



Don Valley
Community Legal Services

2023-24
ANNUAL REPORT

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Joint Message from the Chair of the Board and our Executive Director

This past year has again seen many changes and challenges at our legal clinic, as well as successes.

The renovations for the Thorncliffe Park Community Hub (“the Hub”) are proceeding at a rapid pace. We will be moving in this winter. By next year’s AGM, we will be able to hold it in one of the community rooms and enjoy all of the benefits of being part of this new community space.

Due to the expiry of our lease at our previous location on Leaside Park Drive, the clinic staff has adapted to working remotely for the past few months. Our administrative office has been located to our satellite office inside the Ralph Thornton Community Centre. Document services are also being provided at that location. It has resulted in strengthening our relationships with the other building partners at the Ralph Thornton Community Centre and has provided a greater appreciation for the work of community agencies in the southwest part of our catchment area.

While the majority of our clients have adapted to our current circumstances, it is to be expected that when we do settle into the Hub, we will experience a greater demand for clients walking into our office for intake services. This will result in the adaptation of our hybrid work policy to ensure we have the staffing resources to deal with such changes. Currently we are working with our Hub partners to devise processes that will foster greater collaboration of services for our mutual clients. We are active on the various Hub subcommittees that are working for collaborative methods of communication, health and safety standards, the use of non-dedicated space, artwork from community members, and other financial and administrative factors.

The focus in our community work continues to be on housing issues, which are impacting the legal and health needs of our clients. We continue to work with elected officials, community partners and community leaders to work on solutions to address the increasing lack of affordable housing in the communities we serve. All of our legal teams continue to provide public legal education workshops in partnership with community agencies and through inter agency alliances.

Over the past year, we have emphasized our commitment to the clinic engagement goals that were outlined in the Association of Community Legal Clinics of Ontario (ACLCO) clinic engagement report. Our Social Planning Committee, created in 2023, has been active in planning in person events to foster closer staff relationships. We also retained a consultant to work with us to develop an anti-racism and anti-oppression (ARAO) policy for the clinic. Using this new policy, we are devising work plans that incorporate ARAO as well as an equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) focus with our Board, staff and the community. Our next step is to provide further training to staff on conflict resolution strategies, whether in the workplace or in the community.

Now that we are achieving a major clinic goal of locating into the new Hub, we are looking at further strategic planning work for both the short term and long term. This will lead to further needs assessment work and the utilization of recent statistical data from the recent census and the City of Toronto neighbourhood profiles.

We continue to have a good working relationship with our funder, Legal Aid Ontario (LAO). Representatives from LAO attended the ground-breaking ceremony for the Hub earlier this year. We look forward to having our funder celebrate with us at the official opening ceremony for the Hub in early 2025. We have utilized the additional funding provided by LAO to ensure that the clinic staff obtain decent remuneration with a lessening of the wage gaps between clinic staff and LAO staff. With the financial assistance of our funder, we will be moving towards the digitalization of our files which will decrease our operational costs for closed file storage.

Thank you for taking the time to read our annual report. We hope this highlights the great work that our clinic staff have been doing over the past year in our community. There is great excitement as we look forward to the opportunities of working in the Hub and developing new strategies to leverage our services to those in need living in our catchment area.

Sincerely,

Kirk Cooper
Chair of the Board of Directors

Marjorie Hiley
Executive Director

Thank you to our 2023-24 Board of Directors:

Kirk Cooper, Chair of the Board
Cenobar Parker, Vice-Chair
Vanessa Rose, Secretary and Treasurer
Lucy Becker, Director
Shamsh Kara, Director
Ashish Malik, Director
Ali Meghani, Director
George Nikolov, Director
Jenna Seguin, Director

Message from the Chair of Legal Aid Ontario

While I am not able to be with you this evening, I nevertheless wanted to congratulate Marjorie and the Clinic staff, for continuing to provide the excellent and essential legal services needed by those in your surrounding community, over the past year. Your dedication and commitment to assisting the most vulnerable does not go unnoticed, nor does the innovation you have demonstrated over the past few years.

I wish you every success as you relocate to the Thorncliffe Park Community Hub, and I have no doubt that the additional services that will be available to your clients within a few steps of your new office, will be of very significant benefit to them.

Best wishes for an even more successful 2025.

J.S.A. (Steve) Pengelly, K.C.,
Chair, Legal Aid Ontario

Director of Legal Services' Report

As we embark on the final calendar quarter of 2024, we do so with great excitement for what lies ahead of us and our community in 2025: the opening of the Thorncliffe Park Community Hub (“the Hub”).

The move into the Hub will bring about many changes to the manner in which we deliver our legal services to the community. In anticipation of these changes, we have been working very closely with our Hub partners on devising protocols to help fulfill the Hub’s vision of offering innovative, integrated services to the community, and driving positive neighbourhood change.

By integrating our legal services with our Hub partners from the health, settlement and social services sectors, we are positioning ourselves to provide holistic services and wrap around supports to the community, and collectively advocate against the conditions that give rise to their poverty.

These conditions, which were fully exposed during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, underscore how access to justice is a social determinant of health, and further highlight the need for us to sew mental health and social work supports into the fabric of our legal services.

To this end, we have recently become an Engaged Partner of East Toronto Health Partners. We are looking forward to connecting our legal services to their integrated care planning program, which includes access to case management and home care supports. We also partnered for the first time with Centennial College to have a Social Service Worker student complete their Field Placement with us during the last Winter Semester. Under the supervision of our Caseworkers and a College Field Placement Supervisor, the student worked directly with our clients on servicing the clients’ social needs as an adjunct to their legal issue.

The backdrop to these new and exciting endeavours is a growing demand for our legal services. Since our last Annual General Meeting (“AGM”), there has been a 35% increase in the number of calls received on our Intake Line, resulting in an 11% increase in the number of opened cases. This growing demand has put a tremendous amount of strain on our Intake Team, and has necessitated the closure of our Intake Line on Friday afternoons. This closure has enabled us to ensure the data in our Clinic Information Management System (“CIMS”) is up to date, without compromising on the number of clients we serve each month.

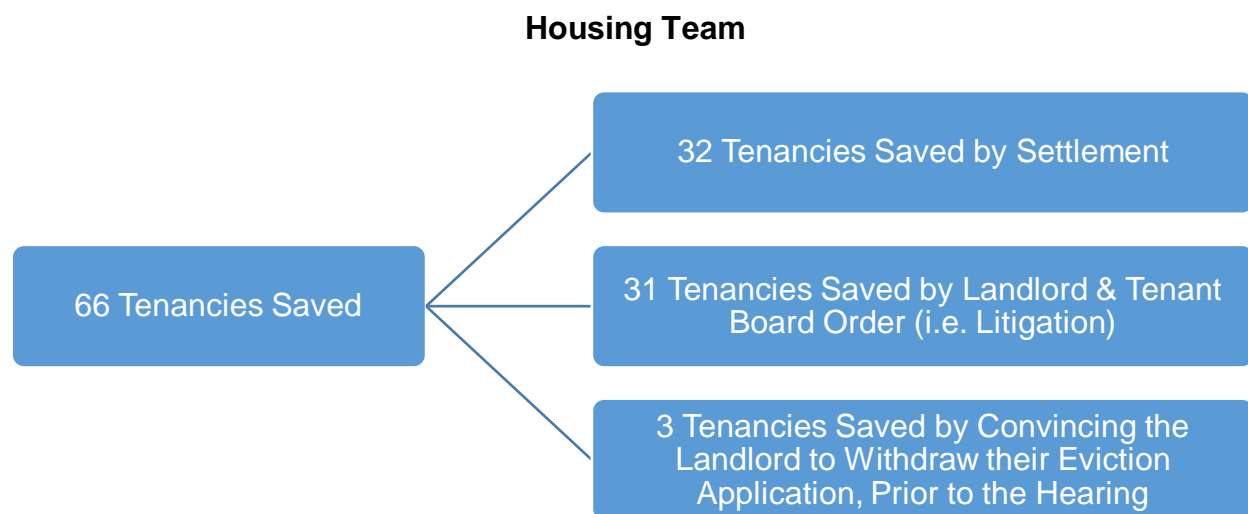
As the housing crisis continues to worsen, the demand for our housing law services increased by 14%. Housing now comprises 50% of all cases opened in the clinic’s core areas of law. The demand for our employment law services also increased by a notable 24%.

