

Legal Centre News

Volume 32

November 2005

Past President of the Canadian Bar Association to speak on the *Charter of Rights* in Peterborough

Susan McGrath, Past President of the Canadian Bar Association, will discuss the Canadian *Charter of Rights*, including how it relates to issues such as *same-sex marriage and access to legal services* when she speaks in Peterborough on Thursday, December 1, 2005 between 4:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. at Cinema 379.

During her recent tenure as President of the Canadian Bar Association, Ms. McGrath has written about the importance of the *Charter* in protecting our values of diversity, acceptance and democracy. She notes that “the rule of law means that order is imposed not by any one individual or group according to their personal whims, but rather by society, collectively, deciding the best way for its mem-

bers to live”. In her work, Ms. McGrath has advocated for fairness in decision-making and for the right of all Canadians to have access to legal services.

“Low-income families need access to legal aid services in order to protect their children, their housing, their incomes, and their health.”

-Martha Macfie
PCLC Staff Lawyer

Ms. McGrath’s first visit to Peterborough is sponsored by the Peterborough Law Association, the Peterborough Community Legal Centre and the Peterborough Area Office of Legal Aid Ontario. The sponsors expect an interesting presentation followed by a lively discussion on contemporary legal and equality issues.

“The Legal Centre looks forward to learning about the Canadian Bar Association’s ground-breaking case that asserts a constitutional right to civil legal aid,” said Peterborough Community Legal Centre Staff Lawyer Martha Macfie. “Low-income fami-

lies need access to legal aid services in order to protect their children, their housing, their incomes, and their health.”

The talk will take place at Cinema 379 at 379 George St. N. in Peterborough between 4:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. Admission is free and all are welcome.

In this Issue

Help for Tenants at ORHT	2
Legal Centre Website	2
Rental Market Update	3
Legal Centre Housing Clinic	3
No Excuse for Stripped-down Welfare System	4
Poverty is Sickening	5
Open Letter to MPP Jeff Leal	6
Overpayment Hardship	8
Walk, Wheel and Ride	9
Special Diet News	10
ODSP Inheritance Rules	11

PLUS insert

Tenant Duty Counsel Program

Making a Difference for Tenants at the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal

The Legal Centre provides an in-depth Tenant Duty Counsel (TDC) Program in Peterborough.

This program is similar to duty counsel services at a courthouse. Legal Centre staff attend weekly Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal hearings, so that tenants who have a hearing can access legal advice, negotiation services and assistance arguing certain motions.

The primary goal of the Legal Centre's TDC program is eviction prevention because every rental housing eviction has costs, both to the family that is being uprooted and to the community that must finance and otherwise sup-

port the move to a new home.

Almost 50% of TDC services are allocated to "economic eviction" cases where the landlord is seeking to evict the tenant for arrears of rent only. TDC negotiates with landlords on behalf of 80% of tenants assisted, and *achieves a settlement 52% of the time*.

What does this mean in real terms? The Legal Centre started to collect eviction outcome statistics for the Peterborough TDC Program as of February 1, 2005. During the nine-month period from February 1, 2005 to October 30, 2005 TDC successfully negotiated to *pre-*

serve 91 tenancies where the landlord was seeking eviction. During the same period, TDC negotiated to significantly *delay 28 evictions*.

The Legal Centre has been providing Tenant Duty Counsel services since 1992. In recognition of the importance of this program, the Legal Centre has received dedicated funding from the Advocacy Centre for Tenants (ACTO) since 2002. ACTO receives funding from Legal Aid Ontario to coordinate province-wide TDC services for unrepresented tenants appearing before the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal.

Legal Centre Website



The Legal Centre's website can be seen at www.peterboroughcommunitylegalcentre.org. Right now the website has information about the types of services that we offer, information about community resources, and links to other websites that deal with legal issues.

Make sure to check the website often. Soon it will have electronic copies of our newsletter, information from the Peterborough Tenants Guide, and it will have regularly updated legal news.

