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CONNECTING REGION INITIATIVE

ACTIVITY REPORT #5

Submitted to the
Law Foundation of Ontario
Access to Justice Fund

On behalf of the
CONNECTING OTTAWA NETWORK

January 2015



Effective communication
Accessible justice



Une communication efficace
Une justice accessible

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INTRODUCTION

This is the fifth Activity Report describing the implementation and outcomes of the *Connecting Ottawa/Connexion Ottawa* project, funded by the Law Foundation of Ontario under the Connecting Region Initiative of the Access to Justice Fund. The report describes activities and performance milestones for the six-month period 30 June to 31 December 2014. Our focus has been the continued implementation of the planned activities, recruitment, training, assignment and supervision of volunteer facilitators, reaching out to our partners in the settlement services and community sectors, providing a learning environment for two students on practice placements from the University of Ottawa Law School and law student from a Pro Bono Students Canada, readying the *Legal Health Check Up* system navigation tool for launch, adding new functionality to our website, and reverting to our original role as case consultants to our partner organizations, a shift away from the interim case management support that had been consuming almost all our resources.

During this period we have operated well within the approved budget. Please see the attached financial statement; this period has ended with a positive fund balance of \$52,950 (including \$44,950 deferred revenue from 2013-14); actual expenditures were \$23,056 under budget. (Please see our [financial statement](#) with notes of significant variations and anticipated pressures in Q3-4.) We expect January/February expenditures to be about \$45,000 so request that the next funding instalment be forwarded no later than mid-March to facilitate cash flow.

We were excited to be back at full staffing strength in May when Erin Fitzpatrick joined us as social worker. Activities that had been languishing or placed on hold since January 2014 were now possible once more. This report fully documents the increase in case consultations, the foundations established for our training and outreach initiatives in the winter and spring, and the revitalization of the facilitator program. However, we encountered a further setback in October when Natalie Drolet, our lawyer, resigned in order to take a challenging and enticing position as Executive Director and Staff Lawyer at the Westcoast Domestic Workers Association in Vancouver BC. From the outset of this project Natalie has been at the core. Her contributions to program development cannot be overstated. She set high standards for everybody associated with the project. We began the search for her successor immediately and were fortunate to have her support and advice while we shortlisted candidates. By mid-December we had selected our preferred candidate and subsequently contracted with Alexandra-Marjorie Derisier to commence on 12 January 2015. In total, we were without a lawyer on the team for only about 6 weeks and this included the Christmas/New Year holiday period. In short, we minimized the immediate impact of Natalie's departure.

Alex Derisier has degrees in civil law and common law from Ottawa University, a civil law exchange with Universidad Panamerica (Mexico), and was called to the bar in 2009. She has experience with labour relations law conducted research on humanitarian issues for the Red Cross, and has worked at the Federal Court of Appeal, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and the Privacy Commissioner of Canada. She is fluent in English, French, Spanish and Créole and can work in all four languages. She is already familiar with our settlement and immigrant services partners and the legal clinic community in Ottawa. Alex's transition from her previous position should be relatively smooth as she was already an employee of Vanier Community Service Centre as the lawyer on the Refugee Pilot Project at the Clinique juridique francophone de l'Est d'Ottawa, with which Connecting Ottawa is collocated.



In previous reports we have expressed concerns that it is challenging to retain excellent staff when the future of the program is precarious and employment contract renewals are uncertain. We are pleased to now report that much of this uncertainty has been lifted. In September our Advisory Group approved staff recommendations to develop a proposal to the Law Foundation to extend funding of the project for another year, until July 2016. The direction was to

- o continue with consultation support to our network partners,
- o address the growing interest and demand for PLE,
- o implement tools to enable trusted intermediaries to identify legal issues with confidence, and
- o train selected facilitators to initiate outreach activities to focus population communities.

The funding proposal was submitted in October and the LFO Board informed us of the decision to extend our funding in November 2014. We are very appreciative of the Foundation's continued support for the Connecting Region initiative and the work being done here in Ottawa.

Here is a report of our progress so far. We thank the Law Foundation for its continued encouragement, interest and support.

ACTIVITY REPORTS

➤ CENTRALIZED HUB FOR INFORMATION, ASSESSMENT AND REFERRAL

OUR CHALLENGE

To ensure that the first point of service for our focus populations becomes a “trusted intermediary” that *always* has the capacity to communicate with the client, assess the problem presented, provide comprehensive information about all facets of the problem presented, and take immediate steps to refer and connect the client to legal and other services that will resolve the problem.

OUR INTENT

- To support and promote *211 Eastern Ontario* (delivered by a partner, the Community Information Centre of Ottawa - CICO) as a centralized hub for information, assessment and referral (IAR) services for all partners
- To reach out to our partners to build awareness of *211* as not just another IAR resource but as the *default* source of information and referral services for issues that have a legal component
- To augment the already very comprehensive *211* database as necessary, to be assured that *all* local legal services have been described using the *211* taxonomy.

PROGRESS

The Community Information Centre of Ottawa continues to be an important resource and valued partner during project implementation. Connecting Ottawa has

- Continued to promote *211 Eastern Ontario* as the default information, assessment and referral (IAR) resource in all project communications, materials and activities, as well as through our use of social media.
- Regularly audited the capabilities of CICO’s IAR professionals to assess and refer persons who contact them with an issue that could be addressed by a legal service.
- Continued a training program for CICO staff to strengthen capabilities regarding legal services information, assessment and referral. We provided one training session to two groups of staff during this reporting period.
- Maintained a feed of the CICO database to the Connecting Ottawa/*Connexion Ottawa* web sites.
- Extended the reach of the [CICO Community Bulletin](#) by posting events on the Connecting Ottawa/*Connexion Ottawa* web sites.

During 2014 there were 991 calls to the Community Information Centre of Ottawa/211 Eastern Ontario related to legal issues. This represents a 29% increase in call volume over the previous year. The most significant increases related to requests for legal advice (up by 31%), access to Legal Aid clinics (up by 32%), requests for law information

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(up by 33%), family law and mediation issues (up by 60%), and calls about probation and parole (up by 178%). Other topics included non-urgent police services, court issues, human rights, detention issues, and advocacy.

Issue	2012	2013	2014
Non Urgent Police Services	203	210	224
Legal Advice	136	140	184
Legal Aid Clinics	98	101	134
Law Information	120	121	161
Family Law	40	40	99
Mediation Services	4	4	3
Court issues	110	112	118
Probation & Parole issues	14	14	39
Human Rights	12	12	6
Detention Issues	15	15	23
TOTAL	752	769	991

Of some interest is the fact that our call audits (conducted weekly) triggered no requests for information or referrals from Connecting Ottawa. Our audit comprises an anonymous caller who describes a scenario taken from our *Legal Health Check Up*. Each of these scenarios involves an issue that requires access to legal information or other legal service to be effectively resolved. In almost all cases, the professional IAR agents at CICO responded appropriately to our caller by providing a referral or a source of further information. However, Connecting Ottawa was never referenced as a possible resource to our caller. This is not necessarily problematic; CICO agents are familiar with the information and resources available on our web site and we have always promoted our services as accessible to front-line service providers and trusted intermediaries but *not* for the direct referral of clients. We will be sharing the outcomes from our audit with CICO in the coming weeks and will then determine ways that we can further support their IAR agents.

