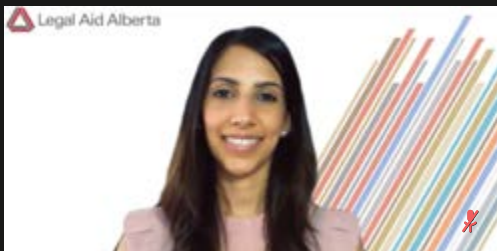


ANNUAL REPORT

2020 - 2021






Manage
Participants


Stop Video


Mute


Share


Invite


Chat

End Meeting



TABLE OF CONTENTS



4.....	MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR
5.....	BOARD OF DIRECTORS
7.....	MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO
8.....	THE EXECUTIVE TEAM
	President and Chief Executive Officer: G. John Panusa
	Vice-President, Finance and Technology: Steve Burford
	General Counsel and Advisory Counsel Services: Doug Ingersoll
	Vice-President, Justice Services: Lori Haughian
9.....	ABOUT LEGAL AID ALBERTA
	Vision, Mission and Values
10.....	NUMBERS AT A GLANCE
11.....	CERTIFICATES BY LOCATION
12.....	TRANSFORMATION IN A YEAR OF COVID-19
	New in 2020-21
16.....	PROTECTING ALBERTANS
	Emergency Protection Orders
	JP Bail
	Duty Counsel
	Criminal Adult
	Criminal Youth
	Family and Civil, and Child Welfare
	Immigration and Refugee
19.....	THERAPEUTIC COURTS
	Drug Treatment Court
	Mental Health Court
	Indigenous Court
20.....	ON THE FRONT LINES
	With an Emergency Protection Order Program Lawyer
	With an Adult Criminal Duty Counsel Lawyer
22.....	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS
23.....	NEWS HIGHLIGHTS
	Indigenous Summer Student Program
	Articling through the pandemic
	Criminal trial group established
	Indigenous court battles fear
26.....	FINANCIAL STATEMENTS



MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

Pursuant to Sections 19.1(a) and 19.2(b) of the Governance Agreement Respecting Legal Aid, it is my pleasure to submit on behalf of the Board of Directors the 2020-21 Legal Aid Alberta Annual Report for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021.

As the new chair of the Legal Aid Alberta Board of Directors, I am honoured and proud to help lead an organization whose goal is to make life better for Albertans by providing access to justice—particularly for those who are vulnerable. Our mission is challenging at the best of times but in the face of the pandemic, I am especially impressed with the Legal Aid Alberta team's fierce dedication to supporting Albertans, and its commitment to ensuring our justice system continued functioning in an effective and fair manner despite unprecedented change.

Using their knowledge, expertise, and creativity, the LAA team pivoted quickly to a work-at-home environment while lawyers and our justice system partners built and continually refined a new mix of virtual and reduced-contact proceedings. Through it all, the LAA team demonstrated empathy, compassion, and a strong sense of accountability to the people of Alberta. Likewise, our board made the move to virtual meetings, continuing oversight and support of LAA.

Facing unimagined challenges, we demonstrated our continuing resolve to serve Albertans. At the same time, this organization undertook a major review of policies and practices, resulting in improved operational effectiveness and further ensuring that LAA is supporting our province and meeting our objectives.

Our board received a Governance Diagnostic Report prepared by Watson Advisors Inc. and is moving forward in implementing many of its recommendations, including a thorough review of our committees, our governance, terms of reference, and overall effectiveness.

Our board was active in supporting innovative ways to serve clients and support the justice system through the pandemic. We approved moving the LAA Contact Centre IT systems to a platform provided by Telus, which is expected to improve front-end service and help people access legal aid services more quickly, as demand for services remains high.

The changes and transitions continued: Peter Carter, Jim Donihee, and Graham Johnson, who each served on the board since 2014, and Daryl Royer, who served on the board since 2017, ended their terms. We are grateful for their many contributions.

In turn, we welcomed three new directors with expertise in law, finance, and government relations. Catherine Braeuer, Brad Pickering, and Kent Teskey, QC, bring fresh perspectives and valuable professional expertise to the LAA Board of Directors. We are excited about having these talented individuals contributing to the LAA mission.

The coming year will see ever more challenge and change. We are confident in our belief that LAA will continue delivering exceptional front-line service and implementing innovative ideas as we provide access to justice for all Albertans.

RYAN CALLIOUX
*Chair, Board of Directors,
Legal Aid Alberta*



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

In the face of the pandemic, the LAA Board of Directors grew in strength and resolve to support access to justice for Albertans in every corner of the province. Ensuring that LAA is serving Albertans effectively, the board undertook a major review of its policies and practices, improving operational effectiveness.

Appointments to the board are made following a rigorous selection process. Our directors are dedicated, knowledgeable, and committed to providing access to justice for all Albertans. This year, LAA added a trio of highly respected directors. Catherine Braeuer, Brad

Pickering, and Kent Teskey, QC, bring fresh perspectives and valuable professional expertise to the LAA family. The board supports our goal of providing legal services and expertise, providing access and fairness for all Albertans.

The Board of Directors works with LAA in serving the public good and remaining accountable to Albertans.

Direction and decisions of the Board of Directors and the strategic plan are implemented by the Executive Committee to support the legal aid business plan.

RYAN CALLIOUX, CHAIR

Edmonton, Alberta

Director since 2016

Called to the Alberta Bar in 2002, Ryan is an Edmonton-area lawyer and mediator who has dedicated his professional legal career to helping families and children. Practicing family law for the past 19 years representing parents, children and Alberta Justice/Children's Services, Ryan is an experienced litigator in family law and child welfare cases who has represented clients at every level of court in Canada. Ryan also has been an advocate for all individuals that have been affected by domestic violence and has advised government on risk management initiatives to assess and reduce domestic violence and enhance legal services to protect victims of violence. He has been a member of the LAA board since 2016.

CHRISTINE HUTCHINSON, VICE CHAIR

Calgary, Alberta

Director since 2017

Christine has been practising law for 19 years. A member of the Lac La Ronge First Nation, she has always worked in access to justice, starting as an Indigenous court worker in her community. She later obtained a BA in Aboriginal Justice and Criminology and a JD. Christine has served on many boards and committees, operates her own legal practice at Siksika, and is currently working in energy regulation.

CATHERINE BRAEUER

Edmonton, Alberta

Director since 2021

Catherine is a CPA, CA whose career has focused on finance, technology, and corporate governance consulting for a variety of organizations including publicly funded health care, education, children's aid, and legal aid entities. With PMP, CISSP, and CRMA certifications and experience, she leads Finning International's Global Financial Reporting Transformation Team.

OWEN EDMONDSON

Edmonton, Alberta

Director since 2017

Owen built a 32-year career as a senior executive in finance and regulatory roles for a major Alberta electric and gas utility. He is a CPA, CGA with an MBA from the University of Alberta. Owen is on the Board of several not-for-profit organizations.

NANCY PECK**Calgary, Alberta****Director since 2016**

Nancy is chief financial officer of ATB Capital Markets Inc. She has more than 25 years of financial experience with a formal accounting designation and has completed the Director's Education Program with ICD.

DEANNA STEBLYK, QC**Calgary, Alberta****Director since 2015**

A past chair and vice-chair of Legal Aid Alberta, Deanna attended the University of Alberta law school and joined the Alberta Bar in 1999. She practised civil litigation for 10 years and has practised at the Alberta Securities Commission since 2008. She is senior special counsel to the vice-chairs of the commission.

BRAD PICKERING**Edmonton, Alberta****Director since 2021**

Brad is a retired Government of Alberta deputy minister, having served 17 years in various senior leadership roles as deputy minister of Municipal Affairs, chief executive officer of the Alberta Environmental Monitoring and Reporting Agency, deputy minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, deputy solicitor General/Deputy Minister Public Security, and deputy minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Prior to joining the Government of Alberta, he spent 20 years in the municipal government sector.

HILARY ROSE**Edmonton, Alberta****Director since 2016**

Hilary chairs the audit committee of Legal Aid Alberta. She is a CPA, CA with broad experience in government, industry, and academia. She has served on several not-for-profit boards including Legal Aid Alberta, Alberta Provincial Audit Committee, Genome Alberta, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and the Alberta Insurance Council. She is a trustee of the National Film Board of Canada.

Hilary is a member of the Institute of Corporate Directors. She holds a BA (Economics and Political Science) and certifications in internal audit, risk management and client server computing systems.

KENT TESKEY, QC**Edmonton, Alberta****Director since 2021**

Kent is a criminal lawyer at the firm of Pringle Chivers Sparks Teskey, practising across Western Canada at both the trial and appellate level. He is a past president of the Law Society of Alberta.

MICHAEL WAITE, QC**Calgary, Alberta****Director since 2018**

Michael joined the Alberta Bar in 1999. He practises health law, employment law, estate litigation, and general commercial/civil litigation. He also has experience in family law and criminal law with Calbert Waite.



