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2024



Scarborough  
Community  
Legal Services

# ANNUAL REPORT

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# OUR MISSION

Scarborough Community Legal Services assists low-income individuals and groups access justice and protect their legal rights by providing free legal services and working to change systems to benefit people living in poverty. We work with community members, organizations, and social justice groups to achieve our mission. Our four key strategies are: legal services, legal education, community development, and law reform.

## OUR VISION

We envision a community where all people can access justice, have equality of opportunity, and live free from discrimination and poverty.

## OUR VALUES

Respect  
Diversity, Inclusion, & Equity  
Accessibility  
Social Justice  
Community  
Collective Action  
Excellence & Accountability  
Expert & Caring Staff

# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

Over the past year, we have continued our mission to assist low-income individuals and groups in East Scarborough to access justice and protect their legal rights. It is our outstanding team of staff, volunteers, partners, and community who are responsible for our impact. Through our Annual Report, we are excited to share and highlight our accomplishments and successes.

The past year has been both challenging and inspiring for our clinic. We are acutely aware of the growing struggles faced by those in our community. The housing crisis in Toronto has reached alarming heights, with many of our clients paying far more than the 30% of their income on rent, a measure typically used to define affordable rental costs. This crisis has made it increasingly difficult for people in our community to secure stable and affordable housing, creating a ripple effect on their overall well-being.

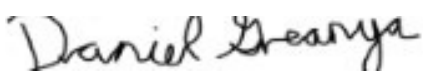
Despite these difficulties, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to advocating for those who are most vulnerable. Over the past year, our legal staff have continued their diligent work on housing, income maintenance, immigration, and employment law matters. We opened more cases and served more clients than in the previous year, ensuring that more of our community members can access justice. East Scarborough is strong. Community members have come together to collectively fight against unfair and unjust systems and we are inspired by the resilience of our community.

In addition to providing direct legal services, we amplified our community development efforts over the last year by engaging with organizations, tenant associations, city councilors, and others to build new relationships and strengthen existing ones. Together, we are pushing for systemic change to address the root causes of poverty and increase access to justice. We have also remained committed to offering public legal education activities and materials in our community, equipping community members with vital information about their rights and available resources.

We continue to be impressed by the dedication and perseverance that our staff bring to their work, and we want to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to them for their impressive efforts over the last year. We also want to thank our volunteer Board members who support and assist all the clinic's efforts to remain responsive to our community. We thank our staff, students, volunteers, and Board members for their tireless efforts and the invaluable part you play in the success of our clinic.

As we look forward to the coming year, we remain committed to continuing this vital work. We are grateful for the trust you place in us and for the continued collaboration of our partners. Together, we can make meaningful progress toward a more just and equitable future for all.

Best regards,



Daniel Greanya  
Chair of the Board



Renee Griffin  
Executive Director

# COMMUNITIES BUILDING JUSTICE TOGETHER

## PROJECT UPDATE

As part of our commitment to anti-discrimination work, in December 2023 we launched a new project, “Communities Building Justice Together” (CBJT). This project is funded by the Law Foundation of Ontario and will continue until June 2025.

### Project Overview

CBJT aims to increase access to justice for Indigenous and Black communities in East Scarborough, in part by developing community-led resources that respect Indigenous and Black voices. We do this by understanding systemic barriers each nation continues to face, centering the well-being of Indigenous and Black people and communities, and developing meaningful relationships with Indigenous and Black community members and organizations. Over the course of the project, we will create sustainable, culturally relevant protocols and resources that address systemic inequalities and promote social justice and access to justice. Indigenous and Black communities will have additional legal tools and support as a result of the project.

## OUR CBJT TEAM



**Kinzi Ahmed**  
CLW  
Black Justice  
Coordinator



**Abby Carpenter**  
CLW  
Indigenous Justice  
Coordinator

During the first phase of the project, CBJT’s focus has been on establishing meaningful relationships with Indigenous and Black community members and organizations, in a good way. We understand that Black and Indigenous communities are unique from one another and that the approach required to develop relationships amongst these communities varies from race to race and nation to nation. In the second half of the project, we will deliver public legal education sessions, materials, and resources that meet the unique needs of our Indigenous and Black communities. We are also providing support in navigating the legal system and offering a platform for community organizing around access to justice issues.

