

Caring For Our Communities! The Volunteer Lawyers Service



Sponsored by: United Way of Calgary and Area, Canadian Bar Association Alberta, The Law Society of Alberta, and The Association of General Counsel of Alberta

If you have not yet heard, the Volunteer Lawyers Service (VLS) is a program that has been providing eligible non-partisan charitable organizations with *pro bono* legal services for over ten years. The success of this program is a result of our dedicated volunteer lawyers who donate as much time as they are able, to assist not for profit groups throughout Alberta. The legal services our volunteers provide to these organizations increases access to justice and legal aid that would otherwise be unavailable because of a lack of financial resources. Mary Anne Wilkat, of Ogden House Seniors Centre commented, "It has been wonderful to know that this opportunity to have access to a volunteer lawyer is available, especially because we are a non-profit organization with no money..." and Sandra Hebert from the Calgary Winter Festival Foundation agrees; "We knew we needed to re-organize our program in order to move forward with our expansion plans, and this would not have been possible without the VLS because we would not otherwise have had the funds to seek the advice we required ..."

The not-for-profit organizations who seek the services of our volunteers are groups that provide numerous benefits to our communities. Whether they are just starting out, or are in the process of expanding, our lawyers are catalysts for their development, growth and even sometimes their sustainability. For instance, the Medicine Hat Youth Action Society, is a not-for-profit group that helps at-risk youth, but because of a contentious legal issue, they themselves had become "at risk" for closing their doors. With the assistance of one of our volunteer lawyers, this group was able to resolve their matter and remain open. The VLS has also hosted an annual workshop which was facilitated by one of our volunteer lawyers who provided "start up" information and services to three newly developed not-for-profit organizations looking for direction in becoming operational. By offering their time to these groups, volunteer lawyers are by extension écaring for our communities.

The appreciation expressed by the various organizations which benefit from the VLS volunteers is abundant. Comments of appreciation include:

"We are very pleased with the service we received from (our Volunteer Lawyer); he is always ready to help. We would highly recommend him and this program" - Mr. Lepin, Aboriginal Métis Citizens Alliance of Canada – Alberta Chapter

"We were delighted to find out a program like this exists, it has been wonderful for us...we couldn't have done it without you." – Sandra Hebert, Calgary Winter Festival Foundation

Our lawyer gave us more time than we ever would have expected of a volunteer. Even in times when we didn't need his help, he took an interest to call us and follow up. – Mary Anne Wilkat, Ogden House Seniors Centre

"Our legal matter was a brief one, but the service was excellent." - Ken Garant, Catholic Charities Clothes Bank

"S.I.A.M. really appreciates the service the United Way and the Volunteer Lawyers Service provides. Thank you so much for all your help, there are few people out there that go to such lengths." – Sabrina Silins, Society for the Integration of Alternative Medicine.

"We're so excited to have a lawyer to work with..." – Shannon Mann, FLEA Foundation

"I appreciate and would like to thank you for providing me with a volunteer lawyer to help me set up the program I'm running...the volunteer lawyer did a great job helping me...I would like to thank you again." – Bol Tap, Calgary Sudanese Family Integration Center

Often this feedback does not go beyond the ears of the VLS Project Co-ordinator. As a result, the VLS decided that in this next decade of service, we have begun a new recognition program to celebrate our volunteers and reward them for all that they do to help our not-for-profit organizations and ultimately our communities. This includes volunteer lawyer profiles in issues of the CBA-Alberta's *Law Matters* publication.

To find out more about the Volunteer Lawyers Service, and how you can volunteer on our roster, contact the Project Co-ordinator at 403-218-4317, or by e-mail at vls@cba-alberta.org.

The Volunteer Lawyers Service thanks the following lawyers for their contributions over the last few years:

Yvonne Chenier
Pat Heinsen
Michael Kleiner
Randal Penman
Carole Smith Wallace
Peter Swiecicki
Paul Trotter
John David Oke
Douglas Rae
Rob Verbuck
Gillian Sinclair
John Anderson
Alexander Kooiman
Robert Omura
Grant Borbridge
Irene MacEachern
LuAnne Morrow
Kevin Tuohy

Guy Cochrane
Peter Piliounis
Fiona G. McLean
Allan Nielsen, Q.C.
Gabrielle C. Kaufmann
John D. Phillips, Q.C.
Brenda Johnson
Sacha Fedora
Louis Faber
Jennifer Lepp
Dushan Bednarsky
Linda Svob
Manoj Gupta
Susan Jantz
Geoffrey Coombs
John Evans
Cameron Kemp

Canadian Lawyers Insurance Association insurance coverage is available for lawyers who take on a *pro bono* file with this Service.