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO IN THE FACE OF THE PANDEMIC

It is characteristic of Albertans to pull together and overcome adversity. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, we knew we could find solutions and continue providing access to justice for all Albertans.

Initially, the pandemic caused chaos. Courts closed. Matters were postponed. Uncertainty reigned. But Legal Aid Alberta pressed on—we remained operational. We were not designed to work in a virtual world, but our organization is nimble. We adapted to new ways of doing things with a work-at-home program. We empowered our team—from the all-important contact centre team to front-line lawyers—with the information and tools they needed to continue their work. We collaborated with justice system partners to solve problems neither we nor our clients ever imagined facing.

LAA did not simply survive. We began to innovate and thrive, using our knowledge and creativity to develop new ways of serving Albertans:

- A new Duty Counsel Triage process allows our lawyers to continue screening applicants to determine whether they are at risk of jail, even while docket courtrooms are disrupted by the pandemic. Duty Counsel Triage also enables duty counsel to continue assisting unrepresented accused with simple matters that can be quickly resolved.
- Advance Appearance Duty Counsel is a temporary service responding to the closure of docket courts. It allows accused to connect with duty counsel up to 14 days before their first court appearance. The result is fewer warrants issued, fewer demands for basic information from judges, prosecutors, and courthouse staff, and the same quick service by LAA duty counsel.
- Public engagement took a great leap forward. A record number of calls to our contact centre demonstrated that Albertans were hungry for information. We responded with public webinars on key issues like family violence, obtaining emergency protection orders, and the Youth Criminal Justice Act; and by providing expert commentary in the media offering insight on issues such as changes to the Divorce Act.



Members of the LAA family pulled together to support our mission—and one another. Our ability to grow and innovate in the face of the pandemic is due in large part to our team's expertise, creativity, and commitment to access to justice. In the earliest days of the pandemic, we made personal contact with each and every one of our 289 team members, checking in with them to understand how they were managing, learning from them what they needed to feel safe, and understanding what they needed to thrive in the new reality.

We remained connected with our roster lawyers with new communication channels and consulted with them to understand their challenges, keep them apprised of changes, and support them with procedural enhancements.

We are one. From duty counsel lawyers to our contact centre team, and the IT professionals who empowered them to get their jobs done, every member of the LAA team pivoted and offered help in new ways. Our Emergency Operations Centre and Post Recovery Committee are taking a big-picture view to chart our path forward.

The coming year is filled with challenges and promise—the promise that LAA continues adapting and finding ways to serve all Albertans. In the final analysis, we did the most Alberta thing possible: we took care of each other. In doing so, we found new strength.

G. JOHN PANUSA
*President and CEO,
Legal Aid Alberta*



EXECUTIVE TEAM

In 2020-21, the LAA's executive team led a swift response to the pandemic, finding new ways to protect disadvantaged Albertans by tapping into creativity, expertise, and a passion among team members to ensure access to justice for all. LAA's executive team leads our operations, policies, plans, and budgets ensure in alignment with our strategic plan. This team drives towards LAA's vision of an Alberta where everyone is able to understand and protect their legal rights and ensures LAA is fulfilling its mission of supporting fairness in the justice system.

G. JOHN PANUSA – President and Chief Executive Officer



John is responsible for the overall operations of the organization and leads LAA's executive management team. He has overall responsibility for creating, planning, implementing, and integrating the strategic direction of Legal Aid Alberta. He is responsible for co-ordination of the province-wide legal aid plan in accordance with the Governance Agreement. He is also LAA's liaison with the judiciary, the Minister and Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, the Law Society of Alberta, the federal government, other legal aid plans in Canada, the legal community at large, and the general public.

STEVE BURFORD – Vice-President, Finance and Technology



Steve leads all Finance and Technology services within LAA and ensures our systems and infrastructure enable our front-line staff to deliver high-quality legal services to our clients. This includes preparing budgets, business plans, and sustainability plans for the board of directors and LAA's funders. He oversees the Information Technology, Finance and Accounting, Project Management Office, Business Intelligence, Purchasing and Facilities/Infrastructure Management departments.

DOUG INGERSOLL – General Counsel and Advisory Counsel Services



Doug oversees LAA processes, training, and strategic initiatives to safeguard quality of services for clients. Together with his Advisory Counsel Services Team, he ensures that LAA conducts business to the highest ethical standards, aligns with best practices, and eliminates or mitigates all legal, regulatory, and commercial risks. This includes managing high-cost cases and client coverage appeals, providing legal advice to staff counsel on complex client matters, representing the interests of LAA or LAA clients at all levels of court and advising senior management on internal legal matters.

LORI HAUGHIAN – Vice-President, Justice Services



Lori is primarily responsible for providing executive oversight for Justices Services within Legal Aid Alberta. This includes client intake and assessment services, appointing, client recoveries, and certificate and tariff administration. She also guides and oversees the day-to-day operations of the LAA staff lawyer functions encompassing client certificate files and Duty Counsel Services throughout the province. Lori also leads support for the internal People and Culture initiatives fostering multidirectional dialogue across the organization.



ABOUT LEGAL AID ALBERTA

Legal Aid Alberta (LAA) is a not-for-profit organization that provides legal representation and support for Albertans facing legal issues.

A registered society incorporated under the provincial Societies Act, LAA is independent from government but accountable to Alberta's Minister of Justice and Solicitor General and to the Law Society of Alberta.

LAA provides legal services to clients in support of fairness in Alberta's justice system—services that help ensure Albertans in all circumstances understand and can defend their legal rights.

LAA operates on a hybrid service delivery model. LAA staff provide legal and other support services directly to Albertans, while the remaining services are provided by LAA roster lawyers. Members of the roster are independent Alberta lawyers who have registered with LAA to provide services on behalf of the organization.

Within our mandate, LAA is uniquely positioned to provide services that have a positive impact on the justice system and the lives of Albertans. This includes

services like duty counsel for all Albertans in courtrooms and elsewhere, services in support of emergency protection orders, services for Indigenous Albertans at the Siksika Nation, and support workers for youth and families in crisis.

LAA also provides legal services to those who do not qualify, on behalf of the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, when directed to do so by the courts.

LAA strives to be an employer of choice and a centre of excellence where employees are, and are recognized to be, some of the top experts in their fields. We are committed to sharing knowledge within the legal community, working to support improvements to the Alberta judicial system.

Working with our funding partners, stakeholders, and community, we provide targeted training for practising Alberta lawyers and the legal community on a range of topics, with the goal of better outcomes for the clients they represent.

VISION, MISSION, AND VALUES

The LAA vision statement focuses on tomorrow, on where we want to be, and on the direction our organization is headed. Our mission statement focuses on today, and on what we can do now to move toward our ideal future state.

VISION

An Alberta where everyone is able to understand and protect their legal rights.

MISSION

We provide legal services and expertise to individuals and the legal community to support fairness in the justice system.

VALUES

Our organization strives to always focus on what matters, and to stay true to our values in everything we do. These values are the underpinning of our organization, reflecting on what is truly important to us. They guide us in the decisions we make every day.

WE ARE ONE

We work together in a collaborative and supportive manner to deliver unwavering and innovative services to our clients as one unified organization.

WE ARE PROTECTORS

We serve Albertans, often the most vulnerable of us, and work tirelessly to protect their rights and to ensure a fair process.

WE ARE EXCEPTIONAL

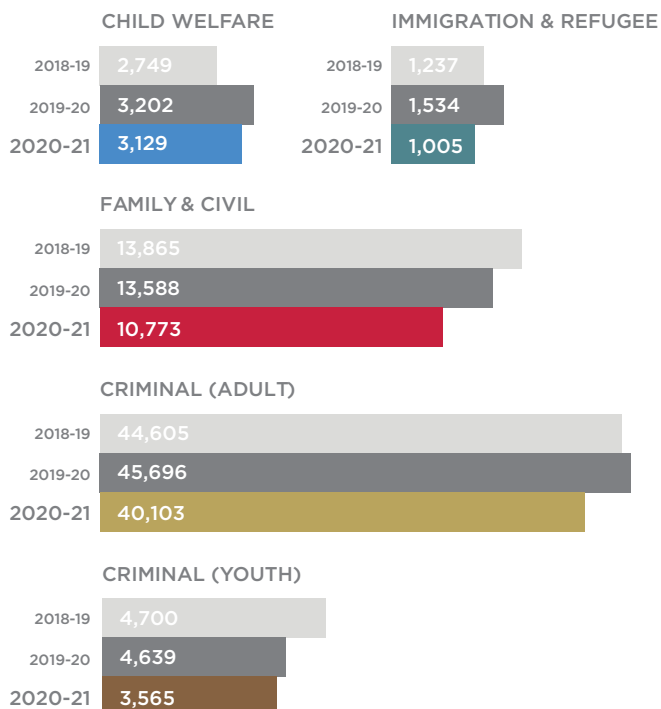
We are experts at what we do and we continually strive for improvement.

WE ARE INDEPENDENT

We operate and provide legal counsel free from outside involvement.