### Community Listening

In 2024, we undertook community listening activities. This exercise has developed into an ongoing conversation with community members and our partners. During this ongoing process, we understand that it is important that we follow Indigenous Legal Orders. In doing so, we will continue the listening process, identify systemic gaps, and address the specific legal needs of Black and Indigenous communities.

### Phase 1: Community Listening / Needs Assessment

To ensure that we could assess the needs of our community, we worked with Evenings and Weekends Consulting. With their team, we developed and led a community listening campaign. This campaign focused on gathering feedback from community members and partner agencies in Scarborough using the following methods:

1. Survey Distribution
2. Open House Meetings:
3. One-on-One Interviews

The draft report of the feedback collected is currently being circulated among staff, Board members, community members, and the project's Project Advisory Committee (PAC) for further input. The final report is expected to be available in the coming months.

### **Project Advisory Committee (PAC)**

To guide the project, we established a Project Advisory Committee consisting of community members and representatives from partner agencies. The PAC generally meets quarterly, with the first meeting having been held on May 12, 2024. The delivery of the project is guided by the PAC and informed by the findings of the community listening campaign conducted in Phase 1. This will ensure that the resources developed are relevant and responsive to the needs of the Indigenous and Black communities in East Scarborough.

### **Phase 2: Strengthening Relationships and Delivering Public Legal Education**

Building on the foundation built in Phase 1, we have begun to focus on strengthening

relationships with community members and agencies within the Indigenous and Black communities and developing our public legal education plan.

### **Key Partnerships**

We want to thank the following organizations with whom we are building strong connections through the project: Malvern Family Resources, TAIBU Community Health Centre, Tropicana Community Services, Black Legal Advocacy Centre, R.I.S.E. Edutainment, 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations, Aboriginal Legal Services, Aboriginal Housing Support Centre, and Native Canadian Centre of Toronto

Communities Building Justice Together is a vital initiative that seeks to address systemic barriers to justice faced by Indigenous and Black communities in Scarborough. We remain committed to fostering strong relationships, delivering meaningful legal services, and empowering communities to organize and advocate for justice.

This year, we continued to celebrate Black History Month by hosting learning events for legal clinic staff. In February our staff were honored to be invited to an advance screening of R.I.S.E. Edutainment's Legal Artivism Program's documentary: RISEN!. This film documents the incredible work and journey of RISE Edutainment and its artists.

We also hosted a discussion panel entitled "The Cascading Effects of Racism and Community



## **STAFF LEARNING EVENTS**

Upheaval". We welcomed special guest speakers, Gordon Cudjoe, Danardo Jones, Nana Yanful, and Roger Love to discuss the impact of anti-Black racism and the Toronto Police Service on our community. This event was attended by community legal clinic staff from across the province.

This year, we also had the opportunity to work with Geraldine King of NVision Insight Group. Geraldine led a full day workshop for our staff and Board members where we discussed the Calls to Action made in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report and the Final Report of the National Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Finally, we welcomed Fae Johnstone and Sreya Roy of Wisdom2Action to lead a workshop with our staff where we explored the core concepts of trans and gender diverse identities and considered inclusive practices to better serve and support 2SLGBTQIA+, trans and gender diverse community members and clients.

# COMMUNITY CHAMPION AWARD

## WE PROUDLY PRESENT THIS YEAR'S AWARD TO EAST SCARBOROUGH STOREFRONT

The East Scarborough Storefront uses the power of collaboration to support people and build community in East Scarborough. They believe that it takes collective community responses to keep people engaged to address complex community based and social issues.

The Storefront focuses on helping networks of residents, social service organizations, academic institutions, businesses, planners and architects engage in meaningful discussions, run programs, organize events, share learning and participate in a wide range of activities effectively and collectively.

We are excited to continue our work with Storefront. A recent example of our collaboration is a drop in program where our legal staff offer services on site at the Storefront's location on the first Thursday of each month.

With this award, we celebrate the Storefront's dedication to leadership, engagement, and positive change in our community.

