



Community Advocacy & Legal Centre

Report from the Chair—Tim Grew



COMMUNITY ADVOCACY & LEGAL CENTRE

2008 Annual Report

There are so many people involved in making the clinic a success. On behalf of the Board I would like begin by thanking some of these people. The relationships with the community partners is so important and this year we particularly appreciate being able to jointly organize the Affordable Housing Action Network's (AHAN) Community Forum on Poverty Reduction which precedes our Annual Meeting. We thank AHAN and all the other community groups who work with us.

I would like to thank our dedicated staff who work so effectively and efficiently to further our goals. They are indeed the key to our success and they need to realize how much the Board appreciates their dedication. Denise Bird and Carolyn Hamilton are to be congratulated for their notable anniversaries—five years!

Welcome to our two new lawyers, Emma Barz and John No. We wish David Little and John McKean well as they explore new horizons after many years of service.

Thank you to our volunteers—Bethany Douglas, Lindsay Little, Sven Dedic, Carole Tasse, Lynne Iker, Ryan McDonald, and Chelsea Guy.

I also want to mention the Board members who have served this year. Their commitment to the work and success of the clinic is remarkable. They give generously of their time and expertise and assist in so many ways. Each one of them contributes with their special talents and it is most appreciated. I would like to



make special mention of local lawyer Rick Rolston who has served for a total of 23 years. We have valued his wise counsel and he will be truly missed.

This year Board members began a succession planning exercise. This effort quickly pointed to the need for a renewal of our strategic plan upon which we have now embarked. A needs and capacity assessment is in the early planning stages. We are applying for charitable status and we hope to fundraise to permit us to hire law interns in the future. We also began to work more closely with our neighbouring clinic in Northumberland to the west and look forward to future collaborations with their Board of Directors.

We are engaged in the consultation about Legal Aid Ontario's *Discussion Paper on Roles, Responsibilities, Relationships and Accountability Regarding*

Clinic Law Services. This document was slow in arriving and points the way to new relationships and funding arrangements for the clinics in Ontario. It has and continues to take up considerable time and energy to stay abreast of the developments. Hopefully the structures governing the Clinic system will become clear soon and we can return to our own priorities.

The other development that occurred and will affect the coming year was the selection of Michele Leering, our Executive Director, as a recipient of the Law Foundation's Community Leadership in Justice Fellowship for 2008-2009. This is an honour for Michele and we all feel as though we are basking in the sun with her. Congratulations. It does however mean that we have had to adjust our work plans as we plan for and work through her absence.

There are many issues to resolve as we head on into 2009. New challenges will also no doubt arise as we continue to support the clinic and its staff in fulfilling our mandate.

Teamwork enables the work of the clinic to prosper!

Thank you all.

Executive Director and Staff's Report - Michele Leering

2008 has been a year of change and renewal, evaluation and reflection, and work to ensure our initiatives are sustainable.

Our Board continues to be very active—members donated approximately 1000 volunteer hours for clinic governance and to support clinic staff in their work. The energy and enthusiasm that our Board

members bring invigorates our staff. They also contributed special expertise to program evaluation, human resource management, and volunteer program and website development.

This year we have also welcomed an increasing number of volunteers and placement students to our work, due to the work of our Volunteer Task

Force. In the first ten months of this year approximately 600 volunteer hours have been registered. We would like to double that figure for next year!

This year the staff collaborated to create this report on line. Many thanks to my co-authors and wikipedians!

Significant Accomplishments in 2008:

Meeting the demand for services

The demand continues to be heavy, although it is levelling out. In the first nine months, we took on 322 new client cases, higher than 2005 and 2006. We are still catching up from last year's high of 598, which had seen the largest number of new cases in the clinic's history.

We also dealt with approximately 3360 requests for information, advice and brief services, a decrease of 5% over last year. Overall we helped 9098 people in the first nine months of this year which is a slight decrease over the same period last year.

We worked on more than 100 projects. Project files are opened for our legal

education, community development, systemic advocacy and law reform initiatives, in addition to special internal projects that focus on quality improvements or innovations, staff training, or collaborative work with legal clinic system colleagues and Legal Aid Ontario.

