BAFFLEGAB

Semi-annual newsletter of the Community Advocacy & Legal Centre

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Poverty reduction strategy for a poverty-free Ontario

In 2008 the provincial government promised to review social assistance as part of its Poverty Reduction Strategy. In 2009 the government appointed the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council (Council) to make recommendations on how to do that review. The Council was made up of people with expertise in the area of poverty and social assistance including clinic lawyer Mary Marrone from the Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC).

In June 2010 the Council issued a report calling on the provincial government to conduct a more comprehensive investigation of all income security programs in Ontario. The Council urged the government to look at how to improve income and support programs to help all low-income people in Ontario rather than just focus on small changes to Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). The Council called on the government to immediately increase the incomes of people receiving OW and ODSP.

We welcomed the news that the long-awaited Social Assistance Review began in January 2011 with the appointment of two respected commissioners: Francis Lankin and Dr. Munir Sheikh. The review will last 18 months. The commissioners will be holding consultations across the province. We are hoping to hold a local consultation so that we can share local ideas and experiences with the government.

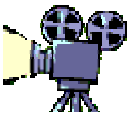
The ODSP Action Coalition (Coalition) is made up of community clinic caseworkers, agency staff, and community activists. It undertakes campaigns

(*Continued on page 2*)

Inside this issue:

FOCUS ON: Poverty reduction	1-2
Legal rights	3-5
What's new at the clinic	6-7
Clinic staff & Board news	8

Poor No More...there *is* a way out



The clinic and other local community organizations are coming together to host *Poor No More*, a heartfelt documentary about Canada's working poor. It will be screened locally in September 2011.

Imagine a world where people do not have to beg, where housing is affordable and university is free. When it's clear that countries that give priority to their citizens' well-being also prosper economically, one must ask: why don't we do the same?

Hosted by TV and film star Mary Walsh, *Poor No More* offers a compelling look at Canadians in low-paying jobs with no security and no future.

Mary then takes us to Ireland and Sweden to see how these countries have tackled poverty while strengthening their economies. It presents an alternative to the two-jobs-to-survive, unemployment-plagued North American reality.

Poor No More explains the roots of our economic insecurity, its impact on Canadians, and proposes remedies. It aims to move this issue from the margins to the mainstream.

Watch our website and follow us on twitter for updates on the screening.

Jessica Michael, Clinic Lawyer

Poverty reduction (Continued from page 1)

and activities to raise awareness of issues affecting persons in receipt of ODSP benefits. The Coalition is meeting with its members to develop a submission to the Social Assistance Review.

Members can participate in these discussions by attending an in-person meeting in Toronto on May 17 or participate in a 2-hour webinar/teleconference on May 12 from 2-4 pm, May 25 from 10 am -12 pm and May 31 from 2-4 pm. For more information on the Coalition meetings go to www.odspaction.ca.

For more information on the Social Assistance Review go to ISAC's Social Assistance Review website at www.sareview.ca.

Deirdre McDade, Clinic Lawyer

Poverty-Free Ontario Forum

The Community Development Council of Quinte will hold a forum **May 17** from 6:30-8:30 pm on the Poverty Free Ontario Initiative at Quinte Gardens in Belleville. This is one of a series of community events being held across the province to discuss what must be done now, and in the term of the next provincial government, to eliminate poverty in Ontario by 2020.

Call 613-968-2466 by May 13 to register. Read more about this event on our Upcoming Events page at www.communitylegalcentre.ca/calendar/Upcoming_Events.htm.

Elder Abuse Study—NICE (National Initiative for Care of the Elderly) is doing a prevalence study on elder abuse in Canada. This is the first comprehensive study in Canada on this issue. If you wish to participate, call 1-855-618-3286. About 300 older adults are needed. Visit www.nicenet.ca for more information.

Paths to justice

People who live in rural and remote areas, and people who speak languages other than French and English, face bigger challenges in understanding their legal rights and obligations, and in accessing the right kind of legal help when they are in trouble. With financial assistance and moral support from the Law Foundation of Ontario (LFO), the clinic has been working with community legal clinic partners from adjoining counties of Northumberland and Frontenac and Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) staff, to develop a regional strategy to overcome what seems at first glance to be insurmountable obstacles.

