

HELPING PEOPLE NAVIGATE THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

AN EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY PARTNERS

PART 2



Acknowledgements

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INTRODUCTION

International aid organizations pioneered an approach called Most Significant Change, a strategy for evaluating initiatives of grassroots community development in developing countries. Its purpose is to learn more about the outcomes of a program from the people who are closest to them. This is a truly participatory approach, giving those who deliver and receive the services an opportunity to identify and define the most significant outcomes for their local communities.

“Justice navigator” is the name used for those hired by Legal Aid BC (LABC), on part-time contracts under the Community Partners program, to help people access legal aid and/or to provide them with appropriate Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) materials. They provide these services in 26 Community Partner locations, each of which serves several communities. These contracts are usually located in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities. The justice navigators were asked to submit a story describing the most significant change experienced by individuals because of the Community Partners initiative. In the instructions, the domains of change were described as:

- ▶ people’s awareness of and access to legal aid;
- ▶ the capacity of the justice navigator’s community to help people in need of legal assistance;
- ▶ their organization’s ability to fulfill its mandate, or meet the needs of the people it serves; or
- ▶ any other large changes not captured by the above.

These domains of change are reflected in the five objectives of the evaluation, which are as follows:

- 1 Assess whether awareness of PLEI services has been increased in CP communities.
- 2 Assess whether awareness of intake services has been increased in CP communities.
- 3 Assess the degree to which the capacity of CPs to identify and respond to individuals with legal issues has grown, and describe ways in which this capacity can reasonably be enhanced.
- 4 Assess the satisfaction of CPs with the support and resources LABC provides, and describe ways in which they could be improved.
- 5 Describe the populations that the program is reaching, the extent to which they include the target populations (rural, remote, culturally isolated, and Indigenous communities), and ways targeting could be improved.

The 19 Most Significant Change stories that follow are multi-layered, incorporating one or more of the themes described below. The stories also incorporate material of direct relevance to four of the five evaluation objectives.¹

- Using and/or distributing PLEI resources, and informing the community about services (stories 1, 2, 3, 5, 11, 12, 13, 18, and 19) (evaluation objective 1)
- Ensuring a better understanding of how to access and secure legal aid coverage or PLC assistance (stories 1, 3, 4, 9, 10, 12, 15, 16, and 17) (evaluation objective 2)
- Helping people secure both medical and financial assistance for medical conditions (stories 1, 2) (evaluation objective 3)²
- Helping people secure or rebuild connections with family and children, cooperate with former spouses, or reintegrate after a prison term (stories 1, 3, 7, 12, and 16) (evaluation objective 3)
- Helping people secure government financial benefits (e.g., social assistance, disability, WorkSafeBC) (stories 2, 9, 10, and 15) (evaluation objective 3)
- Helping individuals without computers or technological access (stories 9, 10, 14, 15) (evaluation objective 5)
- Providing outreach to Indigenous communities (stories 6, 9, and 12) or other cultures (stories 11,13) (evaluation objective 5)
- Adapting office and service delivery to COVID-19 conditions (stories 5, 15, and 18) (evaluation objective 3)
- Resolving issues for seniors (stories 7, 14, and 17) (evaluation objective 5)
- Explaining the advantages of placement in multi-resource centres (stories 15, 16, and 19) (evaluation objective 3)

1. The stories generally do not address objective 4, as they're focused on the experience and changes of the individuals assisted by the justice navigator rather than on the training support the justice navigator receives.

2. The stories supporting evaluation objective 3 frequently address related social or medical issues as well as the legal issues, as the justice navigator frequently helped individuals sort through how to deal with a bundle of issues. They also included adaptations made by justice navigators to deliver services in the context of COVID-19.

