Don Valley
Community Legal Services

2024-25 ANNUAL REPORT

www.DonValleyLegal.ca

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Joint Message from the Chair of the Board and Executive Director

This year we moved into the new Thorncliffe Park Community Hub. As with every new space, it has taken a bit of time for DVCLS to adjust to our new location.

We are working closely with our Hub partners as we navigate the increased operating costs and explore ways to collaborate with each other to the benefit of mutual clients. While we are still in the first year, it is evident that there is a lot of good will between the partners as we look for new avenues of collaboration.

The past year has seen many challenges as we prepared for the big move. We utilized our satellite office at the Ralph Thornton Community Centre (RTCC) as our administration centre. Most of the Intake Team and casework staff worked remotely, both in dealing with clients and with assisting with intakes. We did have our Document Services on Thursdays at the RTCC and they were well attended. This experience has led us to appreciate the need for balance between in person legal assistance and remote work. Both come with positives and negatives and both need to be utilized in order to meet the ever-changing needs of our clients and the communities we serve.

We had anticipated a surge in the need for legal assistance when we relocated to the Hub. We fully opened our services in the Hub in February 2025. Since that time, the demand for legal assistance has increased tremendously and it threatens to overwhelm our scarce human resources. As a result, we are repositioning how we approach in person legal assistance. We are revising the way we handle requests and are moving to an appointment style system except for emergency cases. It is to be expected that over time there will be a need to make other adjustments as we work closely with our partners to find the best methods to assist our mutual clients.

DVCLS is greatly appreciative of the financial support of our funder, Legal Aid Ontario, as we adjust to the additional costs that have arisen from the operations of this Hub. It is to be expected that there would be some financial surprises by relocating here. We are hopeful that we can adjust our budget to cover these additional expenses while continuing to offer first class legal services to our clients, our agency partners, and the communities we serve. Our greatest strength has been our experienced and dedicated staff who have met all of the challenges of relocating, adjusting to new legal challenges, and increased workloads. Senior Management, the Board of Directors and the DVCLS staff will continue to work towards the achievement of reasonable workload goals while maintaining our high standard of work.

Looking towards the future, we are preparing a strategic planning process over the next few months so that we can formulate a comprehensive strategic plan that will encompass both our short-term goals (one year) and develop ways to achieve our longer strategic goals (1-5 years). To do so, we will utilize the census data that our funder has provided to us and seek information from our community partners as to their

ideas for future areas of legal assistance and how to address the current gaps in our services. Such a process involves the balance of individual legal needs with the ability to address the systemic legal issues facing the communities we serve.

It is with pride that we look at what we have accomplished in our public legal education (PLE) programs, our community development activities, and our advocacy work. Our PLE sessions encompass all of the areas of law that we handle. For some topics that we know are of interest to our community, we have private bar lawyers volunteer to lead those sessions. Our community development work continues to increase under the capable leadership of our Community Development Worker, Laura Anonen. We participate in all major community events within our catchment area and utilize volunteers, our Community Services Committee, our staff, and members of our Board of Directors. It has been a wonderful experience to participate in so many events.

A major achievement over the past year as been the introduction of the Renovictions Bylaw for the City of Toronto that came into force on July 31 2025. This bylaw is the result of years of dedicated advocacy work by our clinic, in particular our Housing Law Team and former Team Lead Karly Wilson, our Community Development Worker, Laura Anonen, and our Director of Legal Services, Bhavin Bilimoria. They worked with local municipal politicians and other advocates and organizations to develop a bylaw that would reduce the number of renovictions. It is already evident that this bylaw has decreased the number of tenants being forced to leave affordable housing due to renoviction requests by private landlords. We are hopeful to build on this achievement over the coming years in order to protect existing affordable housing.

We continue to work to integrate anti-racism, anti-oppression, equity, diversity and inclusion principles into our policies and our actions. Our permanent Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression (ARAO) Committee continues to work to achieve the work plans that were part of our ARAO policy. Our revived Governance Committee is reviewing all of our clinic policies to ensure their relevancy and to ensure that ARAO values are incorporated. We support the ACLCO province wide program to educate clinic management and members of Boards of Directors on ARAO principles and values.

We thank everyone for attending our 2025 Annual General Meeting. We hope you will appreciate the work that our clinic staff have accomplished over the past year with clients and with our community endeavours. We thank you for your support of the activities of our clinic now and in the future.

Sincerely,

Kirk Cooper
Chair of the Board of Directors

Marjorie Hiley
Executive Director

Thank You to our 2024-25 Board of Directors

Kirk Cooper, Chair
Cenobar Parker, Vice-Chair
Martin Sonne, Treasurer
Vanessa Rose, Secretary
Lucy Becker, Director
Sandra Bussin, Director
John Campey, Director
Ali Meghani, Director
George Nikolov, Director
Jenna Seguin, Director
Shelina Shivji, Director

Message from the Chair of Legal Aid Ontario

I want to once again congratulate Marjorie and her team at the Don Valley Community Legal Services clinic, for the innovation they have demonstrated in preparing for, and relocating to the Thorncliffe Park Community Hub. This move facilitates significantly improved collaboration with the other Hub participants, and in so doing, provides a full compliment of community services, in addition to the legal service provided by the clinic, are available at the same location for the members of the local community.

Relocating to the Hub ensures that those who access the services offered by DVCLS and are in need of other services offered by health and social services agencies, can easily and conveniently be referred to those who provide the additional services or support required.

My best wishes to the team as this new chapter in the critical work they provide, unfolds.

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

Community Services Committee Report

Our Community Services Committee (CSC) continues to meet regularly where members discuss issues that affect 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.

Major issues the CSC has been focussed on include affordable housing, development, the impacts of government legislation on our clients, and the Ontario Line. The Ontario Line will run through half of our clinic's catchment area, from Flemingdon Park down to East Harbour. There are also several transit-oriented communities (TOCs) planned at stations along the line. These TOCs will include new developments and we have yet to hear of any affordable housing targets. We are concerned about the impacts these TOCs could have on communities like Thorncliffe Park in the future.

Our committee members also focus on community-led events and outreach. This year we attended several events in different neighbourhoods and many inside the Hub. The TNO Summer Festival is always a fun time where we meet hundreds of residents.

Thank you to our current CSC members, Sandra Bussin, John Campey, Geoff Kettel, Jenna Seguin, Miyadah Subrati, Rhiannon Thomas and Vanessa Rose. And thank you to our past members Hafiz Khan, Nisha Iqbal and Yan Feng.

Sincerely,

Ali Meghani
Chair, Community Services Committee

Laura and Miyadah at a community event in the Hub

DVCLS Team at the Neighbours Together on Canada Day event

Corporate Resources Committee Report

This past fiscal year was marked by continued financial prudence, major capital investment, and a shift in how the clinic system will be funded in the years ahead. The Corporate Resources Committee worked closely with the Executive Director and senior leadership to oversee the organization's financial health, infrastructure development, and evolving funding landscape.

Financial Position and Performance

As at March 31, 2025, Don Valley Community Legal Services reported a total funds balance of $534,482, up from $500,925 the previous year. The organization achieved an overall surplus of $33,557, reflecting sound budget management and operational discipline. This year also saw the capitalization of $452,000 in leasehold improvements following DVCLS' relocation to its new office within the Thorncliffe Park Community Hub – an investment that strengthens the organization's long-term service delivery capacity.

Cash and cash equivalents ended the year at $107,921, following the planned redemption of a term deposit. The organization carries no outstanding debt and maintains a healthy liquidity position.

Audit Opinion

The financial statements were independently audited, and we are pleased to report that the auditors issued an unqualified opinion. They confirmed that the financial statements "present fairly, in all material respects," the financial position and results of operations of DVCLS for the year ended March 31, 2025, in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations.

Funding Developments and Strategic Considerations

This year also saw important developments in the funding model for community legal clinics. The introduction of the Malatest framework by Legal Aid Ontario will see future allocations determined using seven standardized indicators. While specific catchment data for DVCLS is expected in the fall, we have been advised that there will be no funding reduction, and any increases will be based on how our region scores within the new framework. This data-driven approach will also inform DVCLS' strategic planning later this year, with targeted engagement of community partners to assess service gaps and future legal needs.

Financial Statements

The Statements of Financial Position, Operations, and Funds Balance can be found on the next page. Audited financial statements are available upon request. Please contact the Executive Director, Marjorie Hiley, if you would like a copy of the full audited statement package.

Acknowledgment

On behalf of the committee, I wish to thank the Executive Director, finance team, and Board colleagues for their dedication and stewardship. As DVCLS navigates these changes and opportunities, we remain committed to ensuring the organization is positioned to serve the community effectively and sustainably.

