

# Cross Country Snapshot of Public Legal Education



## Public Legal Education & Information

Since 1984, the federal Department of Justice has contributed annual core funding to non-profit Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) organizations dedicated to educating citizens about the laws that govern them and the justice system. By supporting these organizations, the Department helps Canadians to become legally literate and better able to participate in and access the justice system.

The PLEI Program provides annual funding to one provincially designated organization in each jurisdiction to deliver public legal education and information to the citizens within their region. PLEI contribution funding to the territories is provided through the Access to Justice Agreements (AJAs) that also cover Legal Aid and Aboriginal Courtwork services. Through its Partnership and Innovation Program, the Department of Justice has also provided financial support to a variety of organizations that apply for funding to undertake specific project initiatives within the area of PLEI. These groups have included community groups such as women's organizations and shelters, immigrant serving agencies; Non-Governmental Organizations such as Canadian Criminal Justice Association, Church Council on Justice and Corrections, Elizabeth Fry Society; the Canadian Bar Association; schools and school boards; and municipal governments.

We have also integrated a PLEI component into various departmental initiatives, including the Youth Justice Renewal

Strategy, the Child-centred Family Justice Strategy, the National Crime Prevention Strategy, the Family Violence Initiative and the Victims of Violence Initiative. These initiatives have drawn on the expertise of the designated organizations, as well as other members of the Public Legal Education Association of Canada (PLEAC), to assist them in informing Canadians about changes in the laws that may have direct impact on their lives.

For the past several years, the Department of Justice has participated in the annual Public Legal Education Association of Canada Conference. We host a one-day session for the purpose of sharing information that has a direct impact on service providers across the country and supporting the Department's ability to promote access to the law and the justice system throughout Canada.

We continue to be impressed by the accomplishments of PLEI agencies across the country and we look forward to continued collaboration with our PLEI partners.

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## British Columbia

Public legal education and information (PLEI) in BC has a rich 30-year history. The work carried out reflects client needs, organizational mandates and various perspectives. While most organizations cobble their budgets together from core and project funds received from a variety of government departments, the Law Foundation of BC has been a major funder and advocate for provincial PLEI services.

The People's Law School is an independent, non-profit organization whose sole purpose is to provide PLEI to BC residents. Established in 1972, it provides free plain language booklets, speaker placements, a cultural minorities program, and, more recently, law-related theatre presentations in schools. "The Society strives to provide people with practical information about the laws as they affect people's lives, such as family law, employment standards, and child protection law." In particular, it

provides PLEI to special needs groups - seniors, youth, immigrants, and entry-level workers. It relies extensively on partnerships with other organizations throughout the province, as well as volunteer lawyers and judges.

The Legal Services Society of BC (LSS) assists low-income individuals to resolve their legal problems and facilitates their access to justice. It uses PLEI to meet both objects. Key strategies include a toll-free staffed legal information and referral line, the production of print and web-based materials, and training and support for community advocates in areas of law where full representation is not available. Three specialized websites have been developed in collaboration with other service providers. The Electronic Law Library (ELL), [www.bcpl.gov.bc.ca/ell](http://www.bcpl.gov.bc.ca/ell), is part of the virtual reference desk of the BC public library system; PovNet, [www.povnet.org](http://www.povnet.org), is run by poverty law service

providers, and a family law web site, [www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca](http://www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca), was developed in consultation with family justice service providers.

The Canadian Bar Association, BC Branch has operated the Lawyer Referral Service since 1971 and Dial-A-Law since 1982. Dial-A-Law is a library of pre-recorded messages prepared by lawyers on specific legal topics from automobiles to wills. Scripts are also available on their website, [www.bccba.org/ScriptContent/login.asp](http://www.bccba.org/ScriptContent/login.asp). More than 49,000 visitors accessed the scripts in 2001/02.

The Law Courts Education Society of BC was established as a society in 1989 after 10 years of running court-based educational programs. It provides educational programs and resources about the justice system to the public and encourages awareness of community needs within the system. It partners with the Ministry of the Attorney General, the Ministry of Education, the judiciary, the Canadian Bar Association (BC Branch), schools, and communities. Their Justice System Education Program is available to any group who wants or needs to learn more about the justice system. They also offer a variety of specialized programs for various groups.

