

# 2006 ANNUAL REPORT

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

**COMMUNITY ADVOCACY & LEGAL  
CENTRE**

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## Community Advocacy & Legal Centre

### Mission

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

### Vision

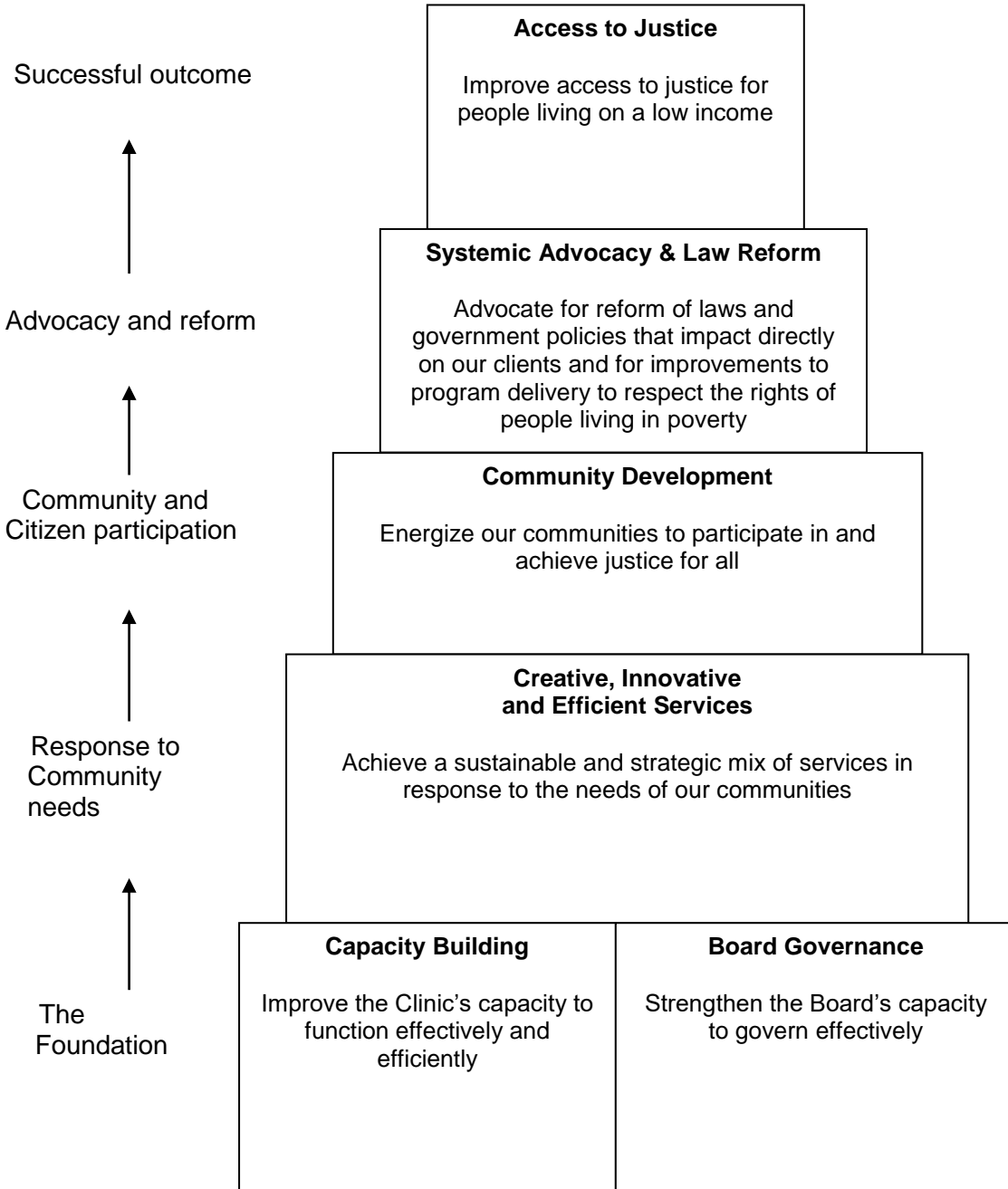
We strive to achieve social justice with dignity by influencing change in our community, our institutions and poverty law.