- Providing information about separation or divorce or helping the person connect to resources (stories 13 and 15) (evaluation objective 3)
- Securing personal ID, a driver's licence, or court information (stories 7, 8, and 10) (evaluation objective 5)
- Helping people deal with abuse as a spouse or a child or escape an abusive relationship (Stories 9, 13, and 17) (evaluation objective 5)
- Helping to resolve financial crises or impediments (stories 7 and 9) (evaluation objective 5)
- Helping people understand, develop, and process wills and estate matters (story 11) (evaluation objective 5)

STORY 1

A separated couple was referred to the Community Partner program for a CFCSA [Child, Family and Community Service Act] family matter. One party was successfully connected to our local Parents Legal Centre for support and legal representation, while the other party was connected to legal aid support and representation through the Vancouver office. The couple was also provided with print-based publications for their reference.

The male individual was also living with an acquired brain injury and significant mental health disorders. I was able to refer him to an appropriate mental health program for additional supports.

This individual successfully connected with a one-on-one worker in the acquired brain injury program and a clinician in the health authority mental health team. He was also connected to a dental clinic for dental care while liaising with WorkSafeBC to sort out benefit amounts for dental work. During this process I provided emotional support until he was adequately connected to the above services.

The parties continue to live separately based on the parental agreement with the ministry, and they now have regular visitation with their children. Both their health and lives have improved because of healthy connections made in the community.

STORY 2

It was not easy to pick a story to use for my Most Significant Change because I have been fortunate to better the lives of many people who have been in difficult situations. I would not have been able to provide this assistance had it not been for funding from Legal Aid BC.

I assisted a person who was employed in a plant nursery. He was picking up a heavy shrub when suddenly his back popped. He was in excruciating pain, so he left his job and saw a doctor at the walk-in clinic. The doctor advised him that he was not fit to return to work, and he needed to file for WorkSafeBC benefits.

After three months of attending physiotherapy and chiropractic treatments, the person was discouraged and felt he needed to go to India to try different types of treatment. The person left for India for a few months and returned when his medical condition was better. When he returned, WorkSafeBC did not want to pay him for any benefits while he was in India, even after accepting that he was in India for medical reasons. As a Community Partner, I set up an appointment with the Workers' Advisers Office to assist him in getting his benefits. After a few weeks WorkSafeBC gave him the benefits that he was seeking. The person was very thankful for the time I took to work with the Workers Advisers' office to get him his benefits.

After receiving his WorkSafeBC benefits, the person had another issue. That is after he had spent the benefits, he had no other form of income, as he currently was not working. I gave the person three booklets on welfare benefits and rights. The person was then assisted with applying for social assistance and started eventually receiving the benefits.

STORY 3

A local man suffering from PTSD and depression got into a disagreement with his partner that resulted in the parties' separation. After the subsequent separation, the individual attempted to take his own life. While he was hospitalized, his spouse applied for a no contact order for herself and the children.

After a long recovery, his first request to me was about supervised access for some of his family members to see the children. I did a screening for an application for legal aid, but his income exceeded LABC's income criteria. So I suggested he find a lawyer to assist with gaining access to his children and dealing with the charges he was facing. I also helped him with access to a support group.

My participation primarily consisted of referring him to specific sites providing legal information whenever he questioned strategies his lawyer proposed and to local resources to help with rebuilding relationships with his children. In addition to relationship rebuilding with family and friends, he has maintained attendance at the group and has been an asset in sharing his learnings from the probation groups he attended. He attends his recovery meetings and has been an inspiration to others experiencing emotional, legal, and addiction issues in the community. He is now considering the possibility of further education and training so he can assist others on either a suicide or similar help line. This story is significant for me as I worked for years in the addiction field and hold a degree in child and youth care. I see the Community Partner program as a significant part of our community's continuum of family care.

STORY 4

The Most Significant Change experience that we have seen happen as a result of the Community Partner initiative was an individual who came to us who needed help with a legal aid appeal. The individual had been awarded a Family Limited Representation contract of 15 hours. At the end of the 15 hours, their legal aid lawyer had advised them to reapply for a Family Standard contract. The individual had been misinformed by their lawyer, as their issue was not something that was covered under regular legal aid contracts. The lawyer also had stated they had used the entire 15 hours but had not done anything for their client in the case.

