

Ontario's Community Legal Clinics

Together Making the Equal Rights Dream a Reality

2024 Annual Report



Association of Community Legal Clinics of Ontario

www.aclco.org

A Client's Story

A refugee mother with four minor daughters in the Congo came to **Neighbourhood Legal Services** in Toronto for assistance in obtaining reopening of her children's files with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. With conditions steadily deteriorating in the Congo, the young girls were facing significant risks. IRCC had closed their files in May 2022. The clinic gathered evidence, submitted it, and made extensive submissions in March 2023. It was discovered that the overseas IRCC office had seemingly lost the submissions. Lawyers at the clinic brought an application for mandamus to the Federal Court that resulted in a settlement. The files for all four children were reopened in November 2023 – exactly 18 months after the files had initially been closed. By April 2024, all four applications were granted and the family was reunited.



Artwork by istock.com/LuckyCreative

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.

Justice System Champions of Community Legal Clinics



In 2024, Ontario’s community legal clinics lost a fervent champion with the passing of **Former Ontario Chief Justice Roy McMurtry**. The ACLCO pays tribute to our dear friend and recommits to continuing to advance his vision for community law:

“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.”

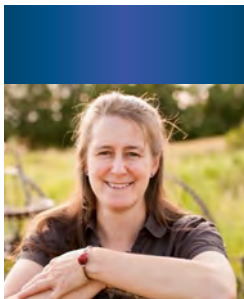
The Right Honourable Richard Wagner, P.C., Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada



Message from ACLCO Co-Chairs

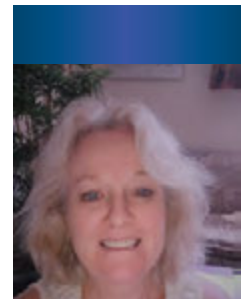
The strength of Ontario’s community legal clinic system is its ability to collaborate on common goals, whether those goals are access to justice through casework, public legal education, community development or law reform. This year has seen the clinics do extraordinary work within their communities advancing the rights of marginalized people, as can be seen in the pages of this report. Clinics have also collaborated on initiatives designed to improve clinic workplaces and workplace culture, so that staff are better able to focus on their work and fulfill clinic mandates.

The role of the ACLCO is to facilitate that collaboration, to communicate effectively with funders and external partners, and to advocate for the resources needed to achieve these common goals.



Seana Moorhead

The Clinic Staff Engagement and Morale Survey and Report and the ongoing work of the ACLCO Race Equity Advisory Committee are excellent examples of this collaboration. One of the ACLCO’s priorities in the coming year will be to advocate for the resources needed to establish a comprehensive and system-wide Learning and Training Program and support for Race Equity initiatives.



Jenny Gullen

The 5% funding increase to the clinic system this past year was welcomed across the board by clinics. This increase is a positive first step that puts clinic staff closer to compensation that is comparable to their counterparts. The ACLCO looks forward to working with both Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) and the Ministry of the Attorney General of Ontario (MAG) to complete this process.

The ACLCO also looks forward to working with MAG and LAO, following the clinic consultation process, to develop a meaningful tool for measuring poverty law needs across the diverse and complex low income communities that make up our province.

We thank you for your support over the past year and look forward to further collaboration in 2025.

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.

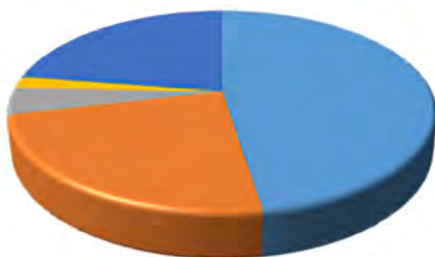


The People We Serve

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 2024, Ontario’s community legal clinics opened 123,500 cases. 77,026 cases were in the areas of **housing** and **social assistance** – helping to keep a roof overhead and food on the table.

Housing Cases



- Eviction
- Tenants Rights
- Rent Regulation
- Subsidized Housing
- Other

Social Assistance Cases



- Disability Denial
- General Rights
- Overpayment
- Other

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 2024, over 100,550 services were provided by Tenant Duty Counsel.