### Values

We believe:

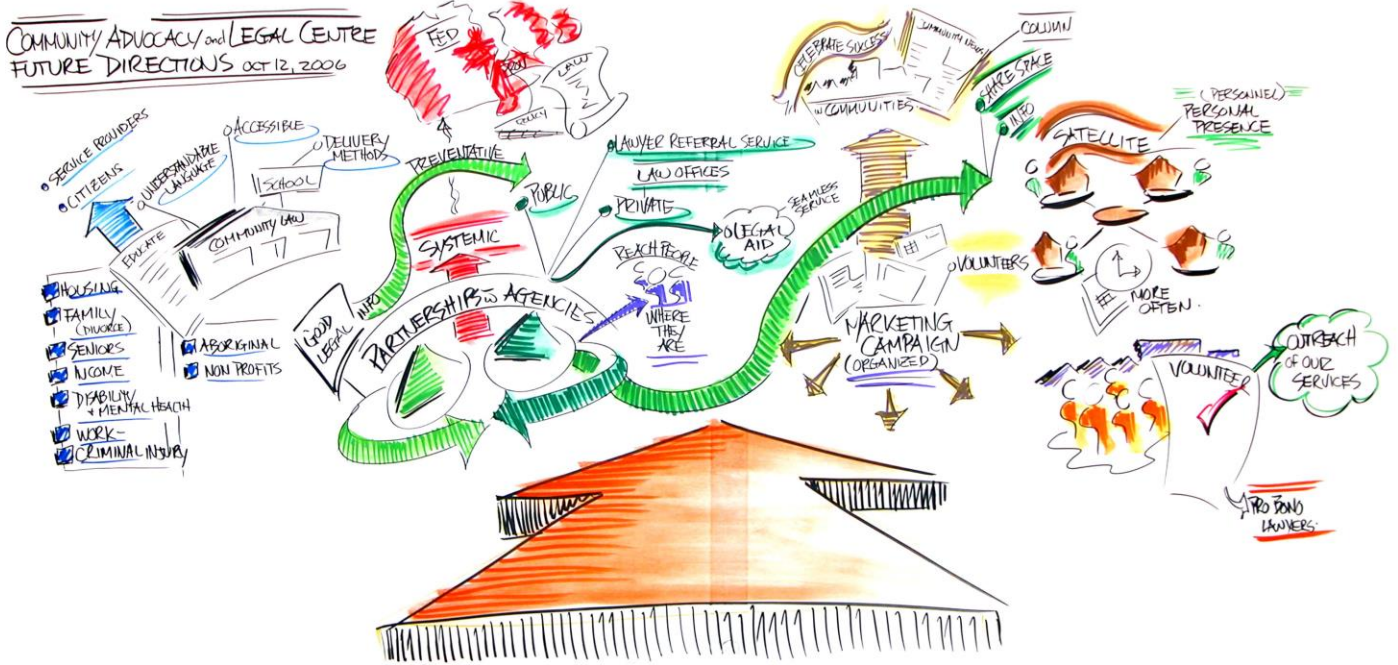
- Justice is a right for individuals and communities
- In being client centred and accessible
- Every person is of infinite value
- In being responsive to, and collaborative with, our community
- In creative, innovative and effective services and work

# STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK 2003 - 2007





# Where We are Going: The Next 5 Years



# **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

## **Overview**

2006 has been a demanding year with both challenges and opportunities.

Our work continues to be guided by our Board's five-year strategic plan with its six major goals. In October of this year, Board and staff met with people from our community to review these goals and set new directions. Over the next two to five years, expect to see:

- new partnerships emerging
- more publicity and outreach about our services across our service area and particularly in our satellite office communities
- more preventative and systemic legal work
- a “Know Your Law” project – taking law to the community (conditional on new funding).

This year our staff have included Denise Bird, Gina Cockburn, Richard Ferriss, Diane French, Carolyn Hamilton, Ruth Hatton, Samantha Hayward, Marieanne Langer, Suzanne Linscott, David Little, Michael Mumby, Deirdre McDade, John McKean, Jessica Michael, Lynda Morgan, Sharon Powell, Steven Starbuck and Deb Wilson.

Our Board is very active and members donate hundreds of volunteer hours for clinic governance and to support clinic staff and to develop new programs. Staff are tremendously encouraged by the new energy and enthusiasm that our Board members bring to us. They have also brought new expertise to tackle challenges in evaluating our programs, managing our human resources, and ideas for developing both a new volunteer program and the proposed community law school project.

## **Significant accomplishments in 2006**

Some of this year’s more significant accomplishments have included:

- ✓ Meeting the demand for individual client services without additional money for staffing from our principal funder Legal Aid Ontario (LAO).

The demand continues to be heavy. In the first nine months, we dealt with approximately 3250 requests for information, advice and brief services. Furthermore, our statistics program also records that we helped more people in the first nine months of this year compared to last year (9232 compared to 9099).

We took on 300 new client cases in the first nine months, which is an increase over last year, and higher than the average number of cases we've taken on in the past five years. We are also carrying in excess of 120 project files which is an all time record. Project files are opened for all 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 or Legal Aid Ontario. Due to serious limitations in our statistics program, this work is not reflected in our statistical records appended to this report.

- ✓ Recovering more than a **million** dollars for our clients – even on the most conservative estimates.

