

# THE HELP CENTRE OF NORTHUMBERLAND

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## CHAIR'S REPORT BY Carol Blaind

In this, my second year as Chair of The Help Centre of Northumberland, I once again have the somewhat daunting task of compiling an annual report. As I review the year gone by, there has been so much activity, it is hard to imagine where to begin. As is the usual, it is the time of year when we acknowledge our accomplishments and achievements in service to our community and envision the work of the next year.

This year one of the many accomplishments we celebrate is the twentieth anniversary of The Legal Centre and our esteemed Executive Director, Lois Cromarty. The Legal Centre opened for business on April Fool's Day, 1991. However, there was no "fooling around" once the work began. The Legal Centre got busy with issues involving Tenant Rights, Employment Insurance, Social Assistance Benefits, Disability Benefits, Worker's Compensation and Canada Pension Plan. These are just a few of the services needed by residents in Northumberland County. Since then, the Centre has grown and expanded services in response to identified community needs and has been a leader in poverty reduction campaigns.

The work seems never ending, but fortunately, with Lois at the helm, supported by her talented team, the Legal Centre continues to respond with expertise, compassion and integrity. We are grateful for the leadership Lois has provided both to her team and to the Board of Directors in meeting our mandate and mission. We are also grateful to Legal Aid Ontario for funding to sustain the

work of the Legal Centre.

On The Help Centre side of the organization, services are provided to the public through our Income Security and Housing Security programs. These programs are supported by funding from a variety of sources, including Northumberland United Way, Northumberland Labour Council, and the County of Northumberland. Delivered by knowledgeable and competent staff and volunteers, these programs remain free of charge to individuals and families residing in Northumberland County.

Organizations such as The Help Centre of Northumberland have seen an increase in demand for services, necessitating an increase in accessing resources. The Help Centre has been fortunate to have had support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation for the past three years with funding to hire a Special Events and Fund-raising Co-ordinator. Carolyn Dalgarno finished her term with us this past summer but was instrumental in organizing and establishing fund raising events that will carry forward. We thank Carolyn along with the fund-raising committee, the staff on both sides of the agency and the volunteers for their hard work and support. In addition to raising much needed funds, these events also provide an opportunity to raise awareness in the community of the work that is done for, with and on behalf of the residents of Northumberland

County.

Resources needed for us to continue and expand our work come in a variety of ways. Volunteers are always needed and always welcome to bring their skills, abilities and interests to support the work of the agency. We invite all those interested in donating their time, skills and abilities to contact The Help Centre or The Legal Centre.

On a final note, there are not enough words to thank my Board colleagues for the trust they place in me as Chair of the Board. There is not enough time or appropriate space to identify the work done by the staff and volunteers, and no amount of appreciation can really convey enough, our gratitude to our supporters, funders and donors.

When is "enough" enough? When there is no longer a need for organizations such as The Help Centre of Northumberland to work and advocate in ensuring that all members in a society have enough resources to have basic needs met; to have access to social and economic justice as a tenet of Human Rights.

As always, we invite members of the public to join us in the work we do by taking out a membership, volunteering or joining us in any of our many community events.

And to all who support the work of The Help Centre of Northumberland...thank you, thank you, thank you!  
Carol Blaind



*By the close of the fiscal year 2010-11, Legal Centre staff dealt with 4,775 requests for assistance; another 3%+ increase in demand over the 4628 requests for help that we dealt with in 2009-10.*



First of all, I want to thank the staff of the Legal Centre for all their efforts in providing high quality service in response to an ever-increasing demand. The dedication and determination of the Legal Centre staff, and their commitment to social justice is something the whole community can take pride in. By the close of the fiscal year 2010-11, Legal Centre staff dealt with 4,775 requests for assistance; another 3%+ increase in demand over the 4628 requests for help that we dealt with in 2009-10.

#### Summary Services:

The first contact by a client with the Legal Centre is recorded as a summary advice, a brief service or a referral. The 4775 requests for help are broken out in the following table. Referrals are made when the matter is beyond our areas of practice, or when there is a conflict of interest, or when the client does not reside in Northumberland County (other than those we service from out of area through our collaboration agreement).

Social assistance problems were the highest number of requests for help, while requests for family law assistance made up the bulk of referrals.

At this time, we do not have a reliable tool that can track the monetary and tangible outcomes of our summary advice and brief services. However we do survey our summary advice clients to get their views on whether the advice we provided was effective, and what clients thought of the service. Some of our summary advice clients commented:

- I can't say enough about how wonderfully (my matter) was handled. Kudos to all of you. I never went in that you didn't remember my name....
- I was happy with the service....

#### 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. In 2010-11, we started the year with 206 files, and opened a further 368 cases (up the 257 cases we

ADVICE TYPE	BRIEF SERVICES	SUMMARY ADVICE	REFERRALS
Tenant's Rights	78	1043	39
Ontario Works	67	567	7
Ontario Disability	125	877	6
Worker's Compensation	48	175	10
Canada Pension	36	148	0
Employment Insurance	3	44	0
Other Income Maintenance	0	25	5
General Administrative	9	425	26
Immigration	0	2	0
Employment Standards	1	48	3
Wrongful Dismissal	0	45	18
Employment Other	0	38	3
Public Services	0	6	3
Health Care	0	20	21
Correctional Law	0	2	0
Human Rights	2	17	8
Criminal	0	7	60
Family	0	17	211
Consumer	3	66	37
Criminal Injuries	26	46	3
Wills	0	83	12
Others	3	78	121
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>3779</b>	<b>595</b>

ther 368 cases (up from the 257 cases we opened in 2009-10). We track the outcomes of the files in which we represent clients. These results are tracked when the file is closed. While tracking results does NOT mean that we only take cases where we believe there will be a large payment to the client if we are successful, we believe it is important for our community to have a sense of the monetary difference the legal clinic can make in the lives of low-income residents.

