

Ontario's Community Legal Clinics

Together Making the Equal Rights Dream a Reality

2023 Annual Report



Association of Community Legal Clinics of Ontario

www.aclco.org

A Client's Story

Escaping a lifetime of gender based violence in Iran, our non-English speaking client arrived in Canada seeking new opportunities, a new life and a way forward. Instead, she found herself subject to sex-based discrimination, sexual violence and citizenship-based discrimination at her first job in Canada. Her employer, who was of the same ethnicity, refused to pay her more than \$5.00 an hour on the premise that she did not have permanent status in Canada. He also harassed her in the workplace, making unwanted comments to her. This escalated to egregious sexual advances. When she threatened to report him, he threatened he would have her deported. Later on, he even threatened to have her killed if she did anything. Despite the tremendous trauma she faced, this client found the courage to pick up the phone and call her local legal clinic. Over the next five years, Don Valley Community Legal Services represented her through a long battle at the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario. The battle ended this year when the Tribunal awarded her \$180,000.00 in damages – the second highest damages award made at the Tribunal in its history thus far.



Who We Are

Community legal clinics serve people in communities across Ontario. Funded primarily by Legal Aid Ontario, clinics offer a broad range of legal services to address the basic legal needs of low-income Ontarians.

There are 71 community legal clinics in Ontario, each governed by their own board of directors chosen by the community. Clinics serve the most vulnerable on issues that are most critical to them, including secure and affordable housing, income security, health care, human rights, disability programs, education, workers' rights, victim assistance, environmental issues and more. The vital work that clinics do is aimed at ensuring that people with low incomes are able

to meet their most basic needs, giving them the ability to live healthy lives, in dignity, as active members of society. Most local neighbourhood clinics serve geographic communities, while specialty clinics serve specific groups including people with disabilities, injured workers, racialized communities, the elderly, children and youth.

Clinics are rooted in the communities they serve, using limited resources to provide often life-saving services that are most needed by that community. Clinics work closely with other local agencies to ensure that clients are well-served and to follow a coordinated community approach that ensures long-term solutions.



Legal Services that ensure equal voices and reduce poverty

Community legal clinics work every day to protect and promote the rights of low-income Ontarians. Community legal clinics fight for justice for people who live with low-incomes - whether speaking for a client whose wages have not been paid, or bringing to the Supreme Court of Canada arguments that underscore the impact of the law on disadvantaged communities. Steadfast advocacy for access to justice and respect for the rights of all, regardless of ability to pay, ensure a just and equitable society for all Ontarians.

Much of the work done by community legal clinics is aimed at ensuring people with low-

incomes have access to basic measures of adequate shelter and income support. These essential supports in turn result in improved health, improved opportunities for children to succeed in school, and for adults to participate in the labour market and the economy.

The work that community legal clinics do to help low-income people secure access to our justice system is therefore not only an issue of justice. Clinic services that result in a reduction of poverty have a significant positive impact on the health, vitality and economic return of local communities.

What people in the justice system say about community legal clinics

“Legal Aid, and, in particular community law, is perhaps the single most important mechanism we have to make the equal rights dream a reality.”

Former Ontario Chief Justice Roy McMurtry



“The most advanced justice system in the world is a failure if it does not provide justice to the people it is meant to serve. Access to justice is therefore critical. Unfortunately, many Canadian men and women find themselves unable, mainly for financial reasons, to access the Canadian justice system.”

Former Supreme Court of Canada Chief Justice, Beverley McLachlin



“Whenever I think about access to justice, a quote from Honoré de Balzac comes to mind. He said that, ‘Laws are spider webs through which the big flies pass and the little ones get caught.’ To me, that image perfectly captures not just the inequities in our legal system, but the tangible effects those inequities have on people. While the system is meant to treat everyone equally, some people get stuck, and expend a great deal of time and energy trying to break free. Others breeze through to resolution, and move on with their lives. Giving people access to justice is like giving them the tools to free themselves from the spider’s web.”

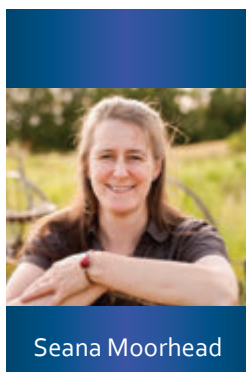
The Right Honourable Richard Wagner, P.C., Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada



Message from ACLCO Co-Chairs

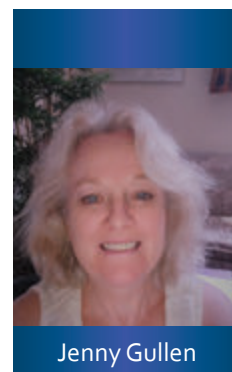
We are pleased to present this report on behalf of the ACLCO Board members. It was wonderful to once again host our AGM in person in November 2023. This gathering of 148 participants from clinics throughout the province was not only a chance to have in-depth conversations about issues important to clinics, but also a chance to connect to other hardworking clinic staff and Board members and to remember that we are part of a larger, dynamic province-wide system dedicated to access to justice for low-income Ontarians.