Notwithstanding this increased demand for individualized legal services, our Caseworkers and Community Development Worker have continued to work tirelessly with our local politicians from both the City and the Province, Ombudsman Toronto, our community partners, tenant associations, resident councils and inter-agency networks, like the Flemingdon Thorncliffe Inter-Agency Network, on public legal education, law reform and community initiatives, some of which are highlighted below in their Service Team Reports.

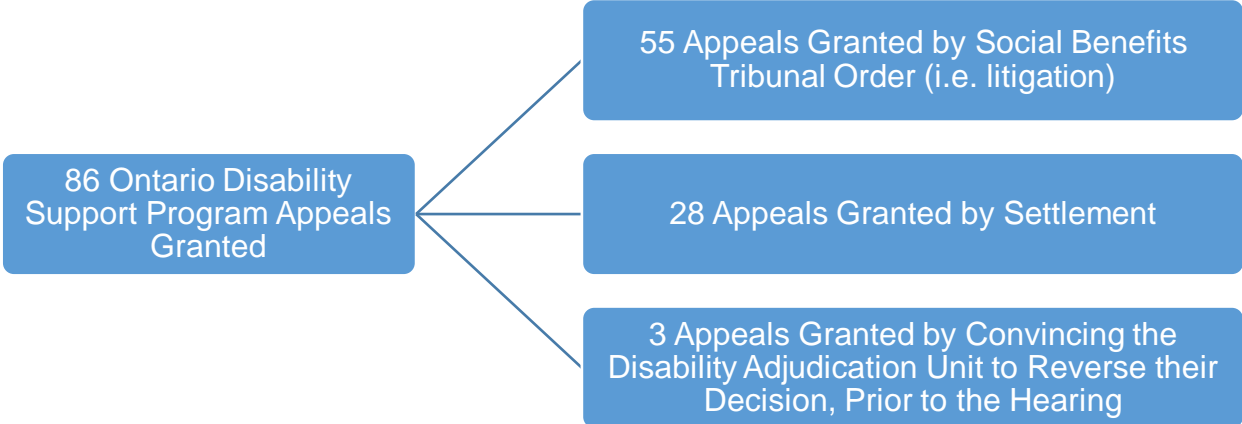
Internally, our Joint Health and Safety Committee devised new protocols and procedures this past year to improve the safety and well-being of both our staff and clients alike. We have taken these protocols and procedures with us to our satellite office at the Ralph Thornton Community Centre, and will eventually integrate them with the shared protocols and procedures of the Hub.

In anticipation of greater walk-in traffic and the need to deliver in-person legal services at the Hub, we are also working on the next iteration of our hybrid workplace practice to meet this need. This next iteration will undoubtedly rely on the digital file management protocols each of our Service Teams devised this past year.

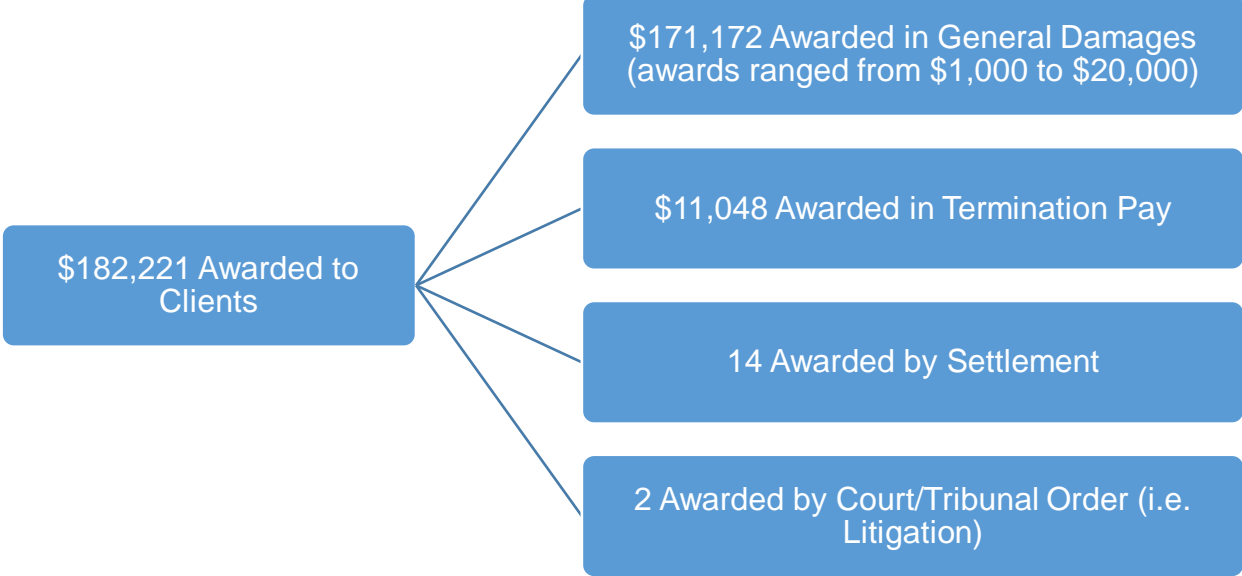
Through these protocols, which fully embed the use of our CIMS into the delivery of our legal services, we have generated metrics for measuring successful case outcomes by area of law. The following metrics are a snapshot of the results achieved by each Service Team since our last AGM:



