

# **Poverty Law Advocacy Needs Assessment Project**

**Submitted to the Law Foundation of BC**

**By the**

**Community Legal Assistance Society**

**June, 2004**

This project was conducted by Brett Haughian,  
from the Community Legal Assistance Society

# INDEX

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A.	PURPOSE OF PROJECT	1
B.	METHODOLOGY	2
	1. Advisory Committee	2
	2. Selection of Community Organizations	2
	➤ Organizations by Region	4
C.	THE PATH OF EXCLUSION	4
D.	POVERTY LAW ADVOCACY SERVICES	14
	1. Organizations that Provide Poverty Law Advocacy Services	14
	2. Types of Services Provided	15
	3. Areas of Law Covered in Services	17
	4. Referrals	19
	5. Training	21
E.	TRAINING AND LEGAL SUPPORT NEEDS	23
	1. Training Needs	24
	(a) Preferred Areas of Law for Training	25
	(b) General Characteristics of Training	27
	2. Legal Support Needs	31
F.	ADDITIONAL NEEDS OF COMMUNITY ADVOCATES	34
	1. Operational Funding	35
	2. Legal Advocacy Funding	36
	(a) Family Law Advocacy Funding	38
	(b) Aboriginal Advocacy Funding	39
	3. One Stop Shop	40
G.	RECOMMENDATIONS	42
	Principles	
	1. Leadership	42
	2. The Intention to be Inclusive	43
	3. Funding for Legal Advocacy Services	43

Legal Support and Training Needs	
4. Funding for Legal Support	44
5. Funding for Training Costs	44
6. Annual Training	45
7. In-Person	45
8. Location of Training	45
9. Tiered Training	45
10. Comprehensive Training	46
11. Training Materials	46
Acknowledgements	47

APPENDIX A ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

APPENDIX B PARTICIPATING COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The reduction of legal aid has significantly affected the availability of legal services and the public's access to justice. This project spoke with community advocates who provide legal services about how these, and other program cuts, have impacted their clients and the availability of legal advocacy services.

The project interviewed advocates from 100 community organizations throughout the province. The project selected organizations who provide services to the Aboriginal population, women, the multicultural population or who provide services under the broad category of poverty law. The project's specific goals and a brief description of the findings are set out below:

1. Document the demand, variety and scope of advocacy services provided by lay advocates throughout the province

There is more pressure on community advocates to assist people. This is due in part, to self-help and technology, as the primary methods to access information, benefits and services. This trend is excluding a whole stratum of society.

Community organizations provide services in a variety of areas of law. The main areas of law are welfare, residential tenancy, family and disability. There is confusion about what services remain because the cuts have depleted networks.

2. Identify the training and legal support needs of lay advocates

Because advocates are dealing with issues that are more complex and interrelated than before, they want information in a variety of areas. The Law Foundation and Legal Services Society are the main sources of training for organizations who receive formal training.

Advocates indicated their need to:

- Contact a knowledgeable person to ask questions of and receive a timely and accurate answer.
- Receive timely and accurate information about changing legislation, regulations and government policies.
- Receive needed legal supervision without impact on their organization's existing budget.

3. Provide a vehicle for community organizations to articulate their solutions to the problems related to providing advocacy services

Funding is a major barrier to providing legal advocacy services. Organizations require basic funding for, operational costs, training, legal advocates in general, family law advocates and Aboriginal advocates.

4. Develop recommendations on the characteristics of an effective and efficient model to fulfill the legal support and training needs of lay advocates. These recommendations are comprised of principles and characteristics.
  - Advocacy services, legal support and training initiatives must be provided by an organization or body of organizations whose leadership reflects a larger sense of purpose, offers hope, and inspires those who serve.
  - Future decisions about providing services, and providing legal support and training must be made with the intention of including community advocates.
  - Community organizations need stable funding, in addition to legal support and training, to provide an effective service.
  - A dedicated 1-800 phone number in each of the four regions that is accessible only to legal advocates to provide legal support.
  - Pay the expenses for community advocates to attend training.
  - Provide back-to-back training sessions to deliver annual training to as many advocates as possible.
  - Provide in-person training sessions in local communities.
  - Present information in each area of law in a tiered format: beginner, intermediate and advanced. The information should be comprehensive rather than limited to a general overview.
  - Provide advocates with a summary of training materials in advance of the sessions.