

Legal Aid BC Update

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



Helping Aboriginal youth and young adults who face family violence

The Legal Services Society has released an animated video and graphic novel-style publication aimed at educating Aboriginal youth and young adults about domestic violence.

Clear Skies tells the story of a woman and children who live with family violence. It was developed in partnership with the Healthy Aboriginal Network (HAN). The legal content was created by LSS, and HAN provided the writer, illustrator, and animator—all First Nations.

Creating an animated video and “comic book” represents a new direction for LSS public legal education and information, and we’re proud of how the materials turned out. I hope you will take a look at them on our [Aboriginal Legal Aid in BC website](#).



Meeting Community Elders in Kamloops



At the end of May, I was accompanied by LSS Board Chair Tom Christensen and LSS Aboriginal Services Manager Trish Kumpf on a trip to Kamloops, where we met with members of the Aboriginal Justice Council and Aboriginal Community Justice Council.

The latter consists of 9 community elders who attend **First Nations Court** to assist the court in arriving at an appropriate sentence. The Aboriginal Justice Council is a broader group of representatives from various parts of the justice system who were involved in establishing the First Nations Court in Kamloops. We were interested in hearing about how the First Nations Court was developed there and the experience thus far.

It was clear that the development of the First Nations Court in Kamloops originated in the community, driven by a recognition that the usual approach to sentencing was not serving Aboriginal offenders or First Nation communities well. We were impressed by the First Nation Court’s emphasis on trying to develop a healing plan for offenders that focuses on the underlying causes leading to the commission of offences and how it seeks to enable the offender to rejoin the community. Based on what we heard, First Nations Court appears to be reducing the cycle of offending that has too often been seen in the past.

The success of the First Nation Court’s success is also its challenge. It’s more than simply additional court time. It is a heavy obligation for the elders who are an integral part of the court, and requires a different approach by Crown counsel, defence counsel, the court, and the offender.

LSS will be actively looking at how it can better support the important work of all First Nations Courts in BC, and how that may inform LSS strategy to improve services to Aboriginal peoples across the

province.

International Legal Aid Group 2015 Meeting

The International Legal Aid Group (ILAG) is an aggregation of legal aid leaders and access to justice academics. Led by Professor Alan Paterson of Strathclyde University, this group meets biannually. Three themes emerged from this year's meeting: the applications of technology to the delivery of publicly funded legal services (like the Netherlands **Rechtwijzer** program); the increasing role of social science research in designing legal aid programs that better meet the needs of low income people (like Ab Currie's **The Legal Problems of Everyday Life**); and the spread of quality assurance techniques, particularly peer review structures, as a way to promote better legal aid services. English justice commentator **Roger Smith** observed that a few years ago developments in English legal aid, like quality assurance, were the models that other countries followed, but that this leadership role has been assumed by Scotland, the Netherlands, and in some aspects, Canada.



The papers and program for this year's meeting are available on the **ILAG website**.



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