

ACCESS JUSTICE

2003 ANNUAL REPORT

8278 Manitoba Street • Vancouver, BC • V5X 3A2
Phone: (604) 482-3195 • Fax: (604) 324-1515
Email: ACCESSJUSTICE@TELUS.NET Web: WWW.ACCESSJUSTICE.CA

A Non-Profit Charitable Society (Reg. # 87068 4123 RR0001)

The President's Message

There are many aspects to 'Access Justice.' There is the time aspect: our Society has demonstrated over a fifteen year research project that it takes approximately 4 years to bring a 'course of action' to trial. There is the cost aspect: Typically, a civil law suit involving a lawyer is not worth taking to trial unless the amount involved is over \$70 000. Then, there is the technical aspect: Increasingly, clients are unable to understand the legal process.

The goal of the Western Canada Society to Access Justice is to improve all these aspects of access to the law so that the 'ordinary citizen' can bring a claim that to him/her is large within a reasonable time at reasonable expense and in a way that is reasonably comprehensive. It would appear that our Society has been focussing on only one aspect of 'Access Justice,' namely, the cost aspect. By providing a far-reaching pro-bono program, we have brought the legal process to many persons that could not otherwise afford such access.

To some degree, we have addressed the time aspect of the problem of access to justice. By providing research reports approximately every three years analyzing the length of proceedings in the Supreme Court of BC (curiously some of the vital statistics we have gathered such as the length of time between the Course of Action and the commencement of proceedings are not available from the courthouse administration). However, those reports dramatic as they may be, have not produced any measurable effects on the length of court proceedings. On the contrary, our latest study shows that the length of court proceedings has become even greater over the last 2 years than in the previous thirteen years (we think that this is not due to delays from the court in obtaining trial dates).

We have also made the various missions to the judges 'litigation committee' and the Attorney-General in an effort to make the rules more workable and comprehensible to the 'ordinary citizen.' But again, there is no measurable result from all that hard work.

The strategy of the Society is not just to make studies and reports; it is not just to make justice available at pro-bono clinics. The strategy of the Society is to address all the multitude of issues and rules involved in Access Justice from a new point of view: The real issue is a 'people problem'. If the Society can change the attitudes of both the profession and the public to access to justice, then and only then will it be possible for effective law reforms to improve the access to justice.

By recruiting virtually hundreds of lawyers to regularly meet with persons on low income, we bring home to them a new reality!

The Year in Review

2003 was a year of consolidation of the tremendous progress and expansion made the year before. The directors had decided well in advance that we would set as our goal for 2003 the providing of backup resources for each clinic. We wanted to lay down firm roots and communications between clinics so as to be able to undertake further expansion in the year 2004. We succeeded in providing the following resources for our clinics:

We greatly expanded our client telephone service so that our multiple access line would serve the majority of Lower Mainland clinics.

We were very fortunate in having Jimmy Yan work with us as a summer student improving our website and he has continued to work as a volunteer steadily adding improvement and users to the web. By the end of the year, we were ready to start centralizing our appointment-making system at each clinic on the web. Both client and lawyer appointments could be entered onto the web by team captains and by clinic coordinators so that we could know exactly what was going on at each clinic.

Chief Justice Brenner very kindly permitted us to use a room in the courthouse for our clinics and to establish a 'Pro-Bono Registration Centre' by the front entrance of the courthouse. Clients could now fill out an application for help at a clinic and deposit it in the box provided by the notice board. Our volunteers would pick up the applications daily, sort them, and send the necessary client lists (including the names of opposing parties so as to avoid conflicts!) to the appropriate lawyer. We enhanced our manual program so that all our clinics were given copies of our law manuals. They were prepared largely from L.S.L.A.P. materials with their permission.

We liased with the Chief Justice, the Attorney-General (we met with him twice), the Law Society, the Canadian Bar Association, and Pro-Bono Law BC. We became an approved 'Pro-Bono provider' under the aegis of Pro-Bono law BC. None of the foregoing improvements could have made without the help of a large number of hard-working volunteers many of whom had computer and other skills. The amount of administrative work in running one clinic is formidable! However, we were very fortunate to have a full-time clinic coordinator, Phil Dougan, who was particularly skilled in gathering together a large force of non-lawyers who helped post notices, upgrade the web, prepare letters, act as 'chaperones' at clinics, answered client calls, and performed a host of other time-consuming administrative functions.

By the end of the year, we had met our goal and improved the Society's clinics so that they had the necessary infrastructure and support systems. We now have the necessary foundation for further expansion in the year 2004.

Statement of Operations

THE WESTERN CANADA SOCIETY TO ACCESS JUSTICE

STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS

Year Ended December 31, 2003

	2003	2002
TOTAL RECEIPTS	85,795	63,367
EXPENDITURES		
Advertising and promotion	7,388	11,205
Interest and bank charges	157	189
Office and miscellaneous	6,997	15,334
Rent	0	1,510
Salaries and benefits	61,754	33,797
Telephone and internet	5,150	2,626
Travel and entertainment	5,721	0
	87,167	64,661
EXCESS OF RECEIPTS OVER EXPENDITURES FOR THE YEAR	(\$1,372)	(\$1,294)

2003 Board of Directors

Executive Director – Dugald Christie	Christie and Co.
Director – Bruce Fraser, Q.C.	Richards Buell Sutton
Director – Craig Cameron	Department of Justice, B.C.
Director – Del Feller	Feller Drysdale
Director – Richard Lee	Greiner Bethell
Director – Ian Campbell	Campbell Renaud Trial Lawyers
Director – Graham Walker	Sole Practitioner