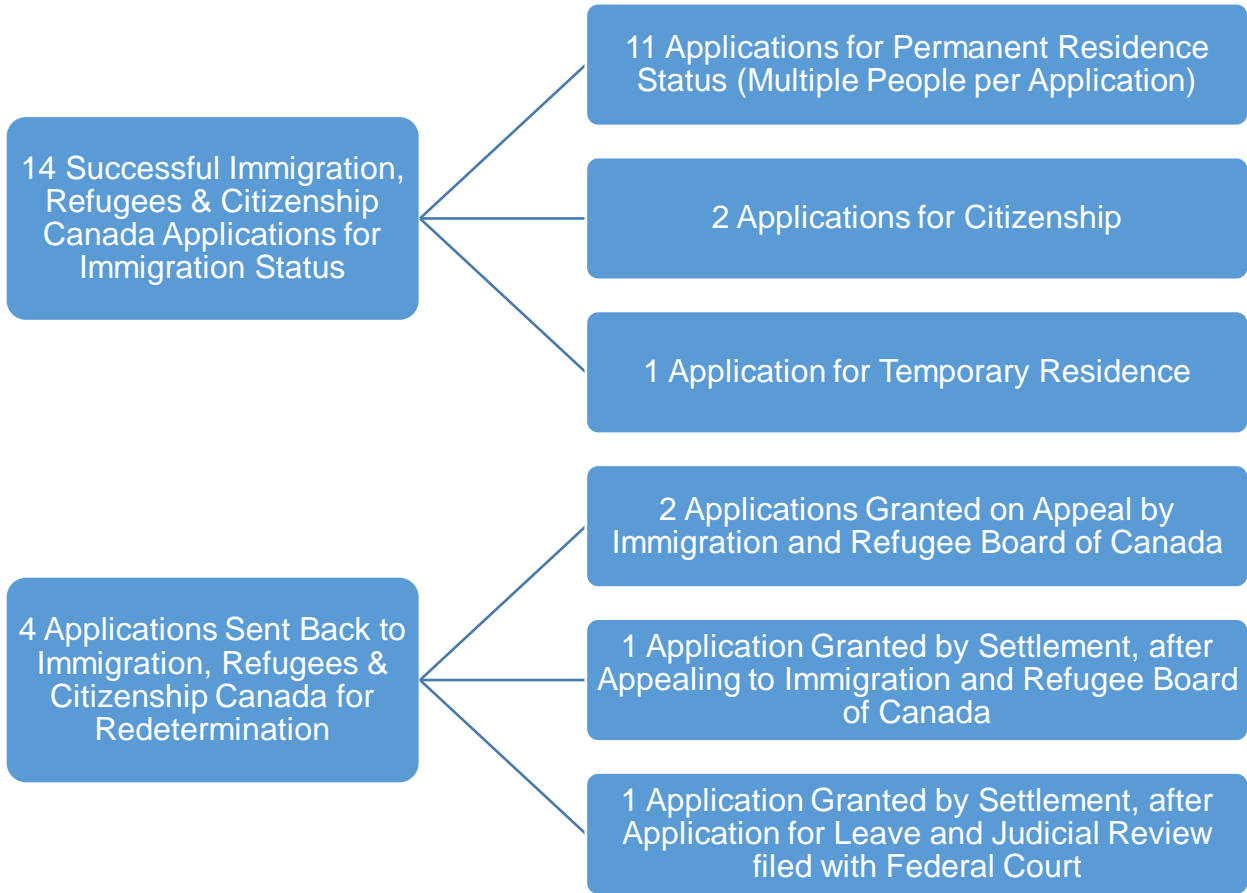
Income Maintenance Team



Employment Team



Immigration Team



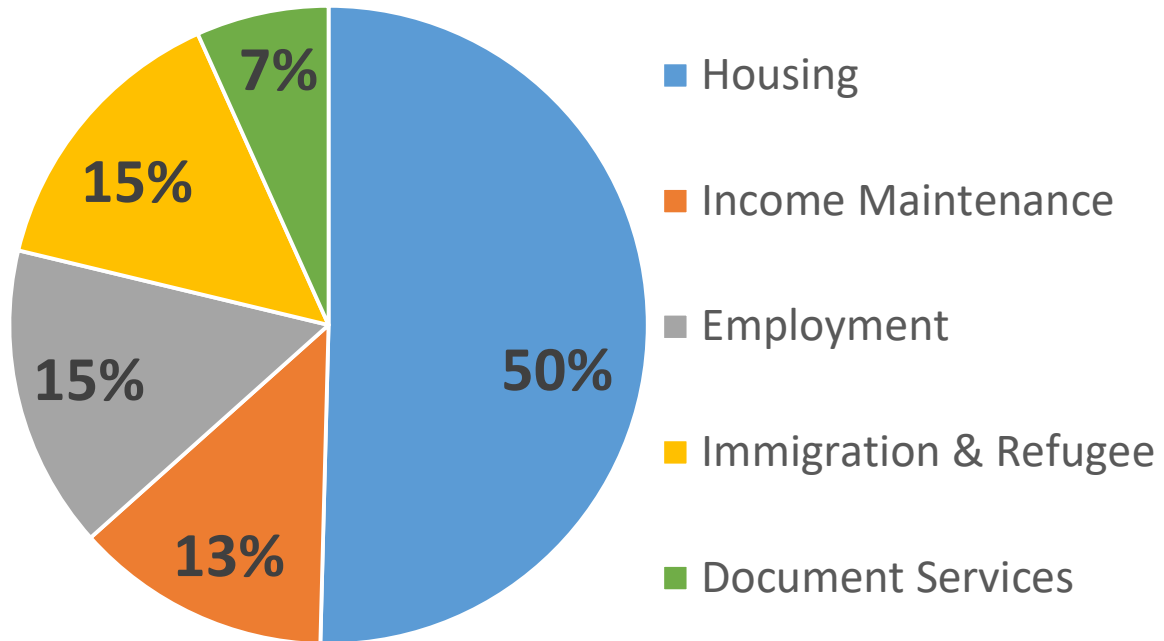
These metrics, together with the highlights noted below in each Service Team’s Report, tell the story of a staff who are committed to serving and achieving justice for our community. With the ongoing support of our funder, Legal Aid Ontario, for whom we are most grateful to have a great working relationship, we look forward to sharing the next chapter in our clinic’s story with you, live from the new Hub.

Thank you to all of our staff for their amazing work, and to our Board of Directors for their steady leadership.

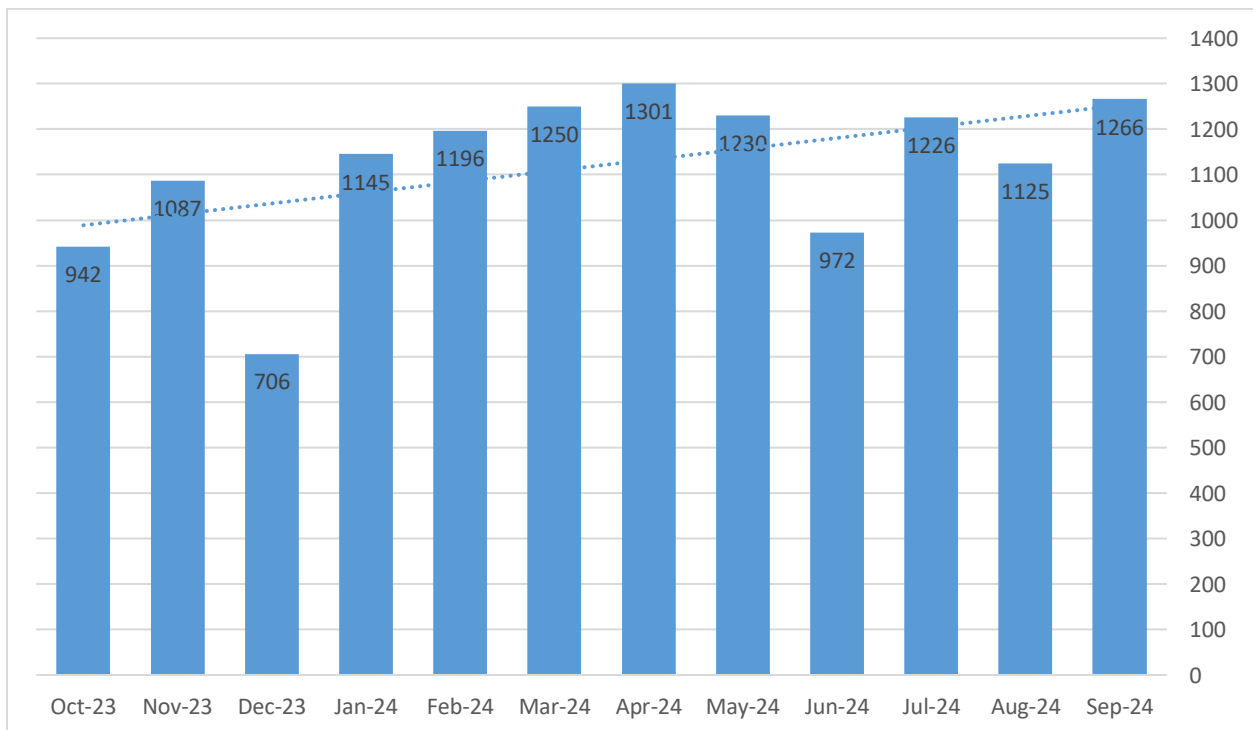
Bhavin Bilimoria
Director of Legal Services

