

CONNECTING OTTAWA NETWORK CELEBRATION EVENT

October 15, 2018

**Connecting
Ottawa** . . .
Effective communication
Accessible justice

A PROJECT OF
 **The Law
Foundation
of Ontario**

ACCESS TO LEGAL INFORMATION & SERVICES FOR THOSE WITH COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

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WELCOME

Connecting Ottawa . . .

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CONNECTING OTTAWA MANDATE

- Improve access to justice for linguistic minorities; people who are not proficient in English or French or who face communication challenges as the result of a disability or sensory impairment.
- Develop capacity among “trusted intermediaries” to provide legal information/referrals to this target population.

HOW WE CAME TO BE

- The Law Foundation of Ontario commissioned a report: *“Connecting Across Language and Distance: Linguistic and Rural Access to Legal Information and Services”*.
George Thomson & Karen Kohl, December, 2008
- Findings:
Communication barriers connect with access to justice issues:
 - Self-help measures are not sufficient;
 - Legal problems are usually part of a larger constellation of issues;
 - People go for help to the community, generic services, “trusted intermediaries”;
 - This makes the non-legal community of services an essential partner in the solution.

HOW WE CAME TO BE

- Applied to The Law Foundation of Ontario's call for proposals to develop projects to address access to justice for those identified in the report.
- 2010 – Connecting Region “Candidacy” Funding to design project awarded to (then) South Ottawa Community Legal Services (lead organization).
- 2012 – Connecting Region Phase 2 Funding Received for 2012-2015 (July – June).
- 2015 – 2019 -- Yearly funding approved by the Foundation.

OUR MODEL

- Project, not organization.
 - CLSO lead organization.
 - VCSC “employer” of record/ “home” for FT staff.
- 2 Front line Professional Staff.
- 1 Project Manager.
- Website of legal information and community resources.
 - Links to 211/CICO and Steps to Justice.
- Advisory Group.
- Partnership network of 50 organizations.

OUR OBJECTIVES

- Support and develop capacity among front line workers to identify legal issues, provide legal information/referrals and support clients from a holistic perspective.
- Deliver information and seminars to partners and clients on legal issues and resources.
- Share lessons learned and best practices within community support networks through newsletters, annual conference, presentations/workshops, etc.
- Manage and maintain website that promotes legal resources to front line workers and clients.

OUR ACTIVITIES

- Maintain/report to advisory group & partnership network.
- Serve/support approximately 450 clients per year via consultation/collaboration with front line legal and social services workers.
- 6 Lunch and Learn sessions per year for front line workers.
- 30-40 partner/agency specific training sessions per year.
- Maintain and update website of legal information/resources and share information through social media.
- Assist partners' clients to access services via volunteer facilitators.
- Produce multilingual information pieces to assist with provision of legal info/referrals.
- Annual Conference.
- Coordinate partnerships/services to fill gaps (PBSC/YMCA Newcomer ID Clinic).

OUR STORIES

- Case studies of CO impact are presented at all Advisory Group meetings and to The Law Foundation of Ontario as part of our reporting process.
- Here are two of them:

OUR STORIES

- “Mr. Mohammed” and two acquaintances (all former GARS) were criminally charged with “uttering a forged document” after presenting their Syrian, International driver’s and Ontario (G1) licenses at the Ministry of Transportation (MTO).
- Through CO intervention, information, and referrals, a criminal lawyer was secured to assist the client and, eventually, the charges were withdrawn.

OUR STORIES

- “Mariella” had been sponsored by her partner but when she arrived in Canada her partner became abusive. Referral to a legal clinic was not successful due to a conflict of interest.
- CO referred the client to appropriate social supports and, due to the conflict of interest and limited availability of immigration lawyers at other clinics, CO prepared statutory declarations detailing the abuse to submit to IRCC.

THE LAW FOUNDATION OF ONTARIO

- Provides funding for Connecting Ottawa project since inception.
 - Strong partner/supporter of our work.
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- Law Foundation Welcome:
David Kinsman, Grants Officer

CONNECTING OTTAWA EVALUATION

- Comprehensive evaluation of Connecting Regions Program conducted in 2017 by CAP Consulting for The Law Foundation of Ontario.
 - Connecting Ottawa is the only pilot initiative of the original three to receive ongoing funding.
- Methodology included:
 - Program document review;
 - Stakeholder interviews;
 - Front line staff interviews;
 - Network surveys;
 - Conference evaluation survey;
 - Case study examples;
 - Volunteer facilitator interviews.
- Thank you to network partners for supporting.