The Centre for Education, Law and Society was established

in 1984 and given formal approval by the Simon Fraser University Board of Governors in 1994. It seeks to improve the legal literacy of children and young adults through a program of teaching, curriculum development, and community initiative. Projects are diverse and focus on the schools. Three undergraduate courses and one graduate course in law education have been developed and are offered through the Faculty of Education.

These are some of the key organizations in a large and active network of PLEI providers, which encourage clients, institutions, or the public to understand and use or shape the law.

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## Alberta

Alberta was one of the first jurisdictions in Canada to take up the public legal education (PLE) challenge. Flexibility in the objectives of the Alberta Law Foundation has meant that diverse organizations - some with PLE as their only mandate, others with PLE as part of their broader programming - have been able to explore both conventional and innovative means of delivery. Written materials, classroom sessions, telephone lines, dramatic presentations, intermediary training, mass media programming, simulations, literature, and web-based services have all been used successfully.

The Public Legal Education Network of Alberta (PLENA) is a network of agencies, organizations and individuals united by their common interest in public legal education and information. Members are involved wholly or in part in direct delivery of PLE to the public, most on a not-for-profit basis. PLENA facilitates communication, co-operation and coordination among groups providing law-related public educational services. PLENA's broad membership, representing a wide range of PLE experience focussing on a variety of subjects and its close connections with communities across the province, gives it the ability to identify and reach many audiences. Today, virtually every sector within the province has been the beneficiary of some form of public legal education.

The Legal Studies Program (LSP) at the Faculty of Extension of the University of Alberta has a broad PLE mandate. It is also one of the few PLE agencies in Canada with both research and PLE professional development mandates. Current LSP initiatives include exploration of strategies for using the Internet for public legal education

and consolidating the last 35 years of PLE knowledge. The Legal Studies Program publishes the *LawNow* suite of resources and developed and manages ACJNet, [www.acjnet.org](http://www.acjnet.org), the national access to justice network.

Community-based legal service organizations such as Student Legal Services of Edmonton (SLS), Student Legal Assistance (SLA) in Calgary, and Calgary Legal Guidance (CLG) also play large public legal education roles. SLS is a primary supplier of public legal education pamphlets. CLG runs Alberta's Dial-a-Law service with recorded information on legal issues. John Howard Societies throughout the province provide education on criminal justice issues for both adults and school students.

The provincial government and the Courts are taking on increasingly important PLE roles. Alberta Justice has a PLE Coordinator and a web site with considerable information about the Alberta legal system. The Family Law Information Centres of the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench provide information for self-represented family law litigants and the Alberta Law Society Libraries provide services to the Alberta public.

Agencies with specific programs for public education are also an important part of the Alberta PLE scene and many integrate PLE with their other mandates. Native Counselling Services of Alberta has an active PLE program and the new Edmonton Centre for Equal Justice includes PLE as part of its programming. Community colleges and school boards across the province provide a range of "law for the layman" courses and undertake special projects

within their geographic mandate while various research institutes provide topical educational resources and services.

Alberta PLE is primarily funded by the Alberta Law Foundation and Justice Canada. As well, many groups receive funding from other foundations, associations and agencies including Alberta Justice.



## Saskatchewan

Recent years at the Public Legal Education Association of Saskatchewan (PLEA) have been some of the most interesting, challenging and successful in our history – one of the longest histories among PLEI organizations in Canada, having been established in 1980.

An Aboriginal PLEI Needs Assessment was recently completed. The opportunity to learn of Aboriginal-specific PLEI needs and address these through novel methods of delivery is very exciting for us. This focus will be a continuing priority for our organization. We are very grateful to the Law Foundation of Saskatchewan for making the Needs Assessment possible.

Funding is always a PLEI issue, and collaboration involving community organizations, governments, courts, legal professionals, and other PLEI agencies, is integral to meeting the mission of developing an informed and engaged citizenry. PLEA recently partnered with the Saskatchewan and Canadian Human Rights Commissions, Aboriginal Friendship Centres of Saskatchewan, and Saskatchewan Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs to produce the handbook, *The Rights Path*. The handbook addresses issues that may face Aboriginal peoples living in urban centres. Such partnerships are extremely important in the volunteer and non-profit sector as resources are often stretched.