Following 9 months of research, consultation and deliberation, the Five County Network released *Paths to Justice: Navigating with the Wandering Lost*, a report that documents what we learned and what we believe can be done about the challenges. The report is available online at (www.communitylegalcentre.ca/connectingregions/toolkit.htm) along with the PowerPoint presentation shown during recent Legal Awareness workshops held March 3 and 4 in Sharbot Lake, Kingston, Belleville and Cobourg.

Recommendations include developing a Legal Education & Advocacy Regional Network (LEARN) and developing LEARN LAW - a community capacity building strategy that will include developing and offering a comprehensive series of legal information workshops for service providers and trusted intermediaries. LEARN Legal Literacy is a parallel strategy aimed at building up legal literacy in the community-at-large.

The Five County Network eagerly awaits news from the LFO on whether its bid for funding for Phase II to carry out these innovative projects will be given the go ahead. In the meantime, LAO has awarded the Five County Network a special grant for a project called @LAST - which will see further research, consultation and deliberation about how Legal Aid services to individual clients can be improved by better integration and coordination of Legal Aid services in family, criminal and poverty law.

Michele Leering, Executive Director and Clinic Lawyer

Affordable housing update

Despite successful local geared-to-income housing development, housing continues to be the single largest expense for low-income families. Children under 15 comprise more than half the number of Canadians living in housing that is unaffordable, substandard and overcrowded. Our community is no exception.

Work by volunteer affordable housing committees continues in each of Hastings, Prince Edward and Lennox and Addington Counties to push for more affordable, safe, suitable housing.

In Prince Edward County a consultant was hired and a report has been produced by SHS Consulting, called "Strategic Action Plan for Affordable Housing in Prince Edward County." The report identifies the key areas of concern as well as identifying an action plan.

The Lennox and Addington County group has also been working with the assistance of a Community Facilitator for Homeless and Affordable Housing.

The Prince Edward and Lennox and Addington groups will consult jointly with the social services staff about actions the Joint Social Services Committee and each counties' staff will be able to move forward with.

The Affordable Housing Action Network (AHAN) in Hastings County hosted a meeting for community input for the Belleville Community Plan, which has now been updated. Rural communities in Hastings County will also need to be updating existing plans and AHAN will be watching for opportunities to assist with the updates.

The Advocacy committee of AHAN will be closely watching the upcoming provincial elections and will be asking candidates their plans for furthering affordable housing projects locally.

Gina Cockburn, Clinic Lawyer

Women's Poverty

Women who work full-time year-round earn only 71 cents for every dollar earned by men. 20% of women are in low-wage occupations, compared to 10% of men.

Almost half (47%) of people receiving Ontario Works are sole support parents and their children – the vast majority are sole support mothers.

Lone mothers receiving social assistance are not allowed to keep child support payments from the father. The Ontario government deducts these payments from their social assistance cheque. In Quebec, parents are allowed to keep $100 per month.

Poverty often traps women in abusive relationships. Without access to adequate income, housing, childcare and decent employment, many women and their children are trapped.

Source: Ontario Report Card on Child & Family Poverty, Ontario Campaign 2000, www.campaign2000.ca/bringinginwomenvoices

The Poverty Game

The Poverty Game is a role-playing opportunity for people who want to increase their understanding about how devastating being poor can be.

Volunteer Osgoode Hall Law School law students recently updated the game, which had originally been created by a group of women in British Columbia, so that it would be more relevant to Ontarians.

The game is available for free to community groups that wish to organize a workshop as an experiential learning exercise. A leader's guide is provided. A clinic staff person could attend as a resource person. Contact Denise Bird at ext. 23 for more information.

Applying for EI — Changes to the Record of Employment form

Are you having problems getting your Record of Employment (ROE) from your employer? Did you know that employers are submitting Records of Employment electronically now, and that you can access your ROE over the internet? Here's what's happening, and how to get your ROE.

The ROE comes in electronic and paper form. Employers complete ROEs for employees receiving insurable earnings who then stop working and experience an interruption of earnings. The ROE is the single most important document in the Employment Insurance (EI) program.

An employer must complete an ROE even if the employee does not intend to apply for EI benefits. On the ROE, the employer enters details about your work history with the organization, including insurable earnings and insurable hours.

On March 15, 2011 the Government of Canada made two changes to EI, which affected ROEs. The changes apply only to ROEs your employer submits electronically through Service Canada's online services, such as ROE Web.

ROE Web allows employers to create, submit, print, and amend ROEs using the internet. It will also be more convenient to you because on the same day that the employer posts their ROE online with Service Canada you can go on and take a look at it for yourself and can print yourself out a copy.

Also, if you are trying to apply for EI it makes the process a lot more efficient because Service Canada will already have a copy of your ROE and will not need to wait for you to mail it in or drop it off to them.

If your employer is submitting ROEs electronically, **they no longer need to print a paper copy** for you. The employer must ensure you are aware that they will be submitting their ROEs to Service Canada electronically. **If you want a copy of your ROE you should visit the My Service Canada Account page on the Web**.

You do not need to submit a copy of your ROE to Service Canada; as they will have already received it from your employer electronically.

But, if your employer is still doing a paper copy of the ROE, you need to request a paper copy, fill out the EI forms and send in all of your paperwork, including the ROE.

See the article below, **"Who needs a My Service Canada account."**

Jessica Michael, Clinic Lawyer

Bancroft Drop-In Clinic hours changing — Our drop-in clinic will not be open during July and August but will likely be back in the Fall. Please watch our website or local media for updates.

Who needs a "My Service Canada" account?

Would you like to access your My Service Canada account online?

You will need an epass login identification number and one of the following access codes: either the 4-digit EI access code (which is located at the bottom of the benefit statement you receive after applying), or the 7-digit personal access code (which you receive in the mail after you register online for a My Service Canada Account – for non-EI clients).

Once you have your access code mailed to you from Service Canada, either your EI number or the personal access number, you can create your ID online from their website. You will be required to enter in personal information, and follow the few steps it takes you through online.

To register with My Service Canada Account, you should visit www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/online/mysca.html

Jessica Michael, Clinic Lawyer

More special diet changes

The Special Diet Allowance provides money to allow people receiving Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support to purchase healthier food.

After lobbying by community legal clinics, anti-poverty activists and health care groups, the provincial government announced that it had decided to keep the Special Diet Allowance program instead of cancelling it. However, there will be big changes to the program.

Under the old program there were 43 medical conditions that received funding, but under the new program there are only 29 medical conditions. Some medical conditions that have been removed are gout, constipation and pre-diabetes. This means some people will lose their Special Diet Allowance.

The amount of money people get will also change. For some medical conditions, the amount of money is going up a lot. For example, if you have hypertension, your allowance will go from $10 a month to $86 or if you have diabetes, it will go from $42 a month to $81.

However, for other medical conditions, the amount of money is going down. For example, if you have a child between 2 and 8 years old with lactose intolerance your allowance will go from $97 a month to $30. If you have celiac disease, the allowance will go from $131 a month to $97.

Everyone currently receiving a Special Diet Allowance MUST submit a new application form by **July 31, 2011**. If you do not submit a new application by this date your Special Diet Allowance will end. The new form must be completed by a doctor, nurse practitioner or registered dietician.

If your Allowance is reduced or denied you must request an Internal Review within 30 days and then you can appeal to the Social Benefits Tribunal. Contact us for help or if you have questions about the new rules.

Deirdre McDade, Clinic Lawyer

We are now a registered charity!

We are pleased to report that we are now a registered charity. Our charitable number is 12464 4121 RR0001. We can accept donations by cash or cheque at any time.

Workplace Safety & Insurance Board makes program changes

The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) is making significant changes to its Labour Market Re-entry (LMR) and Return to Work (RTW) program to get better results for injured workers and employers.

This new program focuses on quality training and sustainable jobs for injured workers. The WSIB is going to remove the use of external LMR case managers and instead will be using qualified WSIB staff to manage the injured workers pathways to work.