**LEGAL SUPPORT**

Scarborough Community Legal Services provides free legal services to low-income residents of Scarborough who live east of Midland Ave.

Legal Support Services

Legal services in the following areas of law:

- Tenants' Rights in Market-Rent & Subsidized (RGI) Housing
- Social Assistance (OW, ODSP, CPP-D)
- Employment
- Immigration

Book an appointment & a legal worker will reach out to you within 48 hrs

Notary / Commissioning Affidavits Services ONLY

Every 1st Thursday of the month  
**By appointment only**  
 Time: 10 am - 1 pm.  
 Location: 4040 Lawrence Avenue East, Scarborough, ON, M1E 2R2

To book an appointment, contact: 416-208-9889




## OUR LAW STUDENT PROGRAM

In 2023-24, we welcomed an articling student and an LPP student to our team. Our law student program has been a great success and both students have continued to work with us after completing their placements. Our articling student shared some reflections on the program:

My articling experience was marked by exceptional support and growth. From the outset, the staff exhibited an unwavering commitment to my professional and personal growth as a legal advocate. In the initial month, I had the opportunity to volunteer at the Afro-Carib Festival. This experience proved invaluable as it allowed me to engage with the Scarborough community and gain insights into their pressing legal issues. As the articling term progressed, I was entrusted with managing my own caseload, with supervising staff ensuring that the workload was appropriate for my level of experience. My familiarity with the Landlord and Tenant Board and the Social Benefits Tribunal grew, enabling me to represent clients effectively at hearings.

Beyond the legal work, the SCLS staff facilitated regular social events and outings. These activities provided opportunities to build strong interpersonal relationships with colleagues, fostering a supportive and collaborative work environment that has left a lasting impression.

My experience at SCLS has been exceptionally positive, and it is not an exaggeration to describe it as the best workplace I have encountered. The standout aspect of my time at SCLS has been the remarkable team members and the exceptional working environment. I am both grateful and proud to have completed my articling term at SCLS and to continue contributing to the Scarborough community.

# 2023 - 2024 BY THE NUMBERS



In the last 12 months  
we opened  
**2418**  
new cases

**183**  
Employment



**1280**  
Housing



**10%**

increase from 2023-  
2024 housing cases



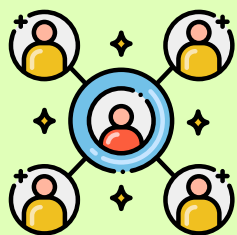
**679**  
Income  
Maintenance

**58.6%** of these cases were  
OSDP disability  
eligibility appeals

**216**  
Immigration



**60**  
Admin & Other



**2091**  
referrals  
were made to  
community  
resources

**108**  
initiatives  
related to public  
legal education,  
community  
development, law  
reform, other non-  
casework related  
activities were  
undertaken



**50**  
community  
support work files  
were opened



# EMPLOYMENT TEAM REPORT

Over the last year, our employment law team has continued to assist workers from our community with wrongful terminations and workplace issues. As in previous years, many of our clients over the last twelve months have been vulnerable workers, including those who identify as women, visible minorities, and persons with disabilities.

Our partnerships with inter-clinic groups continued to be a great resource and source of support for the team. We continued to participate in the Workers' Rights Action Group, an inter-clinic group that meets regularly to discuss current issues that vulnerable workers face and review recent changes in employment law. Likewise, our employment team continues to work closely with the TEEILS program, consulting closely with staff lawyers Richa Sandill and John Wigle of Don Valley Community Legal Services on many employment law files. These partnerships have allowed us to provide an increased level of service to our clients.

We also want to extend our sincere thanks to the Richa, John, and the TEEILS team for their ongoing support as our employment team goes through a period of transition with the departure of our staff lawyer, Tisha Alam. We thank Tisha for all her incredible work on behalf of vulnerable workers during her time with the clinic.

In the last twelve months we successfully resolved a number of cases before the Human Rights Tribunal including cases in which we represented a driver of a delivery company with a disability, a server who experienced sex based discrimination, a woman who was terminated after announcing her pregnancy, and an employee who was denied accommodation for prayer-related breaks.