Respectfully submitted,

Martin Sonne
Chair, Corporate Resources Committee

Financial Statements

DON VALLEY COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES

Statement of Financial Position

March 31, 2025

	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)	102,142	799	-	-	4,980	-	**107,921**
HST recoverable	13,148	100	-	-	-	-	**13,248**
Prepaid expenses	36,287	-	-	-	-	-	**36,287**
	151,577	899	-	-	4,980	-	**157,456**
Capital assets (note 4)	-	-	410,915	-	-	-	**410,915**
Total assets	151,577	899	410,915	-	4,980	-	**568,371**
LIABILITIES							
Current Liabilities							
Accounts payable (note 6)	33,889	-	-	-	-	-	**33,889**
Inter-fund payable (receivable)	16,435	(8,926)	-	-	(7,509)	-	**-**
	50,324	(8,926)	-	-	(7,509)	-	**33,889**
FUNDS BALANCE	101,253	9,825	410,915	-	12,489	-	**534,482**
Total liabilities and funds balance	151,577	899	410,915	-	4,980	-	**568,371**

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

Approved on behalf of the Board:

Director
Don Valley Community Legal Services

Draft Statement Subject to Revision

DON VALLEY COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES

Statement of Operations and Funds Balance

Year ended March 31, 2025	General Fund $	Legal Disbursements Fund $	Capital Fund $	Renovations Fund $	Non-LAO Donations Fund $	Investing in Neighbourhoods Fund $	Total $
Revenues							
Legal Aid Ontario							
-direct receipts	2,873,231	18,700	-	-	-	-	**2,891,931**
-indirect receipts (note 7)	208,706	-	-	-	-	-	**208,706**
Recovered from clients	-	5,239	-	-	-	-	**5,239**
City of Toronto	-	-	-	-	-	7,548	**7,548**
Employment and Social Development Canada	13,205	-	-	-	-	-	**13,205**
Canadian Red Cross	-	-	-	-	10,431	-	**10,431**
Other income (note 3)	80	-	-	12,917	673	-	**13,670**
	3,095,222	23,939	-	12,917	11,104	7,548	**3,150,730**
Expenses							
Salaries	2,143,336	-	-	-	-	6,903	**2,150,239**
Benefits (note 8)	361,098	-	-	-	-	645	**361,743**
Professional dues	30,599	-	-	-	-	-	**30,599**
Travel	12,169	-	-	-	-	-	**12,169**
Communications	20,157	-	-	-	-	-	**20,157**
Accommodations	167,946	-	-	-	-	-	**167,946**
Equipment	8,170	-	-	-	-	-	**8,170**
Library	5,901	-	-	-	-	-	**5,901**
Supplies and services	37,548	-	-	-	73	-	**37,621**
Professional fees	12,556	-	-	-	15,965	-	**28,521**
Indirect payments (note 7)	208,706	-	-	-	-	-	**208,706**
Legal disbursements	-	24,735	-	-	-	-	**24,735**
Loss on disposal of capital assets	-	-	417	-	-	-	**417**
Amortization	-	-	60,249	-	-	-	**60,249**
	3,008,186	24,735	60,666	-	16,038	7,548	**3,117,173**
Excess of revenues over expenses (expenses over revenues)	87,036	(796)	(60,666)	12,917	(4,934)	-	**33,557**
Transfer to Capital Fund (note 4)	-	-	452,000	(452,000)	-	-	**-**
Transfer to General Fund (note 4)	13,437	-	-	(13,437)	-	-	**-**
Funds balance, beginning of year	780	10,621	19,581	452,520	17,423	-	**500,925**
Funds balance, end of year	101,253	9,825	410,915	-	12,489	-	**534,482**

Draft Statement Subject to Revision

Governance Committee Report

The Governance Committee was initially established in 2023 under the guidance of our former Treasurer, Keith Persaud. Due to the challenges of relocating into the Thorncliffe Park Community Hub, its activities have been in abeyance for the past two years.

The Committee has been rejuvenated and is comprised of myself as the Chair, our Treasurer, two other Board members, and on an ad hoc basis the Chair of the Board. It meets as required, generally every two months.

The new terms of reference state that the Governance Committee is an advisory body reporting directly to the Board of Directors. It is empowered to: recommend governance policies and procedures; lead Board and Director evaluations; oversee nominations and succession planning; and engage external advisors, where appropriate, with Board approval. It does not have decision-making authority unless expressly delegated by the Board.

Currently, the Committee is engaging in a review of all of the policies of DVCLS in order to ensure they are relevant and in accordance with our Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression (ARAO) policies and work plans. It is also revising a Board performance and evaluation form and reviewing a matrix for Board recruitment that outlines the necessary skill matrices of candidates for the Board.

I am very grateful for the dedication of the members of the Committee: Martin Sonne, John Campey, Shelina Shivji and Kirk Cooper, and the assistance of senior management, Marjorie Hiley and Bhavin Bilimoria. It is our hope that this Committee will help to improve the governance capabilities of our Board of Directors and provide inclusive governance practices that reflect the values and strategic direction of the clinic.

Yours truly,

Lucy Becker
Chair, Governance Committee

Director of Legal Services' Report

"The only constant in life is change" – Heraclitus

January 24, 2025 marks more than simply the day Don Valley Community Legal Services moved into the Thorncliffe Park Community Hub: it marks the day we began changing the way we deliver legal services to the community, for the better.

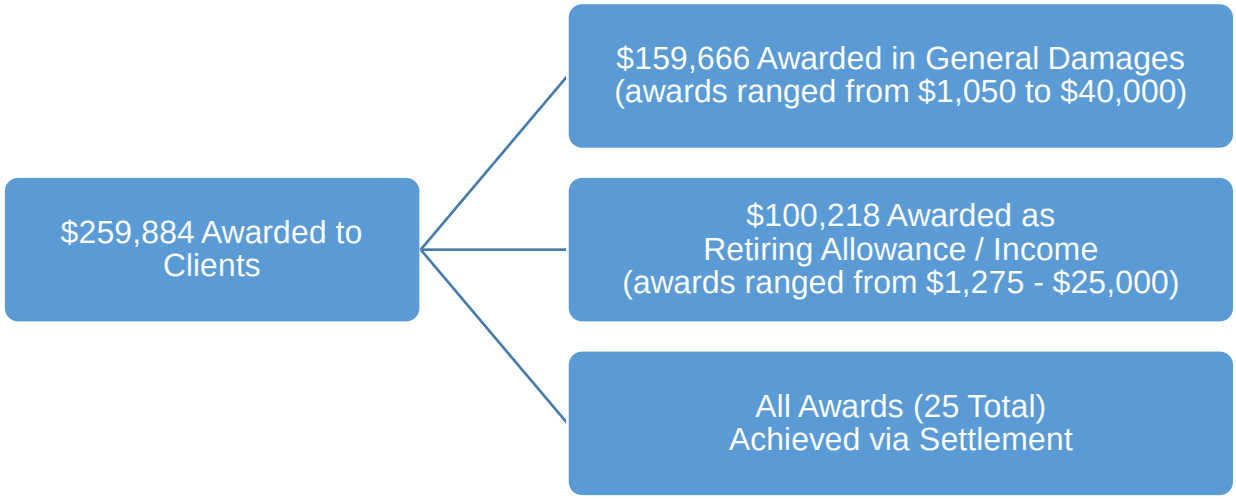
Prior to this day, our intake services were delivered exclusively over the telephone, through our intake line. While this process was initially occasioned by the restrictions of the COVID-19 Pandemic, it was ultimately necessitated by us having to vacate our previous leasehold before moving into our new one.

However, once we settled into our new leasehold at the Hub, we fully embraced the community by providing in-person, intake services through walk-ins on Monday and Tuesday afternoons. The impact of this change was seismic. From March through to the end of September 2025, we averaged approximately 37 walk-in intakes each week.