In addition, we continue to work with the Community Information Centre of Ottawa to implement a customized data template that will collect information about every call that was identified as having a legal issue or a referral to a legal service. This will enable us to track agency and (anonymized) caller information; language and communication barriers; access to interpretation services; the legal issues (using the same *YourLegalRights* taxonomy that is used in in our websites); requirements for accompaniment, accommodation or other facilitation; eligibility for services; source and level of income; need for follow up; etc.

➤ DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN A WEB SITE

OUR CHALLENGE

There are excellent public legal education and information (PLEI) resources available, especially given the leadership of Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO) and their web site initiative, [Your Legal Rights](#). However, the fact remains that navigation of the legal system remains challenging for many front-line service providers in Ottawa.

OUR INTENT

To supplement the on-line information available from *Your Legal Rights* and the Community Information Centre of Ottawa (CICO) by developing a local web site resource that includes comprehensive and current information about local legal services, and by sharing information about the Connecting Ottawa project and the ways in which it can support project partners to ensure access to justice by our focus populations.

PROGRESS

We have established web sites in both English and French: the [English site](#) was launched on 9 January 2013 and the [French site](#) was launched on 19 February 2013. The domain registrations have been extended until November 2016.

During this period we have taken steps to develop the sites further by

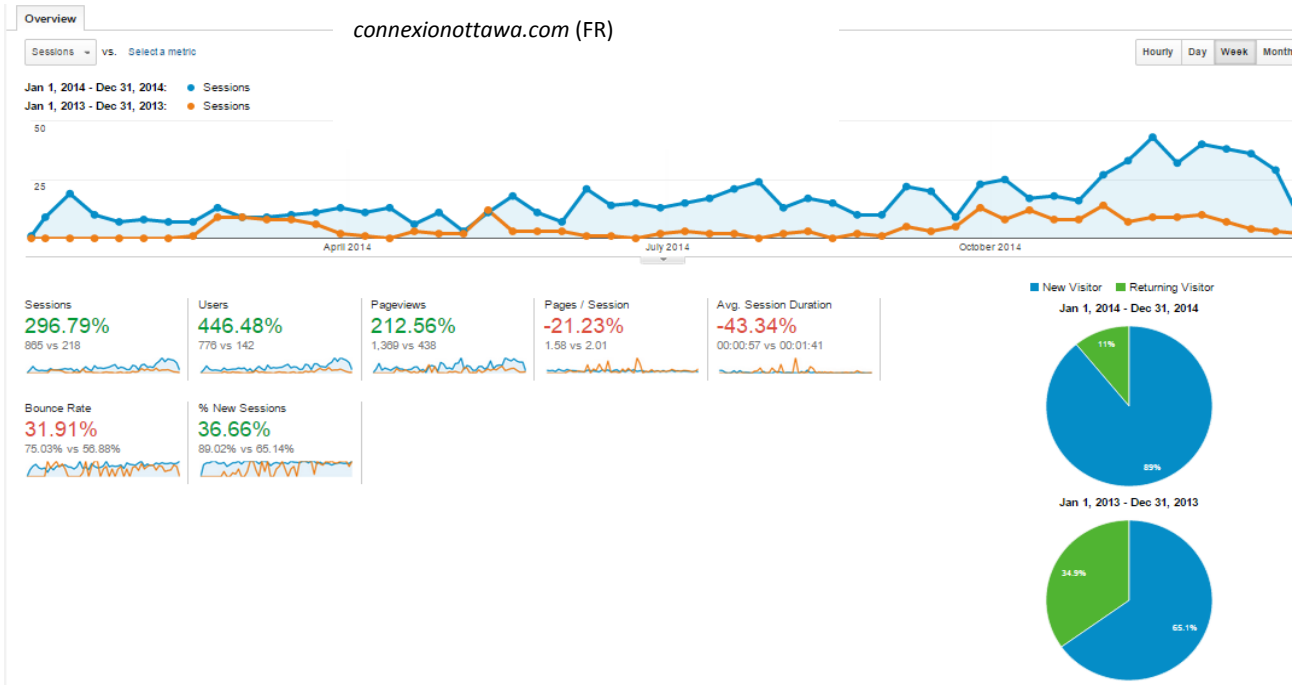
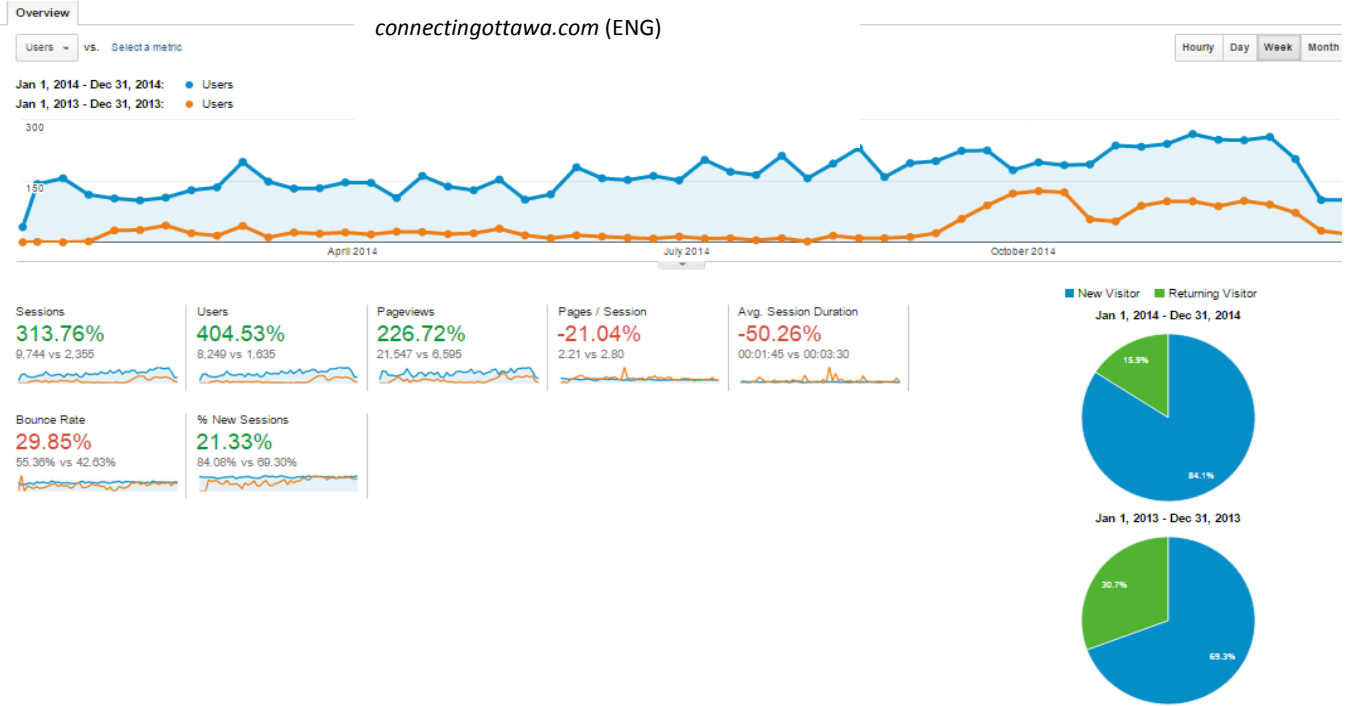
- Adding security updates
- Expanding the “Resources” menu to provide information about *Communication Accessibility Resources* and *Counselling Services for People with Precarious Immigration Status*. Data entry is incomplete so these features will not launch before March 2015. (See the [screen capture](#).)
- Maintaining a current "Events" calendar that shares information about workshops, public legal education sessions, conferences and other learning opportunities of interest to our partners
- Protecting ourselves from robot users who “contact us”
- Added Twitter plug-in to display real-time social media messages

We are still working on:

- Embedding a brief video tutorial about how to make best use of the site. The script has been approved and animations are in final draft.
- Integrating client scenarios from our Legal Health Check List to better define legal issues/sub topics and referral services.
- Adding video presentations of our keynotes from our 2014 Conference
- Evaluating how the site is being used, via an embedded user survey

Google Analytics informs us that traffic to the sites continues to grow steadily. Comparison data year over year (2013 and 2014) is displayed in charts below. The topics that appear to have been of greatest interest are the Public Guardian/Trustee, youth diversion, eviction, partner abuse, and refugees/people without status.

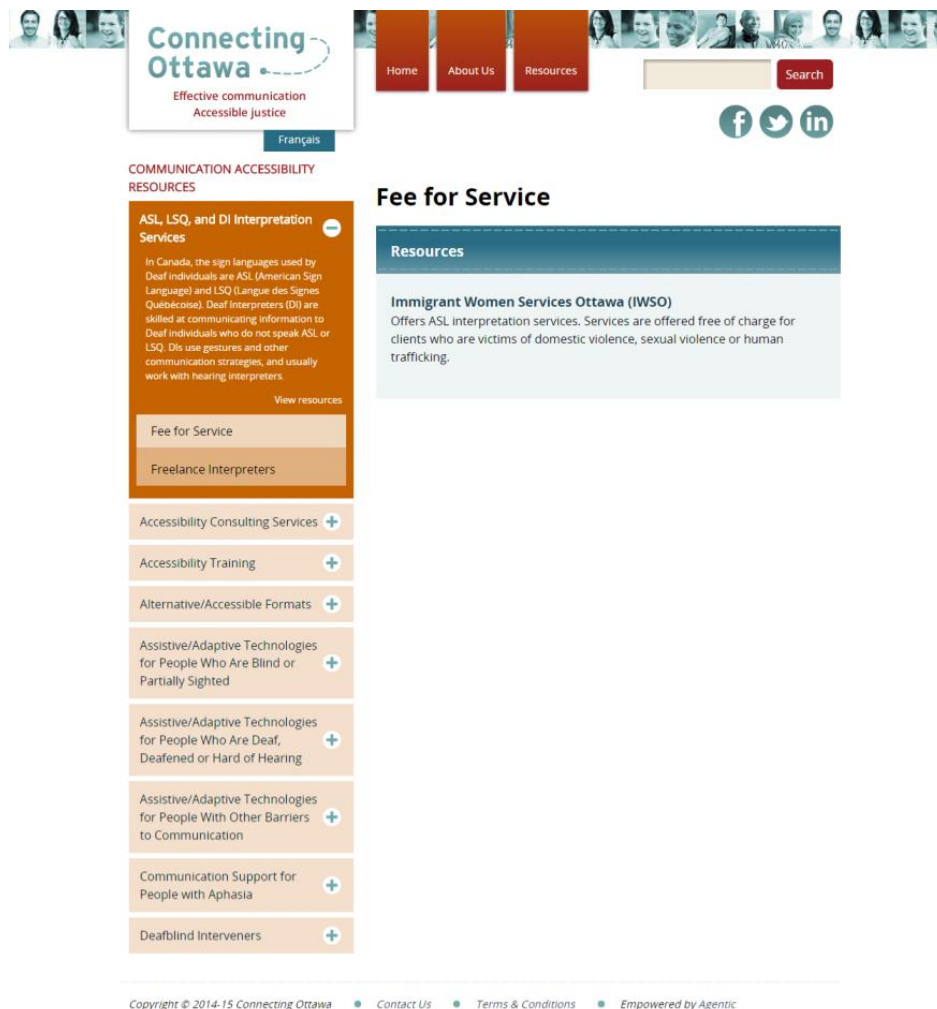
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When compared to the previous year (January to December 2013), the number of users of the English web site has increased by 404%; the number of users on the French web site has increased even more, by 446%. The volume of page views has also increased significantly - by 227% (English) and 212% (French) respectively. We are pleased to see that our bounce rate (which measures the volume of users who immediately leave the site) has dropped – by almost 30% (English) and 32% (French) respectively. 84% of traffic to the English site and 89% of traffic to the French site is comprised of new users.

Each of the sites contains links to the project’s presence on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#). Social media is another vehicle for the project to share news and information related to our focus populations, their access to services, and emerging legal issues, especially concerning immigration, poverty, and accessibility for persons with disabilities. Twitter and Facebook are both “broadcast” media and it has been difficult for us to assess our impact aside from crude measures related to “follows”, “retweets”, “likes”, etc. Although we have been active contributors to the Twitter feed, the only posts to Facebook have been generated from that feed.

Between 1 April 2013 and 31 December 2014, Connecting Ottawa posted 1,050 tweets. During this activity reporting period, we made 190 posts to Twitter which generated 55 retweets and had a 46,000 retweet reach for our messages. 316 persons or organizations are now following us each day (up by 12.5%); we are following 318 persons and organizations.



➤ DEVELOP A POOL OF FACILITATORS AS INFORMED AND TRUSTED INTERMEDIARIES TO CONNECT CLIENTS

OUR CHALLENGE

For many clients – and particularly among our focus populations - a gap can exist between the point of referral and the point of legal services delivery; clients never actually connect with the services to which they have been referred. This gap can be bridged by trusted intermediaries who are volunteer facilitators trained and supported to problem solve with the client to systematically overcome the barriers to connection.

OUR INTENT

Connecting Ottawa will recruit, train, and pay honoraria to a pool of volunteer facilitators who can be effective trusted intermediaries and who can be matched with clients on the basis of gender, culture, languages spoken, and availability.

PROGRESS

Connecting Ottawa has continued to promote opportunities for multilingual persons to volunteer their time and experience to facilitate access to needed services by our focus populations. Our screening and orientation process includes interviews, information sessions, a positive Ottawa Police Service Record Check appropriate for volunteers working with vulnerable populations in community non-profit agencies, and completion of a full-day of training prior to assignment with a client. This training offers not only a shared learning experience re: active listening, problem solving, cultural competencies, privacy and confidentiality, maintaining personal boundaries, roles and responsibilities, etc., but also creates an opportunity for project staff to assess the capacities and capabilities of prospective Facilitators in a dynamic setting. Successful volunteers sign a Volunteer Agreement that describes the expected relationship between Facilitators and Connecting Ottawa. We have just updated and revised a Policy Manual developed to appropriately manage risk associated with this activity; for example, permitted use of personally owned vehicles while on assignment, and ways to establish appropriate personal boundaries with clients.

Our Facilitators are a highly diverse group, ethnically, culturally, linguistically and in terms of their “Canadian experience” in the work force. Many have chosen to volunteer as another step in the process of finding meaningful paid employment where they can use their professional skills. We are always pleased to support the employment aspirations of our Facilitators and we celebrate with them when those aspirations are realized, even though their success will deplete our volunteer pool. Some Facilitators have yet to receive their first assignment because their cultural and linguistic profiles do not match the needs of the client or because of their limited availability or because there has been a temporary decline in the number of referrals for Facilitator support. Other Facilitators have experienced many assignments and are now in a position to mentor newer recruits.

