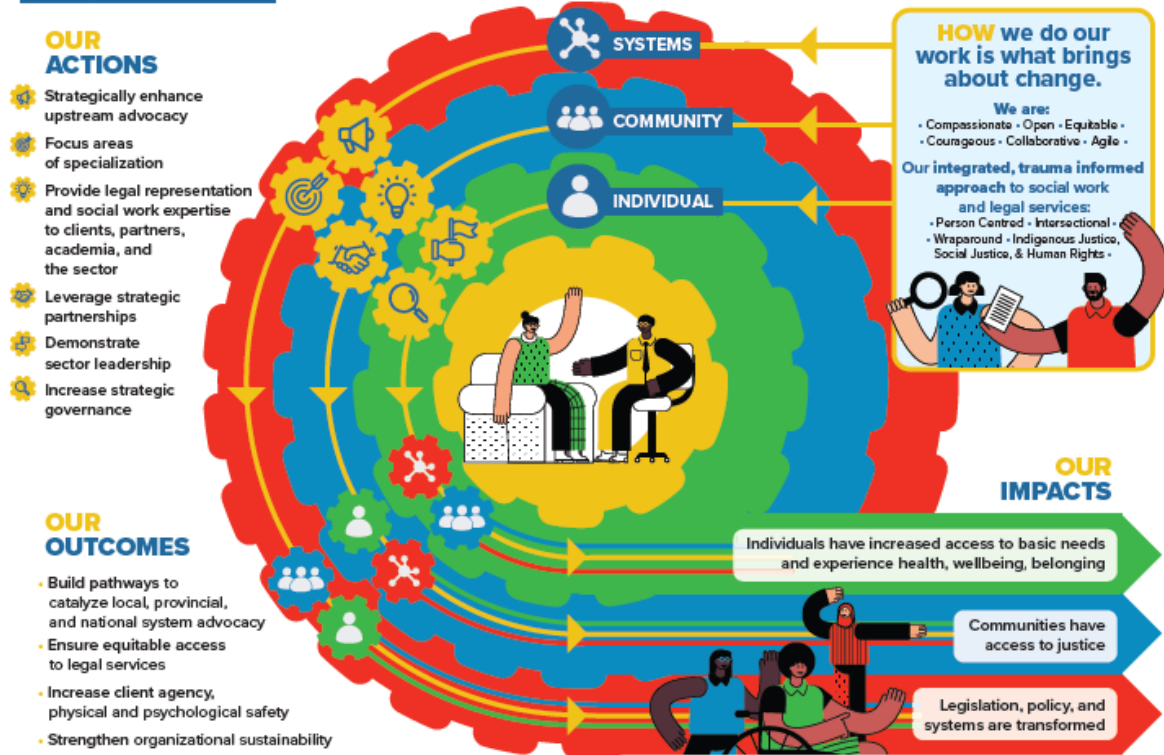


2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT

LAW integrates legal and social work expertise in partnership to support clients, community, and future sector leaders, engaging in strategic advocacy for a more equitable social justice system.



March 26, 2025

Submitted by:

Shelley Gilbert
Executive Director

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Executive Director's Report

Shelley Gilbert



Although this year's AGM theme is "Navigating through Uncertainty," one of Legal Assistance of Windsor's strengths has been the ability to adapt and evolve with the needs of our community and recognize these changes are often a reflection of what is happening provincially, nationally and now globally. Our community partners, clinic programs and work with people who need the expertise of the legal and social work professionals at LAW has provided us, sometimes glimpses, sometimes great insight, into the lives and experiences of people and communities. We continue to learn and strive to do our best work for people and communities in need as well as enhance strategies to work together as a team, as mentors and teachers. To further these strategies, staff and Board have worked together on internal initiatives striving to ensure we develop trauma informed organizational knowledge and that our strategic directions, decisions and actions are based on clear values and outcomes.

The Trauma Informed Organization Committee has established actions under three pillars: Education, Culture and Policy.

- Supporting and encouraging educational opportunities for all staff, regardless of their role, to deepen their knowledge about trauma as well as its impact on the people we serve and on ourselves. Staff learn together in some sessions and learn individually in others.
- Establishing opportunities for staff to share food, birthdays, challenges and wins at staff meetings or monthly lunches has helped to promote comradery and deepen our understanding of each other's work. We have also been thankful to celebrate cultures and religious customs by touring exhibits at Art Windsor Essex in recognition of Black History Month and sharing Iftar together.
- We have reviewed and evolved five internal policies to better reflect the organizations intention to support staff and students, ensure our response to clients in need is based on best practice while utilizing our internal expertise and that these ensure continued organizational operations. Thanks to the staff for their feedback, to the committee and to the Board for their review and approval of these policies. We will continue this process considering the rest of LAW operational and personnel policies over the course of the next year.

This work is also reflected in the strategic planning LAW began last year during which the Board, staff and community partners across the country were consulted about our work and our impact. We have begun a process of deepening the integration of the resulting theory of change/strategic plan and operationalizing how this tool directs our organizational strategies and our reflective individual and team practice. Our recent staff retreat provided us the opportunity to establish organizational and individual activities and assisted us in establishing a process where decisions made organizationally, by the Board and by staff are reflected in the theory of change. We look forward to continuing this process over the next year.



Now more than ever, as anti-immigrant sentiment and other bigotries increase with few challengers, LAW is committed to recognizing and supporting our community members' intersectionalities. We understand these as elements, often relevant to the legal challenges and legal strategies used on their behalf, but also as strengths important to the advocacy and support provided by social work staff.

We take this knowledge with us in our systemic advocacy efforts as well. For example, providing public legal education sessions regarding housing rights to non/limited-English speakers requires insight into different communication styles and the building of relationships with newcomer service providers. Understanding systemic barriers to health care resulting from living with precarious or no immigration status requires ongoing advocacy at the federal and provincial levels as well as the sharing of information and strong collaborations with health care providers in our community.