Approximately 46,500 cases were in a broad range of other areas of law:

Areas of Law



- Immigration/Refugee
- General Administrative
- Workers Rights/Employment
- Other Income Maintenance
- Other Legal
- Family
- Health Care
- Workers' Compensation
- Criminal
- Victim of Violence
- Human Rights
- Indigenous Rights
- Public Services
- Environmental

Highlights of Clinic Work in 2024

PROTECTING THE RIGHT TO SHELTER - A SYSTEM WIDE EFFORT Continuing to Defend against Homeless Encampment Evictions

Homelessness in Ontario has worsened to the point where we see many Ontarians living in encampments. For those living on the streets and attempting to create temporary shelter, being evicted from one's tent and having to sleep completely unsheltered is one of the worst imaginable outcomes. For that reason, Ontario legal clinics have been defending people facing encampment evictions.

It's estimated that there are currently over 40,000 unhoused in Ontario. Some will stay in shelters, but routinely, there aren't enough beds in shelters, and some can't or won't stay there due to myriad barriers preventing access. They pitch tents on public property. There has been intense pressure on municipal councils to evict them. Until the legal clinics intervened, many unlawful evictions were occurring across Ontario.

A line of cases in Canada have held that encampment evictions taking place on public lands can constitute a breach of the section 7 Charter rights of encampment residents.

Waterloo Region and the City of Kingston went to court seeking approval to evict encampments. **Waterloo Region Community Legal Services** and **Kingston Community Legal Clinic** successfully defended these cases, with the help of the **Hamilton Community Legal Clinic** and Legal Aid Ontario's Clinic Resource Office (CRO). CRO created an "Encampment Toolkit" with which clinics could defend local evictions. The Clinics' Encampment Defence Group was created to disseminate information and coordinate eviction defence work across the clinic system.

These decisions have served to influence action to protect encampment residents in other parts of the province. In a case brought by the **Hamilton Community Legal Clinic**, the Court affirmed the decisions in *Waterloo* and *Kingston*.

The **Waterloo Region Community Legal Services** represented two members of an encampment in Cambridge. The City of Cambridge rescinded the eviction notice of the encampment that housed up to 12 people and decided to end any further action against the residents.

Community Legal Assistance Sarnia were successful in persuading Sarnia City Council to reverse its decision to dismantle the Rainbow Park homeless encampment. The local police also expressed significant concerns about the constitutionality of simply removing the individuals who are camped there. These concerns flowed from the court decisions in *Waterloo* and *Kingston*.

The **Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario** spearheaded sending a letter signed by most legal clinics to each of Ontario's 440 municipalities, through the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, warning them to obey the law. **Community Legal Clinic of York Region** monitored news stories daily about potential evictions and disseminated them through Twitter. The clinics sent letters to mayors, councillors, and police chiefs where evictions were threatened. Municipalities appeared to slow down, and sometimes largely pivot away from encampment evictions.

Ontario legal clinics hope to continue to defend against encampment evictions wherever they are threatened. We hope that the Ontario government will ultimately create inexpensive housing for all unhoused Ontarians, as is its constitutional responsibility.



Protecting against Renovictions through Law Reform

Renovictions - where tenants are evicted under the false pretense of necessary renovations so landlords can increase rents significantly, or refuse tenants' return to their homes - have become increasingly common throughout Ontario. Renovictions disproportionately impact low-income and marginalized communities, exacerbating homelessness and leading to the loss of affordable rental housing options.

The **Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO)** has been working very closely with local clinics, ACORN Canada, and many city councils to press for renovation by-laws in their municipalities. Through these efforts the renovation by-law, the first of its kind in Ontario, came into effect in the City of Hamilton in 2023.

In November 2024, Toronto City Council finally approved a new renovations by-law. The "Rental Renovation Licence By-law" will come into effect on July 31, 2025.

Don Valley Community Legal Services (DVCLS) has been involved in advocating for and consulting on a renovations by-law since 2019, beginning with the renovation of tenants from a rooming house. Recently, the clinic began receiving more intake calls about other renovation cases, as were other clinics in Toronto. **DVCLS** worked with local elected officials and with tenants facing renovation. Joined by **ACTO** and ACORN Canada, the clinic deputed to the City of Toronto committees, submitted letters advocating for a strong and effective by-law, and provided their expert opinion on how to implement a by-law and why it was so important.