These conservative estimates are based on the retroactive awards that people received as a result of our advocacy, and not on the future value which is many times more the value of the retroactive award. And we have only done calculations for three types of cases that we take. These cases reflect only about 42% of the type of legal files we open. In the first nine months of 2006 we recovered the following for clients with these types of problems:

- ★ Ontario Disability Support Plan (ODSP) appeals - \$539,000.00
- ★ Workers Safety and Insurance Board appeals – \$210,000.00
- ★ Criminal Injuries Compensation Board cases - \$273,000.00

- ✓ Clinic staff recently won an Outstanding Achievement GEM (“Going That Extra Mile”) award from LAO for their team work – with many of the accomplishments listed below being the reason why they were cited for the award. Unfortunately, LAO cancelled the awards ceremony in Toronto this year due to their budget deficit which is a disappointment.
- ✓ Continuing to publish our twice annual Bafflegab newsletter which is also now also sent electronically and available on-line through our clinic’s new website. We recently learned Bafflegab was seen as the most helpful clinic resource when we met with focus groups of local service providers to evaluate our clinic’s services.
- ✓ Launching and developing our popular (but not as well-known as we’d like) website at [www.communitylegalcentre.ca](http://www.communitylegalcentre.ca).

Statistics indicate we’ve had 5,866 user hits in the first year which surprised us. The total page hits are 39,961. New resources and links are added weekly. Positive accolades have come from many quarters, including LAO’s Quality Service Office. We recently learned that 80% of the staff who work for local service agencies do not appear to be aware of our website yet. We are planning more workshops on how to use it effectively, and have just done outreach to all the local library staff also.

In the course of developing the website, we’ve created a lot of new tip sheets and resources which are also very popular.

- ✓ Carrying out an Eviction Prevention Project (funded by a grant from Provincial Homelessness Initiative Funds administered by the County of Hastings)

This has included developing special resources for duty counsel and better working relationships with service providers to prevent eviction. We also delivered a large number of workshops on legal issues to service providers. Tenants continue to receive "hot line" service. Our triage system continues to work well. We continue to devote considerable resources to homelessness prevention through community development and capacity-building initiatives.

- ✓ Supporting the Affordable Housing Action Network (AHAN) in Hastings County

The Network launched a new website, and has bi-monthly meetings which we help to support and organize. The AHAN has become a broadly based representative coalition to tackle issues of homelessness and the creation of affordable housing options. Their meetings are well attended, including the recent Belleville all candidates meeting on affordable housing issues. Clinic staff participate in the new Steering Committee and also on the Bricks and Mortar, and the Information and Networking task forces.

- ✓ Continuing to work to reform laws through test case litigation and other co-ordinated litigation and systemic advocacy strategies.

We have two new cases before the Divisional Court on the definition of "disability" under the *Ontario Disability Support Plan Act* one of which was recently adjourned pending the outcome of the Crane case. We still are involved with a case challenging the discriminatory provisions of the *Ontario Works Act Regulation* on "adults living with children". This case has partially settled resulting in a substantial change to the legislation providing Ontario Works to many more adults who are living with a parent.

We continued to target social assistance overpayments this year. We've been highly successful in this initiative – reducing the debts alleged owed by local clients by a substantial amount. We also did a lot of advocacy on the Special Diet issue and currently have a number of appeals before the Social Benefits Tribunal where we are raising Human Rights arguments.

The Housing Team has been doing a great deal of work on promoting adequate Property Standards and new Vital Services bylaws. They have been meeting with Hastings County to develop model bylaws for local implementation. Better bylaws would go a long way to helping this community to maintain affordable, safe and secure housing for low income tenants.

Our Criminal Injuries Compensation advocates made a systemic complaint to the provincial Ombudsman's office which is currently under consideration. We complained on behalf of 22 clients citing significant delays in the process. We had a phone interview with the Investigator outlining our concerns and recommendations for change.

We were also involved in another complaint to the Ombudsman's office on behalf of clients receiving disability pensions who were not being paid fairly for retroactive benefits because of Ministry delays. The Ombudsman wrote a lengthy report and made many recommendations after receiving complaints from all over Ontario. Recent Ministry changes and announcements will benefit clients to the tune of \$150,000.00

- ✓ Working more closely with other legal clinics to strengthen the legal clinic system, improve our skills and knowledge, and improve our working relationship with our main funder Legal Aid Ontario. This work has included:
  - Active participation in the Association of Community Legal Clinics Ontario and many advisory committees and consultations (Provincial Learning Committee, Deaf Services Consultation, CRO Caseworkers' Advisory Committee, Regional Domestic Violence Training Committee, LAO-Clinic Relationship Retreat, Human Rights Reform, Strategic Planning Consultation, Case Management Software Pilot Project)
  - Presenting a day long workshop for the Ontario Project for Inter-clinic Community Organizing (OPICCO) about evaluation and outcome measurement for community development work and creating a legal clinic specific "tool kit" including interactive templates
  - Developing a "community of practice group" for legal clinic Executive Directors and Office Managers that has just launched a new collaborative Sharepoint website "SAGE online" to share best practices and encourage innovation
  - Presenting several workshops on legal topics at Eastern Region clinic conferences and chairing a new "Learning Task Force" to upgrade the quality of our professional development activities.
- ✓ Increasing our use of technology and software programs to increase our efficiency and effectiveness

