

## **Law Students' Legal Advice Program (LSLAP)**

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### **Introduction & History**

The Law Students' Legal Advice Program (LSLAP) provides free legal advice and representation to people who cannot otherwise afford legal help. We cover a wide variety of areas that fall within our poverty law mandate, including criminal law, small claims, employment standards, residential tenancy, WCB, consumer protection, employment insurance, social assistance, wills and estates, immigration and refugee, incorporation of non-profit organizations, and human rights.

The program was established over 40 years ago, when students from the UBC Faculty of Law first operated a summer legal clinic called Vancouver Inner-City Services. This program expanded to include a small number of clinics operating on a weekly basis during the school year. In 1978, the program was incorporated as the Greater Vancouver Law Students' Legal Advice Society, a non-profit society.

From those roots, LSLAP has grown into a large organization of over 200 dedicated student volunteers staffing over 20 legal clinics across the Greater Vancouver Regional District on a year-round basis. Three of those are specialty clinics, with one serving clients in Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese) and two focussed on immigration and refugee matters. LSLAP students assisted approximately 3200 people during the 2012-2013 year, making LSLAP the second-largest provider of free legal services in British Columbia. We emphasize full representation wherever feasible.

### **How We Work**

Our students play an important role in providing access to justice, but having them do so presents a unique set of challenges. As a primarily student-run program, LSLAP's makeup changes on a yearly basis, with the bulk of LSLAP clinicians being first year students. In

order to provide the most service while maintaining quality, LSLAP has a number of structures and policies in place to provide oversight, continuity, and opportunities for early and ongoing training.

### *Oversight*

At the highest level, a board of directors, composed of one UBC Law faculty representative, three LSLAP student members, and interested members of the legal community, oversee the program, including hiring the supervising lawyers.

Day-to-day administration of the program, however, is primarily the responsibility of the 6-member student executive committee, working closely with staff lawyers and administrative staff. The executive is elected for a one-year term by the LSLAP membership, is headed by the Executive Director, and reports to the Board and to the Law Foundation.

### *Getting to Work*

To equip new students to handle files as soon as possible, mandatory training sessions are held at the beginning of the year, with further sessions held throughout. Once students have attended those first sessions and signed the *LSLAP Code of Conduct and Practice*, they can attend their first clinics. School-year clinics are held on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, with space provided by a variety of community organizations at no cost.

Each clinic is staffed by a clinic head and clinicians. Clinic heads are elected by their fellow clinicians at the end of the first semester of the school year for one-year terms. They oversee clinics, manage files, liaise between the student executive and the volunteers, and provide mentorship for student volunteers who lack experience in the program. Special training sessions are held for clinic heads, to train them in file management and running clinics.

At the clinics, students conduct half-hour intake interviews (hour-long at immigration and refugee specialty clinics). Under the supervision of practicing volunteer lawyers, clinicians review the facts of clients' cases and collect documents.

After intake, the program supervising lawyers (one for civil and one for criminal files) then assist the students to determine the level and type of service, and supervise all file work.

The supervising lawyers review all legal work and provide guidance and training to students. In addition to the supervising lawyers, LSLAP employs a full-time office administrator who has been with our program since 1997 and is an invaluable staff resource.

In order to avoid overburdening new clinicians, students are able to take on as much or as little work as they like, in consultation with supervising lawyers. Mentorship is also available from a variety of sources, including clinic heads, more experienced clinicians, and executive members. At least one executive member is available for consultation during lunch hours, and upper years students are actively involved in making LSLAP a welcoming place for new students. We also have a variety of precedents throughout the areas of law we cover which are updated regularly.

#### *Other Opportunities*

Beyond volunteering, students can enroll in a credit program, through which they receive course credit for major file work. Major files may consist of full trials in provincial court, oral or written submissions to a tribunal, immigration applications, sentencing submissions or peace bonds, small claims applications, and anything else the supervising lawyer determines should be worth credit. Credit students also mentor volunteers, and supervise a clinic at Robson Square Small Claims Court.

Our operations continue during the summer, when LSLAP runs the same number of clinics but with a greater capacity for file intake. Approximately 15-25 students have full-time paid positions during the summer. The positions are distributed through a jobs draw.

Students earn ballots through regular clinic attendance and file work during the year. As such, the jobs program acts as an incentive for students to volunteer during the school year, and allows the program to continue operating on a large scale throughout the summer.

Summer clinicians run day-time clinics 3.5 days during the week and supervise volunteer clinicians from law schools across Canada who participate in our summer program. In addition, paid students are responsible for editing and updating a chapter of the LSLAP manual, which is published yearly and is available for order in physical copies and at no cost online. The manual is intended to be the first stop for students doing research, as well as to educate members of the general public. At over 1000 pages, it provides information on 22 areas of law, and is used by libraries and organizations throughout British Columbia.

### **Future**

LSLAP already plays a significant role in providing access to justice to people for whom it would not otherwise be available. However, we plan on continuing to expand our role in particularly underserved areas. We are currently running a pilot project through which students assist persons in custody with filing appeals. Students travel to the institution, where they meet with clients and assist them with filling out the necessary forms.