Since 2021, **DVCLS** has seen a 35% increase in calls regarding renovations and demovictions and anticipates that increase growing to 40% by the end of 2024. These statistics are collected from those tenants that actively contact the clinic for assistance. Countless do not. Renovictions remain a growing concern for the tenants in the Don Valley area and across the province. Each affordable unit lost to renovation is replaced with a market rate unit, usually double or triple in rent, and that continues to erode the supply of affordable housing in our communities.



The team from DVCLS, ACTO and ACORN Canada join Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow after deputing before Toronto City Council.

Don Valley Community Legal Services will never forget the tenants they have helped over the years who lost their homes. This by-law will make a difference for renters across Toronto. The clinic continues to share their expertise and work with other legal clinics in municipalities across Ontario to help fight for their own renovations by-laws, hoping never to have to fight to save a client's home from renovation again.

In September 2024, **Community Legal Services of Ottawa** participated in an anti-renoviction rally at Ottawa City Hall. The clinic provided a comprehensive overview of the critical protections a by-law could offer to tenants facing N13 notices. The rally gathered various speakers who shared their personal experiences with renovations, illustrating the profound impact of the affordability crisis on residents. Many expressed their fears and frustrations over losing their homes due to unnecessary renovations that landlords often use as a guise for eviction. Many of the speeches focused on individual stories. The clinic emphasized the importance of systemic protections, like the proposed by-law, in safeguarding tenant rights. The clinic articulated how a by-law could prevent needless losses of affordable housing, asserting that the City has a vital role in protecting tenants from such renovations. The legal clinic's presence at the rally underscored the need for robust protections against renovations and the ongoing advocacy required to ensure that tenants are not left vulnerable in the face of the current housing crisis.



Unprecedented fines and substantial compensation to tenants illegally locked out

Community Legal Assistance Sarnia (CLAS) represented a group of tenants at the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) in a series of applications brought by tenants who had been displaced from 20 rental units following a fire in one of the units in their residential complex.

After the fire, the landlord illegally locked the tenants out, delayed in undertaking repairs, and engaged in a campaign to have the tenants give up their tenancies. The LTB ordered a group of the tenants back to possession after an urgent hearing. Rather than comply with the LTB's order, the landlord appealed to Divisional Court. The Court quashed the appeal as an abuse of process. Most of the restored tenants were then returned to possession via sheriff enforcement of the LTB's interim order.

CLAS has carried on with the 20 applications at the LTB on liability and remedy. The results appear to be unprecedented with 14 orders having been made for the landlord to pay the maximum fine of \$35,000 (\$490,000 total, at this time). The LTB Vice-Chair also ordered substantial compensation to tenants, especially by LTB standards, including seven orders for general damages in excess of \$13,000.

This landlord had been previously held liable for having illegally locked tenants out after a fire, a point that did not impress the LTB Vice-Chair.

CLAS was grateful to have the litigation support of colleagues at the Clinic Resource Office at Legal Aid Ontario that resulted in the quashing of the landlords appeal. That support assisted the clinic to "punch so hard above our weight".

The clinic also acknowledges the amazing tenants who have kept the faith as they struggled to survive with the loss of their homes and denial of their rights for many months.



Fair Rent Ontario

Let's unite for full rent control. It's time for a future where all renters enjoy stable homes and secure futures!

In 2023, the **Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario** launched a Rent Control Campaign: *Fair Rent Ontario* to advocate for full rent control in Ontario.

Fair Rent Ontario recently held its launch webinar to a great reception from the public and partners. *Fair Rent Ontario* is a cross-sectoral coalition of groups bringing their expertise together to demand full rent control in Ontario by eliminating:

- ***The 2018 Rent Control Exemption***
- ***Vacancy Decontrol***
- ***Above Guideline Increases***

The coalition has called for an All-Hands-On-Deck approach from the clinic system to support the advocacy for full rent control. The approach includes a letter writing campaign demanding full rent control; promo materials to display and share on social platforms; flyers for print to display in the office, especially waiting areas for clients; the collection of public endorsers of full rent control; along with a newsletter for developments on campaign milestones and major updates.