Our work with victims of crimes of violence over 50 years exemplifies the importance of inter-sectorial collaborations as victims are often considering involvement in some legal venue or have entered a system they feel unprepared to navigate and that is unprepared to recognize their needs. This underscores the value of the interdisciplinary work of our gender based violence program through which people, their experiences and legal challenges are not compartmentalized, but seen as relevant and important to the work ahead. We are happy to see unintentional impacts of our interdisciplinary approach include establishing relationships and collaborations with non-traditional sectors including the family and criminal court systems and law enforcement. These collaborations prevent additional harm to victims of violence and establish real safety plans, respected by all systems, and based on the type and level of risk to a victim. As Co-Chair of the

Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee (VAWCCWE), we have encouraged leaders in our community to work collaboratively at a Leadership Table and consider the education needs of their staff related to gender based violence, the supports they require to act and the policy barriers they face addressing this trauma with their clients.

We take this knowledge and expertise with us further as we work for systemic changes to the Temporary Foreign Worker program and advocate for protections to human trafficking survivors. In collaboration with the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) and affected people, I have met with senior immigration and Employment and Social Development Canada officials to discuss temporary immigration status barriers and problems with the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. As Co-Chair of the Immigration & Settlement Working Group with the CCR, we are well placed to understand the systemic barriers facing workers in Canada and advocate for a human rights based approach to migration programs.

Each element of our work contributes to change in peoples' lives and in our communities. How we do our work with systems, our community and individuals leads to the actions we use to achieve outcomes and maximize the positive impacts of LAW.

Thank you to the staff and students from both law and social work who come every day with their best selves ready to learn and to grow and to advocate for the needs of people living in Windsor/Essex.

Staff Changes

LAW experienced a number of staff changes over the last year that brought new personalities, ideas, enthusiasm and practice expertise to the clinic.

Natasha Manning joined LAW as the Director of Legal Services in July 2024. She brings experience and expertise in immigration and housing while also juggling some of the administration aspects of student recruitment and LAW policy directions.

Robyn Hodge is the Director of Social Work Services and is responsible for supporting and supervising staff & students in three programs by ensuring reporting and financial accountability requirements are met while continuing to work directly with clients requiring support and advocacy.

Nicole Wilson is our Staff Social Worker who came to us with invaluable experience and has applied that expertise and compassion to individuals requiring help in Windsor/Essex. However, she also shows those qualities to each staff and student at the clinic and truly makes everyone feel appreciated.

Vivian Wang joined us this year as our invaluable Service Coordinator. She has studied the clinic system, learned LAW's workings, supported staff and students, dealt with leases and photocopiers and contracts and a thousand other things each day and we thank her for all the support she has shown the clinic.

Naomi Cowan began as the Intake Worker last April and brings compassion and empathy to the people who come to us looking for help and direction for their legal problems.

Taylor Vetro has joined us as the Project Coordinator of our anti-trafficking project, the Windsor Essex Counter Anti-Trafficking Network (WECEN), during Bianca Colaluca's maternity leave. We have been lucky to have Taylor support our survivors and work with our fantastic anti-trafficking team.

Tammy Goulin is our Housing Support Worker with WECEN advocating for safe, affordable housing for trafficked survivors and their families. Her understanding of the systems impacting our clients coupled with their experiences of trauma ensure our clients have the best opportunity for housing success.

Amna Elsallak works with the WECEN team supporting our county clients, many of whom are foreign nationals. She brings a great deal of expertise from other international work and we are so happy to have her with us.

Kristen Jeavons has rejoined us as the Indigenous Justice Worker after having beautiful twins. We are all so proud of how she has been able to straddle work and motherhood. She showed grace, compassion and leadership after a community tragedy this year and I want to again, acknowledge her amazing advocacy and kindness.

Sarah Bernik has joined us to provide legal information and advice through our Housing Summary Advise and Duty Council Program. We are thankful for her dedication and quick learning and know this will support clients needing additional services from LAW.

Farida Madhosh was once a LAW law student and now our articling student and has shown great mentorship skills and support to students at the clinic. None of us doubt she will be a wonderful practitioner and we will miss her come June.

Staff

Tori-Lee Jenkins continues to show amazing skill and compassion to those experiencing housing instability and eviction during a time when losing your housing often means homelessness. She provides this service while also supervising students, acting as the principal for the articling student and taking all of our questions and consultation needs.

Hajar Tohme began with us a year ago in February assisting Ontario Works and ODSP applicants and recipients. She shows such commitment and thoughtfulness with her clients, with students and with staff.

Kelly Demers has been at reception for the last seven years and is the clinic's welcome to people often feeling anxious and afraid. Showing understanding at the beginning of a person's relationship with LAW helps us to build a sense of trust.

Amanda Pierce is the social worker on the Gender Based Violence Program funded through the Department of Justice. Coming to LAW with great experience and talent helped to propel this project forward. She brought new ideas and visions considering what is possible when advocating and supporting survivors.

Clairice Allsop is the lawyer on the Gender Based Violence Program and provides clear and honest advice with compassion while utilizing a trauma informed approach in her practice. Her approach has fostered important collaborations in non-traditional sectors that create a more seamless service delivery system.

Evelyne Dubois continues her amazing advocacy on behalf of clients requiring immigration representation. Both our clients and LAW are lucky to have her working with us.

Amanda Morales works with us in two different, but related, migrant worker programs providing advocacy, information and support to Spanish speaking people. Celebrating cultures and ensuring people know they are valued is crucial to the success of the programs. We also congratulate Amanda on obtaining her PHD from the University of Windsor this year!

Claudia Membreno, once a social work student at LAW, has been helping to facilitate the Spanish speaking migrant worker groups for the last five years. This group, co-facilitated with Amanda, helps re-build the social capital of migrant workers in Canada and celebrates all they bring to our community.

