

TDS Pro Bono Spotlight - Legal Help Centre

published 11/30/2016

Author Vivian E. Rachlis is no longer with TDS.
Please contact us for further assistance.

On any given Tuesday or Friday, a small room on the second floor of a downtown Winnipeg shopping mall buzzes with activity by law students, social work students and practising lawyers. Community members holding demand letters, court documents, landlord letters and immigration notices are lined up down the hall. At 1 pm sharp, the accordion doors are opened by the law student/receptionist. The twice-weekly drop-in clinic run by **Legal Help Centre** (“LHC”) is open for business.



For the next busy 3 1/2 hours, the receptionist assigns files to individual students, who then meet with their “client” in a private interview room. Following each client interview, the student debriefs the interview with one of the practising lawyers/volunteers standing by in the back room.

By the end of the afternoon, up to 30 clients will have been seen. In the process, the students will have increased their skills and knowledge in interviewing and dealing with clients, and learning about ethics and responsibility in the legal profession. Since its inception in 2011, TDS lawyers have been a part of the team of lawyer volunteers who guide, assist and mentor the law students at LHC drop-in clinics.

As an “access to justice” initiative, LHC plays a meaningful role in assisting lower income people to learn about their rights and to assist in determining next steps, either for the exercise of rights or to access needed social services. LHC does these things by providing referrals, legal help and public legal education and information.

Legal aid services are only available for a minority of legal matters and at that, to a minority of lower income people. Many other lower income people do not qualify for legal aid. For those that may have a family law matter, require advice about their rental arrangements with their landlord, or face a collection letter because of a debt past due, access to justice is not just a concept, it can be a tangible issue that plays out in basic matters relating to daily needs or personal security.

Through the dedication of its staff, students, and the larger Winnipeg legal community, LHC

has become a successful initiative well-known and well-used by lower income people. As one of LHC's funders, and because of the many TDS lawyers who are delighted to serve in a governance capacity and as lawyer supervisors, TDS has been proud to be a part of the work of Legal Help Centre.

DISCLAIMER: *This article is presented for informational purposes only. The content does not constitute legal advice or solicitation and does not create a solicitor client relationship. The views expressed are solely the authors' and should not be attributed to any other party, including Thompson Dorfman Sweatman LLP (TDS), its affiliate companies or its clients. The authors make no guarantees regarding the accuracy or adequacy of the information contained herein or linked to via this article. The authors are not able to provide free legal advice. If you are seeking advice on specific matters, please contact Keith LaBossiere, CEO & Managing Partner at kdl@tdslaw.com, or 204.934.2587. Please be aware that any unsolicited information sent to the author(s) cannot be considered to be solicitor-client privileged.*

While care is taken to ensure the accuracy for the purposes stated, before relying upon these articles, you should seek and be guided by legal advice based on your specific circumstances. We would be pleased to provide you with our assistance on any of the issues raised in these articles.