Important new materials and activities relating to civil justice have come from PLEA lately. A new booklet called *Special Care Homes* meets a vital informational need in Saskatchewan. Another new booklet called *Domestic Relations*, incorporates significant legislative changes in family law. A series of further booklets on consumer law was completed through the generous assistance of Saskatchewan Justice. These publications look at consumer concerns

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involving automobile and general purchases, frauds and scams. We were also able to recently bring back two very popular booklets, *Buying and Selling a Home*, and *Non-Profit Organizations*. Most of our materials are available on our web site, [www.plea.org](http://www.plea.org).

PLEA's League of Peaceful Schools, established through special funding from the Law Foundation of Saskatchewan, maintains a strong presence in our province. The program links and supports schools wishing to create a safer and more peaceful learning environment.

Other core PLEA activities (Free Legal Information Sessions at public libraries and regional colleges, our Speakers Bureau, Phone-in Line, and weekly newspaper article series) continue to be strongly relied upon and supported by the people of Saskatchewan.

PLEI is strong and vibrant in Saskatchewan, although we continue to face many challenges in meeting our mission. These challenges include issues related to funding, an increasingly complex society, cultural diversity, and raising our profile both in the community and within the legal system. Little of our work would be possible without the support of the Law Foundation of Saskatchewan, whose members have always believed in the great cause and mission of educating people about the law and the legal system for the betterment of our society.

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## Manitoba

Community Legal Education Association Manitoba Inc. (CLEA) is a not-for-profit organization incorporated in 1984. There are five staff members and a volunteer, fifteen-member Board. CLEA's primary function is to provide public legal education and information services to Manitobans. We do this through various core programs including:

- Law Phone-In & Lawyer Referral – people can phone

from anywhere in the province and obtain information about the law, or, if appropriate, referral to a lawyer or law-related agency;

- Speaker's Bureau – over eighty lawyers have volunteered to speak to community groups and schools on a variety of legal topics;
- Community Legal Intermediary Training Course (CLI) – a series of twelve, two and one-half hour sessions on

various areas of law. CLEA trains intermediaries who then act as resources in their community or at their jobs.

CLEA also takes on a variety of projects. We recently completed a series of 22 workshops around the province on the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*. Currently, we are creating a teaching kit for Grades 9 to 12, also dealing with the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*. We hope to launch the kit in September.

We also distribute a variety of plain language legal publications produced by CLEA and other agencies. Many Manitoba government departments have programs or have produced publications for the general public in order to increase public understanding of legal issues.

- Manitoba Justice, for instance, has produced several excellent publications. These include *Family Law in Manitoba*, an excellent and quite comprehensive booklet dealing with various family law issues, and a series of information sheets explaining the rights of victims under the *Victims' Bill of Rights*. As well, *For the Sake of the Children* is an excellent supportive information program for parents experiencing separation and divorce.
- Manitoba Family Services and Housing have a series of pamphlets dealing with parenting issues after separation and recently produced a series of information sheets on

Employment and Income Assistance.

- The Seniors Directorate publishes *A Legal Information Guide for Seniors* which provides information on wills, estates, health care directives and powers of attorney. The publication is actually a good guide for adults of all ages.

It is impossible to summarize the diversity of public legal education and information activities in Manitoba in a few paragraphs; this is just a sampling. The highlights of Community Legal Education Association activities are presented, as well as some of the many other public legal education and information initiatives taking place in the Province.

The core funders supporting CLEA and our PLEI activities are the Department of Justice Canada, the Manitoba Law Foundation and the Law Society of Manitoba. We also have many community partners and could not offer our programs without the help of hundreds of volunteers.

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## Ontario

Ontario has a decentralized and diverse – but far-reaching and effective – network of public legal education delivery. People in Ontario receive legal information through organizations in their communities such as women's shelters, community centres, settlement agencies, schools, hospitals, libraries, police, government offices and court-related services. Many organizations develop a few products or workshops each year, with and for their communities.

Ontario is unique and fortunate in that this network includes the community legal clinic system of 79 independent clinics supported by Legal Aid Ontario and dedicated to providing legal services to their low-income or otherwise disadvantaged communities. The need to inform low-income communities about their legal rights was a key rationale behind the establishment of Ontario's community legal clinics. Clinics develop presentations, workshops and materials to address the legal information needs of their communities. In 2001, legal clinics across Ontario made over 3,000 presentations and produced over 2,600 public legal education pieces. In recognition of this work, the largest food bank in the province honoured the clinic system with its 2002 Public Education award.