We also resolved a number of wrongful dismissals claims in the Small Claims Court, in addition to successfully representing a client at the Social Security Tribunal in an appeal of a decision regarding significant EI overpayments.

The team also continued its involvement in public legal education, offering legal education to our community members and agencies. These activities have continued to strengthen our relationships with community partners and help educate vulnerable community members about their rights as employees.

As we continue our transition and grow our employment team, we remain committed to assisting and supporting workers with their employment law matters. In the New Year, the team will be looking for opportunities to promote the employment law services we offer to even more members of our community.

## OUR EMPLOYMENT TEAM



**Petrea McConvey**  
CLW



**Anum Malik**  
Staff Lawyer  
(On Leave)

Former team members in 2023-2024:  
Tisha Alam, Staff Lawyer

We also received support from **Richa Sandill**, Staff Lawyer (on leave) and **John Wigle**, Staff Lawyer, from the Toronto East Employment & Immigration Law Services program (TEEILS)

# HOUSING TEAM REPORT

SCLS has experienced a marked increase in new housing calls to the clinic over the past year, and unfortunately, the majority of these calls are related to evictions. The current rental crisis, and drastic increase in Toronto rents over the past five years, has provided considerable incentive for landlords to evict their long term tenants.

The high cost of rent in Toronto, has of course, made it more difficult for tenants to pay their monthly rent, resulting in a noticeable increase in evictions due to rent arrears. Unfortunately, each time a tenant is evicted the unit can be, and almost always is, rented at a significantly higher monthly rent, contributing to the overall increase in rents in the City.

Because of the increase in eviction applications, we have less resources to represent tenants with maintenance and tenants rights applications. We are, however, able to provide advice and information regarding tenant applications.

## OUR HOUSING TEAM



**Janet Brakohiapa**  
Staff Lawyer



**Kevin Laforest**  
Staff Lawyer



**Petrea McConvey**  
CLW



**Linda Mitchell**  
CLW



**Nishat Kazmi**  
Licensing  
Candidate



**Em Pedota**  
Licensing  
Candidate

In many of these cases we provide ongoing assistance, and hearing preparation so that tenants are better able to represent themselves, at their hearings before the Landlord and Tenant Board (“LTB”). Even though it can take many months, or even more than a year, for a hearing to be scheduled, we encourage and support tenants in their effort to hold landlord’s accountable.

One of the clinic’s priorities in the area of housing is to save and preserve affordable housing. This is especially important where an eviction application is brought by landlords for subsidized and affordable units. The majority of clients who attend the clinic for housing issues cannot afford the market rents and rent increases which have become the norm in the past few years. Many of our clients spend more than the 30% of their income on rent. Lately we have observed that some clients spend up, to or more than, 80% of their income on rent, leaving them very little for other living expenses. Most of our clients living in subsidized units cannot afford rent without their subsidies.

Increasingly, we are representing tenants at the Landlord and Tenant Board for eviction applications for cause such, as alleged anti-social behavior. Such cases may include eviction application for alleged interference with landlords or other tenants, damage, impairment of safety or illegal acts.

Former team members in  
2023-2024:

**Lavanya Subramaniam, CLW**  
**Christopher Lin, CLW**

Several years ago we had to step up to take on some of these cases because LAO stopped issuing certificates for these matters. In order to provide access to justice to individuals who are eligible for our services, we have had to increasingly take on these cases to address potential miscarriage of justice to some vulnerable clients in our community.

### **Caseworker Successes**

One of the successful cases SCLS dealt with this year involved a tenant who is a senior with multiple health issues. Their social housing landlord applied to terminate their tenancy because a large number of guns were found in their unit. It was clear that this tenant's son who was not a tenant at the unit but visited frequently had been causing the issues. As a result of their disability they client had no idea that illegal activity was going on in their unit.