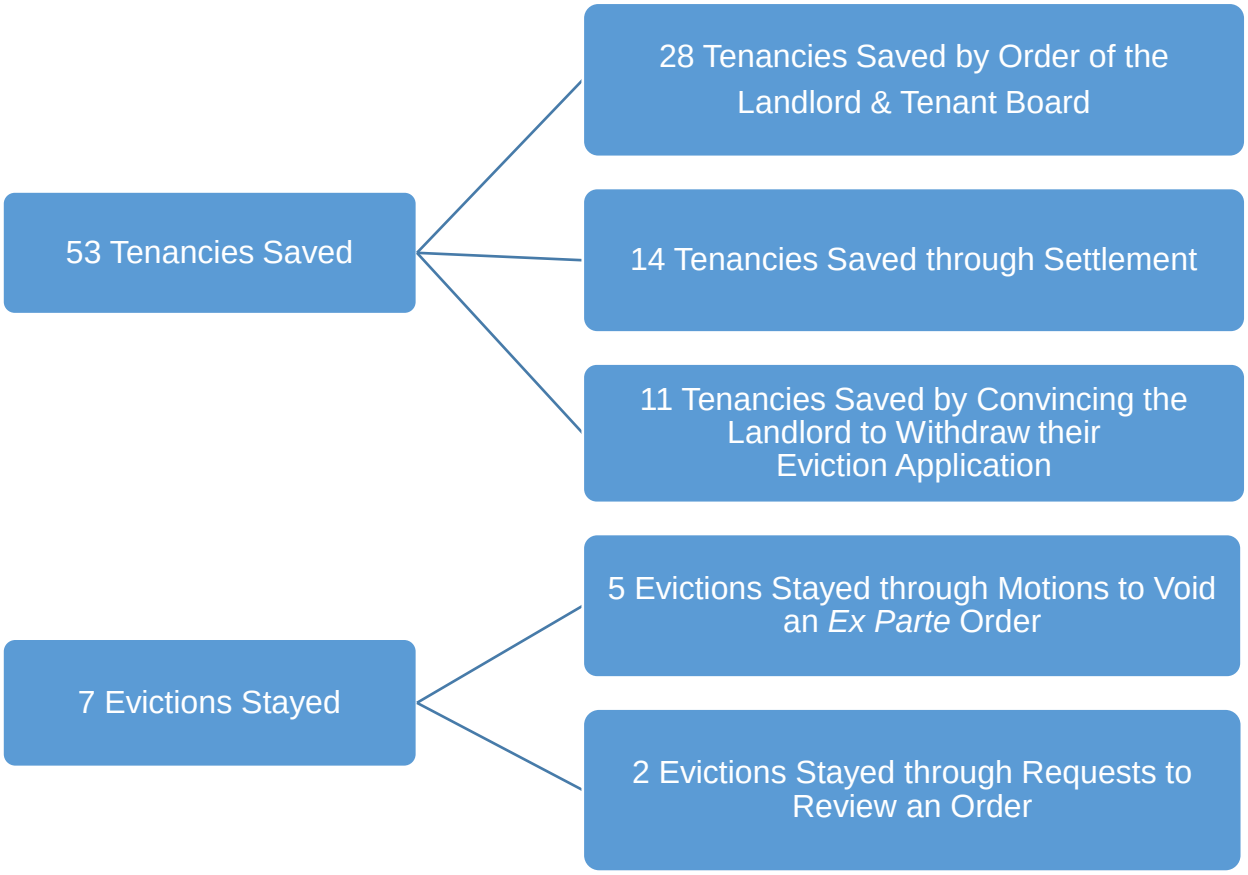
In order to help our Intake Team cope with the pressures of this change, the decision was made in April 2025 to close our intake line on Wednesday mornings, in addition to Friday afternoons and during walk-ins. Even though our intake line was therefore closed for three afternoons and one morning each week, the number of calls into our intake line still increased by approximately 4.5% since our last Annual General Meeting (AGM). Similarly, the number of new cases opened also increased by approximately 4.5%.

This ever growing demand for legal services has taken a tremendous toll on our most valuable resource: our staff. We are therefore changing our in-person, intake services from a walk-in model to an appointment based system in October 2025. In doing so, our goal is to protect our staff from burnout by establishing reasonable workloads, and thereby enable them to continue achieving access to justice for our community. To this end, the following metrics showcase some – but not all – of the successful case outcomes from each of our service teams, since our last AGM.

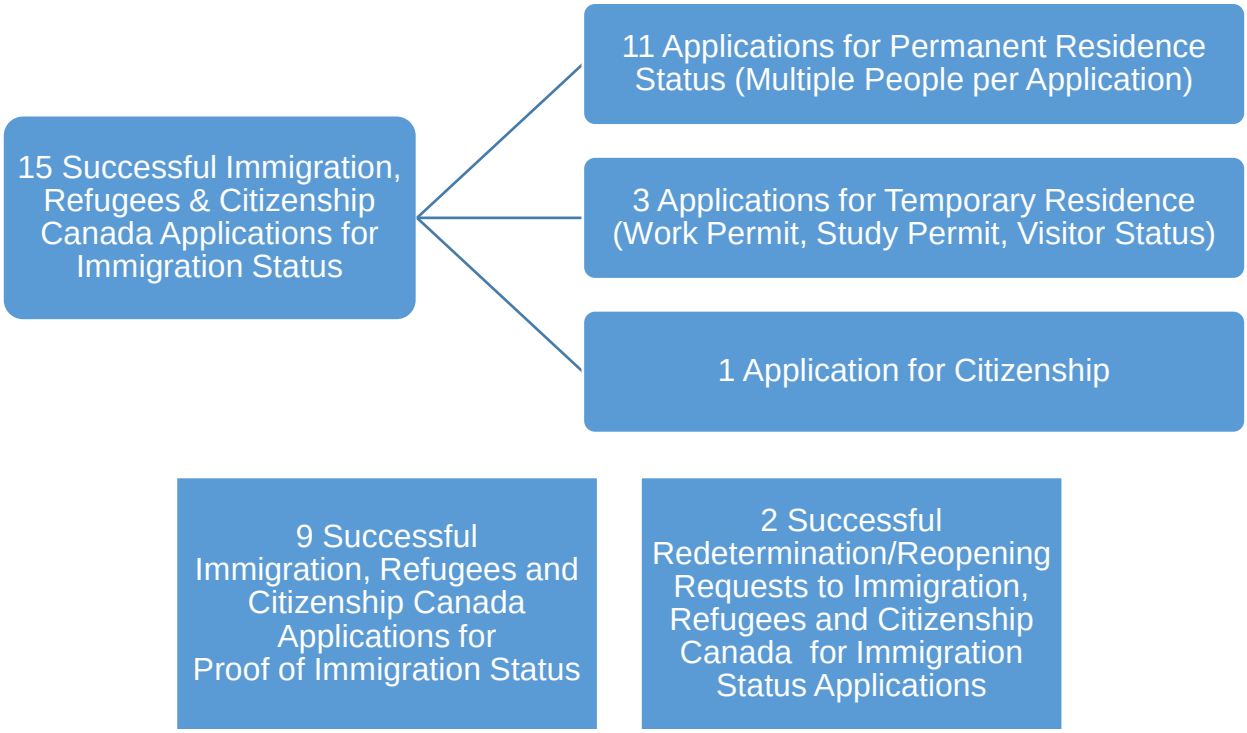
Employment Law Team



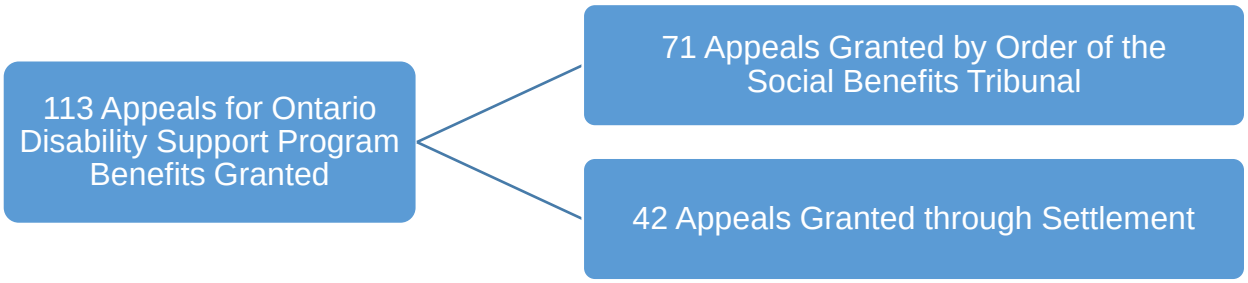
Housing Law Team



Immigration Law Team



Income Maintenance Team



In addition to these successful case outcomes, our staff have also worked tirelessly this past year with our local politicians, community partners, tenant associations, resident councils and inter-agency networks on public legal education, law reform and community development initiatives. The City of Toronto's recently enacted Rental Renovation Licence Bylaw, which curtails dubious renovictions by nefarious landlords, is but one example of how our staff's dedicated and strategic advocacy, coupled with effective coalition building, helped bring about a tangible change in the law.

