the main issues [Indigenous] clients face, as well as availability or gaps when it comes to the services available to clients.

It should take you about 25 minutes to answer today's questions.

### INVOLVEMENT WITH LEGAL AID BC (OR THE LEGAL SERVICES SOCIETY)

Q1a. Given that participants in this discussion may have different levels of involvement with the Legal Aid BC (or the Legal Services Society or LSS), can you share with us if you are...

- Very familiar with the services Legal Aid provides
- Somewhat familiar with the services Legal Aid provides
- Not very familiar with the services Legal Aid provides

Q1b. If you have any additional comments about your involvement with Legal Aid BC (LSS) please share them here.

To make sure all participants in the discussion are aware of the services that the Legal Aid BC (LSS) provides, please visit this web page before continuing: <https://legalaid.bc.ca/>

### MAIN ISSUES FACED BY [INDIGENOUS] CLIENTS

Q2. Thinking about the [Indigenous] people who come to you for help, what are the main issues that they face?

### SERVICES/SUPPORTS AVAILABLE

Q3a. What kinds of services/supports in your community do a particularly good job in helping [Indigenous] people with specific types of issues?

Q3b. What issues do they address well?

### SERVICES/SUPPORTS LACKING

Q4a. Are there issues your [Indigenous] clients face for which services/supports in your community are currently lacking?

Q4b. What types of issues are these?



## CONSEQUENCES OF SERVICES/SUPPORTS LACKING

Q5. What are some the consequences of not having services/supports in your community to help [Indigenous] clients address these issues?

## SUGGESTIONS FOR LEGAL AID BC (LSS)

When it comes to serving [Indigenous] people, concepts such as trust, offering accessible services that help people resolve their issues effectively, fairly and quickly are usually top priorities.

What, if anything, could the Legal Aid BC (LSS) do to:

Q6a. Ensure a high level of trust among the [Indigenous] people who come to Legal Aid BC for services

Q6b. Offer services that are more culturally appropriate [for Indigenous people]

Q6c. Reduce barriers to access [for Indigenous people] (e.g., cultural, language, disability, literacy, technology, etc.)

Q6d. Offer more effective services [for Indigenous people]

Thank you!

Those are all of our questions for Day 1.

Please click "Submit" to record your answers. You will then be re-directed to a summary page showing your answers, as well as responses from other participants. You can add comments if you have any additional feedback or thoughts that you would like to share with the moderators and other participants.

And please remember to check back in tomorrow to answer the Day 2 questions.

## Day 2

Welcome to Day 2 of our Online Discussion Board!

Thanks for checking back in for today's discussion. We'll be focusing on clients with legal and other interrelated issues (e.g., debt, housing, substance abuse, etc.), as well as on service accessibility.

It should take you about 25 minutes to answer today's questions.

### OTHER ISSUES [INDIGENOUS] CLIENTS FACE

Q1a. Are there [Indigenous] people who come to you who are experiencing both legal issues and other issues that might have a legal component, such as, access to treatment for substance issues, debt, housing, income assistance, pensions, employment?

Q1b. What are the most common types of situations that these clients are in?

### HELPING [INDIGENOUS] CLIENTS WITH INTERRELATED ISSUES

Q2. How do you currently try to help the [Indigenous] people who come to you with these issues?

### ORGANIZATION AND DELIVERY OF SERVICES

Q3a. Is there a way services for these issues could be organized and/or delivered that would better serve these clients?

Q3b. What would this look like from your perspective?

### IMPACT OF ORGANIZATION AND DELIVERY OF SERVICES

Q4. What do you expect the outcomes would be for your [Indigenous] clients if services were organized and/or delivered in this way?

### THE ROLE OF LEGAL AID IN SERVICE DELIVERY FOR INTERRELATED ISSUES

Q5. What role do you see the Legal Aid BC (LSS) playing in organizing and/or delivering services in the way you previously described?

### ACCESSIBILITY OF LEGAL AID SERVICES

Q6a. Next we'd now like to ask you about the accessibility of Legal Aid services. Do your [Indigenous] clients currently have challenges accessing Legal Aid services?

6b. What are these challenges?





#### TIMELINESS OF LEGAL AID SERVICE DELIVERY

Q7. How could Legal Aid BC (LSS) modify the way it currently provides services in order to make sure [Indigenous] clients can get the help they need in the most timely way?

#### ACCESSIBILITY OF IN-PERSON SERVICES

Q8a. Are in-person services accessible for your [Indigenous] clients?

Q8b. What assistance would your [Indigenous] clients need to use in-person services?

#### ACCESSIBILITY OF PHONE SERVICES

Q9a. Are services by phone accessible for your [Indigenous] clients?

Q9b. What assistance would your [Indigenous] clients need to use phone services?

#### ACCESSIBILITY OF ONLINE SERVICES

Q10a. Are online services accessible for your [Indigenous] clients?

Q10b. What assistance would your [Indigenous] clients need to use online services?

Thank you!

Thank you! Those are all our questions.

Please click "Submit" to record your answers. You will then be re-directed to a summary page showing your answers over the past two days, as well as responses from other participants. You can add comments if you have any additional feedback or thoughts that you would like to share with the moderators and other participants.

## Consolidated Feedback Notes - In Person Focus Groups

In-person focus groups for the Community Dialogues were held at conferences and workshops in the following locations: and with participation as noted

1. Abbotsford - 60
2. Cranbrook - 38
3. Fort Nelson - 22
4. Hope - 20
5. Provincial advocates conference x2 – Total number of participants – 12-15
6. Port Hardy – 17

Detailed notes from each focus group are set out below.

### **Abbotsford Community Dialogues – January 29, 2020**

#### **Question #1: Understanding community service needs and gaps**

##### **1. What kinds of issues do people come to you for help with?**

- a. **What are the most common issues?**
  - b. **What are the issues that there aren't services for in your communities?**
- Table - agencies from Abbotsford, Hope, Langley, Surrey
  - Most common issues:
    - income security (disability applications and appeals)
    - senior abuse, family violence
    - ashamed to disclose/fear in admitting when there's abuse & violence (cultural)
  - Gaps in services:
    - legal advice missing for immigration, child custody matters
    - affordable housing (not enough, too expensive) and food options
    - access to funds to replace IDs
  - Barriers to accessing services:
    - limited access to Service Canada (once a month)
    - transportation lacking
    - language barriers
    - most clients are unaware of the services that are available
    - mental health related issues may cause them to be unable to leave their homes

##### **2. If you could provide or get people help for only certain issues, which ones would you help with first?**

- housing
- income
- ID
- Forms
- subsidies for families
- safety
- stable program locations (agencies face issues securing free space to run programs out of on a consistent basis)

- being able to access programs due to transportation

## **Question #2: Omitted**

## **Question #3: Making services accessible**

### **Are services accessible to clients? What assistance would clients need?**

#### **1. In-person services**

- Not really accessible for immigration issues since clients have to call in to Vancouver office. Or, they have to travel to Vancouver office, but many clients can't drive and hard to bus to Vancouver.
- Yes, for criminal and family via intake worker, but not in all communities.
- Need more intake offices.
- Transportation is always an issue – they'd need transportation, access to a car.
- Child care is an issue when doing in-person intake. Every appointment they have to talk about family violence so having a child there isn't great.
- Clients need help gathering documents.
- Many clients/women want support workers to go with them. It's good as support workers because they have a lot more experience so they can help them, but it can be time consuming and difficult to transport and go with them.
- An option of an intake outreach service where intake workers visit transition houses or community organizations to take applications (e.g. a couple times per month)?

#### **2. Online services**

- Generally accessible IF a client has access to a phone, computer, printer, internet at home or through a community organization, library, etc. But, not everyone has access.
- Clients may need translator/interpreter.
- May need access to support worker who can help them talk through the online process (website language, wording, navigation isn't super accessible to someone who doesn't have prior knowledge of legal aid).
- At transition houses clients have access to internet/computer, but when they leave, access becomes more difficult.

#### **3. Phone services**

- Yes, most clients do have phone or access to phone (i.e. community organizations). However, intake telephone hours aren't always accessible for working clients.
- Need a translator/interpreter.
- Long wait times.
- Paperwork is an issue; client may need help gathering documents as well as sending them into the intake office (in person is better for submitting documents).

#### **4. What is most important for improving access to legal services in your communities?**

- Funding

- Issues with intake workers, lawyers. Need more consistent audits to check up on the lawyers/check in a lot more with that.
- For clients, not having it be so scary for them to submit complaints/make it easier for clients to provide a “review” or “report” about their lawyer and the level of service they received.
- For intake workers, make sure they’re on the same page. Inconsistencies from intake workers on what actually is the policy.
- Have lists of lawyers in the community available to clients and advocates, so can help find the best fit for the client.
- Make it easier for client to switch lawyer (used to be able to have “one free change”).

#### **Question #4: Making sure services meet quality standards**

##### **1. What are the most important elements of a quality legal aid service for your clients?**

- Physical office for clients.
- Provide in-person translators.
- Lawyers to give advice in language client speaks.
- Immediate intake services (e.g. Family LawLINE). Able to access/connect with intake from home for those with transportation challenges.
- No waiting period. Have had experience with intake workers where they ask clients to submit documents online, sometimes it’s worked well (but some clients have difficulty with getting documents emailed to them to fill out on their own). You don’t have to wait for a week or two to get into the intake for emergency protection services.
- Languages in booklets – if person is denied legal aid, at least they have publications in different languages. Website in multiple languages.
- Intake workers are empathetic and understanding, will work with community workers. Cultural competency to allow for more empathy.
- Accessibility/understanding if someone has mental or physical disabilities.
- Our clients are mainly newcomers to Canada, so they need:
  - translators, sometimes better if they have physical contact,
  - increase in hours for client services/intake, re: immigration issues,
  - transport issues because immigration intake office is in Vancouver only – clients could get better quality service if they could get to Vancouver (i.e. in-person services important for quality of service with immigration issues).

##### **2. What would make you feel confident that your clients were getting a quality legal aid service?**

- Client feedback is important – how they were treated and served, if their goals were met (esp for domestic violence services).
- Clients need a safe place to make an application.
- Clients need to know what steps will be taken in their case; explain process so client isn’t surprised about what happens.

##### **3. What kinds of topics would be most important for training to improve quality of service? (e.g. cultural competency, training about the law, training about mental health or addiction issues)**

- Advocates would like more info about:

- Family law in-depth training; Divorce Act (in addition to FLA)
- how to support clients with mental health, addiction issues,
- trauma informed care
- elder abuse, dementia, how to differentiate between illness and abuse
- child protection, how best to support client, role of MCFD and support workers
- mediation and reconciliation (general skills we could use for clients, e.g. co-parenting)
- medically assisted dying
- different cultures (e.g. South Asian, Indigenous) to be able to build rapport with them
- how to support landlords; training for landlords
- Advocates would like direct line to LSS to ask general inquiries; you can look for things online, but easier if there was a direct contact for service providers.
- For lawyers – trauma informed practice (family), cultural competency (immigration)
- Clear information about the complaints process.
- Feeling that you've been listened to, that your questions get resolved, a process on how to move forward. Feeling welcome.
- Being treated with respect; non-judgmental service.
- More local legal aid offices, especially for immigration.

# Navigating the next 40 years: Talking about how legal aid services can better help your communities

Cranbrook / July 11, 2019

**Purpose:** Understand the community's current needs and priorities for future legal services

## Agenda:

1. Introduction and instructions (10 minutes) -- Sherry
2. Small group discussion of questions (20 to 25 minutes) – All, LSS staff facilitate at tables
3. Report out and large group discussion (50 minutes) – All, Sherry facilitates
4. Wrap up (5 minutes) -- Sherry

## Introduction

1. LSS is celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019. Over the course of this anniversary year we are seeking input from communities and legal aid clients on what legal aid services could look like in the *next* 40 years to better help people resolve their legal issues. Fort Nelson is the second community we are seeking input from – so thank you in advance for helping us learn from our time together today.
2. To help us bring your perspective to these discussions, we will be meeting this year with as many as 9 communities across BC and asking all of them the kinds of questions we will ask you today. We also plan to conduct online discussions with small groups of community agencies and with clients.
3. What we learn from you today we will use to
  - a. Tell government, legal aid lawyers and others in the justice system what people in communities see as the priorities for the future of legal aid
  - b. Help us set LSS priorities for future changes to legal aid services.

Your views are important to us in this process. We want to listen and include your input when we set our priorities, and share your views with the government. We can't guarantee that your views will always influence the decisions, but we will consider your views and we will keep you informed.

4. Today we're going to discuss four sets of questions in small groups at your tables, and then report out to the whole group what was discussed and talk about the questions together. Please choose someone from your group to be the note keeper recording what your table discussed. Please also choose someone (it can be the same person) who will report out to the whole group what your table discussed. One of us from legal aid will join you at your table to help guide the discussion. You have about 20 minutes to discuss and note down your answers to the questions, and then we will regroup for a wider discussion.

# Navigating the next 40 years: Talking about how legal aid services can better help your communities

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## Process and instructions for facilitators

### Small Group Discussions (20 – 25 minutes)

- Break the participants into 4 small groups (group size dependent on # attendees)  
*Ideally, people from the same organisation will **not** be in the same small group.*
- Each group chooses a note keeper to record what is discussed.
- Each group chooses a reporter who will tell the large group what was discussed.  
*Note keeper and reporter can be the same person, or 2 different people.*
- Each small group gets 1 or 2 related questions for discussion. Each note keeper will get a handout listing their group's questions, with space for recording what is discussed.
- Small groups discuss their questions for 20 – 25 minutes. The note keeper records the main content of the discussions.
- LSS staff facilitating the dialogue session will circulate among the small groups, and gauge whether to wrap up after 20 or 25 minutes. If a group is not engaging in much discussion, facilitate the process.

