

Don Valley
Community Legal Services

Annual Report 2025-26

Table of Contents:

1. Joint Message from the Chair of the Board and Executive Director…….2-3
2. Thank You to our Board of Directors……...4
3. Message from the Chair of Legal Aid Ontario……4
4. Community Services Committee Report……..5
5. Corporate Resources Committee Report and Financial Statements……6-8
6. Governance Committee Report……9
7. Director of Legal Services' Report……10-14
8. 2025-26 Statistics……15-18
9. Community Development Report……...……...19-20
10. Employment Law Team……..21-22
11. Housing Law Team…….23-25
12. Immigration Law Team……26-28
13. Income Maintenance Team……29-31
14. Intake Team……..……32-33
15. Administration Team……34
16. Students……..……34

Joint Message from the Chair of the Board and Executive Director

We have now spent over 18 months in our space in the Thorncliffe Park Community Hub. It has been a time of learning and adjusting to our office space and our relationships with our Hub partners. We have continued to work closely with our Hub partners to navigate increased operating costs that are associated with the increased space and the heightened community presence. This was very evident with how we worked with our Hub partners to assist those left unhoused from the condo fire situation in late November 2025. We worked to contain unrealistic community expectations while coping with the legal challenges affecting those residents left without access to their homes for many months. This work continues with our involvement in the Resilience project which will be described by our guest speakers from the Hub at our Annual General Meeting.

It is evident that we share a lot of good will between Hub partners as we work out budgetary processes and ways we can communicate in our intake procedures that provide positive benefits to our mutual clients. It is anticipated that this interdisciplinary effort will lead to the better multi-scope services for these clients in the future.

We face more challenges in how we can cope with increased client demands in light of the tariff restrictions and lack of affordable housing. The finalization of our strategic plans needs to take into account the increased demand for services while our staff numbers remain stagnant. The Board of Directors is committed to having a fair and equitable work-life balance for staff which is reflected in the work accomplished over the past year to set realistic workload limits.

Taking into account these factors, we continue to offer two afternoons of in person intake appointments, one afternoon for in person document services, and four mornings a week of intake telephone services. Our strategic planning is committed to exploring new ways of how we can disseminate effective legal information to our community.

Our funder, Legal Aid Ontario, has worked with us to ensure that we are able to meet our financial responsibilities, particularly our increased leasehold expenses. For this support we are very grateful. We have also made considerable adjustments to our other operating costs in order to free up funds that can be used for the training of staff and to supplement administrative supports.

Our clinic staff have proven to be adaptable to constant change – whether it be regarding our intake services, how to unbundle legal from non-legal tasks or how to cope with the increased intensity of client demands. The safety and well being of our staff is of prime importance to the Board of Directors and Senior Management.

For the upcoming year we are looking at many ways we can maintain the quality of our legal services while improving access to justice. Our strategic planning process is near

its completion and it has focused on what can be innovative methods of service delivery for the future, how to assess legal needs in the community, and how to utilize our community and Hub partners as key intermediators for the delivery of legal information and services.

We continue to accomplish great achievements with our public legal education (PLE) programs, our community development activities and our advocacy work. Our website and social media presence has assisted in not only the promotion of the work of our clinic but in educating the greater public on legal topics. We continue to provide new articles on relevant legal issues on a monthly basis and we post notices of public meetings and other activities that would be of interest to our community.

Recently we have helped to organize several public meetings so the residents of our catchment area have the opportunity to meet with municipal election candidates and ask them questions on municipal topics. We also work with our Hub partner agencies to put on larger events within the Hub space that would appeal to community members. We want to thank Laura Anonen, our Community Development Worker, for her wonderful leadership in organizing events and for facilitating clinic staff's efforts in PLEs, community outreach and legal advocacy.

We have seen the practical results of the new Renoviction Bylaw (Rental Renovation License Bylaw) which came into force at the end of July 2025. Due to this bylaw, few tenants now face eviction for renovation reasons. We have worked with other community partners and municipal politicians to encourage the City of Toronto to use its authority to force bad landlords to make repairs to rental units. Furthermore, a recent high level court decision, Bokhari v Top Medical Transportation Services, has resulted in procedural reforms at the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal. We also continue to work towards our goal of having wrap around services for our mutual clients.

This year we continued to work on our anti-racism anti-oppression policies and action plans. We are also planning to draft an artificial intelligence policy. Our Governance Committee is actively reviewing all the clinic policies and establishing oversight to evaluate our governance practices. Our Community Services Committee has reviewed its purposes and is working to ensure it is informed of the issues facing our community, including new demoviction cases and how we can preserve affordable rental housing in the face of gentrification of neighbourhoods.

We thank everyone for their attendance at our 2026 AGM and for your support of the work of our clinic over the past year. We thank our dedicated staff for all they have accomplished, and for the hard work and dedication of our Board of Directors and volunteers.

Sincerely,

Kirk Cooper
Chair of the Board of Directors

Marjorie Hiley
Executive Director

Thank You to our 2025-26 Board of Directors

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

Message from the Chair of Legal Aid Ontario

It is once again my pleasure to congratulate Marjorie and her team on another very successful year, serving clients in the Don Valley catchment area and beyond.

The past year has been significant because in addition to continuing to provide high-quality legal services to the clients of the clinic, it has also been a period of transition, settling into new accommodations and building relationships with other service providers located in the Hub. Moving house is never easy and I commend Marjorie, her team and the Board of Directors who, from our perspective at least, made it appear seamless.

The foresight demonstrated in planning and executing a move to a location where additional human services were offered to clinic clients, was quite extraordinary. Proof of this was provided at a conference Marjorie and I attended a couple of weeks ago which focussed on the need for improving the relationship between medical and legal practitioners since as one physician in attendance noted, “sometimes the most important referral a doctor can make for a patient is to a legal professional”. He also questioned why such a referral was not included in the OHIP schedule of fees. The discussions and presentations by the attendees at that conference provided irrefutable evidence that locating a legal clinic in close proximity to health care and social services providers is critical, and clearly the way of the future.

Once again, I tip my hat and offer my congratulations to the Board, the leadership and the entire team at Don Valley Community Legal Services for a great year past, and my best wishes for an even better year ahead.

Steve Pengelly, KC
Chair of the Board, Legal Aid Ontario

Community Services Committee Report

This has been a busy year for the Community Services Committee (CSC). We meet on a monthly basis to discuss issues that affect the communities we serve, advocacy work, local events, communications and outreach initiatives. The committee is made up of Board members, our Community Development Worker, senior management, and community members from across our catchment area.

The major issues that the CSC has focused on this year include building and protecting affordable housing, the impacts of government legislation on our clients (such as Bill 60), the effects new developments, such as the proposed Thorncliffe Park transit-oriented community, will have on our communities, and the impacts of the Ontario Line. We also assisted community members affected by the fire at two condo buildings in Thorncliffe Park.

Committee members often attend community-led events with our Community Development Worker, Laura Anonen. Laura frequently attends tenants' meetings, community fairs, special events hosted by politicians, and our pop-up legal clinics, and she reports back to the CSC on what is happening across our catchment. CSC members also provide insights on issues and needs in our own communities. Recently, Laura and other CSC members have been involved in organizing All Candidates forums for the municipal election, which are great ways to hear about the concerns of residents. We have also been working to ensure our website and social media are up to date to help community members find information they need. The CSC also helps to oversee and evaluate DVCLS' communications.

We have also been active with member recruitment. Over the past year we have welcomed new community members such as Irma Spahiu, Bella Shulman and Kamrana Quershi. Board members on the committee include Cenobar Parker, Vanessa Rose, Sandra Bussin and Sabrina Bruno. Geoff Kettel, a former Board member, has continued on the committee. We would also like to thank our former members Rhiannon Thomas and Miyadah Subrati for their years of support. And many thanks to our Board member John Campey for his insights on our community.

All the best,

Ali Meghani
Chair, Community Services Committee

Corporate Resources Committee Report

Comments from the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee

The 2025-2026 fiscal year required careful financial oversight as Don Valley Community Legal Services managed increased occupancy and storage costs, staffing changes, and ongoing uncertainty surrounding funding. The Corporate Resources Committee worked with the Executive Director and management to monitor financial performance, address emerging pressures and support the clinic's long-term sustainability.

Financial Position and Performance

For the year ended March 31, 2026, DVCLS reported an overall deficit of $118,073, compared with a surplus of $33,557 in the preceding year. Total funds balance declined to $361,990 from $534,482. A significant component of the reported deficit was $93,143 of non-cash amortization associated with capital assets, including the leasehold improvements undertaken in connection with the relocation to the Thorncliffe Park Community Hub. The General Fund recorded an operating deficit of $20,759 and returned $54,419 of unspent funds to Legal Aid Ontario.

Cash at year-end was $40,112, compared with $107,921 at March 31, 2025. Current liabilities were $59,982, primarily accounts payable and accruals. These results reinforce the importance of continued attention to cash flow, operating costs and available funding. The organization's financial statements report no long-term debt.

Financial Oversight and Operational Developments

Throughout the year, the Committee monitored the financial implications of the Hub relocation, including additional rent and operating charges. Legal Aid Ontario provided incremental support for occupancy costs, while management worked to resolve outstanding rent obligations and reconcile related funding. The Committee also reviewed staffing and compensation pressures, budget variances and the effects of timing differences and year-end accounting adjustments.

A further priority was reducing ongoing off-site storage costs. By fiscal year-end, the clinic reported that its files had been removed from Iron Mountain, with the expectation of lower storage expenses in future periods. Phase 1 digitization expenditures were absorbed in the year's operations, preserving the $35,000 allocation for the next phase of digitization. These initiatives are intended to improve operating efficiency and reduce recurring cost pressures.