In the past fiscal year, our representation in the 322 cases that we closed during the year resulted in an estimated \$1,294,341.90 in lump sum (retroactive) awards to our clients. The ongoing monthly financial change for those clients is an estimated \$22,062.28 difference per month in total (or about \$264,747.36 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.

The monetary difference our work can make in the ongoing lives of low-income Northumberland residents can mean the difference between being homeless and being housed, between living in substandard housing and living in well maintained, safe and secure housing, between being impoverished and having a stable source of income.

We also survey our case file clients to get their views on the work that we did for them. Surveys are sent out when the file is closed, and clients can return the survey anonymously if they choose. Some of our case file clients commented:

- I think you guys did a fantastic job – no improvement necessary.
- The service received exceeded our expectations. We were extremely satisfied... and are grateful that the Legal Centre was there to help us.

#### **Satellites**

Just as a reminder, we do operate satellite offices in several locations around the County:

- In Brighton, we meet clients at the Trinity United Church office (on Chapel Street) from 9 – 11 am on alternating Fridays.
- We then drive up to Campbellford that same day, 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).
- We go to the Colborne Food Bank (fourth Tuesday of the month, 9 to 11 am).
- We also regularly attend the Greenwood Tower community dinners to provide assistance to those in Port Hope.

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, 2010-11 saw the Legal Centre get the benefit of having paralegal students completing their field placements with us. Paralegal students must complete a set amount of placement hours in order to graduate. 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. These students came from all three surrounding Colleges (Durham, Sir Sandford Fleming, and Loyalist), and we have to thank the College Placement officers from each of those institutions for sending quality students our way. In 2010-11, our students were Craig Wilson, Judith Alexander, Wilmalee Rudy, Sarah Monaco, and Beth Rider. Cherie Douglas, who was in between her first and second year of paralegal studies, volunteered her time throughout the summer months in 2010. Thanks to all of these students for their great work and for the invaluable contribution that improved the lives of low-income Northumberland residents.

We also were fortunate enough to receive funding from HRSDC that allowed us to hire an articling student. Kulvinder Deol was with us from May to December. We were pleased to be able to provide training in clinic practice that will hopefully stand Kulvinder in good stead in her law career. We wish her all the best on her call to the Bar.

#### **Northumberland Poverty Reduction Action Committee (NPRAC)**

NPRAC, a committee made up of community agencies, institutions, and individuals, continues to work towards reducing poverty locally.

In 2010-11, NPRAC signed an historic Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Ontario Institute of Technology's Community Link Unit (CLU) to undertake research on what specific actions could be taken to improve the lives of low-income Northumberland residents who are living with a mental health or addiction issue. This was the first MOU signed between the CLU and a Northumberland initiative.

NPRAC now has its own website ([www.nprac.ca](http://www.nprac.ca)) that has been created by Duane Schmerhorne as the webmaster. Duane has done an excellent job of creating and hosting this site for a very nominal fee, in essence donating his time and expertise. The website gives information on local resources and gives ideas on how poverty can be reduced.

#### **Wrongful Dismissal Project**

We have had another successful year of our collaboration agreement with our neighbouring clinic in Belleville, the Community Advocacy and Legal Centre (CALC). CALC lawyers give our Northumberland clients help in pursuing wrongful dismissal claims against their employers, in exchange for NCLC mentoring in CALC's WSIB cases. CALC reports that 6 clients received service, with monetary results of \$67,542.66.

#### **Wills Project**

Brad Halls, Doug Mann, Bruce Coleman, Allan McCracken all graciously donated their time to provide wills and powers of attorney for low-income clients. When you see them, please thank them for this valuable contribution to the security and dignity of our low-income neighbours in the County. Thanks also to Dari Haddon, a volunteer lawyer who does the initial groundwork with the clients to gather all the information needed to prepare the will. This information is given to the private bar lawyers who use it to draft the will, and then meet with the client to go over the will before signing. In 2010-11, the generosity of these wonderful members of the local private bar meant that 23 low-income clients had wills prepared.

#### **Poverty Law Innovations Fund**

The Legal Centre is excited to receive funding from Legal Aid Ontario to develop a plan to start a Student Legal Aid Services (SLASS) at Durham College, using paralegal students to deliver the service under the supervision of a Review Counsel. This project is a joint partnership between NCLC, the Durham Community Legal Clinic and Durham College School of Justice and Emergency Services. If all goes well, this service should be up and running in January 2012.