The decision maker at the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) hearing must hear and consider all the relevant circumstances of the landlord and the tenant as well as the impact on other occupants at the rental property in deciding whether to delay or deny the eviction application. Relying on provisions in the *Residential Tenancies Act* (RTA), we made submissions to show that the impact on the tenant if she was evicted would outweigh the impact on the Landlord and other occupants of the residential complex if the tenant was granted relief from eviction. The tenant's rent geared to income tenancy was saved. We relied on the fact that the son was incarcerated for a lengthy period and would not be able to attend the unit. The safety concern to the community was therefore removed. It was ordered that the tenant remain in the unit subject to conditions contained in the order issued by the Board.

In another case, a tenant, a senior with mental health disabilities allegedly had a serious altercation another tenant at the complex. Again relying on provision in the RTA as well as the *Human Rights Code* (Code) related ground of disability, the tenant's eviction was prevented by conditions being ordered to maintain their tenancy.

It is worth noting that most of these can be resolved without eviction if it is demonstrated that the clients have a disability or other Code related ground which the decision maker has to take into consideration when making a decision to terminate a tenancy.

### **Above Guideline Rent Increases**

The clinic also assisted organized tenants at 25 Cougar Court to negotiate and settle two Above-Guideline-Rent Increase ('AGIs') at their building. AGIs remain a preferred tool for landlords, particularly larger corporate landlords, to raise rents quickly and beyond the bounds of the provincial rent control mechanisms. In 2019-2020 there were 758 applications for AGIs, up from 252 application in 2011-2012.

As per the legislation, AGIs have to be approved at the LTB, and the Board does permit tenants to raise objections before approving or denying an application. Practically speaking, however, the defences available to tenants are limited – where landlords have met the eligibility criteria to be awarded an AGI, they will generally succeed.

At 25 Cougar Court, tenants decided not to follow traditional pathways to defend against the AGI, rather, they chose to negotiate directly with their landlord. SCLS facilitated these negotiations, providing tenants legal information, and offering space for negotiations to take place. More importantly, however is what SCLS did not do. SCLS did not insert itself as a needed 'middle-person' between tenants and landlord. Rather, we created the space and provided the resources for tenants to do so themselves. When tenants had reached an agreement, SCLS assisted to ensure the necessary paperwork was completed and filed with the LTB to codify those terms. This work stands as a possible precedent for the clinic to follow in supporting organized tenants in other buildings.

SCLS is not the vanguard in the fight of working class tenants against their landlords. Rather, we are part of a broader community that can assist and support tenants while empowering our community members to be active participants in their own struggle.

# SUBSIDIZED HOUSING EVICTIONS FOR ARREARS

Assisting subsidized housing tenants at risk of eviction because they've fallen behind with their rent payments has always been a priority for SCLS. Subsidized housing is housing of last resort. Most of our clients are people with disabilities, seniors, sole support parents, and other vulnerable individuals. Eviction would be devastating as the barriers to finding affordable housing are practically insurmountable.

Most of our RGI cases are with tenants living in Toronto Community Housing (TCHC), but we also assist tenants who live in housing co-ops, non-profits, and those who have subsidies in private buildings. We are now seeing a shift in arrears cases from TCHC since the mandate of the Office of the Commissioner of Housing Equity (OCHE) expanded to include all TCHC tenants. When TCHC staff is unable to resolve an arrears case, they must send the case to the OCHE before an application for eviction is filed at the LTB.

Many of our files are cases that were not resolved by OCHE. These cases tend to be challenging. The arrears balances are often quite high and the repayment terms must be for long periods given the limited incomes of our clients.

As in previous years, we continue to deal with cases that involve the cancellation of subsidies and errors in the calculation of the subsidized rent. Eviction cases with these issues are challenging because the LTB does not have jurisdiction over the calculation or administration of rent subsidies. We have to try to resolve these issues directly with the housing provider or request a review by the City before the LTB hearing. In our experience, the City doesn't generally expedite reviews even if this means the LTB hearing will happen before the City's review. Often, we have to try to get the LTB hearing adjourned to give us time to resolve these issues. We have a high success rate dealing with these types of cases, but tenants who do not have legal assistance are at a serious disadvantage. They risk having to pay arrears they don't actually owe or be evicted. The province has refused to amend the *Residential Tenancies Act* to give the LTB jurisdiction over the calculation and administration of RGI rents.