CONNECTING OTTAWA EVALUATION

- Seeking to answer:
 - What impacts has Connecting Ottawa had in improving access to justice for the focus populations?
 - What impacts has Connecting Ottawa had in building the capacity of agencies and organizations to work together to improve access to justice for the focus populations?
 - What impacts is Connecting Ottawa having on other organizations in the network?

CO A2J FOCUS POPULATION IMPACTS

- “The evidence collected shows that Connecting Ottawa is having a positive impact on the focus populations.”
 - Through case consultations, legal issues are being resolved, pathways to justice are shortened and frontline workers are identifying legal issues and providing legal information more often.
- *“I think that what [Connecting Ottawa does] is empower our staff.... [Staff] are the first people to know what [client] needs are, so if you understand better what their needs are we’ll be able to refer them to any resource in the community or any resource available within Connecting Ottawa.”*

Figure 1: Results from Frontline Staff Survey (Community/Social Organizations) and Network Survey - Impacts on Focus Populations



CO CAPACITY BUILDING IMPACTS

- “Service providers from community/social organizations rated the capacity building in all areas very strongly and consistently.”
 - Frontline staff ...are gaining both the knowledge and confidence necessary to become trusted intermediaries and help their clients with legal issues, through the case consultation process, public legal education sessions, and the Connecting Ottawa website.
- “Connecting Ottawa is [also] having an impact on organizational capacity or the way individual organizations operate or deliver services to clients”.

CO CAPCITY BUILDING IMPACTS

- *“When things are explained to the client, we learn. So, it is very helpful to know how the legal system works and the barriers to accessing legal services and where to refer for community resources and also much more on rights and responsibilities. So this is my professional development as well as helping clients in the same regard.”*