# INCOME SECURITY BY Dixie Allison



**Our goal is to help individuals become increasingly more independent, and we find that education is often the best way to achieve this.**

The Help Centre has become known as a place in our community where people can come to find solutions, options and assistance without fear of meeting judgement or prejudice, and where they know their privacy is always our first concern. Some of our clients are not able to read or write themselves, so we will help to clarify issues that they don't understand or help to complete forms they find confusing; these are just some of the things we are able to do to make sure our clients are receiving the benefits, assistance or support they need.

The Help Centre has divided its programming into two major categories: Housing Security and Income Security. One major aspect of Income Security is the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP). CVITP is a Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) program that assists low income people who cannot complete their annual tax return and cannot afford to have it done privately. The Help Centre has been offering this program for over 15 years in partnership with CRA and dedicated volunteers.

Our volunteers are part of a great team and have the opportunity to give back to community in a meaningful way. They help individuals and families maintain uninterrupted access to government benefits and entitlements, increase their tax knowledge and experience while gaining new skills and improving existing ones.

Our CVITP has grown over the years; in the last three years in particular, we have seen substantial increases (see chart).

This year, The Help Centre added outreach clinics that were held in conjunction with Port Hope Community Health Centre, TEAM Program, Golden Plough Lodge, Legion Village, Regency Manor, Campbellford Community Hub, and the Colborne Community Hub. Several more are planned

for this upcoming year. We also initiated a couple of new options to our Income Tax program which had great success in their pilot

YEAR	# OF INTAKES	REFUNDS
2008	680	306,082.50
2009	946	465,669.63
2010 (Jan-Aug)	1305	560,810.95

year. The first was a software program facilitated by computer-savvy volunteers which gave our clients the opportunity to be able to do their own taxes. The second option also used our well trained volunteers who completed the intake and prepared the taxes while the client waited. Available by appointment only, this option gave the participating clients more understanding of the process and also saved them travel time since they only had to come in once. This was particularly appreciated by some of our clients with disabilities.

Also under the Income Security umbrella, The Help Centre offers a forms-completion service at no cost to our clients. Over the year, we've helped with forms such as Rent Geared to Income, ACSO Children with Severe Disabilities, Birth Certificate Applications, CPP Disability, CPP Pension, Involuntary Separation Forms, Old Age Security, OAS Supplemental, Ontario Disability Support Program Benefits Application, Child Tax Benefits, Trillium Drug Benefit Applications – the list goes on and on. We have provided access to Disability-Tax-Certificate application forms, child-rearing drop out forms and T1 adjustments (particularly for disability adjustments). We

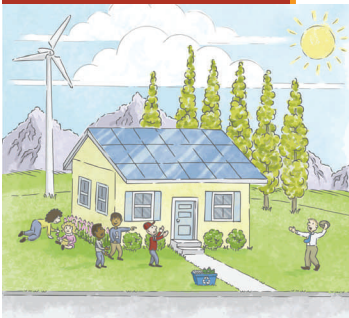
were able, with the assistance of our liaison at Revenue Canada, to help clients with the many issues that arise with the Child Tax Benefit as well as with the Universal Tax Benefit.

We opened the door for many of our clients to benefits such as Children with Severe Disabilities and Developmental Services of Ontario - benefits which they may not have been aware of.

At the Help Centre we also raise awareness for our clients about such organizations as the National Benefit Authority or the Canada Protection Plan. Our clients often believe they have received communication from the government rather than a for-profit company whose name closely resembles a government agency. THC advises caution before using a service that asks the client for an application fee.

Other areas we assist with through our Income Security program are Money Management counselling, Credit Counselling, and mandated Post Bankruptcy Counselling. Also part of Income Security is the creation of resumes, updating resumes and cover letters. All these services are offered with the goal of securing, maintaining or increasing personal income.

Giving our clients the knowledge, tools and support needed to help with their financial security is an undertaking we are very happy to do and a responsibility that we do not take lightly. Our goal is to help individuals become increasingly more independent, and we find that education is often the best way to achieve this.



Are you one of the 732, 910 Ontario households that are low income? You could be a student living off of student loans, or maybe a senior on a fixed income. You could be on social assistance or a single parent. Regardless of the specifics, if you're a low-income person or family, then you're likely trying hard to stretch your monthly income to cover all of the costs of daily living.

Imagine that you're at home with your children making dinner, having a shower, or trying to do homework when the lights go out or the water turns cold. You have just been disconnected. Many people living on a small income and trying to make ends meet can relate to the distressing feeling related to receiving a past due notice, a disconnection notice or a disconnection. For many, being in this position makes them feel helpless and many do not have support networks to turn to in these moments of darkness - this is a reality that many people in our community face. And so, it is very fortunate that Northumberland County should have a place like The Help Centre for its residents to turn to in times of need.

The people who aren't already aware might wonder what exactly The Help Centre can do for an individual facing disconnection. Over the years The Help Centre has worked in collaboration with Northumberland County and a number of different hydro and gas providers in the region to provide emergency assistance to low income energy users, ensuring that when a disconnection notice is issued that adequate advocacy and potential funds are available to assist. Currently the utilities that The Help Centre is working with include Hydro One, Lakefront Utilities, Veridian Connections, Union Gas, and Enbridge Gas.