During this activity period we have seen a rejuvenation of the program. Our social worker (Erin Fitzpatrick, who joined the project in May 2014) has brought energy and focus to renew relationships that had stagnated over the

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previous six months because of staff changes. Our veteran Facilitators reconvened in October for a reorientation and training session and were joined by 2 aspiring volunteers. Our agenda was to update the group on changes to the program and our expectations regarding an extension beyond June 2015, and also to initiate training to support outreach activities to raise awareness of legal issues, planned during Q3 and Q4. Staff made a commitment to continuously communicate with Facilitators between training sessions, via newsletters and opportunities to meet to share their experiences as volunteers. During this period, 4 newsletters have been delivered. A direct and immediate outcome is that we now have a truer understanding about this valued volunteer resource; our roster is current, with only volunteers who have recommitted to the program and updated their availability for assignment. We are also clear about the training requirements as we move forward.

Currently there are 15 facilitators available for assignment, with the capacity among them to speak 16 languages. Another three are new applicants who are still in the process of documentation (including police reference checks) and orientation. We have continued to respond to referrals for facilitators to accompany clients to legal and non-legal service appointments and have also used two CILAT-certified Facilitators (English, French, Spanish, Arabic) as paid interpreters whenever appropriate. During this period 9 Facilitators received assignments. 28 clients have been assisted by our volunteer Facilitators since April 2013.

➤ CONNECT LEGAL SERVICES AND SOCIAL SERVICES

OUR CHALLENGE

The challenge was set by Thomson and Kohl:

- Develop a multi-sectorial network of organizations with the potential to build sufficient capacity for legal services to work in closer cooperation with community health and social services, local agencies serving immigrants, and services for disabled persons with a view to ensuring a more integrated service response for clients from the our focus populations, and
- Build the capacity to advocate at a systemic level whenever the system itself has created barriers to accessible legal services.

OUR INTENT

At an inaugural conference in Ottawa in January 2011, Connecting Ottawa developed a multi-sectorial network of local service organizations committed to finding new ways of working to ensure access to justice for our focus populations. They endorsed a plan that would add staff resources to the network: a social services worker and a legal services worker that would be available to advise and consult with front-line providers of information, assessment and referral services to people with issues that would benefit from legal services. Our intent is not to relieve the overflow of demand for case management services, but to strengthen the existing capacity for competent case management among our partners and, where appropriate, support advocacy efforts for system-level changes.

PROGRESS

- The [network of partners](#) currently includes 49 organizations: 18 community service agencies, 10 agencies serving immigrants, 11 organizations providing legal services, 7 agencies serving people with disabilities, and 3 organizations that offer placements to students interested in access to justice issues. The project also reaches out to additional organizations that could contribute to successful outcomes and liaises with other networks and coalitions (including Local Agencies Serving Immigrants [LASI], the Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership [OLIP], and the Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres).

We have recognized that organizations engage differently with the project; partners participate according to their capacity and resources. To better manage our relationship with the network we have categorized the partners according to the quality and extent of their engagement (Levels 1-3). Organizations in Category 1 are integral to the success of the project; they are fully engaged in decision making processes and contribute time and resources. Organizations in Category 2 communicate regularly with the project,

frequently consult concerning clients, and share their perspectives about our focus and direction. Organizations in Category 3 have expressed an interest in our activities and wish to be kept informed about access to justice issues and opportunities for cross-sectorial collaboration. All organizations receive our communications (information, newsletters, events calendar, etc.), have access to the web site, and be invited to our annual conference and other learning opportunities.

During this reporting period we met with 8 community service partners to assess how our legal issue awareness and system navigation tools can be improved, determine the training priorities for trusted intermediaries within these organizations, and consulted about access to justice for our focus populations. In addition, we reviewed our partnership agreements with Category 1 to be assured that our working relationships will remain productive.

- Further to our Partnership Agreement, office accommodations and human resources services continue to be provided by [Centre de services communautaires de Vanier](#), a Community Resource Centre that is already home to la [Clinique juridique francophone de l'Est d'Ottawa](#). CSC Vanier is the “employer of record” for project staff, manages payroll and benefits administration, provides the security of mature personnel policies and other human resources infrastructure, and provides office accommodations.
- Connecting Ottawa currently has the following staff under contract: Alexandra-Marjorie Derisier LLL, LLB and Erin Fitzpatrick MSW, LLB, RSW. They are both bilingual in English and French; Alex also speaks Spanish and Creole fluently. David Hole MSW is an independent consultant under contract to provide project management services.

During this period we

- Reached out to our partners to
 - Raise awareness and promote use of project services.
 - Discuss ways in which the project can build local capacity for case management for clients from our focus populations
 - Share best practices when responding to issues raised by these populations
 - Understand partners’ history and experience when referring to legal services
 - Explore ways that the project can improve this experience
 - Explore PLE and shared training opportunities
 - Determine the most effective ways to maintain productive liaison with partners and other stakeholders.
- Provided case consultation and advice to network partners. Staff primarily responds to requests for service but our lawyer and our social worker are now regularly collocated with partner organizations with consultation hours weekly for one half-day at [Catholic Centre for Immigrants](#) and one half-day at Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization ([OCISO](#)).

Partner organizations consult with us about hard-to-serve client who face barriers to communication; we provide information and advice but no longer provide direct casework services on even an interim basis, that is we assess the legal issues and communication challenges, connect the client with needed services, and identify an ongoing case manager before terminating our involvement. The daily workload has been increasingly consumed by these casework activities. Although we understand that consultation and advice alone is insufficient support for overburdened front-line service providers who are often poorly prepared to

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respond to the additional demands of clients who have difficulties communicating their issues, by reverting to our original consultation role our staff now have more time available to allocate to training and organizational capacity building. We have also begun implementing alternative strategies to resource service providers, including the assignment of students and Facilitators to provide regular access hours at the organizations that most frequently seek our consultation, case management and client advocacy expertise.

All consultation activities are logged, with source and reasons for referral, legal and communication issues tracked, and case notes maintained. The extent of our involvement varies greatly: in some instances we are consulted without clients being identified or our consultations are relatively brief, in many other instances our staff is extensively involved with researching a legal issue, determining appropriate connections to services and other time-intensive support activities. There were 145 cases opened during this activity period, 13% more than during the previous six month period and 34% more than the previous year. A total of 423 clients and their families have benefited (directly or indirectly) from interventions by Connecting Ottawa to date. The value of collaborative practice and a holistic response has been demonstrated by the 56 cases (to date) that required a shared response from both the lawyer and the social worker. During this period 19 clients required or requested interpretation or augmentative equipment to communicate; Connecting Ottawa was able to facilitate services without the need to subsidize. In 13 cases (to date) Connecting Ottawa has subsidized the costs of interpretation, and in 28 cases (to date) a Facilitator was assigned.