NUMBERS AT A GLANCE

ACTIVE REPRESENTATION CERTIFICATES



AVERAGE TIME FOR LAWYER TO ACCEPT OFFER (DAYS)*



*with increased choice of counsel requests, acceptance time increases

AVERAGE AGE OF CLIENTS



AVERAGE ROSTER CERTIFICATE COST



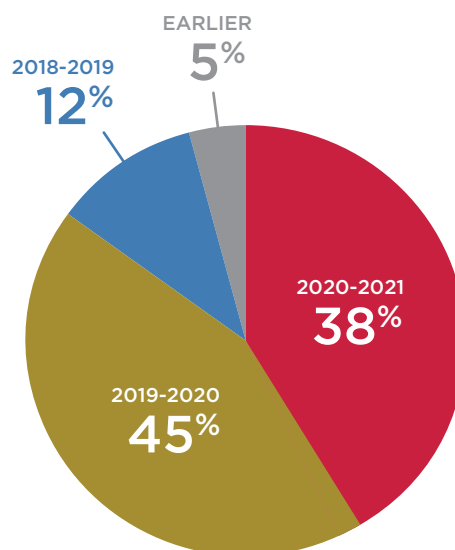
BRYDGES CALLS



DISTINCT REPRESENTATION CLIENTS



PERCENTAGE OF LAWYER INVOICING BY YEAR OF CERTIFICATE ISSUE

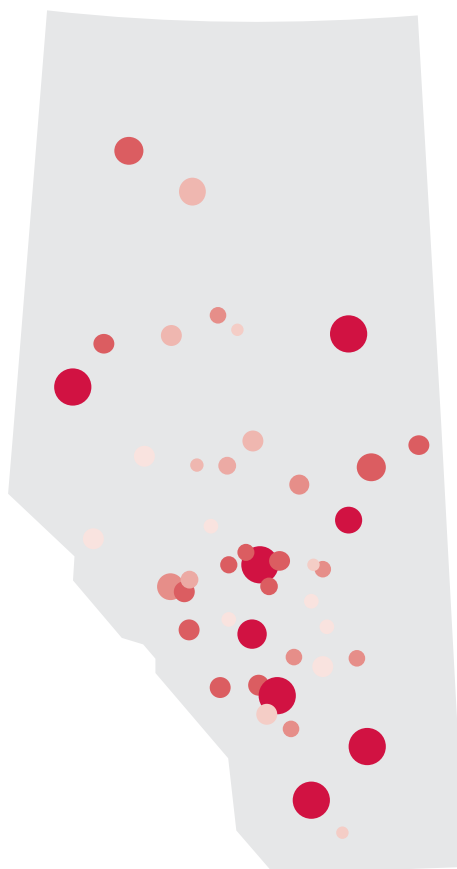




CERTIFICATES BY LOCATION

LOCATION	CERTIFICATES
Edmonton	19,216
Calgary	15,855
Red Deer	2,708
Lethbridge	2,008
Grande Prairie	1,444
Wetaskiwin	1,295
Medicine Hat	1,201
St. Paul	1,078
Fort McMurray	914
Stony Plain	599
Siksika Nation	535
High Prairie	532
Leduc	503
Fort Saskatchewan	444
Peace River	444
Rocky Mountain House	435
Airdrie	385
Sherwood Park	384
Cold Lake	369
Cochrane	362
High Level	361
St. Albert	283
Lloydminster	275
Bonnyville	274
Strathmore	259
Cardston	258
Camrose	249
Lac La Biche	249
Whitecourt	248
Drumheller	246
Edson	243
Hinton	237

Vegreville	230
Wabasca-Desmarais	221
Didsbury	219
Ponoka	210
Valleyview	191
Slave Lake	185
Drayton Valley	180
Okotoks	173
Westlock	173
Fort Vermilion	170
Morinville	168



Pincher Creek	167
Brooks	166
Chateh	137
Canmore	128
Athabasca	125
Stettler	122
Barrhead	117
Fort Macleod	117
Red Earth Creek	117
Tsuut'ina Nation	116
Vermilion	112
Boyle	109
Taber	95
Turner Valley	83
Wainwright	82
Mayerthorpe	81
Breton	79
Evansburg	63
Fairview	59
Killam	50
Glenevis (heard in Mayerthorpe)	47
Grande Cache	47
Fox Creek	46
Supreme Court of Canada	42
Coronation	38
Jasper	36
Hanna	33
Rimbey	31
Falher	23
Fort Chipewyan	14
Bowden Institution	13
Edmonton Remand Centre	9



TRANSFORMATION IN THE YEAR OF COVID-19

LAA established an Emergency Operations Centre that has continued working since March 8, 2020. Under its guidance, LAA is protecting staff, mitigating the spread of the virus in the workplace, ensuring the ongoing delivery of critical LAA services, and ultimately supporting Alberta Courts' recovery from the pandemic.

Meeting with judges, sheriffs, court clerks, and countless partners in the justice system, we played a leadership role in protecting the safety of court workers and clients—and in finding innovative ways to preserve justice. Myriad changes were brought forward, refined, and implemented, including:



The use of Webex and telephones in courtrooms has changed the face of our judicial system. In response to the pandemic, LAA quickly trained and equipped lawyers to attend proceedings virtually.



LAA students at law were dedicated to providing after-hours support in managing a sharp increase in applications for Emergency Protection Orders.



Advance Appearance Duty Counsel service was implemented as a temporary public health and safety measure and is also improving service. Albertans can contact our lawyers by phone up to 14 days in advance of their court date to receive legal advice and assistance.



LAA immigration lawyers were leaders, piloting virtual hearings and preventing further pandemic-related delays for clients who are building new lives.



We arranged for work-at-home operations for approximately 300 LAA team members, including contact centre intake officers who handled large volumes of calls throughout the pandemic.



We empowered front-line courthouse staff with resources such as off-site COVID safety checklists—and reinforced their right to refuse work in unsafe environments.







We developed a COVID screening tool and policies and procedures for essential in-office work.





Our offices in Lethbridge, Calgary, Red Deer, and Edmonton are COVIDized in preparation for safe return to work. Measures include PPE, plexiglass barriers at workstations, and distancing aids such as directional arrows and floor stickers.

NEW IN 2020-21

Examining our operational, service, and delivery models with a goal of continuous improvement, we not only adapted to working in the age of COVID-19—we began to thrive through innovative ways of doing things.

 <p>Choice of Counsel</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Dignity ✓ Compassion ✓ Empowerment 	<p>Clients can indicate their choice of counsel within a court district, within Alberta, or across Canada depending on the seriousness of their charges. This allows clients in rural areas, for example, to have access to the same breadth of experience as those in larger centres.</p> <p>Impact: Putting our clients on a level playing field by letting them choose their own lawyer.</p>
 <p>Duty Counsel Crown Disclosure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Advocacy ✓ Communication ✓ Continuity 	<p>Previously, our duty counsel lawyers had no access to full Crown disclosure. Now that they do, they can represent clients more effectively and refer them to the service that best matches their needs.</p> <p>Impact: Making sure our clients get continuity of service and are connected with the resources they need.</p>
 <p>Authorization Request Process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Service ✓ Stewardship ✓ Time 	<p>When extra hours may be needed for a certificate, our legal experts review the request and determine the appropriate hours required in consultation with the assigned lawyer. This is an important part of our due diligence and financial accountability.</p> <p>Impact: Making sure clients are getting the best service at the best price.</p>
 <p>Advance Appearance Duty Counsel (AADC)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Access to Justice ✓ Options ✓ Safety 	<p>Before AADC, Albertans in areas with a Case Management Office could only travel to the courthouse in-person in advance of their first appearance. Now, they can contact our lawyers by phone up to 14 days in advance to receive legal advice, and assistance in requesting disclosure, and duty counsel may appear on behalf of a self-represented litigant for the scheduled court appearance.</p> <p>This temporary service helps people address their legal matters sooner.</p> <p>Impact: Giving all Albertans a way to deal with many legal matters by phone—saving trips to the courthouse—and giving them a flexible window to get the process started.</p>
 <p>Centralized Duty Counsel Scheduling</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Representation ✓ Rights ✓ Consistency 	<p>Duty counsel scheduling is moving from different systems for every court to one centralized system for all Alberta. This makes our process more efficient, reduces the risk of losing knowledge when an employee leaves the organization, and makes it easier for us to respond to requests and changes.</p> <p>Impact: Duty Counsel—a vital service for all Albertans—will be backed up by a stronger, more consistent system.</p>