Audit Opinion

The March 31, 2026 financial statements were independently audited by Hilborn LLP, which issued an unmodified opinion. The auditors concluded that the financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, DVCLS's financial position, results of

operations and cash flows in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations.

Funding Developments and Strategic Considerations

Legal Aid Ontario funding remained central to financial planning. Additional funding received during the year helped offset a portion of increased occupancy and compensation costs. Nevertheless, the clinic continues to face pressures arising from the cost of delivering services, accommodation expenses and uncertainty over future funding allocations. The Committee will continue to work with management and the Board to align expenditures with available resources while maintaining service capacity.

Financial Statements

The following Statements of Financial Position and Operations and Funds Balance are reproduced from the audited financial statements for the year ended March 31, 2026, including the comparative 2025 statements. The complete audited financial statement package is available upon request from the Executive Director, Marjorie Hiley.

DON VALLEY COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES

Statement of Financial Position

March 31, 2026

	General Fund $	Legal Disbursements Fund $	Capital Fund $	Non-LAO Donations Fund $	Total $
ASSETS					
Current Assets					
Cash	30,600	4,404	-	5,108	**40,112**
HST recoverable	24,551	171	-	-	**24,722**
Prepaid expenses	39,366	-	-	-	**39,366**
	94,517	4,575	-	5,108	**104,200**
Capital assets (note 3)	-	-	317,772	-	**317,772**
Total assets	94,517	4,575	317,772	5,108	**421,972**
LIABILITIES					
Current Liabilities					
Accounts payable	59,982	-	-	-	**59,982**
Inter-fund payable (receivable)	8,460	(951)	-	(7,509)	**-**
	68,442	(951)	-	(7,509)	**59,982**
FUNDS BALANCE	26,075	5,526	317,772	12,617	**361,990**
Total liabilities and funds balance	94,517	4,575	317,772	5,108	**421,972**

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, 2026	General Fund $	Legal Disbursements Fund $	Capital Fund $	Non-LAO Donations Fund $	Total $
Revenues					
Legal Aid Ontario					
-direct receipts	2,983,398	18,700	-	-	**3,002,098**
-indirect receipts (note 5)	247,224	-	-	-	**247,224**
Recovered from clients	-	4,293	-	-	**4,293**
Employment and Social Development Canada	21,541	-	-	-	**21,541**
Other income	23	-	-	200	**223**
	3,252,186	22,993	-	200	**3,275,379**
Expenses					
Salaries	2,170,360	-	-	-	**2,170,360**
Benefits (note 6)	377,660	-	-	-	**377,660**
Professional dues	30,794	-	-	-	**30,794**
Travel	6,281	-	-	-	**6,281**
Communications	20,158	-	-	-	**20,158**
Accommodations	324,818	-	-	-	**324,818**
Equipment	5,645	-	-	-	**5,645**
Library	1,429	-	-	-	**1,429**
Supplies and services	52,185	-	-	72	**52,257**
Professional fees	36,391	-	-	-	**36,391**
Indirect payments (note 5)	247,224	-	-	-	**247,224**
Legal disbursements	-	27,292	-	-	**27,292**
Amortization	-	-	93,143	-	**93,143**
	3,272,945	27,292	93,143	72	**3,393,452**
Excess of revenues over expenses (expenses over revenues)	(20,759)	(4,299)	(93,143)	128	**(118,073)**
Funds returned to Legal Aid Ontario	(54,419)	-	-	-	**(54,419)**
Funds balance, beginning of year	101,253	9,825	410,915	12,489	**534,482**
Funds balance, end of year	26,075	5,526	317,772	12,617	**361,990**

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

Acknowledgment

On behalf of the Corporate Resources Committee, I thank the Executive Director, the finance team and my fellow Board members for their work and commitment throughout a demanding year. The Committee remains focused on responsible stewardship, sound financial oversight and supporting DVCLS's ability to serve the community sustainably.

Respectfully submitted,

Martin Sonne
Chair, Corporate Resources Committee

Governance Committee Report

The Governance Committee was established in 2023. It was in abeyance for 2 years and became active again in 2025. After relocating to the Thorncliffe Park Community Hub, the Board of Directors felt it was important to review our governance practices and to review the policies that had been drafted after the amalgamation of the two legacy clinics into Don Valley Community Legal Services in April 2019.

For the year of 2025-2026 the Governance Committee has been very active and has met regularly. It consists of Board members with the Chair of the Board of Directors as an ad hoc member and with the two Senior managers, the Executive Director and the Director of Legal Services.

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

Over the past year the Committee has engaged in a review of a number of DVCLS policies to ensure they are relevant and in accordance with our Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression (ARAO) policies and work plans. It devised a Board performance and evaluation form and drafted a matrix for Board recruitment that outlines the necessary skill matrices of candidates for the Board. It also provided a slate of candidates to be members of the Board which was approved by the full Board of Directors. As well the Committee drafted job descriptions and a recruitment strategy for board nominations.

I am grateful to its members, Martin Sonne, John Campey, Shelina Shivji, Kirk Cooper and Irene Winel for their time and efforts on these tasks. I appreciate the assistance of our senior management, Marjorie Hiley and Bhavin Bilimoria. It is our goal to help improve the governance capabilities of our Board of Directors and provide inclusive governance practices that reflect the values of our clinic.

Lucy Becker
Chair, Governance Committee

Director of Legal Services' Report

Step with care and great tact.
And remember that life's
A Great Balancing Act.
– Dr. Seuss

To balance the demand for our legal services with our capacity to meet this demand, we have spent the past twelve months carefully and tactfully engaging in change management to the delivery of our legal services. With only a finite number of staff and financial limitations precluding us from hiring more, we recognized that trying to serve more clients in order to meet the community's increasing demand would eventually come at a cost to our most valuable resource, and in turn the source of our pride: our staff and the quality of our legal services.

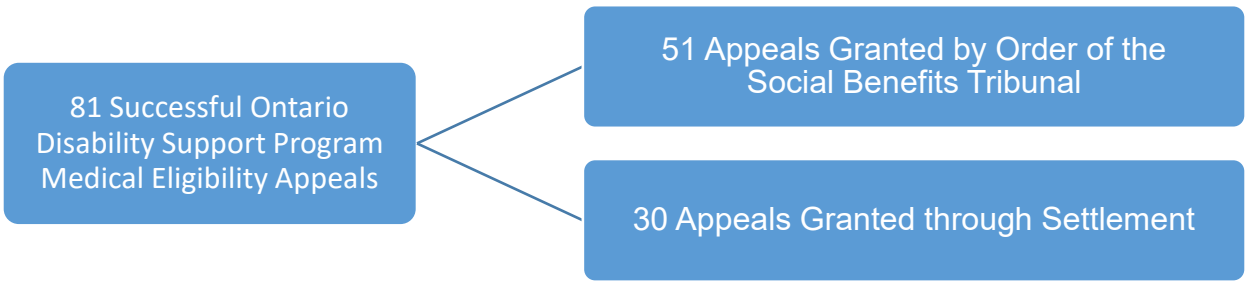
To protect our staff from burnout and thereby preserve the quality of legal services they provide to the community, we introduced various workload safeguards this past year. The crux of these safeguards is to place limits on the number of new cases opened by our intake team, and on the scale and scope of retainers entered into by the caseworkers on our substantive law teams. Altogether, these measures have not only created a more manageable workload for our staff, but they have enabled our staff to better achieve access to justice for the community by balancing their casework for individuals with their role as agents of law reform.

In this regard, the fruits of our staff's labour can be seen not only in the successful case outcomes they achieved since our last AGM, but by their appellate court victory in *Bokhari v. Top Medical Transportation Services*, 2026 ONSC 1073. Our clinic has also seen an 85% reduction in the number of renoviction cases opened since the City of Toronto enacted the Rental Renovation Licence Bylaw advocated for by our staff. Similarly, the City's decision to undertake remedial action at the apartment building located at 500 Dawes Road followed our staff's meeting with Mayor Olivia Chow in March 2026, where we joined the chorus of those advocating for same.

