

Legal Aid BC Update

From the desk of Mark Benton, QC
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LSS launches two more pilot services with funding from the Ministry of Justice

Since my last newsletter, LSS launched the last two of its five Justice Innovation and Transformation Initiatives (JITI). The projects were made possible with Ministry of Justice funding of \$2 million a year for three years.

In March, LSS Board Chair Tom Christensen and Attorney General Suzanne Anton opened the Parents Legal Centre at the Vancouver Courthouse. The centre helps parents find early resolution to their child protection matters, and has the potential to keep more people out of court. The centre's focus is on collaborative planning and decision-making. These have been shown to strengthen family relationships and produce better outcomes for families.



Board chair Tom Christensen, Lawyer Katrina Harry and Attorney General Suzanne Anton at the Parents Legal Centre in Vancouver

Tom and the AG later launched the Expanded Criminal Duty Counsel pilot project in April. This project provides clients with the continuous services of a specific lawyer up until their case is resolved or the matter is set for trial. The service focusses on earlier resolution to clients' criminal law issues.

As many of you know, regular duty counsel don't always have the opportunity to fully review a client's case, talk to Crown counsel, or get the client's full version of events. Under the expanded duty counsel project, the lawyer will review disclosure, talk with Crown Counsel, and attend court if a guilty plea is required to resolve the case.

The project is expected to reduce court appearances, saving court time and resources.

All five of the JITI projects will be evaluated to determine whether they've met their objectives.

New billing portal will change how LSS does business with lawyers

The Legal Services Society recently switched over to a new client management system, replacing one that was fast becoming obsolete and increasingly expensive to maintain.

Some legal aid clients may experience longer wait times on the LSS Call Centre while intake staff get used to the new system, but I am confident that things will improve shortly.

The new system includes a billing portal for lawyers called LSS Online. Almost everything lawyers require to do business with LSS will be done through the new portal. It contains many features lawyers had been asking for, but there will be an adjustment period as lawyers get used to the change.

For LSS, success factors include simplified intake procedures, streamlined management of legal aid cases, improved ability to manage and collect quality data, and to eliminate the risk by building the system in a common technology.

MyLawBC website FAQ

MyLawBC is the new online service LSS is developing to expand access to justice in the province. The interactive application actively engages users in a series of questions and answers to help identify and address their legal problems. Recently, the project team tested the prototype in Vancouver, Terrace and Duncan. Feedback has been positive, with some valuable insights into how to improve the site.

MyLawBC is expected to launch in late 2015, but, in the meantime, the website team has created answers to some of the frequently asked questions about the project. You can find them on the MyLawBC project site in [FAQ](#).



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