



# Legal Aid BC Update

From the office of Mark Benton, QC  
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## WELCOME

This is the first edition of **Legal Aid BC Update**, an email newsletter designed to keep you informed about developments at the Legal Services Society. The newsletter will be distributed monthly to chief executives of justice system stakeholders, Canadian legal aid plans and law-related organizations. Please forward this to anyone in your organization who might be interested. I welcome your feedback.

## David Crossin, QC new chair of the LSS board of directors

Many of you will know David who is one of Canada's leading barristers and a long-time advocate for legal aid. He was called to the BC bar in 1977 and is a partner at the Vancouver law firm Sugden, McPhee & Roos LLP. David served on the LSS board from 1995 to 1999 and was reappointed in 2007. He is also a Bencher of the Law Society of BC and a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers.

## Website enhancement for Aboriginal clients

The LSS website now has a [new section](#) specifically for Aboriginal clients, who make up 25 per cent of the individuals we help. The section features information on Aboriginal legal issues, Gladue rights, as well as a list of self-help publications and contact information for legal aid resources in various Aboriginal communities across the province.

## Family LawLINE

In November 2010, LSS launched an innovative telephone service called [Family LawLINE](#) that helps low-income people resolve family law problems. Lawyers provide callers with advice on the full range of family issues such as child custody, adoption and spousal or child maintenance. Family LawLINE is currently available 9:30 am to 12:30 pm, Monday to Friday and has already helped more than 1,200 callers. Ideally, LSS would like to expand Family LawLINE to full-day, evening and weekend availability. That way, we can best meet the needs of potential callers,

particularly vulnerable women, who often prefer calling outside regular office hours when there is greater privacy from co-workers and family.

### **LSS lawyer receives distinguished award from the Government of Canada**

I am pleased to tell you that Rod Holloway, managing lawyer of appeals at LSS, received the Government of Canada's [Public Service Award of Excellence](#) for Exemplary Contribution Under Extraordinary Circumstances for his work with the Tamil refugees who arrived in BC last summer. Rod, who has been with LSS for 38 years, was instrumental in coordinating the work of lawyers and translators and in working with various government agencies to ensure the justice system handled the refugees as efficiently and effectively as possible. He was nominated for this award as part of a team that included personnel from the Immigration and Refugee Board, Canada Border Services Agency, and the federal and provincial governments.

### **Public opinion poll shows strong support for legal aid**

LSS conducted its seventh annual [public opinion poll](#) in April with 89 per cent of respondents expressing moderate to strong support of legal aid and 80 per cent showing awareness of legal aid in BC. Ninety-two per cent agreed that all British Columbians should have access to legal aid, even if means spending more to reach those in rural and remote communities. This annual poll keeps us updated with attitudes, awareness and knowledge of legal aid in BC.

### **Client survey yields positive information**

We also held our tri-annual [client services survey](#), which helps us build baseline measures when tracking our performance. From the survey we learned that 75 per cent of LSS clients felt they were well-represented by their legal aid lawyer. Overall client satisfaction did, however, drop slightly from 64 per cent in 2007 to 62 per cent in 2011. LSS is examining the causes for this drop. We were also pleased to learn that our clients rated our intake staff more positively than before, commenting that they were treated fairly, that the staff were knowledgeable and that LSS staff went beyond their required duty to serve them.

### **Legal aid around the world**

In mid-June, I had the opportunity to sit down with the [International Legal Aid Group \(ILAG\)](#), a consortium of about 50 legal aid CEOs, academics and researchers from 29 countries, to discuss legal aid. The theme of this year's ILAG meeting was "Revisioning Legal Aid in an Age of

Austerity.” Discussion revolved around defining core services, preserving service quality in the face of cuts, the limits of self-help programs, the use of technology in delivering legal aid, and current innovations. I had the privilege of chairing a session on the use of technology in legal aid and also facilitated the group discussion on legal aid core services. Some very interesting ideas came from these sessions.

After the ILAG meeting, I flew to Uganda at the request of the [CBA's International Development Program](#) and the [Uganda National Working Group](#) to help them develop a strategy to secure government funding to supplement the aid-based legal aid programs currently operating in that country. I facilitated a two-day workshop looking at how legal aid can make an important contribution to the social stability and the economic well-being of Uganda. Hearing the Ugandans talk about their commitment to developing an effective legal aid program, reminded me how common the roots of legal aid in Canada are with the efforts of these Ugandans. We share much of the same values and many of the same challenges.

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