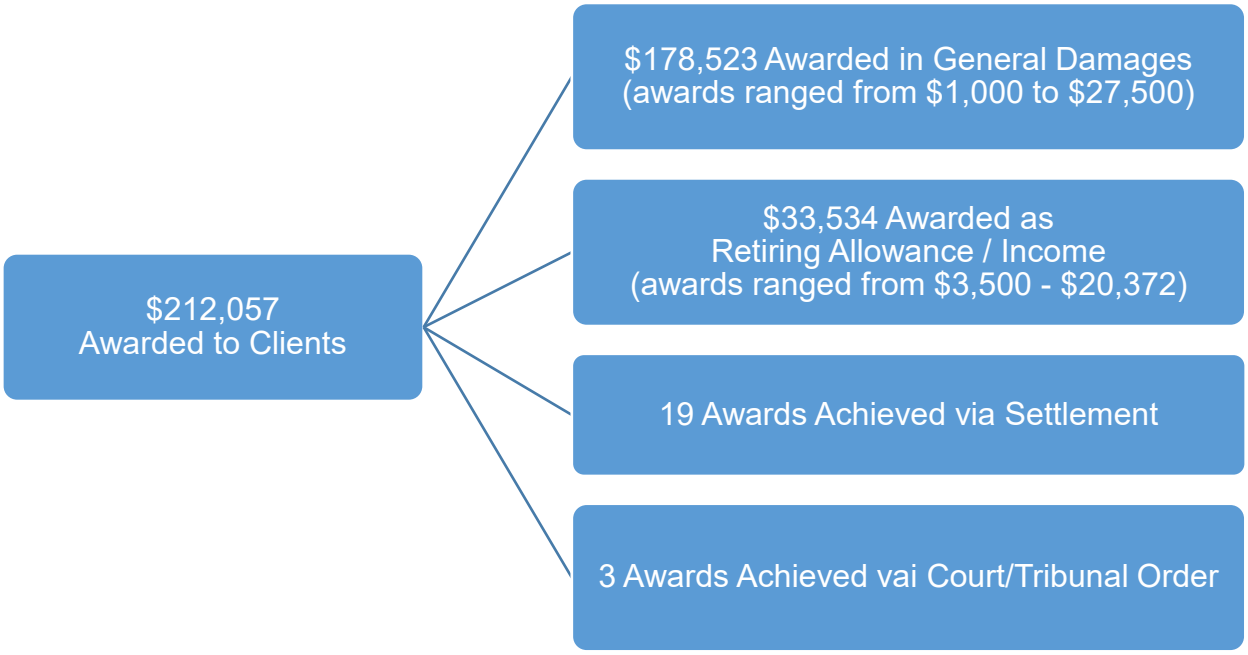


Mayor Chow visited DVCLS in March 2026

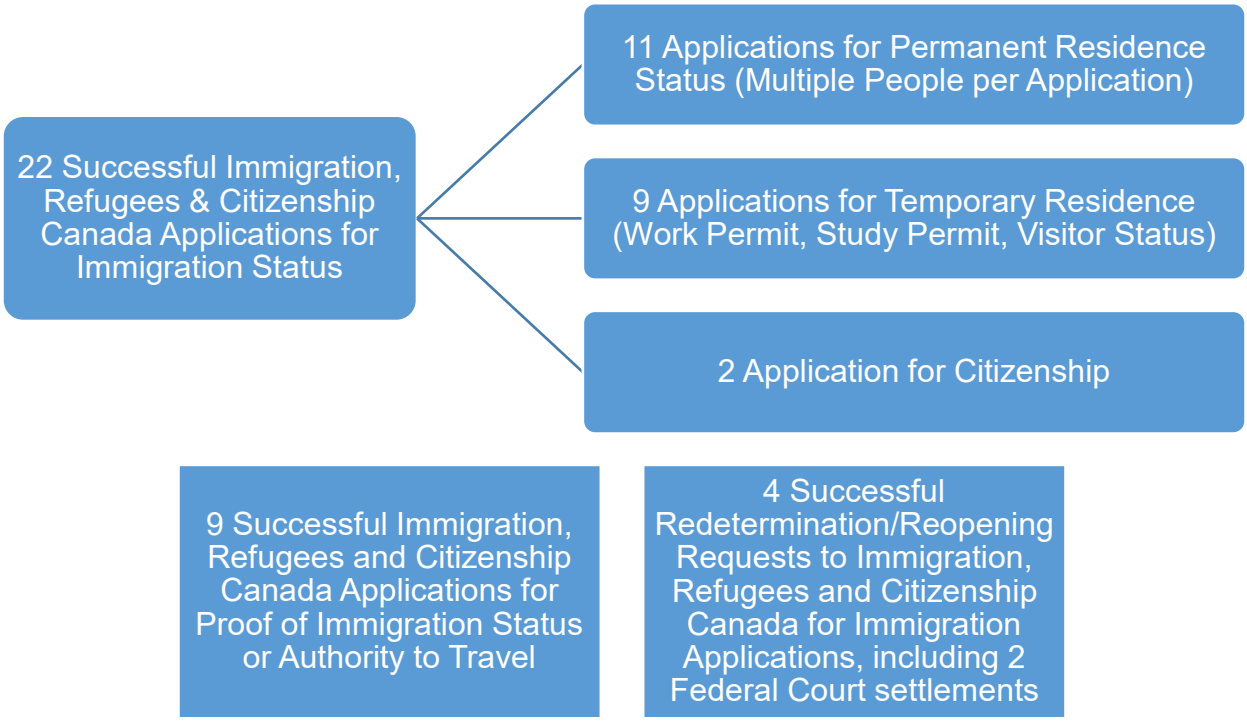
Income Maintenance Team



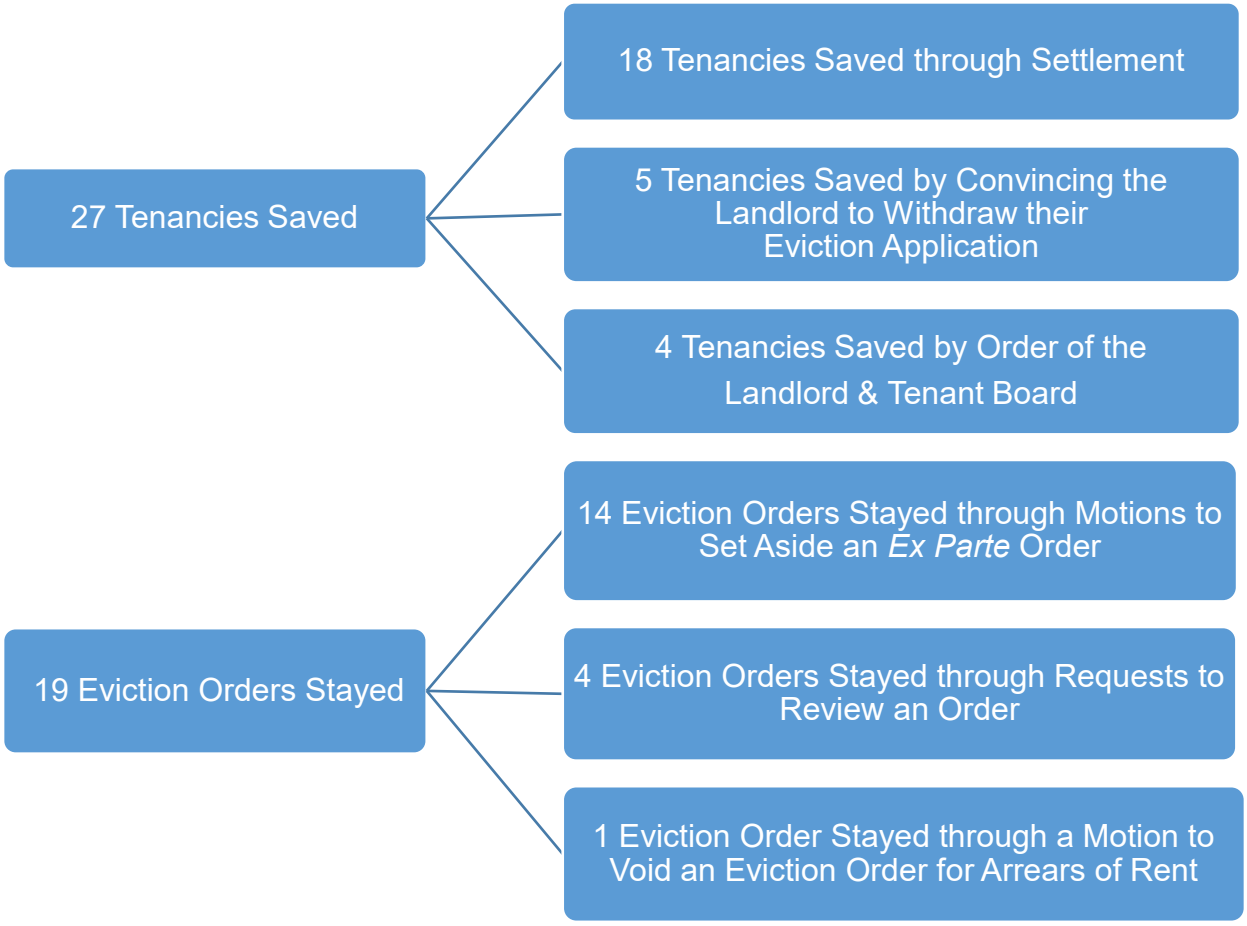
Employment Law Team



Immigration Law Team



Housing Law Team



So even though the community's legal needs greatly exceed the limits of our human resources, this has not precluded us from continuing to provide legal services that are responsive to those needs. For example, to satisfy the community's desire for in-person, intake services while maintaining the workload limits established for our Intake Team, we switched our in-person, intake services from a walk-in model to an appointment-based system in October 2025. Despite this change, in-person intakes still account for approximately 20% of all new cases opened by our intake team.

Similarly, to address the community's need for consistency in service without undermining the workload limits established for our Intake Team, we modified the hours of operation for our intake line and changed the days on which we provide in-person, intake appointments in August 2026. Despite these changes, the number of calls into our intake line still increased modestly by approximately 3% since our last AGM, and by approximately 45% since 2023. Nevertheless, our intake team is better positioned now than ever before to respond to this increase because of the changes we made to our intake system and workflow.

Number of Intake Calls / AGM Year	2023	2024	2025	2026
	9,961	13,446	14,024	14,435

Moreover, by bringing our legal services directly to the community through pop-up legal clinics instead of asking the community to come to us, we built on last year's progress of making our legal services more accessible to all parts of our catchment area. Since our last AGM, we conducted several pop-up legal clinics at Glen Rhodes United Church through Nourish East End's Market Style Foodbank, and at Eastview Neighbourhood Community Centre. These pop-ups are a marked departure from how we have traditionally provided our legal services to the community.

Similarly, by turning one of our administrative positions into a client-facing position called Client Services Coordinator, we now have an in-house staff member dedicated to connecting our clients to the mental health and social work supports they require. In doing so, we are responding to what is often the underlying cause of our clients' legal issues, and thereby resolving or mitigating future legal issues before they arise.