One of the community legal clinics is Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO), a specialized legal clinic established over 25 years ago. It is the cornerstone of community-based public legal education for Ontario's low-income and disadvantaged communities. CLEO, working with hundreds of partners in local legal clinics and

community coalitions, identifies and develops practical, clear-language materials that respond to the pressing legal information needs of Ontario's most vulnerable communities.

In 2002, over 1.3 million CLEO publications were ordered by legal clinics and by over 2,200 other community agencies throughout Ontario. Organizations used CLEO materials in a variety of ways, including distributing them in the community and using them in workshops and to support community organizing. As well, CLEO's website was a much-used information resource in 2002; publications were downloaded over 250,000 times!

In 2000, Ontario's three Chief Justices convened a public education task force that brought together many leading representatives of the legal and education communities, including CLEO. The Ontario Justice Education Network (OJEN)<sup>1</sup> was formed out of the task force activity. Through local committees and its collaborative network, OJEN mobilizes activity and generates support for a range of Ontario public education programs that promote understanding of our justice system.

OJEN's *Courtrooms & Classrooms* school-level program extends across the province, with over 400 volunteers from the bench, bar, court-related personnel and local organizations. In 2002, over 30,000 students met with community leaders from the justice and legal sectors. Collaborative local committees also carry out initiatives such as Mock Trial tournaments and Law Day events and

seminars. Other OJEN achievements include resource materials for Ontario's law-related grade 10 civics curriculum and a highly successful Summer Law Institute for secondary school teachers.

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## Quebec

For almost three years now, Éducaloi has been dedicating itself to serving the needs of Quebec citizens by developing appropriate tools for providing legal information to them in a plain language form. Since the creation of [www.educaloi.qc.ca](http://www.educaloi.qc.ca), which receives approximately 40,000 Internet hits a month, the site has garnered many awards and honours. Most notably, Éducaloi received the 'Educational Site' category of the prestigious *Boomerang Prize*, handed out in recognition of the best interactive communication pieces in Quebec. Moreover, Éducaloi has recently received an Honourable Mention at the Excellence in Public Administration Awards, also in the Education category.

The choice of the Internet as our means of communication is one that became quite apparent to us early in the creation of our organisation. It was quite a challenge to serve a population of 7,000,000, expressing itself in two languages, and spread out over a vast territory. The Internet proves to be the ideal way of meeting that challenge. It is thanks to these Internet tools, amongst other things, that Éducaloi has made its name.

Éducaloï's web site is the backbone of the organisation; that is why so much effort is put into maintaining its quality. Since law is not a static discipline, Éducaloï must constantly assure itself that the information contained on its 2,000-page

- 1 Network members include the province's three Chief Justices, the Department of Justice, the Ministry of the Attorney General, the Ministry of Education, The Law Foundation of Ontario, the Law Society of Upper Canada, the Advocates' Society, the County and District Law Presidents' Association, the Ontario Bar Association, Legal Aid Ontario, the Ombudsman, the Canadian Civil Liberties Education Trust, the Ontario History and Social Science Teachers' Association, Community Legal Education Ontario, the Association of Community Legal Clinics of Ontario, the Ontario Principals Council, and the Institute for Catholic Education.

site conforms to the current laws. The site's credibility and future depend on it. In order to attain this objective, Éducaloï has installed an information update strategy for information contained on its site. It has also created the Web-content Manager position, which has the responsibility of managing, adding to, and updating the ever-increasing information contained in the Éducaloï Internet site.

In the fulfilment of its mission, Éducaloï can count on the support of the Department of Justice Canada, the Quebec Ministry of Justice, as well as on that of the Barreau du Québec, which sponsors the organisation. Over the course of the next year, Éducaloï intends to develop new partnerships in order to finance on a continuing basis, the updating of its Internet tools. Maintaining the quality of the showcase we have given ourselves is indeed quite a challenge. We hope to be able to continue counting on the ever-growing support of partners and ambassadors taking to heart, as we do, accessibility to justice.

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## New Brunswick

New Brunswick is a small province in terms of population and geography, but tremendously rich in diversity. With a significant rural population, a relatively large Francophone population, and several First Nation communities, many exciting challenges present themselves when providing legal education and information to the general public.

The Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick (PLEIS-NB) is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing service in both official languages. For many years, PLEIS-NB has worked closely with government and community agencies around the province to

identify legal information needs and to develop ways to meet them. As a small agency, such partnerships are critical to delivering PLEI in a meaningful way. Members of the provincial Bar and Bench, along with justice system personnel, provide valuable contributions by sitting on our volunteer Board of Directors, reviewing new products, volunteering in our Speaker's Bureau, and collaborating on projects. PLEIS-NB also relies on close partnerships with other PLEI organizations around Canada for everything from product sharing, to product review and joint projects.

In New Brunswick, PLEI delivery is achieved in different

ways. Currently, PLEIS-NB produces well over 100 bilingual products and publications on a wide variety of legal topics that are distributed throughout the province free of charge. In addition to our publication program, we offer a Speaker's Bureau, Video Lending Library, toll-free Family Law Information Line, web site, community referrals, and workshops and seminars on various legal topics. We provide general legal information only - we do not give legal advice, we do not advocate, and we do not lobby.

At a time when many populations are feeling increasingly frustrated by the formal legal system, the demands on our agency are growing. On average, PLEIS-NB responds to approximately 120,000 requests for legal information each year. PLEIS-NB also participates on a number of provincial and regional committees working on various justice issues such as crime prevention, family violence, access to justice

for disability communities, and fraud prevention for seniors.

As a non-profit agency, growing demands for public legal education are a concern. Promoting our services must always be in balance with the resources at hand. It is a constant challenge to meet the day-to-day legal information needs on topics such as wills and estates, landlord and tenant, and family law. At the same time, we work hard to provide information about legislative changes and citizenship issues. Ours is a bumpy road, but one that PLEI providers across Canada travel with pleasure.

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## Nova Scotia

The Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia (LISNS) is celebrating 20 years of providing legal information and education. Much has changed within that time including a growing recognition of the need and value of PLEI. Demand for PLEI has increased from a few hundred calls a year to more than 9,000 in 2001.

LISNS provides legal information in a variety of ways. These include phone, print, Internet, and audio-tape. LISNS is the only sole purpose PLEI provider in Nova Scotia. Other agencies provide legal information as part of their service to specific audiences. These community agencies may be the first port-of-call for a person with a problem. We all work cooperatively to try to ensure that legal information is available when and where it is needed.

LISNS, in partnership with Pro Bono Students Canada at Dalhousie Law School in Halifax, provides an opportunity for law students to learn first-hand the variety of problems facing ordinary individuals seeking legal information. The students have an opportunity to talk with these individuals and through this exposure gain an understanding that socio-economic and legal problems are often interconnected. Students learn to reduce legal language so a non-lawyer can understand complex legal issues. This experience will be valuable as they embark on their chosen careers.

In addition, the provincial government provides PLEI through various programs. The provincial Department of Justice has developed plain language materials about the court processes to address issues raised by the number of unrepresented litigants appearing at all levels of court. Judges, court staff, Legal Aid, the private bar and LISNS have been involved in this initiative.

The media is also taking an interest in PLEI, although it may not recognize it in quite those terms. "The Docket" focuses on legal issues and the host has a background in

both law and journalism. This locally produced program airs nationally on CBC.

Over the last 20 years there has been increasing recognition that the law is not the sole purview of the courts and the legal profession. This trend will continue in the future. Individuals face a myriad of legal questions and problems throughout their lives. When problems occur, they want information; they want to know what their options are. Many do not have the resources to pay for legal services, yet these people are often society's most vulnerable members. If an individual's rights are to mean anything at all and if they are to be able to fully participate as citizens, they must have access to legal information.

Demand for PLEI continues to increase, but resources have not kept pace and we face a continuing challenge to 'do more with less'. Funding levels for core services remain at 1980's levels. This means LISNS must place a greater emphasis on fund raising to secure resources just to keep up with inflation. As well, we try to expand services to meet the public's needs.

Just as we need a responsive, accessible healthcare system which meets the needs of the individual and in which people trust, we need a responsive, accessible justice system. This justice system must not only provide access to courts and lawyers, but also to information about the system itself and an individual's rights and responsibilities. Much has been accomplished in the last 20 years but many challenges are still to be met. LISNS continues to meet those challenges.

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## Prince Edward Island

Community Legal Information Association (CLIA) is a province-wide, community-based, charitable organization established in January, 1985. The Association's goal is to provide Prince Edward Islanders with understandable, useful information about laws and the justice system. We do this with *pro bono* support from members of the local Bar and other professionals.

