

THE HELP CENTRE OF NORTHUMBERLAND

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Chair's Report by Carol Blaind

Recently, a very good friend, in response to my complaints of the time and energy it takes to commit oneself to working toward change in social and political structures, and in trying to make contributions to community, offered me this quote: **"I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits"**.

These words were imbedded in the speech given by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. upon accepting the Nobel Peace Prize.

These words renewed in me the vision and philosophy espoused by The Help Centre of Northumberland, and reminded me why I continue to support the work of the dedicated staff and volunteers of The Help Centre and The Legal Centre.

Assuming the role of Chair last year required long hard thought. Having served under the capable leadership of my predecessor Beth Bellaire, I was very aware of the amount of time and energy this job could take on the part of the Chair. The Help Centre and The Legal Centre have been steadfastly responding to increasing client and community needs, advocating for the community and assuming roles of leadership in this community to promote those

very things of which Dr. King spoke.

As I reflect upon the past year, the thoughts that come to mind are how fortunate Northumberland County and its citizens are to have such a worthwhile organization in this community. I am often in awe of the work the staff and volunteers do to deliver our mandate and I am ever grateful for the support of the Board members in helping me to fulfill my responsibilities as Chair.

This wonderful group of active Board members always seems to find the time to take on the chores, serve on committees, attend many meetings, promote the work of the organization and never complain as they lead by example. Throughout the pages of this Newsletter, you will read about the many accomplishments and achievements of the past year. A strong committee structure, focused efforts, exemplary work by staff and volunteers have led us once again to a time when we can celebrate, acknowledge and reaffirm why it is we do what we do.

Thank you's are extended to the funders of the programs of both agencies.

The Help Centre is also fortunate to live in a community that has been so

responsive to our quest for support. Numerous fundraising events throughout the past year have resulted in community members, individuals, businesses and the media rallying around to help us move forward to raise necessary funds to continue to respond to needs in Northumberland County. A huge thank you to all, you know who you are.

As Chair of The Help Centre of Northumberland, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our amazing staff for the hard work they do, for keeping us as a Board on task and for pushing us to our capacity to reach our objectives. To the many volunteers, for your belief in the work we do that keeps you coming back day after day, year after year, we extend our deep appreciation. Many hands make light work, although, each year, the work load grows and we continue to need you.

As always, we encourage members of the public to join us by taking out a membership, volunteering, or just coming out to join us at our fun filled community events.

I look forward to my role as a volunteer with The Help Centre and The Legal Centre and to approach this role with hope and "audacity".

Carol Blaind
Chair



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Housing Listings

905-372-4380

2009-2010 An intense year!

Largely as a result of the economic downturn, many more residents of Northumberland County found their way to our centre in person or by phone. The charts set out below shows the dramatic increase in the number of people accessing services and the increase in the number of services provided over the past three years. The chart below addresses direct service provision for the fiscal year.

Housing Security <i>Helping people find, keep and maintain</i>	2939
Community Utility Trust - Advocacy Only	1165
Copies, Faxes, Email	1127
Community Utility Trust with Funds	372
Housing Referrals, search and forms	275
Income Security <i>Helping people to access benefits they are</i>	10183
Forms Completion	5761
Income Tax	1289
Voluntary Trustee Program	775
Money Counselling	663
Copies & Forms	912
New Resumes & Resume Updates	338
Job Search, Resources & Referrals	445
Health Security <i>Assisting with health needs when there is</i>	3164
Food Cupboard & Milk for Moms	2464
Advocacy Only	348
Prescriptions & Dental	271
Resources & Referrals	81

Thank You From Mary Anne!

All organizations depend on the service quality provided by its people. The Help Centre is certainly no different. In the fiscal year 2009-2010, staff and volunteers provided more than 15,500 units of service to the Northumberland community and its residents. Whether it was the distribution of food, milk coupons, a resume and cover letter, help with a gas or hydro bill, money management counselling or any other service, our human resources remained dedicated to our mission of assisting residents working toward improving their situation. Without this commitment and dedication we would not have managed to work through the large increase in the number of clients last year. To my staff, Holly Werner, Karin Cummings, Fern Doyle, Dixie Allison, Carolyn Dalgarno and Kim Howson a very large thank you.

Our Board of Directors remained dedicated to our objects, mission and service values by providing thoughtful leadership and direction. This group of ten individuals representing the membership of the organization are very concerned and involved in every facet of the operation to ensure residents in the county received the best service possible from The Help Centre. In addition to regular board meetings attended as Directors, board members attended committee meetings and supported all of our events. Thank you for your diligence and support - Beth Bellaire, Doug Lloyd, Carol Blaind, Wilf Day, Ann Logan, Phyllis Dietrich, Elizabeth Greaves, Krista Skutovich, Patty Park and Shannon Lévasseur.

Our office volunteers are truly an amazing bunch of people. Without your assis-

tance, the staff certainly would not have been able to cope with such an overwhelming increase in the number of people we jointly helped move forward in their lives. To Clara O'Brien, Adriana Hayden, Brenda Weekes, Julie Dalby, and all of the students who worked so hard for us during their placements thank you so much!

With Elizabeth Greaves as our Fundraising Chair, supported by Carolyn Dalgarno, our special events and fundraising coordinator, many volunteers also worked hard to raise our community profile. Your work and dedication is allowing us to continue to offer our services. From coat checks at Probus Club meetings to a bus trip to Prince Edward County on a wine tasting tour, fashion show and most particularly our Empty Bowl Event, our volunteers worked diligently to let our community know we are here to help people. A job well done!

Of course we could not have accomplished all that we did without the financial resources to pay our staff and maintain our office. Organizations such as Northumberland United Way, Ontario Trillium Foundation, federal Homelessness Partnering Initiative, provincial Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Program, United Church of Canada, County of Northumberland, Lakefront Utilities, Veridian Connections, Union Gas, Hydro One, Enbridge Gas and the Stauffer Foundation together allowed us to serve the residents of the county. Thank you.

The biggest increase in the past year was the number of local service clubs and individuals who supported us through their group and/or individual donations. We could not have done it without you. Thank you!



Housing Security by Karen Cummings

Finding and keeping safe, adequate and affordable housing continues to be a major challenge for many residents of Northumberland County. In 2009/10, The Help Centre assisted with close to 3000 housing related services, approximately 19% of the total number of services The Help Centre provided. We offer individual help in finding housing and also make it easier by encouraging anyone in need of housing to take a look at the housing board for listings of available apartments or shared accommodation that are printed from local newspapers or individuals that may have a room or apartment for rent.