2023-24 Statistics

Percentage of Cases Opened by Core Areas of Law: Oct 1, 2023 – Sept 30, 2024

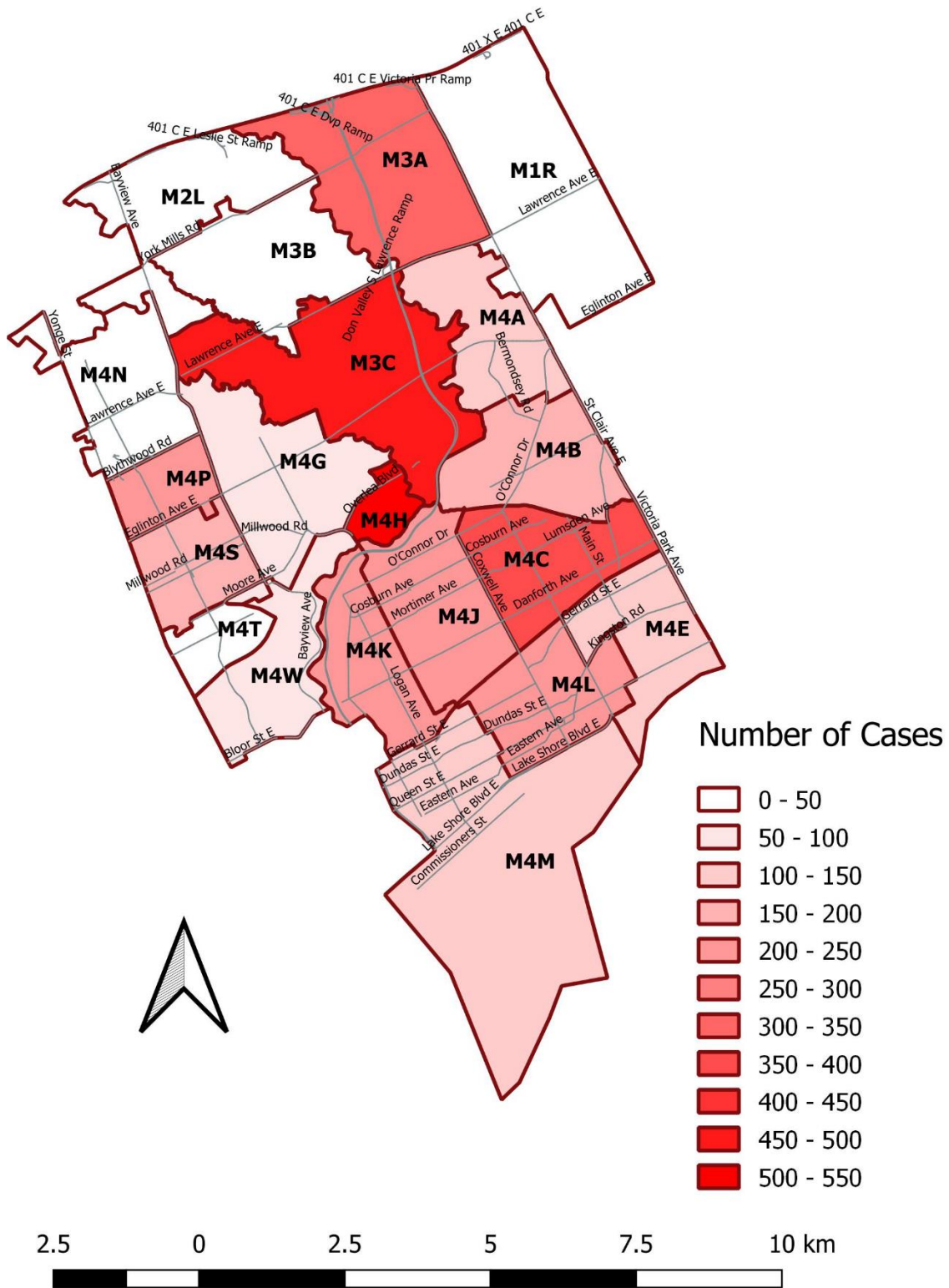


Number of Calls Received on Intake Line per Month: Oct 1, 2024 – Sept 30, 2024

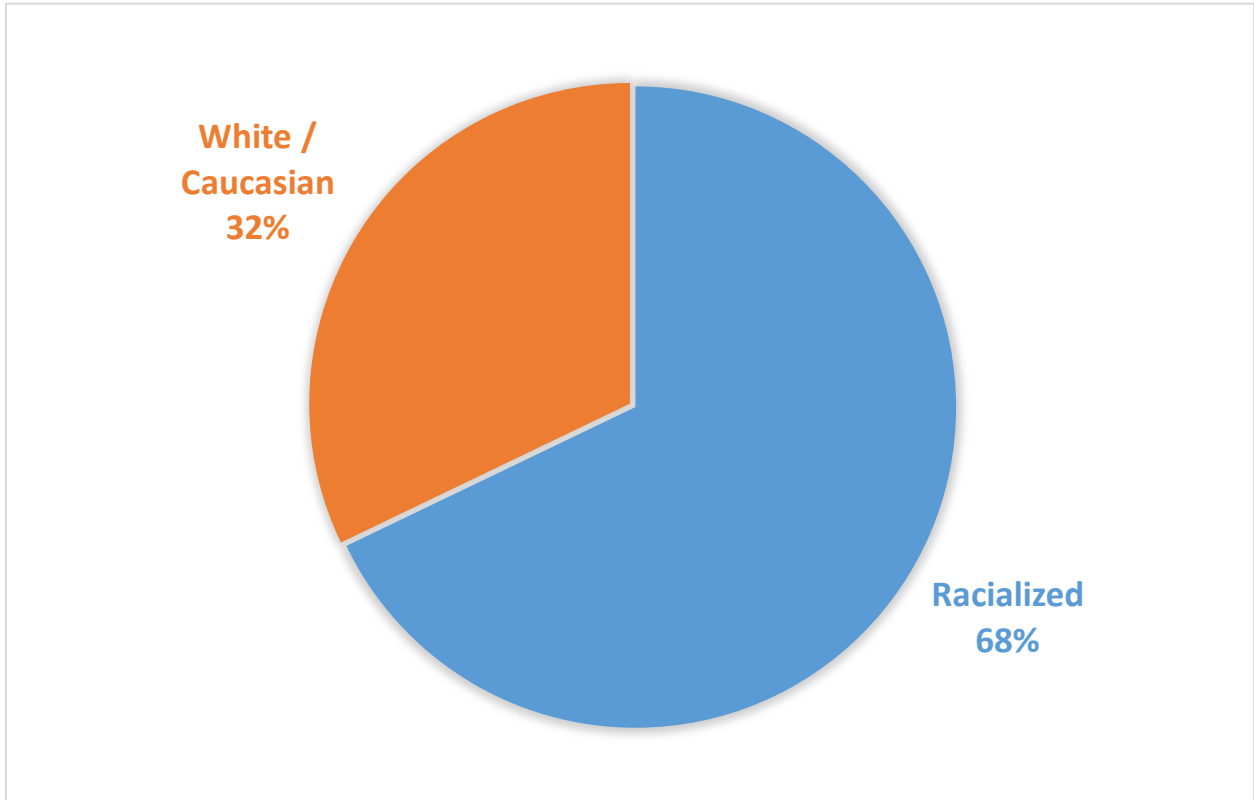


Total Number of Calls Received on Intake Line: 13,446

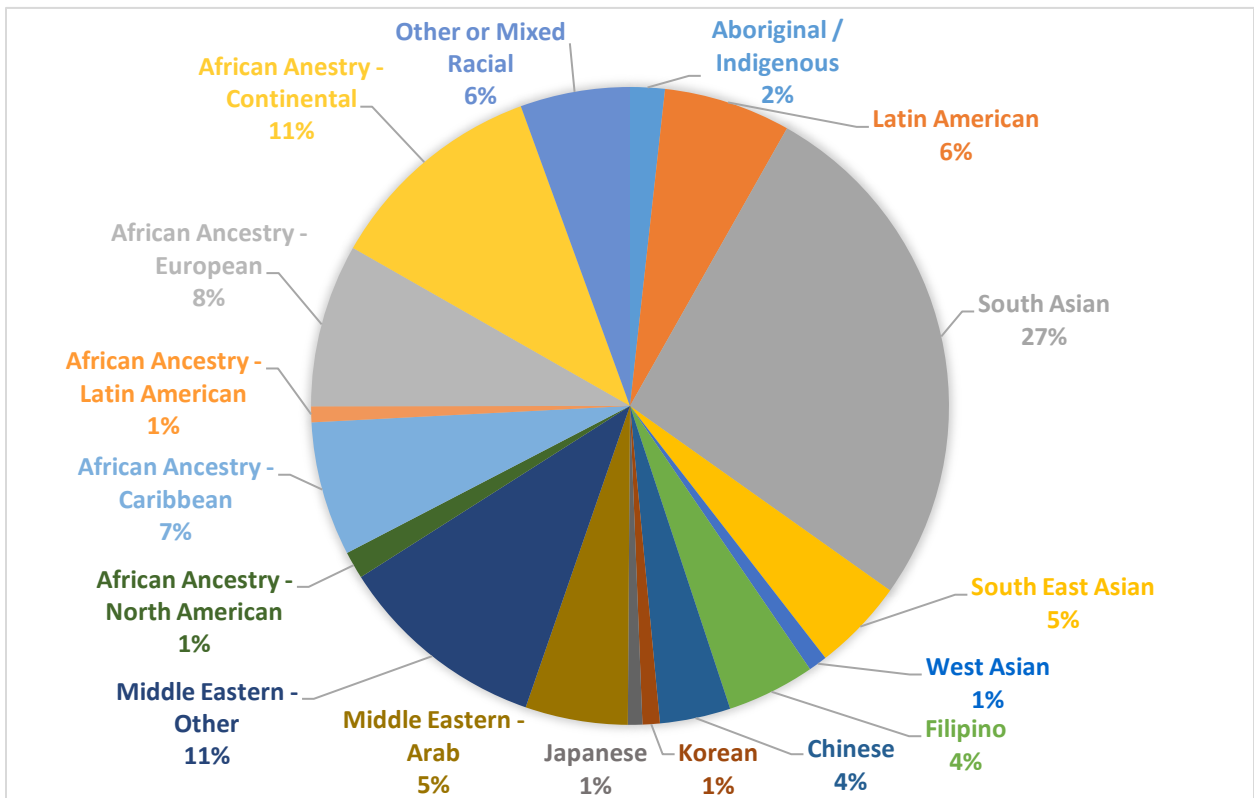
Cases Opened by Clinic Region: Oct 1, 2023 – Sept 30, 2024



Self-Identified, Ethno-Racial Demographics of Clients Served: Oct 1, 2023 to Sept 30, 2024



Self-Identified, Ethno-Racial Demographics of Racialized Clients Served: Oct 1, 2023 to Sept 30, 2024



Staff Training and Ongoing Learning

This past year, DVCLS has undertaken the development of an Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression (ARAO) policy. We created an ARAO Committee made up of staff members and one of our Board members who worked with a consultant to develop the policy. The consultant met with all of our staff and held focus groups, and we came together for a final session in June 2024. We now have a new ARAO policy that will help guide our work and our interactions with clients, community members and each other. The ARAO Committee will continue as we know this work does not end and we need to continually reflect and make changes. Thank you to our consultant Dipal Damani from Inclusion Consulting.

This year we also organized Indigenous Cultural Awareness training for our staff and Board. We created a committee made up of staff members who undertook research and worked together to find resources and consultants who could provide a training session. We held the session during Indigenous People Month this past June where we participated in The Blanket Exercise and a Land Acknowledgement workshop. Thanks to our consultants from Waaban Nang Collective. We are committed to reconciliation and decolonization. We understand and acknowledge this learning and reflection is ongoing. Our committee continues to find resources and learning experiences for staff.



The DVCLS Team at our Indigenous Cultural Awareness training session in June

Community Development

It has been a busy year for community development at DVCLS. Our legal clinic is active in the communities we serve and our Community Development Worker, Laura Anonen, is involved in various community groups throughout our catchment area.

It is important for us to know what the major issues and concerns are in the communities so we can meet the needs of community members. We work closely with grassroots groups, other local agencies, tenant associations and the offices of our elected officials to stay on top of issues. Based off our case statistics, it is no surprise that tenant issues are still a top concern across our catchment.



We have been facilitating and organizing tenant meetings about various issues, such as Above Guideline Increases (AGIs), demovictions and renovictions. We have been invited to speak at events hosted by our elected officials and we are grateful for these opportunities to reach more tenants and inform them about their rights. We also hosted a Tenant Town Hall this past June in Thorncliffe Park where over 50 tenants attended. At this meeting, we learned about serious issues taking place at one of the apartment buildings and we quickly jumped into action. We organized a tenant meeting where over 70 tenants came out. We provided legal information and advice, and helped them organize a tenants' association. We would like to thank our community partners for their assistance with our tenant work – The Neighbourhood Organization (TNO), the Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations' (FMTA) and ACORN.