Recently, Hydro One, Lakefront Utilities, Veridian and Enbridge Gas have joined together in a program called LEAP (Low-income Energy Assistance Program). LEAP provides one-time emergency financial assistance to eligible applicants who are facing disconnect. A similar program that Union Gas and Enbridge Gas have become a part of is Winter Warmth, which also provides emergency assistance during the winter months. Another resource that The Help Centre has the honour of utilizing is the Community Utility Trust (CUT) Fund and Emergency Energy Fund (EEF). Both of these programs are funded by the county that allows The Help Centre to provide emergency assistance to those who are facing difficult times af-

fording the price of oil for their furnace, as well as water and sewer costs to name a few. Living without hydro is undoubtedly a challenging task in today's society and so these programs are a wonderful relief to people needing a little time and assistance to get back on their feet, which is particularly challenging with increasing costs of living.

Over the past few years hydro consumers have seen a jump in the charges appearing on their bills. There have been a few mentionable changes that have contributed to these increases in Hydro bills. There was the addition of 8% added to hydro bills with the newly implemented harmonized sales tax last year, regularly scheduled hydro cost increases and also the implementation of smart meters and time-of-use-pricing. With these changes and increasing costs The Help Center has also seen an increase in its clientele. Last year The Help Centre processed a total of 290 utility applications and to date The Help Centre has already surpassed this tally from last year and the year end is still not in sight. Another service The Help Centre has found to be in high request is assistance in equal billing advocacy. Living on a budget is challenging enough without unexpected costs cropping up; this is why The Help Centre has strongly advocated for many of their clients to enter into equal billing with their utility. Equal billing allows the client to receive a monthly bill of the same price every month, making it easier to find financial balance each month. How the utility company makes equal billing work for them and for the customer is by taking an average of the customer's past twelve months of energy usage, accounting for both the highs and lows of their usage, and charging that amount monthly. Simply because a customer goes on equal billing though does not mean that the customer is not accountable for the level of usage anymore, it is still important to conserve and try to operate during off-peak hours. An important part of energy conservation is to understand the cost of using hydro at different times, keeping in mind there is a summer schedule as well as a winter schedule.

As you can see there is nearly a 50% in-

Regulated Price Plan Time-of-Use Prices	
Off-peak Price:	5.9 ¢/kWh
Mid-peak Price:	8.9 ¢/kWh
On-peak Price:	10.7 ¢/kWh

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crease in the price to operate on-peak as opposed to off-peak. Although there are benefits to having the newly implemented smart meters such as providing billing accuracy, reduced theft and tampering as well as allowing consumers to understand and monitor their usage there are also cons that negatively affect low income families. A principle way that smart meters may hamper low income families ability to conserve energy is that many low income families may live in substandard housing using old equipment or having poor insulation resulting in inordinate amounts of electricity and heat loss. Many low income homes are simply not fit to conserve energy.

For some households in Northumberland experiencing higher bills due to heat loss there may be an option. The Help Centre has been working hard to refer eligible candidates to the new Go Green Weatherization program. Go Green is collaborating with Union Gas and Lakefront Utilities to help those households living below the low-income cut off who might rely on Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program, Old Age Security or other modest pensions. If eligible the Go Green program will finance the weatherization of an older home requiring various elements to weather proof it.

Out of the 732, 910 Ontario households that are low income 469, 000 of them are renters. If high heat and hydro costs cannot be fixed by adequate weatherization or conservation methods an inevitable fact is that eviction may quickly follow a disconnection. The Help Centre tries to prevent eviction and homelessness by helping clients manage their gas and hydro bills through emergency assistance and conservation awareness, but if this is not enough The Help Centre also compiles a housing board to assist those who need relocation. The Help Centre has a board of affordable listings posted for the Northumberland area and is a good visual option to compare prices. The Help Centre's Housing Board is a consolidation of the listings posted in the local news papers, local landlords who inform us of vacancies, unadvertised availabilities, those interested in shared accommodations as well as homeowners looking to rent a room or share a house.

Homelessness is a lonely and harmful position to be in, and it is an occurrence that some residents of Northumberland County are facing. Preventing homelessness in Northumberland County is a major initiative of The Help Centre and one that we strive to achieve through our utility assistance programs.

## 20 YEARS OF LEGAL CENTRE HAPPENINGS, BY Lois Cromarty

I have the distinction of being Employee # 1 at the Northumberland Community Legal Centre, having started work back in 1991 to create a Legal Centre where none had existed. I look back over the intervening years, and find it hard to believe that 20 years have passed. I am indeed thankful that I was given that marvellous opportunity and I trust that the efforts of the Legal Centre in the ensuing years have justified the Board's decision. It is my privilege to be at the helm of the Legal Centre and to work with wonderful staff, amazingly resilient clients, and to work for a Board of Directors who remain enthusiastic and determined in spite of the many challenges thrown their way.

It must have been a daunting proposition for the Board of Directors at the time to contemplate starting up a legal clinic, but the need was there. The original Board of Directors of the newly incorporated The Help Centre of Northumberland were successful on their first application for funding to the Ontario Legal Aid Plan, and thus, NCLC was begun.

When the Legal Centre started 20 years ago, the corporate bylaw of THCN directed that the corporation "maintain and operate a community legal clinic within and for the benefit of the community of the county of Northumberland:

(i) to provide, without remuneration, through its staff, legal services to members of the community who do not have sufficient income or assets to enable them to afford the services of independent legal counsel;

(ii) to provide information to the community of the availability of such services and to encourage the low-income population, through education, training and advice, to actively participate in dealing with problems associated with poverty and social justice as related to law;

(iii) to advocate for law reform where it considers that present law does not adequately serve the interests of the under-represented members of the community."