 <p>Out-of-Court Duty Counsel (OCD)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consideration <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Options <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Resources 	<p>Some of our clients need more time than the standard duty counsel model can offer, but do not need full representation. OCD gives our duty counsel lawyers a way to provide extra support to clients where it helps them deal with their legal matters more effectively.</p> <p>Impact: Giving vulnerable clients more time with duty counsel so that they have the resources they need to make life-changing decisions.</p>
 <p>Out-of-Custody Triage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Planning <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Teamwork <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Health 	<p>Clients who have been charged but not remanded can chat with a duty counsel lawyer in advance of their first court appearance. Our lawyers can request disclosure from the Crown, help the client resolve their legal matter, or refer clients to appropriate services, including full representation.</p> <p>Impact: Responding to COVID-19 by finding new ways to address matters earlier and reduce in-person trips to the courthouse.</p>
 <p>Criminal Trial Group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Access to Justice <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cost <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Efficiency 	<p>The Criminal Trial Group lets us focus our lawyers' expertise on vulnerable clients who need it the most. This includes coverage under the Youth Criminal Justice Act, as well as some clients who have not indicated a choice of counsel, who come to us with challenges and barriers that require the specialized skills and experience of our staff lawyers to have the best possible access to justice.</p> <p>Impact: Bringing our team's specialized expertise to the next level and making it available to Albertans who need it most.</p>
 <p>Family Law Assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Access to Justice <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cost <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Efficiency 	<p>Our assessment team determines the appropriate number of hours to issue for each family certificate, reviews the merit of all property matters and can provide brief legal advice to help clients know what to expect. They are also empowered to provide referrals to Resolution and Court Administration Services (RCAS) when that's the best service for their needs.</p> <p>Impact: Providing clients with service that's customized to their situation, connecting them with the right resources early and making sure they know what to expect.</p>
 <p>Change of Counsel</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Choice <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Relationships <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Timeliness 	<p>We have tightened the timeline for status updates from roster lawyers, limited the number of requests allowed per client, and streamlined our internal processes to substantially reduce delays in the courts due to change-of-counsel requests.</p> <p>Impact: Addressing breakdowns in the lawyer-client relationship faster to minimize delays for clients.</p>

 <p>New Calgary Office Space</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Collaboration ✓ Availability ✓ Efficiency 	<p>Our Calgary office re-evaluated its space requirements and found a new space that costs less, is closer to the courthouse, and allows all our staff to be together on one floor.</p> <p>Impact: Our Calgary team is closer to clients and equipped to work together even better.</p>
 <p>Operational Systems Updates</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Information ✓ Expertise ✓ Knowledge 	<p>We have renewed our public website, implemented a more modern financial system, and adopted better internal communications tools so that our business can run more efficiently and provide the best possible service to Albertans.</p> <p>Impact: Giving clients the very best information, services, and expertise.</p>
 <p>Representation For Sexual Assault Complainants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Rights ✓ Representation ✓ Efficiency 	<p>Sexual assault complainants whose personal and medical histories are coming under question in court now have access to free legal representation from LAA. The new service avoids unnecessary delays and strain on the justice system.</p> <p>Impact: Meaningful representation for complainants, fewer trial delays and adjournments.</p>

A NIMBLE RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

In March 2020, LAA responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with authority. We pivoted quickly to a remote work plan, ensuring each member of our team had the technology and training they needed to maintain a high level of service. We ensured LAA met public health restrictions and satisfied the high standards our justice system demands. Through various stages of the pandemic, safety requirements in different courts have shifted. Despite the uncertainty surrounding safety requirements affecting supporting services, our lawyers have continued in-person appearances whenever possible.

OPERATIONAL SYSTEMS UPDATES





PROTECTING ALBERTANS

In the face of the pandemic, Legal Aid Alberta has been a trusted constant, delivering access to justice during chaotic times. LAA improves the lives of all Albertans by helping the most vulnerable among us. The way we serve has changed—virtual court proceedings have become increasingly common. As the pandemic wreaked havoc on the lives of our clients, our determination to serve them grew stronger.

By focusing on duty counsel, immigration, child welfare, domestic violence, child representation, high-conflict clients, and adult and youth criminal matters, we are fulfilling a critical function and supporting fairness in the judicial system.

EMERGENCY PROTECTION ORDERS

Family violence is an unfortunate reality for many Albertans. Our Emergency Protection Order (EPO) program helps victims of family violence protect themselves against an abuser. Our EPO lawyers responded to increasing demand as the impact of the pandemic grew, appearing in person and in virtual settings to protect vulnerable Albertans. LAA EPO duty counsel lawyers help claimants understand and protect their legal rights by obtaining and confirming EPOs. Through the program, claimants are provided with information about the court system and their options, referrals to other support organizations, and a lawyer to appear in court to get the order. This service provides immediate protection from family violence and is a critical tool to keep Albertans safe. There is no cost to access this service and there are no financial eligibility requirements—it is available to all Albertans.

QUEEN'S BENCH EPO FILES OPENED

2018-19	1,933
2019-20	1,949
2020-21	2,115

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE BAIL

Many Albertans are at a disadvantage if they are arrested. They can be too frightened, confused, or overwhelmed to exercise their rights or make informed decisions. Without immediate information and advice from experienced defence counsel, an arrested person has limited access to justice and may inadvertently forfeit his or her fundamental rights. For clients, the fear of remaining in custody—potentially leading to life-altering circumstances—was compounded by the pressures of the pandemic. This includes a person's right to a release hearing within 24 hours, which may be essential to the person's staying employed or being home for children. LAA's Justice of the Peace (JP) bail duty counsel lawyers are available from 8 a.m. to midnight, 365 days per year, to inform, advise, and even represent arrested people in official court bail hearings, all by telephone. Launched in mid-2018, LAA's JP bail duty counsel section works collaboratively with the courts and Alberta Justice to make prompt and effective access to justice a reality for all Albertans, from their first point of contact with the justice system.

JP BAIL HEARINGS

2018-19	26,710
2019-20	37,715
2020-21	28,183



DUTY COUNSEL

Our duty counsel lawyers are continuing to serve clients and the courts in an uncertain pandemic landscape of changing public health measures, including court closures. Duty counsel is an integral part of our justice system and helps the court system proceed as efficiently as possible. Duty counsel lawyers provide immediate legal information, advice, and assistance in courtrooms across the province to people who attend court without a lawyer. Often, they speak on an individual's behalf in court. Their work focuses on helping unrepresented individuals navigate the court process and ensures that all Albertans understand their rights and can exercise them meaningfully. This service is free and available to all Albertans appearing in court regardless of their income. LAA assigns duty counsel in docket courts in all Alberta criminal courts (adult and youth), and at institutional hearings, applications for confirmation of Emergency Protection Orders, mental health review panels, and therapeutic courts. Additionally, LAA provides duty counsel services for family matters being heard in provincial court and Court of Queen's Bench.

CRIMINAL ADULT

Access to justice is crucial to a fair and free democracy. In the face of the pandemic, with rising health risks and changing regulations, our lawyers are continuing to provide the best legal support on the front lines of the justice system. In Alberta's justice system, meaningful access to justice usually requires a lawyer who understands and has experience in the area of law at hand. An unfortunate reality is that many people charged with criminal offences cannot privately retain counsel to defend them. A significant part of the work LAA does is related to adult criminal matters. Our lawyers, both staff and roster, work to provide access to justice to Albertans facing the very serious consequences of imprisonment, loss of livelihood, or removal from Canada. A big part of that work is to ensure that clients' rights are respected, and that the justice system is running fairly and in accordance with its own rules and defining principles. When Albertans are in the frightening and vulnerable situation of facing criminal allegations, LAA's role is to give them the information, advice, and representation they need.

ISSUED CERTIFICATES

CERTIFICATE TYPE	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
DUTY COUNSEL (Scheduled Dates)	12,034	10,772	10,240

AVERAGE ROSTER CERTIFICATE COST

CERTIFICATE TYPE	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
DUTY COUNSEL	\$723	\$754	\$636

ISSUED CERTIFICATES

CERTIFICATE TYPE	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
LEVEL 1	23,300	20,626	13,444
LEVEL 2/2.5	6,732	7,167	6,741
LEVEL 3	207	211	216
OTHER	657	537	422

AVERAGE ROSTER CERTIFICATE COST

LEVEL OF CERTIFICATE	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
LEVEL 1	\$1,058	\$1,152	\$1,074
LEVEL 2/2.5	\$2,463	\$2,586	\$2,354
LEVEL 3	\$14,598	\$21,685	\$17,834
OTHER	\$806	\$521	\$723

CRIMINAL YOUTH

The Youth Criminal Justice Act sets out Canada's policy for youth criminal justice. This includes recognition that young people have diminished moral blameworthiness and the right to enhanced procedural protection in a system separate from the adult criminal system. The act also enshrines the right of all persons aged between 12 and 17 years charged with a criminal offence to have representation by a legal aid lawyer. LAA's dedicated team of lawyers specializing in youth matters continued providing in-person legal representation to youth across Alberta whenever safe to do so during the pandemic, to ensure prompt resolution of cases. Recognizing that non-legal life issues are often part of what leads young people to be charged with offences, LAA also helps guide youth clients to supports that can help them identify and deal with such issues, which can often help improve outcomes in court.