As the housing crisis continues to worsen, and as we begin to see the impacts of the new Ontario Line and planned transit-oriented communities, we know the needs of tenants will continue to grow. What we do at the legal clinic is put “band-aids on bullet holes,” helping each client fight an eviction and hopefully save an affordable rental unit. But we are now looking at how we can “stop the bleeding.” Our work on the City of Toronto’s renovictions bylaw is one example of how we can address the root cause of an issue and create systemic change. We will continue to advocate for better protections for tenants, and all of our clients, and ensure law reform is part of our work.



This year we also participated in many community events where we ran our outreach table and distributed free resources. We attended seniors' fairs, school fairs, the Crescent Town Community Fair, Canada Day celebrations, the Flemington Thorncliffe Fall Festival, the Pow Wow at Wandering Spirit First Nations School, and several other events. These events allow us to meet community members and staff from other agencies, and let them know about our clinic and services.

Part of our Community Development work also includes civic engagement – and this does not only happen when there is an election. Laura is the Co-Chair of the Flemingdon Thorncliffe Inter Agency Network (FTIAN) Community and Civic Engagement Committee. The committee helped community members participate in the City’s budget process earlier this year and assisted the Flemingdon Thorncliffe Tenants Network with sending a letter to City Council. The committee is also working to ensure residents know about the upcoming Ward 15 City Councillor by-election and that voices from Thorncliffe Park are heard.

We have also improved our communications this past year and continue to send out our bi-monthly e-newsletter. We continue to be active on social media and post legal information articles on our website. We can see from our analytics that people are looking for this information and we want to ensure it is accessible and easy to find.

Our Community Services Committee (CSC) continues to meet virtually each month where members discuss issues that impact the communities we serve, advocacy work, local events, communications, and outreach initiatives. The CSC is made up of Board members and community members from across our catchment area. We are looking forward to meeting in person once we move into the Thorncliffe Park Community Hub this winter.

Thank you to our past and present CSC members: Parveen Amlani, Lucy Becker, Taslima Begum, Nisha Iqbal, Geoff Kettel, Hafiz Khan, Ashish Malik, Ali Meghani (Chair), Jenna Seguin, Miyadah Subrati, Martin Sweeny, Rhiannon Thomas, Vanessa Wu

We are also fortunate to have amazing volunteers who help with our outreach, events and our office move this year. Thank you to our volunteers!

Volunteers: Saahil Krishna, Wajid Mehmood, Sara Nassif, Raasikh Wasiq



Employment Law Team

This year, two new lawyers join the Employment Law Team – John Wigle, who articulated with DVCLS, and Cosimo Morin.

We continue to assist clients across East Toronto through Toronto East Employment and Immigration Legal Services (TEEILS) with a range of employment law issues, including wrongful dismissals, employment standards violations, workplace discrimination and harassment issues, Employment Insurance denials, and COVID-19 benefit overpayments.