Recovering almost 2 million dollars

These conservative estimates are based on the awards that people received as a result of our advocacy in six types of cases only, and not on the future value which is worth much more. In the first nine months of 2008 we recovered the following for clients with these types of problems:

- Ontario Disability Support Plan (ODSP) appeals \$922,180
 - Workers Safety & Insurance Board appeals \$285,225
 - Employment law and Human Rights \$ 33,329
 - Criminal Injuries Compensation Board cases..... \$466,627
 - Housing (files and TDC) \$102,000
 - Social Assistance Overpayments \$172,568
- \$1,981,929

Employment Law Expansion

We are expanding our services to meet the needs of low income workers.

We've made connections to the local work force through the Worker's Help Centre and the Quinte Employment Network.

We are collaborating with the Northumberland Community Legal Clinic to provide people living in Northumberland County with wrongful dismissal advice and representation. In 2009 we hope to begin a migrant farm workers' outreach report if our fundraising efforts are successful.

Noteworthy success in settling and winning disability appeals!

We have a combined success rate of 90% in ODSP appeals and an astonishingly high level of settlements before a hearing – 52% - which is much higher than the provincial average. This gets the money that clients are owed to them much more quickly – by several months, reduces the stress on clients of having to attend a hearing, saves clinic staff time and resources, and sees reduced costs. Clients get an estimated retroactive award of \$6,100, which allows them to pay off outstanding debts, acquire better housing, improve their standards of living, leading to better nutrition, self-care and health.

Increasing our visibility and accessibility

When we evaluated our clinic's services two years ago we discovered that many people no longer knew who we were or what we did. The name recognition we had built up over 26 years with the name "Hastings and Prince Edward Legal Services" did not survive our name change.



Community Advocacy & Legal Centre

We developed a new logo and colour scheme to update our clinic's image. New and improved communications materials, such as media kits,

pamphlets, press release, and business cards have also been designed.

Furthermore, an easy-to-maintain advertising schedule has been set in place that includes both public relations and paid-for advertising. This work was assisted by a grant from the Government of Canada.

Website hits increasing exponentially

We've created and updated 35 tip sheets and posted other resources which continue to be very popular. These were accessed 22,368 times in the first ten months of 2008.

This website is completely designed and updated in house. It is a legal education project which receives no dedicated staff time or funding from

Legal Aid Ontario. We continue to receive excellent feedback on the site.

In 2009, funding permitting, we will be re-designing the look of the site, incorporating our new logo, and making it easier to navigate.

Did you know?

We have received more than **2 million** hits in the first 10 months of this year to our website at www.communitylegalcentre.ca

This is over **twice** the number of hits during the same time period in 2007. Total page hits increased by 87% to just over 151,000!

Working Towards "Seamless Legal Services Delivery for the Poor"

To better coordinate our services and improve service delivery, we met quarterly with the staff from three Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) Area Offices (Hastings/Prince Edward, Frontenac, and Lennox & Addington), supervisory criminal and family law duty counsel, Queen's Legal Aid, Rural Legal Services and

the Kingston Legal Clinic. This year we collaborated to publish a special tip sheet called "Tips for Family Law Lawyers Assisting Clients on Social Assistance."

We expanded and updated the popular "Where Else to Go for Help?" tip sheet which is designed to help

staff refer people to other resources when LAO and clinic staff can't help. It has also been very popular with all service providers and members of the private bar, and has been downloaded 800 times from our website so far this year.

Updating Our Newsletter's Look



Our newsletter, produced in-house, has been updated to reflect our new logo and colours. It is mailed to clients as well as sent electronically and is always available online through our website.

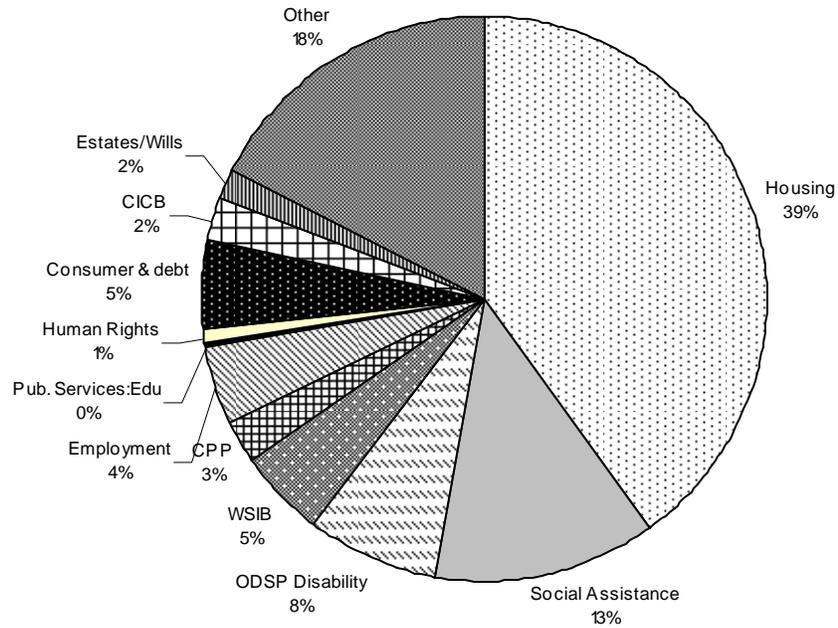
This year we distributed a combined total of 2033 copies of our Spring and Fall newsletters, of which 23% were sent by email.