In order to help tenants who are facing eviction in our community access immediate, case management supports (*i.e.* non-legal), we positioned ourselves to become, and are now a direct referral source for, the City of Toronto's Eviction Prevention in the

Community (EPIC) Program. As the housing crisis moves from bad to worse, our partnership with EPIC has enabled us to save many tenancies by addressing the tenant's social needs, together with their legal issue.

This approach marks a notable change to the manner in which we deliver legal services to the community. It also happens to align with the mission of the Hub: provide innovative, integrated services to the community, and drive positive neighbourhood change. By integrating our legal services with the services of our Hub partners, our goal is to not only provide holistic services and wrap around supports to the community, but to collectively advocate against the conditions that give rise to their poverty. To this end, we are actively cultivating referral pathways between us and our community partners in the Hub, with the goal being to sew mental health and social work supports into the fabric of our legal services.

Another notable change to the manner in which we deliver legal services to the community is the pop-up legal clinics we ran in the Crescent Town Club in December 2024, and again in September 2025. By bringing our legal services directly to the community instead of asking the community to come to us, the goal is to make our legal services more accessible to all parts of our clinic's catchment area. To assist us with this goal, we have recently entered into a Collaborative Program Agreement with the Toronto Public Library, thereby providing us with a venue for not only future pop-up legal clinics, but also for public legal education workshops.

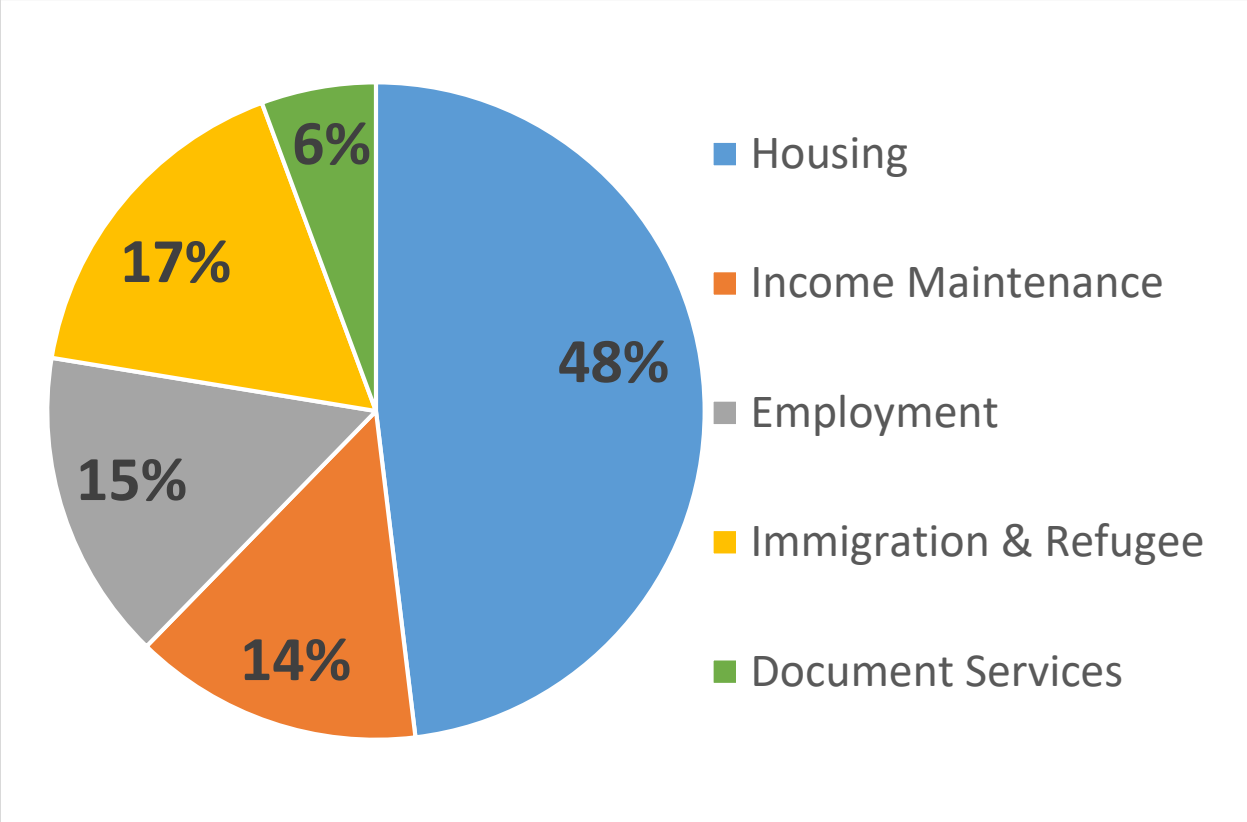
In the coming year, we will undertake the planning of a new, five-year strategic plan and with it will come even more positive changes to the delivery of our legal services. Of course, no positive change could be possible without the hard work and dedication of our staff, the leadership of our Board of Directors, and the trusted support of our funder, Legal Aid Ontario.

Thank You,

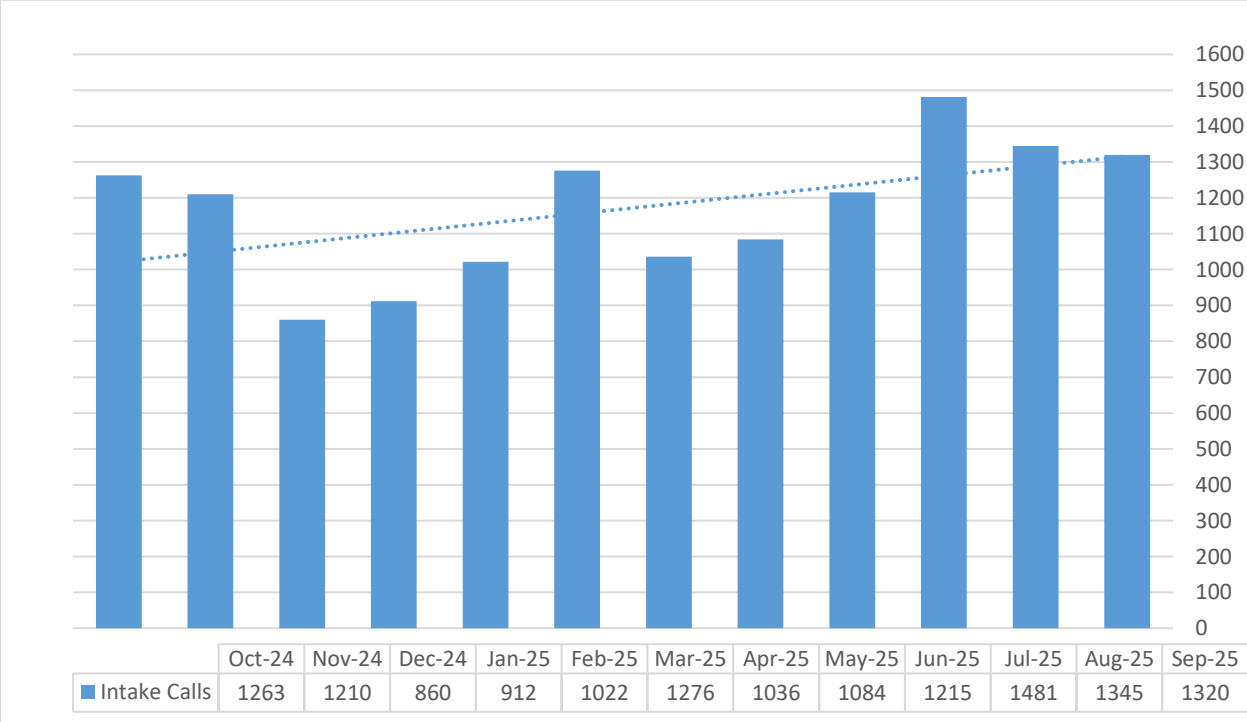
Bhavin Bilimoria
Director of Legal Services

2024-25 Statistics

Percentage of Cases Opened by Core Areas of Law: October 1, 2024 – September 30, 2025