ACLCO continues to work on many issues integral to the effectiveness of the clinic system as it serves Ontario's communities. This year, we focused our efforts on developing and negotiating



Seana Moorhead

with LAO a new Clinic Funding Model to address the issues of inadequate compensation funding within the clinic system. The low compensation funding has historical roots from when the salary grid was discontinued as well as when funding was made available through the financial eligibility review. The lack of funding has led to a crisis for recruitment and retention of clinic staff. We remain hopeful that the new clinic funding model will be approved in the early fiscal year of 2024-2025 and, once implemented, will be a significant step in addressing the compensation crisis.



Jenny Gullen

In addition, the ACLCO continued its efforts to secure increased overall funding for legal aid from both the provincial and federal governments; to work on issues related to clinic leasing, surpluses, the Service Agreements and supports for French Language Services. We are fortunate to have the services of the Policy Counsel and KnowledgeNow and the work they do in supporting clinics.

This year was also the final year for service by many long-standing ACLCO Board members, including Trudy McCormick (serving on the Board since 2006), Danny Rampersaud (serving 11 years) and Mike Ollier (serving 6 years). We thank them for their commitment to the clinic system and to making the ACLCO a strong voice for all of us.

The ACLCO's primary role is as an advocate for the clinic system. It is also our goal to make it easier for LAO to receive a more streamlined response from the clinic system on systematic issues, without ignoring differing perspectives, and thus facilitate communication. Thank you to all clinic staff and Board members for your hard work and commitment to providing access to justice for low-income Ontarians. As Board Co-Chairs, we are extremely grateful to the amazing ACLCO staff of Ivana, Paul and the outstanding leadership provided by Lenny.

The ACLCO is here to help us strengthen our efforts as a system. If you have any questions after reading through this Annual Report, please do not hesitate to ask any of the ACLCO staff or Board members. Thank you for your continued support.

The Most Appropriate Response

Community legal clinics are distinct among legal aid services providers offering a broad range of legal services to address the needs of our clients and the inequities confronting them. Clinics provide legal representation in courts and tribunals, brief services, legal advice and assistance, public legal education, and referrals to other sources of assistance. Clinics address a variety of client needs by choosing the right tool in their legal toolkit to address the problem most effectively and efficiently.

Punching Above Our Weight

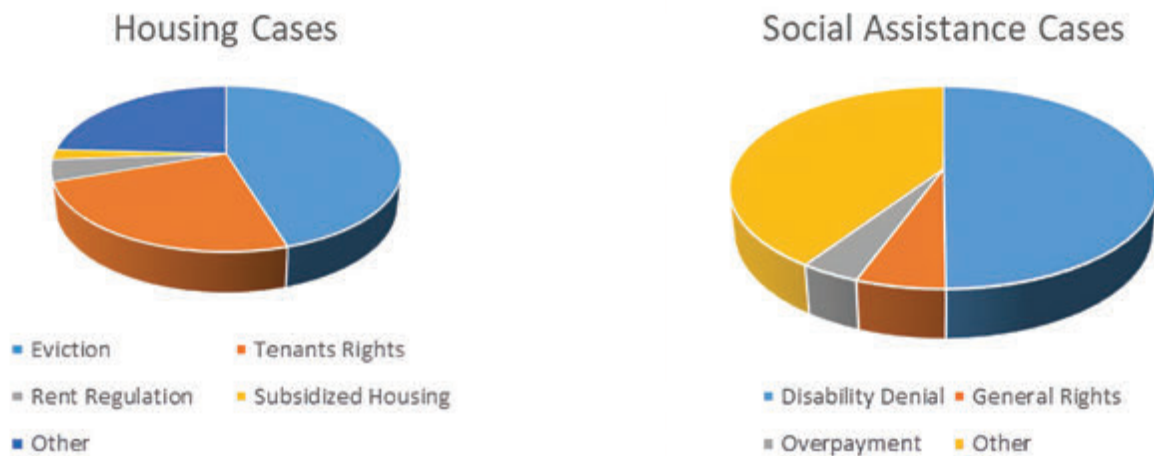
Often the best response to the inequities faced by disadvantaged people is a community response. Community legal clinics serve large numbers by undertaking community organizing, public legal education, policy advocacy, law reform projects and initiatives to address issues systemically. Clinics help build the capacity of people living on low-incomes to be involved in and influence the legal and political processes that affect them. Working with the community to organize and advocate has proven to be effective in changing policies and legislation and addressing systemic issues. In this way, the clinic system contributes to the process of social change and law reform needed to ensure basic human rights and improve the lives of low-income people in Ontario.



The People We Serve

Community legal clinics serve the most disadvantaged who have been pushed to society's margins—people living with disabilities, racialized people, victims of abuse and torture, migrant workers, the elderly, newcomers and refugees, among many others. The legal issues that are handled by clinics for their clients address those issues that arise for the clients because they are living with low incomes.

In 2023, Ontario's community legal clinics opened over 118,000 cases. 73,500 cases were in the areas of **housing** and **social assistance** – helping to keep a roof overhead and food on the table.



In addition to opening cases in their communities, clinics provide Tenant Duty Counsel services at the Landlord and Tenant Board in locations throughout the province. In 2023, over 97,000 services were provided by Tenant Duty Counsel.