Our work brings us to a variety of courts and tribunals including the Ontario Labour Relations Board, Small Claims Court, the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario, the Superior Court of Justice, and Federal Court.

We have highlighted a selection of our cases below. Please note that the content may be triggering for some.

Case Highlights:

Richa Sandill represented a woman who arrived in Canada in 2019 as a refugee, who was extremely vulnerable due to the traumatic abuse she experienced in her country of birth and her limited English. She was soon hired by someone from her ethnic community. In the short period that she worked for the employer, he sexually assaulted her on multiple occasions, physically abused her, and threatened to kill her if she reported him to the police. The client courageously sought legal assistance and we filed an application at the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario in late 2019. The application finally proceeded to a hearing in October 2023, where we obtained a damages award of \$180,000, the second highest award of damages in the history of the HRTO, and a precedent-setting finding of discrimination on the basis of citizenship.

Richa and John Wigle also represented a newcomer woman who, in addition to facing physical and emotional abuse by her husband and father-in-law at home, was forced to work gruelling hours in their family business without pay and while being surveilled. At trial, Richa advanced novel arguments about how the domestic violence that the client experienced at home became sex-based discrimination when it crossed over into the workplace. The client was awarded over \$50,000 in damages, which was capped at \$35,000 due to the monetary limit of the Small Claims Court.

Yolanda Song represented an older, racialized woman who had worked for her employer for nearly 11 years. There arose an issue where her paycheques were being deposited twice in different bank accounts. Our client did not know who was depositing her paycheques a second time or how it was happening. Despite her cooperation in the employer's investigation, the employer accused our client of fraud and terminated her employment for cause, without notice or termination pay. Her supervisor also reported her to the police. We commenced a wrongful dismissal claim at the Small Claims Court

and settled the matter for approximately 7.5 months of pay in lieu of notice, which was a significant financial improvement for the client.

Initiative Highlights:

The “Tareekh Pe Tareekh – Know Your Employment Law Rights” Public Legal Education Campaign created by Richa Sandill from DVCLS and Anchal Bhatia from the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO) saw more growth and success this year. The campaign includes short educational videos in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali and Tamil on basic employment law rights in Ontario. In July 2024, the campaign was awarded the South Asian Bar Association of North America Foundation Community Grant to help fund the creation of future videos in different South Asian languages. Congratulations to Richa and Anchal! We look forward to seeing this important campaign continue to grow.

The graphic features a pink banner at the top with the text "TAREEKH PE TAREEKH". Below it is an orange banner with "KNOW YOUR EMPLOYMENT LAW RIGHTS PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION CAMPAIGN". A central blue box contains a globe and the text "LEARN ABOUT YOUR EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS". To the right, a green box says "Check out these short educational videos in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali and Tamil on basic employment law rights in Ontario." Below the globe is a QR code with the word "SCAN" and a hand icon. At the bottom, there are logos for DVCLS and SALCO, and social media handles for @tareekhetareekh on Twitter and @tareekhetareekh1 on TikTok. Text in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, and Tamil is also present, providing information about the campaign's purpose and contact details.

Team Members:

Richa Sandill, Team Lead, Staff Lawyer (currently on leave)
Yolanda Song, Acting Team Lead, Staff Lawyer
John Wigle, Staff Lawyer
Cosimo Morin, Staff Lawyer

Past Team Members:

Amy Brubacher, Staff Lawyer

Housing Law Team

The number of housing cases continues to grow and our Housing Team has been busy assisting tenants, providing public legal education sessions, and advocating for law reform to better protect tenants.

Case Highlights:

A family in our area received a notice of eviction claiming that the landlord wanted to move his parents into their unit – one of 12 units in an apartment building. The tenants have lived there for nearly 10 years, pay rent significantly below the market rate, and are one of only three units in the building that have long-term tenants, with the rest of the units being used for short-term rentals. They believed the eviction notice to be retaliatory after they had made requests for maintenance and then a member of the household had slipped and fallen on the property. We represented the tenants at their hearing and successfully argued that the evidence of the landlord's bad faith intentions was frankly insurmountable. The eviction application was dismissed, as was the landlord's attempt to review that decision, and the tenants are happily staying in their home. We are now representing one of the few other tenants in the building facing a similar eviction and hoping for the same result!

A tenant in our catchment area was evicted without notice by a particularly notorious landlord in May of 2022. To add insult to injury, he was not given the opportunity to collect his belongings after the eviction. Tenants have 72 hours to collect their belongings from their unit once the Sheriff has evicted them from their home. This tenant returned to the unit within that 72 hour period only to find it completely cleaned out, with many of his belongings in the dumpster outside. We filed an application to the Landlord and Tenant Board against the landlord and waited patiently for a hearing date. Nearly two years later, our case was finally heard and successful! The Board ordered the landlord to pay the tenant nearly \$10,000, and fined the landlord an additional \$10,000 for her blatant disregard of the tenant's rights.

Initiative Highlights:

Our greatest success this year has been our work on the City of Toronto's Renovictions By-law. A project for our team since 2019, we have worked closely with Councillor Paula Fletcher's office to explore a possible by-law that would curb bad-faith renovictions in Toronto. We presented to the City's Planning and Housing Committee to advocate for a by-law back in 2022. After being shelved for over a year, the City was spurred to action when Hamilton passed a renovictions by-law in January of 2024. This re-ignited our work with Councillor Fletcher and we soon found ourselves before that same Committee in June 2024 advocating for the City to adopt a by-law mirroring



that in Hamilton. The Committee unanimously supported moving forward with the by-law, and the next steps were approved by City Council on June 26th. The City has since completed its public consultations on the by-law and will be submitting proposed terms to the Committee for approval on October 30th.

Testimonials from Clients:

“My landlord is a notorious operator that abused the system to get me wrongfully evicted. I was a good, long-standing tenant. I never imagined that I would become homeless all of a sudden but it happened. I was living in my car. I contacted DVCLS. Luis from the Housing Team prepared the legal work required to challenge that injustice. He was understanding and supportive. With his help I achieved a legal victory at the Landlord and Tenant Board. Not only that but with his assistance I filed my own claims for compensation. At the beginning, I felt powerless going against my sophisticated landlord. There is a power imbalance. Somebody has to fight for the little guy -that’s why we need Legal Aid. DVCLS was there for me. As a result of this experience I am no longer a victim. I am a fighter. Thank you DVCLS!”

“My mother’s experience with Don Valley Community Legal Services was beyond great. She quickly had to get legal counsel and luckily for her, she found Don Valley Community Legal Services and Grace Park was assigned to her case. Ms. Park dedicated all the time and attention that was needed to be successful in court. Her rapport and guidance was outstanding at all times, she was prompt, open for calls and quick updates, and worked through all of the questions and issues on this case. She was a calming and confident presence during the very difficult court mediation proceedings. My mom was never once treated as anything other than a valuable client. I would recommend anyone to Don Valley Community Legal Services, they look out for your best interest. We can’t thank Ms. Parks enough for her care, work and time.”

“Bhavin is a professional in every way. He is truly passionate about his work. We were fortunate to have him represent my son at the LTB tribunal this year. My son has both mental health and addiction challenges. His current living arrangements is in the Toronto independent/supportive housing module home programs. He faced eviction not once but twice this past year. After meeting with Bhavin and telling him the story of why he may soon face eviction and worse homelessness, Bhavin was able to keep my son from being evicted. He was able to come to negotiate a reasonable agreement with the landlord, so he can avoid eviction. As a mother with a son living with complex disabilities and mental health challenges I will be forever grateful to Bhavin Bilimoria. Thank you for all that you do and thank you for what you did for my son!”