What was different about the Legal Centre's beginning is that we began our

work as part of a joint agency. The model of a joint agency, where a legal clinic is situated with a sister agency and governed by one Board of Directors, was unusual at the time within the clinic system. Other like models had disbanded, and ours was one of the few that remained. It necessitated much work over the following years to keep the model alive and well, and that is thanks in no small part to the efforts of the Board of Directors. It is ironic that some twenty years on, a joint agency model is again being touted as the way forward by various funders, as being the most efficient and effective way of delivering service to clients. That is not a lesson that we needed to learn!

We quickly grew up and out of the original offices on 241 Division Street in an office arranged by the Northumberland Labour Council, to our current location in the Fleming Building. We set up an 800# and now have satellite offices across the county. Our "numbers served" has consistently increased, year over year, as staff find new ways to deliver quality service.

Although the goals of the Legal Centre sound lofty in the corporate bylaw, we have never lost sight of the fact that there are real people behind the demand for service. We have also never lost sight of the fact that, despite our efforts, some things seem to never change:

- ◆ For clients, living conditions: real deprivation with some having no food, inadequate or no housing; lack of affordable housing; concerns about what happens to the children of women who are forced into "workfare" programs; lack of access to medical care; stigma associated with being poor; can not afford phones; lack of transportation (Issues identified at a Women's Poverty in Northumberland Workshop, March 1998)

- ◆ For clients: massive changes in legislation that reduce rights and benefits for clients, including changes to the laws governing tenant's rights (twice), worker's compensation, welfare and disability benefits (first the rate cuts, then the legislation), employment insurance and employment standards.

- ◆ For staff, workload: "There is one concern that I believe needs mentioning. I have noticed recently among the staff of the Legal Clinic a very high stress level. I think as a board that we need to respond

quickly to the workload of all the staff of the Clinic. Perhaps the time has come for us to do less outreach while our caseload remains so very high." (Chair's report to the Annual General Meeting, September 1993).

Yet, we have made progress over those years, and we have achieved successes, for individual clients and for low-income residents as a whole. Some of the highlights, as I think back, are:

- The 1993 start up of the Northumberland Coalition Against Poverty, as a joint project of the NCLC and the social justice coalition Northumberland Community Coalition, providing a voice for low-income residents;

- Having management of a trailer park taken away from the owner in order to allow tenants to enforce their rights to adequate park maintenance. The park now has paved roads and safe water;

- Helping what the employer called "volunteer" wait staff at a local restaurant/bar enforce their rights under the Employment Standards Act as workers, to get the wages due to them;

- Being the legal representatives on the leading case on "availability" of assets under the Ontario Works legislation;

- The start of the Northumberland Poverty Reduction Action Committee;

- Provision of tenant duty counsel services for over 15 years.

I can go on, for the list of successes can be measured in ways both large and small. Helping a client increase their monthly income is as important to that individual as is the larger law-reform efforts that we have achieved in the last twenty years as part of the entire clinic system.

So, have we achieved the mandate of the Legal Centre, namely to:

- Provide legal services without fee for those who qualify financially
- Ensure and encourage access to such services
- Establish legal education programs and publish/distribute legal education materials
- Organize people or groups around specific issues, or for law reform purposes?

I say, undoubtedly, yes. We can achieve a better quality of life for our clients, and we will continue to apply our resources to make that happen.

# ANOTHER YEAR OF LAW REFORM BY Teresa Williams

From April 1, 2010 to March 31, 2011, we opened 14 law reform files within our clinic. As always, we also participated in regional and provincial law reform initiatives through our clinic memberships. Again, it has been an active year for the Legal Centre advocating in many different ways.

One example of law reform is the Legal Centre's participation in consultations – in writing or in person – at municipal, provincial and federal levels.

An example of Municipal law reform activities would be that in the summer of 2010, a social housing provider in Cobourg banned wading pools from their complex. People living in social housing units are typically low income and vulnerable, and many have children. They are often without transportation to get to cooling stations. The Legal Centre advocated for having the ban lifted as we felt it substantially interfered with their enjoyment of the rental unit, and possibly human rights. There have been no further complaints about wading pools at this address.

While our case files are opened to assist specific clients, they often have an effect on policy changes. For example, if similar cases with similar facts have similar outcomes, eventually it affects how policy and legislation are interpreted. As a result of a recent Ontario Disability Support Program case file, the Ministry of Community and Social Services has issued a memorandum revising a 2008 Clearinghouse Q & A, which stated that stump socks, prosthetic sleeves and mastectomy bras were not surgical supplies or dressings and therefore, were not

eligible for Mandatory Special Necessities benefits from ODSP. In a memorandum to all ODSP offices, the Ministry states that “as of 1 March 2011, ODSP will cover the costs of stump socks and prosthetic sleeves.” ODSP will reimburse those individuals who have paid for these items out of their own pockets as a result of the original Q & A document, if appropriate documentation is provided.”