The individual was denied regular legal aid coverage. We then assisted the individual in appealing the legal aid decision. In the appeal we were able to provide details and evidence that the lawyer who was awarded the Limited Representation contract did not complete or assist the individual. Legal Aid BC reviewed the case, and the individual was awarded 15 hours through a new legal aid lawyer. Through our assistance the individual was able to better understand why they were denied regular legal aid coverage and became more aware of their access to the coverage.

We feel this story is significant as the individual on their own would have given up or not appealed the decision made by LABC. With this result the individual was at least able to get assistance from a lawyer with their legal issue.

STORY 5

I started in the Community Partner position on June 1, 2020. Because I started in the position during the pandemic, and the program had been unstaffed for some time before I was hired, it is difficult for me to make comparisons with previous years.

I have not had the opportunity to travel out of my community to personally deliver publications. That was my plan once travel between communities was allowed. The intention was to put faces to names and to introduce myself. This has still not happened, so it has been a struggle to get the awareness that the program is available to the surrounding areas. However, I am kept busy helping people, so that is positive. It also has allowed me time to familiarize myself with the publications available and to create packages for organizations in and around my community.

The building that I currently work in is now equipped with a COVID-safe room that allows workers to meet people in person with a piece of glass dividing us. We also now have a dedicated phone and laptop that can be used to help people apply for legal aid as well as access LABC's websites. This will aid greatly in people being able to access legal aid services.

STORY 6

The Bella Coola Legal Advocacy Program’s “justice navigator” faces a very welcome “significant change” with the acquisition of a 41-foot diesel boat, funded by the Law Foundation of BC. This boat will fundamentally increase the financial sustainability of the BCLA’s justice navigator outreach program. The three-day monthly site visits were at significant risk due to the escalating charter plane costs that happened once the local Bella Coola Air was closed.



The Making Waves boat project will deliver BCLA’s outreach services to the remote, Indigenous communities of Bella Bella, Klemtu, and Wuikinuxv in the central coast of British Columbia in an unprecedented way. One of the basic principles of outreach is to go to where people live and ordinarily congregate. So we’re reaching out to coastal communities the way that coastal communities reach each other — by boat. For the first time ever, we’ll have a Marine Satellite Office — a fully outfitted, COVID-safe 41-foot diesel boat, to be docked at community wharves.

These are remote, “boat in or fly in only” Indigenous communities that have faced tremendous barriers for decades, with highly disproportionate needs due to the intergenerational impacts of colonization. These communities are often left out of services completely. The Making Waves project will let us to meaningfully engage with people in these island communities — an innovative, cost-effective, and culturally safe way to improve access to justice.



STORY 7

One morning I arrived at work to find a young man waiting for me. He looked ruffled, lost, and lonely. I guessed he was one of the temporary farm workers we frequently see in our area. "Todd" was in a desperate situation; he was alone, homeless, and without ID and had been charged with assault. His story was that he had originally come to BC from Quebec to pick grapes and have a bit of an adventure. He had a great time partying, and he fell in love. Todd was completely besotted by the girl, and soon they were living together, and Todd stayed in town long after picking season was over. But one night the romance turned sour and things were said and done, resulting in Todd's ID being destroyed and the girl being charged with assault.

When Todd came to me, he was living in an old uninsulated trailer without services. Todd had already connected with a legal aid lawyer through a referral from victim assistance. He was terrified of going to jail and just wanted to go home. Through several visits I helped Todd to re-establish connections with family in Quebec. The connections with his family allowed me to help Todd get the information (and the funds) he needed to get enough ID to travel home on the train. I don't think I've worked with anyone more grateful. The last time I saw Todd was the day before he was due to leave. He stood tall and proud and was full of thanks.