Team Members:

Karly Wilson, Team Lead, Staff Lawyer

Bhavin Bilimoria, Director of Legal Services, Staff Lawyer

Luis Mayorga, Paralegal

Jieun (Grace) Park, Paralegal

Immigration Law Team

Case Highlights:

Urgent Processing of Children in Family Sponsorship

We represented a refugee sponsoring a large family of children who had been mistakenly omitted on their parent's Permanent Residence application, as their parent had been recovering from a serious medical episode during the Permanent Residence process.

The children had faced threats and safety risks in their parent's absence. We requested urgent processing, documenting the threat with affidavits and supporting letters. With support from a compassionate MP's aide, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) responded quickly, reuniting the children with their parent in Canada in fewer than four months.

Settlement of Family Sponsorship Appeal

The pandemic impacted the availability of services and changed the lives of many. A couple planned to first marry in a video ceremony, and then meet overseas for an in-person ceremony. Fear of the new virus kept them indoors, and then came the pandemic lockdown.

IRCC requires in-person wedding ceremonies, and refused the application despite finding a genuine relationship. On appeal, demonstrating the bonds between the couple's families with documentation of visits, photos and communications, Minister's counsel kindly accepted our request to permitting a "*Tabesh* conversion", processing the couple as conjugal partners, something the Immigration Appeal Division is empowered to grant. The video ceremony marked the beginning of their mutual commitment and, thankfully, a year had passed before their application was successfully accepted for filing – a rare occasion when delays were beneficial.

By the time of our meeting, the family should be reunited in Canada.

Regularizing Status

We helped a mother who has been in Canada without Immigration status since 2017 receive stage 1 approval for Permanent Residence on Humanitarian grounds – after it was determined that her husband could not sponsor her. She had an eight-year old child, making it particularly important that she be allowed to stay in Canada.

Stage One Approval, also known as 'Approval in Principle', is when IRCC agrees that there are sufficient humanitarian and compassionate factors to allow a person to apply for Permanent Residence from within Canada – and that so long as the other

requirements for Permanent Residence (ID verification, passport possession, etc.) are met, they should be granted the status.

Assistance for a couple Appealing an IRCC finding that their marriage was not genuine.

The husband's sad backstory which involved a previous marriage with abusive in-laws, and his nervous demeanor, lead to the original rejection. There was also an element of discrimination in the original decision, as the immigration officer was suspicious of the marriage on account of the wife being (slightly) older than the husband. We helped him organize his story and find witnesses so that he could be persuasive before the Immigration Appeals Division.

Humanitarian and Compassionate Application for Unsuccessful Refugee

A woman lost her refugee claim, despite the Immigration and Refugee Board agreeing/believing her in-laws back home wanted to kill her. The Board had refused her claim because the in-laws threat to kill her was tied to their intention to steal her house, which they were successful in while she was away from the country - thus the Board deemed she was no longer at risk. We helped her apply for Permanent Residence on Humanitarian and Compassionate grounds and received stage 1 PR approval within a few months.

Helping a Client Sometimes Means More than Providing Legal Service

A client who had a failed refugee claim related to domestic violence received stage 1 Humanitarian and Compassionate Permanent Residence approval. This client had lost trust in the legal and immigration systems, so we considered winning her trust as important as getting the approval.

Testimonials from Clients:

"I'm profoundly grateful for the support and generosity that helped my family and me move from Afghanistan to Canada towards the end of 2023. Thanks to the crucial assistance from individuals like [the DVCLS lawyer who helped us], with her supportive clinic and [the MP aide], as well as the IRCC and the Government of Canada, we've started a new chapter here. Your help has led to many positive changes, including educational opportunities, financial stability, a safe place to live and hope for a better future. We are deeply thankful for the kindness that has allowed us to feel safe and welcomed in our new home. Your help has been instrumental in transforming our challenges into stepping stones, fostering a brighter future filled with hope and opportunity. We will forever cherish the warmth and generosity we've experienced on this journey."

“As a journalist, my journey to Canada was motivated by my fight for human rights and the rule of law against oppressive regimes. This journey was fraught with challenges, but the support I received from various organizations, especially from Zachary Morgenstern and the dedicated team at Don Valley Community Legal Services (DVCLS), was instrumental in helping me and my family secure a new life in Canada.

Navigating the complexities of immigration with IRCC was no easy task, particularly due to the legal hurdles surrounding my family’s case. However, Zachary’s professionalism and compassionate approach went far beyond expectations. He provided both exceptional legal expertise and unparalleled emotional support during some of our toughest moments. His unwavering support played a critical role in helping me secure Permanent Residency in Canada.

Zachary not only handled the legal challenges with exceptional skill but also provided immense emotional support to my family. His video calls with my wife, while she was still in Pakistan, were a source of great comfort during a difficult time, especially when she was recovering from severe burns and a back injury. His kindness helped ease our burden during moments of uncertainty.

We are profoundly grateful to Zachary, as well as the entire network of professional and caring individuals at DVCLS, for their unwavering service to the community. I would not hesitate to recommend Zachary and his team to anyone in need of their exceptional legal services.

My family join me in extending our heartfelt thanks to Zachary and DVCLS for their remarkable support in helping us secure Permanent Residency in Canada.”

Team Members:

- Allison Krochak, Team Lead, Staff Lawyer
- Marjorie Hiley, Executive Director, Staff Lawyer
- Zach Morgenstern, Staff Lawyer
- Jennifer Wan, Staff Lawyer



Income Maintenance Team

Case Highlights:

We assisted a client who was eligible for ODSP through the prescribed class as he was eligible for CPP-D. He was asked for documents as part of his financial assessment and he did provide some documents. He was found financially eligible over 6 months later. We assisted him to file an appeal to the Social Benefits Tribunal, ordered up his ODSP file, and assisted him to piece together support for his account (provided through detailed submissions) that his worker never informed him verbally or in writing that his documents were sufficient nor that his file had been closed. His appeal was unsuccessful and we assisted him to file an Application for Reconsideration, which led to another hearing and eventually to a successful appeal.

We assisted a client to file an appeal of an ODSP refusal, but the documents from her family doctor's office were sparse. Her conditions were predominantly related to substance abuse. We were able to obtain her Emergency Room records from various hospitals which clearly confirmed a substance abuse issue. Her application was granted with these documents without her having to attend a hearing.

We assisted a woman with an ODSP appeal after a medical review refusal. We had previously assisted her with receiving ODSP in an earlier appeal. Due to mental health issues, she constantly missed deadlines and could not stay on track during the medical review process. We had to assist her with various time extension requests and kept track of the outcomes. Eventually her medical review appeal was granted without a hearing.

We assisted a woman to file an appeal of an ODSP refusal. She was a newcomer to Canada and was newly diagnosed with mental health conditions so there was not a long history of treatment. We represented her at her hearing and provided assistance so she could explain her history – just before coming to Canada from a country torn apart by war, where she had witnessed extreme violence, she resided in another country where she did not feel safe and two of her immediate family members died due to illness. Her appeal was successful.

Initiative Highlights:

Our Team continues to provide Public Legal Education (PLE) sessions and workshops to community members across our catchment area. We often partner with other local agencies and organizations to provide PLEs to their clients. Our Team also attends monthly Social Assistance Action Committee (SAAC) meetings.

This year we advocated for a fully funded, inclusive and meaningful Canada Disability Benefit. We sent letters to



our Members of Parliament and signed on to the Income Security Advocacy Centre's letter to Minister Freeland and Minister Khera. Christine also did an interview on the Canada Disability Benefit with Beach Metro News which was published in May,

Christine has also joined the GTA Legal Clinic Conference Planning Committee where she has been active in the venue subcommittee work, as well as being one of the two leads on planning the Income Maintenance sessions.

Testimonials from Clients:

"When my ODSP was denied and everything seemed hopeless, Nalini Ramsook staff lawyer has provided highly professional advice and representation for my Tribunal appeal and I no longer have to worry about becoming homeless. I will be forever grateful for Nalini's help."