### Reporting Out & Large Group Discussions (50 minutes)

- Each group reports out to the large group about their discussion for 5 to 10 minutes
- The large group has an opportunity to discuss/give input about those questions.
- Patricia will record the reporting out and large group discussion. We will also collect the notes taken by each small group

### Wrap Up (5 minutes)

- Thank everyone for their participation and feedback.
- Advise participants about our plan for reporting back to them:

Thank you everyone for participating today. At the end of our sessions, we will put together all the feedback we have received and share it with the organizations that participated. This will happen about a year or so from now. Any questions before we break for lunch? Thank you again for your input.

# Navigating the next 40 years: Talking about how legal aid services can better help your communities

Cranbrook / July 11, 2019

## Question 1: Understanding community service needs and gaps

### *Intro for table facilitator:*

People in every community in BC need help with all kinds of problems – family problems like separation or violence, problems finding housing, dealing with addictions, problems with debt, problems with a criminal charge. Organizations that provide help – like legal aid, like your organization -- often don't have the resources to help all the people who need it with all of their problems, so there are gaps in services.

LSS would like to know what people in your community need help with most, and where are the service gaps.

Please discuss the following 2 questions.

### *Questions for table discussion:*

1. What kinds of issues do people come to you for help with?
  - a. What are the most common issues?
  - b. What are the issues that there aren't services for in your community?
- Parenting support and counselling. In Cranbrook there are different counselling services, but there is a big waitlist. Counselling services are less available for men.
- Access to doctors. There are no walk in clinics. Doctors have a full case load. It's particularly difficult to access services if people have special health concerns because of the lack of transportation (no Greyhound).
- Housing. Affordable rentals are difficult in Kimberley and Cranbrook.
- Service gaps at LSS: many people need help trying to get divorced – no help for that. On remand days, there's no duty counsel. If you have a presentation hearing for CFCSA, there's no legal support for those days. Sometimes duty counsel is the opposing party's lawyer. We don't have very many lawyers that will take on legal aid cases. We sometimes need to transport clients 2.5 hours to legal aid lawyers (Ferne).
- More duty counsel needed. One remand day isn't enough.
- More access to help with protection orders for those who are just above the eligibility cut-off.
- Transportation: people don't have a way to access services. Greyhound buses are gone, and low income people in surrounding communities have no options to get to services in Cranbrook.
- Time with attorney: first meeting with their lawyer is often in a hallway at the courthouse. People haven't spoken to their lawyer and will tell the judge so. Crown counsel is overworked and more duty counsel is needed.



## **Navigating the next 40 years: Talking about how legal aid services can better help your communities**

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### *Questions for table discussion:*

2. If you could provide or get people help for only certain issues, which ones would you help with first?
  - Cyber safety. A lot of the parenting questions are around this issue (bullying, mental health, isolation, identity theft/personal information) This issue is getting bigger and bigger.
  - Housing. This is a basic need that is getting worse as the population increases. There is a lack of affordable and accessible housing. There is currently less than 1% vacancy rate.
  - Child care. There is a lack of affordable and accessible child care.
  - Health care needs to be expanded. Both physical and mental health are difficult to access.

# Navigating the next 40 years: Talking about how legal aid services can better help your communities

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## Question 2: Help with problems that may not need a lawyer

*Intro for table facilitator:*

LSS provides services to help people resolve their legal problems. But many of the people we serve are also facing housing, debt, addictions or other problems that they also need help with so they can move on with their lives. Some of these problems also have a legal component.

Today LSS has Aboriginal Community Legal Workers (ACLWs) in more than 10 communities (in Duncan and as part of our Parents Legal Centres in 9 locations). ACLWs can help connect people with services for issues like housing or addictions. We also give people information about services for these other issues when they apply for legal aid.

LSS would like to do more to help people resolve these other kinds of issues.

Please discuss the following 3 questions.

*Questions for table discussion:*

1. How do you currently try to help clients who come to you with these issues?
  - Most services are “piece meal” and are in bad shape in surrounding towns with less resources
  - Housing issues are the primary issues. There are a number of services in Cranbrook, but it’s not available in Kimberley.
  - A travelling poverty advocate
  - Home share program
  - Debt – confined to helping through the 1-800 helpline
  - A number of navigators – Aboriginal / Seniors/Family Navigator – but in silos of service
  - Addiction – they can detox at Ponderosa House but there are private organizations (that assist with addiction, but it’s quite expensive), also only a few beds.
  - Crisis line – can be used for any issues
  - Transportation and accessibility issues – there is at a hub for services, where a number of services are at the same place, but it’s only available for Cranbrook so some people need to relocate to Cranbrook to access these services. There’s not much ability to do outreach outside of the catchment area.

# Navigating the next 40 years: Talking about how legal aid services can better help your communities

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## *Questions for table discussion:*

2. Is there a way for services to be organized or delivered that would better serve these clients? What would this look like from your perspective?
  - The barrier we ID'd was transportation, and the inability to go out to clients. Difficult to fly people to places to Kelowna or Calgary.
  - All of these things stem from poverty.
  - Losing the bus system
  - Not much funding for people in this catchment area. Very difficult system. Columbia Basin Trust Fund's projects don't consistently fund the services that are needed.
  
3. What role do you see LSS playing in organizing or delivering these services?
  - Encouraging people to use Clicklaw and BC211. Promoting the services.
  - Navigators – that could be something that's done for these much more rural areas where people are spread out over a large area.
  - Dial a law
  - Something similar to the Family Law Line, but also Housing Law Line / Poverty Law Line. Some organizations (i.e. TRAC) provide more "These are your options" rather than "This is what you should do." Would rather have legal advice not just legal information.
  - With the shortage of housing, landlords are getting away with shady behaviour (I.e. charging for service animal). Person with disability not having the ability to fight that.
  - If all this stuff is out there, but I don't know about it until I come to this seminar. A guide – this is my problem, how do I do this – need a navigator.
  - Previously – very difficult to find and locate. It's nice to see your public presence. Deneen – there's always been someone (local agent) here, but got increase last year, so we were able to provide extra services.
  -

# Navigating the next 40 years: Talking about how legal aid services can better help your communities

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## Question 3: Making services accessible

*Intro for table facilitator:*

LSS is exploring different ways to deliver legal aid services to make them more accessible to the people who need them.

Today, LSS provides services in the following ways:

- In person services include:
  - You can apply for legal aid in person at 35 locations across BC, including legal aid offices and in courthouses. In 3 of these locations, a legal information outreach worker will help you find legal information.
  - At our 9 PLC office locations, you can get help with child protection problems from a lawyer and an advocate, who can also help with other problems like housing.
  - We provide legal advice at courthouses through family and criminal duty counsel, including at Frist Nations Court
  - We partner with 25 community organizations in 33 locations to help their clients apply for legal aid, get legal information, and connect with other services that can help.
- Telephone services include:
  - You can apply for legal aid on the phone through our call centre
  - We provide information and advice on family law problems over the phone through our Family LawLINE.
- Online services include:
  - We provide information about legal aid and the law online through our websites, including our MyLaw, family law and Aboriginal websites.
  - We are also exploring ways to help clients reach agreements to family law problems online on their own or with the help of a mediator.