Little Native Hockey League 2024

Community Legal Clinic of York Region, Hamilton Community Legal Clinic and Don Valley Community Legal Services provided a Free Mobile Legal Clinic to the 2024 Little Native Hockey League Hockey Tournament, held in Markham. The clinics provided legal information in the areas of Housing, Social Assistance, and Employment Law.

Every year since 1971, 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.

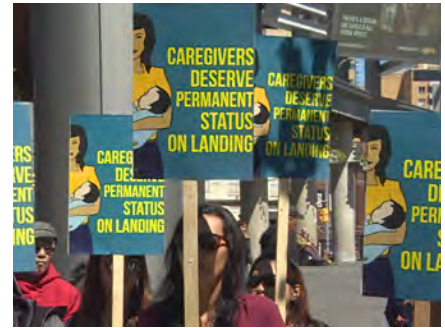


Migrant Care Workers Rights

A client who came to Canada on an employer-specific work permit was forced to quit their job due to abusive and unsafe working conditions. The client’s “Open Work Permit for Vulnerable Workers” (OWP-VW) application was refused. **Parkdale Community Legal Services** was able to have the application re-opened and a new decision rendered.

Migrant care workers have long fought for the right to come to Canada with permanent residency and their families to do important care work. Standing on the shoulders of caregiver leaders in the 1970’s and 80’s, care workers finally won permanent resident (PR) status on arrival on June 3, 2024 when Immigration Minister Miller announced the new caregiver program.

Parkdale Community Legal Services (PCLS) continues to push for a regularization program for those migrant care workers already in Canada who are in limbo due to previous restrictive caregiver pilot programs. There are an estimated 300,000 to 500,000 undocumented residents in Canada who face exploitation at work. Successful organizing pushed the Prime Minister to commit to a regularization program in 2021 and to a broad and comprehensive regularization proposal.



However, the federal government has begun backtracking. They are falling prey to rising anti-immigrant xenophobia and racism. **PCLS** continues to call on the government for a regularization program and to stop ceding ground to divisive anti-immigrant narratives.

During the past year, **PCLS** has successfully reunited families in Canada after long periods of separation; obtained open work permits for clients on closed work permits tied to abusive employers; secured waivers from the language and knowledge requirements of citizenship for clients with medical issues; assisted clients with protected-person status in Canada to acquire permanent residency; helped several clients without identity or status documents to acquire PR cards, citizenship certificates, travel documents, OHIP cards, and other photo identification; and continued pushing forward many of our longstanding and complex immigration files.

JusticeMakers

Willowdale Community Legal Services (WCLS) hosts a group called JusticeMakers, made up of local residents and clients. The group advocates for issues related to people living with low incomes. Over the past year, JusticeMakers wrote letters to government officials advocating for increases to social assistance rates and supported **WCLS’** work to secure affordable housing in a new development, including deputing at a North York City Council meeting.



When they are not advocating, JusticeMakers engage in skill-building sessions for members to sharpen their advocacy skills and increase their knowledge about issues affecting people with low-incomes. For example, JusticeMakers learned about how to do media interviews, tenancy rights and responsibilities, tenant unions, and different types of affordable housing models in Toronto.

Rights-Based Workshops in Support of Migrant Workers in Leamington

Annually, over 50,000 temporary foreign agricultural workers come to work in Canada, with a large number of them based in Leamington Ontario, the area in which over 60% of Ontario's greenhouses are located. Migrant workers are the backbone of the agribusiness industry and are among the most vulnerable workers in the economy.

In a special revival of the **Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples'** signature *Cafecito* Program, the Leamington project showcased a rights-based approach to supporting migrant workers, including those in the LGBTQ+ community. The event, held on June 2, 2024, provided tailored workshops addressing critical topics such as Employment Standards-worker legislation, immigration, human rights, sexual health, and harm reduction services.

