



# **Strategic Plan 2018-2021**

***“Justice through advocacy”***

Durham Community Legal Clinic  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Durham Community Legal Clinic (the “Clinic”) was established in 1985 when the Durham Tenants Hotline applied for funding as a full-service legal clinic. The Clinic opened in February 1985 under its current name The Durham Community Legal Clinic.

## **VISION**

A healthy and sustainable community where residents are empowered and engaged.

## **MISSION**

The Clinic will promote the diverse needs of the community through social justice and equitable access in an integrative, innovative and client-centered manner.

## **VALUES**

The Clinic values equity, diversity, inclusion, financial stewardship and enrichment within all the communities of Durham Region.

## **CORPORATE STATUS**

There has been no change to the corporate status of the Clinic, since the last funding application to Legal Aid Ontario (LAO). The Clinic remains to be a registered charity as well as a registered corporation.

## **STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS**

In order to achieve the Clinic’s mission and vision, its key activities will focus on:

1. Transferring knowledge to residents of Durham Region through public education, partnerships with subject experts (such as community agencies), and empowering the community by providing resources to build financial literacy.
2. Providing service through the most effective delivery model while maintaining financial stewardship.
3. Increasing public awareness of the Clinic’s services across Durham Region.

## **A CURRENT SNAPSHOT OF THE CLINIC'S BUSINESS POSITION**

Through discussion with the Clinic's management team, staff and board members, an analysis of the Clinic's current strengths, weaknesses, potential future opportunities, and potential future challenges were identified as follows:

### **Strengths**

- Dedicated staff with a strong corporate culture that has, in turn, resulted in cohesive communication with clients;
- Dedicated Board of Directors;
- Increased areas of law, such as Senior Law, Education Law and Immigration Law;
- A new Education Center (the Hub) to educate the community on areas of law, with Durham College as a key partner. This "Access to Justice" Hub is a first of its kind, serving the community while providing valuable professional experience for paralegal students;
- Partnership with community agencies that provides Wrap-Around-Service for the Clinic's clients;
- The Clinic's satellite offices, in Ajax, Uxbridge and Cannington, have been receiving positive feedback from clients.

### **Weaknesses**

- No dedicated resources to properly market the Clinic's presence in the community, especially in keeping up with the rate of expansion into new areas of law;
- Stress: Staff may feel overwhelmed due to expansion into new areas of law;
- Capacity challenges: Volume of service may change dramatically once moved to new location;

- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are not currently evident;
- Collection of Clinic documents is still governed by a relatively paper-driven process.

### **Potential Future Opportunities**

- New office location at 200 John Street West, Oshawa, will provide easy access to walk-in traffic;
- Other service agencies at the location include: An Ontario Works/Employment Supports office, Service Canada and Service Ontario;
- In conjunction with the Hub, the Clinic will be able to deliver more presentations to the community through leveraging of resources;
- Web or social media can be integrated with a range of community services such as tax clinics.

### **Potential Future Challenges**

- Focus on the Hub could divert resources from the Clinic's day to day operations;
- Staff morale may be adversely affected due to changing workload;
- CIMS system: Support may not be responsive, as the central call center serves both Legal Aid Ontario, as well as all the legal clinics in Ontario. The system may also be unable to scale to meet the Hub's requirements;
- Durham may find itself defending its strategy due to its increased share of funding in 2018;
- Political factors may adversely affect funding or service levels as a result of the new Ontario government.

## **STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS AND DESIRED OUTCOMES**

The areas of effort for this Clinic are a result of the internal and external research, financial analysis and the preferences of the board and other stakeholders. The alternatives discussed will detail the areas of effort on which the Clinic will focus for the next three years (*i.e.* Strategic Planning period).

**ACHIEVING THE STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS**

In order for the Clinic to follow the aforementioned Strategic Directions that will ultimately lead to achieving the mission and vision, the Clinic must leverage its strengths and potential opportunities to mitigate its weaknesses and potential challenges.

**Strategic Direction 1:** Transferring knowledge to residents of Durham Region through public education, partnerships with subject experts (such as community agencies), and empowering the community by providing resources to build financial literacy.

Overview

The Clinic focusses heavily on educational opportunities for its internal staff, clients and partner agencies to provide an integrative approach in delivering its services. The new office location at 200 John Street West, Oshawa, as well as the Hub, are the key drivers of success in meeting this strategic objective. As a result of this, there are numerous opportunities to leverage resources from partnering agencies within the vicinity, as well as from education institutions such as Durham College.