There have been many changes to federal Employment Insurance legislation and regulations. Special benefits are now eligible for self-employed persons. There have been positive changes for long-tenured workers and a variety of training incentives. Most recently, the Legal Centre provided answers to a series of principles-based questions in order to help produce a better understanding

The Legal Centre has been actively monitoring the happenings around the Social Assistance Review. We have sent written submissions to the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario outlining our recommendations on how Social Assistance legislation and policies may be improved. A preliminary report is scheduled to be released in “late fall” according to the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance. Once the paper is released, more input will be welcomed in writing and in person. The Legal Centre will participate in the review process whenever possible.

We will be hosting our 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Justice Forum on Monday October 17, 2011 – the International Day for the

Eradication of Poverty – at Columbus Community Centre. It will focus on the Social Assistance Review. It is important to keep the Social Assistance Review on the agenda of who ever is elected provincially on October 6, 2011. We will focus on how to keep it forefront in Ontario's mind and what steps are next.

## Northumberland Community Legal Centre Presents: 9th Annual Justice Forum

Please join us on Monday October 18, 2011

**Time:** 2:00PM to 4:00PM

**Address:** Columbus Community Centre—232 Spencer Street East, Cobourg



This year's focus is on the Social Assistance Review happening in the Province of Ontario. Guest facilitators will be Dana Milne from the Income Security Advocacy Centre and Naomi Ives from the ODSP Action Coalition.



Light refreshments will be available.

of employment insurance and how it works with the province's social assistance programs. The results have not yet been published.

Many of our law reform efforts may not be apparent to the public. For example, there is currently a review of social assistance happening in the province of Ontario. It has already been a bit of a process and a final report is not expected until July 2012. The Commission was appointed in 2010, and the Review itself began in January 2011. In June 2010, the [Social Assistance Review Advisory Council](#) provided recommendations on the scope of the review.

These are some examples the Legal Centre's involvement in municipal, provincial and federal law reform activities. It is our commitment to our clients to continue to advocate for fair and just law reform.

Law reform happens in areas that you may not even expect. You can be involved in law reform also. One of the best ways to be involved in law reform is to vote. With provincial elections scheduled for Thursday October 6, 2011 the Legal Centre will be busy ensuring Law Reforms projects are not forgotten.

## A HUGE THANK YOU BY Karin Cummings



*We continue to offer the Volunteer Income Tax Program and the 2010 tax season saw a whopping 1305 returns processed with a total of \$504,346.00 in refunds going back into our community.*



To sum up the past year at The Help Centre is a feat unto itself. With a review of the many services we offer at the centre, a decision was made to streamline what we do into two main categories of service: Income Security and Housing Security. Effective in July we closed our food cupboard. This was not an easy decision to make as we know that in past years we assisted many families on a weekly basis with these necessities but with at least 13 available food banks or cupboards in Northumberland, we decided to close ours while ensuring clients had access to other options in the community. We also removed Health Security from our programming but knowing this was such a valued and necessary service, we were happy to be able to pass this over the Salvation Army making sure there was no gap in this service. These changes allowed us to concentrate our services on helping residents with the necessary tools to better manage their finances through our existing programming of income and housing security.

We continue to offer the Volunteer Income Tax Program and the 2010 tax season saw a whopping 1305 returns processed with a total of \$504,346.00 in refunds going back into our community. This is a 38% increase in returns over last year. Thank you, to all the income tax volunteers and your hard work in making this happen: Joyce Sommerville, Kirk Vavra, Gayle Nelson, Sharlene Mead, Harold Peters, Betty Carruthers, Pat Cooney, Charlene Niles, Carlos Rajkuwar, Jane Soutar, our long time volunteer Clara O'Brien and finally to Leo Nicholas who not only played a big part in coordinating this past tax season but for his big heart and humour. This past tax season we branched out and offered tax

preparation at a number of outreach locations in the region, allowing those that couldn't get into the centre to still be on time with their tax filing.

Congratulations to Dixie Allison for successfully completing the Insolvency Counsellor Qualifications Course (BIA). This accreditation has allowed Dixie to provide post bankruptcy counselling for those that have declared personal bankruptcy and are required to have 2 post bankruptcy counselling sessions.

At The Help Centre we see many people that are struggling with paying utility bills and if they are without these essentials, inevitably they become homeless or displaced. Thanks goes out to Northumberland's hydro and gas companies for their contributions to the Winter Warmth and LEAP programs. These funds in combination with Northumberland County's Community Utility Trust Fund and Emergency Energy Fund, have allowed us to assist over 400 households with their arrears or advocacy for reconnection. Our goal with these programs is to ensure that Northumberland residents do not go without the basic necessities of life. Thank you, these very important programs made it all possible.

To the teams at Stalwood Homes and the United Way Day of Caring, we give you lots of happy faces. We love our beautiful new offices and our clients are able to feel more comfortable with the increased privacy that our new surroundings provide. It was a tough couple of weeks in the construction zone but fun and well worth it. Thank you.

We celebrated a very good year with our fundraising events. A lot of hard work by our volunteers, our fundraising committee and especially Carolyn Dalgarno,

our Special Events and Fundraising Coordinator further increased the awareness of need in our community and the agency profile. Funds raised allow us to continue helping the residents in Northumberland County when they needed help. Carolyn will be leaving us in September but what she has set in place the past 3 years has been invaluable. Excellent job!