FAMILY AND CIVIL, AND CHILD WELFARE

LAA helps Albertans dealing with family law and child welfare matters by advising and guiding them through the legal system and representing them in court actions. LAA helps eligible Albertans with client protection, child welfare, representation of children, parental custody, access and parenting orders, and child and spousal support. When a vulnerable Albertan is involved with legal issues due to family breakdown, LAA can often help protect and exercise that Albertan's rights. Public health orders limiting occupancy in courtrooms provide relief to LAA family law clients whose lawyer appears on their behalf—either in person or virtually—according to provincial regulation and court practices. LAA's role is to help disadvantaged and vulnerable Albertans with legal issues, which includes limited matters related to civil law. In Alberta, a disabled or incapacitated adult can have another adult appointed as his or her guardian or trustee, to help the person with essential life decisions and functions. If a person is subject to an order like this and disagrees with the terms, LAA can help them through the court process, to ensure it proceeds fairly and equitably.

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE

Support for immigrants and refugees is an important part of the work LAA does to support the most vulnerable. Many of Alberta's residents came here from other countries, often to improve their lives, better provide for their families, or seek refuge from violence and persecution. Immigrants who are physically resident in Alberta sometimes require assistance with immigration issues or refugee claims. To help ensure that these legal processes unfold fairly and according to law, LAA helps newcomers and non-citizens with legal actions such as refugee claims, judicial reviews of refugee claims, detention reviews, and appeals, among others. Public health restrictions on personal appearances led to the introduction of virtual hearings. LAA immigration lawyers embraced this shift to help lead clients to move their cases forward.

ISSUED CERTIFICATES

CERTIFICATE TYPE	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
LEVEL 1	2,214	1,910	1,028
LEVEL 2/2.5	779	801	600
LEVEL 3	10	6	4
OTHER	198	2	6

AVERAGE ROSTER CERTIFICATE COST

LEVEL OF CERTIFICATE	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
LEVEL 1	\$732	\$853	\$817
LEVEL 2/2.5	\$1,838	\$1,738	\$1,772
LEVEL 3	\$12,328	\$6,231	\$24,092
OTHER	\$1,228	\$1,247	\$693

ISSUED CERTIFICATES

CERTIFICATE TYPE	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
CHILD WELFARE	1,714	1,928	1,487
FAMILY & CIVIL	7,097	5,741	3,006

AVERAGE ROSTER CERTIFICATE COST

CERTIFICATE TYPE	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
CHILD WELFARE	\$3,016	\$3,451	\$3,346
FAMILY & CIVIL	\$3,159	\$3,391	\$3,902

ISSUED CERTIFICATES

CERTIFICATE TYPE	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
IMMIGRATION & REFUGEE	883	1,137	328

AVERAGE ROSTER CERTIFICATE COST

CERTIFICATE TYPE	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
IMMIGRATION & REFUGEE	\$1,481	\$1,348	\$1,675

THERAPEUTIC COURTS

Throughout the pandemic, LAA has been on the front lines of Alberta's Drug Treatment Court, Indigenous Court, and Mental Health Court.

The pandemic disrupted procedures, and courthouses across the province are operating in new and different ways. Whether meeting masked with clients in courthouses or appearing virtually, Legal Aid Alberta lawyers continue providing front-line service.

Legal Aid Alberta is playing an important role in Alberta's therapeutic courts, supporting fairness in the criminal justice system and providing alternative pathways out of the system for certain individuals.

DRUG TREATMENT COURT

The Drug Treatment Court (DTC) program is a justice alternative for drug-addicted offenders. Instead of serving jail time, participants complete a rigorous, court-monitored drug treatment program and are evaluated every week by the DTC team and the court for at least one year. LAA played a leading role with the Government of Alberta and the Alberta Judiciary in establishing and expanding Drug Treatment Courts—recognizing that addressing root problems has a long-term impact that helps break the cycle of crime. The objective is to rehabilitate offenders after they plead guilty by treating the underlying problems that led to addiction and the loss of control that led to criminality. Participants must adhere to strict guidelines and participate in treatment programs that support their recovery and return to the community. Successful graduates emerge from the program with the tools to continue their recovery, empowered to be productive members of society, and with a lower risk of recidivism. LAA has provided duty counsel services to the DTC program since its inception in 2005 in Edmonton. Currently, we dedicate two duty counsel lawyers to DTC in Edmonton and Calgary.



Two years ago, 33-year-old Tyson was living on the streets of Edmonton and addicted to meth. Today, he's sober, works as an outreach worker, and has reconnected with his daughters.

"In the beginning I doubted myself, I didn't think I'd make it this far," he says. "Drug court has given me the opportunity to go forward in life and be stronger than I ever was. It has taught me a lot of things: compassion, being vulnerable."

MENTAL HEALTH COURT

Edmonton's Mental Health Court (MHC) is a specialized criminal docket court designed for people in conflict with the law due to mental health issues. The program helps participants address the other complex issues they may be dealing with, such as homelessness, addictions, trauma, and poverty. This court uses a collaborative approach, integrating health care and legal professionals to break the cycle of crime for Albertans facing mental health challenges. LAA plays a vital part in the MHC process and ensures the court functions effectively, dedicating three duty counsel lawyers and three justice navigators to MHC.

"This court is like no other as it is a safe place for those who struggle with mental health issues," says Amna Qureshi, an LAA staff lawyer. "People are treated with great dignity in an effort to understand their challenges in conditions that don't set them up for failure."

INDIGENOUS COURT

This court, located in Calgary, is the first of its kind in Alberta and deals primarily with bail and sentencing hearings while focusing on a holistic and restorative-justice approach to crime. Through peacemaking and culturally appropriate practices, this court serves Indigenous people in a way that reflects their culture in current laws and sentencing procedures. LAA has committed a lawyer for several years as part of our long-standing service to the Provincial Courts at Siksika Nation and the Tsuut'ina Nation.

"Given the history of oppression towards Indigenous people in Canada, many have untrusting relationships with the court. First Nations people are open to me because I'm First Nations. The trust is there," says Grace Auger, an LAA duty counsel and criminal lawyer at Siksika Nation. "The biggest obstacle for them is fear."



ON THE FRONT LINES WITH EMERGENCY PROTECTION ORDER PROGRAM

LAA's Emergency Protection Order Program (EPOP), offered in Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge, provides EPO claimants with a duty counsel lawyer to represent them in court throughout the EPO application and confirmation process. Because applying for an EPO can be an overwhelming, emotionally charged, and confusing process, EPOP makes it easier and reduces those barriers. Legal support through EPOP includes duty counsel services (legal advice, document preparation, commissioning of evidence, liaising with partners including police and court, and court representation) from the initial application hearing at the provincial court level through to review at the Court of Queen's Bench at the chambers stage.

After a claimant has obtained an EPO in provincial court, the EPOP team will continue to assist them by:

- Reviewing documents and transcripts from the provincial court or JP proceedings.
- Contacting the claimant and discussing their instructions. There is often legal advice given about issues concerning parenting, divorce/separation, pets, and finances.
- Referring the claimant to apply for LAA coverage on the other issues or recommending they seek counsel if they do not qualify.
- Attending at Queen's Bench for a mandatory review. As part of the process, the lawyer will touch base with opposing counsel to see if a negotiated resolution is possible.

On occasion, if the EPO remains contested, the lawyer could end up representing the claimant in an oral hearing where verbal evidence is given at court to determine whether the EPO should remain in place.

In addition to working with claimants, EPOP staff educate key stakeholders, such as the police services, victims' services, and shelter staff, so they can better support victims of family violence.

COVID-19 has affected every aspect of family life and the legal procedures to provide safety for abused persons. In the case of individuals and families, public health orders often mean being literally locked up with an abusive person.

"Some people are not in a good situation to begin with and now they have to stay home—they have no escape, and this puts them at a heightened risk of domestic violence," said LAA staff lawyer Shilpi Walia, who's based in Calgary.

Virtual appearances in court using secure platforms have had a positive impact. In a virtual forum, established to meet public health measures, clients are less intimidated by the presence of the person they are seeking protection from.

"That is one big advantage about being virtual—claimants are now saying, 'Thank goodness I didn't have to see them in person,'" she said. *"There are times when claimants in court have been so concerned for their safety that we've had sheriffs escort them as they are leaving the building, which sometimes means having the claimants leave through the back door rather than the front entrance."*



ON THE FRONT LINES WITH ADULT CRIMINAL DUTY COUNSEL

When an accused person attends court before securing a lawyer to represent them, they are usually confused and overwhelmed by our complex and adversarial court system. LAA provides duty counsel services in adult criminal docket courts across the province in an effort to level the playing field, ensure due process, and support fairness in the justice system. Each day, LAA duty counsel lawyers are present in criminal docket courtrooms to inform, advise, and represent dozens of unrepresented Albertans. They provide essential, front-line services even in the face of the pandemic.

When an accused person attends court without a lawyer and needs legal support, our adult criminal duty counsel lawyers will:

- Interview them, finding out their circumstances and goals.
- Explain the system and their options within it.
- Advise them on what course(s) of action will most likely get them closest to their goals.
- Negotiate with the Crown toward the best or most fair outcome.
- Conduct their court appearance on record before the judge or justice, including guilty pleas.
- Present legal argument on their behalf in sentence hearings.