Rental Market Remains Desperate

Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) reports that the average vacancy rate for rental residential units in the City of Peterborough has risen to 1.7 % in October 2004 from 1.4% in October 2003. In contrast, the average vacancy rate in Ontario was 4.1% in October 2004. In October 2004, there were a total of 94 vacant units in Peterborough.

The average cost of a one-bedroom apartment in Peterborough rose from \$614.00

per month in 2003 to \$675.00 in October 2004 representing a 9.9% increase. The average 2-bedroom unit rose from \$728.00 per month to \$775.00 for the same time period, representing an increase of 7.65%. During this period the regulated guideline increase amount on occupied units was 2.9%.

This means that it is very difficult for tenants to find housing in Peterborough. If tenants can find housing, the cost is often beyond their

reach. What makes the situation even more desperate is that while the cost of housing continues to steadily climb, the incomes of many tenants do not.

The minimum wage has increased by .60 cents per hour since 1995 while benefits derived from social services increased by a mere 3% in 2004 after being cut by 21.6% in 1995. The 3% increase in 2004 barely offsets the inflation rate as reported by the Consumer Price Index.

Legal Centre offers walk-in housing clinic

The Legal Centre started a walk-in Housing Clinic in February 2005. It was possible to expand our services to include this clinic due to the addition of a Housing Community Legal Worker to our staff. The Housing Clinic has been a very successful project that we plan to continue in 2006 pending necessary funding.

The Housing Clinic's hours of operation are from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. every Friday morning. Tenants can come to the office and meet with our Housing Worker on a first-come first-serve basis. Some of the services offered at the clinic include: drafting applications to be heard before the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal; negotiating and drafting payment plans; drafting and swearing affidavits

and statutory declarations, and; legal advice.

The Clinic is a success because we are able to get involved in the early stages of the dispute between the landlord and tenant. We have helped tenants preserve their tenancies and enforce their legal rights without having to go to a hearing at the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal.

****When you come to the Housing Clinic, make sure that you bring with you all important papers relating to your tenancy (for example, papers from your landlord, your lease, reports from inspectors, rent receipts, photos etc.)*

Housing Clinic for Tenants

What: Free, in-person legal advice and brief services for tenants

When: Friday mornings from 9:00 a.m. until 11:30 a.m. (it's best to come early to make sure you can get in to speak to someone)

Where: Peterborough Community Legal Centre, 150 King St., 4th floor (above the new Post Office)

No excuse for stripped-down welfare system

Ontario Minister of Community and Social Services Sandra Pupatello promises to attack the problem of “abuse” of the special diet program in social assistance.

She will respond to the efforts “to misuse the intent” of special diet allowances.

The special diet program was

never intended to alleviate the issues of hunger and malnutrition. Those should have been dealt with in the regular assistance cheques. But that’s where the problem lies: How much money is enough for welfare recipients to live on?

Valerie Tarasuk of the University of Toronto Department of Nutritional Sciences found in a study published in the *Canadian Journal of Public Health* in 2002 that welfare rates were inadequate to pay for the cost of the health ministry’s Ontario Nutritious Food Basket.

Does the social services minister ever talk to the health minister?

In its 1987 submission to the Social Assistance Review Committee aptly titled, *Public Assistance in Ontario: A System Malnourished and Neglected*, the Ontario Association of Social

“...at one time social assistance rates were based on Toronto Social Planning Council’s Guides for Family Budgeting.”

Workers said: “The ministry should establish public assistance rates that are justifiable in terms of sound nutrition and home economics.”

Such rates should also consider shelter costs. A single Ontario Works recipient receives \$536 a month. What is left for food and all other expenses after paying for housing?

Ontario welfare rates bear no relationship whatever to actual need.

Former premier Mike Harris chose to reduce rates to average levels in other provinces.

But he gave no consideration either to the differences in cost of living or to the adequacy of rates elsewhere.

Way back in 1973, René

Brunelle, who then had Pupatello’s job, wrote that at one time social assistance rates were based on Toronto Social Planning Council’s *Guides for Family Budgeting*.