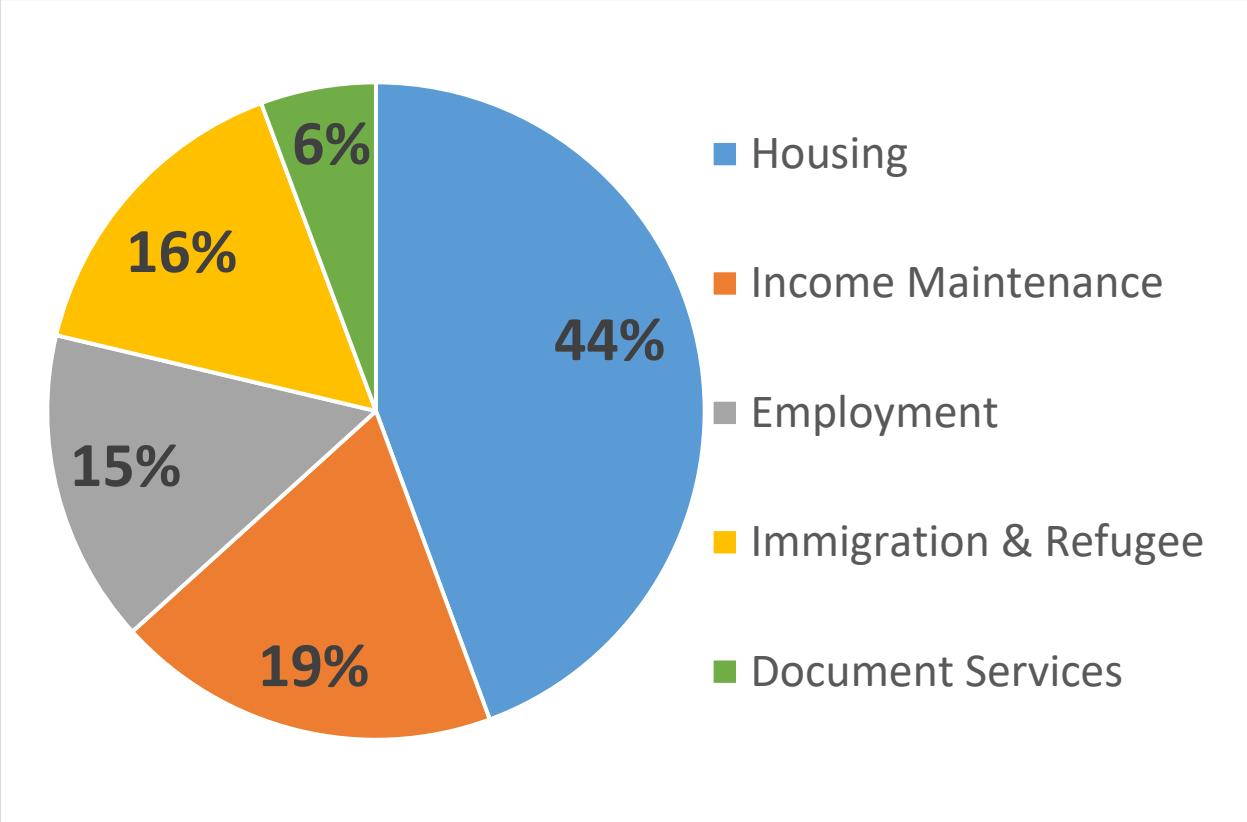
These are two examples of the innovative service delivery models we are currently exploring through our five-year strategic planning process. This strategic plan will ultimately provide the blueprint for how we will continue balancing the demand for our legal services with our capacity to meet this demand moving forward. A major component of this blueprint is building on the ways we have already integrated our legal services with the services of our community partners inside the Thorncliffe Park Community Hub. Our participation in a Hub working group focused on integration is leading to the development of a partner-facing intake form that will help connect clients with the wrap around supports they require.

Thank you as always to our staff for their hard work and dedication, to our Board of Directors for their guidance and leadership, and to Legal Aid Ontario for their attentiveness and support. This balancing act would not be possible without all of you.

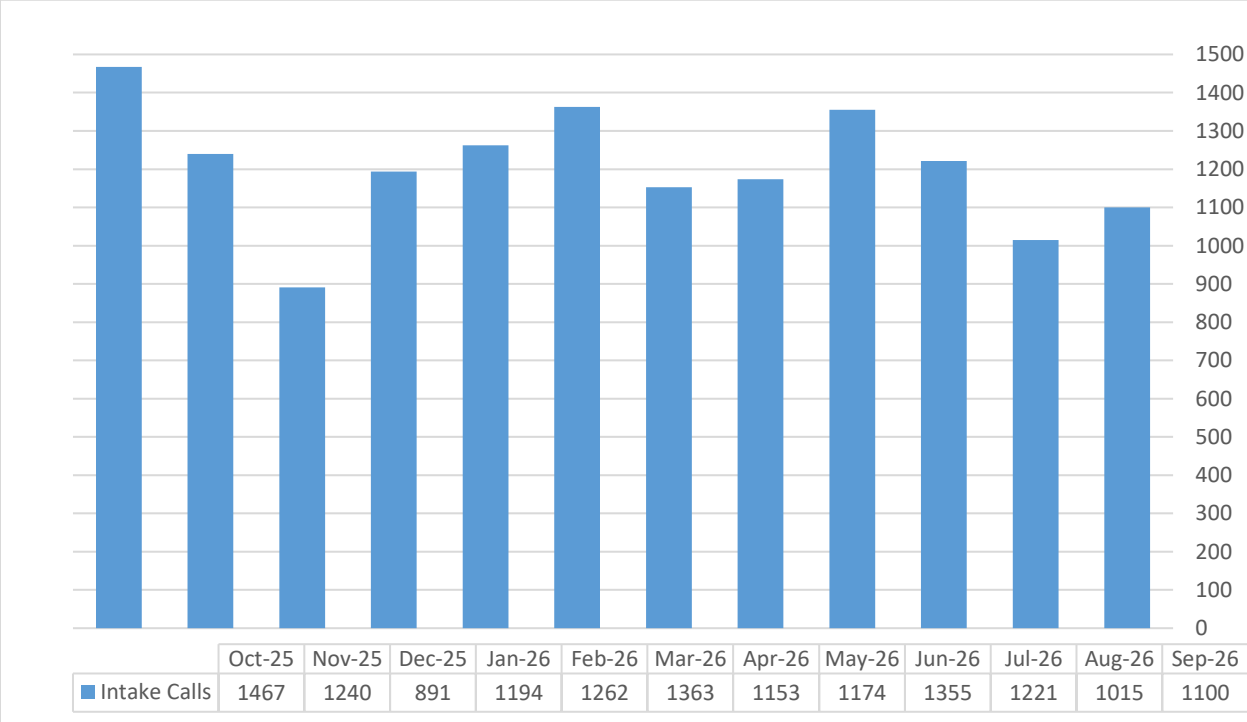
Bhavin Bilimoria
Director of Legal Services

2025-26 Statistics

Percentage of Cases Opened by Core Areas of Law: October 1, 2025 – September 30, 2026



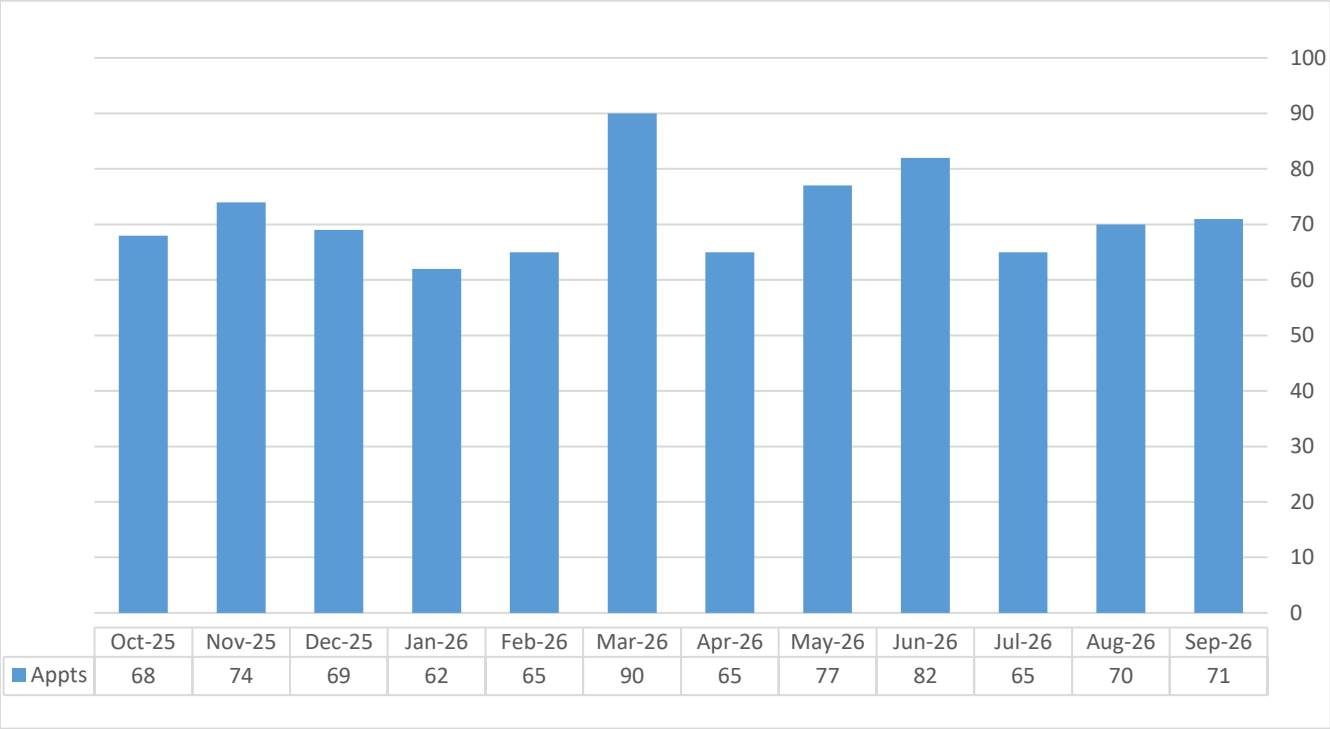
Number of Calls Received on Intake Line per Month: October 1, 2025 – September 30, 2026