Improving Results for Tenants

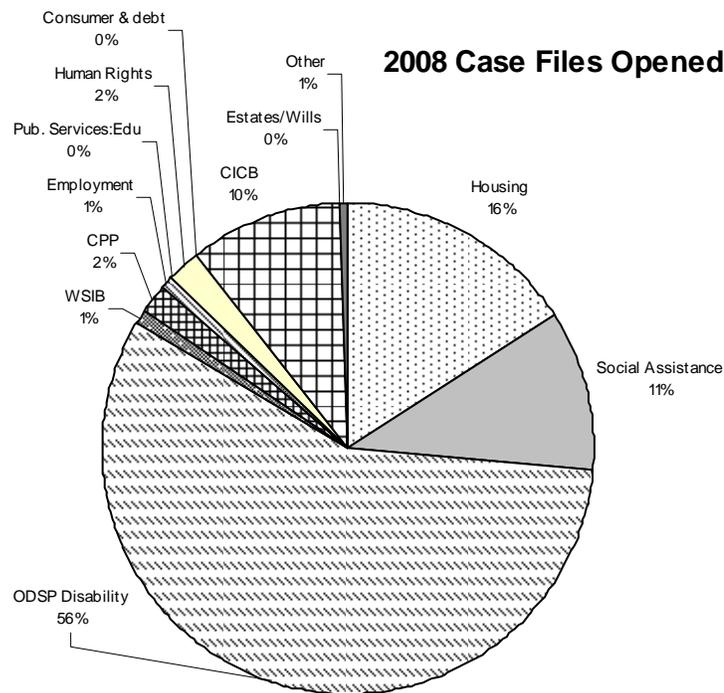
We've created a system to track financial outcomes in housing related files. The average award in case files is about \$400 per file, or in excess of \$22,000 in total. The average award in tenant duty counsel matters is about \$200 per matter, or almost \$78,000 in total. These include awards made to tenants and arrears of rent offset or written off.

Our housing law services have been revamped and upgraded and with the help of an assistant, funded by a Trenval Economic Development program. Housing calls continue to make up more than 36% of total clinic advice calls and more than 67% of summary advice work. Housing files represent about 16% of all clinic files, surpassed in number and percentage only by ODSP disability files.

2008 Total Advice, Brief Services and Referrals (to Sep 30)



2008 Case Files Opened (Up to Sep 30)



Eviction Prevention Project Very Successful

The Landlord and Tenant Board increased the number and frequency of sittings in Belleville which presented staffing challenges, as well as shortened the time to respond to clients' needs. There are often 10-14 days between the time a tenant is advised of the hearing and the hearing itself.

We delivered workshops on legal issues to service providers and consumer groups. Tenants are still receiving "hot line" legal services thanks to the extra funding we receive from the County of Hastings and the Provincial Homelessness Initiative Funds.

We continue to be concerned about the level of housing disrepair that low income tenants face. We are working with Property Standards officers to improve the enforcement of local bylaws.

We have partnered successfully with the Hastings County Social Services Department to develop a new model Vital Services bylaw. This type of bylaw helps keep on vital utilities when the landlord does not pay important bills. There have been a number of difficult situations where tenants were left without heat and/or hydro that could have been prevented by this type of bylaw.

Due in large part to the additional funding, we have been able to travel throughout Hastings County with Hastings County staff to inform municipalities about the need for and benefit of a Vital Services By Law. Five municipalities enacted a Vital Services By-Law as a result!

The Hastings County Affordable Housing Action Network (AHAN)

continues as a broadly based representative coalition to tackle issues of homelessness and the creation of affordable housing options. Quarterly meetings are well attended. Clinic staff continue to participate in the Steering

Committee and each of the three Task Forces - Advocacy, Bricks and Mortar, and Information and Networking.