CLIA is a resource to the community providing legal information, education, leadership and support about municipal by-laws, provincial and federal laws, the legal and court systems, and the general administration of justice in PEI. We work through personal contact; workshops, presentations and seminars; CLIA web site (more and more); our legal information resource centre (less and less); the development and distribution of publications; special programs; and the media. CLIA operates a regional 1-800 telephone inquiry line and Lawyer Referral Service for the Law Society of PEI.

We network and develop partnerships throughout the community: consultative, coordinated, cooperative or collaborative. We work closely with the courts and criminal justice agencies to jointly inform, educate and develop community capacity around law related issues. Of particular interest is our involvement in two provincial initiatives.

1. The Executive Director sits on the management team of the Premier's Action Committee on Family Violence Prevention. We organized Island-wide public forums on family violence and are now in the first year of a five-year Family Violence Prevention strategy. This involves awareness, education and training; partnerships and coordination; service delivery; and policy, legislation and legal issues.

2. The Executive Director also chairs the Implementation Steering Committee which follows on the work of the Access to Justice Task Force, established by the Honourable Gerard Mitchell, Chief Justice of Prince Edward Island, in 2001. CLIA notes with interest the following general recommendations from the Task Force Report:

- There must be greater attempts undertaken to educate the public about the justice system.
- There should be greater co-operation between the Judiciary and the Community Legal Information Association to develop self-help kits and information booklets, packets, videos, etc., for use by the public and the litigants who represent themselves in court proceedings.
- The Community Legal Information Association office needs to be located in a more accessible location and be given a higher profile in the Community.
- The government should take steps to ensure that teachers in the school system have adequate information, textbooks and other resources to educate children about our legal institutions and the justice system.
- The language, procedures and accessibility of the civil justice system ought to be simplified, made more user friendly and made easier for all to understand.
- The Court must develop the ability to explain the fundamentals of the dispute resolution process to litigants.
- The public needs to be informed about rights and responsibilities and the effective use of all means of dispute resolution.

CLIA is part of a national network of PLEI organizations that exist in every province and territory and is a member of the Public Legal Education Association of Canada. Funding for CLIA comes from a variety of sources, primarily the Department of Justice Canada, the Office of the Attorney General (PEI), the PEI Law Foundation, and the Law Society of PEI.

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## Newfoundland and Labrador

The delivery of PLEI in Newfoundland and Labrador is an exciting and challenging endeavor. Our population is spread over a large area with many rural communities dotting an often inaccessible coastline. It is further divided into island and mainland areas. Adding to our challenges are the diverse pockets of French, Mi'Kmaq, Metis, Innu and Inuit populations.

PLEI is necessary as many communities lack the resources that allow individuals to make informed decisions about

legal matters; remote areas may lack lawyers, libraries and even Internet access. As a result, community groups and volunteer organizations play an integral role in the delivery of PLEI services. They provide assistance to victims, family mediation, services for new Canadians, protection services, women's advocacy groups, human rights and general guidance through the legal system.

Public Legal Information Association of Newfoundland (PLIAN) is the sole purpose PLEI provider in Newfoundland

and Labrador. The Department of Justice Canada, the Department of Justice Newfoundland and Labrador and the Law Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador fund PLIAN. Our Board of Directors, volunteers and community partnerships are vital in the delivery of PLEI.

PLIAN is dedicated to informing and engaging the public and the legal community about the law and the legal system. We write and distribute pamphlets on legal topics, conduct information sessions and presentations, host a Legal Information Line, a Lawyer Referral Service and a web site. Our web site, [www.publiclegalinfo.com](http://www.publiclegalinfo.com), provides free legal information. It offers cost-effective distribution, can reach most remote communities and contains information on all our services. It also contains our publications in four languages - English, French, Innu and Inuit.

In meeting the province's diverse nature, PLIAN is committed to community outreach. We travel throughout the province conducting presentations and seminars and disseminating information, brochures and pamphlets. We also mail out publications to over 5,000 community organizations, government groups, medical centres and schools.

PLIAN also engages in a number of special projects designed to meet the unique needs of our communities. Youth Justice Camp is a day camp for junior-high youth where they learn about the law, legal processes and the effect both may have on them. We recently compiled Family Law Kits that have

been distributed to service providers throughout the province. PLIAN has equipped clergy, social workers, women's centre staff, librarians and others with legal information people require but are often unable to access.