Another approximate 45,000 cases were in a broad range of other areas of law:



Highlights of Clinic Work in 2023

Injured migrant workers are entitled to loss of earnings benefits and retraining support-wrongly denied by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB)

The appeals of four injured migrant workers, represented by **IAVGO Community Legal Clinic**, were heard together by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal. The workers challenged an unjust policy of the WSIB that targets vulnerable migrant workers. The policy limits benefits for injured migrant farm workers on the assumption that they can find work in Ontario - a fictional assumption, as the repatriated workers can neither live nor work in Ontario.

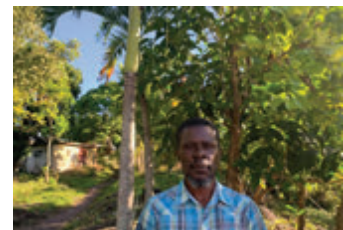
The injustice of the WSIB's policy is epitomized in the case of one of the workers, who dedicated 16 years to Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) before a life-altering back injury. The accident, which occurred when he fell off a tobacco wagon, robbed him of his livelihood as an Ontario farm labourer. It also ended his career as a barber in Jamaica. Even though the effects of his injury are permanent, the WSIB capped the worker's loss of earnings benefits at 12 weeks. They deemed him able to work as a parking lot attendant in Ontario, despite the worker living in another country, having lost the legal right to live and work in Canada, and possessing limited literacy and numeracy skills.

In its ground-breaking decisions, the Appeals Tribunal considered the relevant text, context, and purpose of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, and found that there was no basis in the statute, or binding policy, to limit to 12 weeks the loss of earnings benefits of the injured seasonal agricultural workers, without consideration of their actual circumstances. The Tribunal ordered the WSIB to assess and compensate actual wage losses and return-to-work prospects of the injured migrant workers based on the realities of their lives in Jamaica.

The Tribunal took official notice of anti-Black racism and other forms of discrimination when weighing evidence. The features of the SAWP program and, the precarious employment status of SAWP workers, were found to provide relevant context including: "the undisputed existence of anti-Black racism in Ontario, the vulnerable employment status of SAWP workers, and their challenges in accessing health care both in Ontario and in their home countries".

Following the Tribunal's decision, the WSIB announced that it is conducting a review of how migrant worker claims are adjudicated to ensure that it takes account of the local labour market realities of workers in their home countries.

This win was the fruit of years of unwavering dedication from injured workers, alongside the teams at IAVGO and Justicia for Migrant Workers, and a host of community partners.



Addressing the Housing Crisis

Over the past thirty years, rental costs in Ontario have soared. As of May 2023, average asking rents in Toronto were \$2822 - \$2590 in Mississauga and \$2106 in Ottawa. Asking rents across the province have increased anywhere from 10% to 35% in some municipalities – and that’s just compared to the previous year’s prices.

Renters, especially renters with low incomes, cannot keep up. Evictions are on the rise. More and more people are being pushed into precarious housing or homelessness, leading to ordinary people struggling to get by. This is not fair and it’s not right.

In 2023, the **Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario** (ACTO) launched a Rent Control Campaign. The goal of the campaign is to restore real rent control for all, to eliminate vacancy decontrol, and to cool rising rental prices and put rental housing affordability front and centre.

ACTO published a new report to accompany the campaign. The report, *Housing Hardship: How Ontario Renters Struggle to Keep a Roof Overhead*, contains the details of the cost of living and affordable rental housing crisis and, the rise of evictions in Ontario. The second part of the report outlines recommendations for how all levels of government may work together to address the crisis and provide support for renters.



Extreme Heat and the Right to Cooling

The summer of 2023 saw devastating impacts caused by the climate crisis on low-income, vulnerable or disadvantaged communities across the country. One of the more dangerous impacts of climate change is extreme heat.

Like many climate change impacts, extreme heat deeply impacts the most vulnerable. Particularly affected are the elderly, people with chronic diseases, disabilities or mobility issues, and young children. Due to the severity of the health impacts of extreme heat, it is a public health emergency and immediate legal change is necessary. This is why the **Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA)**, and allied organizations have been advocating for Ontario municipalities to adopt maximum heat by-laws in rental apartments.

This year, CELA continued the Climate Change Impacts and Vulnerable Communities initiative and developed a report focused on the City of Hamilton. The report recommends and provides draft language for a maximum heat municipal by-law that would require landlords to maintain a maximum temperature of 26°C in rental units.

In May 2023, following presentations including those of the **Hamilton Community Legal Clinic**, **CELA**, **ACORN Hamilton**, and the **Low Income Energy Network (LIEN)**, the City of Hamilton's Public Health Committee unanimously passed a motion to refer the implementation of an Adequate Temperature By-law to the 2024 budget. If approved during City Council's budget vote, the by-law would be in force for the summer of 2024.



"The heat in my apartment affects my health. When I get overheated I get migraines. Sometimes, it feels like I'm in an oven. It affects my sleep. I have problems sleeping at night because it's too hot. I could have access to AC but I can't afford the hydro bill. Cost is the major barrier for me. This summer's going to be hot, next summer is going to be even hotter because of climate change."