The cases presented a full range of legal and social issues. Altogether, 18 different organizations referred cases to our lawyer who responded to 16 different legal issues, of which 45% related to immigration, 13% to family law, 7% to employment, 6% to criminal matters, 5% to wills and powers of attorney, 5% to access to benefits, and 3% to housing. Altogether, 11 different organizations referred cases to our social worker who responded to 11 different issues, of which 20% related to immigration, 20% to health, 18% to employment, 18% to housing, 10% to family issues. When both our lawyer and social worker partnered to provide service to clients, 4 organizations provided referrals of which not surprisingly 82% originated from the organizations where we are collocated (Catholic Centre for Immigrants and OCISO).

We have presented [two case studies](#) as examples of the services delivered by our lawyer and social worker.

CASELOAD ANALYSIS								
	# Cases: Jan-June 2013	# Cases: July-Dec 2013	# Cases: Jan-June 2014	# Cases: July-Dec 2014	# Cases: Total	# Orgs Referring	# Interpretn Arranged	YTD: # Facilitators Assigned
Social Worker	14	28	12	51	105	11	2	19
Lawyer	20	67	103	72	262	18	10	5
Shared	8	13	13	22	56	6	1	4
TOTAL	42	108	128	145	423		13	28

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- Added two students to the project from the Faculty of Law at Ottawa University (352 hours placement). Cemone Morlese and Amelia Calbry-Musyka were with us on placement from 2 June until 5 August 2014. Each student allocated $\frac{2}{3}$ of their placement experience to consultation support to clients and service providers within the Connecting Ottawa network. For the remaining $\frac{1}{3}$ of their time the students collaborated on an independent research project related to an access to justice issue and otherwise supported the early development of the new Ottawa Sanctuary City Network. Although these internships proved to be good learning opportunities, instead of contracting with Ottawa University to receive interns during the fall semester, we approached Pro Bono Students Canada for a student. PBSC placements provide opportunities for us to have a more sustained relationship with a student, albeit for fewer hours each week. Kristina Bezprozvanykh joined us in October 2014 and will be available until May 2015.

There were no social work students on placement with the project during this period, although we have renewed our relationship with Carleton University School of Social Work and will receive a MSW student (Jocelyn Wattam) from 5 January until 24 April 2015.

- Completed the development of a means to assist trusted intermediaries and service providers to more readily identify the complex, and often interconnected barriers facing clients who are seeking access to justice: our *Legal Health Check Up* (LHCU) is a flagging tool that workers can use to identify whether the problems presented by their clients may have a legal solution. Trusted intermediaries have told us that in order to provide legal information to clients, they first need to be able to recognize when a legal issue exists – “most of the time we don’t recognize if it is a legal issue unless the client emphasizes the they need a lawyer or if they talk about how severe the problem is” (front-line worker). Our approach to raising awareness of what in fact constitutes a legal issue has been described in [an article](#) prepared by Natalie Drolet at the request of CLEO (for future publication in a news blog).

Our goal was to develop an accessible, simple and versatile tool that corresponds to the taxonomy of our websites that already feature a directory of legal services in Ottawa with links to reliable easy-to-read legal information resources. The format invites users to click on different areas of the law and related legal topics – for example, “Housing” (area of the law) and “Maintenance and Repairs” (legal topic) in order to find relevant legal services and resources. The LHCU adds problem statements that correspond to the areas of law and legal topics; e.g. when a user explores “Maintenance and Repairs” they are provided with a list of common problems, such as “I told my landlord that my heating is not working properly but he has not fixed it”. The intent is to encourage trusted intermediaries to take a holistic approach to the complex issues presented by their clients.

The result is a comprehensive compendium of 234 problem statements (4,649 words) organized into 13 legal issues and 71 legal subtopics. Our focus groups consistently emphasized the importance of clear, simple language that points to recognizing legal issues and made the case for expanding the list of problem statements even further; our content has been reviewed by lawyers with particular expertise in the 13 legal issues and the language has been revised by plain writing consultants. We have already begun adding this content to the web site by incorporating statements into the subtopic description as a guiding illustration for users (see screenshot, below). In addition, we plan to develop PLE materials that utilise the LHCU statements, initially by designing and producing posters and brochures for the top 5 legal issues referred by our partners and later by incorporating the LHCU as an integral part of our trusted intermediary training and PLE workshops.

Effective communication
Accessible justice

Français

TOPICS

Aboriginal Issues +

Abuse and Family Violence -
Abuse and family violence can take the form of physical, psychological, sexual, financial, or emotional abuse. Abuse happens in all kinds of families, including people of all income levels, ethnocultural backgrounds, and sexual orientations.

Abuse of people with disabilities

Child abuse and neglect

Elder abuse

Partner abuse

Peace bonds and restraining orders

Consumer Law +

Criminal Law +

Education Law +

Elder abuse

Services

Includes physical, emotional, and financial abuse of seniors by relatives and caregivers.

What the clients may say:

- "Sometimes I am left alone by the people who I depend on for help with my basic needs."
- "I have concerns about how my money is being spent since others have started assisting me with my finances."
- "My son has refused to fill a prescription for the heart medication I need, because he says it is too expensive."
- "My daughter refuses to allow me to have visitors at home and I am feeling very lonely."
- "When he starts shouting I am afraid that my son might hit me."

LEGAL SERVICES
Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic
Offers legal help, counselling and language interpretation to women who have experienced violence.

- Participated in learning opportunities, workshops and conferences:
 - LAO – *Practical Tips for Navigating Mental Health Court*
 - CAMH online course – *Refugee Mental Health*
 - CARL – 7th National Conference, Ottawa

- Made presentations and collaborated with other groups on complementary initiatives:
 - Round Table Discussions sponsored by UNHCR High Commissioner
 - Continued contributions to the work of CHI-COP (Collaborative-Holistic-Integrated Community of Practice) – CLEO
 - Continued contributions to the work of the Connecting Communities Advisory Committee
 - Collaboration with ARCH to provide logistical support for a series of workshops in Ottawa for the claims process for former residents of the Huronia, Rideau and Southwestern Regional Centres, that resulted in the identification over 300 potential claimants - a remarkable achievement given the barriers faced by many people labelled with intellectual disabilities when accessing information and legal services
 - Collaboration with the Community Leadership Network for Families to develop a train the trainer framework
 - Partnered with the Association des juristes d'expression française de l'Ontario (AJEFO) in support of the opening of the [Centre d'information juridique d'Ottawa](#).
 - Provided logistical and other supports to the early development of the Ottawa Sanctuary City Network.

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- Hosted a CLEO workshop, *Helping Your Clients Find Good Legal Information*
- Presented *Upcoming Changes in Refugee and Immigration Laws* to the Conseil Économique et Social d'Ottawa Carleton (CÉSOC).
- Contributed to the research of Linda Gyorki who includes the Connecting Ottawa project as a “best practice” in “[Breaking Down the Silos: Overcoming the Practical and Ethical Barriers of Integrating Legal Assistance into a Health-care Setting](#)” (p.56), Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship Report (Melbourne, Australia), September 2014
- Agreed to provide consultation and other resources to the Law Society of Upper Canada as they contribute the backbone organization to support law reform strategies in Ontario.

➤ SUBSIDIZE COSTS OF CONNECTING CLIENTS WITH LEGAL SERVICES

OUR CHALLENGE

Because our focus populations are invariably living with incomes below the poverty level (LICO), their access to justice is limited not only by their relative inability to communicate their issues and navigate the legal service system, but also by the costs of actually accessing affordable legal services and translation/interpretation services, and even public transit fares and child care.