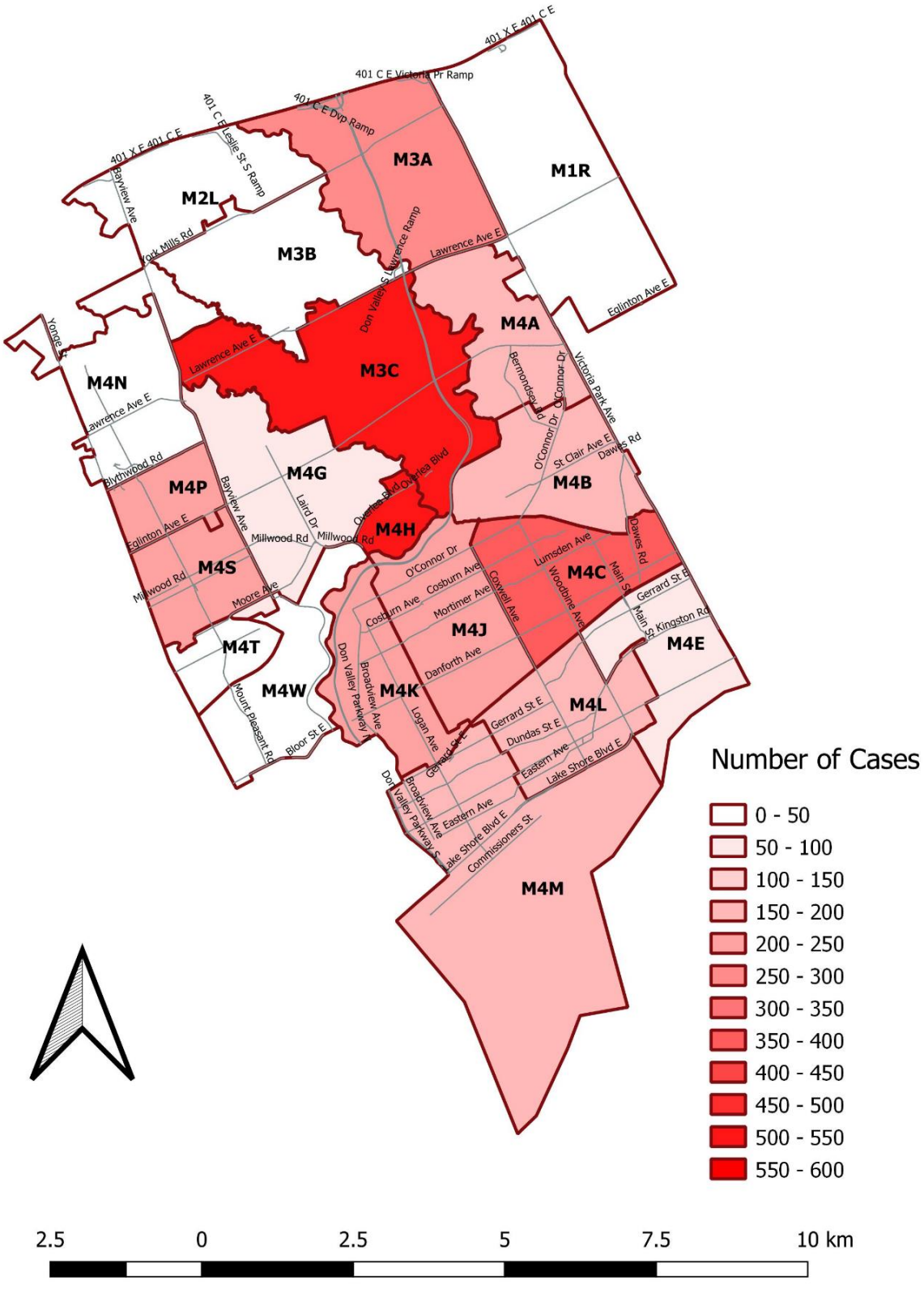
Number of Calls Received on Intake Line per Month: October 1, 2024 – September 30, 2025



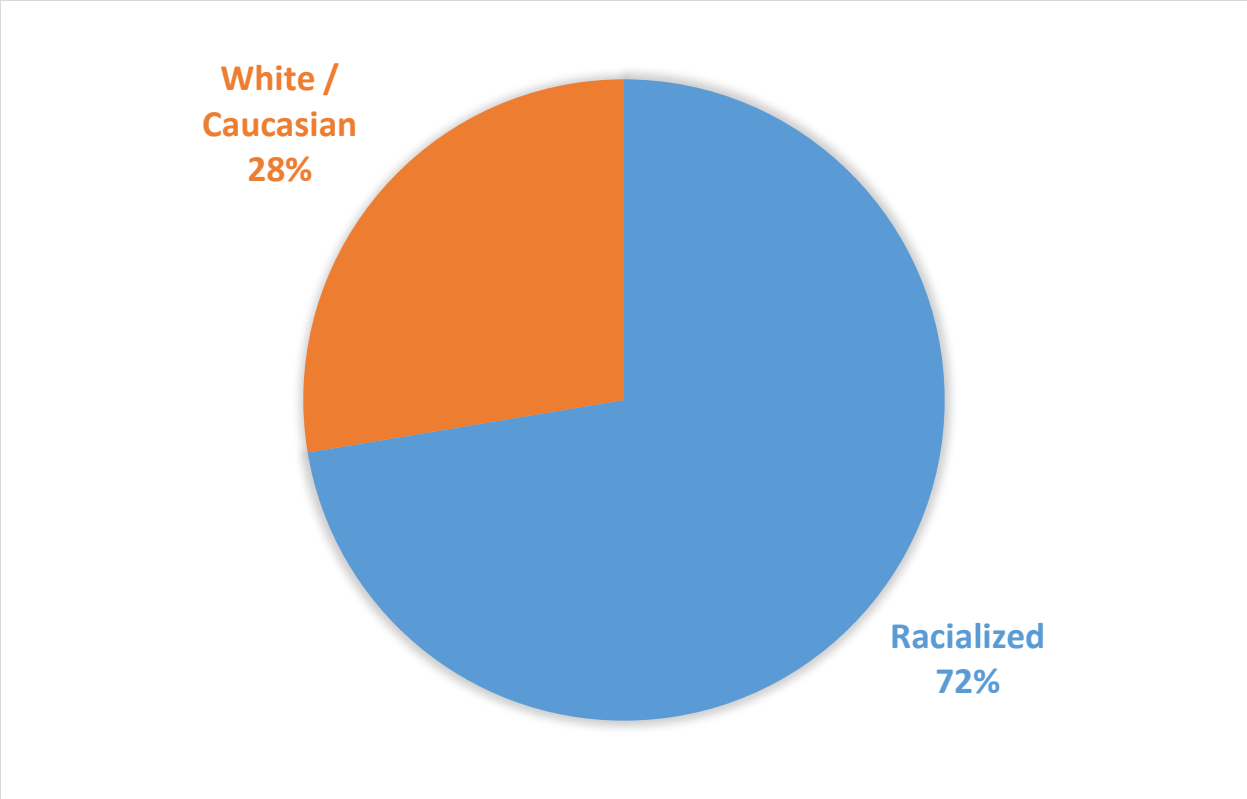
	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25	Jul-25	Aug-25	Sep-25
Intake Calls	1263	1210	860	912	1022	1276	1036	1084	1215	1481	1345	1320

Total Number of Calls Received on Intake Line: 14,024

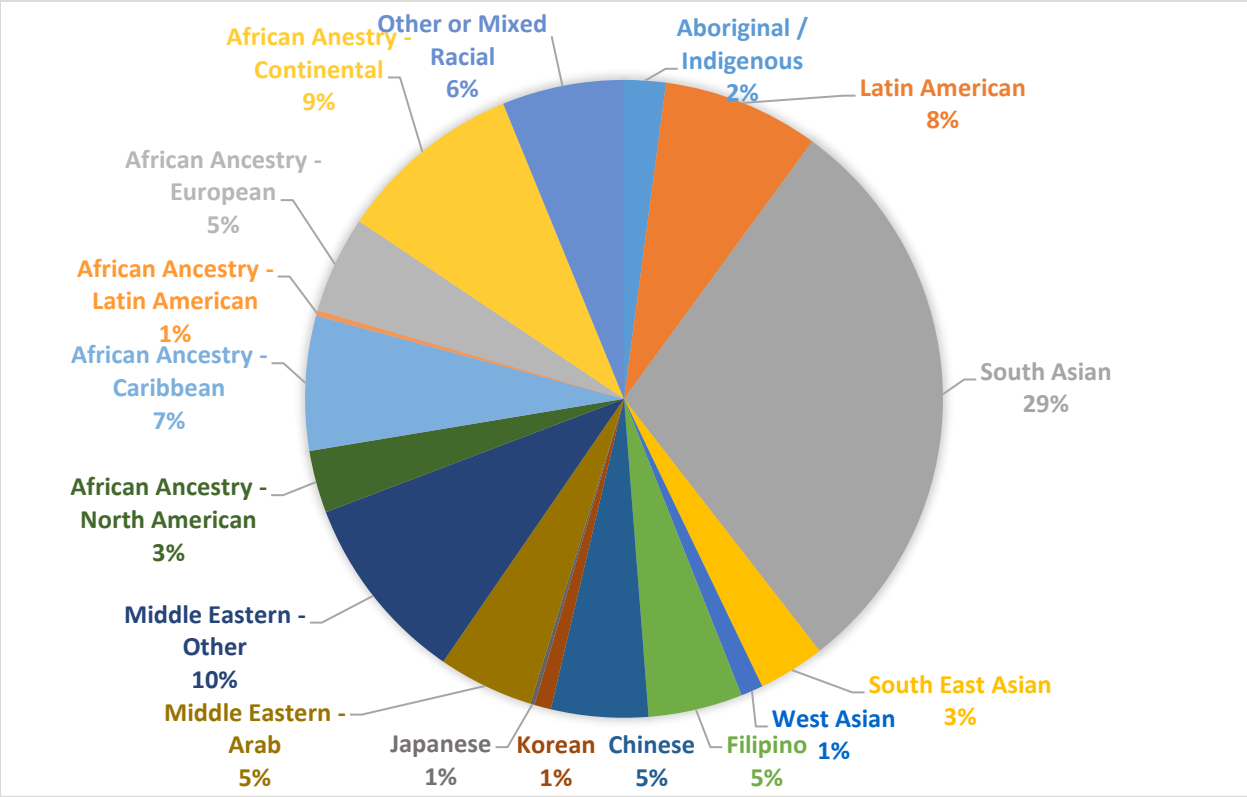
Cases Opened by Clinic Region: October 1, 2024 – September 30, 2025