Liz Scott, Hamilton ACORN member (from Beat the Heat, Hamilton Acorn Report, 2022)



Your Way Forward (YWF) is a partnership of community legal clinics that provides holistic legal services to people who have experienced gender-based violence (GBV). With funding from the Department of Justice, the project is now in its second year working to ensure much-needed legal services are reaching survivors of GBV. YWF partner clinics are: **Legal Assistance of Windsor, Elgin-Oxford Legal Clinic, Community Legal Assistance Sarnia, Durham Community Legal Clinic, Peterborough Community Legal Centre, Northumberland Community Legal Centre, Community Advocacy & Legal Centre, Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, and Justice for Children & Youth.**

All nine clinics serve clients using their own model of legal and support services. The clinics work closely with community partners and are committed to ensuring survivor clients have access to just outcomes.

A key component of the YWF project is all nine clinics collaborating with, and strengthening each other. In March, YWF project staff and management spent two days together in Toronto building community and learning from each other. Being in-person and having dedicated time to consider our collective work mobilized our collaborative efforts and laid the foundation for future considerations around the project's sustainability.



Some highlights of YWF's collaborative priorities:

Systemic Action: Survivors experience many system frailties as they seek justice. YWF searches for avenues to support large-scale change, such as increased access to both family and criminal law legal aid certificates for people who experience gender-based violence and, ensuring survivors' needs are always at the decision-making table.

Public Legal Education: Collaboration among staff with particular expertise led to the development of public legal education materials on some of the common legal concerns that survivors encounter. The materials can be used by all nine clinics, and tailored by local staff for individual clinics and communities.

Learning: All project staff have participated in formal training and in group learning on a regular basis. The project's Community of Practice has hosted external experts, including on femicide inquests, civil options for survivors and, culturally-relevant services. The project hopes to share their learning more broadly with clinic colleagues, as survivors of GBV often turn to legal clinics for answers to their complex, overlapping legal issues.

Inquest Recommendations After the Death of Immigration Detainee

Community Legal Services of Ottawa participated in the coroner's inquest into the death of an immigration detainee who passed away suddenly at Peterborough Regional Health Center in June 2015. The jury adopted all of the recommendations of the clinic and the Refugee Coalition. These recommendations focused on the location of detention, the conditions of detention and the need for an oversight body for Canada Border Services Agency.

The clinic represented the Canadian Council for Refugees and, together with 2 lawyers from the Refugee Law Office, formed the Refugee Coalition and was granted party standing at the inquest. The hearing was 18 days long, involved multiple parties and voluminous evidence (22 witnesses and over 4,000 pages of documentary evidence).

Taking it to the UN

South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario, with the Colour of Poverty-Colour of Change, was one of 6 civil society organizations from across Canada that were chosen to present at the United Nations pre-session for Canada's Universal Periodic Review. The clinic appeared at the UN in Geneva in August 2023 and presented concerns to UN member states about a number of issues including the continued use of indefinite immigration detention; Canada's failure to create a National Action Plan Against Racism; the disproportionate impact of gender-based violence on racialized women; Canada's failure to implement a ruling of the UN Human Rights Committee to provide healthcare to migrant workers; and the proliferation of hate against racialized communities in Canada (anti-Indigenous, anti-Black, anti-Asian, Islamophobia hate).

Several recommendations were made to Canada as a result of the Universal Periodic Review, including more action needed to combat racism and hate, health care coverage for all migrant workers, and the creation of a more comprehensive strategy to collect disaggregated data. Canada is now in the process of reviewing those recommendations and reporting back to the UN on its plans for implementation.

Clinic and Community Partners working together to support Inuit clients

Community Legal Services of Ottawa established a monthly drop-in housing law service at the Pisiksik Justice Department, which provides support for Inuit clients in contact with the criminal justice system, as part of ongoing efforts to collaborate with the Legal Support Program of Tungasuvvingat Inuit and Inuuqatigiit. The legal clinic collaborates with PJD in observing culturally relevant and appropriate approaches to reduce the number of Inuit clients from entering or re-entering the system. The ultimate goal is resiliency, healing and wellness to ensure Inuit maintain healthy and productive lives.

Taking Housing Law Reform to City Hall

The **Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario** has been working very closely with the city of Hamilton on the issue of Renovictions and has been instrumental in shaping Hamilton's renoviction by-law. ACTO's staff lawyer deputed at City Council saying "Be bold. Take it out for a spin ... You are the City of Hamilton and people are suffering."

After much coordinated pressure with allies at Hamilton ACORN, city councillor Brad Clark conceded that, "Council said we're asking you to tell us how to do it; not if we want to do it." On January 18th 2024, the renoviction by-law, the first of its kind in Ontario, officially came to pass.



Pathway Out of Energy Poverty in Northern Ontario

An Assessment in Northern Ontario and Recommendations on Next Steps

The **Low-Income Energy Network** (LIEN) is a joint program of the **Canadian Environmental Law Association** (CELA) and the **Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario** (ACTO). The program published "*Pathway Out of Energy Poverty in Northern Ontario*", a report assessing energy affordability programs available to low-income people in Northern Ontario. One of the main findings was that ongoing monthly assistance is crucial for low-income people struggling to pay their utilities bills and that utilities costs are particularly high in Northern Ontario.

The report, provided to the Energy Minister and the Energy Critics, made 18 recommendations to improve the energy affordability programs for low-income people in the region, with a priority placed on ongoing assistance programs.

Several Northern clinics provided insights to LIEN on energy poverty in their communities: **Elliot Lake & North Shore Community Legal Clinic; Sudbury Community Legal Clinic; Kinna-awaya Legal Clinic; Keewaytinok Native Legal Services; and, Manitoulin Legal Clinic.**



Little NHL 2023 Legal Outreach



Indigenous Justice Coordinators, with the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic, Waterloo Region Community Legal Services and the Elgin-Oxford Legal Clinic, held several big events in 2023!