Key highlights of the event were:

- **LGBTQ+ Inclusion:** The morning session was specifically designed for LGBTQ+ migrant workers.
- **Broad Participation:** The afternoon session catered to all migrant workers, reinforcing allyship and collective worker rights.
- **Expert Presentations** from the following organizations:
 - United Food and Commercial Workers union
 - Latinos Positivos
 - Batista Migration Law Group
 - **Community Legal Clinic of York Region**
 - **The Centre for Spanish-Speaking Peoples**
 - Dignity and Diversity Leamington
- **Community Engagement:** Flyers were distributed through NGOs and churches, with dedicated outreach to workers in congregating areas before the event.
- **Cultural Connection:** Music and refreshments capped off the day, celebrating the community's resilience and unity.

The workshops not only empowered workers with practical knowledge and tools but also strengthened community ties and advocacy networks. The commitment and collaboration of presenters, local organizations, and the LGBTQ+ community were instrumental to the event's success.



The Legal Fight against Environmental Injustice



Over many decades, the Grassy Narrows First Nation (“Grassy Narrows”) in northwestern Ontario has experienced the direct and cumulative effects of industrial activity and resource extraction which have adversely affected human health, degraded the environment, and impacted Grassy Narrows members’ way of life and their inherent, treaty, and Aboriginal rights. These environmental injustices include:

- the historic discharge of mercury from an upstream mill into the river system that flows through the Grassy Narrows territory
- the current discharge of sulphate from the same mill that facilitates the formation of highly mobile methylmercury within the river
- the hydro-electric dam projects that altered river flows within Grassy Narrows territory
- the clearcutting of forests within Grassy Narrows territory
- the issuance of mining-related claims and approvals within Grassy Narrows territory.

In 2024, **Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA)** continued to represent Grassy Narrows on several environmental fronts. For example, **CELA** and co-counsel began a legal challenge against the “free entry” system for mining exploration under Ontario’s *Mining Act*. This system has allowed some 10,000 mining claims to be registered in Grassy Narrows territory without notice, consultation, or consent. The litigation seeks a declaration that the free entry system contravenes Grassy Narrows’ treaty and Aboriginal rights that are recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.

At the same time, **CELA** and co-counsel are representing Grassy Narrows in administrative proceedings involving a new gold mine that is proposed within the territory of Grassy Narrows. The Grassy Narrows community is downstream of the proposed mine and is concerned that the narrowly framed assessment process will not adequately identify, evaluate, mitigate, or prevent the potential impacts of the mining project (if approved) upon water quality, fish and wildlife, and treaty and Aboriginal rights.

CELA continues to meet with and make submissions to the Ontario government in relation to provincial approvals which are required for advanced exploration activity at the proposed mine site. This advanced exploration program (if approved) will produce 1 million tonnes of waste rock and 400,000 tonnes of overburden, and Grassy Narrows is concerned that the stockpiled waste rock will release various toxic substances into the environment.

Heard but not seen at the Social Benefits Tribunal

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, most hearings before the Social Benefits Tribunal (SBT) were held in person. The SBT hears appeals from decisions denying Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) or Ontario Works benefits. Claimants are among those with the lowest income in the province. The tribunal periodically sent adjudicators to small communities in Ontario, such as those served by **Community Advocacy & Legal Centre** in Belleville, so applicants would not have to travel long distances to attend hearings. When the pandemic hit, the SBT switched to phone hearings before transitioning to hearings over Zoom.

The SBT is an adjudicative tribunal that is part of Tribunals Ontario, the umbrella agency for 13 provincial tribunals. Access to a computer and internet services are needed to access proceedings before the tribunals of Tribunals Ontario as it has retained almost completely the electronic hearing format of the COVID era, saving it money in travel and meeting room costs.

For parties with no computer or internet service, Tribunals Ontario introduced a new program designed to improve access to justice. The Mobile Access Terminal (MAT) Service, announced in April 2023, was touted as a benefit for parties with technology-related challenges to be accommodated “almost anywhere in the province.”

The service promised that parties in rural areas and small towns who had no access to a computer or reliable internet service would not have to travel to one of five hearing centres in large cities to get access to computers. The only requirement to receive the service is an “approved accommodation request.”

Now, however, the SBT has consistently been denying requests for accommodation by parties with no access to computers or internet, often telling claimants that they should just use the audio on a telephone to participate in the hearing. The result is a hearing where the claimant cannot see the adjudicator or other participants, and cannot be seen, while opposing parties can.

