



Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Services SUMMER REPORT 2015

Message from the Chair

At this time last year Kensington-Bellwoods was just beginning the fight to oppose the closure of the 14 general service Community Legal Clinics threatened by the Greater Toronto Area Clinic Transformation Project. We had learned that although the Project's "Vision Report" had yet to be released, the report concluded that the way forward for general service clinics in Toronto necessarily involved the closure of all 14 clinics and the development of 3 or 4 (or 5 ...) mega clinics with a staff each of approximately 33. While we weren't opposed to increasing the staffing of all clinics, we were opposed to closing all clinics.

Throughout the Fall and Winter of 2014-2015, the Board and Staff of KBCLS worked hard to convince people that acceptance of the Vision Report meant the death of the 14 clinics. We launched a petition campaign, arranged our own Town Hall in September and followed-up with a conference for the 14 clinics and the community in January. We had great turnouts at both events. As well we attended a number of clinic Annual General Meetings and Community Consultations across Toronto arguing our position, and published a series of hard hitting responses to communiqués from the Working Group of the Transformation Project.

At first it was difficult to gauge support for keeping clinics open. As time went on (especially after the January conference) it became clear that most clinics in Toronto (13 out of 14) opposed the mega clinic model. While the Transformation Project attempted to move forward, Legal Aid Ontario requested a "workplan" that would justify the ongoing existence (and funding from LAO) of the Project. That workplan never materialized, so in June LAO withdrew funding for the Project, and it has been abandoned.

Shortly after becoming aware of this, Kensington-Bellwoods sent out the following statement to our friends and colleagues in the clinic system:

We feel that the way forward for community legal clinics entails ongoing dialogue and development of initiatives especially around the areas of community engagement with local clinics, and systemic change in the legal system. This is important for each clinic that has been part of the Transformation Project. In addition, collaborative relationships that have been stimulated amongst clinics in the GTA through the Transformation Project need to continue and to grow. At the same time, stronger links are needed between all general service community legal clinics in the province as well as the specialty clinics. Many exciting initiatives are on or close to the horizon. Some have already been undertaken. We must all strive, with assistance from ACLCO and other transformation projects around the province, to capitalize on our existing resources and the increased funding across the system to build on the great work that has been accomplished by the clinic system over the last 40 years.

I would like to thank our community for its support in this fight, and I hope that everyone has a great Summer!

Gary Newhouse
KBCLS Board Chair

On the following page:

Workers' Rights Forum to Support the \$15 and Fairness Campaign

KBCLS Community Survey on Special Events



On June 15th, Kensington-Bellwoods and our community partners, Access Alliance Community Health Centre, West Toronto Community Legal Services, OPSEU Region 5, United Steelworkers Toronto Area Council and other supporters of the \$15 and Fairness Campaign, held a Workers' Rights Forum to promote improved wages and conditions for working people. Gary Newhouse, KBCLS Board Chair, welcomed the 50 participants who attended and facilitated the event. Emma Van Leusden, KBCLS Staff Lawyer, spoke about the present state of workers' rights and the need for pro-active enforcement of employment standards. Chris Davis, from St. Stephen's Youth Employment Campaign, and Winnie Ma, from the \$15 and Fairness Campaign spoke of their own experiences as workers and the need to promote the campaign. Gab Ross, from the \$15 and Fairness Provincial Campaign Executive, gave background on the campaign and along with a call to action locally and provincially. As well, the Justice for Injured Workers Choir performed original songs by the members, adding enlightening entertainment to the program. For more information about the campaign, please visit <http://15andfairness.org/> online.

DON'T MISS OUT ON ANY EVENTS – GET ONLINE AND GET INVOLVED – AND TAKE OUR SURVEY!

Even if you do not have Internet access at home right now and even if you are not yet familiar with email, you can get “online” at your local Toronto Public Library, where you can get free email from Yahoo or Gmail or other free email providers. Talk to your local library workers to learn how. When you're online, please visit and LIKE us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/kbcls) and then check out our community survey at: www.surveymonkey.com/r/PVN6DVT

For more information about Kensington-Bellwood Community Legal Services, call 416-924-4244 or visit: www.kbcls.org