	Oct-25	Nov-25	Dec-25	Jan-26	Feb-26	Mar-26	Apr-26	May-26	Jun-26	Jul-26	Aug-26	Sep-26
Intake Calls	1467	1240	891	1194	1262	1363	1153	1174	1355	1221	1015	1100

Total Number of Calls Received on Intake Line: 14,435

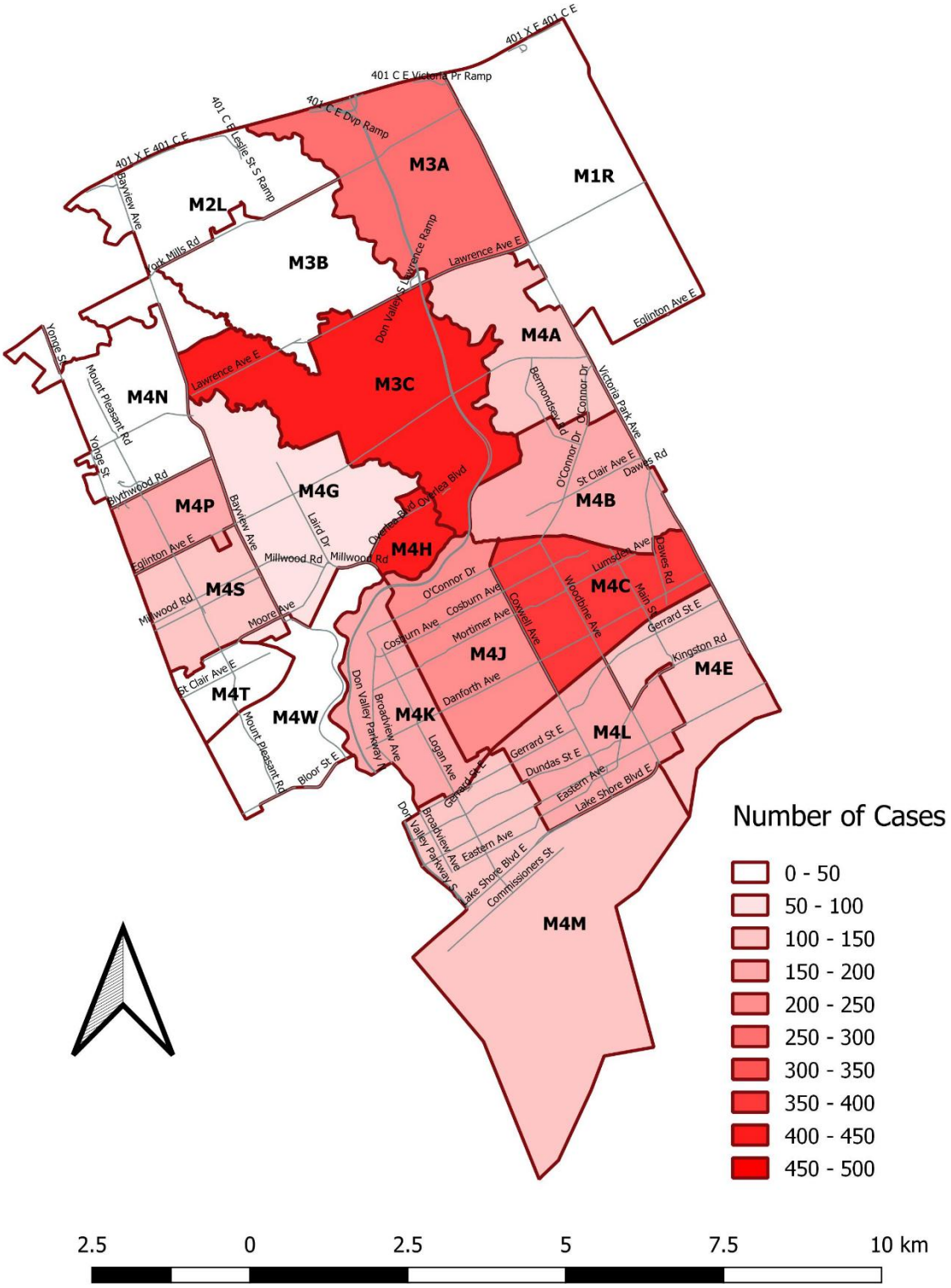
Number of In-Person, Intake Appointments per Month: October 1, 2025 – September 30, 2026



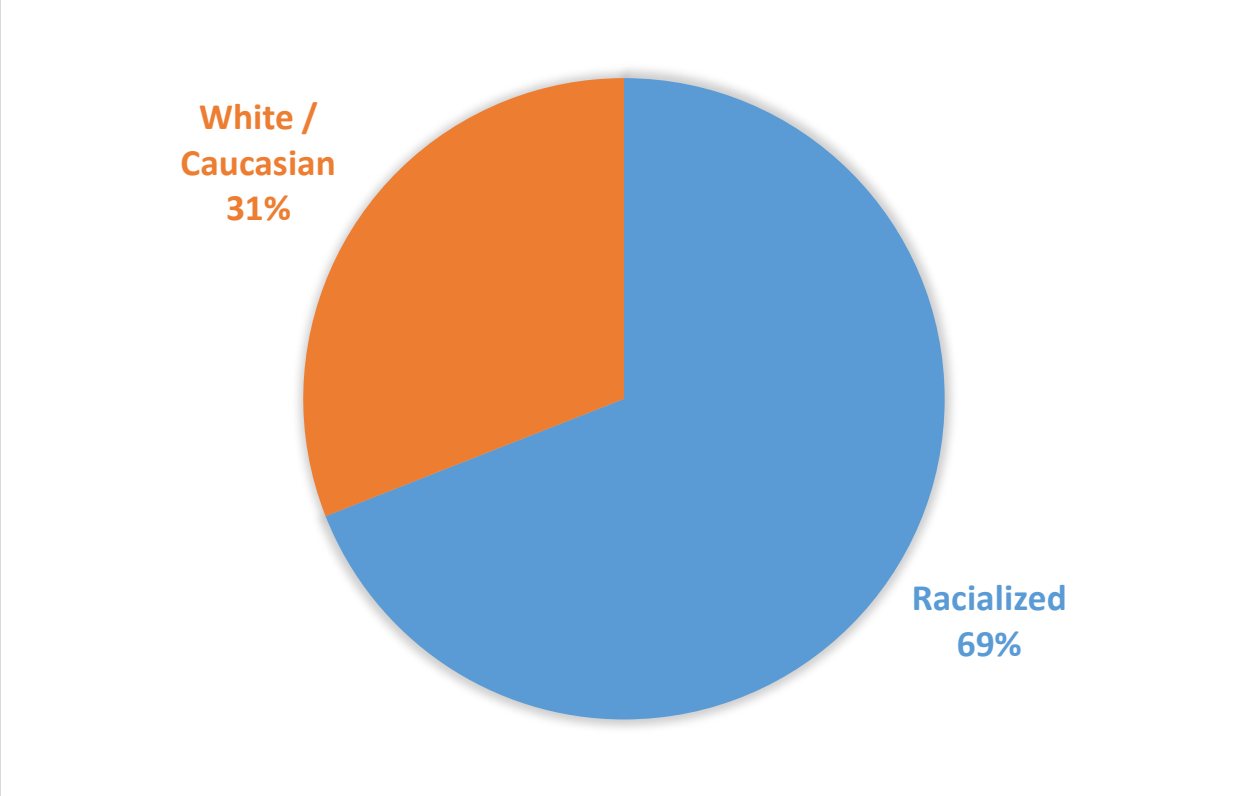
	Oct-25	Nov-25	Dec-25	Jan-26	Feb-26	Mar-26	Apr-26	May-26	Jun-26	Jul-26	Aug-26	Sep-26
Appts	68	74	69	62	65	90	65	77	82	65	70	71