We would like to know what ways of delivering legal aid you think would make our services more accessible for your clients.

Please answer the following 4 questions.

## Navigating the next 40 years: Talking about how legal aid services can better help your communities

Cranbrook / July 11, 2019

1. Are in-person services accessible for your clients? What assistance would your clients need to use in-person services?
  - Local agent would be great, and signage for where the office is. We had a local agent here but we didn't know she was here. We need communication if we get a local agent on who and where they are.
  - Face to face advice and/or assistance with the application process would good.
  - A travel subsidy – assistance and child care when clients need to use in-person services.
  - If there were in-person services – free up invisible barriers – stigmatization. It's a small town so a place where they won't be seen. Accessible yet confidential
  
2. Are online services accessible for your clients? What assistance would your clients need to use online services?
  - We need someone to assist/support many of the clients in filling out online applications. We have a lot of mental health issues. One question at a time instead of a long list of questions. Keep it simple. Don't want essay questions.
  - Having community partners know as much about the process as possible so that they can assist clients and help fill out paperwork/applications.
  - Online services are accessible unless in a non-coverage area, they can access public wifi places like library, Service BC, service providers
  - Stress can affect comprehension for online services; absorbing information is sometimes impossible. Having access to a support worker to go through those websites with them.

# Navigating the next 40 years: Talking about how legal aid services can better help your communities

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## *Questions for table discussion:*

3. Are phone services accessible for your clients? What assistance would your clients need to use phone services? (Consider voice and text service).

- More flexible business hours for intake needed.
- A message centre so clients who have limited access to a phone so that they can call in. Not their own voice mail, but could get info from the intake worker on their own time. Maybe they can open up their own file. Many don't have access to email or voicemail, it may not be safe.
- Ensuring that the information through legal aid is getting to the most vulnerable people – i.e. hospitals; Street outreach; service providers that are already engaged with those vulnerable populations.
- Lack of knowledge – many pregnant women who are vulnerable have safety concerns, and MCFD is called. They're never told that they have the right to call a lawyer.
- Brain damage – neurotrauma – abused women who are punched/strangled or homeless people brutalized by police will experience problems with taking in information and accessing services; storing information
- Clients have limited telephone access, cell services, and minutes on their cell phones. Knowledge on where to access phone services would be helpful.

4. What is most important for improving access to legal services in your community?

- Keep it simple, remove barriers (transportation)
- Cell service is very spotty.
- A lot are living in tents without cell service, lots of restrictions on time/data issues in their plan.
- More in person services, and community partners knowing what's available.
- Phone services are accessible if you're in town.
- Telephone accessibility – anyone can come in and use my phone
- Knowledge of where to gain access to a phone.
- Supports to complete phone applications.
- Info for clients to know the service is available.

# Navigating the next 40 years: Talking about how legal aid services can better help your communities

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## Question 4: Making sure services meet quality standards

LSS takes steps to make sure our services meet high standards of quality. Some of the things we do include:

- provide training and support for front line staff, including cultural competency training
- provide training and support for our lawyers and other service providers, including cultural competency training, training on the law, mentorships for lawyers and workshops like you attended today;
- evaluate our services to assess whether they help clients get the intended outcomes
- survey clients to ask them whether the legal aid services they received met their needs; .

LSS would like to know what would help our clients trust the quality of our legal aid services.

Please discuss the following 2 questions.

### *Questions for table discussion:*

1. What would make you feel confident that you were getting a quality legal aid service?
  - Getting training on trauma informed practice. Ensuring that lawyers and other service providers, including Intake, have trauma informed training. At times it feels as though Intake rushes through interviews and does not take a trauma informed approach.
  - Understanding of problems in rural areas, including the limitations of resources.
  - LSS doing continuous file reviews. Making sure knowing what's working and what's not. Both lawyer files and other parts of the organization.
  - Complaints procedure so clients are heard and validated. We know there is currently a complaints procedure, but it is not easy to find, and it should be very accessible to clients.
  - Education and training. Intake workers and all parties involved.

## Navigating the next 40 years: Talking about how legal aid services can better help your communities

Cranbrook / July 11, 2019

### *Questions for table discussion:*

2. What kinds of topics would be most important for training to improve quality of service? (e.g., cultural competency, training about the law, training about mental health or addictions issues). What are the most important elements of quality service for your clients?

- Trauma informed training.
- People that are making decisions (lawyers) everybody is knowledgeable about the specific areas that the client is experiencing.
- Providing opportunities for clients to attend training – some people may not reach out to support workers.
- Interviews via Skype/Facetime with lawyers (so that lawyers can provide more of this service to clients).
- Do you have a YouTube channel for clients to watch? The Indigenous legal topics via comics. Related to literacy issues.
- A helpline for support workers where they can phone and have support about where to direct clients. It can be overwhelming to sort through the websites, and look for information.
- Understanding the multiple barriers facing clients, including myths around domestic violence and sexual assault.



# Navigating the next 40 years: Talking about how legal aid services can better help your communities—Feedback Report

Fort Nelson / June 6, 2019

**Purpose:** Understand the community's current needs and priorities for future legal services

## Agenda:

1. Introduction and instructions (10 minutes) -- Kathryn
2. Small group discussion of questions (20 to 25 minutes) – All, LSS staff facilitate at tables
3. Report out and large group discussion (50 minutes) – All, Kathryn facilitates
4. Wrap up (5 minutes) -- Kathryn

## Introduction

1. LSS is celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019. Over the course of this anniversary year we are seeking input from communities and legal aid clients on what legal aid services could look like in the *next* 40 years to better help people resolve their legal issues. Fort Nelson is the first community we are seeking input from – so thank you in advance for helping us learn from our time together today.
  2. While we are here talking with you, there are many other people talking and thinking about the future of legal aid too. For example, the BC government and legal aid lawyers are also looking at ways to improve legal aid services and access to justice. The ministry is expected to meet with the lawyers and LSS over the next few months to consider what changes it may make to how much legal aid lawyers are paid and to what services legal aid provides.
  3. To help us bring your perspective to these discussions, we will be meeting this year with as many as 9 communities across BC and asking all of them the kinds of questions we will ask you today. We also plan to conduct online discussions with small groups of community agencies and with clients.
  4. What we learn from you today we will use to
    - a. Tell government, legal aid lawyers and others in the justice system what people in communities see as the priorities for the future of legal aid so the government is better informed when they make decisions about legal aid.
    - b. Help us set LSS priorities for future changes to legal aid services.
- Your views are important to us in this process. We want to listen and include your input when we set our priorities, and share your views with the government. We can't guarantee that your views will always influence the decisions, but we will consider your views and we will keep you informed.
5. Today we're going to discuss four sets of questions in small groups at your tables, and then report out to the whole group what was discussed and talk about the questions together. Please choose someone from your group to be the note keeper recording what your table discussed. Please also choose someone (it can be the same person) who will report out to the whole group what your table discussed. One of us from legal aid will join you at your table to help guide the discussion. You have about 20 minutes to discuss and note down your answers to the questions, and then we will regroup for a wider discussion.