Yannin Ramirez has been with LAW since 2019, but this year moved from the Housing Support Worker at WECEN to our Youth In Transition Worker helping youth between 13 and 24 years of age. She also uses her amazing artistic and creative skills to facilitate the peer support group with trafficked people.

Jee Min, as our finance expert, is tasked with helping me make sense of LAW's many grants and helping us to stay on track. I appreciate her commitment to LAW and all the work we do.

Board

Our work could not be done without the support of LAW's Board of Directors. We welcomed Debbie Cercone and Mark McCondach last year and thank them for their thoughtful insights, follow through and support.

Emilia Coto resigned from LAW's Board this year after having her second baby. As a former law student and now immigration lawyer, her insights on community needs helped to inform the work we do. We want to formally thank her for the years of support to LAW.

Our Board Chair for the last three years, Rielly McLaren, has supported LAW in too many ways to mention here. His leadership, kindness and support provided a foundation for LAW through various transitions of staff, leadership and programs. He helped us think through the beginning of our Trauma Informed Organization process and ensured everyone recognized the support provided by the Board. We all want to thank Rielly for his guidance, passion and support for LAW.

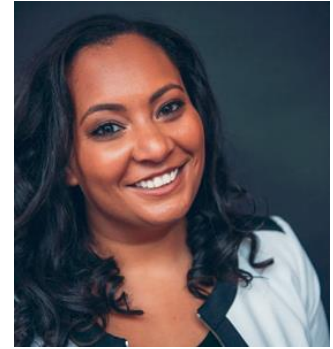
LAW Board 2024-2025

<i>President</i>	Rielly McLaren
<i>Vice President</i>	Reem Bahdi
<i>Treasurer</i>	(Interim team) – Rielly McLaren, Shelley Gilbert, Jee Min
<i>Secretary</i>	Shelley Gilbert (<i>Ex officio</i>)
<i>Directors</i>	Emilia Coto (to September 2024)
	Adrian Guta
	Joan Simpson
	Adam Wydrzynski
	Zakieh Zarabi
	Daniel Bilodeau
	Jillian Rogin (<i>Ex officio</i>) (to June 2024)
	Mark Mccondach
	Debbie Cercone

Director of Legal Services

Natasha Manning

The Director of Legal Services (DLS) Position is fairly new to Legal Assistance of Windsor (LAW) as it was added in 2024 and I stepped into the position in July 2024. Over the past eight months, in addition to practicing Immigration Law at LAW, I have provided supervision to legal and non legal staff in a way that prioritizes our community and our clients in line with LAW's Strategic Plan.



Unfortunately, this position was vacant for three months, therefore the beginning of my tenure was largely focused on catching up with both the Immigration caseload and the organizational/ management tasks of the Director of Legal Services. In a short time, I have learned so much about LAW and the benefits of being an interdisciplinary clinic. I believe this is our greatest strength as clients receive wrap around services from lawyers, paralegals, social workers, and caseworkers that are trauma informed and look at the whole person. At LAW, we understand the social determinants of health intersect with most problems faced by individuals. It is important to assist with socio-economic problems and legal problems in order to achieve success for our clients in the long term.

To support more interdisciplinary exchange at LAW, I will be co-implementing monthly case consultations that will begin for staff very soon. LAW has always had monthly case consultations for students, and of course information case consults occur almost on daily basis, but carving out a formal time for staff to learn from each others experiences, and contribute to problem solving as a group, will help to ensure that more of our valuable knowledge is shared with the entire office, and that our decisions are aligned with our Strategic Plan.

Another important task that I have worked on since becoming DLS is transitioning our Tenant Duty Counsel (TDC) and Housing Summary Advice services from being provided by per diem private bar lawyers to an in house paralegal. This position was implemented in October 2024 and I was responsible for training the new paralegal and managing this position. I am pleased to report that Sarah Bernik has been a wonderful addition to our team at LAW, and that her knowledge of housing law, client service skills, and overall capacity has grown exponentially in the very short period of 5 months.

A task I am currently working on in conjunction with a law student and social work student is to perform a gap analysis on a resource very important to our clients who're not competent in the English language, form filling. This is a basic task that clients need in order to access and participate in so many community and government resources. It is of particular importance in relation to legal applications as well. The intent of this gap analysis is to ensure we're aware of the services that already exist in Windsor – Essex, and to determine whether our legal knowledge can help to expand the availability of this resource for community partners. For example some community based organizations are hesitant to help clients complete some applications, especially those related to immigration law. LAW is actively looking for opportunities to provide training to our community partners in order to strengthen the services they provide to our community.

My role also includes providing direction to other Staff Lawyers and ensuring LAW, as an organization, complies with best practices and professional standards of the Law Society of Ontario, and Legal Aid Ontario. LAW is a well respected legal clinic that has served the community for more than 50 years. I will be working from a strong foundation to update some of the paperwork and documentation we utilize on a regular basis such as employee contracts, our retainers, our

policies etc. In my role I have also updated the case selection criteria for Immigration Law and streamlined our intake process.

I know there is much room for growth in the position of DLS. Over the next year I plan to build upon LAW's relationship with our community partners and get to know the Windsor-Essex community as best as I can. I would also like to focus on updating some of our client management and file management processes at LAW. For example, one of our goals is to transition to more of a paperless office and reduce the cost of storing files in hard copy format as opposed to digital. I also want to enhance our student program and create more opportunities for our students to have as much hands on legal experience and litigation experience as possible.

I am happy to have stepped into this new role at LAW. Our work is driven by a deep commitment to justice and advocacy and having a positive impact on our clients and the Windsor-Essex community. As DLS, I want to provide as much support and guidance to our staff as possible, work with the Executive Director to make any necessary improvements to our policies and systems of organization, in a way that best serves our clients and helps us to achieve all of our strategic goals.