I also have story about a person I will call Maria. She is in her 80s and still lives in her own home in a nicely maintained manufactured home park. The only assistance she receives is for biweekly housecleaning and help with her wee garden. Maria is kind, sweet, and generous, and she looks after her neighbour's dog when her neighbour needs a hand. Maria's family doctor referred her to the justice navigator for assistance with her financial issues.

Maria lives on a minimal income with a small mortgage and monthly pad rental. She has two adult children who are unable to supply regular financial support. Her income was just able to meet her monthly needs. Maria's bank sent her a credit card without her understanding the obligations and consequences that accompanied the card. Over the course of about six months, Maria used the card to pay for various expenses. It wasn't long until it was maxed out and the monthly payments became unreachable. This caused her a great deal of stress that began to affect her health, including not eating. We sat together and created a list of her assets and liabilities as well as her monthly bills. Maria was confident that the bank manager would grant her a loan to assist with the debt; we made

an appointment and went to the bank together, but they turned her down for the loan. Maria was devastated. Our next step was to call the Credit Counselling Society (CCS) and set up an appointment. On the day of our appointment, Maria was beside herself because the bank manager had been so quick to brush her off and the collection agency kept calling. But the experience with CCS was positive and gave her hope that she could find a way to cope with the situation.

Our call to CCS was over a year ago, since then I have kept in monthly contact with Maria. She is once again lively and enjoying life. No, her debt didn't go away, but having access to the Community Partner program helped her deal with her issues, reducing her stress and allowing her to remain in the home she loves.

STORY 8

There are some people who need extra help getting information from the court before they can get legal aid, and I don't turn them away. They may have lost their court documents or don't know what to say to get their social assistance letters that state their income. In these cases, because I do not know their file number (which Crown needs), I first phone the court registry to ask what their file number is before I contact Crown. I let Crown know that I am assisting an individual who has misplaced their court paperwork and in need of their Initial Sentencing Position and their copy of charges in order to get legal aid. They will then scan that information and send it to me through email. I also get a hold of their band office to ask Social Development if it's possible to get a letter stating how much they get every month so I can send that to LABC as well, information that is also scanned and sent to me through email. I explain to people the steps I am taking to get all this information.

There are people who are grateful I do this because they may not know even the first steps to take with this sort of problem. I truly like my job and love to help others.

STORY 9

As part of the Community Partner and justice navigator role, I provide services to a local First Nation.

A couple of years ago I assisted a member of the local First Nation community who had been wanting to file for divorce for many years — let's call her Susan. Susan did not know where to start or how to proceed. In addition, her only income was a disability benefit, so the cost of the divorce was also a barrier.

I initially talked to Susan about legal advice. I assisted her with a call to the Family LawLINE at Legal Aid BC. Within minutes, Susan and I connected with a LawLINE lawyer, and Susan was receiving advice and next steps. Susan does not have a computer, so it was arranged for the written communication from the lawyer to go through a staff member at the Health Centre Building (in the First Nation community). I also assisted Susan through the process of working with the Family LawLINE lawyer to apply for spousal support, and then file for divorce. I also helped Susan access forms, provided information, and facilitated communication with the lawyer.

Following the advice of the lawyer, Susan was very pleased to hear that as someone who receives Persons with Disability benefits, she could get an order to waive court fees. An application was also submitted to a local not-for-profit agency for a grant for transportation costs to and from the courthouse. The grant was approved, and Susan could go to the courthouse to file her documents.

Susan had also shared with me her story of abuse at day school; I listened. I let Susan use the Community Partner computer to write an email to Indian Residential Schools Day Scholars (justicefordayscholars.com). Susan said she felt lighter after taking this step.

I was able to see Susan taking steps and overcoming barriers. She trusted me to help throughout the process, and it was wonderful to see her moving toward accomplishing her goals.