"Christine Antunes was lovely and very thorough with helping me win my case. She made the process feel straightforward and efficient, and helped remove a lot of the stress it was causing me. I am very happy with how things turned out."

"It was amazing service. I was in constant contact with my representative (Christine). She made me feel at ease as it was very overwhelming."

"Suzannah deserves more-than-five stars for her patience and professionalism."

"Christine Antunes is amazing. Thank you so much for all your help over the last year. Coming into this case I was more stressed than I have ever been. I was confused and not sure, all at a time while I was dealing with and trying to navigate my declining health and limitations. Your advice, knowledge and assistance were invaluable to me, like I can't put into words how helpful you have been throughout this process ... Thank you, Christine! Thank you for helping me get the support I need which has given me the opportunity to continue my education and accomplish my goals despite my illness/disabilities."

Team Members:

Christine Da Costa Antunes, Team Lead, Staff Lawyer
Rana Ismail, Staff Lawyer
Suzanna Li, Paralegal
Nalini Ramsook, Staff Lawyer

Past Team Members:

Sara Nassif, Staff Lawyer

Intake Team

Our Intake Team are typically the first members of our staff to speak with clients. They handle 50-100 calls a day and triage cases. They provide information and legal advice, answer questions, and refer clients to our legal teams or other agencies.

Team Members:

Lucia Henao-Quinones, Team Lead, Paralegal
Anyka Lobo, Paralegal
Cherryann Nurse
Esma Ozbek

Past Team Members:

Neroobha Sivaraman, Paralegal

Administrative Team

The day-to-day operations would not be possible without our fantastic Administration Team. They keep our office running and provide support to our entire staff.

We have also been fortunate to receive funding from the City of Toronto's Investing in Neighbourhoods (IIN) Program. We would like to thank the 2023-24 IIN staff Elisabete Da Silva and Rebecca Kyomuhendo.

Team Members:

Elena Angulo, Interim Office Manager
Javairia Al-Noor, Admin Support

Past Team Members:

Marcia McKenzie, Office Manager
Alicia Charles, Office Admin Assistant
Elisabete Da Silva, Admin Assistant, IIN
Rebecca Kyomuhendo, Admin Assistant, IIN

Students

Thank you to our past and present students for their hard work and contributions.

Articling Student: John Wigle

Pro Bono Students: Ufuoma Akalusi, Celine Tsai, Brian Lu, Ashley Kam

Summer Students: Samantha Campione, Saathana Karunakaran, Kunal Variawa

Social Service Worker Placement Student: Jillian Labay

Finances

Comments from the Chair of DVCLS' Corporate Resources Committee

Hilborn LLP, DVCLS auditors, approved at the 2023 AGM, conducted the 2023/24 audit. Their statement:

“In our opinion, the accompanying financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Organization as at March 31, 2024, and the results of its operations and its cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations”

- Hilborn LLP did not identify any significant quantitative aspects of DVCLS's accounting practices, including accounting policies, accounting estimates, and financial statement disclosures, that require communication.
- They noted that the same revenues were consistent through the year and that our financial instruments show no exposure.
- With respect to our CAAT (Pension Fund) involvement (see note #7), Hilborn LLP agrees with the actuarial report obtained. Their audit finding is that there are no control deficiencies.
- No misstatements were identified, no deficiency of internal control was identified.
- No fraud, no noncompliance with laws or regulations came to light.
- No difficulties were encountered while performing the audit and there are no unresolved disagreements.
- The audited statements show a net fund balance of \$780.
- Financial highlights from the year include a 2% increase in funding from LAO.

As always, we continue to look for efficiencies to reduce expenses.

2023/ 2024 Highlights:

LAO provided the general base funding increase of 2% as of April 1, 2023. We provided staff with a 2% cost of living increase. With a better financial position, later in the year, we were able to approve some staff equity increases, paid as of August 1, 2023, to better align staff salaries with our new salary grid. The clinic will continue this process as additional funding becomes available.

We successfully applied for funding from the Federal Government Recovery Fund. The fund provided for \$400M across the country, affiliated with several agencies (e.g., United Way, Red Cross, The Toronto Foundation). We received \$32K from The Red Cross and used the funds for EDI and ARAO training.

\$452K in additional funding was approved by LAO for our participation in the Hub. This amount augmented the Ministry of Health funding and confirmed our inclusion in the Hub. The funds were invested in a GIC until they will be needed.

Complete audited financial statements are available. Please contact us to request a copy.

DON VALLEY COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES

Statement of Financial Position

March 31, 2024

	General Fund	Legal Disbursements Fund	Capital Fund	Renovations Fund	Non-LAO Donations Fund	Investing in Neighbourhoods Fund	Total
	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
ASSETS							
Current Assets							
Cash and cash equivalents (note 3)	30,804	12,458	-	450,000	4,380	-	497,642
Accounts receivable	11,353	-	-	-	-	-	11,353
HST recoverable	16,334	93	-	-	-	-	16,427
Prepaid expenses	35,862	-	-	-	-	-	35,862
	94,353	12,551	-	450,000	4,380	-	561,284
Capital assets (note 4)	-	-	19,581	-	-	-	19,581
Total assets	94,353	12,551	19,581	450,000	4,380	-	580,865
LIABILITIES							
Current Liabilities							
Accounts payable (note 6)	79,940	-	-	-	-	-	79,940
Inter-fund payable (receivable)	13,633	1,930	-	(2,520)	(13,043)	-	-
	93,573	1,930	-	(2,520)	(13,043)	-	79,940
FUNDS BALANCE	780	10,621	19,581	452,520	17,423	-	500,925
Total liabilities and funds balance	94,353	12,551	19,581	450,000	4,380	-	580,865

The accompanying notes are an integral part of these financial statements.

Approved on behalf of the Board:

Director
Don Valley Community Legal Services

DON VALLEY COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES

Statement of Operations and Funds Balance

Year ended March 31, 2024

	General Fund	Legal Disbursements Fund	Capital Fund	Renovations Fund	Non-LAO Donations Fund	Investing in Neighbourhoods Fund	Total
	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
Revenues							
Legal Aid Ontario							
-direct receipts	2,697,636	18,700	-	452,520	-	-	3,168,856
-indirect receipts (note 7)	172,287	-	-	-	-	-	172,287
Recovered from clients	-	6,409	-	-	-	-	6,409
City of Toronto	-	-	-	-	-	47,283	47,283
Employment and Social Development	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Canada	9,877	-	-	-	-	-	9,877
Canadian Red Cross	-	-	-	-	29,008	-	29,008
Other income	41	-	-	-	510	-	551
	2,879,841	25,109	-	452,520	29,518	47,283	3,434,271
Expenses							
Salaries	1,996,503	-	-	-	-	43,224	2,039,727
Benefits (note 8)	334,325	-	-	-	-	4,059	338,384
Professional dues	28,040	-	-	-	-	-	28,040
Travel	4,798	-	-	-	-	-	4,798
Communications	14,141	-	-	-	-	-	14,141
Accommodations	171,592	-	-	-	-	-	171,592
Equipment	4,333	-	-	-	-	-	4,333
Library	4,965	-	-	-	-	-	4,965
Supplies and services	31,875	-	-	-	783	-	32,658
Professional fees	43,943	-	-	-	15,965	-	59,908
Indirect payments (note 7)	172,287	-	-	-	-	-	172,287
Legal disbursements	-	26,136	-	-	-	-	26,136
Amortization	-	-	14,600	-	-	-	14,600
	2,806,802	26,136	14,600	-	16,748	47,283	2,911,569
Excess of revenues over expenses (expenses over revenues)	73,039	(1,027)	(14,600)	452,520	12,770	-	522,702
Funds balance (deficit), beginning of year	(72,259)	11,648	34,181	-	4,653	-	(21,777)
Funds balance, end of year	780	10,621	19,581	452,520	17,423	-	500,925

Thank you!

