

# ACCESS JUSTICE

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## 2006 ANNUAL REPORT

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## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

The year 2006 brought progress, loss, and renewal to the Western Canada Society to Access Justice. We saw continued progress in the growth of our clinic services and in the access to justice advocacy initiatives that we supported. We encountered profound loss with the tragic death of the organization's founder Dugald Christie on July 31, 2006. We experienced the beginnings of renewal in the latter part of the year thanks to the dedicated efforts of staff, board, and our lawyer and non-lawyer volunteers who continue to be the foundation of Access Justice.

Our progress during the year is outlined in the balance of this report.

We mourned Dugald's passing and we were touched by the incredible outpouring of sentiment as the bar, bench, and public reflected on his legacy. We are committed to building on that legacy.

Our efforts at renewal will take us well into 2007 and beyond. We are confident we can meet the challenge.

It is traditional that we present our Annual Report for activities covering the calendar year. The events of 2006 meant we necessarily had to limit or postpone some activities including the production of this Annual Report well into the year 2007. We share now that a number of developments during the first part of 2007 have been a great encouragement to us including maintenance of our clinic attendance numbers, continued strong financial support from our donors coupled with generous grants from the Law Foundation of BC and the BC Ministry of the Attorney General, new initiatives towards enhancing our relationship with other pro bono providers, and the hiring of a new Executive Director.

Thank you all for your continued support.

Bruce Fraser, QC  
Chair  
August 2007

## ABOUT ACCESS JUSTICE

Access Justice is a non-profit registered charity with a volunteer board of directors and a permanent staff. In 1990 the Western Canada Society to Access Justice was founded. The society was originally known as the Lower Mainland Society to Assist Research of Trials (START) and was comprised mainly of senior litigation lawyers. The Society's initial mandate was to conduct research on barriers to the legal system. Since 1999 the Society has broadened its mandate to include direct pro bono work.

Access Justice's mandate is to:

- Develop and operate pro bono legal advice clinics
- Educate lawyers, low-income people and the public of the need for increased access to the legal system (as well educate low income people about the options available to them)
- Research the length of court proceedings and the effects of court proceeding delays on low-income people; and
- Actively promote access to justice for low-income people.

Access Justice is dedicated to providing first-class pro bono legal assistance to low income individuals who cannot afford a lawyer and do not qualify for Legal Aid. Those that qualify can receive free legal advice in areas of law including criminal, family, immigration and civil issues. Access Justice serves clients whose monthly net family income is below \$2,700 for single applicants, or below \$3,000 for a family of four.

Access Justice's pro bono clinic programs provide a professional and accommodating setting where clients can receive legal assistance from volunteer lawyers. Clients receive their free one-on-one legal advice at one of the many pro bono clinics throughout Western Canada. Access Justice has the capacity to provide free legal advice for up to 600 clients each month.

The clinics are based in communities and are easily accessible for clients. Access Justice partners with local community organizations to provide legal services. Partner agencies publicize and host the clinics providing a location for clients to receive legal assistance. Access Justice has 80 clinic sessions scheduled at 64 partner agencies. Our partner agencies include community centres, youth services, Native friendship centres, multicultural organizations, women's centres and senior's centres.

For more information, check out our website at [www.accessjustice.ca](http://www.accessjustice.ca).

## 2006 YEAR IN REVIEW

### *Dugald Christie's Death*

2006 was a year of change and transition as Access Justice was faced with a great tragedy. 2006 was marked by the untimely and tragic passing of Access Justice's founder and Executive Director Dugald Christie. Dugald was killed in an accident in Ontario on July 31, 2006 as he was cycling to raise awareness about the importance of ensuring that all citizens, irrespective of status or income, have equal access to justice. Dugald's leadership and vision has given marginalized Canadians and immigrants a face in the Canadian legal system. Access Justice has persevered through this challenging time with the support of its directors, staff, volunteers and the legal community. Access Justice will continue Dugald's mission and continue to strive towards Dugald's vision of a more equitable legal system in Canada.

