

Legal Aid BC Update

From the desk of Mark Benton, QC
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LSS Justice Innovation Projects Show Early Signs of Success

In a speech to the Law Society's benchers on September 25, LSS Board Chair Suzette Narbonne announced some good news coming out of two LSS justice innovation pilot projects. In Port Coquitlam, instead of a roster of duty counsel, LSS has employed one lawyer at the courthouse to provide expanded services. Suzette told the benchers that after just six months the project has reduced the number of court appearances from about 8 to just 2 or 3. Of the client files that have closed, she noted that the rate of resolution is 96 percent.

The other pilot project that's having an impact is the Parents Legal Centre in Vancouver, which deals with children who have been taken into government care. Instead of paying private lawyers to go to court on behalf of the parents, the centre employs a lawyer and an advocate to focus on early, collaborative solutions. Early indications are that the model is working for both the families and the institutions involved.



Suzette spoke to the benchers along with former LSS Board Chair Tom Christensen. Their speaking notes are on the [LSS website](#). The justice innovation projects are described on the same page.

Encouraging words from the Attorney General

Attorney General Suzanne Anton spoke at the same Law Society benchers meeting. Her ministry is funding the justice innovation initiatives until the end of the 2016/17 fiscal year. She described the expanded criminal duty counsel project and the Parents Legal Centre as “extremely successful”.

These and three other pilot projects will be evaluated to determine if funding should be continued. The AG said, however, “if things turn out to be really successful early, you move on more quickly to rolling it out generally.”

Evaluation and Survey About Legal Aid Services Show Positive Results

LSS commissioned its first-ever [evaluation of LSS's child protection services](#) in 2014/15. Overall, clients have a high level of satisfaction with our child protection services, with 64% saying they are satisfied or very satisfied.

Most (almost 80%) of those who apply for child protection services, receive a referral to a lawyer. A large portion of these clients were satisfied or very satisfied with their lawyer (67%). The majority also strongly agreed or agreed that their lawyer had effective communication with them.

Client survey

About every three years, LSS conducts a [Client Satisfaction Survey](#). It shows that overall satisfaction with LSS services went up in 2015: 66% of clients were very satisfied or satisfied compared to 62% in 2011.

Compared to the last survey, more clients strongly agreed or agreed that LSS supported them so they could be more involved in resolving their legal issues (66% up from 59%). Clients also strongly agreed or agreed that LSS supported them to address their related legal issues (59% up from 48%).

Clients who had a lawyer to represent them in court remain the most satisfied with LSS overall: 75% are very satisfied or satisfied. This is an improvement over 2011, when the percentage had dropped to 68%. Among clients who received representation, satisfaction is equally strong among CFCSA and criminal clients (75%), but marginally lower among family law clients (65%).

LSS Participates in Innovation and Access to Justice Conference



I recently attended the Innovation and Access to Justice Conference in Montreal to learn more about what other jurisdictions are doing.

LSS Public Legal Information and Applications Director Sherry MacLennan spoke about MyLawBC at the conference.

MyLawBC is a new LSS online service that will use guided pathways to help users to resolve their legal problems. It will be launched at the end of January 2016. Sherry emphasized the importance of user testing and the value of collaboration.

Introducing New LSS Board Members

LSS has several new board members this year. Directors can only stay on the board for six years and five out of nine have reached that limit.

Dinyar Marzban, QC, joined the board earlier this year. More recently, Karen Christianson, CA; Jean Whittow, QC; and Dean Crawford, QC, were appointed. We expect to know who the fifth new board member will be soon. Board chair is lawyer Suzette Narbonne. All their biographies are on the **LSS website**.

The LSS board is established by statute, and the fact that we have a board is one of the most important aspects of LSS' independence from government.

The board works in a number of key areas: it is responsible for employing the CEO; working with the CEO to establish LSS's strategic direction; providing oversight on how LSS manages risks, providing advice to the CEO on key issues affecting the society, and is directly involved with key stakeholders, like the AG and the chief justices.



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