Actions

- a) The Clinic must be cognizant that the changes to its business model may bring about a significantly higher number of clients than staff and resources are accustomed. It is imperative that baseline measures are defined as soon as possible based on actual statistics within the first month of operations at the new office location. Statistics from the annual Impact Reports will continue to be tracked.
  
- b) Partner with the Regional Municipality of Durham’s Social Services Department and other community agencies within the 200 John Street West, Oshawa, location for numerous initiatives, such as workshops and forums. This allows the Clinic to efficiently share knowledge with various agencies, as well as gaining new insight on how to better serve or educate clients.

**Strategic Direction 2:** Providing service through the most effective delivery model while maintaining financial stewardship.

#### Overview

The Clinic's delivery model of services must be as efficient as possible since financial constraints limit the amount of initiatives that can be undertaken each year. Examples of funding sources of the Clinic and the Hub include: Legal Aid Ontario (LAO), the Regional Municipality of Durham, Durham College and the City of Oshawa.

#### Actions

- a) Expedite the process of going paperless to address the increasing amount of paperwork due to client growth, as well as to realize administrative savings to maximize efficiency in the use of in-kind funding.
- b) As a result of new partnerships, the Clinic can free up limited staff resources normally dedicated to planning activities in preparation for workshops and forums. The Clinic will commit these resources to core activities and professional development for staff. Issues that relate to CIMS will also be resolved more effectively with additional staff resources.
- c) Demonstrate to LAO the Clinic's operational improvements as a result of the move to 200 John Street West, Oshawa, such as new initiatives to develop public education, improvements to existing measures, etc. This demonstrates the need for ongoing or increased funding to ensure that the quality of these initiatives is upheld to the highest standards each year. This is also important given the change in the Ontario government and demonstrates the value of the Clinic's work.
- d) As with LAO, emphasize and develop key measures with the Regional Municipality of Durham, Durham College and the City of Oshawa in order to secure and justify ongoing funding.
- e) Develop an annual client satisfaction survey to fully understand what clients value. For example, the Clinic's satellite locations have received positive feedback and successful elements from each office can be incorporated across all locations.

**Strategic Direction 3:** Increasing public awareness of the Clinic’s services across Durham Region

Overview

As the Clinic continues to serve new areas of law, it is essential for the Clinic to search for innovative ways to reach out to prospective clients. Similar to other legal clinics across Ontario, the Clinic lacks the resources for dedicated social media staff. Hence, developing social media protocols within the Clinic and the Hub will prove to be a challenge unless dedicated funding streams for the purpose of social media are available.

Actions

The Clinic will seek assistance from and provide support to the Association of Community Legal Clinics of Ontario in obtaining in-kind funding for the purpose of social media.

**ACLCO Guidelines**

The Association of Community Legal Clinics of Ontario has released a Strategic Plan for Ontario’s Community Legal Clinic system with four Strategic Directions:

1. Expand Client Access to Poverty Law Services: Collaborating to expand client and community access to poverty law services to address challenges such as changing demographics and the racialization of poverty, evolving service needs, and limited resources.
2. Enhance Capacity for Systemic Work: Strengthening our capacity to do preventive and systemic poverty law work – including community development, law reform, test cases, and public legal education – to achieve the greatest positive impact for our client communities.
3. Strengthen Community Connections: Increasing clinic accountability to the clients and communities we serve and pursue a range of ways for clinics to be an integral part of community efforts to meet the needs of persons living in poverty.
4. Enhance System-Wide Coordination and Support: Strengthening our capacity for provincial coordination and support to enable clinics collectively to provide the highest quality service and to ensure the clinic system is accountable for the services it provides with public funds.



**STRATEGIC PLAN REVIEW**

This plan represents a three-year commitment from the Clinic to specific initiatives and areas of effort. On a yearly basis, the Board of Directors, along with the Executive Director, will meet with staff to review the Strategic Plan and related goals. This plan is presented as a “rolling plan” in that adjustments may be made to the timing, tasking and related initiatives based on any changing priorities.

**CONCLUSION**

The Clinic’s Strategic Plan 2018-2021 represents the focused commitment of the Clinic to the community at large. The Clinic will use a balanced approach to addressing the areas of effort through three key strategic directions. This plan reiterates a hope and desire for “just through advocacy” in Durham and provides a clear path of how to get there.