Individuals affected by past plant closures and downsizing in the region face greater challenges as severance and Employment Insurance received may have or soon will be running out. If there is no job in sight they find themselves unable to cover even the basic costs for necessities. Others are working low wage jobs and supporting families, or on limited fixed incomes and need help to make ends meet. Sometimes choices had to be made between paying rent, buying food and maintaining heat and hydro accounts.

There was a time when a renter had only to ensure they had enough money every month to cover rent, food and other monthly commitments. Due to increases to the cost of utilities, fewer landlords are offering units including these utilities in the base rent. 91% of housing security activities the past year was utility related and through an application process to the Community Utility Trust Fund, 14% received some one time financial assistance with paying a utility bill to avoid disconnection. Only with the help of the Province of Ontario for the Emergency Energy Fund, Northumberland County for Utility Funds and The United Way for the Winter Warmth Program have we been able to give this vital assistance. The balance, 77% of utility assistance was through advocacy. By developing partnerships with the utility companies, we were able to get extensions to payment arrangements, have deposits reduced and late payment charges removed. Advocating with the representative minimized disruption and allowed the individual and the company to come to

mutual agreements. Other times, with consent, it was necessary to work with social services to request assistance in order to keep the utility up and running. Many families signed up with a retailer when advised they would save money on their utilities. Most contracts are for 5 years. In that period there are times of saving money but also times when the cost increases and for some had doubled. As with any long term investment, the ability to ride out the low times is necessary but when you are on a low or fixed income, this is impossible. In 2009/10, The Help Centre assisted 77 individuals or families to have the retailer contract cancelled. If we can prove hardship based on income through Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program, if they are senior and only in receipt of Old Age Security and Canada Pension, or if they are living in Rent Geared to Income housing, we have had success. The goal is to help prevent homelessness. Working to keep utilities active is one positive step along that path.

Voluntary Trustee Program

For the past 10 years, The Help Centre has offered an intense money management program to assist people with managing their money on a weekly and monthly basis. The program has helped over 100 people in our community to have some money left over at the end of the month; keep their housing, pay the bills and enjoy a sense of financial security that had been missing in their lives. The staff time required for this program was increasing and funding was not. We needed to try other avenues to assist trustee clients. In early 2009, The Help Centre applied for and received six months of funding from the federal government's

Homelessness Prevention Initiative to pilot a program whereby community volunteers were trained to become Volunteer Voluntary Trustees. We were able to hire Karin Cummings as our Trustee Coordinator. Over the six months, Karin recruited and trained several volunteers to assist 15 clients with their day to day money management. We believe the program was very successful, however, we could not find further funding to keep the program going. The program was wound down after another 6 months and closed by March 1st, 2010. For the individuals we served through this program, we

worked closely with other community agencies to ensure that their needs were met. We want to thank all of the volunteers, funders, banks and benefits providers who worked with us to stabilize individual trustee clients. A huge thank you must go to Karin Cummings for her work, financial knowledge and skills with our volunteers and trusteeships.



Community Development by Marisa Conlin

people together to discuss poverty reduction.

The Legal Centre co-ordinates and participates in community development activities as part of our mandate in order to improve the circumstances of our clients. In the 2009-2010 year, the Legal Centre undertook twenty-seven community development projects.

These activities focused on outreach and awareness, advocacy regarding health care for low-income individuals and poverty reduction.

Our outreach and awareness activities included our satellite clinics in Campbellford, Brighton, Colborne, Port Hope and Bewdley. The Legal Centre regularly attends its satellite clinics in these communities in order to ensure that our services are accessible to all parts of Northumberland County.

“We go to all of these communities because we recognize how difficult it is to get around in the county,” said Teresa Williams, Community Legal Worker. “Transportation services are limited for people living in rural areas, and folks who don’t have much money or have disabilities find it especially hard to travel to appointments. Our goal is to make our services as accessible as we possibly can.”

The Legal Centre tries to hold its satel-

lite clinics at food banks and community meals where our clients are often already going to make it easier for them to access our services and to save them from making extra trips. Through our satellite clinics, we offer all the services that we provide in our office. We provide advice and referrals, we assist with appeals and paperwork that relate to our areas of practice, and we can book ongoing legal appointments for our clients at the satellites.

We engage in outreach activities and represent the Legal Centre at community events to raise awareness about the services that we provide and to raise awareness in the broader community about the challenges faced by our clients.

Legal Centre staff have also participated in various committees and advisory groups to advocate for improved access to services such as hospital services, community-based health care, and mental health treatment.

The Legal Centre works on poverty-reduction through its leadership on the Northumberland Poverty Reduction Action Committee (NPRAC). NPRAC was formed as a result of a Justice Forum which the Legal Centre hosted to bring

“We recognized that poverty is multifaceted and involves many different issues,” said Legal Centre Executive Director and NPRAC Chair Lois Cromarty. “We wanted to mobilize the community because we recognized that we couldn’t solve the problem alone, and we recognize the value of this community—that’s why we’re here.”

The Legal Centre contributes its legal expertise, policy development skills, and community development experience to the committee along with its client focus and ability to see the many sides of problems she said.

The Legal Centre hopes to help NPRAC to continue to grow and address issues that affect Northumberland residents who live in poverty.

We continue to look for ways to expand our community development activities because we believe that they have a direct impact on the legal issues that affect people with low-incomes. We recognize that legal problems are not necessarily the only problems that our clients have, and we work to collaborate with other agencies and community members to improve the living conditions of our clients.

mediation is available by telephone if parties would prefer to attempt to settle their matters prior to a hearing, as well as at hearing locations on the day of hearing.

Questions about law reform are raised locally at various Community Development and Public Legal Education events. When the same concerns are raised repeatedly, we look into whether or not there is some law reform action that we can take.

We have had input federally, provincially and locally and have had some successes at all three levels. Locally, we were able to meet with the Pine Ridge Chapter of the Ontario Building Officials Association for some clarification about inspection orders regarding mould. When Ontario Works was requiring single mothers to have their children’s DNA samples analysed to determine paternity, the Legal Centre made a complaint to the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario (“IPC”). While we have not received the written report, the IPC has

Law Reform by Teresa Williams

The Legal Centre has always participated in law reform activities. From April 1, 2009 to March 31, 2010, we opened 15 law reform files within our clinic. While these are the physical files we have opened within our office, we also contribute to law reform regionally and provincially through our clinic memberships.

It is difficult to measure the work we do in law reform. The results are not always immediate. Sometimes it takes years to see the results of law reform efforts. Often times, the clients we serve are not aware of what changes are being made towards legislative, regulatory and policy change.

Much of the work we do towards law reform is in written submissions directly to the legislative body governing the laws. Legal clinics are often consulted prior to legislative bodies making changes.

