



# Legal Aid Alberta

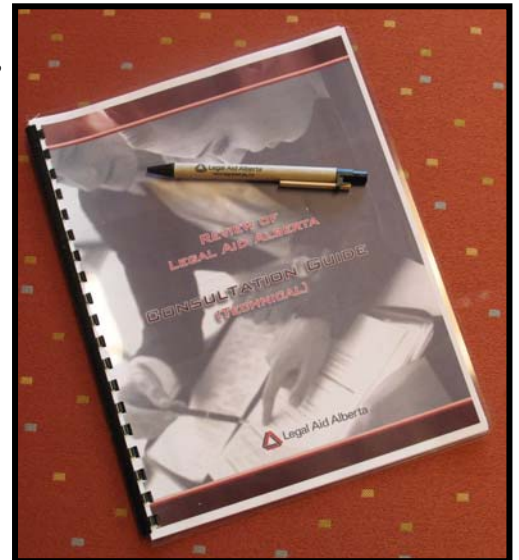
## The Brief

Your source for information on LAA's innovative and cost effective services for Albertans in need  
VOLUME 3, ISSUE 2 FALL 2009

### Legal Aid Alberta Review Release of Stakeholder Consultation Report

Legal Aid Alberta (LAA), in partnership with Alberta Justice and the Law Society of Alberta, embarked on a major review of its operations and programs in 2009. The goal of the review was to find ways to change and improve the legal aid plan for the benefit of Albertans while, at the same time, making it sustainable.

One aspect of the review involved consultation with a variety of stakeholders. The consultation approach enabled organizations and professionals in the field, clients and other interested people to review and comment on a variety of operational and programming options. To view the full report, please visit the What's New board on our homepage.



► Legal aid is an essential component of the administration of the justice system and the purpose of the review is to improve access to justice for Albertans in need.

#### INSIDE

Women in Need Get a Helping Hand  
Page 2

"Just-Us Girls"  
Page 3

LAA's Award Winning Social Worker  
Page 4

Visit  
[www.legalaid.ab.ca](http://www.legalaid.ab.ca)

On the homepage under the What's New heading, you can find the complete Stakeholders Consultation Report and companion workbook that was provided to participating stakeholders prior the August sessions.



### Participating Shelters:

YWCA Sheriff  
King Home  
(Calgary)

Dr. Margaret  
Savage Crisis Ctr  
Society  
(Cold Lake)

Lurana House  
(Edmonton)

Odyssey House  
(Grande Prairie)

YWCA Harbour  
House  
(Lethbridge)

Central Alberta  
Women's Emerg.  
Shelter  
(Red Deer)

Columbus House  
of Hope  
(St. Paul)

Wheatland Shelter  
(Strathmore)



## Women in Need Get A Helping Hand

*LAA Partners with Alberta Council of Women's Shelters*

As part of a pilot project launched on September 8th, Legal Aid Alberta (LAA) has partnered with the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS) to improve the accessibility and quality of legal advice and representation services to women who are staying at women's shelters. Leveraging off of the ACWS' recent 'Practical Frameworks for Change' initiative, an opportunity presented itself in which LAA could offer tailored service to women living in shelter. Taking into consideration the legal issues and logistical challenges that women in shelter often face (i.e. fleeing abusive relationships, issues concerning children, and/or not being able to leave the shelter in fear of their safety), specialized service delivery was required in order to best meet these clients' needs.

The first step in the process was to set up a direct line to the Alberta Law Line ( a program of LAA) that shelter residents could call for free legal information and referrals, and brief legal advice. Unlike the toll-free number that is available to the public, the participating shelters have access to a direct line where clients bypass the call queue and speak with a Legal Resource Agent immediately. The Legal Resource Agent is then able to provide the shelter client with information relating to their issues and can assess whether or not the client is financially eligible to speak with a staff lawyer over the phone to get legal advice. Also unique to this pilot project, is the opportunity for the client to apply for legal aid over the phone. For the purposes of the pilot, phone applications are being taken over the phone by staff at LAA's Whitecourt Regional Office. Should the client meet the necessary eligibility requirements, her file will be sent to the regional office nearest them where a lawyer in their area will be appointed to represent them.

In addition to increasing access to justice to women in need and in crisis, this pilot project has created not only an opportunity to strengthen our referral relationships with stakeholders, but also an opportunity to provide training and education in relevant legal rights and remedies for shelter workers, and also to provide training in domestic violence issues for LAA staff.

## Youth Restorative Action Program

*A Profile*

The Youth Restorative Action Project (YRAP) is a Youth Justice Committee, sanctioned under section 18 of the Youth Criminal Justice Act, and is the first committee of its kind mandated to work, in Youth Court, with young people who have caused harm as a result of racism, intolerance and significant social issues. YRAP is completely youth run, by persons between the ages of 14-24 years of age.

Offences in front of YRAP include kidnapping, aggravated assault, Manslaughter and First Degree Murder. YRAP meets with young offenders to discuss the harm that has been caused by criminal action, and come up with creative, effective resolutions to repair the harm and address the actions of the youth, in a way which is both educational and rehabilitative.

Legal Aid Alberta (LAA), particularly the Youth Criminal Defence Office (YCDO), is proud to work with YRAP and support its crime prevention and crime reduction initiatives. YCDO Edmonton been able to reduce billing amounts, and reduce legal certificate counts because of the services that YRAP provides to at-risk youth. Referrals between YRAP and LAA are a social investment with extremely high returns. It costs between \$90,000 and \$120,000 per year to house one youth in jail and YRAP is able to divert young people away from jail and reduce recidivism. LAA is proud to cooperate with YRAP and supports their mandate of education and rehabilitation. For further information on YRAP, please visit [www.yrap.org](http://www.yrap.org).

## Alberta Law Line Web Intake Form

*Early indicators prove online form a useful tool*

Introduced in the Spring issue of The Brief and launched on July 2, Alberta Law Line's online intake form provides clients with an easy-to-use access point to Law Line, instant access to an exclusive online resource and referral database and a guided interview.

The online intake form allows callers to start the Law Line intake process by providing the necessary personal and legal information using an easy and interactive form that is accessible through the Legal Aid Alberta website ([www.legalaid.ab.ca](http://www.legalaid.ab.ca)). Once the completed form is submitted, a unique client ID number is generated that enables the client, when the client calls in, to bypass other callers in the Law Line phone queue. Based on the information provided in the form, clients are then directed to a self-help library where they can browse through a number of links that provide resources specific to their issue(s). These resources are offered in a variety of areas including family law, immigration, wills and estates, and employment matters just to name a few. The entire self-help library has been developed by Law Line staff based on the referrals they give to clients daily over the phone. To ensure quality information and easy access, these links are closely monitored and updated regularly. The self-help library cannot be accessed publicly through the website—it is available exclusively to those who have completed the online form.

*Some highlights:*

- given the ability to initiate the process at their convenience, callers are becoming more informed and educated prior to speaking with Law Line staff
- Law Line staff are reporting that clients who have completed an online intake form are less reluctant to give their personal information (this information is essential to providing service)

If you wish to refer your clients and/or someone you know to the Alberta Law Line online intake form, it can be accessed directly on the Legal Aid Alberta homepage. Please note, this is an intake form for Law Line services only and is not an online application for legal aid.

*The Alberta Law Line is a program of Legal Aid Alberta that provides free legal information, referrals and advice\* to Albertans over the phone. (\*Legal advice is available to callers who qualify based on LAA's financial eligibility guidelines and/or the nature of their legal problem.)*

### “Just-Us Girls”

In association with the YCDO, the Elizabeth Fry Society of Edmonton and other project sponsors (including Youth Restorative Action Project, Young Offender Branch, Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, Region 6 Children and Youth Services and Alberta Justice, Family Law) Family Resource Facilitators (FRFs) from the Family Law Office (FLO) have developed a program to assist young mothers, who find themselves in trouble with the law. The program is called “Just-Us Girls” and it works to support young mothers (12–24 years old) who have had their children apprehended due to addictions, neglect, housing needs, family violence and/or the young mother's criminal involvement in the youth criminal justice system. “Just-Us Girls” is based on a restorative justice model, and has been designated under the Youth Criminal Justice Act as the 125 Youth Justice Committee of Alberta. Subject to an application before the Provincial Court, “Just-Us Girls” gives young mothers the opportunity to be referred to volunteers who will help them access the services they need and work out a plan in which their child(ren) may be returned to them with what conditions may be appropriate. The young mothers then return to court with a report and the support of “Just-Us Girls” for the Judge to decide the matter.

Just-Us Girls is currently taking referrals on a limited basis until February 2010. At which point they will be holding another training session for new volunteers. If individuals are interested they can contact Just-Us Girls at [just-us.girls@live.ca](mailto:just-us.girls@live.ca).

▶ 16% increase in call volume

▶ highest call volumes have been seen in the 26-55 age group

▶ clients who have completed the online intake form and call the Law Line with their client ID, save an average of 2.5 minutes in wait time



# Value Added Services

## *YCDO Celebrates Award Winning Social Worker*



Legal Aid Alberta (LAA) employs dynamic, skilled people who desire to make a difference in the lives of Albertans by providing legal assistance and related support services. Recently, one of LAA's dedicated staff members was publicly rewarded for her efforts.

Nicole Mizzi, a Social Worker at the Youth Criminal Defence Office (YCDO) in Calgary, is the proud recipient of the 2009 Pulse of Social Work's "New Professional Award." The Pulse of Social Work awards recognize excellence in social work for Calgary and area by way of peer nominations and selection committee review. Nicole's honour specifically recognizes a registered social worker who consistently demonstrates excellence in her practice and who exemplifies the values, mission and goals of the social work profession.

Nicole has been employed at YCDO for five years and became a Registered Social Worker within the last year. Apart from being able to manage the often disadvantaged client, Nicole has to know and understand the youth justice system, somehow make that sensible to the client and advocate in such a way as to make the system accountable to the client's needs.

In her role as a social worker, Nicole provides support to certain assigned clients. She advocates for resources, drives them to appointments with probation officers, doctors, psychologists or other professionals. With very high need youth she will attend case conferences with Calgary Young Offenders Centre (CYOC) staff or probation officers to be part of the client's treatment plan by being a support person. Nicole is a strong advocate for the client and has a profound but practical and solution-based sensitivity for the client's needs.

Nicole is also involved in community development. She is a member of the organizing committee for the "Youth Gear Up Event" (see The Brief, Spring 2009) and has facilitated a "guest speaker" program at Junior High Schools in Calgary. Congratulations to Nicole on her deserving success.



## Legal Aid Alberta

### **Provincial Office**

400, 10320 - 102 Avenue  
Edmonton, Alberta  
T5J 4A1

Phone: (780) 644-4971

Fax: (780) 415-2618

Web: [www.legalaid.ab.ca](http://www.legalaid.ab.ca)

### **For information on this publication:**

LAA Communications, (780) 644-4971

Legal Aid in Alberta was officially established in July 1, 1970 by an agreement between the Law Society of Alberta and the provincial Attorney General to deal with both criminal and civil matters.

An independent organization incorporated under the Societies Act, Legal Aid Alberta receives the bulk of its funding from the Government of Alberta through the Minister of Justice.

Through eleven regional offices and nine program offices, our mission is to provide a continuum of innovative and cost effective legal services for people in need throughout Alberta.