Self-Identified, Ethno-Racial Demographics of Clients Served: October 1, 2024 to September 30, 2025



Self-Identified, Ethno-Racial Demographics of Racialized Clients Served: October 1, 2024 to September 30, 2025



Community Development Report

It has been a busy year for community development at DVCLS. Our legal clinic continues to be active in the communities we serve and our Community Development Worker, Laura Anonen, is involved in various community groups throughout our catchment area. We receive frequent requests for public legal education (PLE) sessions and we greatly appreciate participating in events and town halls hosted by our elected officials and other agencies.

Moving into the new Thorncliffe Park Community Hub has allowed us more space and resources to meet the needs of our communities. We can easily book rooms for tenant meetings or community groups, and we now have plenty of space for resources for all of the different events we attend. Community members have also been using the Hub as a third space, which has improved our interaction and outreach with everyone.

Our community development initiatives also include civic engagement. We are part of the Flemingdon Thorncliffe Inter Agency Network (FTIAN), and Laura co-chairs the FTIAN Community and Civic engagement Committee. Earlier this year we had both a provincial election and a federal election, which meant helping to organize four different election forums. We invited the candidates to participate in the forums where community members could submit questions in advance around different issues affecting their community. We held forums in Thorncliffe Park, Flemingdon Park and Crescent Town.

We also participated in a City of Toronto Budget Coalition with Social Planning Toronto and other organizations to advocate for more funding for programs and services that our clients use. Laura provided a session at a Social Planning Toronto online event on programs and services for tenants and why it is so important the City continues to increase funding. We can directly see how improved services benefit our clients.

We continue to work with tenants across our catchment during a worsening housing crisis. We joined the tenants of 500 Dawes Road for a site visit with Mayor Olivia Chow in July. We were pleased to see her commit to the City taking remedial action at the building – a building where we receive numerous cases. We also continue to assist the tenants of 65 Thorncliffe Park Drive and connected them with the Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations (FMTA). They have organized their own tenants' association and we have helped them host tenant meetings at the Hub. Above Guideline Increases (AGIs) are impacting many buildings in our catchment and we are looking at different ways we can assist tenants facing AGIs. We do not handle AGI cases, but we can help

provide legal information, organizing capacity, meeting spaces and more so that tenants can come together and try to fight unfair rent increases.

Laura has also been speaking at several conferences the past year about the renovictions bylaw and advocacy at the municipal level, sharing how advocacy led to the new bylaw. She spoke at the Low Income Energy Network Conference last November, at the Feed Ontario Conference this June, and attended the National Right to Housing Conference in Ottawa in May. She has been building our network with other organizations doing similar work on tenant issues, housing and the affordability crisis.

We hosted two pop-up legal clinics in Crescent Town, one last December and one this September. Crescent Town is a community with many tenants and newcomers on the eastern border of our catchment area. It is important we maintain ties to the community and ensure residents know about DVCLS and our services. Sometimes we need to meet clients where they are to better serve them. We look forward to planning future pop-up clinics in Crescent Town and other neighbourhoods.

We continue to improve our communications, which was greatly needed as we navigated the move into the Hub and provided walk-in hours earlier this year. We are now on Instagram where we can cross-promote information and events with other organizations and community groups. Follow us at @donvalleycls. We also post legal information articles each month on our website and send out a bi-monthly e-newsletter.

This year we formalized a collaborative program agreement with the Toronto Public Library so that we can provide workshops and other initiatives in their branches within our catchment. We look forward to providing more workshops and potential pop-up legal clinics with our local libraries. We also hosted a tour of our office and the Hub for staff from the different branches so they could learn more about our services and how we can work together to serve clients.

We are also fortunate to have amazing volunteers who help with our outreach and at community events. Thank you to our volunteers Andrew Holownych, Harima Razban, Nathalie Nellis and Raasikh-Wasiq!

We look forward to planning new initiatives and projects in our upcoming strategic planning.

Employment Law Team

Over the last 12 months the Employment Law Team has undergone significant changes while continuing to fiercely advocate for our clients' rights in the workplace.

In terms of personnel changes, we sadly bid farewell to Yolanda Song, a dedicated member of the team since 2023, and Kanika Gupta, who joined the team on a 4-month contract this summer. On the bright side, we are thrilled to welcome back our Team Lead, Richa Oza. Richa is returning from a leave during which she completed her Masters at Osgoode Hall Law School. Our other two lawyers, John Wigle and Cosimo Morin, both completed their first years with DVCLS over the last 12 months and are looking forward to further developing DVCLS' employment law practice in the years to come.

We continue to work with clients across all of East Toronto, both within the DVCLS catchment and within the catchments of four other legal clinics through the Toronto East Employment and Immigration Legal Services (TEEILS) program. Our work includes many types of employment law issues such as wrongful dismissals, violations of employment standards legislation, human rights issues, employment insurance denials, and COVID-19 benefit overpayments. Our work brings us to many different courts and tribunals, including: Small Claims Court, Superior Court, Divisional Court, the Court of Appeal, Federal Court, the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario, and the Ontario Labour Relations Board.

Case Highlights:

In the last year, we obtained $259,884.36 in unpaid wages, wrongful dismissal damages, human rights damages, and other entitlements on behalf of our clients. Below are some highlights from our work this past year.

John represented an elderly man who was terminated by his employer when he complained about breaches of his employment contract. His employer then tried to coerce him into accepting a termination package that would have severely limited his entitlements without first having an opportunity to speak with a lawyer. Luckily, the client was savvy enough to ignore his employer's threats and contacted our clinic for help. Through a series of demand letters, we were able to quickly negotiate a settlement of over $25,000 within months of his termination.

Cosimo represented two older, racialized women who had worked for the same employer for over 8 years. Their employer terminated both of them, allegedly for cause, for breach of an employer purchase policy. No investigation into the incidents took place and the employer terminated them without providing any form of payment. With Cosimo's assistance, both were able to draw the employer's attention to the unfounded nature of the employer's cause allegations and each received settlements of over $16,000.

The team also helped multiple clients to fight claims that they had wrongly received COVID-19 benefits payments in the last year. In many of these cases, the clients were newcomers to Canada with limited English-language skills who applied for COVID-19 benefits, sometimes with the encouragement of the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) itself, and were then told years later to either prove their eligibility or repay over $10,000. Through written submissions, speaking with CRA agents, and litigation at the Federal Court, we have been able to send multiple cases back for reconsideration and establish our clients' eligibility, thereby reducing or even eliminating their debts to the CRA.

In November 2025, DVCLS will be appearing before the Divisional Court in the judicial review of a decision of the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario (HRTO) where the Tribunal dismissed our client's case on the basis that the HRTO did not have jurisdiction to hear his application. The case raises fundamental concerns about access to justice for applicants to the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario – indeed, six different organisations have been granted leave to intervene in the hearing of the judicial review.