The Legal Centre wrote to the Landlord Tenant Board in December 2009 about the issue of legal representatives being witnesses and giving testimony. Earlier in August, the Landlord Tenant Board sent a request to legal clinics within the province for input regarding a draft policy about Representatives Giving Evidence.

Generally, the more immediate and evident successes come with respect to policy changes. Recently, the Northumberland Community Legal Centre participated in a successful, province-wide campaign to end telephone hearings being arbitrarily scheduled before the Landlord Tenant Board. As a result of the legal clinics’ input, the Landlord Tenant Board is no longer arbitrarily scheduling telephone hearings. This is a success for clients because the majority of contested matters before the Landlord Tenant Board are mediated. Tenants and Landlords are often able to resolve their matters without the need of a hearing through mediation. Me-

Law Reform Con't

confirmed verbally with us that Ontario Works has discontinued this practice.

It is an integral part of clinic work, and law reform deserves attention. As this upcoming year is a municipal election year, we will ensure local by-laws are in the minds of our clients, community partners and local candidates. The Legal Centre will continue to ensure that the residents of Northumberland are being justly served.

Wrongful Dismissal Project

We are now coming to the end of the second year of our two year collaboration agreement with our neighbouring clinic in Belleville, the Community Advocacy and Legal Centre, that gives our Northumberland clients help in pursuing wrongful dismissal claims against their employers. Because wrongful dismissal is a type of law that we do not practice here at the Northumberland Community Legal Centre, CALC offered assistance to our clients in exchange for mentoring in WSIB cases.

As far as we know, this collaboration agreement between clinics is the first of its kind in the clinic system. This has proved to be a very successful venture, as it allows both clinics to expand services without expanding numbers of staff.

From March 2009 to April 2010, our colleagues at the Belleville clinic helped out on 57 requests for summary advice on wrongful dismissal and have 6 ongoing files. This project has been extremely successful to date the gain can not be underestimated in terms of the ongoing economic stability and dignity afforded to the clients.



The Tenant Duty Counsel Program

The last year has been incredibly busy for NCLC's Tenant Duty Counsel Program (TDC), with TDC staff assisting more tenants with their rights and responsibilities than ever before.

The Northumberland Community Legal Centre receives funding from the Advocacy Centre for Tenants in Ontario (ACTO) to provide Tenant Duty Counsel services at all Landlord and Tenant Board hearings held in Northumberland County. In fact on July 28, 2010 we welcomed Tracy Heffernan (Director, Tenant Duty Counsel Program) and Kristina Brousalis (Supervisor, Toronto Tenant Duty Counsel Program) from our funders at ACTO, who attended our hearings to observe our TDC in action. Our funders confirmed our quality of services and innovation advising our TDC that "they came away with all kinds of new and excellent ideas about how to provide TDC here in Toronto."

As TDC we provide a variety of services to Tenants appearing before the LTB. We provide information and legal resources, we may also provide summary advice, document preparation, referrals and in some cases representation. Likewise, TDC often assists with negotiation and LTB Mediation.

Northumberland County TDC stats are quite impressive and demonstrate the experience and diligence of our TDC workers. From the period of April 2009 to March 2010 we assisted 160 Tenants in 17 Superblock hearing sessions averaging 9.4 clients per session. TDC saved Tenants moving costs in 38 instances by negotiating or mediating payment plans allowing the tenants to remain in their rental units. In this fiscal year period TDC managed to save tenants \$58, 685, in waived rent arrears, damages, filing fees, rent abatements etc, an increase of \$17,782 from the 2008-2009 fiscal period. Likewise, our TDC also assisted with many Tenant Applications that went to hearing throughout this time period, however in the

majority of Tenant Applications the Adjudicator reserves on the decision and we do not receive a copy of the decision and as such cannot determine the monetary extent to which tenants benefited from our assistance.

It is also important to note that TDC successfully extended tenancies in 12 instances and actually managed to prevent eviction in two cases involving mobile homes which if eviction had been granted would have required selling or moving mobile homes. Likewise, TDC was successful in negotiating with a Landlord to waive all costs associated with damages in one case and in another case we were successful in mediating with a Landlord on a

Tenant Application, where the Landlord committed to repairing the Tenant's entire unit, including new flooring, bathroom and kitchen repairs

and painting the entire unit

The most recent Provincial statistics cover the period beginning October 1, 2008 and ending September 30, 2009. It is interesting to note that during that time period Northumberland TDC assisted 43.6% of all cases on the docket, again averaging 9.4 clients a session. This is far higher than the provincial average which saw TDC assisting 13.4% of all cases on the docket averaging 5.8 clients served per session.

Likewise, throughout this time period Northumberland TDC represented 36.9% of the total clients served while the provincial average was 23.5%. In most other categories Northumberland County equalled or surpassed the provincial averages.

Lastly, our TDC provided assistance to the Durham Legal Clinic, by filling in as TDC for several dates in March of this year when they were experiencing staffing changes. As always it was a pleasure to assist a sister clinic!

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THE HELP CENTRE PROGRAMS

The Help Centre of Northumberland provides social justice advocacy, education and direct services that empower the residents of Northumberland County. This mission statement was implemented on The Help Centre side of the agency through the following programs and services in 2009-2010. The following articles address each of these areas.

Income Security

In a perfect world, all members of our community would have sufficient resources, enough income to meet their basic needs and there would be no need for any programs or services in this area at all. This is certainly not the case in our communities. Too many people do not have sufficient income and resources to acquire their most basic of needs. The Help Centre offers practical assistance and works to empower clients to assist themselves and where necessary to have a staff or volunteer assist them to have their basic needs met. In 2009-2010 these services were provided through the following programs: Community Volunteer Income Tax Program, Voluntary Trustee Program, Money Management, Credit Counselling, Post Bankruptcy Counselling, Resume Creation, or help with completing government forms. As one client stated, "I always check first with The Help Centre. They can't always directly help me, but they know where I can get the help I am looking for".