In a partnership with the Nipissing First Nation, the Little NHL committee and the City of Mississauga, the IJC's took a Free Mobile Legal Clinic to the 2023 Little NHL Hockey Tournament! This is a much anticipated event, every year since 1971, in 'Indigenous Country.' Indigenous folks from across the Province, including fly in communities, come together in the same space. There were over 187 teams registered for the three-day event from tyke to midget and, with these players, came family members and community members to cheer them on.

The IJC's, along with a team of legal helpers, provided legal advice in; Family & Criminal law, Refugee law, Housing, Social Assistance, Employment, WSIB, Wills & Estates, Powers of Attorney, Sexual Harassment in the Workplace, Human Rights, Queer Justice, and Notary services.

Little NHL 2023 Legal Outreach!
Free Mobile Legal Clinic
St. Thomas, Waterloo & Hamilton Indigenous Justice Programs
March 13, 14 & 15 – 9am to 1pm
@ The Iceland Arena, Special Events Room
Drop In Or By Appointment

FREE & CONFIDENTIAL LEGAL ADVICE IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS OF LAW
Family Law, Criminal Law, Refugee Law, Landlord & Tenant Law, Social Assistance (OW, ODSP, CPP/D),
Employment Law, WSIB, Wills & Estates, Power of Attorney, Sexual Harassment in the Workplace,
Human Rights, Queer Justice/Trans ID & Notary Services

(For more information call or text: Sara George, Indigenous Justice Coordinator: 226-377-3083)

Mitgwech to The Little NHL Committee & Nipissing First Nation for making this possible.



Employment Law Team

The Toronto East Employment and Immigration Legal Services (TEEILS) has grown to cover the areas served by **Don Valley Community Legal Services**, **Neighbourhood Legal Services** and **Willowdale Community Legal Services**.

The employment law lawyers on the team help clients across the east end of Toronto with a variety of employment law issues, from wrongful dismissal litigation, to demand letter negotiations, to complex human rights and workplace harassment cases. This work has resulted in hundreds of thousands of dollars in settlements and court or tribunal awards for clients over this past year, from the Social Security Tribunal, the Ontario Labour Relations Board and the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario.

Each of our lawyers takes on complex and systemic litigation, including Superior Court litigation involving the new tort of online harassment in the context of workplace harassment; a Ontario Labour Relations Board case under the Employment Protection for Foreign Nationals Act, and has become among the clinic system's most experienced practitioners for Federal Court judicial reviews of CERB overpayment decisions.

The team's public legal education and law reform work also continues to grow. The Tareekh Pe Tareekh Campaign on TikTok, Twitter and Instagram had over 40 videos posted in five different South Asian languages on workers' rights topics. Jointly run with the **South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO)**, Tareekh Pe Tareekh has scaled new heights this year, from being featured on the CBC and OMNI News to being shared in MPPs' newsletters.

The poster features a pink banner at the top with the text "TAREEKH PE TAREEKH". Below it is an orange banner with "KNOW YOUR EMPLOYMENT LAW RIGHTS" and "PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION CAMPAIGN". The main content is divided into two columns. The left column has a blue box with a globe and the text "LEARN ABOUT YOUR EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS". Below this is a QR code and a "SCAN" button. The right column has a green box with the text "Check out these short educational videos in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali and Tamil on basic employment law rights in Ontario." Below the QR code is a section with text in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, and Tamil, followed by the SALCO logo and social media handles @tareekpetareekh and @tareekhpetaareekh1.

TAREEKH PE TAREEKH

KNOW YOUR EMPLOYMENT LAW RIGHTS
PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

LEARN ABOUT YOUR EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

Check out these short educational videos in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali and Tamil on basic employment law rights in Ontario.

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SCAN

DV CLS **SALCO** South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario

@tareekpetareekh @tareekhpetaareekh1

The Forgotten Ones: The Impact of COVID-19 on Black Families & Child Welfare Survivors

The Collective of Child Welfare Survivors (CCWS) is a grassroots organization that provides support for child welfare survivors, primarily between 8-29 years of age, and their families, particularly those who are Black, Indigenous, and racialized. CCWS works in partnership with the **Black Legal Action Centre** (BLAC) and other partners on the child welfare experience. The work is grounded on the pillars of critical youth-centering, decolonization, and addressing anti-Black racism.

The CCWS has produced a study, *The Forgotten Ones*, focusing on the experiences with Ontario's child protection system of Black child welfare survivors and Black families/caregivers, amid COVID-19 and the restrictions imposed in response to the virus. This report provides a sobering view of how the 'child welfare' system continues to produce various forms of struggle for Black people.

The study reflects a serious concern as to whether the child protection system is promoting the best interests of the child for Black children. It illuminates how the socioeconomic, health, and legal conditions of COVID-19 work in hand with anti-Black racism; and, how Ontario's system is barely meeting the low standard of "promoting" the best interests of the child, let alone actualizing the best interests of the child for Black children.