The Help Centre could not have accomplished this past year without the without the financial assistance from The Northumberland United Way, Ontario Trillium Foundation, provincial Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Program, and the many donors that have put their faith in our programs and services. Thank you.

It has been a tough year, a year of change. Many thanks to our staff; Kim Howson, Dixie Allison, and Carolyn Dalgarno for your ongoing support and Stephanie Howson, Leo Nicholas and Charlene Niles for jumping in when we needed it the most and a big thank you to our office volunteers; Clara O'Brien, Brenda Weekes, Julie Dalby, Adriana Hayden, Brandie Ribble, and the many students that put in such hard work during their placements. Your hard work, dedication and belief in the work we do were reflected in the faces of the people you helped every day. Finally, our appreciation and Thank You to our Board of Directors for your time, leadership, vision, direction, dedication and support.

The demand for the Legal Centre to coordinate and participate in community development activities has increased in the last year. In the 2009-2010 year, the Legal Centre undertook twenty-seven community development projects. In 2010-2011, the number of activities increased to forty-three. These projects continued to focus on outreach and awareness regarding Legal Centre services, advocacy regarding issues that affect 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 meet the needs of

clients who are not able to come into our office because of disabilities, lack of transportation or for many other reasons. The Legal Centre is constantly working to make our services more accessible. 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. The Legal Centre works on poverty-reduction through its leadership on the Northumberland Poverty Reduction Action Committee (NPRAC). NPRAC continues to promote research and host events to keep poverty reduction on the public and political agenda and to advocate to improve the circumstances of

people who live in poverty in Northumberland County.

One of the Legal Centre's significant new partnerships is a Connecting Regions project which seeks to identify and find ways to address gaps in services in Northumberland and neighbouring counties. This has included community consultations and research.

Over the last year, the Legal Centre has also provided input to other agencies regarding their services in order to promote the needs of our clients. We have participated in youth-oriented events as well in order to help ensure that young people are better informed of their rights.

## GET OUT AND VOTE BY Marisa Conlin

The next provincial election is on October 6, 2011. The province governs services and creates laws and makes decisions that affect us every day. This includes things like health care, education, and public safety. We encourage everyone to get out to vote.

If you are on the Voters List, you'll get a Notice of Registration Card in the mail. If you don't get one, you can still vote, but you should contact your local returning office after the election is called on September 7, 2011 for more information. There are also lots of options for voting. You can vote during special ballot days, by mail, during advance polls or on election day.

For more information about how to vote check out Elections Ontario's websites at [www.elections.on.ca](http://www.elections.on.ca) or <http://wemakevotingeasy.ca>.

In order to gather more information about the candidates' plans to help Northumberland County, the Legal Centre sent the following questions to each of the local candidates.

1. Name 3 specific things that you will do to increase affordable housing in Northumberland.
2. How will you improve health care in Northumberland? Specifically, how would you improve access to services that are limited or unavailable in Northumberland such as outpatient rehabilitation services, mental health services, treatment for addictions, etc.
3. Name 3 concrete new actions your party will implement in Northumberland that will specifically reduce poverty locally.

Unfortunately, we have not received sufficient responses from the candidates. As soon as we do will make this information

available through our website.

In the meantime, you can learn about the parties from their websites:

The Green Party of Ontario	<a href="http://www.gpo.ca">http://www.gpo.ca</a>
New Democratic Party of Ontario	<a href="http://www.ontariondp.com">http://www.ontariondp.com</a>
Ontario Liberal Party	<a href="http://www.ontarioliberal.ca">http://www.ontarioliberal.ca</a>
Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario	<a href="http://www.ontariopc.com">http://www.ontariopc.com</a>



# TENANT DUTY COUNSEL BY Sarah Cooling

It has been another busy year for the Northumberland Community Legal Centre's Tenant Duty Counsel Program, with TDC staff assisting more tenants appearing before the Landlord and Tenant Board 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.

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 stats are impressive and highlight the dedication and experience of our TDC workers. For the period of April 2010 to March 2011 we assisted 217 Tenants in 17 Superblock hearings sessions averaging 12.76 clients per session. This is an increase of 35% over the same period last year. TDC saved Tenants moving costs in at least 33 instances by negotiating or mediating payment plans allowing the tenants to remain in their rental units. Furthermore, in this fiscal period TDC managed to save tenants a total of \$46,343 in waived rent arrears, damages, filing fees, rent abatements etc.

For the this past year, NCLC Tenant Duty Counsel have focused on:

1) **Advocating for Increased Access to the LTB for Tenants in Northumberland County** – We have lobbied our politicians, and further raised this issue in the

context of public hearings addressing affordable housing issues. We continue to advocate for the Service Canada office in Northumberland County to accept Landlord and Tenant Board Applications or another means for Tenants/Landlords to pay for Applications.

2) **Increasing Tenant Applications** – We have worked hard to increase the number of tenant applications being filed. Our satellite office hours have made our services more accessible to tenants.

3) **Following up with clients after LTB hearings to obtain copies of Orders**- We have been reminding tenants after every hearing to provide us with copies of Orders. We have received some.

4) **Requesting OPRI's** – we have advised all tenants filing Maintenance and Repair Applications on the availability of OPRI's, which are Order's Prohibiting Rent Increases where a Landlord is in violation of their obligations.