## MR. M'S STORY

Mr. M has a mental health disability that impacted his ability to manage his finances without supports. After his ODSP benefits were cancelled, ODSP stopped paying his rent directly to TCHC and arrears accrued on his account. These arrears increased even more rapidly after his subsidy was cancelled and his rent was raised to the market rent.

Mr. M was unaware that TCHC had filed an eviction application at the LTB and he didn't attend the hearing. An eviction order was issued and the Sheriff subsequently enforced the order. Mr. M went to a homeless shelter, but after he was robbed, he was too afraid to go back. It was winter and he had nowhere else to go. A volunteer from a cultural agency noticed Mr. M had been sleeping in a nearby bus shelter and he brought him to our clinic. While there was no remedy available at the LTB which would allow Mr. M to regain possession of his unit, with support from the OCHE, we were able to successfully advocate to have his tenancy reinstated. TCHC agreed to let Mr. M move back in and also restore his subsidy if the arrears were paid in full within a certain timeframe.

We successfully advocated with ODSP to reinstate Mr. M's benefits without having to go through a lengthy appeal process. A portion of the arrears was paid by ODSP and the Housing Stabilization Fund. Volunteers from the cultural agency organized a fundraiser and raised enough money to pay the balance of the arrears. Mr. M's tenancy and subsidy were reinstated and he moved back to his unit a few days before Christmas.

## MR. E'S STORY

Mr. E is an 82 year old senior who had been living in a TCHC unit with his spouse for the past six years. Shortly after he reported to TCHC that his spouse had passed away, he was told in a curt telephone call from a TCHC staff member that he had to leave the unit because he was not on the lease and that TCHC was going to change the locks to the unit.

Mr. E had nowhere else to go and couldn't afford private market rents on his limited income. He was afraid to go to a homeless shelter.

Although Mr. E wasn't on the lease, his presence in the unit wasn't hidden from TCHC and he was well known to the superintendent and neighbours. Nonetheless, there was no remedy available at the LTB to stop TCHC from locking him out. But to us, this was unconscionable. We saw this as another potential tragedy in the making, as was the case of Al Gosling, a senior who died in 2009 at the age of 82 when he became homeless after he was evicted from his subsidized apartment by Toronto Community Housing.

We faced significant challenges in advocating on behalf of Mr. E. We were told that he would have to become homeless and live on the street in order to be eligible for priority rehousing in a subsidized unit. This was unacceptable to us. After six months of advocacy with TCHC and the City of Toronto, Mr. E was finally allowed to sign a lease and remain in his subsidized unit, without having to experience homelessness.

## IMMIGRATION TEAM REPORT

This year once again saw many significant changes to the immigration system. Our clinic has continued to work, largely in the area of family reunification applications, pushing at the boundaries of the immigration system and holding immigration decision-makers accountable to community members.

Our intake calls this year included an unusual number of questionable "procedural fairness" letters from immigration visa offices, particularly for applications to bring the family members of protected persons in Canada. These letters contain a list of complicated rules and then threaten to refuse applications unless the applicant provides an adequate response. We assisted with a number of responses this year on

behalf of clients, and we're happy to report great success correcting immigration officer's legal and factual errors before applications are refused and litigation is required. Each successful response means an application is back on track, which spares clients months or even years of delay and uncertainty.

We supplemented this legal work by making the community aware of this disturbing trend in our public legal education sessions.

This year we successfully judicially reviewed the refusal of an application for a Temporary Resident Permit for family violence (TRP). Our client made an application for a TRP to stabilize her immigration status and allow her to escape a

long-term situation of abuse. After significant delay processing her application, she received a shocking refusal letter. Our clinic brought an application to Judicially Review that negative decision at the Federal Court.

We prepared an argument demonstrating that the officer ignored or misunderstood the law, the policy guidelines for this program, and the clear evidence provided with the application. After reviewing our submissions, the Department of Justice agreed to settle this case without requiring a hearing.

Our client's TRP application was then quickly approved by a new officer. Since then, our client has left her abusive relationship and is building a new, independent life for herself and her young child. She has already used her newfound stability to become a source of help and support for others in the community. We are now assisting with an application for permanent residence in Canada, and we hope to have a positive update on this case in the coming year.