OUR INTENT

To advocate for measures that will ensure the affordability of legal services for all persons accessing justice, and to manage a modest fund that could purchase interpretation and translation services that are not eligible for LAO subsidy; sign language interpretation, assisted and augmentative communication services for people with disabilities, and language translation and interpretation services for allophones that are just beginning their navigation of the system (often via contact with a community health or social service partner organization)

PROGRESS

There has been little activity related to this, and given that access to the project fund is intended as an option of “last resort” this has probably been a good thing. During this period the only expenses related to the purchase of bus tickets to facilitate client transit to appointments.

At the outset, Connecting Ottawa had identified the need for skilled interpretation and translation as potentially a significant barrier to accessing justice. However, immediately prior to Year 1 of the project LAO announced the availability of funding to community legal clinics to purchase interpretation services. This has greatly assisted allophones to access the legal services they require and reduced the anticipated demand for the kinds of subsidies that we were prepared to make available. The exceptions remain the Family Law Information Centre (FLIC), LAO Duty Counsel, and services provided by Pro Bono Law, where clients continue to experience barriers because of an inability to speak one of the Official Languages. In addition, the majority of non-legal services have extremely limited budgets (if any) to allocate to interpretation for clients. Most commonly, clients are asked to bring a family member or friend to provide interpretation at the cost of confidentiality and privacy concerns.

In our approach we will continue to try to strike a balance between encouraging trusted intermediaries to ensure that clients have access to interpretation provided by CILAT-certified interpreters when necessary without opening the flood-gates to a demand for interpretation subsidies that could be beyond our budget. Meanwhile, we encourage LFO to work with LAO to make interpretation services more readily available to FLIC and Duty Counsel.

We have successfully negotiated the services of a network partner, [Community Interpretation Services for Our Community](#) (CISOC) at a preferred rate that is considerably reduced from their established rate (almost \$70/hr). Further, we have arranged to purchase interpretation services directly from three of our Facilitators who are CILAT-certified. Finally, we have strengthened our connection with our network partners that provide services to persons

LAW FOUNDATION OF ONTARIO – CONNECTING REGION INITIATIVE – PHASE 2

with disabilities; we now have an increased awareness of the high costs of interpreters, interveners and other augmentative communication services required by this population and have budgeted accordingly.

➤ COORDINATE ALL ACTIVITIES, MANAGE PROGRAMS, EVALUATE OUTCOMES

OUR CHALLENGE
 To manage a project that will move from being “a good idea” to being a demonstration of “good practice” and excellent outcomes.

OUR INTENT
 Our purpose is to strengthen the capacity of network partners without creating another organization, by resourcing and coordinating activities, evaluating performance and outcomes, ensuring that all partners understand their contribution and role over time, and communicating regularly and effectively with our network partners and other stakeholders.

PROGRESS

The project coordinator provides progress reports at every meeting of the Advisory Group, consults with project staff weekly, approves all project expenditures, works with the bookkeeper (at South Ottawa CLS) to ensure the project’s financial health, and is always available for consultation about the many and varied issues that emerge with almost frightening regularity.

- During this reporting period, the Advisory Group met on 18 September 2014 and again on 11 December 2014 (at which the contents of this Activity Report were received). It will meet again on 12 March 2015. The current membership of the Advisory Group is as follows:

NAME	SECTOR	ORGANIZATION
Daniel Gagnon	Legal Services	CLS Ottawa Centre
Christine Sharp	Community Services	CIC / 211
Tim Simboli	Community Services	CMHA (Ottawa)
St-Phard Désir	Immigrant Services	CÉSOC
Michel David	Services to Persons with Disabilities	Canadian Hearing Society
Cindi Rye	Community Services	Pinecrest-Queensway CHC
Mohamoud Hagi-Aden	Community Services	South-East Ottawa CHC
Gary Stein [CHAIR]	Legal Services	South Ottawa CLS
Sarah Caspi	Immigrant Services	Jewish Family Services
Maria-Teresa Garcia	Immigrant Services	Catholic Centre for Immigrants
STAFF		
Alexandra Derisier	[Lawyer]	Connecting Ottawa
Erin Fitzpatrick	[Social Worker]	Connecting Ottawa
David Hole	[Secretariat]	Connecting Ottawa

LAW FOUNDATION OF ONTARIO – CONNECTING REGION INITIATIVE – PHASE 2

- In September, project staff met over two days to discuss the future direction and priorities for the project. These were presented to the Advisory Group, approved, and became the basis for a proposal to the Law Foundation of Ontario to extend project funding for another year (that is, from 1 July 2015 until 30 June 2016). In November, the Advisory Group received notice that the proposal was accepted. We are grateful to the Board of the Law Foundation for their continued support of the Connecting Ottawa project.
- Another lawyer was recruited in December to replace Natalie Drolet who moved to become the Executive Director and Staff Lawyer at the West Coast Domestic Workers Association in Vancouver. Natalie had been the lawyer with our project from the outset and shaped many elements of the program over the past two years. We advertised using Charity Village job postings, use of social media, and mobilization of our partnership networks. We received 46 applications, interviewed six preferred candidates, and hired Alexandra-Marjorie Derisier LLL, LLB. Alex's contract begins on 12 January 2015.
- All partners have signed a Partnership Agreement that is valid until 1 October 2015. We are currently reviewing the language of the Agreement, given that we now know that Connecting Ottawa's funding will extend into 2015-16. Any recommendations for amendment will be discussed by the Advisory Group in March 2015.
- Work has continued to develop and improve administrative systems required (role descriptions, program descriptions, eligibility requirements, work flow, invoicing and payments, records management and administration), and to provide the logistical and administrative support services necessary to build the overall capacity of the network.

➤ SHARE LESSONS LEARNED

OUR CHALLENGE

To share our experience – good and not so good - with peers and colleagues so that the system of legal services is strengthened and is more readily accessed by our focus populations.

OUR INTENT

We will not only host an annual conference for network partners and interested stakeholders but also to seek out conferences, symposia and other opportunities to make presentations, participate on panels, offer workshops, and poster lessons learned to audiences of our peers and colleagues in community services, especially legal services. In addition, to further develop and inform our network of partners, the project will produce and electronically distribute a newsletter (the *Communiqué*) periodically.

PROGRESS

- Given the disruptions in our staffing during the fall, we postponed the creation of a conference planning working group until the end of January 2015. Whereas Connecting Ottawa usually presents an annual conference in March we are proposing to host our next conference in May. Although the theme has not yet been confirmed it is likely that we will use this as an opportunity to showcase the Legal Health Check Up as a PLE tool.
- Connecting Ottawa produces and distributes a newsletter (*Communique*) for our partners and project stakeholders/contacts. However, there were no newsletters produced during this reporting period.
- Connecting Ottawa has produced and distributed promotional materials to our partners and other referral sources: rack cards, posters, and sticky notes.