Working with Susan has had an impact on me too. I truly feel honoured to do this work, and I want to thank Legal Aid BC for the opportunity to provide Community Partner services in my community.

STORY 10

Becoming a Legal Aid BC Community Partner has significantly increased my organization's ability to meet the needs of the people we serve, and to share legal information and resources with other service providers so they can better assist people. We have always been aware of LABC services and referred people to them. However, as a Community Partner, we have access to up-to-date information about LABC, responsive LABC staff who can help answer specific questions, a dedicated Community Partner line to help us connect people with LABC intake, and valuable training for staff. Finally, demand for our services had exceeded our ability to respond, and the Community Partner funding enables us to increase staff hours and meet the needs of the region in a timely fashion.

In our Community Partner role, we helped a man who had not been able to work for many years because of an injury. He had significant arrears in spousal support and had been unable to renew his driver's licence. He could not afford a lawyer and was unable to navigate the family court system on his own to change the order. The arrears continued to mount, and he was struggling without his licence. He was depressed and frustrated. We were not sure how to help him. At the time, he was not eligible for legal aid representation to help change the order. When LABC let us know about its new Family Limited Representation contracts, we encouraged him to apply. He did not have a phone, so we set up an appointment in our office and used the dedicated Community Partner line to connect him with LABC intake. He was successful in getting a limited retainer, and with the help of the lawyer, was able to have his arrears cancelled and to renew his driver's licence. The effect of no longer having arrears and getting his licence back was transformative. Staff noticed that he was able to laugh and talk about his interests and goals, whereas before he would only talk about his anger and frustration with his situation — he felt he could move on with his life.

One of the cornerstones of our agency is our belief that everyone should have equal access to justice. Our partnership with LABC has increased our capacity to help some of the most vulnerable people in our region access legal information and advice and to support them to exercise those rights.

STORY 11

I received a call from a person who was helping his mom with some estate planning documents. He was looking for legal information on preparing a will, being a power of attorney, and making end-of-life healthcare decisions for his mother.

He was here for a short time visiting his mother and wanted to get all this done before he left the country. He was not a resident of BC and was totally in the dark about the legal requirements of these documents.

In my telephone conversation with him, he said he had called so many places and gone on so many websites that he was really confused what all these three legal documents were. He had a bunch of information but was not sure what specific legal information he needed to focus on.

As has been my common practice in all these years, I told him I am not a lawyer but can provide legal information and direction in this area. He told me he was leaving the country in two weeks, was under a bit of time stress, and had to deal with all this before he left. I discussed with him three legal documents and what each one is for.

I usually follow up with links and detailed legal information, and I emailed him the next day with legal information on wills, power of attorney, and end-of-life planning for healthcare decisions. He emailed me back saying, "Wow, this is amazing!! I am very grateful to you for sharing all this info with me. It is all very helpful." This really demonstrates the capacity of the Community Partner program to provide legal assistance to people when they need help.

STORY 12

An individual reached out to us while in a correctional institution; she was seeking cultural support. We arranged for her to attend Indigenous cultural programming with our Aboriginal Liaison Worker, and she was also introduced to our Indigenous Justice Worker and Community Reintegration Worker who sometimes help with cultural programming.

Upon release, she decided to stay in the community and got a bed at a local shelter. She came to us to see what sort of reintegration services we offered. At the intake, we gained an understanding of her current needs. We focused on finding her permanent housing and maintaining her sobriety. After spending some time at the shelter, she moved into a supported living facility, and later she was able to secure low-income housing. The individual remained sober during her struggle to find housing; she attended the Wellbriety group whenever her schedule allowed. She has just celebrated her one year of sobriety.

She began to volunteer with the Salvation Army. This turned into full-time employment. She has been working for the Salvation Army for over a year now. Furthermore, she recently got a second job working for a peer mentorship program for people who are being released from prison.