Our on-line resources continue to increase significantly. All staff are showing increased self-sufficiency in their use of software to boost productivity. New creative ideas are being experimented with constantly. Our website portal is increasingly used to make our referral and advice work easier. Our "knowledge and information management" skills are increasing – more user friendly resource and information banks are being maintained.

- ✓ Helping to launch PLANc – the Canadian Poverty Law Advocates' Network.

This ground-breaking conference is being held in Vancouver on November 24 and 25, 2006. It is being funded jointly by the Canadian Bar Association, and the Law Foundations of Ontario and British Columbia. Forty delegates from across Canada were chosen by the Steering Committee to attend this first ever event. We have been working on this project since June 2003, when one of our clinic staff first organized a workshop on "Poverty Law Services across Canada" at the International Connections and Direction Conference.

- ✓ Expanding our work towards “seamless legal services delivery for the poor” by working more collaboratively and strategically with other Legal Aid service providers in four counties. Clinic staff involved in this project recently won a GEM award from LAO for “Going that Extra Mile” for this innovation.

We met several times with the three Legal Aid Ontario Area Offices (Hastings/Prince Edward, Frontenac, and Lennox & Addington), three supervisory criminal and family law duty counsel, and review counsel from Queen’s Legal Aid, and clinic staff from Rural Legal Services and the Kingston Community Legal Clinic.

Jointly, we updated “Who Does What?” which is a protocol which ensures accurate referrals for Legal Aid-funded services regardless of which one of our services you first contact. LAO has recently identified this protocol as a “best practice”.

We also created another new referral resource so that staff at all offices will work more consistently with clients through implementing a “holistic approach” to the problems they present with. The “Where Else to Go for Help?” tip sheet is designed to refer people to other resources when LAO and clinic staff can’t help. It has been very popular and was recently featured on CLEONet: A clearinghouse for public legal information. We’ve also been asked to present on our model for intake at an upcoming legal clinic conference in Southwestern Ontario.

- ✓ Improving our satellite office locations and accessibility in Bancroft and Trenton

In recent months we’ve found new space that better meets our needs and keeps us within budget. That is no small feat when our funding has been frozen for many years and we now have five satellite offices when we are only funded for four! The new office locations can be found on our website.

- ✓ Facilitating pro bono work with the local private bar

We analyzed the results of our 2005 survey of private bar members and their interest in doing volunteer work. Eleven local lawyers were recruited for special education advocacy with local families and have been referred to Pro Bono Law Ontario’s (PBLO) Child Advocacy Project to participate in their referral panel. Fourteen local lawyers are interested in providing free legal advice to non-profits and charities and have been referred to PBLO’s Volunteer Lawyer Service who will screen and match eligible local groups. And to top it all off, more than twenty lawyers in our service area are interested in offering public legal education to the community in various media formats including radio, local cable tv, print media, brown bag lunches, community forums and workshops. In January 2007, we are holding a special “In Celebration, In Recognition, In Appreciation” event to recognize the exemplary pro bono contributions of local lawyers.

- ✓ Increasing our capacity to plan and evaluate all our work more effectively

We’ve continued to upgrade and standardize our project management. We are just beginning to track and record our work in a new Project Management Data Base created by one of our staff in Microsoft Access. All Board and staff attended training

earlier this year with consultant Andrew Taylor from Centre for Research and Education in Human Resources. We developed three “program logic models” for our intake system, our ODSP disability appeal services, and our website to help us come up with new methods for understanding and evaluating the impact of our work. This learning has been transformational and continues to provide us with new insights on how we can improve what we do.

#### ✓ Evaluating Our Services & Monitoring Client Service Measures

As a twenty-five year anniversary project, we held focus groups throughout our service area and are speaking with key informants to evaluate whether people are happy with our services and how we could improve. We are start to analyze the results at the present time. We did learn that service providers are less familiar with our clinic services than we would like, are confused by the name changes we underwent, and would like more services in rural and remote areas. Service providers are still confused by the different services offered by LAO Area Offices and our legal clinic.

The new performance measure of client satisfaction mandated by LAO was implemented for the second year. Our clinic's performance was stellar including a high level of client satisfaction, extremely rapid response rate to callers - 97% of new callers are provided with information about next steps in the first hour after they called, and the evaluation study indicates that people surveyed are satisfied with our services.