The key takeaways of the study outlined the health and social risk and carceral condition for Black child welfare survivors presented by COVID-19; the ruptures experienced by Black families along with the blame for those ruptures; that COVID-19 restrictions resulted in Black and Afro-Indigenous children being left in abusive and anti-Black placements; that trauma, harm and dire outcomes caused to them by child welfare have little impact on criminal punishment of Black child welfare survivors; the few specific services available to Black families dwindled and/or disappeared; Black advocacy groups unaffiliated with Children's Aid Societies or the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies are fundamental in changing the trajectory of the cases of Black families.

Taking it to the Senate

South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario and Black Legal Action Centre appeared at the Senate of Canada in 2023 to advocate for legislation that would provide a pathway to Canadian citizenship for kids in care. Racialized children in care have faced significant issues because of the failure to address immigration issues while they were children, which has often resulted in removal from Canada when they are adults.



Trans ID Clinic



The **Peterborough Community Legal Centre** has an essential message for Transgender, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people: You are valued and deserve to feel protected by society.

The PCLC Trans ID Clinic has operated for three years now. In 2020, the clinic identified an underserved need in the community and acted to improve access to suitable identification (ID) for Trans people by assisting with name and gender marker change applications. Since then the Trans ID Clinic has supported over 46 applications.

Lack of access to suitable identification can inhibit one's ability to participate in crucial areas of life like health care, social services, housing, and employment. For Trans people, having government-issued identification that is incongruent with one's identity or presentation can also subject someone to transphobic harassment, discrimination and gender-based violence.

The Trans ID Clinic aims to reduce the barriers associated with obtaining a name and gender marker change and appropriate ID by: funding the costs associated with the application process to eligible participants; advising and assisting on the application process; troubleshooting issues that arise; connecting participants to necessary community services; and commissioning and mailing applications.

Last year, the Trans ID Clinic also engaged in a law reform project that advocates for an amendment to the Vital Statistics Act (VTA) to remove the requirement that a person applying to change the sex designation on their birth certificate must provide a letter from either a practicing physician or psychologist who deems the sex designation is "appropriate". The Clinic pushed for a more expansive list of professionals and, for the removal of sex designations on short-form birth certificates altogether.

In a climate of moral panic, it is more important than ever to stand with Trans people and actively support their ability to live with dignity and safety.

West Scarborough Resilient Community Project



West Scarborough Community Legal Services (WSCLS) is committed to ensuring that it is meeting the needs of the community it serves by engaging in outreach initiatives to connect with Scarborough's marginalized and vulnerable populations and, to improve its connection to new populations.

After two years of operating remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Clinic wants to create a new strategy to meet clients' complex and evolving needs in collaboration with the community. Thanks to a \$99,900 grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation Resilient Community Fund, WSCLS was able to tackle a yearlong project to reach out to, connect with, and better understand the needs of four vulnerable communities in Scarborough: individuals identifying as Black, Indigenous, Racialized, and/or living with mental health and substance use.

The grant allowed WSCLS to partner with two consultants and a project manager with lived experience to round out the Clinic's existing expertise to take on this project. The project allowed the Clinic to connect with 171 community members through a community forum, individual interviews, a focus group of community leaders, and a focus group of clinic staff. This helped WSCLS better understand the needs of the community, particularly those who were most isolated by the pandemic, and develop tools to better meet those needs. Some highlights include:

- a comprehensive needs assessment of vulnerable communities that identified key barriers to accessing clinic services, along with recommendations for addressing the needs
- a social media, digital strategy to address the digital divide experienced in the community
- improving community partnerships and collaboration as an important tool to better meet the needs of the community and to help the clinic address the complexity of needs facing WSCLS's clients.



The goals of the Health Justice Program, a partnership that includes **ARCH Disability Law Centre, HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario, Neighbourhood Legal Services**, Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto and St. Michael's Hospital, are threefold:

1. To improve social determinants of health where a legal remedy exists for low-income patients of St. Michael's Hospital's Family Health Team, and improve the access to justice of this population through preventative, stabilizing interventions before crises arise. Direct service is the cornerstone of the program, and helps to inform education and systemic advocacy initiatives.
2. To support and cultivate clinicians' abilities to recognize and smartly refer legal issues that impact their patients' health. Our education program continues to strengthen the capacity of Family Health Team and related primary healthcare community to provide services with a knowledge of their patients' rights within the healthcare system and how to navigate appropriate legal resources in the community. In turn, the HJP aims to improve legal partners' ability to deliver service within a trusted primary care setting.
3. To identify and take action on collaborative systemic law reform issues that impact low-income patients' social determinants of health, bringing together legal aid and medical partners in advocating for positive change for the betterment of the populations we jointly serve.



Julia Hotz

@hotzthoughts

AND, at St. Michael's @UnityHealthTO, doctors like @Gary_Bloch, lawyers like @Stonejenge, & lived experience advisers like Janet and Sureya are making sure inequity, poverty, ableism, violence, & discrimination don't get in the way of health (&inspiring @nbcnewamsterdam! (5/13)



10:26 AM · Nov 7, 2022

Health and Human Rights

Since the beginning of the HIV & AIDS epidemic, human rights have always been the underpinning to an effective response. This not only includes the right to access health care services free of stigma and without discrimination, but brings confidentiality, bodily integrity, privacy and autonomy to the forefront.