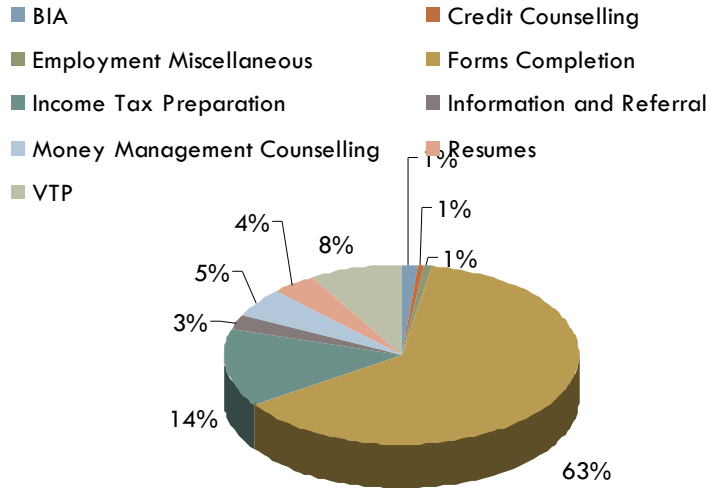
Housing Security

In the past several years, finding and keeping an adequate and affordable home has been a major challenge in Northumberland County. The supply and demand equation has created a multitude of housing problems, especially for the very poor in our community. On the demand side, vacancy rates have been extremely low, forcing higher rental housing costs. To compound the supply problem, very few rental units of any kind have been built, keeping the supply limited. This is especially critical in the Cobourg and Port Hope areas where most major services are offered that people want and need access to. This basic list of needed services includes hospital, health care, schools and college, government offices, social services offices, grocery and other retail stores as a start. The affordable housing shortage is also directly impacted by the high cost of purchasing a home. The Help Centre has offered housing services to help people find and keep housing in this volatile market. This includes daily listings, shared accommodation listings, helping people to fill out forms so that a complete application to social housing can be successful and help through the Community Utility Trust Fund. We are grateful to the Province of Ontario for the Emergency Energy Fund, Northumberland County for Utility funds, Northumberland United Way for the Winter Warmth program and to many churches and service clubs for their contributions that help individuals stay warm.

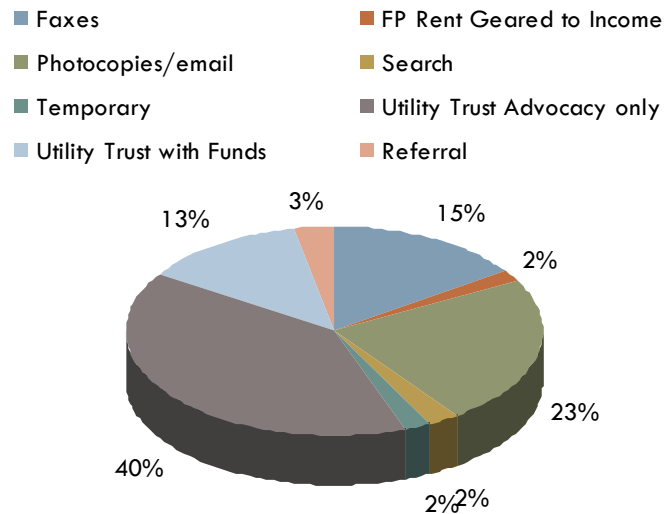
Health Security

Help Centre was very active in assisting people to get their basic health needs met through a variety of services. The services in this area range from Trillium Drug Benefits plan applications to helping people through complex applications for disability programs, access to our Food Cupboard and distribution of Milk For Moms coupons and emergency help with medical costs. Individuals and families have been struggling with the health care pressures of finding a family doctor, finding counselling services or finding optical, dental, denturists, pharmacies and other health care professionals who are willing to work with them to pay for their services. Often, this is where The Help Centre assisted clients with advocacy and when necessary, finding funding from churches, service clubs and private donations to get these needs met. In order to accomplish this important task, The Help Centre required the assistance and commitment from numerous community members. St. Peter's Church Crisis Fund, Cobourg Rotary, St. Vincent De Paul I Port Hope, Cobourg and Grafton, Sunrise Rotary are just a few that provide exemplary assistance. Thank you.

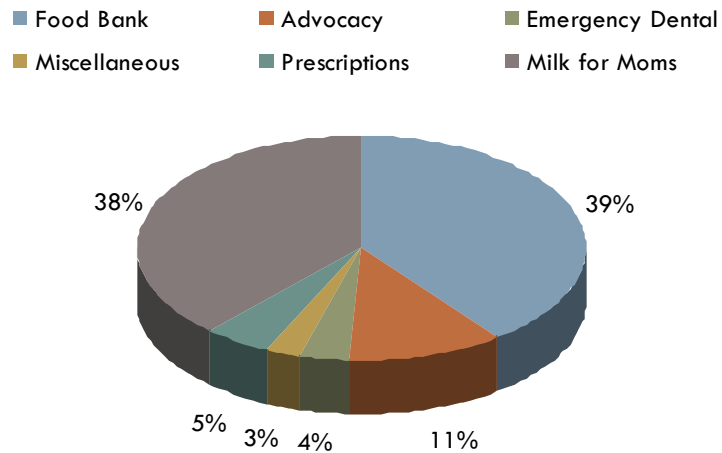
Income Security



Housing Security



Health Security



THE LEGAL CENTRE – ANOTHER YEAR, ANOTHER 15% INCREASE IN DEMAND– by Lois Cromarty

By the close of the fiscal year 2009-10, Legal Centre staff dealt with 4,628 requests for assistance; more than a 15% increase in demand over the 4010 requests for help that we dealt with in 2008-09. It must be impressed upon the readers of such numbers that there are real people behind the statistics: real people whose lives are being profoundly affected by the financial circumstances facing them.

Put yourselves in those shoes for a moment: you may have been cut off social assistance, or denied disability benefits; you may be facing

eviction from your apartment or living in a place in a shocking state of disrepair; you may have been injured at work and be facing a barrage of negative decisions from WSIB; you may have been wrongfully fired from your job but still have been denied employment insurance. Think about trying to keep food on your table and a roof over your head for your family as you try to sort through these legal issues. As the local economy has still not recovered, it is no wonder that the need in the community has continue to skyrocket, and no wonder that the Legal Centre has been called upon more than ever to help out.

Summary Services

That first contact by a client with the Legal Centre is recorded as a summary advice or brief service. The 4628 requests for help are broken out in the following table. Social assistance problems were the highest number of requests for help:

Case Files

Summary advice turns into a case file if a financially eligible summary advice client needs representation (i.e. if the matter is not something that the client can resolve on their own) in a meritorious case. Because the number of sum-

Case Type	Opened	Closed
	257	273
ODSP	97	89
OW	44	49
WSIB	37	46
CPP	20	27
Housing	38	41
Employment Insurance	6	7
Employment Standards	2	
Criminal Injuries	12	7
Human Rights	1	3
Health		1
Wills/consumer		3

mary advice requests went up, so did the number of case files.

In 2009-10, we started the year with 222 files (up 17% from the 190 we started with in 2008-09), and opened a further 257 cases (up 11% from the 232 files we opened in 2008-09). Once again, over one third of the files opened were ODSP appeals.