### **Challenges we face in 2007**

We expect to continue to try and do more with same resources. **We hope to continue in much of the work already described and to:**

- Obtain funding for the creation of the “Know Your Law” project – a community or people’s law school that will primarily assist service providers, community volunteers and clients. We have recently applied to the Law Foundation of Ontario for a special project grant.
- Continue our commitment to our work for vulnerable communities, focussing on the special needs of victims of domestic and sexual violence, the d/Deaf, and the disabled. We are pleased to be able to continue to work with Jennifer Jackson on a LAO committee trying to improve Legal Aid-funded services for the d/Deaf and also with the local Deaf Accessibility Project.
- Obtain funding to develop an innovative Volunteer Program that would accomplish a few things we’ve never been able to consider with our restricted resources. We are looking for Community Outreach Coordinators, and Client Community Facilitators for the seven different geographic communities we serve, and the two special client communities of the d/Deaf and the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory. We also want to work with the 20+ local

lawyers who have offered free legal advice and information services. Obtaining a one year Trillium grant for a Volunteer Program Developer will help us be able to accomplish this.

- Increase our ability to serve our clients more holistically, offering a broader range of legal information and advice to meet their needs
- An outreach and publicity campaign about our clinic's services and website. We are seeking the services of a volunteer Marketing Consultant to assist us with this work.
- Work more closely with allies and partners in our local community to leverage more advocacy and other resources for our clients and disadvantaged communities.

### **Thanks to all the people who make it possible...**

Board, staff and community... with special mention for our front line staff...

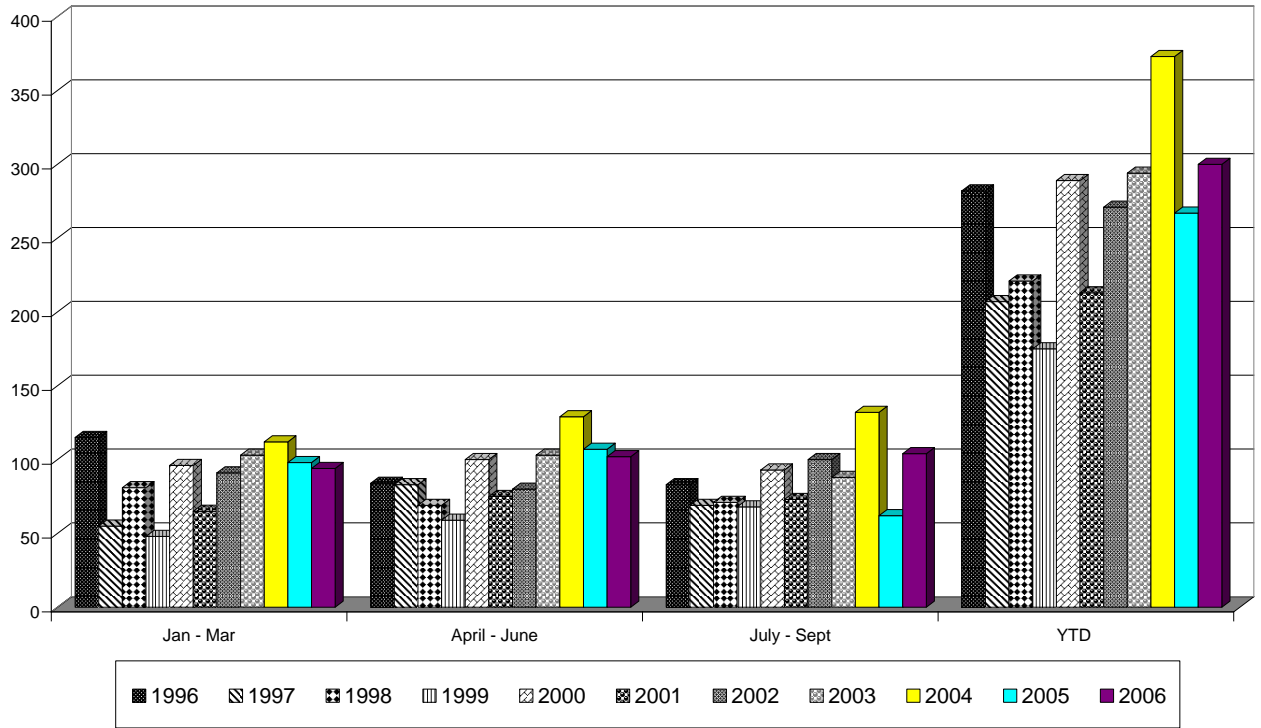
We could not do as much as we do without the dedicated, empathetic and professional assistance of the staff who share client intake responsibilities (Carolyn, Denise, Diane, and Sharon). They are on the front lines and the phone lines all day. They deal with calls and visits from despondent, desperate and distressed individuals constantly and do an excellent job of finding out what the problem is, assisting with problem solving, calming them down, offering a supportive ear, and making appropriate referrals where non-legal help is necessary. They also triage each caller's problem based on need and urgency so that the legal staff can respond most efficiently and appropriately.