However, he added, the “Total amounts for ordinary needs have been increased several times so that the rationale behind the allowance structure was lost.” At the beginning of that same year, Ontario made a deliberate decision to increase assistance for the disabled at a higher rate than that for other welfare recipients. The rates have gone from being nearly equal to the situation today where a single person on disability gets

“...the rationale for welfare rates was lost decades ago, and Ontario governments of all stripes have refused to develop another....”

a maximum of \$959 a month, compared with \$536 for someone with Ontario Works. Harris cut Ontario Works

rates by 21.6 per cent, leaving the Ontario Disability Support Program untouched.

Please see Welfare on p. 10

Poverty is Sickening: Families on Ontario Works can't eat healthily

The Peterborough County-City Health Unit researched the cost of eating healthily in Peterborough for their June 2005 publication called *Nutrition Matters*. The report clearly demonstrates that families on welfare do not have enough money to eat – and they *certainly* do not have enough income to purchase nutritious food.

The Health Unit report estimates that a family with one parent and two children under 13 needs to spend \$387.00 per month in order to purchase nutritious food. This estimate does not include prepared foods, paper

products, toiletries or household cleaning products. Unfortunately, a family like this that is on Ontario Works will be left with only \$117.74 per month for food after they have paid the rent and the bills! This family will not be able to choose healthy foods, but will be forced to buy food that is cheap and filling. This family will have to go to food banks and attend church-sponsored lunches and school lunch programs. *This family will go hungry.*

indication that Canada or Ontario are even showing recognition for the real problems plaguing health care." Shame on our governments.

"...in determining risk to health, poverty and low incomes are more important than medical and lifestyle risk factors such as smoking and lack of exercise."

Poverty and hunger are growing problems that promise to get worse in Ontario, with a lack of affordable housing, limited rent regulation, ever-

increasing heat and hydro costs, low minimum wages and horribly inadequate social assistance rates. Low-income Ontarians must often choose between paying their rent and feeding their children.



"...a family with one parent and two children under 13 needs to spend \$387.00 per month in order to purchase nutritious food."

Hunger and inadequate nutrition lead to increased incidence of illness and disease. Dr. Dennis Raphael of York University says that in determining risk to health, *poverty and low incomes are more important than medical and lifestyle risk factors* such as smoking and lack of exercise. Dr. Raphael concludes that, "There is no

What can you do?

Lobby the government by writing a letter to your local MPP, Mr. Jeff Leal, 236 King Street, Peterborough, ON, K9J 2L8.

You can also **participate in campaigns** like "Walk Wheel and Ride for Dignity" and "Feed the Kids, and Pay the Rent" campaigns. If you would like information about how to get involved, contact the Legal Centre.

Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal discriminates against Tenants

In 2002, the McGuinty Liberals promised to protect tenants by making changes to the Tenant Protection Act (TPA) and the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal (ORHT).

Unfortunately, nothing has happened. Meanwhile, the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal continues to process about 5000 evictions a month.

Recently, an Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal adjudicator ruled that the Tribunal discriminates against tenants.

The Legal Centre sent a letter to Peterborough M.P.P. Jeff Leal and asked him to press his government for immediate reforms.

Here is a copy of this letter :

Dear Mr. Leal:

Re: Ontario Rental Housing Decision TNL-68501-SA

I would like to take this opportunity to bring to your attention the above noted decision of the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal dated September 22, 2005. It is abundantly clear from this decision that the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal has developed standard practices which discriminate against tenants in favour of landlords. I urge you to use this decision to press for your government's long promised reforms to the *Tenant Protection Act* (TPA).

The key finding in the decision is that the TPA effectively discriminates against single parents, persons with disabilities and those with language challenges by requiring tenants (not landlords) to file a written dispute in order to participate in the adjudicative process. In addition, the decision concludes that a number of *discretionary* Tribunal practices discriminate against tenants. The following is a list of some of the most troubling examples:

- The Tribunal chooses to issue default orders as soon as possible;
- Tribunal staff, as a matter of Tribunal practice, at times contact the applicant Landlords who have not filed a certificate of service, to notify them that the certificate of service is required to issue the default order;
- Tribunal staff do not contact, as a matter of Tribunal practice, respondent Tenants who have not filed a dispute before a default order is issued;
- The Tribunal template for default orders does not refer to the availability of an option to file a motion to set aside the order;
- The Tribunal prepares default orders to send to the parties but does not provide blank motions to set aside the default order;
- Information forms, which refer to the process of filing a motion to set aside the order, are not sent to the recipients of default orders;

- Given its heavy caseload, the Tribunal practice to issue as many default orders as it does, as soon as it does, is a discretionary choice of the Tribunal.

