

For Immediate Release

Friday, January 26, 2007 Belleville, Ontario

Local Lawyers Recognized for Pro Bono work

Local lawyers were recognized for their generous contributions to the community by the Board and staff of the Community Advocacy & Legal Centre at a special open house this past week. The legal clinic hosted a special event "In Celebration, In Recognition, In Appreciation" to acknowledge the free legal work done by lawyers in Hastings, Prince Edward and Lennox & Addington Counties to help people in desperate need when Legal Aid is not available to them.

Clinic lawyer Gina Cockburn explained that "a survey clinic staff conducted of local lawyers confirmed that many provide a variety of free legal services to those who are unable to pay. These services range from advice and assistance in family law or other legal matters, to assisting non-profit agencies. Local lawyers regularly provide many hours of unpaid service to individuals and organizations."

Clinic chairperson Cathy McCallum took the opportunity to thank the local bar members for this often unrecognized contribution and applauded lawyers for their contribution to increasing access to justice for people living on a low income or in poverty. Executive Director Michele Leering spoke about the future for the local pro bono project. "Thirty local lawyers are willing to donate their time to provide information about the legal system and the laws that impact on us. Plans are being developed by the clinic in collaboration with the Law Associations in Hastings and Lennox & Addington Counties for a "Know your Law" series of public talks, brown bag lunches and newspaper columns in the year to come. This is an exciting new initiative."

John Mastorakos, president of the Hastings County Law Association noted "the lawyers of the Hastings County Law Association are well aware of the financial hurdles being faced by our citizens when they attempt to access legal assistance. We are pleased to be involved the Pro Bono Law Project and to be working with the clinic to find alternative methods of providing legal advice beyond the traditional framework of a private Legal Aid retainer." Former Pro Bono Steering Committee member and lawyer Barb Burford spoke about other projects underway. "Pro Bono Law Ontario (PBLO) provides referrals for non profit agencies and parents and children with education law problems through their Volunteer Lawyer Service and Child Advocacy Project. Local lawyers are now involved as volunteers with those programs". She notes however that "many local practioners get referrals directly from their community and not through an organized PBLO project." Gina Cockburn thanked PBLO for providing seed funding the local survey and supporting the new initiatives.

For further information about the contents of the press release, please call Gina Cockburn, ext 34 or Michele Leering at the Community Advocacy & Legal Centre at 966-8686, ext. 27 or Toll Free at 1-877-966-8686.

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