### *Social Service Tax Challenge*

One of Dugald Christie's initiatives was his challenge to taxes on legal services. Dugald brought an action against the Attorney General of British Columbia challenging the constitutionality of the social service tax on legal services on the grounds that it deprives low income individuals from obtaining lawyers. After Dugald's passing, the Society continued to support the action in his name and Darrell Roberts Q.C. acted as lead counsel on a pro bono basis. Through ventures like the social service tax challenge, Access Justice hopes to continue to raise awareness in the legal community of the need for accessible legal services.

### *Funding*

In 2006 Access Justice was awarded a three-year project grant of \$225,000 from the Law Foundation of British Columbia. The grant will allow the Society to undertake its multi-year Pro Bono Clinic Enhancement project to improve the quality of Access Justice's pro bono clinic model. By the end of 2009, Access Justice hopes to improve pro bono services in BC and Western Canada, increase the number of clinics and clients who know about Access Justice, increase client access to pro bono services, educate the public and social agencies on the availability of clinic services, and expand advocacy for the need for access to justice for the poor.

The Law Foundation of British Columbia also approved a grant of \$90,000 to assist with Access Justice's operating costs for the transitional period the Society faced following the passing of our Executive Director.

### *New Clinics*

Access Justice's Pro Bono clinics experienced an increase in clinics in 2006. Two new clinics, the Battered Women Support Services clinic and Mental Health Issues Clinic, were initiated in 2006. The Mental Health Issues Clinic provides individuals diagnosed

with mental illness access to community-based, high quality pro bono legal advice. The clinic aims to meet the needs of clients who suffer from mental disease and/or substance abuse.

In the Fall of 2006 Youth Clinic Development Project was established: 9 lawyers served 16 clients at Vancouver Community College, Douglas College, or Capilano College by year end.

### ***Videophone Legal Clinics***

Our videophone legal clinics experienced continued success in 2006. Access Justice believes that all British Columbians regardless of geographical area, should have access to quality legal assistance through our pro bono clinics. Launched in 2003, the videophone clinics allow lawyers to provide legal assistance to clients living in rural areas of British Columbia through the simple means of a web camera, telephone and a fax machine. The advancement in inexpensive internet-based teleconferencing technology has enabled Access Justice to pioneer a method of clinic teleconferencing that respects client confidentiality and security. Currently we have videophone legal clinics in six communities across British Columbia – Trail, Terrace, Smithers, Williams Lake, Nanaimo, and Fort Nelson.

### ***Improvements to Clients Access System***

With the support of VanCity, Access Justice was able to undertake the Client Access System Improvement Project. This allowed enhancements to the quality of the services provided to clients. The project also allowed expansion of the Society's capacity to receive, schedule, confirm, and remind clients and lawyers by consolidating the Society's call centre infrastructure and resources.

The project provided many improvements to the quality of services. Client attendance also increased from 73.69% to 79.09%, meaning more scheduled clients attended their appointments at the pro bono clinics. The number of appointments scheduled by Client Call Volunteers (CCVs) also increased significantly. In 2006 CCVs booked 2,403 pro bono clinic appointments, a 24.3% increase from 2005. The project also provided for regular training of CCVs. From September 2006 – December 2006 the Volunteer Coordinator provided 640 hours (16 hours per volunteer) training to 40 qualified CCVs. The Society also organized a workshop on how to deal with difficult clients for Access Justice Staff and CCVs taught by James Lowe, the Crisis Hotline Trainer of Chimo Crisis.

### ***Client Online Self-Registration***

Access Justice's website <http://www.accessjustice.ca> is our gateway to public information, clinic booking tools, online donation mechanisms and statistical reporting services. Currently the majority of Access Justice's clinic program referral system operates through calls from clients. Providing the option of online booking for clients

will greatly relieve the call centre's resources. Clients will be able to book appointments with lawyers without assistance from either our client call volunteers, thus reducing workload of the volunteers.