These procedural biases have turned the Tribunal into a highly efficient eviction machine. According to the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal, 35,969 tenant households were ordered evicted without a hearing in 2004. Each month some 5,000 eviction applications are processed at the Tribunal and 57% of those tenant households facing the loss of their homes do not have a chance to explain their circumstances or make appropriate repayment arrangements. This is a situation that cannot be allowed to continue.

Landlords and tenants need balanced legislation that recognises the need for protection of *both* parties, and a system that provides a fair and accessible process for resolving disputes. Your government recognized this in its policy platform document, *Growing Strong Communities*, [November 2002] which states: “[i]n our first year of government, we will repeal the misnamed *Tenant Protection Act* and replace it

with an effective tenant protection law... we will also restructure the regulations guiding the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal so that the process to file grievances and respond to eviction notices is more fair and equitable to tenants.”

We ask you, on behalf of the tenant households of Peterborough, to promptly contact your colleague, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and urge him to act without further delay on your government’s promise to reform the *Tenant Protection Act*. At a bare minimum, real “tenant protection” requires the following:

- an end to the requirement that tenants file a written dispute in order to be heard in the adjudicative process. A default order should issue only where a party does not attend the hearing;
- a two-stage hearing process whereby the first return date would be a pre-hearing conference to canvass the possibility of settlement failing which a hearing date would be scheduled. Our experience as tenant duty counsel tells us that many landlords and tenants are willing to settle their disputes and that a large

number of applications would be resolved on the first date;

- a revamped Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal with competent adjudicators, and a competitive and transparent appointment process for members;
- a Tribunal culture of fairness, where access to the justice system is fostered, alternative dispute resolution encouraged and where eviction is a remedy of last resort.

We thank you for your assistance in making a reformed *Tenant Protection Act* a priority for the legislature fall. We would be happy to meet with you and your staff to discuss this pressing issue.

Yours truly,

Melinda Rees

Executive Director
Peterborough Community
Legal Centre

Undue Hardship: Overpayment Recovery

Have you received a letter from Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability (ODSP) telling you that you have been overpaid benefits or has a staff person at OW or ODSP told you that you have an overpayment? Have you noticed that money is being taken off your monthly cheque or, if your benefits are paid directly into your bank account, your benefit statement shows that your benefits were reduced?

Many clients receiving Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program benefits are in this situation. They do not receive their full monthly entitlement because part of their cheque is being clawed back to repay an assessed overpayment. This is a problem for a number of reasons.

First, often there was no overpayment or the amount of the overpayment is wrong. Lots of families are paying back money that they don't actually owe!

Second, sometimes the overpayment is so old (sometimes from more than 10 years ago) that it is unfair to expect a person to be able to remember what they were doing at the time, never mind be able to defend against the overpay-

ment. Often there are other circumstances that make it unfair to recover the overpayment, such as when the overpayment was caused by an error by OW or ODSP staff.

Third, even the *maximum* OW and ODSP rates do not adequately provide for a family's most basic needs. The actual costs of shelter, food, transportation and clothing are not factored in when the provincial government sets the rates. The rates were increased by a paltry 3% in 2004 after being frozen for 9 years.

Undue hardship? The clawback of \$26 from someone who gets \$536 per month, or \$60 from a family of 4 that gets only \$1,215 per month, can tip the balance so that the family must choose between paying the rent and other bills *or* buying food.

What should I do if my benefits are being reduced because of an overpayment?

1. *What information do I have about the overpayment?*

Check at home for papers that have information about the overpayment. Check to see if you got a letter telling you that you had been overpaid. Come to the Legal Centre with your papers, cheque stub or benefit statement.

2. *Can I appeal the overpayment?*

You may be able to appeal the overpayment. Put a letter in to the OW or ODSP office asking to have the overpayment reviewed. This is called an Internal Review Request. *The Legal Centre can help you with your Internal Review Request and we can fax it from our office.*

3. *What should I put in my Internal Review Request?*

State in the Request: "I disagree with the amount of the overpayment, the decision to recover the overpayment and the rate of recovery. The recovery is causing me financial hardship."

4. *What if my Internal Review is out of time?*

You may also need to ask for an "extension of time" for filing the Request. You do this if you received the letter telling you about the overpayment more than 10 days before you file your Internal Review Request or if you never got a letter telling you about the overpayment. Add to your Internal Review Request that you need an extension of time for filing the Request and outline why you did not file your Request earlier.

5. *Is there anything I can do to speed up the appeal process?* See Process p. 11.

Walk, Wheel and Ride for Dignity

- Greetings from a Walker

As many of you know, the Walk, Wheel and Ride Campaign for Dignity concluded, for this year, with a rally at Queen's Park. A Legal Centre Board member, Joanne Bazak, was one of the walkers. Joanne sent us a letter from somewhere along the route that we want to share with our readers:

*September 28, 2005
Greetings everyone,
Through torrential and sunny skies, aching muscles and blistered feet we have been walking, wheeling and riding to Queen's Park We're a diverse group of people from all walks of life, all income groups, all ages (a baby of six months old to 65) We're workers, union members, health care professionals, teachers, social justice activists, leaders and citizens. Today, the cyclists begin their journey to Queens Park.*

Some of us have disabilities, some have been homeless, some have gone hungry, others have lived in relative



wealth. We are walking, wheeling and riding together, side by side, in great spirits and united by our vision and hope, bolstered by the support and hard work of hundreds of people and the vision of dignity for all Ontarians - dignity that starts with a living income, and safe, affordable housing for all! We all know that everyone has the right to basic necessities of life. Everyone has the right to dignity. No one in our wealthy province should go hungry, be homeless or struggling to get by, tapped in a pit of poverty. With a living income and affordable housing, people can step onto the bottom rungs of the ladder out of the poverty pit!!

I implore you, keep spreading the word, educate, get post cards signed, talk to your MPP, leaders, people on the street. Walk, wheel or ride a with us. Walk, wheel and ride to Queen's Park on Sept. 29th. We know that poverty in our province is unnecessary. We know the root causes. We know the solutions and we have the resources to end poverty. Let's keep working together.

Postscript:

The rally was a great success. Kudos to Linda Slavin (federal NDP Candidate) and her team for the organizational work they did in Peterborough. Kudos also to M.P.P. Jeff Leal who rode the bus and attended the rally. And most of all, kudos to the walkers, wheelers and riders from Peterborough!

Speakers from around the province called on politicians to increase social assistance rates to reflect the real cost of living, raise the minimum wage to \$10 an hour, end the clawback of the National Child Benefit Supplement from families on social assistance, and put real funding into affordable housing. Over 4100 postcards were collected and delivered to Premier Dalton McGuinty's office. However, despite their best efforts, organizers were not able to get a meeting with the Premier or any members of Cabinet. To get more information on the rally, check out the WWRD website at: <http://www.walkwheelridefordignity.org/>. The Ontario Needs a Raise Campaign would also like to **See WWRD p. 10**

Welfare from p. 4

Dalton McGuinty's Liberal government "generously" increased both rates 11 years later by 3 per cent, widening the gap even further.

But stomachs do not vary in size between the disabled and those who rely on social assistance.

If welfare rates lack a rationale, they do react to impulses, such as a general inclination to blame the victim. Society has traditionally been prejudiced against welfare recipients, particularly those who are able-bodied and single welfare mothers. Remember Harris' comment about beer-swilling pregnant women on welfare?

As we have seen, the rationale for welfare rates was lost decades ago, and Ontario governments of all stripes have refused to develop another, relying instead on seat-of-the-pants ad-hockery.

What should recipients do in response to this studied non-feasance by their political masters? In a wealthy province like Ontario, there is no excuse for hungry mothers and hungry children.

Pupatello cries abuse, but she follows a long line of social services ministers who have demonstrated an inability to demonstrate that they are addressing the needs of the people they are charged with overseeing.

Under the Harris government, the attack on the poor was open and vicious.

Now it is hidden behind gentle words, with concerns expressed about those who would "abuse" such a fine program.

Reuel S. Amdur is a social worker living in Val-des-Monts, Quebec who has worked for social planning councils in Peel, Hamilton, and Toronto.

This piece was originally published in the Toronto Star on October 7, 2005.

Reprinted with the permission of the author.

WWRD from p. 9

encourage groups to continue trying to get meetings with our local MPP. The provincial government will soon be going into pre-budget discussions once again so continuing pressure is needed to achieve an increase to social assistance rates and the minimum wage, an end to the claw-back of the NCBS and provincial funding for affordable housing.

Special Diet News

As this Newsletter goes to print, the government has announced new, strict Special Diet rules. Look out!

It will now be much harder for families on Ontario Works and Ontario Disability to get extra money to cover health-related dietary expenses. Those who now get Special Diet funds will have to reapply using new forms. Only OW and ODSP have the forms.

What should you do? Ask your caseworker for a Special Diet form. Call the Legal Centre.

Legal Centre staff are available to speak to classes, tenants' organizations, agencies and community groups about our areas of practice.

Call us at 749-9355 to arrange a presentation at your next meeting.

Getting an inheritance when you are on Ontario disability benefits (ODSP)

There are special rules about inheriting money or other property from someone who has died if you get your income from ODSP.

Inheritances under \$5000: ODSP considers an inheritance to be a type of gift. You are allowed to receive gifts worth up to \$5,000 in any 12-month period. Receiving the gifts will not affect your benefits in the month that you receive them but, if you already have assets, you might not be eligible for ODSP the next month. This is because a gift, such as an inheritance, could put you over the maximum amount of assets you are allowed. You will not lose your benefits if you spend the inherited money to buy assets that are exempt, and if you buy those exempt assets in the month that you receive the money.

Inheritances over \$5000: An inheritance of *up to \$100,000* will not count as an asset if it is placed in a trust. When money is put in a trust, someone else, called a ‘trustee’, manages the money for you. The trustee could be a person or an institution, such as a community organization or a bank. If you are on ODSP and you inherit *more than \$100,000* you can still continue to get ODSP benefits

if the money is placed in a “discretionary trust” (also called an “absolute discretionary trust” or a “Henson trust”). This means that the trustee is given the power to decide when to pay you and how much to pay you from the trust.

Who sets up a trust and when? Often a trust is set up by the person who has died in their will. But even if a trust is not set up in a will, *you can set one up after you get the inheritance*. You should get legal advice right away so that a trust can be set up and your ODSP benefits are not affected.

Do payments from a trust affect ODSP benefits? ODSP considers payments from a trust to be a gift. This means that payments to you from a trust will not count as income as long as the amount that you receive does not put your total gifts over \$5,000 in a 12-month period. Also, money paid to you from a trust does not count for income if you use it to pay for disability-related items and services. Check with your ODSP worker to find out if an item or service is “disability related”.

Getting Help: Contact the Peterborough Community Legal Centre (749-9355) for ad-

vice if you get an inheritance while you are on ODSP benefits.

This article was adapted, with permission, from an original publication of Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO) entitled "Getting an inheritance when you are on Ontario disability benefits" (May 2005). Please check CLEO's website at www.cleo.on.ca to order or view CLEO publications.

Process from p. 8.

If you just recently got a letter from the OW or ODSP office telling you about the overpayment, in addition to sending in your Internal Review Request you can also send in an appeal form to the Social Benefits Tribunal. You should attach a copy of the Internal Review Request form to the Tribunal appeal form. *The Legal Centre has these forms, can help you complete yours, and will fax it in from our office.*

6. How do I appeal to the Social Benefits Tribunal?

You can also send in an appeal to the Social Benefits Tribunal after you get an Internal Review Decision letter. You have 30 days to file your appeal. As noted above, the Legal Centre has the appeal forms, can help you complete yours, and will fax it from our office.



