

## Provincial Access to Justice Initiatives

By Gillian D. Marriott, QC and Kendall Moholityn

Alberta's pro bono organizations have found innovative ways to deliver pro bono services to Albertans. By bringing services into the heart of the community in a one-day format, these organizations have assisted access to justice for many Albertans who would not otherwise receive assistance.

### Advice-A-Thons Across Alberta

On September 12 and 14, 2015, Calgary Legal Guidance (CLG), the Central Alberta Community Legal Clinic (CACLC) and the Edmonton Community Legal Centre (ECLC) participated in a provincial access to justice initiative with each hosting a legal Advice-a-Thon event. These one-day, open air events represent an alternative model for pro bono service delivery. The goal of these events was to increase services to vulnerable individuals requiring legal support and to raise awareness of what the clinics do to support individuals with low income and to strengthen communities. The Advice-a-Thon concept was modeled from a similar event held annually in British Columbia.

**Calgary Legal Guidance (CLG)** hosted their event at the City of Calgary Municipal Building on September 12. The event was set up as a summary legal advice clinic, similar to what the clinics do on a daily basis but instead held outside and on a Saturday. The intent was to support individuals who may have difficulty attending a daytime or evening clinic and offer a weekend option as a more manageable time frame. In addition to the clinic, CLG hosted a free identification (ID) clinic, and notarized picture identification. This identification is often helpful for those who are homeless and/or fleeing family violence situations. CLG offered 90 clients free legal advice and administered 30 ID's. A total of 30 volunteers and 24 staff offered 120 volunteer hours and 120 staff hours.

Justice Minister Kathleen Ganley and Human Services Minister Irfan Sabir spoke about the important work the clinics are doing for community members by creating safe places for individuals experiencing complex issues to obtain support for their legal and social needs.

**Central Alberta Community Legal Clinic (CACLC)** celebrated its 10th Anniversary on September 14, 2015 in conjunction with the Advice-a-Thon event. CACLC offered both free legal summary advice clinics and Photo ID (Affidavits of Identification) to 50 people in a two hour time frame. Three volunteer lawyers, new to CACLC, supported five long term volunteers with the high volume of clients. In addition to the legal help, a number of CACLC Board Members, staff from PBLA, and even guest speakers rolled up their sleeves to assist and to cook over 200 hamburgers for clients and guests to enjoy.

**Edmonton Community Legal Centre (ECLC)** held its event on September 12, 2015 as a public awareness and fundraising initiative. A total of 36 Edmonton lawyers volunteered one hour of their time to provide 30 minutes of free legal advice to two low-income people each in an open-air setting in Sir Winston Churchill Square in

downtown Edmonton. Each participating lawyer was asked to collect a minimum of \$500 in donation "pledges".

The event exceeded all expectations. A total of 93 low income people received free legal advice, many of the volunteering lawyers stayed for extra shifts to see clients, and a total of \$31,785 was raised--\$23,535 by the volunteer lawyers from their friends, family, and colleagues, and \$8250 by corporate sponsors--most of them Edmonton law firms--including the "Gold" sponsor, the Edmonton Bar Association. ECLC was highlighted by all three main Edmonton television news programs that evening and as a feature guest on CBC Radio Active the night before. Deputy Justice Minister Philip Bryden stopped by to talk to people and show his support for the work ECLC does in the community.

### Other Events

**Lethbridge Legal Guidance Society (LLG)** hosts an annual event in conjunction with Law Day at the Lethbridge Court House. The event, held since 2012 in Lethbridge, has also been hosted in the additional locations of Blairmore, Medicine Hat and Brooks. The Ask-a-Lawyer event is possible through the tremendous support and enthusiasm of the local bar association. In 2015, 12 volunteer lawyers, eight legal assistants and three volunteers assisted 106 clients with their legal concerns during the Ask-a-Lawyer event. Feedback from the volunteer lawyers noted 100% satisfaction with their experience and a suggestion that it be held twice per year.

**Lloydminster Legal Clinic.** In true 'Border City' fashion, Pro Bono Law Alberta (PBLA) and Pro Bono Law Saskatchewan (PBLS) joined forces to provide residents with free legal advice through a one-day legal clinic in Lloydminster on Friday, September 18, 2015. The clinic provided an opportunity for individuals in the Lloydminster community and surrounding area to meet with a volunteer lawyer for up to 30 minutes of free legal advice. Through the combined efforts of the event partners and 11 enthusiastic volunteer lawyers a total of 66 individuals received free legal advice. The volunteer lawyers suggested that the event be held annually if not every six months. 

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