In this past year, the **HIV&AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario** engaged in a number of initiatives at the intersection of health and human rights. Based on their advocacy, the Ontario College of Massage Therapists rescinded a policy that required its members to collect information from clients about their HIV positive status.

In addition, the clinic organized to respond to the decision of the Ontario government to end healthcare coverage extended in March 2020 to people without insurance. This coverage primarily impacts those with no or precarious immigration status. The clinic continues to work to challenge the cuts.

The clinic was also very much involved in the response to Mpox. In addition to participating in regular community meetings, they assisted in drafting calls to the government for emergency support and services in response to Mpox infections. The clinic amplified the unique concerns of people living with HIV to ensure that vaccine distribution was equitable and privacy and confidentiality were honored.

To ensure a human rights-based approach to HIV self-testing, the clinic worked with key players in the rollout to ensure that people are able to maintain privacy, independence and control throughout the testing process. To this end, the clinic played a lead role in drafting a consensus statement on a human rights approach to self-testing as well as providing input into materials provided to people who use self-tests. Research also continued into what happens to people's health information and blood when they are tested for HIV or engage in viral load testing. It is essential that the pathway – how and where people's bodily substances and health information is collected, stored, used and shared – is made clear, especially as people living with HIV are unduly surveilled and criminalized. The research is well underway and the clinic is excited to share the results to assist people to understand what happens to their blood and health information, and to work with them to ensure that their human rights and privacy rights are always upheld.



THE EIGHTH FIRE

New mural welcomes the community to West Toronto Community Legal Services

A number of years ago, WTCLS formed its Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Committee with participation from the Board, staff, and community members. Among the first priorities was addressing the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We saw the need for all of us at WTCLS to learn more about Indigenous cultures, experiences, and histories, and to better understand present challenges and opportunities. We realized we needed to better connect with Indigenous groups in our area and explore how to better serve Indigenous clients. We needed to ensure that our offices were welcoming and our services met their needs.

A chance meeting at a local community event brought us to our first significant “Reconcili-Action” project. WTCLS wanted to make their office more welcoming to the community and learned that the Bloorcourt BIA had some funding to support its members to improve streetscapes. Soon, a mural was being discussed and thoughts quickly turned to the award-winning artist, muralist, and Indigenous educator, Philip Cote. Philip’s work was completed in the cold and dark of November 2022. Lots of hot tea was needed to keep Philip and his students going! We were all thrilled with the outcome! A public launch was held in June, 2023.

Philip explained that Indigenous Ancestors described visions of the future coming in stages called the Seven Fires. More recently, he said, there has been talk of a time when Indigenous People will come forward with their knowledge connecting with western knowledge and from this union will emerge the lighting of the Eighth and final Fire that will bring about an age of Peace. The clinic hopes that the mural will make our office more welcoming to Indigenous community members. We also hope that it will make our office more welcoming to everyone as a positive and safe place to go in times of need. Lastly, we hope that everyone who sees the mural will stop and reflect on the need for all of us to take action on Reconciliation.



What our clients say

*« Je remercie énormément Laurie Joe pour son dévouement et travail exemplaire. Sans elle je n'aurais jamais réussi à passer au travers. Son encouragement et sa gentillesse m'a tellement aidé. Merci aussi aux **services juridiques Communautaires d'Ottawa** d'aider les gens les plus démunis. »*

"Exceptionally excellent service. I was very pleased with the kind-hearted staff who always kept me up to date. Thank you for all of your hard work."

Nipissing Community Legal Clinic

"Thank you for your dedication and kindness and for making me able to relax a bit."

Nipissing Community Legal Clinic

"You are amazing; without your help I would have gone on fighting for the 6th time"

Community Advocacy & Legal Centre

*"With sincere thanks and appreciation: Thank you greatly for all of your assistance throughout the LTB hearing process. Your help really allowed me to go through the legal procedure for the first time with a clear understanding and confident that everything was handled correctly. I appreciate your work and **Downsview Community Legal Services** as a valuable resource in our community, for those who need it."*

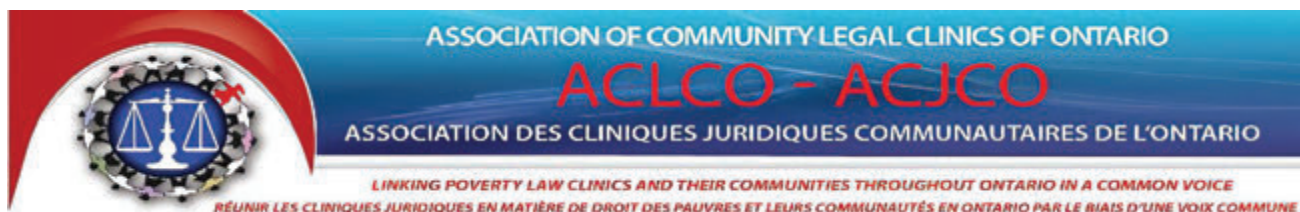
Awards and Recognitions



Shannon Down, Executive Director of the **Waterloo Region Community Legal Services**, is the recipient of the Waterloo Region Law Association FEMPOWR Pillar of the Community Award. The award is presented to a member of the Waterloo Region Law Association who is committed to providing feminist engagement and mentorship to future leaders in the legal profession. Her clinic nominated Shannon as a team.