After securing housing and employment, she was able to focus more on her legal issues. At first, she needed help reconnecting with her lawyer for a criminal matter. We were able to help with this by reaching out to the local agent intake worker. After connecting with her lawyer, she received a sentence of community probation. Her family members have custody of her children, so she was also seeking legal materials and advice related to the issue. We provided her with the appropriate resources. Through her involvement with LABC's family law services, she was able to gain visits with her children.

This is one of many people whom we have better assisted with their legal issues because of our involvement with the Community Partners initiative. Our organization has become more aware of the legal services that are available throughout the province and can make the appropriate referrals to outside agencies.

STORY 13

One of the stories that stands out for me (even though it is still somewhat ongoing) is one about a lady who comes to our ESL programming.

She has been in Canada for about three years, married to a Canadian man. She is much younger than her husband. When she first came to Canada, she didn't know any English and her husband wanted her to work right away, so he started bringing her to English classes that we offered. At first, he drove her or arranged rides for her, but those stopped and she would walk. She lives on the outskirts of town, so that walk took well over an hour and is not the safest walk, never mind adding bad weather to it.

There were hints of unhappiness, but it was hard to pinpoint as her English wasn't that strong. As she got more comfortable with us and better at English, she let us know that she was very homesick and unhappy with her new life. She didn't feel supported by her husband, and never mentioned much more than that. Then we didn't see her for a while. When I tried to reach her, I found out she had gone back to Brazil. She was not sure if she would come back to Canada or to her husband. Then COVID hit, and I barely heard back from her.

A few months ago, she knocked on our office door looking to come back to class. She was back as of two months prior. She seemed so enthusiastic and happy. After a while, though, she seemed down. She said her husband was emotionally abusive and hurtful, that she was desperate to leave him but felt very trapped. Her husband had told her if she wanted a divorce, to figure it out herself. She was very scared to stay, but she had no job, living isolated from town with no transportation. She wasn't aware that she could leave, that she had options. She had no idea that she could go seek help from victim services, that there was a thing called "sponsorship breakdown," or that she had any rights under family law. She thought she didn't have any other choice but to stay. After we spent many hours explaining the choices she had, going through handouts such as *Live Safe, End Abuse* and the Family Law in BC reference tool, and explaining that sponsorship breakdown is a real thing, she started to feel less pressure and stress.

Since all this happened, she has been staying with a friend while still working things out with her husband — they have been talking with a neutral party and working on discussing what their needs are. She has been coming to English class and has gotten two jobs! She also has an electric bike and is working on getting her driver's licence. Sometimes her confidence still wavers, but that is bound to happen. She has mentioned she does not feel as pressured to stay with her husband knowing she has legal resources to help her leave if she chooses to.

I strongly believe that our ability to give this person the knowledge that she didn't have to stay in an unhappy relationship, that she has legal options and protection, gave her the power to change her outlook and feel confident about what she wants. As an agency it is important for us to have LABC and other agencies and resources available so that we can help those like her. These kinds of partnerships help us meet people's needs and fill in those gaps. This is one story of many, especially during these times. Knowing that we can make a difference and help empower others to improve their quality of life is priceless.

STORY 14

A very elderly couple came to me asking for direction as to what to do. They showed me an endorsed document that outlined the gifting of a vehicle to them by a brother-in-law. The brother-in-law died, leaving the vehicle in their care. Their niece (the brother-in-law's child) arrived soon after to remove her dad's personal effects from his home and needed the vehicle to transport those items. They gave her permission on condition that the vehicle be returned. It was never returned; the niece said it belonged to her as part of the estate. The police would not take the case, and all attempts to reason with the niece failed.

We gave the couple the phone number for Access Pro Bono and the Civil Resolution Tribunal as they do not own a computer and didn't know how to text. The couple spoke with Access Pro Bono, who said they would have to initiate a civil action. When I reviewed the paperwork, I found a lawyer's name and learned he was the executor of the brother-in-law's will and that it contained information that was contrary to what the niece said. At the request of the couple and after an Authorization to Release Information was signed, I emailed the lawyer explaining the issues at hand.