# Navigating the next 40 years: Talking about how legal aid services can better help your communities—**Feedback Report**

Fort Nelson / June 6, 2019

## Process and instructions for facilitators

### Small Group Discussions (20 – 25 minutes)

- Break the participants into 4 small groups (group size dependent on # attendees)  
*Ideally, people from the same organisation will **not** be in the same small group.*
- Each group chooses a note keeper to record what is discussed.
- Each group chooses a reporter who will tell the large group what was discussed.  
*Note keeper and reporter can be the same person, or 2 different people.*
- Each small group gets 1 or 2 related questions for discussion. Each note keeper will get a handout listing their group's questions, with space for recording what is discussed.
- Small groups discuss their questions for 20 – 25 minutes. The note keeper records the main content of the discussions.
- LSS staff facilitating the dialogue session will circulate among the small groups, and gauge whether to wrap up after 20 or 25 minutes. If a group is not engaging in much discussion, facilitate the process.

### Reporting Out & Large Group Discussions (50 minutes)

- Each group reports out to the large group about their discussion for 5 to 10 minutes
- The large group has an opportunity to discuss/give input about those questions.
- Patricia will record the reporting out and large group discussion. We will also collect the notes taken by each small group

### Wrap Up (5 minutes)

- Thank everyone for their participation and feedback.
- Advise participants about our plan for reporting back to them:

Thank you everyone for participating today. At the end of our sessions, we will put together all the feedback we have received and share it with the organizations that participated. This will happen about a year or so from now. Any questions before we break for lunch? Thank you again for your input.

# Navigating the next 40 years: Talking about how legal aid services can better help your communities—**Feedback Report**

Fort Nelson / June 6, 2019

## Question 1: Understanding community service needs and gaps

*Intro for table facilitator:*

People in every community in BC need help with all kinds of problems – family problems like separation or violence, problems finding housing, dealing with addictions, problems with debt, problems with a criminal charge. Organizations that provide help – like legal aid, like your organization -- often don't have the resources to help all the people who need it with all of their problems, so there are gaps in services.

LSS would like to know what people in your community need help with most, and where are the service gaps.

Please discuss the following 2 questions.

### **Questions for table discussion:**

- 1. What kinds of issues do people come to you for help with?**
  - a. What are the most common issues?**
  - b. What are the issues that there aren't services for in your community?**
- 2. If you could provide or get people help for only certain issues, which ones would you help with first?**
  - A lot of family problems –guardianship, division of property,
  - Form help with small claims/filing/division of property
  - People have to go to Fort St. John to go to Supreme Court
  - Mental health support services are the #1 issue, for people facing family law issues. Are fewer services for men (e.g., owing child support but unable to pay);
  - NE region of BC is NOT northern BC (ie., big unique region with fewest services. Has its own issues that need addressing with own services)
  - Lack of lawyers – we need some pro bono lawyers, family duty counsel, advice services
  - No walk in legal aid office, No legal advocate
  - Lack of transportation, internet, phone (all too expensive), can't access online services and it is expensive to travel
  - In custody people need access to services
  - Low-income people – unable to call or find a computer; need to find somewhere to access help digitally. Internet is expensive.
  - When economy is booming, there is lack of temporary foreign worker legal information, employers will ask employees to work outside their contract; threat of deportation
  - The 1-800 numbers do not work here.
  - Travel and accommodation costs are expensive for people to access court services.
  - Need more of a collective partnership with legal aid; Northern Rockies shouldn't be confused with Northern BC; dynamics are different here

# Navigating the next 40 years: Talking about how legal aid services can better help your communities—**Feedback Report**

Fort Nelson / June 6, 2019

## Question 2: Help with problems that may not need a lawyer

*Intro for table facilitator:*

LSS provides services to help people resolve their legal problems. But many of the people we serve are also facing housing, debt, addictions or other problems that they also need help with so they can move on with their lives.

Today LSS has Aboriginal Community Legal Workers (ACLWs) in more than 10 communities (in Duncan and as part of our Parents Legal Centres in 9 locations). ACLWs can help connect people with services for issues like housing or addictions. We also give people information about services for these other issues when they apply for legal aid.

LSS would like to do more to help people resolve these other kinds of issues.

### **Questions for table discussion:**

- 1. Do you think LSS should provide more services for these other types of issues? For example, LSS could hire more paralegals or other non-lawyer service providers like advocates, mental health workers, or “navigators “to help clients coordinate the different services they are using.**
- 2. How can we work better with the organizations that are already helping people with these issues?**
- 3. What kinds of partnerships between legal aid and organizations like yours would best help our shared clients?**
  - Yes, LSS should provide more services about this types of issues because more advocates are needed. Most organizations are stretched and helping with legal aid isn't their primary role (just an additional thing they do). Community workers' mandates aren't being met because they're doing jobs that they're not mandated to do.
  - Would also help to give orgs \$ so they could hire someone to assist with legal aid
  - In a small town, it is important for people to have options (of services/organizations/people) so people have choices about where to get help; i.e., if they don't want to go to Fort Nelson FN for help because their aunt works here. Privacy an issue.
  - Need people to help people connect with lawyers -- more ACLWs
  - Need more advice clinics, more duty counsel. Need people with legal knowledge.
  - Not enough lawyers, DC won't help you if you are not in custody
  - Need a legal aid location in Fort Nelson
  - People need access to computers and phones from service providers (don't have their own), so need 3rd parties who can provide in person to help with legal aid applications/calls. Need designated people in other agencies to help with legal aid applications. Arranging third party consent – would be helpful to deal with people who may not have access
  - For marginalized people, better to have in-person other than phone; things get lost in translation
  - People with disabilities – difficult to have services over the phone and online.
  - More training about range of legal aid services needed
  - We could video or skype if the cost is too prohibitive for in person advice or assistance.

# Navigating the next 40 years: Talking about how legal aid services can better help your communities—**Feedback Report**

Fort Nelson / June 6, 2019

## Question 3: Making services accessible

*Intro for table facilitator:*

LSS is exploring different ways to deliver legal aid services to make them more accessible to the people who need them.

Today, LSS provides services in the following ways:

- In person services include:
  - You can apply for legal aid in person at 35 locations across BC, including legal aid offices and in courthouses. In 3 of these locations, a legal information outreach worker will help you find legal information.
  - At our 9 PLC office locations, you can get help with child protection problems from a lawyer and an advocate, who can also help with other problems like housing.
  - We provide legal advice at courthouses through family and criminal duty counsel, including at Frist Nations Court
  - We partner with 25 community organizations in 33 locations to help their clients apply for legal aid, get legal information, and connect with other services that can help.
- Telephone services include:
  - You can apply for legal aid on the phone through our call centre
  - We provide information and advice on family law problems over the phone through our Family LawLINE.
- Online services include:
  - We provide information about legal aid and the law online through our websites, including our MyLaw, family law and Aboriginal websites.
  - We are also exploring ways to help clients reach agreements to family law problems online on their own or with the help of a mediator.

We would like to know what ways of delivering legal aid you think would make our services more accessible for your clients.

Please answer the following 4 questions.