**Figure 3: Frontline Staff Survey Results
(Community/Social Organizations) - How
Connecting Ottawa has helped**

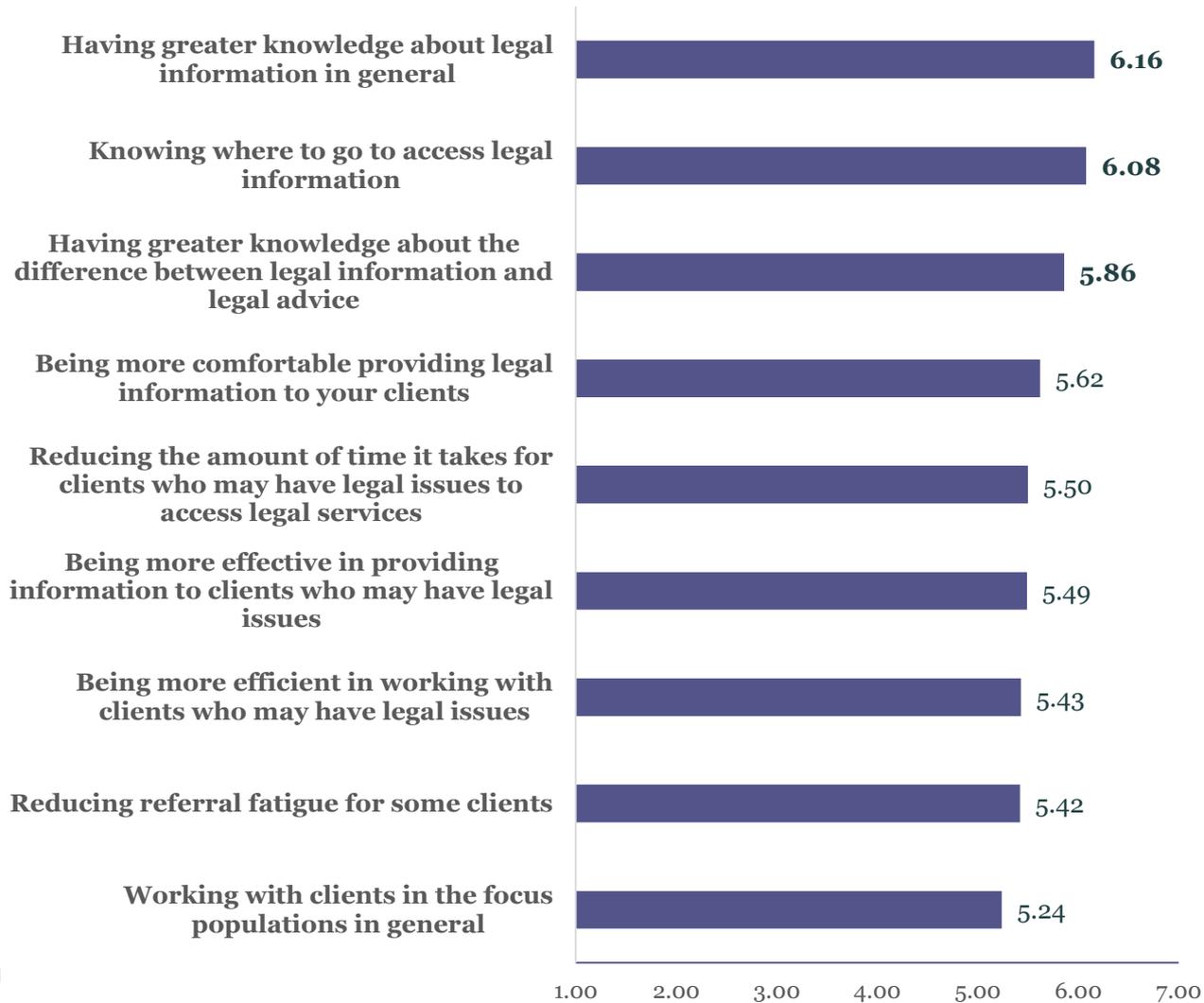


Figure 6: Network Member Survey Results - Changes to Organizations



CO CAPCITY BUILDING IMPACTS

- “Legal service providers reported that Connecting Ottawa had been helpful in working with clients in the focus populations and had helped them be more effective and efficient in addressing both the legal and social needs of clients in the focus populations.”
- *“Connecting Ottawa has helped me in my work by providing resources and training. The website assists me assessing possible areas where clients can receive additional support and provides enough detail so that I can refer clients to resources at the court house or in the community. Further, in-person training ... helped me consider new approaches to file management and client interviews based on a trauma-informed care perspective”.*

CO AGENCY COORDINATION IMPACTS

- “The results of the network survey, frontline staff survey, and stakeholder interviews show that staff and network members believe there is greater collaboration across sectors, more awareness of services, and greater service coordination because of Connecting Ottawa”.
- *“It’s good to be connected with them. Sometimes the developmental/intellectual disability groups tend to be very isolated and always kind of speaking to the same crowd and.... partnering with Connecting Ottawa ... expands our relationships. It expands contacts. It gives us more resources....”*

BEST PRACTICES OF CO/STRENGTHS

- Excellent (right) staff that is mobile and flexible.
- Holistic and tailored approach.
- Focus on capacity building.
- Ongoing development of relationships/outreach.
- Well respected in the community.
- Responsive to community needs.
- Useful education efforts and website.
- Having a champion and effective Advisory Group.

AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- Further expand network and enhance involvement of some network members.
- Improve efficiency and coordination of volunteer facilitator program.
- Enhance disability community engagement.
- Clarify social worker role.
- Better promote informational resources that Connecting Ottawa offers.
- Enhance educational opportunities and access to educational opportunities for network members.

SUMMARY

- “Connecting Ottawa is excelling at fulfilling its mandate -- in doing what it set out to do. They are working at maximum capacity and yet there are still gaps, unmet needs, and groups not being reached. There seemed to be an interest and desire amongst many stakeholders and frontline staff to extend the outreach and mandate of Connecting Ottawa. More resources would clearly be needed to expand its reach and meet the needs of new frontline staff and their clients, while continuing to meet the needs of existing frontline workers and their clients”.

NEXT STEPS

- Share evaluation with community (today).
- Review findings and recommendations of report.
- Identify opportunities to integrate recommendations that will improve our practice and impact at current capacity.
- Explore ways to increase our capacity to address unmet needs identified in the evaluation.

CLOSING COMMENTS

- Gary Stein
 - Chair, Connecting Ottawa Advisory Group
 - Executive Director, Community Legal Services of Ottawa

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