It must be remembered that the Legal Centre did not get additional staffing to cope with this jump in demand. The results of the efforts of our 3.5 caseworkers speak for themselves, as there is no more direct action that can be taken in terms of poverty reduction activities than putting money into the hands of low-income persons.

In the past fiscal year, our representation in 273 cases has resulted in an estimated \$1,186,900 in lump sum (retroactive) awards to our clients. The ongoing monthly financial change for those clients is an estimated \$29,500 difference per month in total (or about \$353,952 for the year). We arrived at these estimates from the various Tribunal orders, which state the start date for benefits and from reliable information on the likely monthly differential.

<u>Summary Advice and Brief Services</u>	<u>Total Requests</u>
	4628
Social Assistance:	1657
Ontario Works	684
Ontario Disability Support	973
Housing:	1086
Other Practice Areas:	702
Workplace Safety & Insurance	244
Employment Standards	89
Canada Pension Plan	157
Employment Insurance	91
Human Rights	28
Wrongful Dismissal	40
Other Income Maintenance	41
Criminal Injuries	12
Non-Core Areas Plus Referrals:	1183
Affidavits/administrative	312
Consumer	198
Health/Public Services	46
Family	13
Violence	7
Criminal	16
Immigration	1
Referrals	590

Quality Assurance Audit

Four days in February 2010 were devoted to an on-site quality assurance audit performed by the Quality Service Office, a branch of Legal Aid Ontario. QSO reviews all the legal clinics, and the results of these audits are reported to LAO's Independent Audit and Program Evaluation Unit.

The audit covered topics such as:

- ✦ effectiveness in identifying and addressing client legal needs in clinic service areas;
- ✦ effectiveness in engaging with the community and coordinating services, including accessibility and service standards;
- ✦ effectiveness and efficiency of legal representation and other program activities, including level and type of service, innovations in service delivery, and assessing the success and efficiency;
- ✦ effectiveness and efficiency of clinic governance and management, including board contribution to the operation of the clinic, strategic planning and management systems, clinic financial management and human resources management.

We are very pleased to report that the QSO found that Northumberland Community Legal Centre is a "**very commendably performing clinic in every way**".

Client Satisfaction Surveys

We survey our clients to get their views on whether we are doing a good job.

Some of our summary advice clients commented:

- ✦ "you guys are a great help to the community";
- ✦ "you guys are really great: helpful, friendly, happy";
- ✦ "(you) couldn't improve";
- ✦ "can't think of anything (to improve the service)".

We also send out a survey when we close files. Even though we are not always successful for them, our clients

respond that our help is valuable to them. These are some of the comments we got back last year:

- ✦ I'm thankful (that the Legal Centre staff) come to Brighton.
- ✦ This took two years. I'm proud (the Legal Centre) helped me fight through to the end successfully.
- ✦ I could not have received better representation anywhere! Thank you.
- ✦ Although I understand there is always room for improvement, this centre is one of the best run of its kind, in my experience of sitting on the other side of the desk. Keep up the great work!
- ✦ I feel I had a(n) outstanding lawyer... She put me at ease, and gave me hope when mine was gone. Our community is very luck(y) to have this service.
- ✦ I believe I would not have made it through my situation without the knowledge and assistance of my Legal representative. I was slipping through the cracks of the system becoming another sad statistic. Thank you for helping me save my life.
- ✦ No improvement needed. Always there to assist or answer my questions. Kept in touch. I thank you for all your help. Although it was not successful- I tried.... Thank you so much for trying.
- ✦ The Legal Centre has done a great job on different issues. I applaud the whole organization for the help and service. I could not have survived without them.

Change in Satellite Practice

We have, for some time now, alternated going to Brighton and to Campbellford on alternate Fridays. Starting in July 2010, we combined our Brighton and Campbellford visits into the same day, thus saving mileage costs.

In Brighton, we meet clients at the Trinity United Church office (on Chapel Street) from 9 – 11 am. We then drive up to Campbellford, and meet clients at the Salvation Army soup kitchen at the Methodist Church (on Ranney Street) from 11:30 to 1 pm.

We also go to the Community Works in Bewdley (second Thursday of the month,

3:30 to 5 pm), and to the Colborne Food Bank (fourth Tuesday of the month, 9 to 11 am).

We want to thank all of these institutions for supporting our work in those communities. We have not been charged a fee to provide service through these locations, and we and our clients from those areas are grateful for this help.

Students

Once again, we had the luxury in 2009-10 of having paralegal and law clerk students completing their field placements with us, as well as a UOIT student completing her community hours. Because of the number of hours required for these placements, we got nearly the equivalent of another full-time staff person without an increase in our costs. In 2009-10, our students were Amanda Puddister, Laurie Dilts, Rachel Landry, Craig Jones, and Rebecca Keetch. Thanks to all of these students for their great work!

Northumberland Poverty Reduction Action Committee (NPRAC)

I chair this committee, made up of community agencies, institutions, and individuals, whose goal is to spark action to reduce poverty locally. Between April 2009 and March 2010, NPRAC produced a paper called "Making a Difference" which outlined the gaps in services in Northumberland County, and presented this to County Council. Council endorsed this report in principle.

NPRAC also made representations to the federal government on their role in poverty reduction, and to the provincial government on affordable housing. NPRAC presented to the Legislature's Select Committee on the link between mental health/addictions issues and poverty. NPRAC also wrote to the LHIN about the effect of the closure of rehabilitation services at the Northumberland Hills Hospital on low-income persons. NPRAC also started publishing a newsletter.

This concerted effort has raised the issue of recognizing the impact on low-income people of policy changes in all arenas.

INCREASE IN VOLUNTEER HOURS = INCREASE IN SERVICES PROVIDED

During the past year, the number of volunteers increased from 40 to 66 and the volunteer hours increased to 5,463. This does not include the many hours the Board of Directors (also volunteers) have spent. Many of the volunteer hours spent by the Board were dedicated to fundraising activities particularly the yard sales and the Golf Tournament. This increase in volunteer support resulted in the Help Centre's ability to provide more than 15, 528 client services to the community at large.

As the number of volunteers and volunteer hours spent increased, there was also an increase in volunteer retention. Over the year, only four left to pursue jobs or further education. This continuity provided the much needed stability the Help Centre required to adapt to the increased demand for services. A volunteer sur-

vey conducted in the fall showed that most volunteers were satisfied with their placement and many of their suggestions were implemented resulting in ongoing training and information sessions.

This year's Income Tax Volunteers, recruited specifically for the income tax program beginning March 1st, formed an extremely efficient group who both enjoyed each other's company while, at the same time, managed to process over 1,000 income tax returns in a completely seamless manner. Many of these volunteers have stayed on and become part of the regular office assistance group as well as providing continued assistance for the completion of tax returns..