All-Together Affordable Housing Corp. continues its development and plans its first Annual General Meeting for early 2009.

The Affordable Housing Committee in Prince Edward County continues its work. It will do a needs assessment in 2009. We are also working with the Lennox & Addington group.

Social Assistance Law Reform Successful

We settled four appeal cases before the Divisional Court on the definition of "disability" under the Ontario Disability Support Plan Act. We successfully settled a case that challenged the discriminatory provisions of the Ontario Works Act Regulation on "adults living with parents". This resulted in a significant change to the legislation providing Ontario Works to many more adults who are living with a parent.

We continued to target social assistance overpayment decisions



this year. We've been highly successful in this initiative – reducing the debts alleged owed by local clients by substantial amounts. In the first nine months of 2008 we saved our clients \$172,568 in overpayment recovery. We continue to have very good success challenging the "spouse in the house" decisions made by the Ministry and Social Service Departments – with the Social Benefits Tribunal finding that clients are not in a spousal relationship with their co-residents.

The Clinic endorsed the 25 in 5 Poverty Reduction campaign and wrote to our provincial members of parliament urging the government to support the campaign to reduce poverty levels in Ontario by 25% in 5 years and by 50% before 2018.

One of our staff lawyers joined the Board of the Income Security and Advocacy Centre - a specialty legal clinic that seeks to address systemic issues and improve income security for people in Ontario.

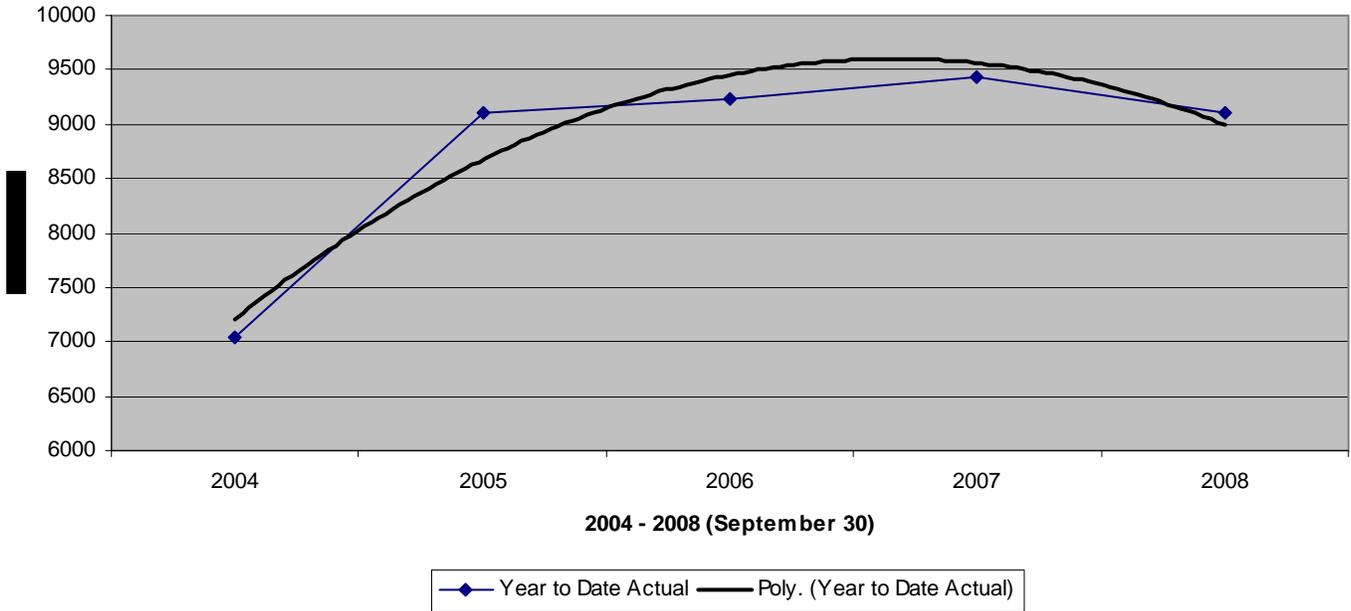
Napanee Services improved!

Our Napanee satellite office is now located in the Napanee Legal Aid Ontario Area office. People living on a low income in Lennox and Addington counties now have greater access to justice by having Legal Aid and us under one roof. Thanks to Nancy Myers and her staff for taking us in. We've saved \$5000 annually also!