We were eventually able to persuade the niece to return the vehicle and avoid a civil case.

STORY 15

In late spring of 2021, Sarah (a pseudonym) came by saying she wanted legal aid. I initially referred her to our local family duty counsel to get more information on a separation. She is the kind of person who seemed to not want to rock the boat when asking for help. But I encouraged her to contact duty counsel.

She called back a week or two later saying the duty counsel lawyer would take on her case if she had legal aid. This was notable as I didn't think she had a case eligible for legal aid coverage based on what she initially told me. However, she was not someone to state all her issues out loud. In other words, her struggle was hidden behind a sort of stoic wall.

After calling legal aid, she explained more about her situation, and she was indeed approved for a family lawyer, for good reason. This is an almost senior woman who wanted a separation/divorce from her long-time partner.

She lives boat-access only and was somewhat nervous about her safety after she successfully began to take the steps to separate. I connected her with our local women's outreach, and our local 24-hour transition house line in case there was a non-emergency crisis and she needed to talk to a non-police line outside of our resource centre's hours.

I work as an information and referral specialist for most of my hours. Being aware of that, she mentioned needing help on an advocacy front, and I was able to easily connect her to our legal advocate (funded by the Law Foundation of BC) — who shares a wall with me. Sarah had been living on \$360 per month. I told our advocate that Sarah had needed help restarting her union benefits, and that she was also waiting on a yes or no from CPP. The advocate was able to help her with these issues.

Sarah also referred a friend in her community to us for some help as well. I gave this person information about housing and childcare on the coast.

During COVID, we can only have one person in the office at a time, and we operate by appointment. However, we accommodate drop-ins as often as we can. On this day, I was able to assist Sarah outside. We set up a chair, and I troubleshooted a setting on her phone that was preventing her from viewing a banking page she needed to print. It sounds convoluted, and it is! These barriers are the small but debilitating things that prevent people from moving ahead. I was happy I could figure it out! It turned out she had her phone set on "magnifier mode" so she couldn't view web pages properly, and the banking experts walking her through the process could not understand why she couldn't complete the steps. I was happy to be there to be an independent set of eyes, help her troubleshoot, and keep the tone light!

Sarah said to me the other day that it was the initial intake person at a neighbouring organization (the person who works at the front desk) who was kind enough to listen to her and refer her to me. She added, “And thanks to you, I am finally moving forward with my life.”

Having an office like ours that lumps together services and runs multiple programs, combined with having the flexibility to help people for big chunks of time with any number of issues — not unlike the way social workers help people — is such a key service in our community. It is such a load off for people to find that — yes! — they can get help with printing stuff, navigating government services, advocating for their rights, and finding out about other services that may be a good match to them, and all because they happened to come in for another issue, in this case, legal aid and information. So many people using legal aid services benefit from having a one-stop-shop model like our resource centre. I only wish we were funded to have more staff on hand all the time!

The last time I saw Sarah (and I’m sure I’ll see her again), she expressed a desire to volunteer for us when she’d sorted out her personal issues and had begun to have some free time again. It’s a sign we can effect positive change.

STORY 16

A person came in to get help. He is the biological father of a five-year-old daughter, and though he and the mother were separated, they had an amicable co-parenting agreement. The mother's family invited her and the daughter to visit them, so the two of them went up there. They kept in touch with the father over the phone. After a few weeks she called him to say that they were thinking of staying and not returning home. He came to our office to get advice, and I referred him to the legal advocate. Following the advocate's recommendation, the man contacted the mother to say that she hadn't followed the proper relocation steps. She said she would be speaking to a lawyer, so we referred him to LABC right away. His legal aid lawyer was able to make a successful application for jurisdiction. Because of help from LABC, all court hearings would be conducted from our community, so he'll be given many chances in the relocation process to work out a more favourable situation.