# Navigating the next 40 years: Talking about how legal aid services can better help your communities—**Feedback Report**

Fort Nelson / June 6, 2019

## **1. What services would your clients most need to get in person from an office or other location? For example, applying for legal aid, a person to help you find legal information, an advocate to help you connect to other services? What would make in person services more accessible for your clients?**

- Need a legal aid office/lawyer to provide advice in Family and Criminal. Too many conflicts now for family law. Alternatively – virtual office
- Need help with forms; step by step to help with completion of application
- Need support to coordinate service providers
- Need to clarify Legal Aid vs. Legal Services Society – people don't know they're the same.
- Strong preference for in person vs. telephone services.
- Have a legal aid office in the community.
- Clients don't get a letter that says – this is your lawyer, this is their contact.
- Transportation is a huge issue – Greyhound shut down; no flights go to Fort St. John; only one flight to Prince George.
- A lot of people don't have emails, or they forget their password; email is not a good way to get feedback. Maybe through Facebook/texting? Paper forms for older generations? When helping older people, can't show them the phone, have to print out documents.
- People are using the paper applications. Wherever people don't have access to computers. Or people want to take the forms with them (but then don't come back).
- Need legal aid application form available online so it can be filled out and submitted

## **2. What online services would be most helpful to your clients? For example, applying for legal aid, getting information, or getting advice from a lawyer or mediating a dispute? What would make online services more accessible for your clients?**

- Need a completeable PDF legal aid application form available online
- Need third party support to use online services. Computer literacy an issue
- Virtual office
- Video conferencing
- Training on how to fill out forms; could just be online; step-by-step website for the fillable paperwork or PDF version.
- Connection with Terrace offices – can advocates be more connected to offices/connections between office locations
- Phone apps to do the application on your phone
- Doing facetime for iPhone users
- Online applications are useful for certain demographics

## **3. What phone services would be most helpful for your clients?**

- Call centre needs more capacity – clients don't want the automated message. Waits are long
- Is there a feedback option at the end of the call?? Should be able to give feedback on the phone.
- Clients call from Prince George to Atlin
- Skype services would be better than phone.

## Navigating the next 40 years: Talking about how legal aid services can better help your communities—**Feedback Report**

Fort Nelson / June 6, 2019

### 4. What is most important for improving access to legal services in your community?

- Intake needs to let people know when they are approved.
- Better explain service stop date and service hours limited to clients
- Transportation – need some help with transportation
- Get feedback from clients – text surveys. Lots of clients don't have email
- Paper forms for older people or where there is no online access or phone access
- Simple plain language materials and forms
- Simplified application process like online fillable PDF

# Navigating the next 40 years: Talking about how legal aid services can better help your communities—**Feedback Report**

Fort Nelson / June 6, 2019

## Question 4: Making sure services meet quality standards

LSS takes steps to make sure our services meet high standards of quality. Some of the things we do include:

- provide training and support for front line staff, including cultural competency training
- provide training and support for our lawyers and other service providers, including cultural competency training, training on the law, mentorships for lawyers and workshops like you attended today;
- evaluate our services to assess whether they help clients get the intended outcomes
- survey clients to ask them whether the legal aid services they received met their needs; .

LSS would like to know what would help our clients trust the quality of our legal aid services. Please discuss the following 2 questions.

*Questions for table discussion:*

### **1. What would make you feel confident that you were getting a quality legal aid service?**

#### A. Lawyers

- Good communication with counsel – call backs and follow ups by counsel
- Skype for remote locations would support this
- Enough time or access to counsel.
- Clients need “what’s happening in court” explained to them
- Lawyers need to learn to speak plain language
- Lawyers only seem to visit/pay attention to clients in custody. Not in custody not important

#### B. Legal Aid

- Legal aid rep within the community. Clients often have difficulties with communication, they may not have a phone or minutes. Physical presence.
- Need more flexible guidelines both for eligibility and coverage.
- Simplified application process; online fillable PDF
- Ability to apply for legal aid for people with no ID, no phone to call (or minutes on phone or a computer

#### C. Access

- Clients aren’t able to access legal aid because they don’t have ID.
- Access to telephones to contact legal aid. People will not have cellphones or have limits and won’t be able to access tech to reach legal aid.
- One place to send people to go to get access to legal aid. Share what that legal aid office can do for people. Library – lots of transients; people have developed a trust relationship with the librarians, they go to them with forms, they want that information shared on a broad base.
- One place for legal aid information and applications

#### D. Knowledge about legal aid for other agencies helping our clients



# Navigating the next 40 years: Talking about how legal aid services can better help your communities—**Feedback Report**

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*Questions for table discussion:*

**2. What kinds of topics would be most important for training to improve quality of service? (e.g., cultural competency, training about the law, training about mental health or addictions issues). What are the most important elements of quality service for your clients?**

- Mental health and addictions training, not only for frontline workers, but for people who are working with people who are marginalized.
- Training on how to deal with overdoses (naloxone)
- Training for advocates on court procedures
- Indigenous cultural competency training for other service providers
- More of these types of conferences for basic legal knowledge and LSS services held outside the lower mainland
- Domestic violence training – not just basic legal concepts
- Group meetings of community advocates about resources
- Immigration/deportation
- Training on collecting information on Indigenous status/identity – encourage collection by explaining the benefits
- Gladue rights
- Training – group meetings amongst many service providers to share services. All the people here might meet once in a while – community roundtable.
- People don't know how to read the court order. That lawyer may not be there to explain it, it's not up to the registry to explain it. Court orders are very unclear. And they can't access a lawyer. Some court orders are very interpretive. Very difficult especially for people with FASD.
- Training in actual court procedures for frontline workers. If you're not sure of the system itself, it's hard to support someone through it.
- There are many offices in Lower Mainland, and very few in the north. This could be it better portioned out, could have one office in the northeast. They forget about us

## HOPE

### #1 Understanding service needs and gaps

- **What kinds of issues that Indigenous people need help with the most?**
  - Child protection, violence, family and intimate partners, lateral violence, housing, addiction, employment, finances, on and off reserve,
- **What are the issues that there aren't services for?**
  - Hope division – housing, grief and loss counseling, legal services/legal aid, sensitivity training, supportive housing, LGBTQ supports
- **If you could revive or get Indigenous people help for only certain issues, which ones would you help with first?**
  - Trauma which led to addiction, cultural retraining, parenting courses, financial literacy, transportation

### #2 Problems that may not have a legal component

- **How do you currently try to help Indigenous people with these issues**
  - Try to advocate or refer to other agencies, there are barriers – transportation, legal aid help time in the community, identifying what they'd like to see addressed and try to help.
  - Barriers – access to the internet, reading levels, supporting alongside
- **Is there a way for services to be organized better?**
  - Hard to get into legal aid services with existing hours. More hours.
  - Possibly a mobile unit because of transportation barriers.
  - Increased education with community members so they can bring their questions forward.
- **What role did we see LSS play in org or delivering services?**
  - Mobile unit, extending hours,
  - Paper resources – internet can be a challenge
  - Advocate for more workers, i.e. ACLW

### #3 Making services accessible

- **Are in person services accessible for Indigenous clients**
- **What assistance would your clients need to access in-person services**
  - Transportation – a lot of places don't have services or they come infrequently. Hard time understanding what it means when it says community partner, doesn't understand they're connected to legal aid, it can be confusing if you can have an umbrella term. More raising awareness. For individuals, I work in Hope, I didn't know there was a community partner.
- **Are online services accessible for your clients? What assistance would your services need?**
  - Teleconference, online applications (Legal aid working on it) \*note that online applications need to be developed with readings levels in mind and should not replace but be supported by in person assistance. Roll out of online training should also include training for advocates.