5) **Rural Housing Issues**- We are now attending Satellite clinics in Brighton, Campbellford, Colborne, and Bewdley. We have made many home visits in rural areas of the County- completing applications and drafting forms.

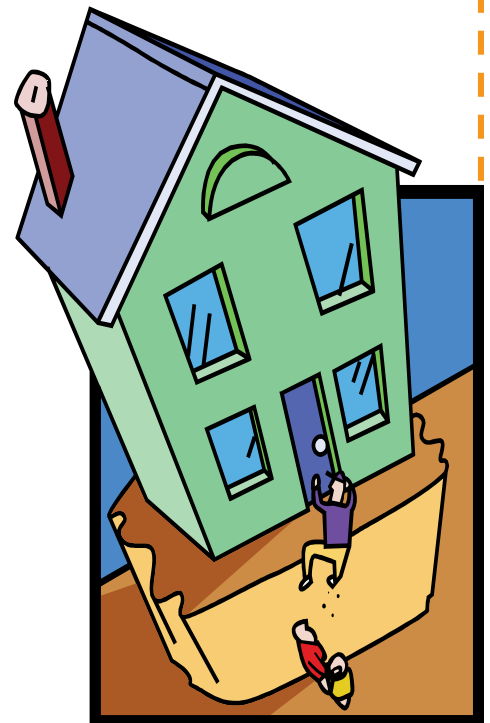
6) **Challenging Inspectors regarding Tenant's rights to Inspection Reports**- We have assisted many tenants in making MFIPPA requests for the Building Inspectors Reports and have spoken with several Building Inspectors regarding this issue. Likewise, while we continue to have problems with the Building Inspectors in Port Hope, we did file a complaint with the Ontario Association

of Property Standards Officers. We have also filed Privacy complaints around the refusal of Port Hope Building Inspectors to provide copies of reports to Tenants.

7) **Two TDC will be attending the LTB to increase number of Tenants Served**- we have had 2 TDC attend the majority of LTB hearing blocks. This has definitely increased the number of tenants receiving service as well as our ability to better track the outcome of cases.

8) **Mental Health Housing Advocacy** – We continue to advocate for accommodation at LTB and from Landlord's on behalf of mentally ill tenants.

Over the past year, our Tenant Duty Counsel have worked very hard to assist tenants in exercising their rights. We have advised and informed tenants of their obligations and continue to assist tenants in our rural community to access justice and enforce their rights under the current Legislation.



## REPORT FROM THE FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE BY Liz Greaves

We can report a very successful year for 2010/2011 – thanks to a large number of volunteers, staff and supporters.

Our three priorities as a committee are:

1. To raise money for The Help Centre of Northumberland;
2. To raise public awareness of some of the needs in our community;
3. To have FUN.

We covered the county with poinsettias last December. Our sale of these beautiful seasonal flowers added brightness to banks, shops, offices and homes and we appreciate all who supported our sale so willingly.

Our signature event - "Empty Bowls" - celebrated the work of local potters, the generosity of local business and the pleasures of good food while reminding us that many in Northumberland need support in a variety of ways if they are to enjoy what others can – a healthy diet, a home and kitchen to prepare food in and friends or family to share it with. Throughout the spring, we sold

Mexican flower pots and garden accessories from porch and garage – a generous and welcome donation from a business that was closing. This was a wonderful example of a thoughtful donor and numerous volunteers that sprang into action to make this unexpected gift work for our community.

In the summer, we had our second annual golf tournament – blessed with wonderful weather, a good (and larger than last year) turn-out, and a lot of enjoyment for those who golfed and those who cheered the sportsmen and women on.

We also had our 3rd Annual T.U.F.F. ride (Together United for Fairness) this summer. This was a fantastic day spent motorcycling throughout Northumberland County. We then descended upon the Le-

gal Centre for a terrific lunch and great prizes. We had a good turnout and a very enjoyable day.

We had a summer yard sale – always a chaotic event – but a grand way to talk about The Help Centre of Northumberland and the work we do, while distributing goods from one household to another. At the end of the day, we had the pleasure of taking what was not sold to another local charity, so that the goods and the money will stay in our community.

For the past three years, we have had the benefit of a part-time position (thanks to a grant from Trillium) to lead the fund-raising initiatives. That has ended now, but left the legacy of a group of people who will in various ways keep the momentum we have now. You would be warmly welcomed to

join us with your ideas, energy and desire to help our community in this essential way.

Although tempted to say a special thank you to certain volunteers who went over and above this year, I will not do so. There were so many people who contributed in ways large and small that all should be applauded and thanked with enthusiasm and sincerity.



The Help Centre of Northumberland invites you to our:  
**Annual General Meeting**

And join us for the

**Northumberland Community Legal Centre's 20th Anniversary Celebrations**

**When:** Thursday September 29, 2011 at 7 pm  
**Where:** Carpenters Hall, Local 397 459 Croft Street, Port Hope

All are welcome – Light refreshments will be served

For more information or to RSVP before September 27<sup>nd</sup>, please call the: Legal Centre at: 905-373-4464 or 1-800-850-7882 or the Help Centre at: 905-372-2646 or 1-888-698-3382




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