Often, special projects center on legislative changes. Our book, *For the Record*, outlines in plain language the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*. *For the Record* has been a tremendous success and is presently being up-dated, re-printed and distributed!

PLIAN is committed to working with partners to develop solutions to emerging issues. Currently we are collaborating with the provincial and federal Departments of Justice to address issues pertaining to youth, families and others. Through partnerships, PLIAN is able to share expertise, information and resources to better serve Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We recognize the importance of an informed public and are committed to ensuring that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians remain on the cutting edge of the ever-changing legal system.

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## Nunavut

In July 2000, the Legal Services Board of Nunavut came into being and began seriously thinking about PLEI. The unique aspect of PLEI work in Nunavut is that those individuals who seek to administer PLEI must first gain the respect and trust of their audience. In a Territory that is self-governed by the Inuit people, the need to engage everyone in understanding the justice system remains critical to that system's success. PLEI providers must fully understand the culture and incorporate Inuit Qaujimaqatugangit or Inuit traditional knowledge, into the work that they propose to do.

In March of 2001 the Legal Services Board of Nunavut brought elders, court workers and service providers together to talk about PLEI needs and how to meet them. From this meeting a number of initiatives were born. These include:

- A recognition that the Inuit court workers must receive better training and support in order to effectively deliver PLEI. A formal training and certification program was developed and the training has commenced for all Nunavut court workers. The focus is on building confidence, support and recognition. Court workers are then able to effectively deliver PLEI to people understandably upset and confused by how different the

formal justice system is to their traditional ways.

- In 2001, the Board developed a web site dedicated to PLEI, [www.plein.ca](http://www.plein.ca), providing practical information and referral on legal matters in English, Inuktitut and French.
- Nunavut joined forces with the NWT to provide legal information through a volunteer lawyer operated LAW LINE that is available two evenings per week.
- Also in 2001, a weekly PLEI newspaper column was introduced in the territorial newspaper. Volunteers write short, simple articles on legal topics. This very basic forum has received a great deal of positive feedback. Articles are in both English and Inuktitut. They are also posted on our PLEIN website. To date, *News North* has published 77 "Legally Speaking" articles. Topics include information on criminal, family, poverty and administrative law.
- Finally, the coming into force of the new *Youth Criminal Justice Act* has resulted in two ongoing projects. The first, *On the Road to Justice*, involves joining forces with British Columbia PLEI providers. The co-operative environment among PLEI groups in Canada has enabled us to modify an existing program and deliver it to Nunavut students in



a cost efficient and effective way. The second project is a large public media campaign scheduled for the next fiscal year. Community radio stations will deliver information segments on the new *Act* throughout the Territory.

There is still lots of work to be done on PLEI in Nunavut, but with many people now working together to plant, water and nurture the seeds of knowledge, we cannot help but reap the rewards.

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## Northwest Territories

The Legal Services Board of the Northwest Territories is responsible for the provision of Legal Aid to territorial residents. We are also responsible for providing Public Legal Education and Information throughout the Territory.

We operate the LAW LINE staffed by volunteer lawyers. It is available twice per week from 5:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m. We accept telephone queries from Nunavut as well as NWT. Long-distance charges are reversed and the Legal Services Board shoulders the expense. The Law Society of the Northwest Territories operates a Lawyer Referral Service that is also accessible on-line and they have a PLEI page on their web site with general information on various legal topics. Both are available at [www.lawsociety.nt.ca](http://www.lawsociety.nt.ca).

Legal Services Board outreach initiatives include Community Courtworkers interacting with youth attending programs at the Native Friendship Centre. Courtworkers explain our legal aid program and distribute pamphlets containing basic information on *Charter* rights and appropriate behaviour if engaged by authority figures such as the police. Other collaborations include Aurora College, where our Yellowknife based Courtworker staffs an information booth each September.

Our Community Courtworkers also do a lot of referral work with the general public. Many people are referred to non-governmental organizations in spousal and child abuse situations. As well, there are referrals to the full gamut of governmental programs including income support, child welfare, health and social services.

One unique situation in the NWT is a Justice of the Peace Court. The Chief Territorial Court Judge has expanded the role of this Court. It has been designated a summary

conviction court that can accept guilty pleas to Criminal Code offences, provided the Crown (usually a local RCMP Court Liaison Officer) elects to proceed by way of summary conviction. People appearing in such a court need to understand the process and its consequences. This educational task falls to our Community Courtworkers.