- Give them information they need for their next court date, including a to-do list and contact details for appropriate agencies.
- Record statistics about all the matters we have helped people with.
- Pass information on, if necessary, to the appropriate people concerning what happened in court.

The pandemic has brought major changes in the criminal justice system, most notably virtual appearances. Virtual proceedings allow lawyers to represent clients in courts separated by hundreds of kilometres, in the same day.

"We're seeing a massive acceleration of trends like virtual appearances that are becoming entrenched and very well could become permanent," says Brett Carlson, an adult criminal duty counsel lawyer based in Lethbridge. *"How will you persuade lawyers to appear in person 300 kilometres away when they can appear virtually?"*

Pandemic-driven public health measures add layers of safety and complexity, but the heart of the job remains the same.

"It's fantastically rewarding work," says Carlson. *"You're dealing with people, often at their first court appearance, who are frightened and uncertain and don't fully understand the situation. We alleviate all of their concerns. You come in scared and leave knowledgeable and purposeful, with an objective and an achievable plan."*



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: BILL C-92 AND STRATEGIES TO IMPLEMENT IN LAA CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE – July 2020

Legal Aid Alberta staff family lawyers, justice navigators, and guests learn about the impact of Bill C-92, an Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth, and Families. The new legislation affirms the jurisdiction Indigenous people have over child and family services. This legislation was in response to the Truth and Reconciliation recommendation regarding the need for new child welfare legislation with respect to Indigenous families.

GUEST COLUMN: JOHN PANUSA, LEGAL AID ALBERTA PRESIDENT AND CEO – August 2020

Publishes a guest column in the *Globe and Mail* newspaper. He calls for improved access to justice as a cornerstone in Canada's post-pandemic recovery.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: STAFF REPRESENTATION OF CHILDREN IN HIGH-CONFLICT PARENTING MATTERS – October 2020

Understanding the law and child welfare in highly charged parenting situations—training for staff lawyers and legal assistants.

PUBLIC WEBINAR: HOW TO HELP SOMEONE IN A FAMILY VIOLENCE SITUATION – November 2020

Legal Aid Alberta's first public webinar was a response to increasing calls from Albertans for information on Emergency Protection Orders and family violence situations. This webinar brought LAA expertise in family law, child welfare, and domestic violence to audience members hungry for information during the pandemic.

PUBLIC WEBINAR: TEENS AND CRIME: WHAT TO DO WHEN BAD BEHAVIOUR TURNS CRIMINAL February 2021

Parents need to make informed decisions if their child is arrested. This session was delivered to families, schools, and members of the legal profession.

ASK A LAWYER – February 2021

In partnership with Global Edmonton's morning news program, Legal Aid Alberta lawyers appear once a month to address a timely legal topic on the Ask A Lawyer segment. LAA lawyers appearing on the program have addressed youth criminal law, immigration law, and child support payments.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: YOUTH CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM – February 2021

This five-part professional development series was delivered to Legal Aid Alberta lawyers interested in expanding their practice to include youth criminal law. The training session was part of Legal Aid Alberta's goal to improve access to justice for youth in Alberta through establishing a highly trained Youth Justice Panel. The purpose of the panel is to ensure representation for youth in every corner of the province.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: ON THE AMENDMENTS TO THE DIVORCE ACT AND SPOUSAL SUPPORT – February 2021

Legal Aid Alberta family law training on implications of changes to the Divorce Act that came into effect March 1, 2021.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: TRAINING ON QUESTIONING BY VIDEO – February 2021

Private bar lawyer Michelle Mackay delivered training to Legal Aid Alberta family lawyers adapting to the world of virtual court proceedings.

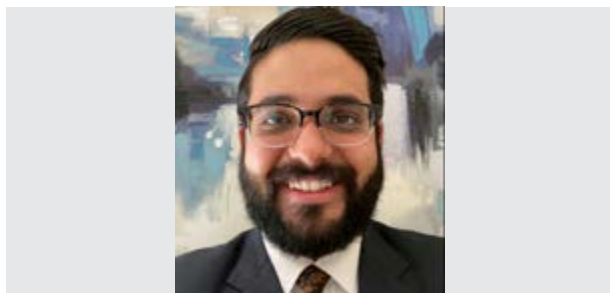
EXPERT COMMENT: DIVORCE ACT CHANGES COME INTO EFFECT – March 2021

Legal Aid Alberta family lawyers across the province spoke with news reporters to explain Divorce Act changes that came into effect March 1, 2021. LAA lawyers appeared on local, regional, and national newscasts, providing insight into these changes.



NEWS HIGHLIGHTS

TRAINED DURING THE PANDEMIC, NEW LAWYER EXPANDS LAA PRESENCE IN GRANDE PRAIRIE



There's a thread running through Dheeraj Janjua's path to studying law and becoming a Legal Aid Alberta staff lawyer: helping people in need.

"I'm very community-oriented. I always thought I'd like a career where I could help people, in a useful way," said Janjua, who grew up in Edmonton. *"I investigated different career paths, including social work, but law*

seemed like a natural progression in terms of helping people in a very meaningful way."

Janjua articulated with Legal Aid Alberta as the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the globe. Court proceedings were adjourned as LAA and its justice system partners found new ways to provide access to justice and prevent spread of the virus.

The innovations worked and DJ, as he is known, found his footing.

"My biggest area of interest is in criminal law and child protection, and I've gained quite a bit of experience in that area during my article in Calgary. Those are the areas I find most promising in terms of helping people."

In February, DJ moved to Grande Prairie, where he serves as a full-time duty counsel lawyer.

DRYWALLER TRADES TOOL BELT FOR LAWYER'S BRIEFCASE



Justin Hjesvold knows a thing or two about hard work. Hjesvold is pursuing his dream to become a lawyer after running his own drywalling company for 15 years.

The first student to complete the Alberta Law Society's Indigenous Summer Student Program at Legal Aid Alberta, Hjesvold got the chance to experience how the

legal system has changed in response to COVID-19.

"I'd say this has been one of the best learning experiences," he explained. He got to see first-hand how client-lawyer relationships develop and learn how the legal system has navigated uncharted waters in the global pandemic.

The Indigenous Summer Student Program connects Indigenous law students early in their careers with experienced lawyers, and it helps the legal professional gain insight into Indigenous culture and issues.

"I am Métis and my wife and two young children are First Nations," Hjesvold said. *"I see a career in the law as a way to both improve the quality of life for my family and also give back to my community in a meaningful way."*

NEW CRIMINAL TRIAL GROUP BLENDS LEGAL EXPERTISE, ENHANCES ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR DISADVANTAGED ALBERTANS



Legal Aid Alberta is improving delivery of criminal law services.

A new team called the Criminal Trial Group is taking a holistic look at client needs and circumstances to ensure LAA can take the client's matter to completion.

The group maximizes LAA strengths in technical areas of law, prioritizes needs-based representation instead of age or location, and streamlines processes.

The CTG will represent a limited number of adults, including former youth clients facing adult charges, clients who have struggled to maintain a lawyer-client relationship, clients with heightened vulnerabilities or special needs, and clients with no realistic ability to choose their own counsel.

CTG lawyers in Edmonton and Calgary still represent youth facing criminal charges who fit within our mandate to take on the most vulnerable and high-needs youth clients. At the same time, LAA is making progressive changes that empower roster lawyers to take on more youth criminal cases.

INDIGENOUS COURT BATTLES FEAR AND MISTRUST



One of the biggest obstacles for First Nations people is fear and lack of trust in the legal system, but there are ways to change that.

Two LAA staff lawyers, Grace Auger and Jessica Buffalo, point to the Siksika Nation's model and Calgary Indigenous Court as practical ways we can bridge the gap for Indigenous people navigating the justice system.

Auger is a duty counsel lawyer at the Siksika Nation joint program, a fully staffed Legal Aid Alberta office 95 kilometres east of Calgary. Buffalo is a duty counsel lawyer with the Calgary Indigenous Court.

"Given the history of oppression towards Indigenous people in Canada, many have untrusting relationships with the court. First Nations people are open to me because I'm First Nations. The trust is there," said Auger.

Buffalo agrees—and both believe the Siksika Nation model and Indigenous Courts are changing things, slowly.

"Now is the time for change, to continue to build that trust," said Buffalo. *"My clients have said, 'Thank you so much for being here to fight for us and for giving us a voice.'"*

IN CASES OF LIFE OR DEATH, LEGAL AID ALBERTA GUIDES REFUGEES TO SAFETY IN CANADA



In our democracy we value our right to speak critically of governments, without recrimination. That's not the case everywhere.

For Muhanad Shaukat, speaking out against the military regime in Sudan ended with death threats from the government he'd criticized on social media.

"Most of my friends who were active on social media there were arrested by General Hemeti and his military," he said, adding that some of them haven't been seen since.