Director of Social Work Services

Robyn Hodge

In the first half of 2024, Shelley and Robyn continued their collaborative efforts to meet the needs of the local community while providing essential support to the LAW Clinic and its staff in their roles as senior social workers. That work remains pivotal in delivering direct advocacy and support to individuals experiencing trauma who seek services from the LAW Clinic.



Social work services at LAW include crisis support, safety planning intervention, advocacy, system navigation, community collaboration, and psychosocial support. Shelley and Robyn have worked closely together to support and supervise staff across various programs, including the Windsor Essex Counter Exploitation Network (WECEN), the anti-human trafficking program, both Migrant Worker programs, the Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Assault Project, and the staff social worker position.

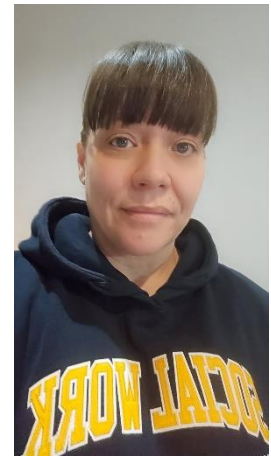
Shelley has focused on systemic advocacy, contributing to discussion papers and engaging in dialogues around federal policies. This advocacy work remains a key priority for the clinic, as LAW's expertise and longstanding commitment to supporting at-risk and vulnerable community members uniquely position the organization to inform policy development effectively.

Robyn has taken the lead on student learning at the clinic, supervising both Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and Master of Social Work (MSW) students from the University of Windsor. The student learning program aims to enhance support for at-risk and vulnerable community members who seek assistance and advocacy from LAW. Community development initiatives and partnerships continue to be integral to the student learning model. In addition to her supervisory role, Robyn maintains an active caseload, providing support to vulnerable and marginalized individuals across all areas of LAW's mandate.

Staff Social Worker

Nicole Wilson

As I near the completion of my first year as the Staff Social Worker at Legal Assistance of Windsor, I feel completely honored to be a part of such a meaningful organization in our community. The unique ability of the clinic to offer interdisciplinary services to our clients not only creates a holistic approach, but also provides all-encompassing solutions. This aligns well with the ever-evolving challenges that our clients experience on a daily basis and in multiple areas simultaneously, such as mental health, substance misuse, income insecurities, homelessness and poor physical health.



The ongoing housing crisis in our area continues to create significant challenges for our clients, including higher rates of housing instability, homelessness, and an overall negative impact on all areas of the individual. The lack of accessible housing resources has made it even more difficult for those already in precarious situations to maintain basic living standards. This has lent to a need to further establish and promote new community collaborations and partnerships that can better serve the individuals in our area. LAW continues to have active memberships with the By-Names List facilitated by the City of Windsor, the Situation Table and weekly representation at the Homelessness and Housing Help Hub. A new partnership recently initiated with Canadian Mental Health Association, Windsor Essex Community Housing Corporation and other community partners, "Health Care Fairs" provides education and resources to tenants at various locations throughout the city and has been extremely successful.

Over the past year, the clinic has observed a concerning increase in individuals struggling with substance misuse and mental health challenges. This surge highlights the growing complexity of these interconnected issues and their profound effect on our clients and community. As such, I have become an active member with the Windsor-Essex Community Opioid and Substance Strategy (WECOSS) Harm Reduction working group and am in the beginning stages of an active partnership with the Transitional Stability Centre (TSC).

Supervision of BSW and MSW social work students continues and the valuable support they provide to clients directly and the community at large is an integral part of the LAW clinic. The work that they provide in collaboration with the law students continues to accomplish our mission of providing interdisciplinary services that contribute to a more comprehensive and compassionate approach to working with our vulnerable population.

Immigration Staff Report

Natasha Manning & Evelyne Dubois

Over the past year, our Immigration Law Team has continued to provide crucial legal services to the migrant worker community and marginalized clients, particularly those who have faced difficulties finding legal representation in the Windsor-Essex area. This includes providing guidance, summary advice, assistance, brief services, and representation to individuals and families who are often underserved and struggle to navigate Canada's complex and ever-changing immigration system.



We were able to achieve significant success in our work. For example, we helped two survivors of domestic abuse obtain their Canadian citizenship, empowering them to begin a new chapter of their lives with the security and stability they deserve. We also represented several family members of a Temporary Foreign Worker in Canada who received a palliative diagnosis and was unable to return home. The family members' visitor visas were all approved allowing them to spend precious moments with their loved one during such a difficult time. In addition, through the **Undeclared Family Members Pilot Project** we were able to reunite a family that had been separated for over a decade. It was a joy to see success with such a long-awaited reunion, helping a family rebuild their lives here together.

We submitted many Temporary Resident Permits (TRPs) and **Humanitarian and Compassionate (H&C) applications** on behalf of clients who would have faced dire consequences if they were forced to return to their home countries. Numerous clients originally entered Canada with valid immigration status, but due to exigent circumstances they lost their status or risked becoming out of status. Canada's Immigration System does not offer routine Permanent Pathways to many foreign nationals. These are people who may have devoted years of contributing to Canada economically, who have all established lives in Canada, and many have even raised families here. The applications we submitted outline the clients' compassionate circumstances arguing that a TRP or H&C is warranted in accordance with Canadian Immigration law. In these applications, we advocate for fairness in our immigration system, and for the best interests of families, our local community, and Canada.

This past year has been one of adjustment with changes to Immigration Law, especially laws effecting students and temporary workers. 2025 brought reduced immigration targets of about 20% which has a large impact on our clientele and increased anxiety related to applications and processing times. The start of 2025 was also the beginning of troubling times for our partners in the US and the rippling effects on community members here.

Our clients worry about uncertainty in our immigration system, especially due to the 21% reduction in immigration levels that came into effect in 2025. There have also been significant changes impacting international students and temporary workers.