FINANCIAL
REPORT

[1 JULY – 31 DEC 2014]

CONNECTING OTTAWA		2520	
STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS FOR THE SIX MONTH ENDED PERIOD ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2014			
	Budget	Actuals	
	(12 Months)	(6 Month)	
REVENUE			
2.0 Law Foundation of Ontario			
414 Received During Year	271,008	121,071.60	
414 From Deferred Revenue (Prior Year's Surplus)	-	44,326.89	
414 To Deferred Revenue (Current Year's Surplus)	-		
	271,008	165,398.49	
EXPENSES			
3.1 Promotion 211/Training			
540 Equipment	-	-	
545 Materials and Supplies	500	-	
615 Travel	600	-	
555 Training/Professional Development	1,000	-	
	2,100	-	
3.2 Website Hosting, Management and Administration			
535 Database Development	-	-	
565 Translation	200	-	
585 Staffing Costs	-	-	
625 Website Hosting, Management and Administration	6,000	236.53	
	6,200	236.53	
3.3 Facilitators to Connect Clients and Legal Services			
545 Materials and Supplies	-	-	
550 Meeting Costs	-	13.14	
590 Training	900	-	
620 Volunteer (IPL) Honoraria	2,700	256.24	
615 Travel	1,000	65.10	
595 Translation/Interpretation	-	170.00	
510 Administration	-	-	
	4,600	504.48	
3.4 Legal Worker/Social Worker Connection			
515 Allocated Administration	10,000	6,666.67	
520 Annual Conference	-	-	
530 Cloud/Mobile Services	2,000	1,087.53	
540 Equipment Purchases	1,500	258.19	
545 Materials and Supplies	1,200	777.55	
550 Meeting Costs	600	488.51	
555 Professional Development	-	-	
557 Professional Fees	1,500	-	
565 Salaries and Benefits	150,600	69,864.87	
585 Staffing Costs	-	52.95	
590 Training/Professional Development	2,500	150.00	
595 Translation/Interpretation	2,000	1,211.65	
615 Travel	5,000	770.34	
699 Sundry	-	50.00	
	176,900	81,358.26	
3.5 Overcoming Barriers to Accessibility			
545 Materials and Supplies	-	-	
595 Translation/Interpretation	6,000	304.03	
615 Travel	-	-	
610 Transportation/Child Care, Etc	1,000	-	
	7,000	304.03	
3.6 Secretariat			
545 Materials and Supplies	-	20.78	
510 Administration	-	259.85	
550 Meeting Costs	250	685.16	
560 Purchased Services	50,000	23,386.50	
590 Training/Professional Development	-	-	
595 Translation/Interpretation	-	145.00	
620 Volunteer Honoraria	-	30.00	
615 Travel	1,000	223.62	
	51,250	24,750.91	
3.7 Shared Lessons Learned			
520 Annual Conference	4,000	-	
550 Conferences, etc	1,500	-	
560 Purchased Services	-	-	
615 Travel	2,500	-	
	8,000	-	
3.8 Administration			
542 Lead Agency Stipend	5,000.00	5,000.00	
527 Bookkeeping	1,000.00	259.85	
525 Bank Charges	50.00	34.50	
522 Auditing	800.00	-	
699 Sundry	-	-	
799 Contingency	8,108.00	-	
	14,958	5,294.35	
	271,008.00	112,448.56	
EXCESS OF REVENUE OVER EXPENSES (EXPENSES OVER REVENUE)		0.00 52,949.93	
Total Expenses			

NOTES

- At the end of this reporting period, all expenses were within budget.
 - The *Lead Agency Stipend* is paid to South Ottawa CLS to compensate for their time sponsoring and supporting this project; the stipend is now fully paid for 2014-15 and no further cost is anticipated.
 - Costs associated with *Website Hosting* in 2014 were paid from funds received in 2013-14. We will be invoiced by Agentic Digital Media for \$6,000 in Q3 of 2014-15. In addition, we expect to incur additional site development costs in excess of the budget; we will address this by reallocation from other lines or from Contingency funds.
 - *Translation and Interpretation* expenses have been a little higher than budgeted YTD and we will monitor this closely during the remainder of this year. However, interpretation is a critical component of the project and we will address demand by reallocation from other lines if required.

- The Excess of Revenues over Expenses will support needed cash flow until March 1st 2015 at which point the project will urgently require further financial contribution from LFO (See our financial position, below.)

CONNECTING OTTAWA	
FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT DECEMBER 31, 2014	
ASSETS	
110 Cash	52,949.93
LIABILITIES	
120 Due to General Fund	-
210 Accounts Payable	-
FUND BALANCE	<u><u>52,949.93</u></u>

2 CASE STUDIES

Gita

REASON FOR REFERRAL

A settlement counselor at [Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization](#) (OCISO) referred Gita for a case conference with Connecting Ottawa, because she was at risk of losing her housing. Gita was being sued by Truda, her former psychologist who is a joint tenant on the title of Gita's home. Gita needed to connect with a lawyer who could assist her with her case, including postponing a hearing scheduled within the month.

ASSESSMENT

Gita does not speak English proficiently and requires an interpreter. The counselor provided interpretation during the case conference.

Truda was Gita's psychologist for a period of three years. In 2000, Gita purchased a home. She did not understand at the time that Truda was intending to be a joint tenant on the title of the home. Gita paid the down payment on the condominium and took out a mortgage. She has had sole responsibility for making paying mortgage and property tax expenses. Truda has never resided at the property.

Gita is being sued in the Superior Court of Justice by Truda, who claims to have contributed to some of the costs of home ownership, including condominium fees amounting to approximately \$3,000, that were not paid by Gita. Gita disputes the amount paid by Truda and does not have the financial means to repay her. It is not clear how Truda came to be joint tenant or why she is only now demanding repayment. Truda is demanding that the home be sold, so that she can recover her money.

Gita's understanding of real estate law, the nature of the lawsuit against her and the reasons for the law suit, is very limited. Gita is a recipient of a disability pension (ODSP) and is very worried about losing her housing and having no money to pay for the assistance of a lawyer. Gita is also socially isolated, with no friends or family in Ottawa who can help her.

ACTIONS TAKEN

Connecting Ottawa provided Gita with the following services:

- Warm referral to [REACH Lawyer Referral Service](#);
- Warm referral to [Law Help Ontario](#) for appointments with various pro bono lawyers;
- Subsidies for interpretation for appointments with REACH and Law Help Ontario lawyers;
- Referral to our Facilitator Program for a Polish-speaking volunteer who could accompany Gita to appointments and provide support; and
- Advocacy with [Legal Aid Ontario](#) for legal services; this did not result in our preferred outcome - representation.

OUTCOMES

Gita received three hours of free legal services from a REACH lawyer. Gita was advised to re-mortgage her home in order to repay Truda and to remove her from the title on her home. However, Gita could not afford to pay the lawyer a retainer to follow through on the advice given.

In consequence Gita will be self-represented, with little understanding of court process or her rights under the law and with limited English comprehension. Her hearing has been postponed twice with the assistance of Law Help Ontario. Pro bono lawyers have continued to provide Gita with advice for the various steps she must take for her defense.

One of our volunteer facilitators has accompanied Gita to appointments at Law Help Ontario for moral support and language assistance since the client's ability to speak English is so limited. The facilitator has also played an essential role in her self-representation by assisting her with documents that were required for her proceedings. The facilitator was able to communicate with Gita in her first language and ensure the forms were completed correctly. Although Connecting Ottawa has continued to provide subsidies for interpretation services it is clear that Gita's ongoing need for language supports will outstrip our capacity to respond indefinitely.

The client continues to receive counselling at the settlement agency.