The program will begin later this year and it will be called the Work Reintegration Program. The program will maintain the relationship between the worker and employer, provide direct oversight for all the re-training services for the injured workers, increase the workers' input and choice in their vocational goals, make greater use of the education system for injured worker re-training, and provide workers with marketable skills and valid credentials.

The goal of this program is to help injured workers return to decent, safe and sustainable jobs and to give Ontario's employers more support from the WSIB to retain and re-train their injured employees.

WSIB plans to have this program in place by early 2011.

Jessica Michael, Clinic Lawyer

VOTE VOTE VOTE
PROVINCIAL ELECTION 2011
OCTOBER 6

To make sure you are on the voters list, or for questions as the election moves closer:
www.elections.on.ca/en-CA/

Or call 1-888-668-8683;
email info@elections.on.ca;
or TTY at 1-888-292-2312

Watch our website for details of an all-candidates meeting that will be organized with other community groups to ask questions about poverty reduction and related issues.

Articling Fellowship reaps rewards for rural and remote areas

Gillian Fahy joined our clinic as a Law Foundation of Ontario Articling Fellow in August 2010, with a special focus on increasing services to people living in rural and remote areas while she was also working towards her accreditation as a lawyer.

Amongst other responsibilities, she has been staffing our clinic satellite offices in Madoc and Bancroft and set up a special drop-in clinic in Bancroft the last Tuesday of every month. She has helped to organize special events for migrant farm workers from Prince Edward County, and outreach to lumber workers in North Hastings. She will be called to the Ontario Bar as a member of the Law Society of Upper Canada in June 2011.

Our clinic pamphlet is now available in French

Do you serve individuals in French? Would you like copies of our clinic pamphlet in French? Please contact us and we would be happy to provide you with copies of our clinic pamphlet that has been translated for your clients. You can also view it online at http://www.communitylegalcentre.ca/about/About_Us.htm.

A decade of hunger in Ontario – Profile of food bank clients

- Single adults now comprise the largest proportion of the population served by food banks – 38% in 2010, up from 26% in 2002
- Single parent families are the second largest group served -- 30% in 2010 down from a peak of 39% established in 2003
- Children and youth under the age of 18 account for 37% of the population served by food banks in March 2010
- Most Ontario households using food banks depended on social assistance (45 %) in 2010
- In rural areas (communities under 10,000), 9% received EI benefits and 40% received social assistance, while 22% accessed Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) benefits
- 64% of people served by food banks in 2010 lived in market rental accommodation; 27% lived in social housing. Only 4.4% owned their own homes
- The report concludes by saying: "Ontarians have a collective responsibility to act to reduce poverty and to ensure that basic social protections are available to prevent hunger and destitution, especially when the economy hits the wall."

For a copy of the full report, visit www.oafb.ca.

Deirdre McDade, Clinic Lawyer

Remember...if you have a **family law** problem, you need to call the Legal Aid Ontario Client Service Centre toll-free line at **1-800-668-8258**. You can apply for a Legal Aid certificate to get representation from a private bar lawyer or you can get legal advice on the phone. You can also visit a Family Law Information Centre in Belleville or Napanee to get advice in person. All these Legal Aid services are dependent on meeting their financial eligibility criteria and only for certain kinds of help. CALC does not deal with family law matters.

Making our website more accessible to the Deaf commmunity

Clinic staff will be working with the Canadian Hearing Society's Belleville office and the Ontario Interpreter Service to translate key portions of our website into American Sign Language (ASL) over the coming months.

This project, funded by Legal Aid Ontario, is designed to increase access to legal information for members of the Deaf community. A local focus group made up of service providers and people who are Deaf will provide strategic advice.

The clinic's website already has a special page to explain how people who are Deaf can best access the clinic's services, see www.communitylegalcentre.ca/services/Deaf.htm.

Michele Leering, Executive Director and Clinic Lawyer

The year in review: Highlights of our work in 2010

If you are interested in reading more about our work last year, we've prepared a full report available at www.communitylegalcentre.ca/about/Board/Annual_Reports.htm or by mail. Just call the clinic for your copy of our **2010 Annual Report**. The report details some of the issues and projects we have been working on, the kind of results we've been able to achieve for our clients, a client's story, and our future directions.