The volunteers who help out in the office on a regular basis are the back-

bone of the volunteer program. These volunteers work either half a day a week, or in a few cases, a whole day a week and provide essential support by answering the telephone, answering queries, taking messages, directing people to the correct information source, dealing with walk-in clients, resumes, data entry, some intake work and generally making it possible for staff to spend time on clients' affairs and the productive operation of the office.

A resounding THANK YOU to all. You have made a significant difference to the community. If you have not yet become a Help Centre volunteer but would like to discuss the opportunities available, please call Carolyn at 905-372-2646.

Poverty Reduction-It Just Makes Cents \$\$\$

I believe prevention is one of the most powerful tools to combat systemic poverty. That is why we continue to focus our efforts on strategic initiatives that prevent individuals and families from finding themselves in arrears. Innovative programs such as credit and post-bankruptcy counselling, money management, and the Community Utility Trust Fund, teach people effective financial management skills while providing a cushion for those at risk of homelessness.

The average cost of having a basic tax return filed in Northumberland County this spring (2010) was about \$85. In this years income tax season, starting March 1st, 2010, Help Centre volunteers collectively saved low-income people more than \$85,500 in what would otherwise have to be spent to have their tax return completed through the

The program to date has put over \$500,000 back into the pockets of low-income individuals and families living in Northumberland County.

Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP). CVITP is a Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) volunteer-based program that assists low-income people who cannot complete their annual tax return, or pay to have it done. The program, which is one of the most popular at the Centre, continues to grow with over 1,000 clients served so far this year, across the county.

The program to date has put over \$500,000 back into the pockets of low-income individuals and families living in Northumberland County. Aside from the obvious benefits to recipients, this is money that is often spent right here in our communities, creating jobs and strengthening the overall standard of living.

Individuals and families who access the program have the added benefits which come from keeping their taxes up to date. This is especially important in accessing further govern-

ment programs such as Ontario Works, the Ontario Disability Support Program, Canada Pension Plan Disability, Old Age Security and Ontario Trillium Drug Benefits as well as essential needs such as social housing.

Our volunteers are the core to the success of The Help Centre's Volunteer Income Tax Program. We would like to send a special Thank You to all of those people who give of their time and their caring to make what we do a success.

Charlene Niles, Kirk Vavra, Julie Verge, Lisa Ing, Harold Peters, Leo Nichols, Joyce Sommerville, Jane Soutar, Brandie Ribble, Kerry McDonald, Robert McInnis, Carlos Rajkuwar, Sharlene Mead and of course our very own Clara O'Brien.

Together this dedicated group have contributed a combined total of 1,497 volunteer hours from March 1, 2010 until August 1, 2010.

Way to go team!

Wills Program Update

It has been more than a year since the Northumberland Community Legal Centre first implemented a wills program with the generous assistance of the local private bar community.

In early 2009, Northumberland Community Legal Centre staff became increasingly aware of a gap in services being provided to their clientele. They found many clients were expressing a need for estate planning. Clients expressed concerns about their state of affairs after their death. Without the ability to pay to have their specific wishes drafted into a legal document, many of our clients were quite anxious about the future.

The Northumberland Community Legal Centre was able to secure the *pro bono* services of lawyers in Brighton, Cobourg and Port Hope who generously agreed to assist our clients by drafting wills and Power of Attorney forms for free of charge. Since March 2009 the Legal Centre in combination with the Pri-

vate Bar lawyers has been able to provide assistance to more than 49 clients with drafting their Wills and Power of Attorney documents.

We continually survey both our clients and the private bar lawyers involved in the program to ensure that we are doing a good job and to provide quality assurance.

Our client survey's have been overwhelmingly supportive. Some of our clients commented:

- no stress, everything went smoothly;
- Easy and nicely done;
- No difficulties whatsoever;
- Very pleasant experience;
- Very nice and professional
- I feel a lot better having my will completed;

It is clear that the Wills Program is a service our clients have found incredibly helpful to them and one that they are extremely appreciative of. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the following lawyers for their support of our services and our clients and their willingness to provide such excellent *pro bono* services.



A big Thank you to:

Bruce Coleman

Brad Halls

Allan McCracken

Anne Marie Steiger

Doug Mann

James McGrath

Marc Bebee

Lastly, we would like to thank Dari Haddon, one of our wonderful volunteers who is consistently demonstrating caring, compassion and a willingness to assist. Thank you for all of your help Dari! We appreciate it!

Since March 2009 the Legal Centre in combination with the Private Bar lawyers has been able to provide assistance to more than 49 clients with drafting their Wills and Power of Attorney documents .



The Help Centre of Northumberland Website

Our heartiest thanks must again go out to the creative genius of Duane Schemerhorn of Dray Design Studios for his patience and assistance in the ongoing maintenance of our website.

Our website is chock full of information about the law, the Legal Centre, the Help Centre and the programs and services provided by each organization.

The website is updated regularly with new information and information on upcoming events.

We invite you to peruse our website and check back regularly for updated event information. The web address is www.thehelpcentre.ca.

We look forward to hearing from you about our website.

Fundraising Committee Report to the Annual General Meeting, September 2010 by Elizabeth Greaves

Thank you – those who helped with our special events, those who attended them, those who donated generously throughout the year. Thank you – Ontario Trillium Foundation as we enter the third year of the grant which allowed us to hire our fundraiser, Carolyn Dalgarno. Thanks to the sponsors who supported each special event we held. And special thanks to the board and staff members who have generously given our efforts their full support.

We hosted a number of special events this year. “Empty Bowls” was a great success – speaking to the issue of poverty in our community while celebrating the beauty of pottery (Northumberland Potters donated more than 100 hand-crafted bowls), good soups and bread and wonderful fellowship.

Our spring Fashion Show was a great event, with wonderful fashions for women and men of all ages and sizes, elegant prizes and delicious savouries.

The TUFF Ride – a motorcycle ride through the Northumberland Hills

– brought a much larger number of riders out: all plan on returning next year.

What is spring without yard sales? We had two this year, one in Port Hope, one in Cobourg. Such a lot of work to collect, sort, price and sell – but what wonderful bargains for the community of yard sale devotees and what fun for the helpers.

In the summer, we held our first of what will be an annual Golf Tournament. This was well-attended, well organized (by super-volunteer Doug Lloyd) and the prize tables overflowed with goodies donated by local merchants, unions and businesses. As the last golfers were leaving the course to begin the BBQ luncheon – the skies opened and much-needed rain came by the bucket. After lunch, as we were preparing to leave, the sun came out.

We held another bus tour to Prince

Edward County, to explore the southern part of this lovely piece of our province – as rich in history as it is in farms, vineyards, cheese and flowers.