COMMENTARY

This case illustrates a number of access to justice challenges. Legal Aid Ontario does not provide full representation for the legal issue faced by Gita despite her eligibility due to her low income. The costs of interpretation in order to attend legal appointments or self-represent in court are not accessible to low-income individuals who do not speak English or French. Further, Truda's professional relationship with Gita – as psychotherapist – raises possible ethical issues and questions about undue influence or even exploitation that resulted in the joint tenancy.

Zainab

REASON FOR REFERRAL

A settlement counsellor at Catholic Centre for Immigrants requested assistance from the Connecting Ottawa lawyer when the Children's Aid Society asked to meet with Zainab and her 10 year old daughter, Malia, at the CCI office to investigate a complaint of physical and emotional abuse. Zainab had called CAS to report that her sister, with whom resides, regularly beats and emotionally abuses Malia. Zainab would like to protect her daughter by living elsewhere but she has nowhere else to go. She says that her sister is Malia's legal guardian.

ASSESSMENT

Zainab's first language is Pashto; she has limited capacity to communicate in English. She and Malia first came to Canada from Afghanistan as visitors in 2009. She signed consents for her sister to adopt Malia who remained here when Zainab returned home in 2011. Zainab came again as a visitor in 2013 and has stayed with her sister, brother-in-law, nephew and Malia since her arrival. Her visa has expired, although she says that she paid her sister \$5,000 to renew it on her behalf. Zainab says that Malia is beaten daily – at least once she was struck on the head with an iron rod – and she has photographic evidence of bruises. Zainab has no income and has nowhere else to stay if she leaves with Malia. She is uncertain of her parental rights, given that she believes that her sister is now Malia's legal

guardian and approached CAS for assistance on the advice of Malia’s school teacher. Zainab walks with a cane and cannot raise her arms above shoulder height. She has many health issues for which she has received emergency care at hospitals only by using her sister’s OHIP card: arthritis, diabetes, stress-related stomach ulcer, etc.

ACTIONS TAKEN

- [Children’s Aid Society](#) investigated allegations of abuse and referred Malia to the [Office of the Children’s Lawyer](#) for representation while in need of protection.
- Zainab was referred to
 - [Cornerstone Housing for Women](#) and Carling Family Shelter for shelter options while seeking housing for her and Malia;
 - [South East Ottawa Community Health Centre](#) for primary health care, available to persons without OHIP coverage or documented immigration status and requiring interpretation; for counselling support from multilingual staff; for assistance with document preparation to resolve immigration issues;
 - [South Ottawa Community Legal Services](#) for legal advice regarding a Permanent Resident application on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, given the best interests of her daughter, her health considerations, and the risks of family violence and financial abuse;
 - [Family Law Information Centre \(FLIC\)](#) for information and advice about resolving her parenting and guardianship issues re: Malia, especially in the context of CAS involvement.
- Zainab has maintained her relationship with the settlement counsellor at [Catholic Centre for Immigrants](#).

OUTCOMES

- Zainab’s health concerns are being addressed;
- Zainab has initiated actions to resolve her immigration issues, determine eligibility for social assistance and, establish a home for herself and Malia with the support of CAS.

COMMENTARY

- This case is another example of the value of facilitated referrals; if our lawyer had not been on site at Catholic Centre for Immigrants at the time that Zainab arrived seeking interpretation and other support for her interview with a CAS investigator Connecting Ottawa would not have been able to provide timely information and advice about her legal options as a non-custodial parent and as an immigrant without status in Canada.
 - This also illustrates the vulnerability of immigrants without status. Zainab was reluctant to seek necessary health care - even though it was available to her at her local Community Health Centre – for fear that her whereabouts would become known CBSA. Similarly she did not determine her eligibility for social assistance benefits or shelter and remained under the effective control of her abusive sister. For 3 years she has lived without financial resources and in fear of discovery by CBSA.
 - Malia’s guardianship issues are not uncommon among immigrant and refugee families who are highly motivated to see a child settled in Canada. In this case, Zainab surrendered her daughter to an abusive relative while believing that she was acting in Malia’s best interests.
 - Finally, this is yet another example of complex legal issues that will not be satisfactorily resolved without coordinated actions of non-legal services: child protection, emergency housing, primary health care, social assistance, ESL training, employment supports, and counselling.
-

LEGAL HEALTH CHECK UP

{The following is an article written by Natalie Drolet for inclusion in an upcoming CLEO news blog.}

Connecting Ottawa is an access to justice initiative focused on individuals who are not proficient in an official language or who face communication challenges due to a disability. Comprised of a network of 46 agencies representing the legal, settlement, disability and community sectors, Connecting Ottawa champions a “no wrong door approach.” We recognize that when people are facing “everyday legal problems,” they will often seek assistance from “trusted intermediaries,” people they know and trust, including social services and health care workers. Our vision is that no matter where a client goes for help, they will get connected with basic legal information and legal services. The idea is to reach clients before their legal problems escalate and become too big to solve.

To make this happen, Connecting Ottawa has developed some innovative tools and strategies to assist front-line workers who may not have a legal background. One of these is the Connecting Ottawa Legal Health Check-Up, a flagging tool that workers can use to identify whether the problems presented by their clients may have a legal solution. Workers have told us that in order to provide legal information to clients, they first need to be able to recognize that there is a legal issue – “most of the time we don’t recognize if it is a legal issue unless the client emphasizes the they need a lawyer or if they talk about how severe the problem is” (front-line worker). The idea is to start by building awareness of what in fact constitutes a legal issue.

Legal Health Check-Ups or Checklists have been taken up by different legal agencies that recognize that access to justice for everyday legal problems can have an impact on one’s health. As such, there have been different approaches to Legal Health Check-Ups. For a large urban centre like Ottawa, we felt it was important to develop an accessible, simple and versatile tool for use by the large variety of trusted intermediaries within the Connecting Ottawa network. To achieve this, we developed the tool to complement the Connecting Ottawa website, and decided to focus on providing easy-to-understand examples of common legal problems.

Connecting Ottawa’s Legal Health Check-Up corresponds to the taxonomy of the Connecting Ottawa websites – <http://connectingottawa.com> (EN) and <http://connexionottawa.com> (FR) - which feature a directory of legal services in Ottawa with links to reliable easy-to-read legal information resources. The format invites users to click on different areas of the law and related legal topics – for example, “Housing” (area of the law) and “Maintenance and repairs” (legal topic) in order to find relevant legal services and resources. The Legal Health Check-Up adds problem statements that correspond to the areas of law and legal topics. For instance, when a user clicks on “Maintenance and repairs,” they will get a list of common problems, such as “I told my landlord that my heating is not working properly but he has not fixed it”. Our goal is that the tool will encourage trusted intermediaries to take a holistic approach to the complex issues presented by their clients.

In the course of the development of the tool, we consulted with lawyers and non-legal service providers. To our surprise, we were encouraged to add to the already long lists of problem statements we presented according to the legal topics. The tool is flexible and we see it as a work in progress that can be added to and adapted in real time. Service providers were also keen to see the tool expand into different formats, such as posters and pamphlets that could be made available to clients and trusted intermediaries in offices and waiting rooms. They emphasized the importance of clear, simple language that points to recognizing legal issues, and suggested we look at health promotion materials for inspiration for these resources. Throughout this process, workers expressed that they are increasingly being asked to help clients with their legal issues. The Connecting Ottawa website with the integrated Legal Health Check-Up is a great place for front-line workers to start.