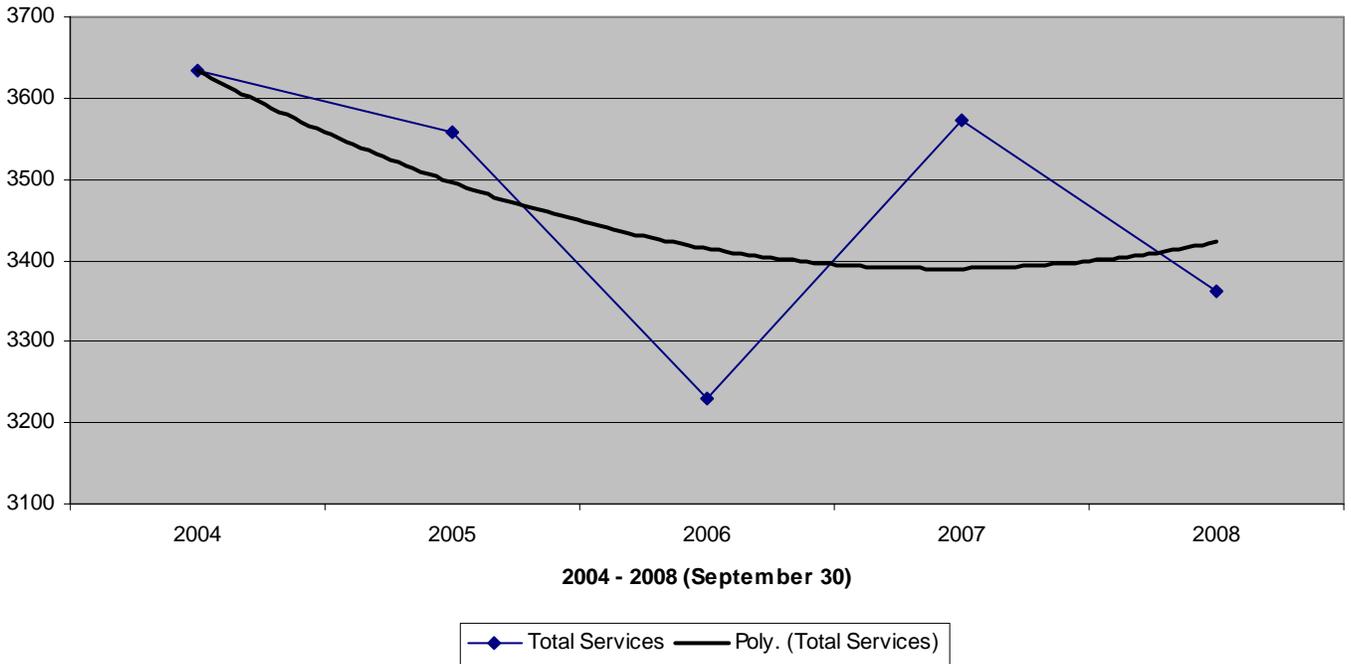
Clients Services rated highly!

Client satisfaction was tracked for the third year. Our clinic's performance was exemplary, including an extremely rapid response rate to callers - 93% of new callers are provided with information about next steps in the first hour after they called. 95% of former clients completing our survey say our services made a difference in their lives.

Number of People Receiving CALC Legal Services



Total Summary Advice, Brief Services and Referrals



Increasing our use of technology and software programs to increase our efficiency and effectiveness

Our in house experimental work continues to show good results and increased productivity. Our clinic "knowledge networking and generation" skills are increasing. Personal knowledge management practices are also improving. Document generation is improving as all our landlord and tenant work is now automated also. All of this means we become more efficient and our time is used better.

Strengthening access to justice, legal aid and the clinic system—a priority

This work includes involvement in:

- The Association of Community Legal Clinics Ontario (ACLCO)
- Provincial Knowledge Management and Transfer Learning Community
- Legal Clinic Housing Issues Committee
- ACLCO Performance Measures Working Group
- Clinic Resource Office (CRO) Caseworkers' Advisory Committee
- Income Security and Advocacy Centre
- Legal Aid Ontario Aboriginal Services Consultation
- Eastern Region Learning Task Force
- Human Rights Reform Group
- Mobile Homes Working Group
- Family Violence Inter-clinic Working Group
- Ontario Project for Inter-clinic Community Organizing (OPICCO) Outcome Measures Project
- Eastern Region Accountability Working Group
- Meeting with the University of Ottawa Community Legal Clinic. We

also went to two Ottawa general service clinics to share our intake resources. And visited the Simcoe and Northumberland clinics, and Aboriginal Legal Services.