I think the Community Partnership initiative made this situation extremely seamless for this person. For advice, he saw the legal advocate in our office, and then when the situation escalated, we were able to get him a legal aid lawyer rather quickly to help him out.

STORY 17

The most significant change to our community resulting from the Community Partner initiative would be the hope felt by individuals who are leaving abusive relationships. Most people we serve feel powerless against their partners when they are trying to leave an abusive relationship, usually with little or no money or resources. Often, they are threatened by their abuser that their children will be taken from them or that they are not entitled to anything if they choose to leave. The opportunity to receive free legal advice and often representation is very empowering for them in a time of uncertainty. Knowing their legal rights and having accurate information regarding the law gives them the confidence they need to stand up and take their power back so they can live a life without abuse.

A specific example: I recently supported an older woman who had been experiencing abuse for many years and had tried to leave many times in the past but had believed the stories told to her by her abuser, such as “You will get nothing if you leave” and “You will have no money to eat and nowhere to live.” Since being connected with LABC, she has been able to get a protection order and an order for spousal support. She has been able to leave an abusive situation and now lives a life free of violence.

STORY 18

I have been the local agent intake worker here since November 2019 and had previously been a Community Partner from the program's inception to April 2016. In the beginning, I had connected with local resources, band offices, health offices on reserve, libraries, district and village offices, local ministries (MCFD, social services, etc.). When contacting them, I usually began with "Hello, I am _____ from the local agent, also known as Legal Aid BC." From the sound of it, many offices didn't know legal aid still existed. I began here at the office in 2002 when legal aid funding was cut. Most of their offices shut down, while some remained open as local agents. So, when I was calling these community resources, I was surprised so many people thought that there still no legal aid services. I had reached out to more than one person in those many offices and followed up with packages or boxes full of pamphlets and booklets that met their needs. For example, when delivering to a band office, my focus was more on family-type booklets. When going to court to do intake for LABC, I would bring a box full of books and pamphlets on criminal issues, small claims, and family law. These materials are set out on tables in the waiting rooms. At our local courts, we have one table dedicated just for legal aid resources that we always keep well stocked.

When I returned to the Community Partner position, I had to be thoughtful about how to provide outreach when we were on lockdown. I created a Facebook page and have been sharing a lot of the posts from Legal Aid BC and the People's Law School. We also provide weekly family legal advice clinics, which are usually filled up, so we haven't had to post the dates. Our local Provincial Court has been a very good resource as they ensure every person knows they can apply for legal aid and suggest they adjourn their matters if they haven't already applied.

I can't think of any significant story to share, but the start of Community Partners seemed quite unique. As an intake worker it can be very difficult to notify the locals that we are here. The people who do go to court and are new to it don't realize they can get a lawyer if they are charged. We used to attend in person, but we have asked duty counsel to let people know to call us if they are at their first appearance.

STORY 19

A most significant change I have seen in my role as a justice navigator involves people's access to legal aid, their awareness of the help available, and collaborative relationships.

My Community Partner office is at the Vernon courthouse. Duty counsel is also located there, just one door down. This makes it easy to refer people back and forth, as well as for me to attend people's meetings with duty counsel to avoid any miscommunication or understanding. The proximity allows for communication between me and the duty counsel.

The local agent is also at the courthouse. We have open communication and check in with each other regularly. When she is not at the courthouse, her office is within walking distance.

People with questions often come to the courthouse looking for info. The court registry refers them upstairs to me, and I can assist them with researching information or I can provide them with publications. People at the courthouse for a court date are also referred to me. I have placed legal posters and pamphlets in view, and I am accessible to walk-ins.

I feel the collaborative work and communication that I have with the local agent intake assistant and all the duty counsel lawyers is what makes legal aid services successful in Vernon. I am very thankful for the relationships.