Natasha Manning, started as the new Immigration Lawyer/ Director of Legal Services at LAW in July 2024. Along with Part-Time Immigration Lawyer, Evelyne Dubois, the Immigration Team worked hard to catch up on a backlog of intakes and to streamline our intake process and case selection criteria.

Looking ahead to this year, our commitment remains to fill the critical gap in immigration legal services, especially for the migrant worker community and other vulnerable groups in our area. There is a noticeable shortage of immigration lawyers in our region, particularly those who accept

Legal Aid Certificates and/or time sensitive, urgent Immigration matters. We assist clients to navigate the certificate system when appropriate, and we represent clients who qualify for a legal aid certificates, but unfortunately cannot find private counsel in a timeframe suitable for the timelines associated with their matter. Through this work, LAW is dedicated to serving the Windsor-Essex community and advocating for the immigration needs of our clients.

In the coming year, in addition to our ongoing casework, we will expand our efforts to engage with the community through more **public legal education sessions**. These sessions will be designed to inform our clients and the general public about the latest developments in immigration law, changes in relevant programs and policies that may affect them, and advocacy initiatives that they may wish to participate in. By offering accessible information, we aim to empower individuals to participate in our immigration and legal system, make informed decisions about their immigration matters and better understand their rights and options.

LAW remains active in social movements to end closed work permits as well as to ensure that everyone has access to permanent residence upon arrival in Canada. The Inter-Clinic Immigration Working Group (ICIWG), of which Staff Lawyer, Natasha Manning, is Co-Chair, continues to support advocacy for 'Status for All' and to highlight issues within the Canadian Immigration system that continue to place vulnerable persons at risk. ICIWG also provides colleagues the opportunity to learn from each other, continuing training in Immigration Law, and mentorship for more junior lawyers.

Overall, our work is driven by a deep commitment to justice and advocacy for those who may otherwise be left behind, and we are excited to continue making a positive impact in the lives of those in need.

Social Benefits Staff Lawyer

Hajar Tohmé

I have been in the role of LAW's Social Benefits Law staff lawyer since February 2024. A majority of my caseload involves assisting people denied Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) benefits. Common issues for denial include a lack of details and medical documentation submitted by the applicant's medical practitioner. I also work on cases involving Ontario Works (OW) and ODSP eligibility, as well as overpayments.



In my role, I also supervise students who through the interdisciplinary nature of the legal clinic, apply both a substantive and practical approach to our client matters. We offer representation for the appeals in question at the Social Benefits Tribunal (SBT). The SBT continues to offer Zoom and telephone hearings. On average, hearing dates are issued approximately five to six months after commencing the appeal process. Virtual hearings continue to be a challenge where before switching to this model, client were able to physically appear before a Tribunal member and a representative from ODSP.

The provincial government has undertaken some changes to social assistance programs this year, including raising ODSP rates by 4.5% in order to keep up with the rising inflation. Employment earnings for people in receipt of ODSP were also changed. People on ODSP are able to keep up to \$1000 in employment earnings every month without having their benefit amount reduced. **The aim of this change was to address the rising costs of living; however, the rates still do not reflect the actual costs of housing and basic needs.**

We continue to advocate for a raise to the OW rates, which have not been raised since 2018. OW incomes remain stagnant and well below the official poverty line for every family type. The stagnant rates continue to be reflective in issues related to stable housing. The shelter component of the OW benefit does not typically cover any housing options in the city.

As of January 1, 2024, Ontario Works no longer provides employment programs or related funding. Recipients are instead referred to Employment Ontario service providers for job search preparation and assistance. The move to Employment Ontario for employment services has resulted in a 22% reduction in ministry funding to municipalities to deliver the Ontario Works program, reflecting the transfer of responsibility. **Legal clinics in Southwestern Ontario are discussing how to best convey their concerns to the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services.**

For OW and ODSP, we continue to see issues regarding financial eligibility and overpayments where the underlying issue appears to be the hurdles for benefit recipients to communicate with their case worker. This issue has also continued into the new management system where a benefit recipient is assigned to a "team" rather than one case worker. **In this way, there are multiple persons involved with a client's benefit file. So far, this has proven to be another hurdle in communicating with OW and ODSP.**

For ODSP, we continue to advocate for mental health conditions and the recognition these conditions have significant impairments and restrictions. We have seen patterns where it is more difficult to prove the substantiality of a mental health impairment rather than a physical one based on the summaries provided by the Disability Adjudication Unit (DAU) for the denial of benefits.

In the upcoming year, we will continue to apply the laws and legislation while also looking to advocacy related to communication and transparency that will hopefully benefit our clients at the initial stages of a potential appeal. **Advocacy through effective communication at the early stages of an appeal (i.e. Internal Review) could help clients resolve matters without having to wait and proceed to a hearing. This is especially applicable for issues where documents can be provided that address the issue for appeal, thus negating the need to proceed to hearing.**

Housing Staff Lawyer

Tori-Lee Jenkins

This past year has continued to be a challenging and complex time for housing in Ontario, and particularly within Windsor-Essex County. We continue to provide advice and representation in our community for those facing homelessness. Our focus is also to take the ground-level knowledge from our clients and demonstrate to those in positions of privilege and power how their decisions manifest in the community. Whether we are speaking with the municipality, the province, the federal government, or other community partners – our focus remains to shed light on the issues facing our clients in a trauma-informed and contextual way.



The Landlord and Tenant Board

The media is rife with stories about the backlog of cases at the landlord and tenant board. The Board has appointed several new members to assist in addressing this backlog. It is important to note that the ratio of landlord applications to tenant applications is 88:12. The bulk of the LTB's workload remains focused on eviction hearings. This resembles what we are seeing in the community. We have seen a large amount of rent owing applications as the economy gets more difficult and housing supply becomes scarcer. While many people call it "housing crisis", I would argue that the system is working precisely as designed. While inflation over the last year has been a significant issue, we have not seen increases in rates to Social Benefits that match the cost of living. We continue to call on the provincial government to raise the rates and to put appropriate safeguards into place to avoid an influx of homelessness.