- For outreach, workers were able to help client's access phone or online services. Now that we've taken this training, we can help clients access these information resources, and the phone system.
- **Are phone services accessible for your clients? What assistance would they need?**
  - Yes, through our different agencies, we can support individuals to getting access to these services. Underlying this, is that clients don't have their own phone or internet access. Maybe 5% of our clients have access. A lot of the legal aid services is supported by the community workers, since there aren't legal aid offices. Read Right and Free reign, can get access to internet.
- Main barrier is transportation.
- Accessibility for lower income, they don't have access to a computer. It leaves them out if they don't have support – they can go to the library, but how do they know what to look for? They're left alone, they have no access. Like mobile units, home visits. More accessibility if they can come in. For people without funding/supports, how do we get to them to teach them this?
- Trying to be efficient with time – you can be overwhelmed and anxious about the meeting, and you don't address what you're supposed to do. If people don't have supports to let them know what the process is, to prepare them. Then they have to wait a whole other month to do anything. This may especially be a problem for seniors who have walkers, transportation issues.

#### **#4 meeting quality service standards**

##### **What are the most important elements of a quality service?**

- Respect – understanding people have varying definitions of what that looks like based on culture; educating yourselves on cultural practices/norms. Building trust in community takes time. Community partner felt she didn't have enough time to do that, with limited hours. There isn't the same trust building with legal aid lawyers in the community (as compared to other community workers). Is there something factored into them going out into the community and making their faces known instead of just being there when they're serving their client.
- Courtroom, very technical proceedings, not sure what that improving those looks like in terms of feasibility.

##### **What would make you feel confident you were getting a quality legal service?**

- Feedback forms, we do have an exit survey, but no one likes filling out a survey. We have a complaints process. Indigenous people's complaints are quite low. A feedback form where it can be anonymous would be different from complaint form.
- Use of feedback forms instead of an official complaints process

##### **What training would be helpful to improve quality of services?**

- Legal Aid providing Community Partners with indigenous cultural training, thought it was excellent.
- Coordination/knowledge of social services within the community: Someone who's experiencing legal issues also experiences a lot of other legal issues – if people had more training about what

other services exist, know better how to refer people, know what else is out there, cross-sectoral knowledge.

- Something for men that they can access for just men.
- Online course on different topics

## **Afternoon session – Tuesday, October 8, 2019**

**Participants included:** Community Connections Society of Southeast BC (Advocate), Chimo Community Services, MPA Society (Mental Health Court Worker), Powell River Community Services Society (Poverty Law Assistant), BC Law Foundation, RISE Women’s Legal Centre (Case Manager), Sources Community Resources Society (Poverty Law Advocate)

**Location of organizations included:** East Kootenay, Creston, Richmond, Powel River, Surrey, Vancouver/Lower Mainland

### **Question 1: Understanding community service needs and gaps**

#### **1. What kinds of issues do people come to you for help with?**

##### **a. What are the most common issues?**

- Common Issues:
  - Housing is a major issue
  - Family - need the right help at the right time in the right way
  - Estate litigation – there is no where to send women
  - Gaps in communication
  - Lack of connections between organizations or lack of coordination between services; need fewer programs that provide more services
  - Lack of understanding of what services are available
  - Lack of legal services, or legal services are there but clients struggle to know what services are available to them or don’t know how to access them
  - Not enough lawyers
- LSS policy – asset test – client may be on disability, but has \$80,000 and no prospect of income, but not eligible for legal aid
- Legal aid clients plea out; lawyers are constrained by amount they are paid; have volume that is too high. Need to figure out ways to make legal aid practice easier for lawyers. Need more lawyers to practice social justice.
- Family – need to create a social justice culture for lawyers who do legal aid
- Language barriers
- Online dialogue tool – need services in different languages. Translation needed for clients to use various available services.
- Siloed services – funding creates this, and we don’t see the value in services/organizations collaborating; how can services be complimentary?
- Need to “stitch services together”

##### **b. What are the issues that there aren’t services for in your communities (please include community name in your answer)?**

- If you have legal issue and not in the lower mainland, you are not going to get your issues addressed. Even in lower mainland, clients don’t know what services are available, how to reach them. Clients are so used to hearing no, they may not attempt

to access them. There is a “culture of refusal” - experience with being refused services in the past prevents clients from reaching out

- Caps on legal aid hours creates situation where lawyers do not help to the full extent that they could
- Can advocates help bridge gap between lawyer and client? Advocates are willing and happy to help, but lawyers don't always share information about the case, or are not sure about how much they should be sharing
- Needs lawyers to do the lawyer work. Need a more collaborative model – clinics with advocates that work in collaboration.
- Seems like there is a lot of procedural advice available, but no substantive advice/legal help.
- Lawyers can be better informed of what resources are available to their clients in the community

- 2. If you could provide or get people help for only certain issues, which ones would you help with first?**

## **Question 2: Help with problems that may not need a lawyer**

- 1. How do you currently try to help clients who come to you with these issues?**
- 2. Is there a way for services to be organized or delivered that would better serve these clients? What would this look like from your perspective?**

- Wrap around services available
- Co-location with legal aid – advocate that works in the same building as legal aid, so very accessible to ask questions, take clients over, get them to intake, and receive representation quickly
- Meeting the client where they are at
- Difficult to help clients with housing issues
- Lack of mental health services and resources
- Minimize client steps - it's re-traumatizing for clients to have to go to several different service providers to try to address their issues and access different services. Organizations are not resourced to provide the array of services clients need. Ideally, we could minimize the steps for clients to receive help. A collaborative model is needed.
- Make easy handoffs of clients

- 3. What role do you see LSS playing in organizing or delivering these services?**

- People need help to navigate the system. LSS could provide efficient referral to other services to help clients navigate services quickly and efficiently
- Idea – “client service log” between service providers – provide a notebook to the client with a summary of what services were provided, who provided the services, and with a referral. The client takes the notebook to the next service provider, who would also make a note, and so on. Explain that the notebook HAS to come back with next steps so that the advocate can remember.
- Sharing of systems between advocates