The **Community Advocacy & Legal Centre** submitted more than 30 technology accommodation requests to the Social Benefits Tribunal for clients with disabilities. The tribunal has not approved a single one of these requests. The Belleville clinic filed a freedom of information request early in 2024 to find out what criteria are used and how often requests for accommodation are approved.

The response says that neither Tribunals Ontario nor the SBT has any policies, procedures or guidelines related to the mobile access service but that decisions are made “on a case-by-case basis by an SBT adjudicator” – an open invitation to inconsistency and arbitrariness.

The Belleville clinic has now filed a complaint to the Ontario Ombudsman about the SBT’s lack of procedural fairness in its failure to approve applications under the service, citing the opaque decision-making process and the lack of policies underpinning the refusals.

The option of a digital hearing can be a good one for clients who want it and are able to attend hearings from home. But for many the digital hearing is an impenetrable barrier to access to justice with the Social Benefits Tribunal.



Your Way Forward (YWF) is a Department of Justice funded project providing holistic legal services to people who have experienced gender-based violence. The project aims to ensure that survivors are informed, supported, and empowered in their access to justice journeys.

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 Legal & Advocacy Centre, Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, and Justice for Children and Youth.** These clinics collaborated in 2024, a pivotal year for the project, to accomplish the following activities.

Systemic Action

On November 25, 2024, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, YWF, alongside sister clinic colleagues, attended at Queen’s Park and called for the Ontario government to declare intimate partner violence an epidemic immediately. YWF is committed to continuing to push for the passing of Bill 173, *Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic Act, 2024*, introduced in March by four NDP MPPs. The declaration would improve outcomes for survivors, ensuring that their safety and legal issues are dealt with appropriately, with greater awareness, sensitivity and urgency.



The declaration would also profoundly strengthen survivors’ access to justice by compelling courts, tribunals, and administrative bodies to consider intimate partner violence when reviewing the facts of a legal case.

Knowledge Sharing

Over the past year, YWF staff have had the opportunity to contribute and share their knowledge in a variety of contexts. In the academic setting, YWF staff from **CALC** and **ACTO** presented on their “collaborative, multidisciplinary, community-based research” at the International Congress on Qualitative Inquiry. Additionally, YWF staff from **PCLC** and **DCLC** provided a session at the Ontario Bar Association’s Human Rights Update on the discrimination that sexual assault survivors might experience during their interaction with the criminal legal system.

YWF presented during the Department of Justice’s Victims and Survivors of Crime Week 2024 on the project’s independent legal advice and representation projects. The YWF program lead and **ACTO’s** YWF team also presented on a gender-based violence panel at the International Access to Justice Forum, hosted by Osgoode Law School in October 2024.

Community legal clinic services are an essential resource for survivors of gender-based violence. This past fall, YWF presented at the Regional Clinic Conferences in the Eastern and Southwest regions, providing strategies for incorporating survivor-specific services into core clinic work.

HIV Criminalization: New Resources for African, Caribbean, and Black Communities



Until Canada makes meaningful reforms to address anti-Black racism in the legal system and ends the criminalization of HIV non-disclosure, it is imperative that people from African, Caribbean, and Black communities have access to up-to-date and culturally resonant legal information about HIV disclosure and the law.

To address this gap, the **HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario (HALCO)** has partnered with the African and Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario (ACCHO), Africans in Partnership Against AIDS (APAA), the Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black CAP), and the HIV Legal Network to produce resources on HIV and the criminal law specifically for people from African, Caribbean, and Black communities.

Beautifully designed by Donica Williams, these resources are available in English, French, Arabic and Swahili. A companion video resource was produced by Nabaga Media Production Agency.

HALCO is grateful to all of the people who participated in the consultations to develop these resources, and extends gratitude to the staff and peers from ACCHO, APAA, Black CAP, and beyond who gave their time and shared their personal experiences.