Community Initiatives

Our housing department is proud of our connections in the community. We hope that by engaging in these partnerships, we may provide a more fulsome service and warm referrals where appropriate. We have attended and organized several Public Legal Education sessions to ensure tenants know their rights and responsibilities. Some of these sessions are in partnership with the Windsor Multicultural Council and others with our Migrant Worker Groups in Leamington. Making this information accessible and available in our clients' language of choice is critical. Because of the rising number of eviction applications, we hope that even if we cannot represent or reach each individual, that they may at least be armed with education and have a better understanding of their rights.

Student Programs

It is also incredibly important that the next generation of lawyers know what community-based work means. Through our Clinic Practice Program, law students engage directly with the community via casework, but also by attending the H4 homelessness and housing hub to provide support and information for our clients. We are consistently providing training in trauma-informed practice and opportunities to engage in meaningful community development work. Hajar Tohme, our social benefits staff lawyer, and I sit on the Board of Directors for the Association for Canadian Clinical Legal Education as a way to encourage the promotion and improvement of clinical legal education in Canadian law schools.

My supportive and compassionate colleagues are my lighthouses in a sea of stormy weather. And my courageous clients inspire me to continue to move forward in these uncertain and often turbulent waters.

Housing Summary Advice and Duty Counsel Paralegal

Sarah Bernik

A re-visioning of this position as an on-site program of Legal Assistance of Windsor began in October 2024 as a response to the need to ensure vulnerable and marginalized tenants were able to access legal advice as well as other services of LAW quickly and easily. The funding for this position comes partially from a grant from the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO) and partially from a grant received from the Law Foundation of Ontario and through the University of Windsor. ACTO's grant allows us to provide Summary Advice for Tenants in the Windsor-Essex area related to their Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) matters and the Law Foundation's Grant provides for Summary Legal Advice for Tenants in the Windsor-Essex area.



I am the first Paralegal in this position at LAW and my first six months have been busy. My Summary Advice appointments provide access to legal advice for Tenants who do not have legal representation. They may or may not have an ongoing application at the LTB. I am there to educate them about their rights as Tenants in Ontario and to inform them of legal strategies and options. I am also able to accommodate walk-ins and respond to emergencies when necessary.

As Tenant Duty Counsel (TDC), I attend LTB hearings and provide tenants in the Windsor-Essex area with advice on the day of their hearing or close to the date of the hearing.

The ability to receive advice before making important legal decisions is a significant access to justice measure for Tenants in our community who are often participating in a system with a power imbalance between them and their Landlords. My work provides access to legal advice for Tenants who do not have legal representation. TDC is a great resources for Tenants who face many barriers and may not have had the ability to access legal support in advance. I also provide advice to clients who may have received summary legal advice, but have further questions arise on the day of the hearing. It is often a huge relief for them to have support during a stressful legal process.

Many clients also have time sensitive matters and are not always able to be seen by our Housing Lawyer on short notice. While providing summary advice, I often assist clients with preparing applications and/ or motions that have very strict timelines. This strategy allows the client to meet the deadline, preserve their legal rights and then be referred to our Housing Lawyer for further assistance and representation at a later date. Assisting in urgent situations is a key part of the work we do to help Tenants preserve their housing and prevent or delay evictions when clients' require assistance to access resources and find alternative housing. The multidisciplinary nature of LAW allows us to provide clients with wrap around assistance.

At LAW, legal staff work closely with social work staff and other caseworkers. We take a trauma informed holistic approach when serving clients. Often housing law issues are related to many other socio-economic problems the client is facing. Working at LAW, I can identify these issues and offer warm referrals to other resources already at LAW. By being in a multi-disciplinary clinic, I am able to stay informed about community resources and have expert guidance from my colleagues when needed. This is a very an efficient and effective way to provide clients with wrap around services.

Like the rest of Ontario, Windsor- Essex is experiencing a housing- crisis. The need for accessible Landlord and Tenant law services and emergency housing support is undeniable. Providing access to justice and preventing homelessness is an important resource. In less than six months, there are many examples of Tenants I have helped to resolve their legal issues, prevent eviction, and access support to find new housing when needed. There have been some organization growing pains in terms of my position, so our goal for the coming year is to continue to achieve these positive outcomes, while also streamlining and organizing the administration and documentation parts of my role to achieve even more efficiency.

Indigenous Justice Coordinator

Kristen Jeavons

This role is dedicated to supporting and advocating for the Indigenous community in various areas of law and broader systemic social issues through an Indigenous-led and decolonizing lens.

Indigenous Justice, led by the Indigenous Justice Coordinator (IJC), provides support and advocacy for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (FNMI) clients and community who are experiencing legal issues in all areas of law practiced at Legal Assistance of Windsor (LAW), for the Windsor-Essex catchment area. The IJC can also provide supportive services in other areas of law such as family law, child protection, and criminal matters.



As well, the IJC may help in the unique areas of Indigenous-related matters including: Secure Certificate of Indian Status applications, Metis Citizenship applications, Jordan's Principle applications, and Native housing advocacy supports. The IJC also coordinates recommendations and referrals in a culturally-intelligent and meaningful way to ensure clients are well supported in community by other trusted intermediaries.

This year has been robust with community partnership endeavors. LAW has assisted hosting and/or supporting the planning various Indigenous community gatherings ranging from: the Orange Shirt Day Walk, the Sisters in Spirit Vigil, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and 2Spirit+ (MMIWG2S+) Mini Round Dance, Indigenous Family Skate Day, and the upcoming Alumni/Student Pow Wow hosted by the University of Windsor and St. Clair College to be held in May 2025. Our continued collaboration and trusted relationships within the Indigenous community also fosters a safe path for clients to access LAW services and to connect with the IJC beyond the office, where appropriate.