### Question 3: Making services accessible

1. Are in-person services accessible for your clients? What assistance would your clients need to use in-person services?
2. Are online services accessible for your clients? What assistance would your clients need to use online services?
3. Are phone services accessible for your clients? What assistance would your clients need to use phone services? (Consider voice and text service).
4. What is most important for improving access to legal services in your communities (please include names of communities with your answer)?
  - Intake in Surrey courthouse is difficult to reach. The call centre is also difficult to deal with, as can sometimes not get through before court appearance. It would be great if advocates could complete the legal aid application with their clients and/or have someone from legal aid more accessible to community organizations (i.e. Sources in Surrey) to answer questions.
  - If someone has a legal issue, try to deal with it; don't know how to refer them to legal aid. Some clients fall through the cracks, don't follow up with engaging in services. Clients are referred to so many services, they lose hope that someone will help them.
  - PLCs work. They are a good model, people need in person services. Mixed model that we are moving to is necessary.
  - Feedback from clients – the service they receive from local agents is not the same as Vancouver legal aid office/Call Centre. There are not given support services, not getting proper refusal forms. These are systemic issues, creating two-tiered services. Vancouver intake is more consistent, more helpful, and much better at referring to supporting services such as duty counsel, LawLINE, etc.
  - Online applications – could be very beneficial for advocates to complete together with clients. Online may be a better option in some circumstances for clients who have experienced trauma. More pathways for making applications is necessary, but online apps need to be in addition to in-person, NOT replace.
  - Need different legal aid application options available for different client and community needs.
  - More representation services, including family law clinics and poverty law clinics.
  - When services, such as online mediation, screen out women who experience violence, then women stop disclosing violence in order to access those services. It can create scary situations. Better to make the resource a safe option to use when violence exists, rather than limit access to it.

### Question 4: Making sure services meet quality standards

1. What would make you feel confident that you were getting a quality legal aid service?

## PAC Notes – October 2019

- Young lawyers don't have the time to spend with clients; need proper skills to interview clients with mental health issues or who've experienced trauma
- Service providers need access to counselling themselves
- Legal information or information on services should be tailored to where people are in the province
- Need more information on legal resources that are available in more remote areas
- Better communication of information to clients; they don't always understand the information they receive about being approved or refused for legal aid

**2. What kinds of topics would be most important for training to improve quality of service? (e.g., cultural competency, training about the law, training about mental health or addictions issues). What are the most important elements of quality service for your clients?**

- Training for new lawyers on what to do with their clients; more training on soft skills
- Resource navigation for clients; in-person support to guide them through the process and help navigate community resources
- Peer support for clients (from others who've been through the same problem)



## **Lunchtime session – Thursday, October 10, 2019**

**Participants included:** The Law Centre, RISE Women’s Legal Centre (Family Advocate Support Line Lawyer), BC Law Foundation, North Shore Community Resource (Family Law Advocate), The Advocacy Centre (Advocate), North Coast Transition Society (Women’s Outreach), Port Alberni Friendship Center (Family Law Advocate), Opportunities Career Services Society (Family Law Advocate), The Kettle Society (Child and Family Law Advocate), Penticton & Area Access Society (Family Law Advocate)

**Location of organizations included:** North Vancouver, Vancouver, Nelson, Penticton, Prince Rupert, Port Alberni

**Questions 1: What are the top 3 ways community advocates and LSS can work together to support clients to address their inter-related issues?**

### **Kathryn’s Group:**

- Fear of authority-reassure confidentiality-not shared with government or immigration
- More structure to Intake interviews
- Not doing interviews well is not efficient and wastes time later. Depends on Intake worker. In my community Intake worker is amazing, but the Vancouver LA office is funneling clients
- Questions about money-Clients don’t have online access or are uncomfortable entering info
- Divorce-people don’t distinguish between different stages of family law case.
- Ask more open-ended questions
- How we ask questions is important
- Provide context for why the question is being asked (i.e. financial eligibility, etc)
- Online tools intimidating for I & R clients
- In-person Intake is best
- Send Intake workers to other agencies
- Refer to community law advocates if not eligible-give their cards
- Denials are confusing
- Lack of legal aid lawyers outside lower mainland
- Turnover
- Hours 1-3:30 at courthouse-Intake hours in general should be longer
- Outreach component to Intake workers job
  - Info about services
  - Time to do outreach (I.E. make appointments at advocacy orgs)
- LSS should use funds to pay lawyers
- Denials-clients think they are denied but not really-we need to be better with this communication to clients
- Training for Intake workers
  - More trauma informed
  - Workers don’t have language
  - Good financial questions-financial analysis
  - Asking more questions before saying no

## **PAC Notes – October 2019**

### **Tami's Group:**

- There should be more of a team effort with advocate and the lawyer supporting the client
- LSS can help build those personal relationships between advocates and lawyers and intake; let lawyers and intake know about us
- Co-location of LSS intake and advocates
- Advocates can provide client with emotional support through the process
- Need more in-person Intake
- Advocate from BWSS described a project that LSS is undertaking to help train advocates to take legal aid applications (e.g. RISE, BWSS advocates) – need more of this
- Inconsistency in the services provided by local agents

### **Questions 2: What would make you feel confident that your clients received a high quality of legal aid service?**

### **Kathryn's Group:**

- Intake process not consistent-need standard approach
- We don't cover divorce
- Lawyers burning through hours
- Advocates help clients prepare for file to save lawyer time
- Choice of lawyer-ask to check online and lawyer rating
- Matching language interpretation takes time
- More hours for collaborative work-MCFD-makes a huge difference early on
- Intake workers don't ID violence issues
- Shame around poverty
- Feels like starting position is "you are lying"
- Better avenue for relaying info and feedback on LSS lawyers and Intake workers
- Cap on number of cases a lawyer can take:
- Some firms share cases
- Quality parameter on number of files
- Or if there are too many complaints no more cases
- Screen lawyers
- Lawyers not aware they can attend to collaborative work
- Mentorship for new Intake workers
- Call centre is really important Intake
- Crucial moment in client's lives
- Quality
- Feedback from clients that got approved
- Matching clients with right lawyer
- Agreeing to change of counsel should client continue to have a lawyer

### **Tami's Group:**

## PAC Notes – October 2019

- Lawyers need training on:
  - Financial abuse – it can't be carved out from the other legal issues
  - Family violence – how to interviewing clients experiencing family violence
- Local agents - don't split the same local agent between two communities; have a local agent in each community
- One local agent telling client to find their own lawyer and then come back; client unable to do so
- Clients and advocates are reluctant to make complaints about Intake or their lawyers, or don't make them at all; need to preserve relationship with lawyers, especially in the smaller communities where there are few or only one lawyer
- When requesting a change of counsel, advocates may help clients with filling out the form; will describe reasons for the change of counsel on the form, but won't say on the form that it's a formal complaint about the lawyer/won't complete that part of the form; clients don't want to make a complaint in case their COC is denied and they have to continue working with the lawyer
- Often it boils down to expectations and communication between the lawyer and client; lawyers need to provide clear expectations and timelines to clients; if there was more of a team approach between lawyer and advocate, advocate could help support client through the process and possibly help prevent some of the issues that arise (which takes us back to where we started with question #1!)
- Eligibility reviews are taking too long – up to 30 days
- Create a more informal mechanism for advocates to provide feedback about Intake or lawyers
- Need more legal services in Prince Rupert; really feeling the loss of Carol's position there; few services outside Terrace, but clients can't travel to Terrace or other communities due to the weather during certain times of the year