What our clients say

*"I'm an Indigenous woman who has faced a lot of bias, discrimination, and racism. I carry a lot of trauma. I have lost faith in humanity and equitable treatment. The **Community Legal Services of Ottawa** treated me with dignity and respect. My lawyer showed care and compassion at my situation with ODSP. Having PTSD and being in a heightened state sometimes comes with communication barriers. Not feeling heard makes it even worse. He gave me the time to sort myself out to get the information he needed to settle my case. Thank You."*

*"I'm profoundly grateful for the support and generosity that helped my family and me move from Afghanistan to Canada. Thanks to the crucial assistance from individuals like the **Don Valley Community Legal Services** lawyer who helped us, with her supportive clinic and the MP's aide, as well as the IRCC and the Government of Canada, we've started a new chapter here. Your help has led to many positive changes, including educational opportunities, financial stability, a safe place to live and hope for a better future. We are deeply thankful for the kindness that has allowed us to feel safe and welcomed in our new home. Your help has been instrumental in transforming our challenges into stepping stones, fostering a brighter future filled with hope and opportunity. We will forever cherish the warmth and generosity we've experienced on this journey."*

"Mairghread represented me in my long, drawn out case exceptionally well. She and her team kept me informed; the government didn't!! She helped me to understand the process and the untimely delays so I could remain calm. I have great confidence in her and would refer everyone I know."

*"Stuart and his staff get five stars from me." **Nipissing Community Legal Clinic***

*"My lawyer's assistance was/is above & beyond my expectations. Her guidance, knowledge, kindness and understanding is second to none. I feel honoured to have had her on my side throughout the long & complicated road to being granted my ODSP Approval. I couldn't have done it without her guidance and assistance."
Community Legal Services of Ottawa*

Chief Justice of Canada visits Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Services



Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Services (KBCLS) was very honoured to welcome the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, The Right Honourable Richard Wagner, to the clinic on November 29, 2024. The event was co-hosted with Pro Bono Students Canada (PBSC), an organization that provides law students nationwide with opportunities to engage in pro bono legal work, in partnership with community organizations and supervising lawyers. **KBCLS** and PBSC have a very successful partnership which enables the clinic to provide increased access to justice to our community, and also provides law students with a rich learning experience in social justice work.

This year, **KBCLS** has 26 law students from University of Toronto Law School and Toronto Metropolitan University's Lincoln Alexander Law School, working on 4 projects – Client Intake; Tenant Applications at the Landlord and Tenant Board; International Students and Immigration Research and Public Legal Education; and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) Appeals Project.

Chief Justice Wagner is a very strong supporter of students' pro bono work. During the visit to the clinic, he observed the projects in action. He also interacted with students and staff of the legal clinic, and answered questions on the importance of access to justice during a fireside chat moderated by the Director of Legal Services. The Chief Justice reiterated the importance of the work done by legal clinics and PBSC student volunteers in reducing the barriers to access to justice and repeated his commitment to making the justice system more transparent and accessible.

Neighbourhood Legal Services Amazing Race

Neighbourhood Legal Services celebrated its 50th anniversary with an event and fundraiser, Amazing Race themed! The clinic made many community connections and had much fun. Six teams participated, to honour five decades of advocacy and storied activism that has come out of the downtown east of Toronto.



Start: (between 3-4pm)
Neighbourhood Legal Services
 163 Queen St. East
 Just a little east of Jarvis on the south side
WE WILL CONFIRM YOUR START TIME!



Finish: (until 6pm)
Daniel's Spectrum Community Living Room
 585 Dundas St. East
DON'T FORGET TO GET YOUR FINISH TIME CONFIRMED!

- The Rules:**
- Visit the 5 stations in any order
 - After doing an activity, get a stamp on the appropriate square on reverse, and move to the next station
 - End at Daniel's Spectrum for food, music & celebration from 6-6pm

SPECIAL PRIZES FOR 3 FASTEST TEAMS WHO VISIT ALL STATIONS!

- 70s** Housing Advocacy
Ernescliffe Housing Coop
477 Sherbourne St.
- 80s** Early Charter & Equality cases
Glad Day Bookshop
499 Church St.
- 90s** Austerity, income security & health
Sumac Creek Health Centre
73 Regent Park Blvd
- 2000s** Changing Immigration & Refugee policies
Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture
194 Jarvis St.
- 2010s** Community Benefits for a changing neighbourhood
40 Oak St.