The **Timmins-Temiskaming Community Legal Clinic / Clinique juridique communautaire Timmins-Témiskamingue** has received the 2023 Not-For-Profit Award from the Downtown Timmins Business Improvement Area. The clinic was recognized with this award by their community partners and neighbours "for supporting our community and the betterment of life in the City of Timmins".



Who we are

The ACLCO is the representative body of Ontario's community legal clinics. We are governed by a 13-person executive comprised of staff and board members from clinics from all regions of the province. We have developed expertise in poverty law services delivered through the community legal clinic model. We act in a leadership role to advocate for sustainable legal aid services and, we are recognized throughout Canada and internationally as a champion of community based legal services.



What we do

The ACLCO communicates and collaborates regularly with government, funders, community and justice organizations regarding legal aid and community legal clinics. The ACLCO helps coordinate the clinic system's interactions with a variety of external justice partners.

A primary focus of the ACLCO has been to work with other legal aid service provider groups, primarily through the Alliance for Sustainable Legal Aid, to pursue increased government funding for legal aid. These efforts have concentrated on working with the provincial government to educate it about the importance of access to justice and legal aid investment. Significant work was also done with the federal government surrounding its role in funding legal aid services in Ontario.

Collaboration with the primary funder of clinics, Legal Aid Ontario (LAO), remains an important focus for the ACLCO. We work with LAO to ensure robust and thriving poverty law services in Ontario. In addition, the ACLCO works with LAO on a wide range of issues affecting the clinic system through the ACLCO Executive and a number of standing and ad hoc advisory committees.

The ACLCO has expanded its supports for community clinics. We operate the KnowledgeNow program, promoting knowledge creation and sharing throughout the clinic system. The ACLCO Policy Counsel plays an important role in clinic support and leadership. For several years before LAO withdrew funding in September 2019, the ACLCO managed the clinic learning and training program for the clinic system.

The ACLCO will continue to work on behalf of Ontario's community legal clinics by ensuring the ongoing flow of new funding into legal aid and the clinic system, by strengthening the clinic-LAO relationship, by fostering strong relations between the clinic system and our justice sector partners, and by expanding the supports we provide to clinics throughout the province.

Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario • Advocacy Centre for the Elderly • Algoma Community Legal Clinic
 ARCH Disability Law Centre • Black Legal Action Centre • Canadian Environmental Law Association
 Centre for Spanish-Speaking Peoples • Chatham-Kent Legal Clinic • Chinese & Southeast Asian Legal Clinic
 Clinique juridique francophone d'Ottawa/Centre des services communautaires Vanier
 Clinique juridique Grand-Nord/Grand-Nord Legal Clinic • Clinique juridique populaire de Prescott et Russell Inc
 Clinique juridique Roy McMurtry (SDG) Legal Clinic • Community Advocacy & Legal Centre
 Community Legal Assistance Sarnia • Community Legal Clinic - Brant, Haldimand, Norfolk
 Community Legal Clinic - Simcoe, Haliburton, Kawartha Lakes • Community Legal Clinic of York Region
 Community Legal Education Ontario/Éducation juridique communautaire Ontario (CLEO)
 Community Legal Services of Ottawa/Services juridiques communautaires d'Ottawa
 Don Valley Community Legal Services • Downsview Community Legal Services • Durham Community Legal Clinic
 Elgin-Oxford Legal Clinic • Elliot Lake & North Shore Community Legal Clinic • Grey Bruce Community Legal Clinic
 Hamilton Community Legal Clinic/Clinique juridique communautaire de Hamilton • HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario
 Huron Perth Community Legal Clinic • Income Security Advocacy Centre • Industrial Accident Victims' Group of Ontario (IAVGO)
 Injured Workers Community Legal Clinic • Jane Finch Community Legal Services
 Justice for Children and Youth • Keewaytinok Native Legal Services
 Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Services • Kingston Community Legal Clinic
 Kinna-aweya Legal Clinic • Lake Country Community Legal Clinic • Landlord's Self-Help Centre
 Legal Assistance of Windsor • Manitoulin Legal Clinic • Mississauga Community Legal Services • Neighbourhood Legal Services
 Neighbourhood Legal Services (London & Middlesex) • Niagara Community Legal Clinic/Clinique juridique communautaire de Niagara
 Nipissing Community Legal Clinic • North Peel & Dufferin Community Legal Services
 Northumberland Community Legal Centre • Northwest Community Legal Clinic
 Parkdale Community Legal Services • Peterborough Community Legal Centre • Queen's Prison Law Clinic
 Renfrew County Legal Clinic • Rexdale Community Legal Clinic • Scarborough Community Legal Services
 Services d'aide juridique du Centre francophone de Toronto • South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario
 South Etobicoke Community Legal Services • Sudbury Community Legal Clinic • The Legal Clinic
 Timmins-Temiskaming Community Legal Clinic/Clinique juridique communautaire Timmins-Témiskamingue
 Unison Health and Community Services • Waterloo Region Community Legal Services
 West Scarborough Community Legal Services • West Toronto Community Legal Services
 Willowdale Community Legal Services • Windsor-Essex Bilingual Legal Clinic/Clinique juridique bilingue Windsor-Essex
 Workers' Health & Safety Legal Clinic

ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY



LEGAL CLINICS OF ONTARIO

ACLCO Member Clinics

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