- Designing and delivering several workshops for Regional training events
- Working with the private bar on a Volunteers Lawyers project
- Co-chair of the fledgling Poverty Law Advocates of Canada in 2009.



The clinic successfully partnered with Osgoode Hall Law School on a project called "Enhancing Access to Civil Justice."

Michele Leering will be a Community Leadership & Justice Fellow for the 2008/09 academic year and will be on leave from January to June 2009.



The Provincial Learning Action Committee provided funding for Michele Leering and Carolyn Hamilton to organize

KnowledgeNOW, an innovative action research project designed to enhance knowledge management, sharing and generation between Ontario's 80 community legal clinics.

Looking Ahead to 2009

In addition to our 2009 plans described elsewhere in this report and in our recent newsletter, the restructuring of Legal Aid Ontario and the future of the Ontario legal clinics system will continue to occupy our attention. We will provide input on a program evaluation framework for clinics, and the design and implementation of new case and project management software which will transform the way we do our work.

The Fellowship will provide an opportunity to do research and development of planning and collaborative approaches to improve services in our local area and Eastern Region. We hope to work with the Law Foundation of Ontario on their upcoming Rural, Remote and Linguistic Access project, focussing on increasing legal services in our region.

Our focus will continue to be on making current initiatives sustainable – particularly our case work, the

website, our involvement in affordable housing and homelessness prevention work, and legal clinic system projects. Although staff transition is a challenge due to the loss of experience, expertise and fruitful working relationships, the opportunities for new ideas and approaches brought by our new lawyers inspires and energizes us.

Having improved our housing law services and case management efficiency, we hope to have a greater impact by pro-active advocacy on housing disrepair and property standards.

We will continue to focus on the special needs of vulnerable communities, including victims of domestic and sexual violence, the d/Deaf, and the disabled. We hope to provide more human rights advice and advocacy through a partnership with the Human Rights Legal Support Centre.

We will continue to expand and diversify our services in Employment Law areas including looking into Workers Compensation issues with migrant farm workers.

We will work with other community groups and individuals to reduce the impact of pay day loans on our clients' disposable incomes. And we hope to provide more consumer law advice.

We will be doing more outreach to the Aboriginal community.

We will continue to provide new opportunities for staff to job shadow and visit other Ontario and American legal clinics in a search for better practices, and new ideas to improve service delivery.

We will successfully complete Phase I of the KnowledgeNOW project.

We will begin work on developing a new strategic plan for 2010 to 2015.



Community Advocacy & Legal Centre

Your community legal clinic

158 George Street, Level 1
Belleville, ON K8N 3H2

Phone: 613-966-8686
Toll Free: 1-877-966-8686
TTY: 613-966-8714
Toll Free TTY: 1-877-966-8714
Fax: 613-966-6251

www.communitylegalcentre.ca

OUR MISSION

The Community Advocacy & Legal Centre provides access to justice through quality legal services, advocacy and information for people living on a low income or in poverty.

We can help by providing:

- Legal information and advice
- Tenant Duty Counsel
- Representation before courts and tribunals
- Legal education sessions & materials
- Community capacity building services
- Law reform activities
- Referrals to appropriate services and to other sources of legal help

OUR VISION

We strive to achieve social justice with dignity by influencing change in our community, in our institutions, and in the law.

2007-2008 Board

Chair	Tim Grew
Vice Chair	Ken Palmer
Treasurer	Rick Helman
Secretary	Rasa Baltutis
Members	Joan Greenwood, Penny Hendricks, Cathy McCallum, Ruth James Morrow, Ginny Pearsall, Rick Rolston

Staff

Emma Barz	Marieanne Langer
Denise Bird	Deirdre McDade
Gina Cockburn	Jessica Michael
Richard Ferriss	Lynda Morgan
Diane French	John No
Carolyn Hamilton	Sharon Powell
Peter Kerr	Victoria Watts
David F. Little	Ingrid Wood

Michele Leering, Executive Director

What our clients had to say...

"[Staff member] is an angel sent from heaven to help the unfortunate."

"I think your services were great."

"My case could not be handled any better."

"Totally satisfied, thank you."

"Everyone was very helpful and [staff member] did an excellent job with my case."

"Thank you for your hard work, I appreciate it greatly!!"

"I was extremely stressed throughout my case and [staff member] was there to help every minute!"