We now move into our quiet season, moving over for the important United Way Campaign. The Fundraising Committee will continue to meet to plan for next year’s special events and would welcome new members, ideas or comments. If you are interested in joining us for some or all of our work, please contact Carolyn Dalgarno at 905-372-2646 or Carolyn@thehelpcentre.ca. We do try to keep that FUN in Fundraising, so not all is hard work.

Fundraising is an essential means of providing more service to our community. As important as raising money is to any charity, at The Help Centre we want our events to be a means of raising awareness of community needs and of developing community responses to address those needs. We have enjoyed enormous support from our community in Northumberland – thank you all.

Elizabeth Greaves, Chair

Fundraising Committee

The Help Centre wants our events to be a means of raising awareness of community needs and of developing community responses to address those needs

Public Legal Education: Breaking the Barrier

by Kulvinder Deol

Effective Public Legal Education (PLE) must be an integral part of the Canadian justice system. In the myriad of complex rules, procedures, forms and limited access to legal representation, it is through PLE that we are able to break barriers to access to justice. By educating the public on the law, clients become aware and knowledgeable of when their rights are being violated. Being a part of the clinic system we are already breaking one of the barriers by providing free representation in clinic areas of practice to clients who would otherwise be unable to afford a lawyer. Here at the clinic we are trying increase access to justice by not only offering legal services to client but also by promoting and providing PLE. Within the preceding year, the legal centre has effectively provided **31** opportunities for legal education to the Northumberland Community. These opportunities included presentations, development of informative literature and hosting events, such as interactive forums.

The Centre continues to publish its own set of informative pamphlets and handouts providing information on specific legal issues. The Centre's latest releases include whether motel residents are covered by the *Residential Tenancies Act*, what to bring to a Landlord and Tenant Board hearing as well as what tenants should do if they have mould. The quick reference publications provide an overview of the potential legal issues in the client's circumstances. These are offered in addition to publications provided by other organizations such as Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO), Legal Aid Ontario, Advocacy Centre for Tenants of Ontario and Advocacy Centre for the Elderly. This literature is free and available to any visitor of the Centre.

The PLE provided by the Centre allows some members of the community the opportunity for self-help. The centre continues to develop self-help kits for client's use such as the T6 Maintenance and Repair Kit. The T6 Kit provides information about how to effec-

tively file a T6 application against the landlord and includes information on steps to take, documentation required, the required forms as well as additional Landlord and Tenant Board requirements. Recently the clinic has developed and distributed Lost Identification kits. Fifty kits were originally compiled and contained basic information, key contact/reference numbers, and steps how to replace crucial identification. Again by providing clients the opportunity to assist themselves, the kits are providing an opportunity for clients to access to income sources and justice. If a client is unable to come into our office or does not have the time to sit with our staff to discuss the issue, the self help kit can be mailed to the client or picked up.

The Legal Centre's website provides a great avenue of distribution of PLE material. The website can be accessed at <http://www.thehelpcentre.ca/>. The website has been a great resource for clients to access information online as well as receive the latest updates on Legal Centre news. Working in partnership with the Help Centre, our client's can also access Help Centre news, information and resources from our site as well.

One of the major PLE events hosted by the clinic in the past year was the 7th Annual Justice Forum focusing on issues of Mental Health and Barriers in Rural areas. The event was a huge success and was attended by numerous community groups and organizations. The effective education of different community partners strengthens their ability to recognize when a legal issue arises with their own clients or participants. Effective mutual education leads to increased effectiveness of the entire network of organizations.

The Legal Centre is excited to be hosting its upcoming 8th annual Justice Forum. This year's forum is focusing on Youth Justice being held on Friday October 15th, 2010. The forum is being designed to disseminate key information regarding youth issues in different areas of law. We are looking for-

ward to a variety of speakers and activities to inform participants on youth issues in employment law, social services, and policing.

Additionally the Centre has reached out to specific groups and individual in the community to educate them on specific legal issues. An Employment Standards presentation was offered to young single mothers regarding worker's rights in an employment setting. The Legal Centre also offered multiple presentations to health staff regarding form completion for Ontario Disability applicants.

The Legal Centre strives to continue to provide legal education to the Northumberland community. Informing members of the community of their legal rights, their legal options and of law in general empowers individuals. We are striving to empower our clientele with the knowledge and awareness to demand their rights in the face of intimidation.

THE NORTHUMBERLAND LEGAL CENTRE GIVES THANKS

The Northumberland Community Legal Centre would like to give thanks to:

1. Volunteer Dari Hadden for her help with the Wills program. Dari's dedication and compassion are irreplaceable. We appreciate all of her hard work;
2. Private Bar lawyers Bruce Coleman, Anne Marie Steiger, Allan McCracken, Brad Halls, James McGrath, Doug Mann, Marc Bebee. Your continued assistance with the Wills Program has been a tremendous asset. We appreciate it!
3. Placement students: Amanda Pudister, Laurie Dilts, Rachel Landry, Craig Jones, and Rebecca Keetch. Thanks to all of these students for their great work!
4. Grade 9 student Moriah Harrington, for completing high school community placement hours at the Legal Centre. Moriah was an exemplary student and we wish her the best for her future!

Inadequate Protections for Tenants of Retirement Homes: ACE's Concerns About Bill 21, The Retirement Homes Act

By Judith Wahl Executive Director & Staff Lawyer

Staff from the Northumberland Community Legal Centre recently received training from ACE on Retirement Homes Issues. We are pleased to provide our Member's with this article by Judith Wahl Executive Director and Staff Lawyer at ACE on ACE's concerns about Bill 21, The Retirement Homes Act. This article has been reproduced with permission.

The Ontario government introduced Bill 21, the *Retirement Homes Act* (the *RHA*), into the Legislature on March 30, 2010 and it quickly received Royal Assent on June 8, 2010 despite opposition from individuals and organizations across the province. As there is currently little or no government oversight of retirement homes, the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly (ACE) supports the purpose of the bill – to regulate retirement homes. However, we strongly oppose the *RHA* and the speed with which the government has passed this legislation.

The legislative process, from the introduction of Bill 21 to the limited debate and Royal Assent, has been very short. For instance, there was only one afternoon of public hearings before the Standing Committee on Social Policy. The Minister Responsible for Seniors, Gerry Phillips, would likely argue that there was sufficient time and discussion with stakeholders because the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat held consultations on retirement home regulation in 2007, which included meetings in five locations around the province with over 800 people in attendance, as well as the receiving written submissions.

However some advocacy and seniors organizations, including ACE, argued that the scope of the original

consultation was the general regulation of retirement homes, not the specific regulatory scheme contained in the *RHA*. Even where the consultation dealt with issues similar to those in the *RHA*, several stakeholders noted that the public did not want self-regulation by the retirement home industry but rather by government.