We assisted a single mother of two to apply to sponsor her youngest who was born overseas. The mother was not eligible to sponsor when she submitted her application. SCLS provided detailed submissions supporting the mother's application to sponsor her child for permanent resident status in Canada and argued that the best interests of the child should overcome any possible ineligibility. IRCC accepted our submissions, approved the mother as a sponsor and we expect permanent residence to finalize shortly.

SCLS assisted a client who had arrived in Canada as a convention refugee to sponsor his daughter who had remained in the home country. While the application was processing, conditions in the home country deteriorated significantly. This made life dangerous for the client's minor daughter. We advocated with IRCC for expedited processing and, working alongside the United Nations International Organization for Migration, were able to secure the daughter a single-journey travel document and a flight to Canada. The daughter has now arrived in Canada where she was finally reunited with her father—and got to meet her two new baby brothers.

We have continued to watch for important applications for permanent residence on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, including an application that was recently approved for an elderly client. The submissions in this case built on a number of helpful Federal Court decisions that encourage immigration officers to abandon a mechanical approach and instead recognize the complicated humanitarian situations of elderly people. Collecting evidence for this application brought us into contact with well-respected academics, inspiring grass-roots women's movements working on the ground in the country of origin, and international medical experts responsible for drafting official reports for the UNHCR. We are very pleased to see that this case had a positive outcome and that our client can now feel safe and secure here in Canada for the first time in decades.

We look forward to the opportunity to continue to work with community members in the coming year.

## OUR IMMIGRATION TEAM



**Matthew Smith**  
Staff Lawyer



**Janet Brakohiapa**  
Staff Lawyer



**Kevin Laforest**  
Staff Lawyer

We receive support from **Jennifer Wan**, Staff Lawyer, from the Toronto East Employment & Immigration Law Services program (TEEILS).

# INCOME MAINTENANCE TEAM

## REPORT

Over the past year, our social assistance team has continued to provide vital legal advice and assistance to residents within our catchment area. We have remained dedicated to community engagement, advocacy, and public legal education while also organizing training sessions for legal clinic caseworkers across Ontario. This report highlights the key developments, trends, and community initiatives from the past year.

### Social Assistance - Updates

#### ODSP Updates

In July 2024, Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates increased by 4.5%, following the inflation-based adjustment that began in 2023. This increase applies to various ODSP benefits, including:

- Basic needs and shelter maximum amounts for singles and families.

## OUR INCOME MAINTENANCE TEAM



**Anum Malik**  
Staff Lawyer  
(On Leave))



**Kinzi Ahmed**  
CLW



**Randy McLin**  
CLW



**Nishat Kazmi**  
Licensing  
Candidate



**Em Pedota**  
Licensing  
Candidate



**Imbisat Chaudhry**  
Community  
Support Worker

**Josh Carson**  
Staff Lawyer

- Board and lodge amounts for singles and families.
- Amounts provided for couples where both partners have disabilities.
- Amounts for services provided by Long-Term Care Homes or Specialized Care Residences.

As of July 1, 2024, individuals receiving ODSP saw this 4.5% increase in their payments, with higher amounts being disbursed at the end of July. For example, a single person's payment could be up to \$1,368 for basic needs and shelter.

This adjustment reflects the Ontario government's commitment to tying ODSP rates to inflation, which began in 2023. While these increases are necessary, they still fall short of meeting the full cost of living, especially given rising housing and food prices.

Advocacy efforts continue to push for more substantial increases to ensure that ODSP recipients can meet their basic needs.

#### New Federal Disability Benefit

The *Canada Disability Benefit Act*, which received Royal Assent on June 22, 2023, lays the foundation for the new Canada Disability Benefit aimed at reducing poverty and improving the financial security of working-age people with disabilities.

The benefit is expected to begin payments in July 2025, with the following proposed eligibility requirements:

- Residency in Canada, as defined by the Income Tax Act.
- A valid Disability Tax Credit certificate.
- Ages between 18 and 64.
- Filing of an income tax return with the Canada Revenue Agency for the previous tax year.