Susan McGrath

of the
Canadian Bar Association
to speak about ...

- ***Charter Rights***
- ***Same Sex Marriage***
- ***Access to Legal Services***

When: Thursday December 1, 2005 4:30 to 5:30 p.m.

Where: Cinema 379, 379 George Street North, Ptbo.

Sponsored by the Peterborough Law Association, the Peterborough Community Legal Centre and the Peterborough Area Office of Legal Aid Ontario.

A free public presentation on important issues.

For more information contact the Peterborough Law Association at 741-0402
or the Peterborough Community Legal Centre at 749-9355

“Paying for the Glue” Sustaining Legal Aid Services

As Lenny Abramowicz, the Executive Director of the Association of Ontario Legal Clinics so aptly stated recently, “Clinics are the glue that sustains healthy communities”. Community legal clinics help low-income Ontarians stay in their homes and secure the basic financial assistance to which they are entitled. They help ensure that the neediest members of our community don’t completely fall through the cracks in our social safety nets, which have long needed mending. Unfortunately, clinics are facing ever-increasing financial restraints of their own and they need help.

To this end, Janet Leiper, Chair of the Legal Aid Ontario Board of Directors has initiated a “Sustainability Campaign”. The aim of this campaign is to bring the financial plight of clinics and the lawyers providing legally aided family and criminal law services to the attention of provincial and federal politicians. Ministers and backbenchers alike need to know that the funding for these crucial services has been frozen since 1999, while the demand from the very needy communities they serve has grown in leaps and bounds. Without a renewed government commitment to loosening the purse strings, these vital services will, inevitably, shrink and some of Ontario’s most vulnerable citizens will not be able to get legal help when their needs are most dire.

To assist in the campaign, local clinics, including the Peterborough Community Legal Centre have approached local M.P.’s and M.P.P.’s, reminding them of the vital services clinics provide and encouraging them to contact the key Ministers with letters of support for increased funding and a commitment to secure funding into the future.

If you, or someone you know has benefited from the services provided by our legal clinic, a letter or phone call of support reiterating the community legal needs and the importance of an increased financial commitment from government, addressed to your federal M.P. and provincial M.P.P. could provide an added boost for this important and timely campaign.

If you are interested in supporting legally aided services, please complete the membership application on the other side of this page and check off the Sustainability Campaign box.

Paul Atkinson

President
Peterborough Community Legal Centre

Community Legal Clinics are funded and supported by Legal Aid Ontario

The Objects of the Legal Centre

The objects of the Legal Centre are:

1. To provide legal services or paralegal services or both including activities reasonably designed to encourage access to such services or to further such services and services designed to promote the legal welfare of the low income residents of the County of Peterborough, on a basis other than fee-for-service;
2. To provide legal information and education and to encourage access to knowledge of legal rights;
3. To provide legal representation to low-income residents of the County of Peterborough;
4. To identify areas of law affecting low-income members of our society and to advocate reform.

Membership

The Centre is directed by its members. If you live in the City or County, and are 16 years of age or older, you can become a member. If you are a member, you can:

- Vote at the Annual General Meeting
- Stand for election to the Board of Directors if you are over 18.
- Get the Legal Centre's newsletter twice a year.

If you want to become a member of the Legal Centre for the 2005/2006 year (December 1, 2005 to February 28, 2007) you need to complete the following form and send or bring it to the Legal Centre at 150 King Street, 4th Floor, Peterborough, Ontario, K9J 2R9. If you are already a member, please pass along the membership application to a friend who supports our objects.

✂

Membership Application 2005-2006

I support the work of the Peterborough Community Legal Centre. I am 16 or older.

Please print:

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please mail or bring this form to our office. Membership takes effect 30 days after approval by the Board. Membership is for one year, and a renewal notice will be sent with the newsletters. There is no fee to become a member. You do not need to be a member to get help from us.

Yes, please send me information on the Legal Aid Sustainability Campaign.