In response to the current political climate and the over-involvement of Indigenous Peoples within the criminal law sphere, the IJC is pleased to share that we await the decision from the Ontario Chief Justice's Office on the creation of Windsor's Indigenous Person's Court (IPC). The IPC aims to implement *Gladue* principles, Indigenous Legal Orders, and restorative justice approaches as a paramount form of alternative resolve for FNMI clients and their criminal matters. The IJC is a Co-Chair of the Indigenous Justice Workers' (IJW) Committee for Windsor-Essex, with a total of 56 committee members that have assembled to submit a Business Case to the Ontario Judiciary as application to bring this much needed specialized court to fruition.

The IJC looks forward to the next year as a time for continued *action* and *implementation* of the TRC Calls to Action and Calls for Justice as it applies to our client service delivery and community partnerships within the urban Indigenous community of Windsor-Essex.

Anti-Human Trafficking Team

Taylor Vetro

Interim Anti-Human Trafficking Project Coordinator

Yannin Ramirez

Youth In Transition Worker

Tammy Goulin

Housing Support Worker

Amna

County Outreach Worker



The Windsor Essex Counter Exploitation Network (WECEN) is dedicated to providing essential services to survivors of exploitation, including labor exploitation, sex trafficking, forced marriage, and online exploitation. Our services are comprehensive, focusing on offering support through various channels, such as assistance with paperwork, supportive counselling, and guidance in navigating law enforcement and judicial systems, and referrals to specialized legal counsel, including immigration, housing and social benefits lawyers. WECEN also connects survivors to local service providers, skills development programs, and a broad network of community partners who play a critical role in the survivor's journey.

Operating as a dynamic initiative, WECEN is driven by individuals with a strong vision and a shared belief in the power of community collaboration to combat exploitation. We chair the WECEN Steering Committee, which enables us to advocate for systemic change and deliver effective support services collaboratively. We also conduct presentations and outreach to other organizations, service providers, colleges, and universities, expanding our reach and spreading awareness on the issue of exploitation.

Housing Support

A critical aspect of our work at WECEN is providing housing support for survivors of exploitation. We currently support eight survivors through our rent subsidy program. Originally, this program was set to end in 2024, but thanks to continued support and efforts, we have been able to sustain these eight survivors beyond this date. While we continue to work toward securing additional funding to assist more individuals, our priority remains helping survivors secure safe and affordable housing.

In addition to the rent subsidy program, WECEN helps survivors navigate other housing options by assisting them in completing Central Housing Registry (CHR) applications and supporting them in securing private market rent opportunities. We are committed to helping individuals find stable and safe housing. We also provide ongoing support to survivors in managing their housing, ensuring they have the resources and guidance needed to succeed in maintaining their homes.

Peer Support Services

WECEN offers a peer support group for survivors of exploitation, providing non-clinical emotional support. This support helps survivors manage emotional distress, improve mental health, and rebuild healthy social connections. Peer support aids individuals in developing essential life skills, such as problem solving, decision making, self-reflection and building resilience in stressful situations.

Our peer support group also plays a vital role in raising awareness about human trafficking and the needs of survivors. Survivors actively contribute by sharing their personal experiences and providing valuable insights that help us refine and improve the services we offer. Their involvement allows us to better understand the challenges they face and to advocate for systemic change in a

way that is truly reflective of their needs. Through their voices, we are able to elevate the conversation around human trafficking and work together to make a real difference in the lives of survivors.

Awareness and Education

February 22nd is National Anti-Human Trafficking Awareness Day, an important time to raise awareness about human trafficking. WECEN created a video series featuring our survivors, with four videos in total. In these videos, survivors answered a series of questions that they felt would be helpful for the community to know in order to recognize the signs of exploitation. Each individual shared their unique perspective, offering diverse insights into their experiences. The video series was posted on our social media platforms to raise awareness and educate the public on the realities of human trafficking and exploitation. This project not only gave survivors a platform to share their stories, but it also allowed us to engage with the community and equip them with vital knowledge to identify and address these issues.

Outreach and Impact

Over the past year, WECEN has focused on preventive efforts to raise awareness and educate various groups, including youth, service providers, and the broader community. We have worked closely with local schools and service providers to ensure they are equipped to recognize the signs of exploitation and know how to make referrals to us for assistance. These partnerships have allowed us to extend our reach and help those who may be at risk of exploitation.

Through a grant partnership with the Windsor-Essex Child/Youth Advocacy Centre (WECYAC), WECEN created informational flyers aimed at raising awareness about the signs of exploitation and the resources available for support. These flyers will be distributed to 14 public high schools and grade schools across Windsor and Essex County, ensuring that students and staff are informed and know where to turn for help.

Our peer support group played a key role in this initiative, assisting with the creation of the flyers and providing valuable input based on their personal experiences. Their involvement helped ensure the materials were not only informative but also relatable, allowing us to connect effectively with young people and school staff.

These preventive initiatives form a core part of our ongoing efforts to support survivors and prevent exploitation. By empowering schools, service providers, and the broader community with knowledge and resources, we are able to ensure that individuals at risk of exploitation are identified and referred to the appropriate services for support.

Migrant Worker Team

Amanda Panambi Morales Vidales and **Claudia Membreno** (Migrant Worker Outreach Workers)



LAW continues to offer enhanced migrant worker-specific supports through the **Migrant Worker Project**. In partnership with **TeaMWork**, this project provides critical **legal and social work services** to migrant workers and undocumented individuals in the surrounding communities of Windsor and Essex. Migrant workers are essential to the region's agricultural economy, yet far too often their experiences are shaped by precarious immigration status, employer dependency, language barriers, and geographic isolation. Many workers live and work in **rural areas** where access to legal services, healthcare, and social supports is severely limited. Navigating Canada's immigration system, securing fair wages, and advocating for safe working conditions remain significant challenges. Recognizing these realities, the Migrant Worker Project Team employs a trauma-informed, non-oppressive, and client-centered approach to service delivery, ensuring that workers have the tools they need to assert their rights and build security in Canada.

