
OTTAWA LEGAL CLINICS TRANSFORMATION PROJECT

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2014

QUALITATIVE DATA SUMMARY

The Steering Committee spent the month of October interpreting the research gathered through community consultations. Over the past few months, we have talked to 16 community partners, 8 board members and 5 legal clinic executive directors through key informant interviews. We have also held 8 focus groups, three with legal clinic staff, and five with legal clinic clients. These consultations were held to help us find out what is currently working well in the community legal clinics, where there are gaps and places for improvement, and to hear about the types of changes people would want to see in a new system.

STAFF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Focus groups were held with the staff from each of Ottawa's three legal clinics. A common theme from the focus group discussions was that clinic staff are hardworking, supportive of each other, caring, and committed to their clinics and the communities they serve – a sentiment shared with the clients themselves and echoed at their focus groups. They discussed how well they worked together within their clinics and with other clinics and community agencies. The commitment of clinic staff to their clients and their work was evident through the thoughtful, fruitful discussions they had.

Staff discussed some of the challenges faced by themselves and their clients. For instance, they identified that many clients still face linguistic barriers if they speak neither English nor French, even with the availability of interpretation services. Staff also mentioned how the eligibility requirements for legal services are too low for many people living in poverty to qualify. They also discussed concerns about the risk of funding cuts and how administrative demands are sometimes difficult to meet and take time away from providing services to clients.

The focus group discussions revealed a common reality for people providing poverty law services in Ottawa: a mismatch between capacity and demand, and the increasingly complex, compounded, and multifaceted issues that clients come to them with. This reality means that services, by necessity, become limited.

To learn more about our discussions with legal clinic staff and to read the full *Qualitative Data Summary* report, go to www.ottawaclinics.ca/the-data.

CLIENT FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Five focus groups were held, one for each clinic and an additional two targeting specific populations, one aimed at Francophone clients, the other at clients living in rural Ottawa.

One major theme that came out of the discussions with clients was access to the legal clinics. Clients were asked about how they are currently accessing the legal clinic, the struggles they face while accessing the clinic, and ways

that could improve access for clients. Most clients said they were able to access services in their preferred language, thanks to clinic interpretation services and the availability of French Language Services, although some mentioned they still faced barriers. Some of the struggles that clients discussed in accessing the clinics were the physical and geographical accessibility of the legal clinic, and the use of public transportation.

In looking at ways to increase access to legal clinics, clients talked about an augmented website and a telephone hotline. However, clients agreed that these could only be used as starting points, and that receiving in-person services is important. Generally, clients were in more agreement than clinic staff about the benefits of a travelling service model; some said they would like to see legal clinic workers travelling to see clients closer to where they live.

Clients also talked about their experiences at the legal clinics. A common theme was that they were very distraught and stressed and did not know where to go for help. All the client groups talked about how the legal clinic staff was patient with them, and really took the time to listen to the clients and to make them feel heard. Most clients had gotten representation from a legal clinic lawyer, and all said that the lawyers, staff and Community Legal Workers helped them to understand their situation.

To learn more about our discussions with legal clinic clients and community partners, and to read the full *Qualitative Data Summary* report, go to www.ottawaclinics.ca/the-data.

COMMUNITY PARTNER DISCUSSIONS

The community partners that were consulted came from a diverse background, some being legal clinic board members, some were funders and some either current partners or potential partners of the legal clinics. People came from different sectors, including community resource centres, community health centres, settlement and immigration agencies, mental health and/or addictions support programs, women fleeing violence programs and services for Francophone clients.

Community partners, funders and board members emphasized the importance of creating community partnerships, especially for meeting the complex needs of clients and addressing issues of capacity. Some partners also discussed how a co-location model would help both with meeting demand and in ease of access for clients.

Community partners had mixed feelings about amalgamation; partners who were currently co-located with a legal clinic were concerned that through an amalgamation process they would lose that partnership. Meanwhile other partners, especially those that served rural areas, were not concerned with whether there was an amalgamated office or not, so long as there was outreach into rural communities.

Increasing access to services through an itinerant model was highly valued by partners. Some partners had used an itinerant model and had had success with it, especially if services were appointment driven.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DISCUSSIONS

A key informant interview was conducted with each of the three executive directors of the participating legal clinics, South Ottawa Community Legal Clinic, West End Legal Services and Community Legal Services of Ottawa Centre. There were also interviews conducted with the executive directors of the Vanier legal clinic, and the University of Ottawa legal clinic.

To read more about executive director discussions and to read the full *Qualitative Data Summary* report, go to www.ottawaclinics.ca/the-data.

Executive directors talked about the strength of the collaboration both between the legal clinics and also between legal clinics and other community agencies. They talked about how community partnerships are frequently made from clinic staff members sitting on agency boards and through community development initiatives. They discussed how certain joint projects have been particularly successful when serving clients with complex, multifaceted needs, such as: the Connecting Ottawa project; a partnership with the University of Ottawa legal clinic and a centre serving First Nations, Inuit and Métis; and a project with the Vanier Community Service Centre legal clinic supporting refugees.

NEXT STEPS

The Steering Committee will now be moving into the model development stage. Using the qualitative data gathered from community consultations, the quantitative data gathered from mapping community indicators of need, and the literature review, the Steering Committee will develop a set of Principles. These Principles will be used to guide the development of new models of poverty law service delivery.

**To learn more about this process, please visit www.ottawaclinics.ca.
To contact us, please email info@ottawaclinics.ca.**