Total Number of In-Person, Intake Appointments: 858

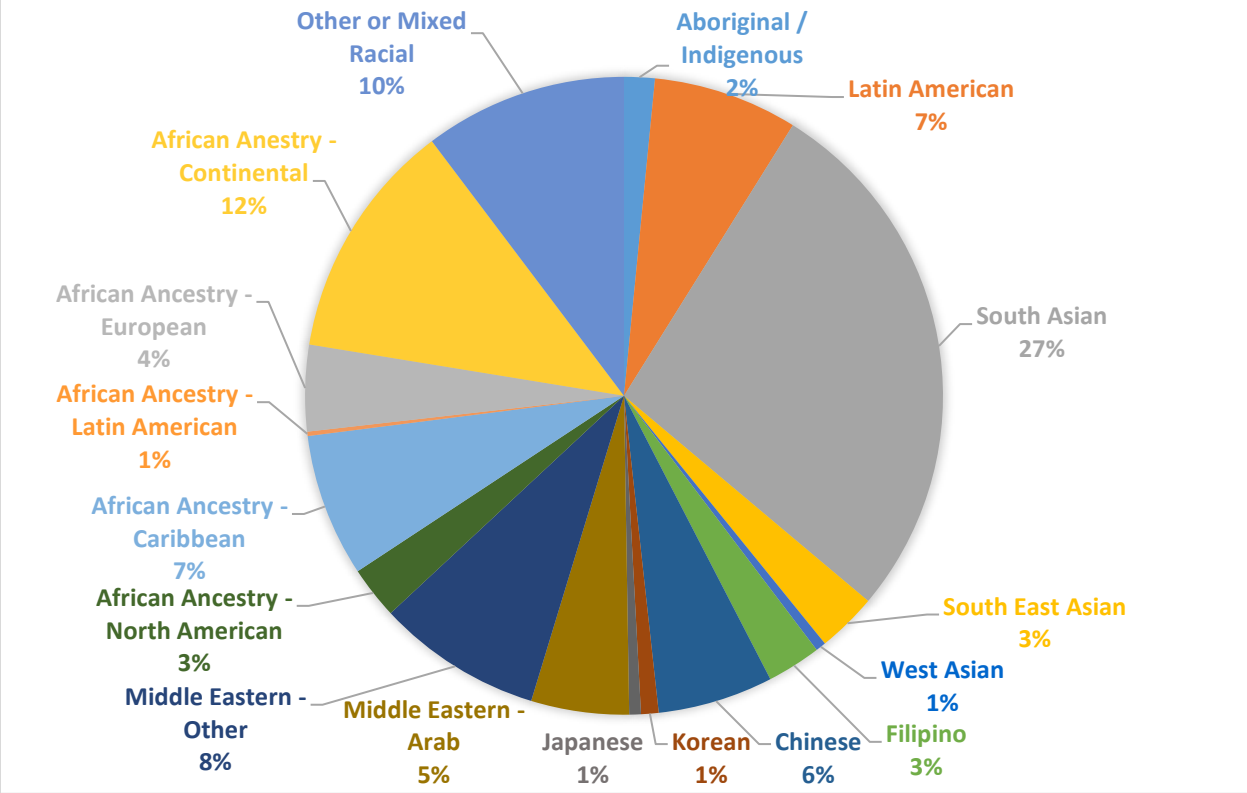
Cases Opened by Clinic Region: October 1, 2025 – September 30, 2026



Self-Identified, Ethno-Racial Demographics of Clients Served: October 1, 2025 to September 30, 2026



Self-Identified, Ethno-Racial Demographics of Racialized Clients Served: October 1, 2025 to September 30, 2026



Community Development Report

When I'm asked to describe my position as a Community Development Worker, I struggle to explain it in just a few sentences. It is a job that encompasses many roles and responsibilities. I am grateful that I have been able to shape this role since I began in late 2022 and get to continue shaping it as the needs of our clients and communities change.

We can see from our statistics that more community members are reaching out to us for help. The affordability crisis and housing crisis are worsening, and legislation such as Bill 60 has made it harder for our clients. I see my role as one that fills in the gaps for our legal teams as we cannot help every client or take on every case. I feel the most important parts of my role are advocacy, law reform, outreach and public legal education.

This year we have seen more tenants than ever seeking assistance. While we no longer need to help clients fight renovictions – thanks to Toronto's Renoviction Bylaw that we fought for – we are still seeing many tenants come to us about Above Guideline Increases (AGIs), maintenance and repairs issues, and other types of eviction. We work with tenant organizations like the FMTA, ACORN, No Demovictions and the new Toronto Tenant Union to support tenants in the areas where we cannot provide assistance. One example I'd like to highlight is the demovictions taking place at 2 and 4 Milepost Place in Thorncliffe Park. We cannot fight this type of eviction at the Landlord and Tenant Board, but we have been able to provide meeting space for the tenants at the Hub, print flyers, ensure they have legal information, and support in other ways.

With the Ontario Line being built across our catchment, we will see more development, rising rents and displacement. As the "eyes and ears of the clinic" in our communities, I am responsible for knowing what is happening, staying on top of current issues, listening to community members, and reporting back to my colleagues – and then coming up with ways of how we can assist our community members.

The past year we have hosted several pop-up legal clinics in other parts of our catchment where clients may find it difficult to travel to the Thorncliffe Park Community Hub. We've partnered with local food banks and the South Asian Women's Rights Organization to provide legal services on site with no appointments needed. We've been able to provide legal advice and information to many people who may not have known about us. We are thankful to our community partners for collaborating with us and I hope to find more locations for pop-up legal clinics in 2027.



Pop-up legal clinic at Eastview Neighbourhood Community Centre

As I mentioned earlier, I help fill the gaps for our legal teams. When my colleague on our Immigration Law Team

came to me about her client's cessation case, I knew non-legal actions were also needed. Roman Slepcsik was facing removal after living in Canada for almost 30 years. The lawyers assisting him were running out of legal options, so we created a community campaign and advocated for Roman to our local Members or Parliament, the Minister of Immigration, and the Minister of Public Safety. We also shared his story at the Rally for Migrant Rights and with community advocates to help spread awareness. He is staying for now, but we still need to ensure he won't be removed in the future. This has also made us think of a larger law reform campaign on cessation. I encourage you to read about Roman's story and the campaign at donvalleylegal.ca/stop-romans-removal.

Another part of my role is civic engagement. DVCLS is part of community networks, like the Flemingdon Thorncliffe Inter Agency Network (FTIAN). Together we hosted All Candidates Forums for Taylor-Massey, Thorncliffe Park and Flemingdon Park ahead of this year's municipal election. I also spoke at several meetings and events to provide information on voting and municipal government to our communities.



The candidates and moderators from the Taylor-Massey All Candidates Forum

I joke that I am the booking agent for my colleagues, sending them requests for public legal education (PLE) sessions. I am very appreciative of their enthusiasm for PLEs and their efforts for including them into their already busy workloads. From October 1, 2025 to September 30, 2026, we facilitated 41 PLEs. This is higher than the previous year and shows our commitment to ensuring community members know their rights.

We are fortunate to have amazing volunteers who assist with our community events and outreach. Thank you Nathalie, Rebecca, Qandeel, Jenny and Gabrielle.

Laura Anonen
Community Development Worker



DVCLS at Councillor Matlow's Tenant Town Hall



DVCLS at the TNO Summer Festival

Employment Law Team

Over the last 12 months the Employment Law Team has yet again undergone significant changes. Nevertheless, we have continued to advocate for our clients' rights across a myriad of legal forums throughout Ontario.

In terms of personnel changes, we sadly bid farewell to our fearless leader, Richa Oza. Richa has spent nearly a decade working in the clinic system and was a member of the DVCLS Employment Law Team since 2021. In her time with DVCLS, Richa was a dedicated and caring lawyer who achieved incredible results for our clients and will be sorely missed by all of us at and the communities we serve.

On a more positive note, we are thrilled to welcome back Kanika Gupta as a member of our team. Kanika briefly worked with DVCLS on a four-month contract in the summer of 2025 to cover a leave. She spent the last year working at the Human Rights Legal Support Centre, assisting self-represented applicants navigate the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario (HRTO) process. She re-joined DVCLS as a permanent member of the Employment Law Team in September and has immediately become an integral part of our team.

We continue to work with clients across all of East Toronto, both within the DVCLS catchment area 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, Federal Court, the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario, and the Ontario Labour Relations Board.

Case Highlights:

In the last year, we obtained hundreds of thousands of dollars in unpaid wages, wrongful dismissal damages, human rights damages, and other entitlements on behalf of our clients. Briefly, some of the highlights from this year include the following:

John completed his first hearing at the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario where he represented a Spanish-speaking woman from the catchment of Willowdale Community Legal Services. The client was subjected to harassment from her direct supervisor and was constructively dismissed after only a few months of work when she complained about this harassment. At mediation, we managed to negotiate a settlement of $10,000 with the corporate respondent in the case. We then proceeded to a hearing against the individual respondent who had committed the harassment, where the Tribunal decided in favour of our client and awarded her a further $15,000.

In November 2025, DVCLS also appeared before the Divisional Court in *Bokhari v. Top Medical Transportation Services*, 2026 ONSC 1073, which was a judicial review of the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario where the Tribunal dismissed our client's case on the basis that the HRTO did not have jurisdiction to hear his application. The case raised fundamental concerns about access to justice for low-income individuals and will potentially to alter the landscape of human rights law in Ontario. Due to Richa's tireless advocacy, the judicial Review was granted, the Tribunal's decision set aside, and the matter sent back to the Tribunal to proceed before a different adjudicator. The case is now back with the Tribunal where we continue to represent the client. Ultimately, we hope this decision will serve as a helpful precedent for Ontarians and pushes the adjudicative board and tribunals to think twice before dismissing a case.

Building off our precedent setting work before the Divisional Court, Cosimo was successfully able to use the case law our team worked to create in order to have a client's case before the HRTO reconsidered where the HRTO had previously dismissed the case for jurisdictional reasons. Cosimo also successfully negotiated numerous resolutions for client's who had been wrongfully dismissed from their employment. He successfully negotiated settlements of $20,000 and $15,000 for clients who had been alleged to have engaged in misconduct warranting just cause for their termination.

