

GTA LEGAL CLINICS TRANSFORMATION PROJECT

STEERING COMMITTEE

Minutes of Meeting: June 4, 2013

1. Introductions

Everyone introduced themselves. A sign-up sheet was circulated to collect email addresses for a mailing list. There were representatives present from 16 of the 17 GTA general service, geographically based community legal clinics. The 17th clinic, Mississauga CLS, has made a decision to not join the project.

2. Chairpersons

Marjorie Hiley, co-chair (with Jack de Klerk) of the Working Group chaired this inaugural meeting of the Steering Committee. She advised that two volunteers from the Steering Committee membership have stepped forward to act as co-chairs for the Steering Committee and they will chair future meetings: Matt Benson (East Toronto board member) and Norma English (North Peel & Dufferin staff member).

3. Outline of Public Interest Report

Stewart Cruikshank gave a presentation on demographic changes in the GTA, utilizing the "Three Cities" report by David Hulchanski (a handout on this was provided). This showed a disappearing middle class and huge growth in the absolute numbers and in the proportion of poor people living in the suburban GTA. These areas include parts of all former boroughs and the 905 region. The communities we serve have changed dramatically since Toronto's legal clinics were formed decades ago, and these changes are only expected to exaggerate in scale over at least the next 15 years.

Jack de Klerk then spoke about the executive directors of the six legal clinics in east end Toronto getting together to talk about how to cope with these changes. They found that they were all coping with many challenges: clients are presenting with increasingly more difficult problems, many clients have significant mental health problems, the location and numbers of the poor in Toronto have changed significantly, *etc.*

A funding proposal was submitted to Legal Aid Ontario and LAO agreed to provide funds to hire consultants. The consultants used focus groups, surveys, and interviews with staff, board and community partners. They helped the clinics to identify problems. The consultants suggested that the solutions to many problems involved becoming larger entities. The report came up with suggestions on how larger clinics could change the delivery of legal services, including the use of "access points" for clients to access services without travelling long distances.

The six east end clinics could see that the report had application beyond their area and proposed to the GTA Legal Clinics Managers Group that this should be a GTA project. The other managers agreed and this project got underway. The same sort of work as was done in east end Toronto (demographics, focus groups, community involvement etc.) will need to be done for the rest of the GTA.

4. Project Funding

The Project applied to LAO for \$145,000 in funding, which was granted. An RFP has been posted and we hope to hire consultants by the end of June.

5. Steering Committee Terms of Reference

The Steering Committee is akin to a board of directors for this project. The Working Group reports to the Steering Committee. Marjorie Hiley introduced the draft Terms of Reference for the Steering Committee. Discussion ensued. There was consensus in favour of the Terms of Reference except with respect to the voting provision (see below).

6. Consensus Decision Making

There was discussion about the consensus decision making process, which is detailed in the Terms of Reference.

The Terms of Reference also state that if it is impossible to reach consensus, then issues will be decided by a simple majority vote. Concerns were raised about that provision. It was pointed out that these are serious matters and should be decided by more than just a simple majority. As well, if each clinic gets one vote, in some cases that vote may represent a low income population of less than 24,000 while another vote may represent a low income population of over 112,000. A voting system was proposed requiring a minimum # of clinics *and* a minimum percentage of the total GTA low income population (as represented by those votes). The Committee decided to use the terms of reference for now but bring the issue of non-consensus voting back as a future agenda item.

7. Communications

The Working Group has set up a website on the KnowledgeNow website. This is accessible by all clinic staff and we will (now that we have a list of names and emails) ensure that permissions are granted for non-staff members of the Steering Committee as well. This website has various materials and discussion papers posted and there is a discussion forum. We will soon be setting up a publicly accessible website [*Note: this has since been done – www.gtaclinics.ca*].

8. Meetings Schedule

It was agreed that the Steering Committee will meet on the 2nd Tuesday of each month, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. No food provided. Next meeting: July 9th. Depending on availability, meetings will alternate between downtown Toronto and North York Civic Centre.

9. June 10th Meeting & Next Steps

There will be a public information meeting about the Transformation Project on June 10, 2013.

10. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned.