

**JUSTICE SECTOR CONSTELLATION**  
**SYNOPSIS UPDATE**  
**NOVEMBER 15, 2017**

**Background**

The Justice Sector Constellation (the “**Constellation**”) seeks to intervene at the intersection of poverty and the legal system so that everyone facing a legal issue can access the justice sector resources and services he or she needs.

The Constellation is composed of a diverse membership that includes justice-serving agencies; municipal, provincial and federal justice administration; community volunteers; educators; and legal supports providers. The Constellation is one of the teams working to implement the poverty-reduction strategy of Enough for All, Calgary’s Poverty Reduction Initiative.

The original mandate of the Justice Sector Constellation was to make recommendations to the Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiative Secretariat on a poverty-reduction strategy in the context of the legal system. These recommendations are set out in the Constellation’s report dated March 19, 2013, which is entitled “Intervening at the Intersection of Poverty and the Legal System” (see at [http://enoughforall.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/JSC\\_FinalReport\\_2013.pdf](http://enoughforall.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/JSC_FinalReport_2013.pdf)).

Over 90 percent of the recommendations developed by the Constellation had previously been made in other reports regarding the legal system and the justice sector. In light of that, the Constellation members agreed to continue to work together on implementing the Constellation’s recommendations. This work has been ongoing since April 2013.

**Update**

Since the last Synopsis Update, the Justice Sector Constellation has advanced its work on a number of fronts, some of which are described below.

**Poverty Law Course for Legal Professionals**

“There is a strong link between multiple unresolved legal problems and social exclusion, poverty and disadvantage”.<sup>1</sup> Many legal professionals are not aware of these links, and of the particular legal challenges facing the disadvantaged and how to best assist them. Lawyers who wish to assist such clients may be hesitant to volunteer their services because of a lack of knowledge and experience in serving disadvantaged populations and in addressing common legal issues that these clients experience. As a result, vulnerable populations may not receive the legal assistance they need, either because of a shortage of legal professionals willing to help or because legal professionals are not equipped to assist them.

The Constellation’s Poverty Law Course for Lawyers Project is intended to help address this need. The purpose of the project is to assist legal professionals to develop the cultural and professional competencies required to serve disadvantaged and marginalized clients, to improve both the process and outcomes for vulnerable populations in addressing their legal issues.

The course was piloted as a workshop in October, with 61 lawyers, articling students, law students and other legal professionals in attendance. The workshop included an exercise exploring the role of privilege

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<sup>1</sup> Melina Buckley, *Moving Forward on Legal Aid: Research on Needs and Innovative Approaches* (Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Bar Association, June 2010) 39, retrieved from [CBA Legal Aid Renewal Paper](#) on November 13, 2017.

in lawyer-client relationships, especially with vulnerable populations. In addition, practical information was provided on interviewing and relating to such clients, including how to identify and address their needs. The workshop was sponsored by the Calgary Foundation, and Mount Royal University provided the venue as well as registration and post-event survey support.

Of the participants who completed a post-workshop survey, 90% felt their knowledge of vulnerable populations was better after the course and 74% felt better equipped to serve these populations. Some 60% were more willing to volunteer to work with vulnerable populations and two-thirds would recommend the course to colleagues if it were offered again.

In light of the positive feedback, the Constellation is considering the next steps for this project.

### **Child-minding Project**

The report on the needs assessment for the Constellation's Child-minding Project has been completed. Research was conducted to assess whether a lack of child-care services at the Calgary Courts Centre was an impediment to accessing the legal system.

The research team found that children attend the Calgary Courts Centre regularly. Both research participants and case studies support child-care arrangements for such children, for reasons of personal safety and protection from inappropriate and sometimes re-traumatizing content.

The report recommends a second phase of research to engage with caregivers to understand the impact on them and their children from having to attend at the Calgary Courts Centre and make arrangements for child care.

### **Strategic Plan**

The Constellation recently completed a strategic planning process, including the development of vision and mission statements, and priority areas for the Constellation's work over the next three years.

The vision of the Constellation is a community where each person has the knowledge, resources and capability to understand and address his or her legal issues, and the legal system does not contribute to or cause poverty. The mission of the Constellation in light of that vision is intervening at the intersection of poverty and the legal system so that everyone facing a legal issue can access the justice sector resources and services he or she needs.

The project priority areas identified in the Strategic Plan are:

- education and engagement, including education of both the public and the justice sector regarding the intersection of poverty and the legal system;
- coordination, including effective referrals both to and by justice sector stakeholders; and
- accessibility of the legal system, including affordable legal services.

The Constellation will now develop a work plan to advance its strategic priorities.