JOIN US for an Amazing Race challenge (it's FREE!) from 3-6pm, followed by food, prizes & celebration at Daniel's Spectrum Community Living Room from 6-8pm

Awards and Recognitions



Shalini Konanur, Executive Director of the **South Asian Legal Clinic Ontario**, was awarded the Public Interest Achievement Award by the South Asian Bar Association North America. Shalini was recognized as a pioneer in Canada on social justice for South Asian communities, showing a deep and significant commitment to their wellbeing. Shalini has worked with low-income South Asian people in Ontario and Canada for the past 17 years. She has focused her work on advancing access to justice and human rights for South Asian people in Canada, and is a recognized expert on gender-based violence in South Asian communities. Shalini was part of a group of people who created the legal clinic to support South Asian communities and to address systemic racism and discrimination within those communities, including higher rates of poverty, growing hate, and discrimination in employment, health, education, housing, immigration, and the justice system.



Theresa McClenaghan, Executive Director of the **Canadian Environmental Law Association**, received an honorary doctorate from Toronto Metropolitan University. TMU awards honorary degrees to those who have made extraordinary contributions to academia and/or society and for the betterment of culture, society or the local community. The degree recognizes Theresa's work as co-counsel for the grassroots group Concerned Walkerton Citizens during the public inquiry into the contaminated water supply in Walkerton, Ontario. It also highlights her later work as a senior water policy adviser to the province's environment minister, overseeing the passage of the *Clean Water Act* and the implementation of the inquiry's remaining recommendations.



Trudy McCormick, recently retired Executive Director of the **Northwest Community Legal Clinic**, received the 2024 J. Shirley Denison Award. The award is bestowed annually by the Law Society of Ontario in recognition of significant contributions to access to justice and/or poverty issues. Trudy McCormick served as the clinic's Executive Director since its founding in 2009. The clinic's journey and the lives it has touched have been inextricably shaped by Trudy's tireless efforts to provide high-quality services to her community and her commitment to addressing the unique legal needs of low-income people in rural Northwestern Ontario.

Trudy was also instrumental in establishing the Association of Community Legal Clinics of Ontario as a force for advocacy on behalf of clinics and the clients they serve. She routinely led engagement and negotiation efforts with provincial officials and Legal Aid Ontario to ensure that the needs of clinics are understood and reflected in funding and policy decisions.



John McKinnon, Executive Director of **Injured Workers Community Legal Clinic**, is the recipient of the 2024 Dianne Martin Medal for Social Justice Through Law, awarded by Osgoode Hall Law School (York University). John also serves on the Board of the ACLCO.

The award recognizes decades spent by John on the legal frontlines advocating for injured workers and a more just workers' compensation system. In a career that began as a law student volunteer at Parkdale Community Legal Services, John has continued to focus on representing low-income and marginalized clients through Ontario's community legal clinic system. John's approach in handling the appeal cases of individual injured workers is "a study in patience, empathy and persistence. Once the file is opened, John ensures that justice is sought as far as is possible. A case which might seem hopeless, will spring to life in John's hands."



The Sidney B. Linden Access to Justice Award for 2023 was awarded to **Ann Schweighofer**. Legal Aid Ontario created the award to honour exceptional individuals who have demonstrated a commitment to helping low-income people, and have given their time and expertise towards ensuring access to justice in Ontario.

Ann was a long-term staff member of the **Rexdale Community Legal Clinic**, from joining the team in 1982 until her retirement in the spring of 2024. In that time she transformed from a "shy, young legal assistant" to the beating heart of the clinic, bringing people together and making both co-workers and clients of the clinic feel seen, supported and included.

With this award, Ann was recognized for having enriched the clinic system in Ontario with her empathy and respect for all the clients, her profound understanding of what it takes to deliver justice for the disadvantaged, the precision and eloquence of her writing, and her flawless administrative support.



Who we are

The **Association of Community Legal Clinics of Ontario (ACLCO)** is the representative body of Ontario’s community legal clinics. We are governed by a 13-person board of directors 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 is 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 Board and a number of standing and ad hoc advisory committees.

The ACLCO also supports community legal clinics through 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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