Legal Aid Alberta immigration law specialist Ruth Williams helped Muhanad apply for refugee status—which has been granted.

In another recent case, Williams helped a woman from Uganda applying for refugee status.

"My life was in danger and I had to find a safe place," says the client, whose family remains in Uganda.

"Without help from LAA, I don't think my hearing would have gone through yet. I felt protected and had peace of mind while they were helping me," she said.

ADDRESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DURING THE PANDEMIC: HUNDREDS ATTEND WEBINAR ON EMERGENCY PROTECTION ORDERS



Incidents of family violence increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. On November 25, Legal Aid Alberta lawyers hosted their first-ever online event to talk with Albertans about their legal options when someone is in a dangerous domestic situation.

"We are concerned about the number of families in Alberta that are experiencing family violence and are unable to access help due to social isolation requirements due to COVID-19," says Legal Aid Alberta staff lawyer Christina Riddoch, team lead of the Emergency Protection Order Program in Edmonton.

The presentation is available to view online.

"It's important for everyone to know what to do so they can help a friend or loved one in a dangerous situation," says Riddoch. "Family violence should not be a private matter. It impacts all of society and has a cost to all of society. Everyone in the community needs to be vigilant."

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Financial statements
March 31, 2021



Independent auditor's report

To the Board of Directors of
The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of **The Legal Aid Society of Alberta** [the "Society"], which comprise the statement of financial position as at March 31, 2021, and statement of changes in net assets (liabilities), statement of revenue and expenses and statement of cash flows for the year then ended, and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies.

In our opinion, the accompanying financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Society as at March 31, 2021, and its results of operations and its cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organization.

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with Canadian generally accepted auditing standards. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the *Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements* section of our report. We are independent of the Society in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in Canada, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Other information

Management is responsible for the other information. The other information comprises the information included in the Annual Report, but does not include the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon.

Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information, and in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated.

We obtained the Annual Report prior to the date of this auditor's report. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact in this auditor's report. We have nothing to report in this regard.

Responsibilities of management and those charged with governance for the financial statements

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial statements in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations, and for such internal control as management determines is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, management is responsible for assessing the Society's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless management either intends to liquidate the Society or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

Those charged with governance are responsible for overseeing the Society's financial reporting process.



Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with Canadian generally accepted auditing standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

As part of an audit in accordance with Canadian generally accepted auditing standards, we exercise professional judgment and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit. We also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the Society's internal control.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by management.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the Society's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the Society to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

We communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

Edmonton, Canada
June 29, 2021

Ernst + Young LLP

Chartered Professional Accountants



The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Statement of financial position

[expressed in thousands of dollars]

As at March 31

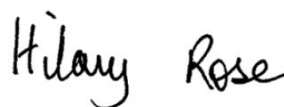
	2021	2020
	\$	\$
Assets		
Current		
Cash and restricted cash <i>[note 3]</i>	50,104	20,057
Accounts receivable	14	—
Goods and Services Tax receivable	740	636
Prepaid expenses	124	89
Total current assets	50,982	20,782
Capital assets, net <i>[note 4]</i>	3,068	3,495
	54,050	24,277
Liabilities		
Current		
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	4,369	4,859
Accrued vacation pay	1,717	1,266
Current portion of deferred lease liability	273	420
Deferred revenue <i>[note 5]</i>	24,325	—
Provision for unbilled services provided on outstanding certificates <i>[note 6]</i>	11,096	13,150
Total current liabilities	41,780	19,695
Deferred contributions <i>[note 7]</i>	8,500	8,500
Deferred lease liability	1,882	1,013
Total liabilities	52,162	29,208
Commitments and contingencies <i>[notes 6 and 8]</i>		
Net assets (liabilities)		
Internally funded capital assets	3,068	3,495
Unrestricted	(1,180)	(8,426)
Net assets (liabilities)	1,888	(4,931)
	54,050	24,277

See accompanying notes

On behalf of the Board of Directors:



Ryan Callioux
Chair, Board of Directors
Legal Aid Alberta



Hilary Rose
Director, Board of Directors
Legal Aid Alberta

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Statement of changes in net assets (liabilities)

[expressed in thousands of dollars]

Year ended March 31

	2021		
	Internally funded capital assets	Unrestricted	Total
	\$	\$	\$
Balance, beginning of the year	3,495	(8,426)	(4,931)
Excess of revenue over expenses	—	6,819	6,819
Purchases of capital assets	1,469	(1,469)	—
Amortization of capital assets	(1,896)	1,896	—
Balance, end of the year	3,068	(1,180)	1,888

	2020		
	Internally funded capital assets	Unrestricted	Total
	\$	\$	\$
Balance, beginning of the year	6,306	(11,458)	(5,152)
Excess of revenue over expenses	—	221	221
Purchases of capital assets	420	(420)	—
Amortization of capital assets	(3,231)	3,231	—
Balance, end of the year	3,495	(8,426)	(4,931)

See accompanying notes

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Statement of revenue and expenses

[expressed in thousands of dollars]

Year ended March 31

	2021	2020
	\$	\$
Revenue		
Province of Alberta	69,967	91,800
Alberta Law Foundation grant – statutory	8,022	5,098
Alberta Law Foundation grant – special	11,100	8,500
Recoveries from clients	4,276	4,511
Interest and other	1,025	1,166
Total revenue	94,390	111,075
Expenses		
Roster		
Legal aid fees and disbursements		
Criminal adult	30,729	42,116
Family and civil	9,317	17,382
Duty counsel	2,919	3,954
Child welfare	2,984	3,574
Criminal youth	1,190	1,702
Immigration and refugee	320	532
	47,459	69,260
Increase (decrease) in provision for unbilled services provided on outstanding certificates <i>[note 6]</i>	(2,054)	500
	45,405	69,760
Other program expenses <i>[note 9]</i>		
Legal representation – staff lawyers	26,758	25,752
Client services – intake and assessment	5,957	6,877
Management, general, and administration	9,451	8,465
	42,166	41,094
Total expenses	87,571	110,854
Excess of revenue over expenses	6,819	221

See accompanying notes

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Statement of cash flows

[expressed in thousands of dollars]

Year ended March 31

	2021	2020
	\$	\$
Operating activities		
Excess of revenue over expenses	6,819	221
Add (deduct) items not involving cash		
Amortization of capital assets	1,896	3,231
Amortization of deferred lease liability	(442)	(375)
Provision for unbilled services	(2,054)	500
Changes in non-cash operating working capital related to operations		
Accounts receivable	(14)	28
Goods and Services Tax receivable	(104)	301
Prepaid expenses	(35)	44
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	(490)	1,077
Accrued vacation pay	451	108
Deferred revenue	24,325	—
Cash provided by operating activities	30,352	5,135
Investing activities		
Purchases of capital assets	(1,469)	(420)
Cash used in investing activities	(1,469)	(420)
Financing activities		
Restricted contributions received for reserve	—	2,677
Contribution received for deferred lease inducements	1,164	—
Cash provided by financing activities	1,164	2,677
Net increase in cash during the year	30,047	7,392
Cash, beginning of year	20,057	12,665
Cash, end of year	50,104	20,057

See accompanying notes

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Notes to financial statements

[dollar amounts in thousands]

March 31, 2021

1. The organization

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta [the "Society"], registered as a society under the laws of the Province of Alberta, operates by agreement between the Society, the Law Society of Alberta and the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General of the Province of Alberta to assist individuals of modest means in obtaining legal services in criminal and civil matters. The current governance agreement became effective April 1, 2019 and expires on March 31, 2024. Under the provisions of the *Income Tax Act* (Canada), the Society is exempt from income tax.

2. Summary of significant accounting policies

These financial statements are prepared in accordance with Part III of the *CPA Canada Handbook – Accounting*, which constitutes generally accepted accounting principles for not-for-profit organizations in Canada, and includes the significant accounting policies described hereafter.

Revenue recognition

The Society's primary sources of funding are contributions from the Province of Alberta, a statutory contribution from the Alberta Law Foundation, per the *Legal Profession Act*, of 25% of the interest it receives on lawyers' pooled trust accounts, and special contributions as agreed from time to time, recoveries from clients, and interest and other income.

The Society follows the deferral method of accounting for contributions. Contributions are recognized in the accounts when received or receivable if the amount to be received can be reasonably estimated and collection is reasonably assured. Unrestricted contributions are recognized as revenue when initially recorded in the accounts. Externally restricted contributions are deferred when initially recorded in the accounts and recognized as revenue in the year in which the related expenses are recognized.

Externally restricted contributions for the acquisition of capital assets are recorded as deferred capital contributions and recognized as revenue as the related assets are amortized over their useful lives. Restricted contributions for the purchase of capital assets that will not be amortized are recognized as a direct increase in net assets.

Recoveries from client recipients of legal aid services cannot be reasonably estimated in advance due to the uncertainty of collection. Accordingly, these recoveries and contributions are recorded as revenue when received.