Testimonials from Clients:

> "Cosimo has been an exceptional lawyer from the time he took on my case. He has integrity, compassion, is mindful and genuinely has passion for the career he has chosen. The last couple of years have been very difficult for me and my family. Cosimo made sure all my questions were answered, I understood the process, updating me with new information about my case, keeping his word and going above and beyond. He really is a one in a million employee and takes pride in his work. My case has been settled and I've been very blessed to have him in my corner till the end. My family and I are very grateful and appreciative for all his hard work and dedication. We are at a much better place in our lives because of him."

Team Members:
Richa Oza, Team Lead, Staff Lawyer
John Wigle, Staff Lawyer
Cosimo Morin, Staff Lawyer

Past Team Members:
Yolanda Song, Staff Lawyer
Kanika Gupta, Staff Lawyer

Housing Law Team

Throughout the past year, the Housing Law Team maintained its commitment to supporting and advocating for tenants experiencing housing precarity by providing legal advice and representation, engaging in law reform, and providing public legal education sessions. While we settled into our new office space in the Hub, we welcomed the ability to offer walk-in services and connect with community organizations to ensure wrap-around housing support. We are committed to ensuring that tenants are able to keep their affordable housing stock, achieve housing stability, and realize the right to housing.

Case Highlights:

We represented a single mother who was facing eviction after her husband left the apartment without notice. She had been living there for years and paid affordable rent. The corporate landlord treated her as an “illegal occupant” and filed an application with the Landlord and Tenant Board to remove her and her young children from the apartment. The landlord refused to accept rent from our client or to negotiate a resolution. The matter proceeded to an eviction hearing. The Board accepted our position, ruled that under the circumstances, our client was a tenant, and therefore entitled to occupation of the rental unit. The landlord’s application was dismissed and our client was able to maintain her housing and keep her affordable rent.

A senior tenant in our area, who had lived in his bachelor unit for over twenty years, was facing an eviction because the landlord wanted our client’s unit for his own personal use. Subsequently, the landlord illegally locked out the tenant from his home and gutted the tenant’s unit, rendering it uninhabitable. The tenant was left scrambling to move out his possessions, was forced to couch-surf, and live out of short-term rentals. We immediately filed an urgent application to the Landlord and Tenant Board and were successful. Not only did we get the landlord’s eviction application dismissed, but the Board also ordered the landlord to pay the tenant nearly $18,000.00, immediately return the keys, complete repairs to the unit, and not collect any rent from the tenant until the repairs are completed.

Initiative Highlights:

Toronto’s Rental Renovation Licence Bylaw

After six years of advocacy and consultations, the Housing Law Team’s work to deter bad-faith renovictions culminated in the passage of the City of Toronto’s Rental Renovation Licence Bylaw. This all began in 2019, after our team approached Councillor Paula Fletcher about exploring a possible solution for the misuse of N13s – notices to terminate a tenancy because a landlord wants to demolish, repair, or convert a rental unit. Our clinic had seen an increase in renoviction cases over the past several years, including the prominent case of a rooming house on Langley Ave where over 20 tenants lost their homes.

Since then, our team has made deputations at the City's Planning and Housing Committee and worked alongside Councillor Fletcher and tenant advocates to turn this solution into a legal reality, where on July 31, 2025, the bylaw finally came into effect. As a result, landlords in Toronto must now obtain a license from the City, and provide tenants with temporary alternate accommodations during the period of the renovation work or make monthly rent-gap payments to the tenant. You can learn more at www.toronto.ca/renovicitons.

We are happy to report that this has led to a significant reduction in N13s, not only for tenants within the DVCLS catchment area, but across the City.

DVCLS' Karly Wilson and Laura Anonen with Mayor Olivia Chow, Councillor Paula Fletcher, and members of ACORN, at the Renovictions Bylaw Announcement October 23, 2024.

Client Testimonials

"*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.*"

"*I'm so grateful with Luis for his help in my eviction case. This wasn't an easy case. It was very challenging but he was understanding and listened to my side of the story. He took my matter seriously and was in contact with me constantly over the past months. In the end, thanks to his negotiations skills he was able to reach an agreement with my landlord and saved my tenancy. Now me and my children can go back to our normal life. Luis is an amazing legal counsel. Thank you DVCLS!*"

"*I used the services of Don Valley Community Legal Services in the past 3 years to resolve my case. My [lawyer] was Michelle Choe and she did an amazing job. We had few meetings with the LTB and she represented me all the time and defended all my legal rights and the case was resolved successfully. I am extremely satisfied with her work through the whole process. Thank you Michelle for your professional work.*"

A Poem for the DVCLS Housing Team (written by a client)

how will we save margo
from herself
and from her landlord
we discuss
in that tiny room
with the fluorescent lights

section 83
form 49
we practice when to talk
and when to stay quiet
since margo isn't there
the silence comes easy

no one will say how long
we can delay eviction
one month or one year
whatever the length
it needs to be longer
she'll die unhoused

and these two saviours
one lawyer and one law student
who haven't even met margo
devote everything
to rescue her
and they save us

Team Members:
Michelle Choe, Team Lead, Staff Lawyer
Bhavin Bilimoria, Director of Legal Services, Staff Lawyer
Luis Mayorga, Paralegal
Jieun (Grace) Park, Paralegal

Past Team Members:
Karly Wilson, Team Lead, Staff Lawyer
Sasha Thompson, Student-at-Law
Stephanie Brook, Summer Law Student

Immigration Law Team

Case Highlights:

1. Ensuring Family Resettlement and Unification

A woman came to DVCLS to seek assistance, as she was devastated that her teenage sons were not being processed as part of her In-Canada Protected Person Permanent Residence Applications. The main consequence of this being her sons had no stable immigration status in Canada, and they would not be able to access student loans or other financial assistance to attend university. After filing for a Writ of Mandamus (a process asking the Federal Court of Canada to make a former order compelling the Government Agency to perform a duty they are legally required to do), we were able to get Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to agree and confirm that the sons would be processed alongside their Mother's Application. This year all three members of the family received their Permanent Residence status.

2. Permanent Residence and the 'Cost' of Health Care

A woman who was a candidate for an economic-based Permanent Residence program came to us, after she had learned she had chronic kidney disease. She received a procedural fairness letter for medical inadmissibility, which alleged the costs of her treatment were expected to impose an excessive demand on government health and/or social services. Although a Government Public Policy was in place to allow an exemption, where health and social services costs were estimated to be under $24,057 (or $120,285 over a five-year period), for her case Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) provided yearly cost estimates in a range from double to quadruple that amount.

A friend's kind and generous offer to donate a kidney through the Kidney Paired Donation Program, provided a glimmer of hope for our client. With support both from the client's treating physician and the hospital potentially responsible for performing the kidney transplant, we managed to obtain detailed cost figures for the various treatment options. It turned out that the earlier the client could obtain a successful kidney transplant, the lower the overall long-term treatment cost. We were able to present five-year cost ranges for five scenarios based on how soon the client could obtain the kidney transplant, after being granted permanent residence: one-year after being granted permanent residence; 11 months; 10 months; 9 months and 6 months. According to our calculations, if the client could receive a kidney transplant within 10 months of obtaining permanent residence, the projected five-year cost should be low enough to qualify for the Public Policy exemption.

After the efforts and kindness shown by the client's generous friend, the hospitals, and our legal clinic Staff, IRCC kindly granted the Public Policy exemption to medical inadmissibility and allowed the Client to become a Permanent Resident.

3. The Importance of a Care System and Community

DVCLS was approached for assistance by a mother of two children under the age of 10. One of her children is deaf, as is she herself. She had been trying to learn both English and American Sign Language (ASL), while overcoming a turbulent divorce. The client's own mother was visiting Canada, when she came to us. She asked if we could help her mother obtain Permanent Residence, so the client and her children could have an additional support person with them in Canada. This year we received Approval-in-Principle on the Humanitarian and Compassionate application. We now await the final stage processing steps for the Permanent Residence.

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.

4. An Update from 2023 Highlights

In our 2023 AGM Report, we told the story of a client who had come to us in May 2021, having been in Canada since 2017 and having already gone through the entire In-Canada refugee process and a Humanitarian and Compassionate Application, without success. In September 2023, we were successful in finally getting the client stable Immigration Status (Permanent Residence) and were in the process of applying to try and unite her with her husband and a daughter, who she had not seen since January, 2017. This year, the Sponsorship Application for those relations was finally successful, and the client and her Canadian born child have now been able to reunite with their much missed family, in Canada.

5. The Complications of Eligibility Criteria

A client's Permanent Residence application for an economic-based pilot program was refused on alleged grounds that her foreign education credentials fell short of the program eligibility requirements. This was an error: the report from a credential assessment service submitted with the original application seemed to indicate her foreign education credentials were equivalent to that listed in the program requirements.