Clinic hosts Law Commission consultations for vulnerable workers

On April 13, 2011, the Law Commission of Ontario (LCO) visited the clinic to speak to agencies and employees about precarious workplaces and vulnerable workers. (Read the article in the Intelligencer at www.intelligencer.ca/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=3073422.) The LCO recommends law reform measures to enhance the legal system's relevance, effectiveness and accessibility and is independent of the government.

This LCO project focuses on precarious work, vulnerable workers, the existing protections for employees engaged in this work, the limitations of the protective legislation, the challenges and difficulties of enforcing rights under existing legislation, the impact of precarious work on the daily lives of vulnerable workers and some of the potential responses.

The LCO defines "precarious work" as short-term and low-paid work with few benefits. It might be dangerous, and workers are also unlikely to have a voice in determining their working conditions. The LCO is calling workers who perform precarious work "vulnerable workers" because of the conditions of work, the difficulty many have in enforcing their rights or because they may be excluded from bargaining collectively about their working conditions.

The LCO was involved in two different consultations at our clinic. They first met with local service providers to learn what they have been hearing and witnessing with regards to local vulnerable workers. Some of the different agencies consisted of Canadian Mental Health, Social Services, Loyalist College Employment Service, and Quinte Immigrant Services.

The LCO then met with some local employees, which included people from local farms, waitresses, and those working in factories. The LCO wanted to know what they would change in their workplaces with regards to injuries, how the injuries were dealt with, hours of work, benefits and wages.

We hope that the information they were given during the consultation was informative, and that it leads to some results for local vulnerable workers with respect to their rights and being able to stand up for themselves.

If you think you have information that would be of interest to the LCO, you can contact Mohan Sharma, head of the project, who would gladly talk to you. You can email him at LawCommission@lco-cdo.org or send mail to 276 York Lanes, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON, M3J 1P3.

Jessica Michael, Clinic Lawyer

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Do you prefer to receive **newsletters by email**? Email us at bafflegab@communitylegalcentre.ca.

If you would like to support the clinic by **becoming a member**, please contact Lynda, ext. 25, or visit our website at www.communitylegalcentre.ca/about/Membership.htm to learn more.

Are you a service provider? You can request copies of our clinic pamphlet for your clients. Please contact Denise, ext. 23, or email us at clinicoutreach@communitylegalcentre.ca.

Clinic staff & Board news — Comings and goings

Welcome to:

- Articling Student **Pam Vlasic**
- Executive Assistant **Maureen Lightfoot**
- Administrative Assistant **Anne Sweet**
- Volunteers **Gordon Mitchell, Stephanie Bosma, Annita Gray, Samantha Foster, Linda Janveaux & Jackie Wimbush**
- Summer Law Students **Melissa MacRae, Chris Robertson, Allison Gaw, Robert Doxtator & Corinna Traill**

Goodbye and thanks to:

- Clinic Lawyer **John No**
- Volunteers **Drew Payette, Joanne Poppenk & Lyne Maisonneuve**
- Loyalist Placement Students **Meredith Magee, Tammy Carson, Stephanie Bosma & Alyssa Reynolds**

Congratulations to our Board Members!

Rasa Baltutis, Tim Grew, Ken Palmer & Virginia Pearsall all received Volunteer Service Awards sponsored by the Government on May 3, 2011. Each Board member was presented with a lapel pin and certificate in recognition of their commitment and dedication as a volunteer in Ontario.

Volunteers welcome

The clinic appreciates past volunteers and placement students and thanks them for their hard work and dedication. We need volunteer help with office duties, working with clients, preparing legal education materials and more. For information about volunteer placement opportunities at the clinic, please check the clinic's website at: www.communitylegalcentre.ca/about/volunteers.htm, or email Sharon Powell, Volunteer Facilitator, at powells@lao.on.ca.

Visit us online!

W E B www.communitylegalcentre.ca facebook http://on.fb.me/CommunityLegalCentre

Follow us on twitter! www.twitter.com/CALCtweets

The information in this newsletter is not legal advice. If you have a legal problem in any of the areas of law mentioned in this newsletter, please contact the clinic in your area.
Go to www.legalaid.on.ca to find a clinic serving you.