### **And finally ...**

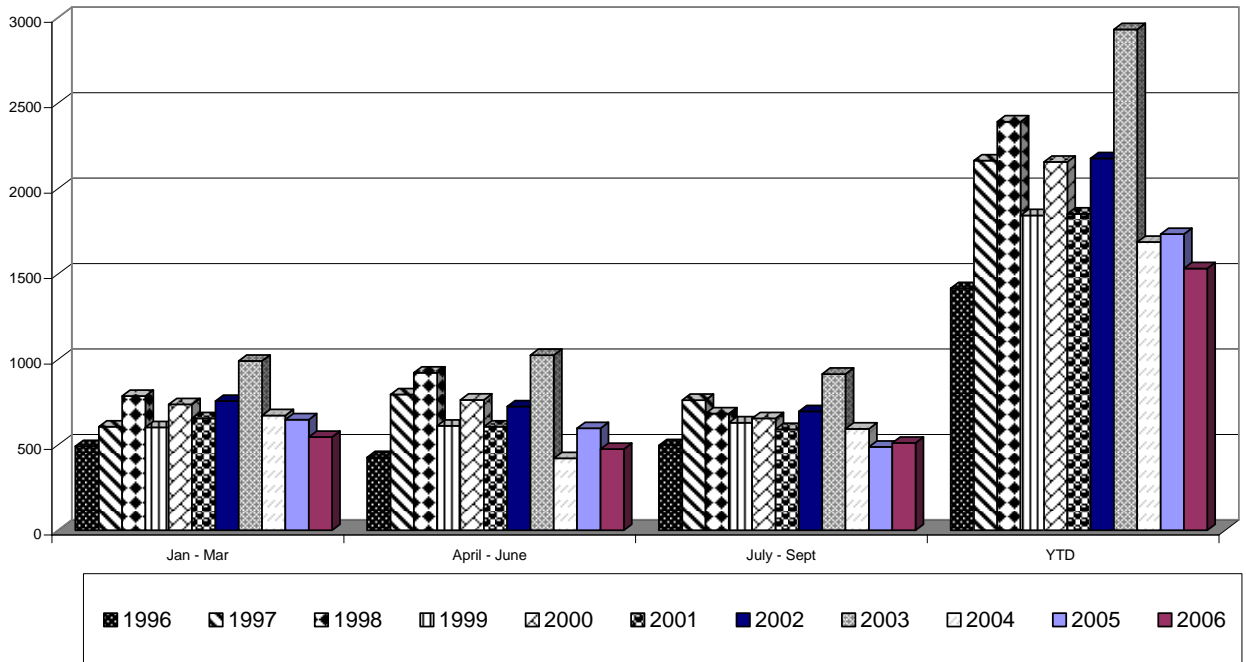
I would be pleased to consider any questions from the membership regarding our operation in this past year or regarding future service delivery.