The team work together to offer comprehensive support, including immigration consultations, open work permits for vulnerable workers, and legal representation for particular immigration matters. Social work services ensure individuals and families receive emergency assistance, crisis intervention, and ongoing emotional support, helping workers address mental health concerns, workplace exploitation, and systemic barriers in immigration, housing and healthcare. Education and community-building remain central to our work. In collaboration with our community partners, we provide public legal education on various topics such as pathways to permanent residency, **know-your-rights sessions** on labor protections, housing rights, workplace exploitation, intimate partner violence, human trafficking, and access to healthcare. These education sessions, facilitated by **lawyers and trusted community leaders**, empower workers to make informed decisions about their legal status, immigration goals and working conditions.

At the heart of this Project is Monarch Migrants, facilitated by staff members, Amanda and Claudia. This peer-led support network fosters leadership and solidarity among migrant **workers**. Through Monarch Migrants, workers connect with each other, exchange knowledge, and develop leadership skills, creating a stronger sense of community and centering the voices of community members. The group offers English language classes, wellness programs, cultural showcasing workshops, and mental health initiatives, ensuring that migrant workers not only receive practical support but also maintain their cultural identity and build social connections in Canada.

The **Migrant Worker Project Team** remains unwavering in its commitment to systemic change while offering individual supports tailored to client needs. By amplifying the voices of migrant workers, working alongside advocacy networks, and collaborating with community organizations such as Workforce Windsor Essex and Legal Aid Ontario and many others, we continue to push for policy reforms, fair labour protections, and pathways to secure immigration status migrant workers. As the needs of migrant workers evolve, our team will remain dedicated to ensuring that all workers in Windsor and Essex can live and work with dignity, security, and justice.

Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Assault Team

Amanda Pierce (GBVSA Social Worker)
and **Clairice Allsop** (GBVSA Lawyer)

As we reflect on the past year of our work in the Gender Based Violence program, we recognize the tremendous collaborative effort of our community in tackling issues of intimate partner violence and sexual assault. We are grateful to our partners who invite us to support their clients in navigating intersecting legal systems, and who come to the table with us to explore creative solutions to ensure the safety and well-being of people experiencing harm.



LAW's longstanding relationship with House of Sophrosyne has expanded to include the provision of in- service education to clients on gender-based violence, family and criminal law. These presentations, provided once during each five-week session, have been well received by participants, and provide us with an opportunity to connect individuals in treatment with appropriate services in their home communities.

The relationships built with the Victim Witness Assistance Program and our local Office of the Crown Attorney has led to an increase in referrals for clients needing independent legal advice in advance of a potential records application in a criminal legal case. This has proven to be another engagement point for survivors in the community, increasing our reach to those who have experienced gender-based violence.

Our collaborations extend beyond the Windsor-Essex community, as we remain situated within a Community of Practice of other community legal clinics providing similar services across the province. A recent in person meeting with our counterparts led to discussions and strategies to support sustainability for this program. The feedback received from our community partners and clients, both directly and through the independent program evaluation, speaks to the profound need for this interdisciplinary approach to gender based violence. We are committed to exploring all avenues to continue this work beyond our initial funding, which will conclude in March of 2026.

Direct client work continues to keep the team busy. We have had the pleasure of walking alongside some clients for the more than two years that our program has been in operation, and some of these clients are now celebrating the resolution of the criminal and family legal cases that were just starting at the time of our initial contact. One of the key pillars of our work is the recognition that harm, and the impacts of that harm, can continue long after a guilty plea is rendered, and a final family court order is made. These clients continue to engage with our program for support as they navigate challenges associated with breaches of probation, and the ongoing practical and social challenges that come from leaving violent relationships.

Our team has also had the privilege of supporting survivors as they begin their journey into advocacy as a tool for healing. Many of our clients have expressed their desire to speak publicly about their experiences to support others who may feel isolated in their circumstances, and to foster change in the systems they have had to navigate. We are very proud of one of our clients who worked closely with the team to prepare both a speech and a written submission for the Provincial Standing Committee on Justice Policy. We have also been connecting many of our clients with the newly formed global coalition, Survivors for Justice Reform, as a response to the challenges our clients have experienced in navigating a legal system that does not always recognize the ways it impacts the agency of survivors. We are grateful to the wisdom and bravery of the survivors with whom we work, as they inform the direction of this sectors systemic advocacy.

LAW Staff 2024-2025

Executive Director	Shelley Gilbert
Director of Legal Services	Natasha Manning
Director of Social Work Services	Robyn Hodge
Staff Social Worker	Nicole Wilson
Immigration Staff Lawyer	Natasha Manning Evelyne Dubois
Social Benefits Staff Lawyer	Hajar Tohmé
Housing Staff Lawyer	Tori-Lee Jenkins
Housing Summary Advice and Duty Counsel Paralegal	Sarah Bernik (from October 2024)
Indigenous Justice Coordinator	David Pitawanakwat Kristen Jeavons (from Sept 2024)
Anti-Human Trafficking Project Coordinator	Bianca Colaluca (to August 2024) Taylor Vetero
Youth in Transition Worker	Yannin Mezo Ramirez
Housing Support Worker	Tammy Goulin
Anti-Human Trafficking Project Outreach Worker	Amna Elsallak
Migrant Worker Outreach Worker	Claudia Membreno
Migrant Worker Outreach Worker	Amanda Panambi Morales Vidales
Gender-Based Violence & Sexual Assault Lawyer	Claire Allsop
Gender-Based Violence & Sexual Assault Social Worker	Amanda Pierce
Articling Student	Farida Madhosh
Service Coordinator	Vivian Wang
Intake Worker	Naomi Cowan
Support Staff	Kelly Demers