Before coming to us, the client had requested reconsideration, politely asking the IRCC officer to double check the credential assessment report, as she believed she met the program requirements. IRCC refused her request, stating there were insufficient grounds to merit reconsideration.

The client received advice elsewhere that her only option was to enroll in school, then reapply. Months passed as the client explored this option: the client found she could barely afford rent and food, let alone foreign tuition rates.

We advised the client to request clarification from the credential assessment service which issued the report: the service confirmed their finding that her level of education was equivalent to the education level required by IRCC's available policy definitions, and suggested the officer had made a mistake.

Requesting reconsideration for a second time with this additional letter, and our formal representation, IRCC agreed to reopen the application.

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

Past Team Members:
Ryan Hardy, Staff Lawyer
Aisha Khalif, Summer Law Student

Income Maintenance Team

Case Highlights:

Most of our cases are Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) medical eligibility appeals and, while each client is special with unique circumstances, the cases we become involved in often end in a successful appeal. We would like to share the following cases.

Nalini assisted a severely anxious client with having an almost $10,000 overpayment overturned by the local ODSP office. She has been able to establish trust with this client and now the client is able to contact Nalini whenever she has issues.

Christine represented a client with limited education, with a learning disability and with physical and mental health challenges, in a matter whereby he was hit with an ODSP overpayment of over $50,000 for undeclared pension income. The appeal was a success, with the adjudicator deciding that while the appellant had an obligation to report his pension income in a timely manner, the overpayment would be reduced by 80% due to lack of guidance/file reviews by the ODSP office (apparently the latter had not undertaken a full file review with the appellant for 17 years).

A client, who was disabled from a motor vehicle accident which also ended up killing her husband, required assistance to submit documents to the ODSP office related to the accident settlement. Despite another agency being involved, it had taken months to get the documents from her legal representative and her ODSP file was placed on hold. Suzannah managed to quickly cut through the complex layers of legal representation to obtain the needed documentation and the client's ODSP benefits were restored.

A client, who was severely disabled after military service, was refused ODSP. While preparing for his Social Benefits Tribunal appeal, the client enrolled in an inpatient treatment facility with no ability to contact outside the facility. Suzannah did not want to ask for a postponement as this would significantly delay the appeal and she felt that the case was strong enough to proceed without his testimony. She attended his hearing and, with strong medical support and submissions, she convinced the ODSP Case Presenting Officer to recommend a Consent Order (a rare event), which the Tribunal ultimately proceeded with.

Testimonials from Clients:

"I want to sincerely thank you [Suzannah] for all the support you have given us throughout this process. Without your help, I could not have resolved this for my mother. I am truly grateful for your dedication and care."

"Nalini provided me with an (sic) excellent service. I am so impressed with the results. They are above and beyond from what I expected… Very professional service."

"I am writing to express my heartfelt gratitude for your clinic's unwavering support with my ODSP claims… Your clinic was a shining beacon of hope, guiding me every step of the way until the end. Throughout and after the process, you (Rana) explained everything to me in meticulous detail, empowering me with the knowledge and confidence to navigate what to expect and for that I just wanted to say thank you."

"I cannot say enough things about Christine. From the initial phone call she immediately gave me a lifeline and reassured me she understood the issues and would be by my side helping to facilitate an ODSP appeal that was causing me so much stress. No longer feeling alone, Christine successfully advocated on my behalf and was able to succeed in winning the appeal to have my disability accepted. She was compassionate and communicated everything in a clear and concise way. I will forever be grateful."

"I am writing to express our sincere gratitude for your expert and timely intervention… As you know, [the client] has been struggling for the past six months to gather, organize, and submit the necessary supporting documents required by ODSP. This prolonged process was causing significant stress and anxiety, and the continuous delays were extremely disheartening. Your efficiency was truly remarkable. The fact that you were able to secure the necessary documentation and submit the documents to the ODSP within a single day has had a monumental impact. Your swift action has lifted a huge burden… We are so grateful for your professionalism and dedication to ensuring justice and access to support those who need it most… You are my angel."

"You worked so hard, gave your extra time, gone the extra mile and dedication to make sure this case go (sic) resolved and you won. You are the best! Nalini, many times I remember being on the phone with you so many times. I was feeling so scared in tears with this complex difficult case, you took your time from your busy schedule to take extra time to stay on the phone to calm me down letting me know with your kind voice that everything would be alright. You are a fantastic lawyer who works so hard to help people in need. I was so lucky to have you to represent me."

This was the first time in my life ever requiring legal counsel and I was very nervous even about the word "Lawyer" which to me always held an intimidating, impersonal connotation. I was so relieved to be met with such compassionate human warmth and an equal presence of competence and confidence that really showed during my court hearing. I could not have asked for a more supportive representative through the differing part of this process. With the particular challenges that present as part of my condition it meant the most to me that Christine was incredibly patient as we gathered the necessary details, in explaining how the hearing works and how best to prepare myself. I am incredibly pleased with Don Valley Community Legal Services… I am more than content about the outcome of my case. This has been a very long, uphill process and being denied my claim the first 3 times felt very unfair in a sense of being someone that genuinely needs the help but not having the personal faculties to advocate for myself. I was so close to considering just giving up any further appeals. It is because of Christine that I not only felt heard just in general, but also like I had a voice and a chance at the tribunal hearing. A huge weight has been lifted off of me by reaching this outcome."

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

Lawyer Rana Ismail providing a PLE for The Neighbourhood Organization (TNO) clients

Intake Team

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

This year, we successfully introduced walk-in hours at our office in the Hub, leading to a substantial increase in the activity of the Intake Team. Notably, on one afternoon, we efficiently served 36 clients. We are moving to in-person intake service appointments this October. Thank you to our Intake Team for always doing their best to serve our clients and helping us as we navigate changes.

> *"I called in with an inquiry and received a call back the very next day, they explained the process and when I could expect a call which came from intake the following day and a paralegal the day after. I dealt with Dante in intake and Lucia a paralegal. They were polite, diligent in getting my details and then listening to my explanation when they called. I can only talk to my experience but I felt heard, respected and appreciated the engagement."*

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

Past Team Members:
Dante Crispino, Summer Student
Marilyn Sutharsan, Summer Student

Administration Team

This year we welcomed Lorena Zelaya as our new Supervisor, Finance and Administration. We also welcomed back summer student Marilyn Sutharsan as our receptionist this fall. We thank our Administration staff for their support and efforts in keeping us going!

Team Members:
Marilyn Sutharsan
Lorena Zelaya

Past Team Members:
Elena Angulo
Kiara Gyomorey, Summer Student

Students

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

2025 Students: Stephanie Brook, Dante Crispino, Kiara Gyomorey, Aisha Khalif, Marilyn Sutharsan, Sasha Thompson, Raasikh-Wasiq

Summer students Stephanie, Raasikh, Dante, Marilyn, Aisha and Kiara with Ryan from our Immigration Law Team (middle)

One of our summer students, Raasikh-Wasiq, has written the following about his experience working at DVCLS this year. Raasikh completed his high school co-op placement with us from February to June, and then returned as a summer student from July to August.

> My name is Raasikh-Wasiq, and I was working at Don Valley Community Legal Services for seven months, from February 2025, all the way up to August.
>
> As a high-school student, this was my first ever “job”. And to me, I could not have asked for anything better.
>
> It is funny because this all started in the summer of 2023, when I was looking for volunteering opportunities, and the first call that I made was to DVCLS. I left a voicemail on the intake line and one morning I received a call from their number. I picked up and on the other side was none other than the one and only Marjorie, who really took my troubles into account and offered me my first ever volunteering opportunity. Since then I have been working with DVCLS, and I could not have landed a better spot.

My time at DVCLS was nothing short of outstanding. Such a positive and accepting work environment, filled with mentors who not only teach, but also understand and promote growth and excellence.

I went from completing data entry, to assisting with office organization, to helping at reception. Words come short when describing the professional and personal growth that I was able to derive from my position here at DVCLS.

I need to pay special thanks to Marjorie, Bhavin, and the staff and students at DVCLS for making my transition into the professional lifestyle so simple and welcoming. It's not everywhere where you have people that truly care about you and want to see you grow. Having that aspect paired with the fun working environment at DVCLS was the best part of it all. This really created an engaging environment for a young person like me, which is something I can never forget. As the youngest person working at DVCLS, I never felt like I was held back in any way, and that really made me feel fully "in the loop" and considered in all regards.

I really feel the sense of endearment when working with DVCLS in all aspects, and I could not be more excited for what the future holds.

Thanks and best regards for your time, I am highly obliged and honored.

Thank you!

Don Valley
Community Legal Services