***Submitted for consideration by the Membership on November 15, 2006.***

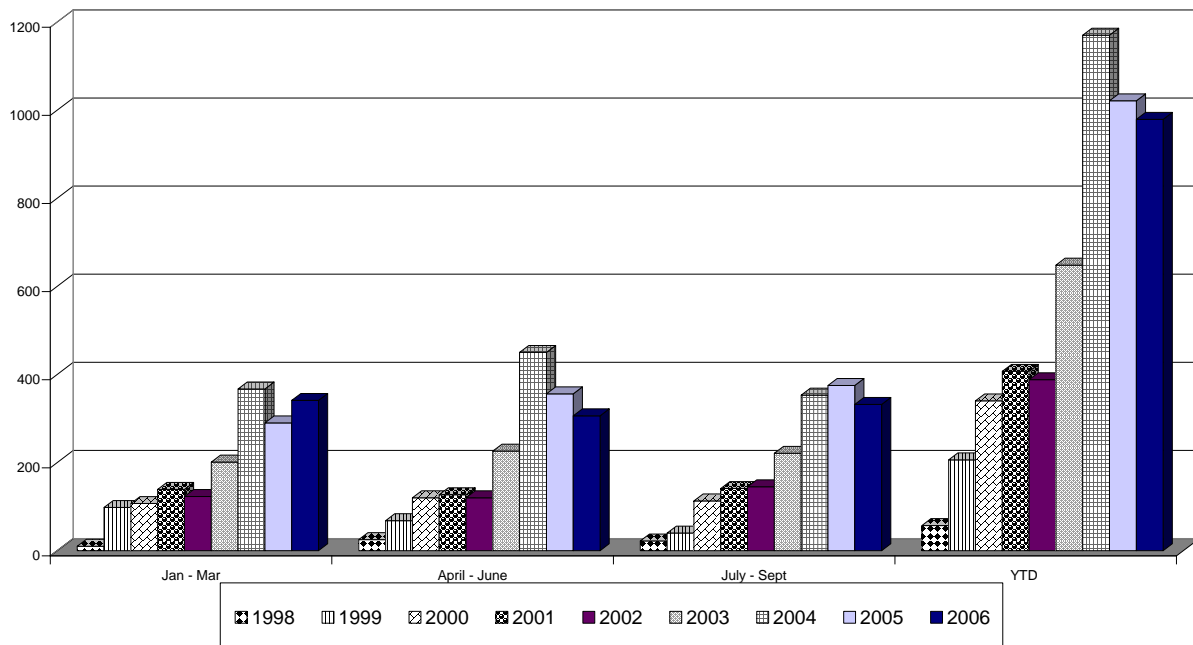
**MULTI-YEAR COMPARISON OF FILES OPENED 1996-2006**



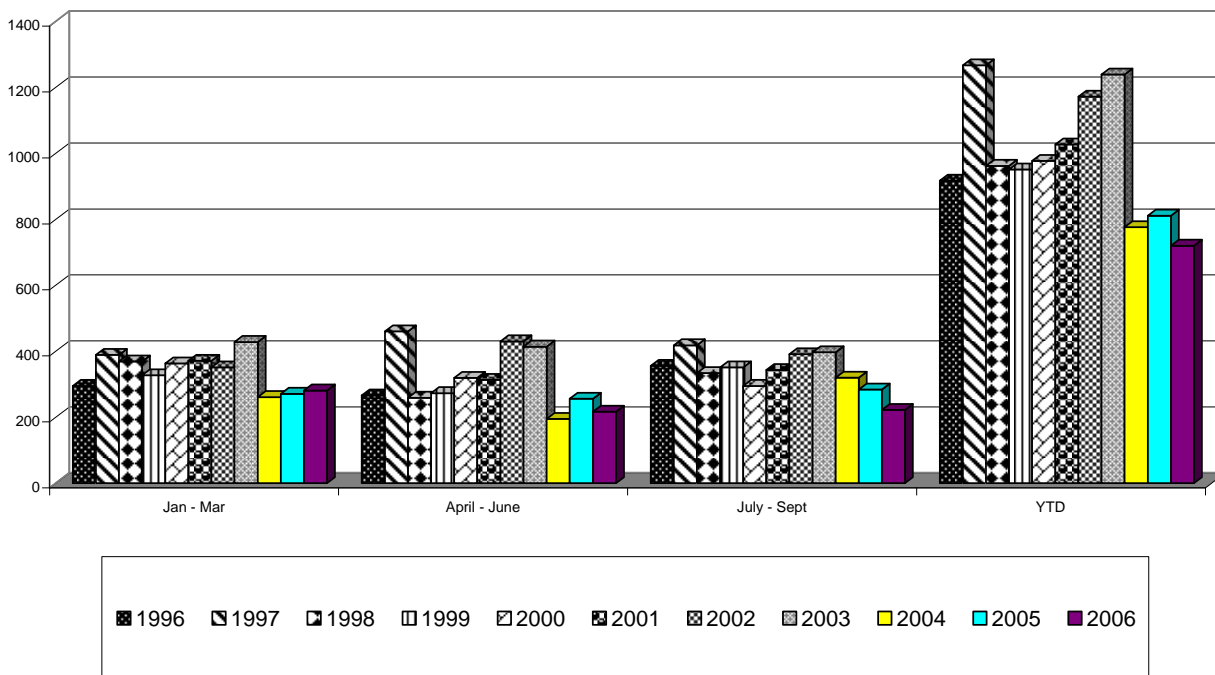
**MULTI-YEAR COMPARISON OF SUMMARY ADVICE 1996-2006**



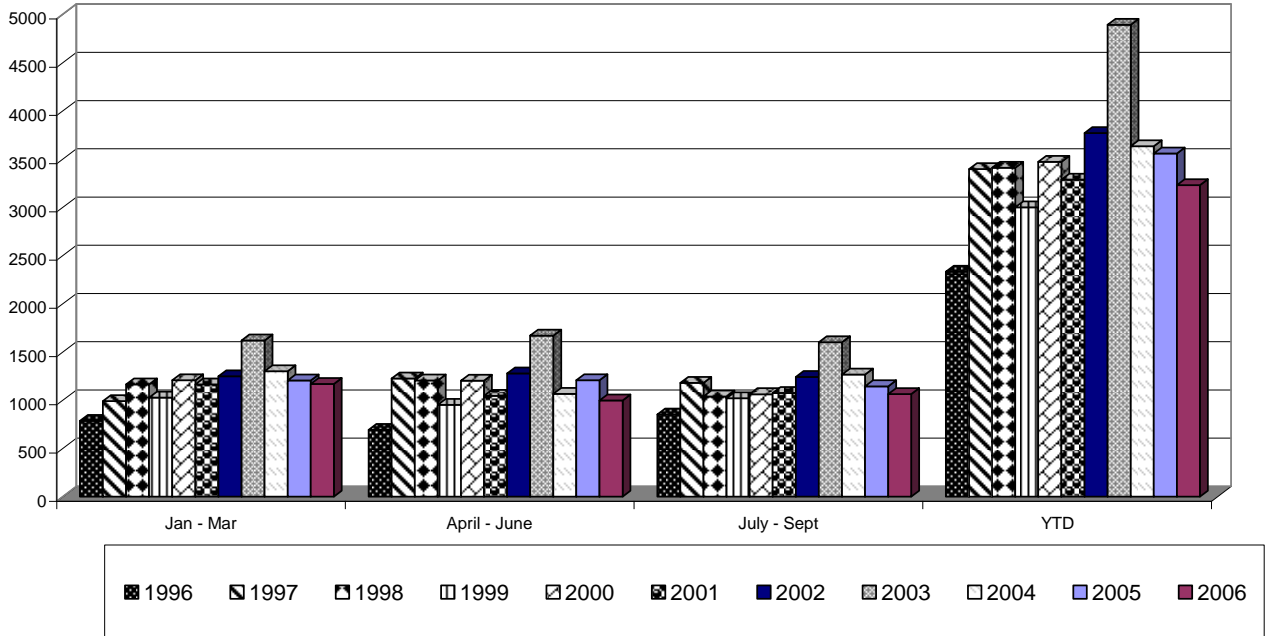
### MULTI-YEAR COMPARISON OF BRIEF SERVICES 1998-2006



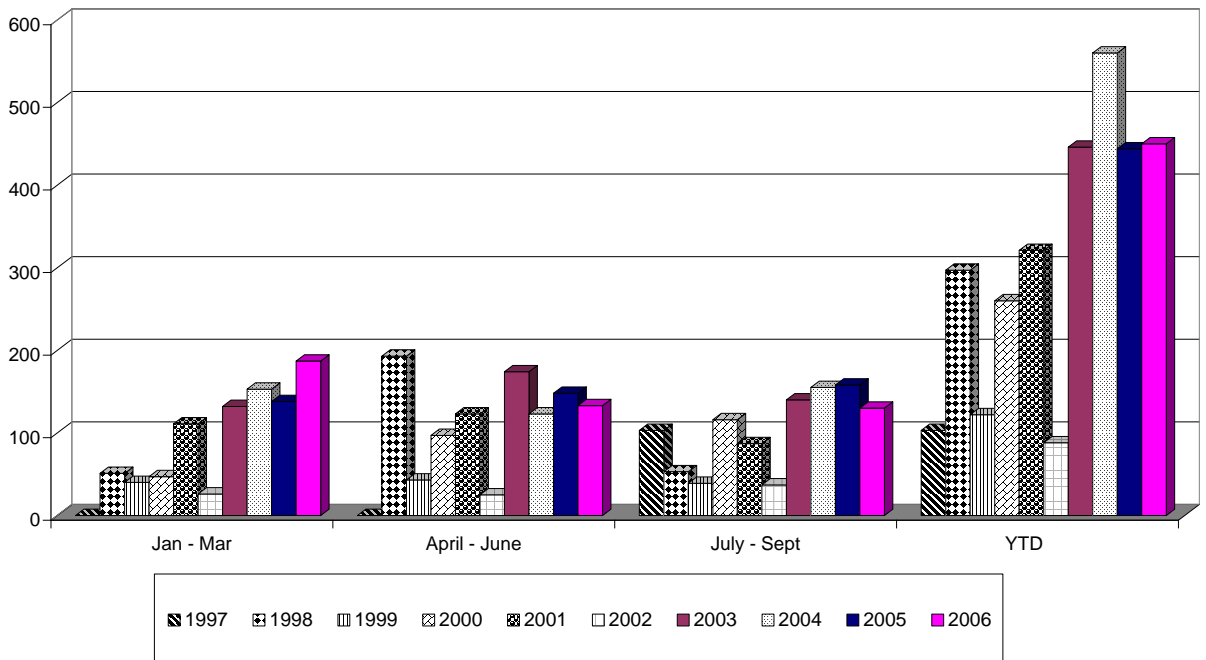
### MULTI-YEAR COMPARISON OF REFERRALS 1996-2006



**MULTI-YEAR COMPARISON OF TOTAL SUMMARY ADVICE, BRIEFS AND REFERRALS 1996-2006**



**MULTI-YEAR COMPARISON OF PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION MATERIALS 1997-2006**



**MULTI-YEAR COMPARISON TOTAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE HELPED 1998-2006**