Family-law practitioners here have recently embraced the principles of collaborative law dispute resolution procedures. They have become increasingly familiar with this new and innovative way of resolving what can be very difficult family breakdowns. The courts have also begun directing independent legal counsel for a child where the child's legal and personal interests might conflict with those of the Superintendent of Child Welfare or of the parents or guardians. Commensurate with these new directions is the educational need that arises as a result of these changes. Over the coming months our Community Courtworkers will be taught the basics of collaborative law to better assist our clients.

NWT Legal Services Board pamphlets on a number of topics are distributed to all of our Community Courtworkers. They make the pamphlets available to the public in the various Courtworker Offices. "Custody & Access" and "Peace Bonds", created in partnership with the local Coalition Against Family Violence, are very popular. Our pamphlets are presently being revised in order to reflect recent changes and to include information on the goals and objectives of collaborative dispute resolution.

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From its position of splendid isolation in the northern vastness, the non-profit Yukon Public Legal Education Association goes about its business of providing legal information and education services to the citizens of the Yukon Territory.

Our principle service is the Law Line, a call-in service that provides information on any legal issue. When legal information is not available on the caller's question, Law Line provides a referral to other community agencies or government departments, which might be better able to assist the caller. This service receives an average of 13 to 16 calls a day. The largest percentage of these relate to family law issues, with civil litigation and criminal law being the next most asked about areas of law.

The agency also makes available a number of self-help kits. As reflected by the numbers above, the greatest demand is for materials relating to family law issues. We provide a Divorce Kit - which includes the documents necessary to commence a divorce and carry it through to its completion; a Variation Application Kit - to assist with applications to change the terms of corollary relief orders made in divorce actions; and a kit designed to assist with claims for custody and child support in common law marriage disputes. In addition, we have general litigation forms available and kits for landlords and tenants to deal with a variety of claims

under the *Landlord and Tenant Act*. All of these documents are available to the general public on our web site, [www.yplea.com](http://www.yplea.com). The site was upgraded last summer and is significantly larger and improved.

As is the case in most jurisdictions, self-represented litigants are a significant concern to the Courts of the Territory. Justice R. Veale has been instrumental in the formation of a self-represented litigants committee for the Territory, which has representatives from YPLEA, Yukon Supreme Court administrative staff, the Law Library, one of the women's centres in Whitehorse, Legal Aid and Justice Veale himself. The committee meets on a regular basis to discuss the issue of self-represented litigants and how better to provide aids making the process easier for the litigant and the Court.

As one of, if not the smallest of the PLEI agencies in Canada, there are physical and financial limitations on the services we are able to provide. For our community and for this agency, however, the service we do provide is significant and valued.

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## The Public Legal Education Association of Canada (PLEAC)

Founded in 1987, the Public Legal Education Association of Canada (PLEAC) is an association of organizations and individuals drawn together from across Canada by a common commitment to educating and informing the public about law and the legal system.

More specifically, the objects of PLEAC are:

1. *To sustain a national organization to engage in the promotion of public legal education in all its aspects;*
2. *To support and advance communication among people interested in public legal education;*
3. *To encourage co-operation among people interested in public legal education;*
4. *To promote the development of the discipline of public legal education;*
5. *To further opportunities for professional development in public legal education, and;*
6. *Generally to do all such things which are incidental to or in furtherance of the aforementioned objects which the Directors in their sole discretion think can be conveniently carried on by the Corporation.*

The organization is governed by a Board of Directors elected each year at the Annual General Meeting, which is held in conjunction with PLEAC's annual conference. The conference is usually scheduled for early fall at a different location in Canada each year.

PLEAC provides a valuable forum within which its members can discuss issues in public legal education and information, share programming ideas and best practices, and develop working relationships that can lead to collaborative initiatives.

PLEAC is facing some organizational challenges as it stretches to meet the demands placed on it. The volunteer Board is finding it increasingly difficult to meet growing operational requirements, and in an effort to address this problem, has embarked on establishing a PLEAC office with a paid staff. As well, the Board has begun a strategic planning process with the goal of setting organizational directions for the coming years.

We look forward to an even more vibrant and effective PLEAC better able to serve our membership and the goal of public legal education and information for all Canadians.

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