### *Communications*

In 2006, Access Justice's website <http://www.accessjustice.ca> continued to be our primary tool for communicating with the public. The website effectively educates the public about the Society's services and is an excellent tool for updating the public on news and information about the Society. The website also provides many resources to clients. The website also contains links to various legal advice programs, lawyer referrals, and mediation services.

Another successful feature of the website is to inform potential volunteer and donors about the Society's purpose and goals. This has helped attract volunteers and donors who have generously donated their time and resources to the Society.

## VOLUNTEERS

The success of Access Justice depends largely on the philanthropy and good will of many selfless individuals who involve themselves to support our pro bono program. Our success in serving our clients over the past year has been made possible through considerable efforts and generous acts of patronage from our lawyer and non-lawyer volunteers.

### *Volunteer Lawyers*

Volunteer lawyers typically donate 2 – 4 hours of their time per month at the clinics. Access Justice coordinates the appointment between the lawyer and the client and if a follow-up session is required the clients call Access Justice. This ensures that the lawyer's time is used efficiently and effectively. Our volunteer lawyers do not prepare typed legal documentation or represent clients in court. The lawyers give advice, help the client gain a winning attitude, and help take the fear out of the legal process.

The work of Access Justice would not be possible without lawyers donating their time to help clients who cannot afford legal assistance. We would like to thank our volunteer lawyers for their ongoing commitment and devotion to the cause of Access Justice. In 2006, 335 lawyers assisted at a total of 1,526 clinic sessions.

*I would like to encourage lawyer volunteers to help at the clinics and/or assist the Society financially... It is a tribute to the many caring persons who help the Society that it has made such remarkable progress on such a low budget.*

The Honourable Donald I. Brenner, Chief Justice

### *Non-lawyer Volunteers*

Access Justice's success would not be possible without the hard work and dedication of its non-lawyer volunteers. People of all backgrounds with a variety of work and education experiences contribute to the continued success of our clinics. In 2006 over 100 non-lawyer volunteers worked at Access Justice. Volunteer opportunities range from administrative, client call volunteer, clinic assistants, community reps, and computer tech and development.

*I find that volunteering with Access Justice gave me the opportunity to help individuals with their everyday problems as I got the opportunity to sit in with the clinic lawyer during the appointment. The lawyers went out of the way to help people.*

- Amrita Abraham, Clinic Assistant

*The most rewarding part of the job is the expression of happiness and gratitude on the part of the clients when they leave the clinics. They express how grateful they are for the excellent help they have received from the lawyers.*

- Mary Atkinson, Clinic Assistant

## STATISTICS

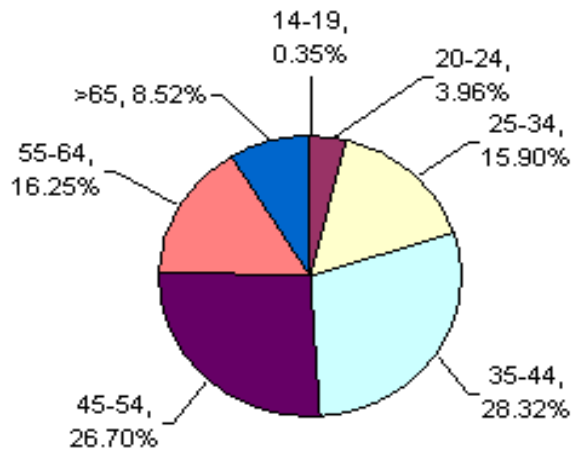
### *Our Clients*

In 2006, 4,001 clients attended our clinics out of a total 5,308 appointments that were booked.

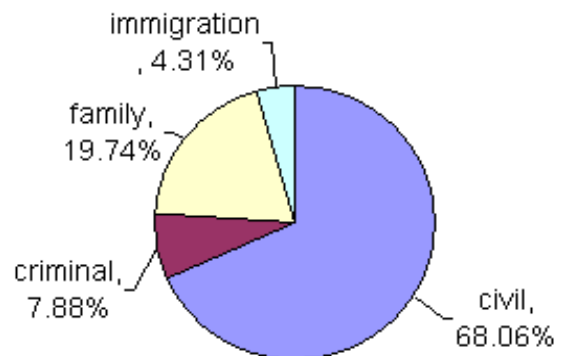
Since 2004, Access Justice has used an online data system. This has allowed us to generate important data about the clients we are serving.