Testimonials from Clients:

> *"I am deeply grateful to the Legal Aid Clinic for their exceptional support and professionalism in handling my employment law matter. In particular, a special shout out to Cosimo for his expertise, dedication, and compassion that helped turn a challenging situation into a positive resolution. I truly appreciate the remarkable service they provide and the impact they make in the community."*

Team Members:
Kanika Gupta, Staff Lawyer
John Wigle, Staff Lawyer
Cosimo Morin, Staff Lawyer

Past Team Members:
Richa Oza, Team Lead, Staff Lawyer
Mahnoor Fatima, Student-at-Law

Housing Law Team

Throughout the past year, the Housing Law Team continues to grow its roots inside the Thorncliffe Park Community Hub. From supporting community members during the Thorncliffe Park fires to advocating for better legislative changes for tenants, our team maintains our commitment to advancing tenant rights by providing legal advice and representation, engaging in law reform, and providing public legal education sessions.

Housing remains the busiest area of law at our clinic, where we handled **1,289** eviction and tenant rights cases. This year also came with new legislative changes to the *Residential Tenancies Act, 2006*, with the passing of Bill 60. While our team faced shorter timelines to prevent evictions for clients, we have also explored new ways to keep up with the ever-increasing demand for housing legal help with limited scope retainers, preparing submissions for self-represented litigants, and pop-up legal clinics.

We are committed to ensuring that Toronto's affordable housing stock is preserved and that tenants can achieve and maintain housing stability amid an economic downturn and ongoing housing crisis.



Case Highlights

A client's housing was saved through early intervention from our specialized eviction intake and housing caseworker. Through the specialized role, the client was able to be informed of his rights and behavioural measures he could take to strengthen the merits

of his case. We were then able to save the client's housing through a consent agreement, which reduced the client's anxiety and stabilized his housing.

Our team won at Divisional Court in the case of *Bousselmi v. Keyes*, 2026 ONSC 3993 for a landlord's own use case, where the landlord appealed a Landlord and Tenant Board (the "Board") decision that dismissed the landlord's eviction application based on a finding that the landlord had acted in bad faith. The Divisional Court held that it was not an error of law for the Board to consider alternative housing options available to the landlord when finding the landlord lacked "good faith" and making credibility findings. As a result, this preserved the housing to three generations of women.

We represented a family at the Board who was facing an eviction for the mother being an alleged "illegal occupant". Through our submissions, the Board dismissed the corporate landlord's application to evict and ruled that our client was the tenant and as such was entitled to remain in her apartment. The landlord subsequently filed a Request to Review of the Order and a new hearing was granted. We again represented the client at the review hearing and the Board confirmed the original order, preserving this family's housing. In a rare decision, the Board granted our request to order costs against both the landlord for vexatious proceedings and the legal representative personally because of their misuse of artificial intelligence in their submissions.

We successfully won a preliminary motion to void an eviction notice for a landlord failing to argue a reasonable cause of action in the first notice. Rather than the Board proceeding to a full hearing and deciding at the end, the Board dismissed the matter prior to any hearing being held. This reduced the feelings of stress and anxiety that clients often feel throughout a hearing and saved the client's time.



Staff at a community event



DVCLS marching in the rally against Bill 60 in November 2025

Client Testimonials

"Based on my direct experience working with Don Valley Community Legal Services, I can say with confidence that their services are not simply valuable to the community—they are essential. I had two separate experiences, one in 2025 and another in 2026, involving my client, where the involvement of the Don Valley legal team was critical to preventing him from becoming homeless again. In both situations, Michelle Choe, a lawyer with the Don Valley legal team, responded quickly and took decisive action to protect [Client's Name] legal rights and housing stability…Michelle's dedication, responsiveness, and professionalism made an extraordinary difference. On both occasions, her intervention provided a level of legal protection that I could not access through any other available community resource. Without her timely response and the support of Don Valley Community Legal Services, I genuinely believe [Client's Name] could have faced homelessness once again…In my view, the services provided by Don Valley Community Legal Services are more than essential—they are a necessity in today's reality, particularly for low-income members of our community who often have very limited resources to advocate for themselves. Their legal team provides a critical safety net for people who may otherwise have nowhere else to turn."

"Luis: Thank you for helping my brother with his eviction hearing. He was afraid that he was going to lose his home. Thanks to your efforts he could keep his basement apartment. I appreciate you more than I suspect that you know."

"I am especially grateful for Bhavin's assistance over the years. He has gone above and beyond to assist me with my housing issues. I really appreciate the services that Don Valley Community Legal Services provides to our community members. Thank you for giving me the best experience in dealing with my housing issues."

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

Past Team Members:
Mahnoor Fatima, Student-at-Law
Alexa Bain, Summer Law Student

Immigration Law Team

Case Highlights:

1. Holding IRCC Accountable

An unfortunate trend that our caseworkers have found themselves dealing with more and more this past year, is the increase in incorrect and erroneous decisions by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) officers. We have seen decisions that do not follow the applicable law or policy, are based on presumptions rather than fact, and that seem to ignore the actual information or evidence submitted by an Applicant. Some of our most successful work this year, therefore, has been about holding IRCC accountable and making sure our clients are getting the legally correct and fair decisions they deserve.

(a) Work Permit mix-up

We were approached by client looking for help with renewing expired Work Permits for himself and his wife. Their previous permits had expired some time ago, and the family were struggling to support themselves, as they had been required to stop working. The family were refused Refugee Claimants, who were in the process of challenging their denial at the Federal Court. They had been issued a Stay of Removal by the Court and had recently celebrated the birth of a child. By the time the couple contacted us, they had already applied to renew their work permits twice. It had taken several months, both times, to get refusals from IRCC on the basis that they were ineligible for new permits because of their removal orders.

The problem was, the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations* explicitly outline that a person with an "unenforceable" removal order IS eligible for a work permit and go on to specifically define that someone who has been given a Stay of Removal falls into that category. The family had included proof of their Stay, and an explanation letter, in both their applications. It was very obvious that the officer in the first application had ignored that evidence and made an incorrect decision in law, and that the officer in the second application had simply duplicated that reasoning. (The decision notes for the second refusal were actually completely the same, word for word).

We assisted the family with submitting reconsideration requests for the Work Permit applications. AND, contrary to normal practice, we insisted that the applications be reconsidered by a different officer, since the ignorance of evidence and lack of knowledge of the law was so erroneous by the first. While it took two months of waiting, the reconsideration requests were ultimately successful, and both the client and his wife were issued new work permits.

(b) Not a "genuine visitor"

We assisted a client who was a Protected Person in Canada, living alone, who had recently been diagnosed with a serious medical condition. He required a quite serious surgery and wanted his adult children to be with him for the procedure and recovery. A Permanent Residence application had been submitted for the family members, but it would take several years for it to be finalized. We assisted with submitting Temporary Resident Permit applications, on an urgent basis, to allow for the children to come to Canada before the processing of their PR, in-time for their father's procedure. Significant evidence related to his medical needs, and their relationship was provided. It was made clear that we were applying for Temporary Resident Permit applications, because the family were aware that as family members of a Protected Person, who had a PR application in-process, they would not qualify as visitors for a Visitor Visa (Temporary Resident Visa) application.

The Applications were ultimately refused on the basis that the visa officer did not believe that the Applicants were "genuine visitor[s] to Canada", and that based on the evidence provided they did not believe "the Applicant[s] met the requirements for a Visitor Visa". No reference to a Temporary Resident Permit, which was what was actually applied for, was ever made. There was no reference, in the decision notes, to the reason why the children were applying to Canada and the urgency of the medical situation.

We submitted an Application for Leave and Judicial Review. In our application Record, we argued that the officer had made a decision that was categorically unfair and unreasonable, because they had applied the wrong legal test, ignored evidence, and ultimately rendered a decision on an application type that was not made. Following the Court rules, our Application Record was submitted to the Department of Justice (lawyers for IRCC), prior to formally filing the document with the Court Registry. We received an offer to settle and have the application sent back for redetermination, even before the Registry could properly process the filing.

2. Prioritizing Family Reunification

A goal of our team at the clinic is to focus on helping clients who have nowhere else to turn to for assistance. As such, our Scope of Practice is constructed in such a way that we prioritize aiding on applications that Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) does not provide Certificates for, or where there are no affordable referral options available. The "bread and butter" of our work, and where we see some of our most rewarding successes, therefore, is Family Sponsorship and other family reunification programs.

(a) One-Year Window case

A resettled refugee who had faced persecution for sexual orientation in their country of origin, was reunited in Canada with their children and other parent/spouse, with requests that Canada adjust the ordinary analysis of genuine marriage to apply to

mixed-orientation marriages and relationships, and for Humanitarian and Compassionate consideration in the best interests of the minor children to have the other parent present in their lives for their daily support. It was a team effort to overcome various initial hurdles to making the application.

Our advocacy in preparation for the visa office interview was essential, as the spouse had not attended school, could not read in her native language, and did not have basic knowledge of the calendar to be able to date events. Learning these potential barriers ahead of time, we requested notified the visa office of these issues and requested accommodations.

All but one of the children were girls who faced severe gender-based restrictions in their country of origin. Our team is happy they will now get to grow up where they can have access to education and participate in public life and be valued as equal members of society.

(b) The Value of Family

A Rohingya refugee was refused in an application to sponsor his wife and young child, due to his limited finances. We appealed the refusal to the IAD (Immigration Appeal Division) and the minister's counsel felt compelled to reverse the refusal noting that the situation was "saddening" and clearly worthy of humanitarian relief." The family had been separated for nine years, as only the father had a viable opportunity to flee their home, initially. While UN-resettled refugees usually do not have to pay to bring their immediate families to Canada, they can only do this within one year of landing. In this instance, the family tried to use the free One-Year Window program, but had their file closed after a miscommunication with IRCC.

When we applied for the client to sponsor his family, we explained the situation with the One-Year Window and hoped the officer would use their discretion given how narrowly this client missed getting to bring their family to Canada under the OYW program and given that the family were stateless, meaning they had nowhere else to safely return. The mother and child were unable to leave their home (let alone attend school). While these arguments did not work for the written application, they proved compelling when presented live at a hearing.

Team Members:
Allison Krochak, Team Lead, Staff Lawyer
Jennifer Wan, Staff Lawyer
Zach Morgenstern, Staff Lawyer

Past Team Members:
Ashna Naidoo, 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:

Suzannah assisted a client suffering from multiple serious and terminal medical conditions, which significantly affected her overall functioning. She also experienced depression secondary to these medical conditions, along with ongoing emotional distress and suicidal thoughts. Due to the severity of her medical conditions and their impact on her functional capacity, the client had significant difficulty following the appeal process and meaningfully participating in the proceedings. Suzannah provided guidance and support throughout the appeal process, requiring considerable time and effort. The appeal was ultimately successful and the client is now in a better position to access the support and assistance available through ODSP to help her manage her medical needs and day-to-day living.

Rana assisted a client who became incarcerated during the ODSP appeal process. She managed to work with his family doctor to get medical conditions included, with Central East Correction Centre to speak to him while incarcerated, and she also liaised with his ex-partner. She submitted a postponement request to the Social Benefits Tribunal (SBT) due to the client's special circumstances, which was approved, and eventually managed to arrange for a telephone SBT hearing at the Central East Correction Centre. In the end, the client's appeal was successful, with a five-year medical review (average is usually two years).

The client was working in a restaurant when he suffered a devastating workplace accident on his third day of employment. While operating a meat grinder, he lost three fingers, resulting in a permanent impact on his ability to work and support himself. Following the accident, the client received benefits through WSIB. However, his WSIB benefits were intermittent, which created significant financial uncertainty. As a new immigrant to Canada dealing with the consequences of a life-changing injury, he also developed depression and experienced significant emotional distress. The client had difficulty navigating the disability benefit system and was unable to effectively manage the application process on his own. His application for ODSP was initially denied. Suzannah appealed the decision on his behalf and the appeal was successful. As a result, the client now has an additional source of financial support and a renewed sense of hope while continuing to deal with the effects of his injury.

Christine assisted a vulnerable client with limited education and family support. He was refused ODSP after his family doctor indicated conditions such as Bipolar Disorder (which was mostly stable) and knee problems on his original application. Around the time he was refused, he was being investigated for progressive symptoms such as

ataxia which had been happening for some time. He was eventually diagnosed with a neurodegenerative disorder which was quickly advancing and interfering with his balance, fine motor skills, and energy, and was expected to shorten his life expectancy. Christine assisted him to gather a significant amount of medical documentation (over 1000 pages) from various sources on this newly diagnosed condition and have it properly verified by his neurologist so that it would be included in his appeal. He was granted medical eligibility for ODSP without having to go to a hearing and with no further medical reviews.

The client had been receiving ODSP for decades. In 2018, his grandfather established an investment account in the client's name. The client was unaware of the investment account until April 2026, following his grandfather's death. The discovery of the investment created a significant issue for the client because the investment was considered an unreported asset and potentially exceeded the allowable asset limit under ODSP. This raised serious concerns regarding his ongoing eligibility and could have resulted in a substantial overpayment (debt) of approximately $44,000. Suzannah negotiated with ODSP on the client's behalf and successfully established that the investment could be treated as an inheritance and placed into a Henson Trust. As a result, the investment and its accumulated growth did not negatively affect the client's ongoing ODSP eligibility, and no overpayment was assessed against him. This outcome allowed the client to preserve his ODSP benefits while ensuring that the inherited funds were appropriately protected for his future needs.

The client filed an Internal Review request of an ODSP decision to create an overpayment (debt) of approx. $100,000. While his Internal Review request had significant merit, it was denied as it was 22 days late (he had good reasons for the delay). Before seeking assistance from our office, he filed an appeal on his own, which the SBT refused to hear because an Internal Review had not been completed. Nalini sought assistance from the Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC) to file a Judicial Review and the ODSP office settled, promising to issue an Internal Review decision (which, even if not successful, he would then be able to properly file an SBT appeal). While a resolution has not been reached yet, this was notable in terms of our clinic assisting a client to obtain due process.

Testimonials from Clients:

> *“I was seeking a lawyer to represent me in a very important case and I was unable to pay legal fees in full. I was referred to Don Valley Community Legal Services where I was introduced to a great lawyer Nalini Ramsook through this Organization. I am very grateful for her representation in my case. She presented my case with true facts and the Court ruled in our favour. She was highly organised and she always reached out to me which helped me to built (sic) my confidence.”*

"I can't tell you how much I appreciate your help and how supported you made me feel. You (Christine) made a difference in my feelings of self worth, you helped me in more ways than one ... this wouldn't have been possible for me without your amazing help. I'll never be able to express how truly grateful I am."

"Excellent treatment and very kind lady … Respond to my calls and even update me on her schedule … Mrs. Antunes was very kind and understanding and helped me focus on what needed to be done for my ODSP while I was dealing with other legal and non profit program traumas and pain. She kept me on track while I was losing focus and provided me with computer access and guidance when no one else did. I would definitely recommend Christine Antunes and DVCLS to anyone who is applying for ODSP. Amazing lawyer and Human Being!!!"

"I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you for all the help and support you gave me during my ODSP case. Going through this process was very difficult and stressful for me, and having your help made a big difference. Mrs. Ramsook, you were professional, knowledgeable, and supportive, and I truly felt that my case was in good hands. I also want to thank everyone at Don Valley Legal Services for their work and support. I truly appreciate the time and effort you and your team put into helping me. When I received the decision that I had won my case, I felt such a huge sense of relief. I am very grateful that I had you and your team helping me through such an important and difficult time in my life."

"I'm shaking ... I just can't believe this particular fight is finally over - I couldn't have done it without your help Christine, you have supported and guided me through this challenge (as i struggle to navigate others) and I will forever be grateful to you and everything you have done for me ... Knowing I have you to help me with this has really made a big difference … I cannot thank you enough Christine, you are a shining beacon in an otherwise dark & scary world."

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

Intake Team

During the 2025-2026 reporting period, the Intake Team continued to serve as one of the primary access points for community members seeking legal information, advice, referrals, and assistance navigating available legal services. It was a very busy year for Intake and the numbers reflect the significant and growing demand for our services.

By the Numbers

This year, Intake received more than 14,000 telephone calls from community members. To put that into perspective, in 2023 we received just over 9,000 calls. This represents a significant increase in demand over the past few years. We also provided more than 800 in-person services and appointments to community members.

Housing continues to be one of the most significant areas of demand. Approximately 68% of housing matters for which Intake provided legal advice were related to non-eviction matters. These matters covered a wide range of housing and tenancy concerns, and Intake provided clients with information about their legal rights, available options and next steps. In addition to housing, the Intake Team continues to provide legal information and referrals in Immigration Law, Income Maintenance and Employment Law.

Responding to Community Demand

With this level of demand, the Intake Team, together with our Executive Director, Marjorie Hiley, and Director of Legal Services, Bhavin Bilimoria, continued to look at ways to provide accessible services while managing workload and service capacity effectively. Initially, our in-person walk-in service was offered on a first-come, first-served basis. During busy periods, we were seeing as many as 37 clients in a single afternoon.

To better manage the volume and provide a more organized service to clients, we transitioned to an appointment-based model for in-person Intake services. The appointment model was initially offered on Mondays and Tuesdays and was more recently adjusted to Mondays and Wednesdays to better balance workload and service capacity.

At the same time, telephone Intake services continue to be available Monday through Thursday, providing community members regular access to legal information, advice, and referrals throughout the week. These changes reflect the team’s ongoing efforts to balance accessibility, responsiveness, workload management, and quality client service.

"Marilyn helped arrange for an in-person appt when I came into office. At my appt, Anika clearly listened to my situation and gave clear answers to my questions by providing advice on my landlord issue. Also laid out approach on how to proceed for consideration. Very satisfied."

"Anyka was extremely knowledgeable, honest, good listener, great advice, in fact so great wish she would represent me, great asset to your organization. Nice and respectful, not like other Legal services I contacted who were dreadful adding to my problem since so unfriendly, little support, and each person had a different answer making me realize how much they really were qualified and professional even if student lawyers or paralegals. Don Vallley Community Legal Services was the BEST. Thank you so much, it really meant a lot to me that someone was so knowledgeable, understanding, nice and especially giving me a little hope. Once again, Anyka is a great asset to your organization."

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

Past Team Members:
Marilyn Sutharsan
Saahil Krishna, Summer Student
Lia Woldu, Summer Student

Administration Team

We recently said farewell to Marilyn Sutharsan who moved into the receptionist role last fall after working as one of our summer students in 2025. We are appreciative of Nathalie Nellis who has been working as our interim receptionist this fall. We also welcomed Anteneh Gedamu as our new Client Services Coordinator. Anteneh comes with a wealth of experience as a former TNO staff member. Lorena has been a wonderful support in the office to senior management, the Board and our staff. We thank our Administration staff for their support and efforts in keeping us going!

Team Members:
Anteneh Gedamu
Lorena Zelaya
Nathalie Nellis

Past Team Members:
Marilyn Sutharsan

Students

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

2025-2026 Students: Alexa Bain, Ashna Naidoo, Dua Abid, Haniya Saeed, Humna Khan, Lia Woldu, Mahnoor Fatima, Raasikh Wasiq, Saahil Krishna, Tian Zheng

Thank you!

