



Legal Aid BC Update

From the office of Mark Benton, QC
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This email newsletter is designed to keep you informed about developments at the Legal Services Society. It is distributed 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. For more information on legal aid in BC, visit the [LSS website](#) or LSS's [family law website](#).

Preparation for new immigration laws

The [Balanced Refugee Reform Act](#), which takes effect in June 2012, requires significant changes to our tariffs, coverage policies and IT systems. LSS staff have been consulting with the immigration bar and with a number of NGOs to ensure our new program meets the needs of our clients, supports legal aid lawyers and is coordinated with the various organizations that serve new immigrants and refugees. Most of the work was completed for the original, December 2011 implementation date. The government's decision to delay the legislation will allow LSS to fine tune the new systems.

Submissions to government finance committee

On September 22, I made [submissions](#) to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. The theme of the submissions was the benefits of investing in legal aid innovation. I outlined for the committee three low-cost programs LSS uses to help people resolve legal disputes without going to court. Those three programs are [Legal Information Outreach Workers](#); medical-legal partnerships with [BC Women's Hospital](#) and a Hastings-and-Main [drop-in centre](#), and our [family law telephone advice service](#).

Chair's Award for Distinguished Service

LSS board chair David Crossin, QC presented the Chair's Award for Distinguished Service to [Sandra Smail, QC, of Kimberley, and Ken Wyllie](#)

[of Castlegar](#) on October 1 in Rossland. The Chair's award is presented on a regional basis to lawyers who have made significant and sustained contributions to legal aid in BC. The awards were presented at the Kootenay Bar Association's fall meeting which was attended by more than 70 lawyers, judges and guests.

Legal aid research

The Legal Services Society / Law Foundation Research Fund has retained criminologist [Yvon Dandurand](#) to conduct a literature review on the economic impact of legal aid. Professor Dandurand is Associate Vice-President, Research and Graduate Studies at University of the Fraser Valley. He has done extensive [research on justice system reform](#). The research fund was established in 2008 to support research on and evaluation of legal aid and other access to justice programs to enhance the quality of and access to justice for British Columbians.

Gladue reports pilot project

To encourage the use of [Gladue reports](#) in criminal cases involving aboriginals, LSS is conducting a [pilot project](#) that allows lawyers to request funding for Gladue reports as a standard tariff item. Prior to the pilot project, Gladue reports required special funding authorization. The pilot project began on July 1, 2011 and runs to March 31, 2012. To date, LSS has funded 18 reports. LSS, partnership with the Justice Institute, also has a separate project underway training Gladue report writers.

Community partner workshops

As many of you are aware, LSS recently provided funding to [24 community organizations](#) that will offer free legal information in remote, rural and Aboriginal communities across BC. On November 21, LSS will host a meet and greet for individuals from these organizations. We will also give presentations on LSS intake, publishing, and legal advice and representation services as well as workshops on building facilitation and presentation skills.

Provincial advocates' conference

LSS, in partnership with the [Law Foundation of BC](#), will be hosting the annual [Provincial Advocates' Training Conference](#) from November 22 to 24. This is an intensive training program for 40 senior advocates involved in family law, poverty law and immigration law. This is the ninth advocates conference LSS and the Law Foundation have organized.

Understanding FASD

In September, LSS and Ministry of Children and Family Development staff held [two information sessions](#) to educate lawyers, advocates and others about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. One session was at a Native Courtworkers training workshop and the other was at LSS's offices for our intake staff and local agents. The sessions discussed how prenatal alcohol exposure affects the brain, the symptoms of FASD, the signs of FASD in adults, and how we can help legal aid clients with FASD.

LSS in the community

As part of our public education programs, LSS will be holding two family law and [community engagement regional workshops](#) – in Nelson on October 25 and in Cranbrook on October 27. These workshops provide training for service providers in the communities, bringing a more integrated approach to legal aid. The day-long sessions will include presentations on intake, public legal education resources, Clicklaw and Access Pro Bono. LSS staff will also provide coaching on real-case scenarios. Attendees include representatives from community groups, school victim services, transition services as well as the Ministry of Child and Family Development.

Tariff consultations

A new LSS initiative has [tariff accounts](#) department staff meeting with legal aid lawyers and their staff to talk about billing procedures and concerns. The consultations allow LSS to get feedback from lawyers so we can improve our services. Consultation have been held in Surrey and Terrace so far.

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