Between 2004 and 2006 9,525 clients consulted with almost 600 lawyers at clinics set up by Access Justice. 35.79% of our clients have a high school (or less) education, 55.79% have an undergraduate education, and 9.47% have a graduate education. Our clients are comprised of a diverse range of cultures. 4.65% of our clients are First Nations people, 48.84% are Asians, 39.53% are Caucasians, 3.49% are African Canadians, and 3.49% are Latino Canadians

**Age of Clients Attending Access Justice Clinics**



**Areas of Law Provided by Access Justice**



## FINANCIAL REPORTS

### THE WESTERN CANADA SOCIETY TO ACCESS JUSTICE STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS, Year Ended December 31, 2006

	Audited		Un-audited				
	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000
<b>RECEIPTS</b>							
Donations	\$138,674	\$120,713	\$98,837				
Grants	112,161	101,616	26,120				
Amortization of deferred contribution	1,050	-	-				
Other	154	849	11				
	252,039	223,178	124,968	85,795	63,367	71,737	31,310
<b>EXPENDITURES</b>							
Advertising and promotion	8,448	11,980	2,950	7,388	11,205	3,097	3,942
Amortization	7,750	3,437	1,514				
Insurance	2,141	1,935	-				
Interest and bank charges	2,128	170	290	157	189	113	54
Licenses, dues and subscriptions	-	2,112	-				
Office and miscellaneous	7,712	8,565	16,090	6,997	15,334	6,415	3,329
Professional fees	6,038	3,650	3,049			547	100
Rent	12,600	10,785	3,100		1,510	19,658	19,831
Repairs and maintenance	519	560	-				
Salaries and benefits	183,082	147,238	90,466	61,754	33,797	25,946	3,349
Telephone and internet	16,315	13,558	7,090	5,150	2,626	2,021	588
Travel and entertainment	4,643	5,200	2,410	5,721		6,113	159
Utilities	-	256	-				
	251,376	209,446	126,959	87,167	64,661	63,910	31,351
<b>EXCESS OF RECEIPTS OVER EXPENDITURES FOR THE YEAR</b>	\$663	\$13,732	(\$1,991)	(\$1,372)	(\$1,294)	\$7,827	(\$41)

## **THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS**

Donations from individuals, lawyers, and organizations make it possible for Access Justice to continue providing legal assistance to those who cannot afford it. In 2006 55% of Access Justice's funding was from individual lawyers. The average donation for individual lawyers was approximately \$150. 8.8% of Access Justice's funding was from law firms. Donations from law firms varied from \$100 to \$6,488. Access Justice's programs and services were possible due the continued support of organizations such as the Law Foundation of British Columbia and VanCity who have generously supported our many endeavours.

## ACCESS JUSTICE BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2006

Bruce Fraser Q.C.	Chairman
Graham Walker	Treasurer
Dugald Christie	Secretary (January to July 2006)
H. Del Feller	
Craig Cameron	
Phil Dougan	
Vicki Bennett	
Leon Getz Q.C.	
George Gregory	
Ian Campbell	
Jeanette Oostlander	

## ACCESS JUSTICE STAFF

Dugald Christie	Executive Director (January to July 2006)
Jimmy Yan	Project Manager/Web Architect
Nagma Azad	IT Manager
Jenny Lau	Clinic Coordinator
Carol Tse	Volunteer Manager
Vivian Song	Finance Manager

*We thank the following staff and who served with Access Justice in 2006:*

Ashleigh Desoto	Clinic Coordinator
Chalit Fernando	Finance & IT Manager
Jason Harman	Assistant to Dugald Christie