Interest and other income are recognized as revenue when earned.

Expense recognition

Legal aid fees and disbursements are eligible for payment in respect of services authorized on issued legal aid certificates. The Society records the estimated value of services provided, but not submitted for payment, on outstanding certificates in the period in which the services are provided. Legal expenses include amounts billed to the Society by lawyers and an estimate of amounts for work performed but not yet billed.

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Notes to financial statements

[dollar amounts in thousands]

March 31, 2021

Allocation of other program expenses

The expenses of each function include personnel and other expenses that are directly related to the function. General support and other expenses are not allocated, except for rent, which is allocated to functions by head count.

Financial instruments

Financial instruments, including accounts receivable, Goods and Services Tax rebate receivable, accounts payable and accrued liabilities, and accrued vacation pay, are initially recorded at their fair value and are subsequently measured at amortized cost, net of any provisions for impairment.

Cash and restricted cash

Cash and restricted cash include cash and restricted cash related to deferred revenue and contributions.

Capital assets

Purchased tangible and intangible assets are recorded at acquisition cost. Contributed tangible and intangible capital costs are recorded at fair value at the date of the contribution. Amortization is determined using the straight-line method at the following annual rates over the estimated useful lives of the assets as follows:

Tangible assets

Furniture and equipment	Over 7 years
Computer hardware	Over 4 years
Leasehold improvements	Over the lesser of the lease term and 10 years

Intangible assets

Computer software	Over 4 years
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Deferred lease liability

Deferred lease liability represents leasehold improvement allowances paid or payable by landlords and periods of free rent or graduated rent increases as inducements to enter into a long-term lease. This liability is amortized on a straight-line basis over the remaining term of the lease and recorded as a reduction of rent expense.

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Notes to financial statements

[dollar amounts in thousands]

March 31, 2021

3. Cash and restricted cash

Restricted cash relates to deferred revenue [note 5] and deferred contributions [note 7].

	2021 \$	2020 \$
Cash	17,279	11,557
Restricted cash – deferred revenue, pandemic [note 5]	24,325	—
Restricted cash – deferred contributions [note 7]	8,500	8,500
	50,104	20,057

4. Capital assets

Capital assets consist of the following:

	2021		2020	
	Cost \$	Accumulated amortization \$	Cost \$	Accumulated amortization \$
Tangible assets				
Furniture and equipment	380	113	326	88
Computer hardware	908	633	1,853	1,302
Leasehold improvements	3,278	1,175	3,092	1,490
	4,566	1,921	5,271	2,880
Intangible assets				
Computer software	5,813	5,390	6,585	5,481
	10,379	7,311	11,856	8,361
Net book value	3,068		3,495	

During the year, the Society removed the cost and accumulated amortization of fully amortized assets as follows: furniture and equipment \$43, computer hardware \$879, computer software \$961 and leasehold improvements \$1,060.

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Notes to financial statements

[dollar amounts in thousands]

March 31, 2021

5. Deferred revenue

As a result of the coronavirus disease ["COVID-19"] pandemic, anticipated services to be delivered by roster lawyers have been delayed. \$24,325 [2020 – nil] of the funding from the Province of Alberta has been deferred and a corresponding amount of cash has been classified as restricted cash – pandemic for this purpose. This will be recognized as the roster expenses are incurred.

6. Provision for unbilled services provided on outstanding certificates

The provision for services provided by roster that have not been billed on outstanding certificates is estimated at year-end using a method that incorporates historical average costs and time frames to complete similar cases. The total reduction for the year ended March 31, 2021 related to the change in provision for unbilled services provided on outstanding certificates was \$2,054 [2020 – expense of \$500]. As at March 31, 2021, the Society had approximately 20,071 [2020 – 22,125] outstanding certificates issued to roster with an estimated liability of \$11,096 [2020 – \$13,150].

The estimated liability is subject to measurement uncertainty. Measurement uncertainty exists when there is a variance between the recognized amount and another reasonably possible amount. Due to the uncertainty involved in the estimation process, there will likely be a difference between the estimated and actual liability and the difference may be material.

In addition to the liability for unbilled services provided to March 31, 2021 on outstanding roster certificates, the Society estimates the future costs to complete roster and Society lawyer certificate files. As at March 31, 2021, there is an estimated \$23,087 [2020 – \$27,218] that will be incurred on approximately 21,536 [2020 – 23,973] outstanding certificates issued to roster and the Society's lawyers over and above both the billings paid to date and work performed but not yet billed. Due to the uncertainty in the estimation process, there will likely be a difference between the estimated and actual costs to complete outstanding certificates and the difference may be material.

7. Deferred contributions

The current governance agreement ending March 31, 2024 requires that the Society defer and hold certain grant amounts received from the Alberta Law Foundation and the Province of Alberta, to a maximum amount agreed with the Province of Alberta [currently \$8.5 million], for non-forecasted or unbudgeted costs.

	2021		2020	
	Province of Alberta	Alberta Law Foundation	Total	Total
	\$	\$	\$	\$
Balance, beginning of the year	1,000	7,500	8,500	5,823
Amounts received during the year	—	—	—	2,677
Balance, end of the year	1,000	7,500	8,500	8,500

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Notes to financial statements

[dollar amounts in thousands]

March 31, 2021

8. Commitments and contingencies

[a] Commitments

The Society is committed under operating leases for office premises to make annual payments in the following amounts for the next five years and thereafter:

	\$
2022	2,307
2023	2,250
2024	2,039
2025	515
2026	507
Thereafter	3,518
	<u>11,136</u>

Included in the amounts are \$627 for 2022 and \$313 for 2023 related to lease payments for the previous Calgary Dominion office location. This location is no longer in use as the office relocated effective September 2020. Amounts related to the previous Calgary Dominion location have been recorded in accounts payable and accrued liabilities in the amount of \$963 [2020 – nil].

[b] Contingencies

During the ordinary course of business activities, the Society may be contingently liable for litigation and claims from clients, suppliers and former employees. Management believes that adequate provisions have been made in the accounts where required. Although it is not possible to estimate the extent of potential costs and losses, if any, management believes that the ultimate resolution of such contingencies will not have a material adverse effect on the financial position or results of operations of the Society.

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Notes to financial statements

[dollar amounts in thousands]

March 31, 2021

9. Other program expenses

Other program expenses reflected in the statement of revenue and expenses, classified by object, are as follows:

	2021	2020
	\$	\$
Salaries and benefits	33,345	32,124
Amortization of capital assets	1,896	3,231
Occupancy	2,803	2,021
Outside services	1,400	1,088
Computer	871	612
Office operating and supplies	1,163	1,014
Travel	55	333
Legal disbursements	107	241
Communication	320	232
Goods and Services Tax not refundable	206	198
	42,166	41,094

Occupancy expense has been allocated to other program expenses as follows:

	2021	2020
	\$	\$
Legal representation – staff lawyers	1,938	1,219
Client services – intake and assessment	543	414
Management, general and administration	322	388
	2,803	2,021

10. Related parties

Certain members of the Board of Directors provide certificate services to the Society. These legal services are provided in the regular course of business under the same tariff of fees as other lawyers. During the year, directors provided certificate services of \$375 [2020 – \$435] to the Society and their respective firms provided additional certificate services of \$830 [2020 – \$944].

11. Trust accounts

As part of its normal professional practice, the Society administers trust money, on behalf of its clients, that is maintained in separate trust accounts and deposits. The Society has no beneficial interest in these trust accounts and deposits, except to the extent that fees for services rendered and disbursements on behalf of the client may be paid therefrom. These amounts are not recorded in the financial statements of the Society. The balances of trust accounts and deposits as at March 31, 2021 amounted to \$42 [2020 – \$224].

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Notes to financial statements

[dollar amounts in thousands]

March 31, 2021

12. Financial instruments and risk management

Credit risk

The Society's exposure to credit risk, represented by the carrying amount of accounts receivable, results from the risk that one party to the financial instrument may cause a financial loss for the other party by failing to discharge an obligation. The Society monitors outstanding balances regularly and allows for uncollectible amounts when determined.

Liquidity risk

The Society is exposed to the risk that it will encounter difficulty in meeting obligations associated with its financial liabilities. The Society is exposed to this risk mainly in respect of its accounts payable and accrued liabilities, accrued vacation pay, and provision for unbilled services provided on outstanding certificates.

13. COVID-19

Beginning in March 2020, the outbreak of COVID-19 has resulted in governments worldwide enacting emergency measures to combat the spread of the virus. These measures, which include the implementation of travel bans, self-imposed quarantine periods and social distancing, have caused material disruption to businesses globally resulting in an economic slowdown. The duration and impact of the COVID-19 outbreak is unknown at this time, as is the efficacy of the government and central bank monetary and fiscal interventions designed to stabilize economic conditions. As a result, it is not possible to reliably estimate the length and severity of these developments, nor the impact on the financial position and financial results of the Society in future periods.

14. Comparative figures

Certain comparative figures have been reclassified to conform to the current year's presentation.