ACE has several concerns about the *RHA*. A detailed brief analyzing the *RHA* is available on the ACE website but the following is a summary of what we perceive to be the main problems.

1. **Two-tiered health care:** Retirement homes will be able to offer any level of care but without the same level of oversight as long-term care homes. ACE, as well as several other organizations, believes this will result in the privatization of health care for seniors and create a parallel system to long-term care homes. Tenants will be paying for health care services that would otherwise be covered by the government. It is expected that some long-term care home operators will change their homes to retirement homes as they will not only be able to operate the same business with a lower level of regulation but also charge more for the same services.

As the *RHA* permits retirement homes to provide any level of care and services, more vulnerable seniors will utilize these services without fully understanding the implications. This opens the door for potential abuse due to the lack of protections against abuse, such as those provided in the *Long-Term Care Homes Act*, which requires reporting and intervention by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

A recent case at Cumberland Lodge

in Ottawa, where the operator of a domiciliary hostel and her daughter allegedly stole over \$300,000 from vulnerable tenants illustrates this point.² This is only the most recent example of those in authority stealing money from those who are under their care. While the *RHA* does not regulate this type of accommodation, even if it did apply, the legislation does little to prevent this from occurring. Moreover, the regulatory authority responsible for retirement homes would not have authority to deal with this type of situation.

2. **Enhanced self-regulation and domination by the retirement home industry:** The *RHA* creates an arms-length regulatory body, called the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority (the Authority), to educate, license and inspect retirement homes. The affairs of the Authority will be supervised and managed by a Board of Directors. Despite assurances from the Minister, ACE is concerned that the Authority will be dominated by the industry or friends of retirement homes. After the initial two years of operation, a majority of the members of the Authority will be appointed by the Board of Directors, resulting in a "closed shop". This is a flawed model that will be difficult, if not impossible, to dislodge or amend. Power will be concentrated with minimal government accountability.³

3. **Tenant rights and complaints – limited enforcement mechanisms:** The *RHA* creates a Bill of Rights for tenants and deems the operator of the home and each tenant to have entered into a contract. While tenants may enforce their rights by pursuing a civil action, there are no special enforcement mechanisms available to tenants.

While the ability to go to court is important, the reality is that civil actions are often expensive and take a long time to be resolved. Tenants need quick action to ensure that their rights are enforced and they are receiving appropriate care.

Tenants may complain about contraventions of the legislation to the Registrar of the Authority and, in certain circumstances, the response of the Registrar may be reviewed by a Complaints Review Officer. Both the Registrar and Complaints Review are solely accountable to the Authority. The decision of the Complaints Review Officer is final – the *RHA* indicates that there is no right of appeal or review outside the Authority.⁴ In contrast, operators who are denied a licence to operate a retirement home have a right to have a review by the License Appeal Tribunal and a further right of appeal to the Divisional Court.

4. Sanctioning of restraint and detention in secure units: The *RHA* permits the restraint and confinement of tenants in secure units. Tenants of retirement homes, unfortunately, do not have the same level of protections provided to residents of long-term care homes under the *Long-Term Care Homes Act*. While confinement in a secure unit in a long-term care home is considered a restraint, the *RHA* specifically states that *confinement* in a retirement home is not a restraint. We disagree with this section and do not believe it to be legally correct. If a person is prevented from leaving, he or she is restrained no matter what the legislation states.

5. Fees: The Authority has the ability to set, collect and use fees collected from retirement homes to carry out the objects of the Authority. The government has stated that it will fund the Authority for the first two years but it has not publicly pledged a specific amount. It is inevitable that the cost of regulation will be passed onto tenants in the form of higher prices. ACE is concerned that this will be detrimental to small and not-for-profit homes, which may be forced to provide fewer services or close.

6. Limited definition of a retirement home:

This legislation only regulates homes occupied primarily by persons who are 65 years of age or older. However, there are many other similar types of accommodation, (such as domiciliary hostels, group homes and attendant care accommodation) which provide similar services but are not regulated by the *RHA* or elsewhere. This leaves an entire vulnerable population living in accommodation where their care is not regulated.

Is There Anything that Can Be Done To Address the Concerns Raised by ACE and Others?

Before the *RHA* is proclaimed into force, the government must draft regulations. The *RHA* requires that there be at least 30 days for the public to submit written comments regarding these proposed regulations.⁵

ACE will definitely be participating in any public consultations. Once the Minister posts its draft regulations, ACE will be seeking input from interested seniors' organizations and individuals on the proposed regulations. If you are interested in participating in discussions with ACE, please contact us. After hearing from individuals and organizations, ACE will draft and post our submission on our website. This information may assist you in the preparation of your own comments.

You may also wish to contact your local Member of Parliament about the draft regulations or the *RHA*. Since there is no proclamation date yet, the government could still amend the legislation or choose not to implement it. While this is unlikely, the government may be persuaded to do so if there is a large public backlash against the legislation.

We encourage anyone with concerns about the *Retirement Homes Act* to speak to their Member of Parliament or participate in these important public consultations as the contents of the regulations will be fundamental as to how this act will be interpreted

¹ Domiciliary hostels are privately owned or non-profit residences that assist vulnerable adults to live in a supportive community environment. Residents are typically living with psychiatric or developmental impairments and/or are elderly. Basic services include 24-hour staffing with support; meals and snacks; medication management; furnished rooms (most are shared accommodation); assistance with daily living activities; housekeeping and laundry services. They also provide access to other on-site and community based services.

² Maria Cook, "Regulations may not have helped in Cumberland

Lodge case: experts" *Ottawa Citizen* (29 May 2010).

³ For a critique of this model, please go to <http://www.web.net/ohc/> and see the legal opinion prepared by Sack Goldblatt Mitchell LLP for the Ontario Health Coalition

⁴ *RHA*, S.O. 2010, c. 11, s. 88(11).

⁵ *RHA*, s. 121.

If you have a Care Home or Retirement Home Question please contact the Northumberland Community Legal Centre for Legal Advice and Assistance:

(905) 373-4464 or

Toll Free:

1-800-850-7882

THE HELP CENTRE OF NORTHUMBERLAND



The Help Centre

(A Proud United Way Member Agency)

Tel: 905-372-2646

1-888-698-3382

Fax: 905-372-2205

Housing Listings



LEGAL AID ONTARIO
AIDE JURIDIQUE ONTARIO

Northumberland Community Legal Centre

(funded by Legal Aid Ontario)

Tel: 905-373-4464

1-800-850-7882

Fax: 905-373-4467

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