Eligible recipients must also be one of the following:

- A Canadian citizen.
- A permanent resident.
- A protected person.
- A temporary resident who has lived in Canada for at least 18 months.
- A person registered or entitled to be registered under the Indian Act.

While the benefit is still under development, it represents a significant step forward in supporting Canadians with disabilities. We will continue to monitor the progress of the Canada Disability Benefit Regulations and provide updates as they become available.

### **Changes to Ontario Works**

Effective January 1, 2024, significant changes were planned for Ontario Works (OW), particularly concerning employment services:

- OW will no longer offer employment programs or provide employment-related funds to recipients.
- Employment Ontario service providers will take over the role of helping OW recipients find or prepare for work.
- OW will continue to manage case management services focused on financial needs that are not employment-related and will connect residents to supports and services that help address barriers to job readiness.

These changes are part of the provincial government's broader vision to transform Ontario's employment services, making them more efficient and responsive to job seekers' needs. Our team remains committed to

supporting OW recipients through these transitions and ensuring they receive the necessary services.

### **Community Development and Outreach**

Members of our social assistance team led many of the clinic's outreach and community development activities this year.

We continued to participate in the Social Assistance Advocacy Committee - a committee of social assistance caseworkers across Toronto to advocate for our clients and increase our knowledge of this legal area. We have taken on a major role in the committee, coordinating training for caseworkers on social assistance matters. Most recently, we hosted a workshop for caseworkers on the topic of estates, trusts and assets for ODSP clients.

As always, we continue to provide public legal education sessions to the broader community as well as to community agencies.

### **Enhanced Support from the Community Support Work Team**

Finally, over the last year Imbisat Chaudhry, SCLS's Social Worker/Community Support Worker stepped into a part-time caseworker role for the social assistance team, while managing her role as a Community Support Worker.

Imbisat assisted clients with their ODSP appeals and represented a number of clients at their Social Benefits Tribunal hearings. Clients involved in this process are quite vulnerable and securing ODSP as a stable source of income is one challenge out of many in their lives. In addition to supporting them with their appeals, Imbisat provided further case management supports for clients who needed help in other areas such as obtaining medical referrals, getting connected to services such as DSO, and more.

This dual role of a social assistance caseworker and a social worker emphasized how intertwined the roles can be. Clients on social assistance are oftentimes struggling with other things as well such as housing, employment, health, childcare, and more. To help our clients, it is important to provide assistance holistically without isolating the legal aspect from their case.



# COMMUNITY SUPPORT WORK TEAM REPORT

This past year, the Community Support Team has maintained its commitment to delivering direct case management and support services to vulnerable clients in the community. The primary reasons for referrals during this period included requests for assistance with their housing, connections to appropriate healthcare services and programs, and support with accessing general community resources.

Housing costs have continued to rise throughout the city, averaging over \$2,000 for a one-bedroom unit in Scarborough. Clients at imminent risk of eviction are directed to contact Central Intake to secure shelter space but are extremely unlikely to secure a bed due to the increasingly high demand for shelters and insufficient city intervention to address the underlying cause. Clients are instructed to contact Central Intake again every 2-3 hours to inquire about space again, creating a circumrotation of uncertainty and no immediate direction on support with navigating their dire situation. The escalating cost of living in the Greater Toronto Area exacerbates difficulties in securing new housing, particularly for clients receiving social assistance, due to discrimination and stigma around their source of income as well as the struggle to afford current market rates. We assist clients in connecting to housing supports such as the Housing Help

## OUR COMMUNITY SUPPORT WORK TEAM



**Imbisat Chaudhry**  
Community Support Worker

**Tien Huynh**  
BSW Student

Centre, VHA, and provide direct casework through assisting clients submit applications for subsidized housing, generating a housing list of “affordable” market rent prices, navigating the shelter system through Central Intake, and more. Despite our efforts, these broader systemic and institutional barriers to access housing persist and continue to get worse.

In June 2024, the Community Support Team established a partnership with The Furniture Bank, an essential resource in the community, which increases access to furniture for clients in need. This collaboration enables the team to refer clients to the program directly, streamlining access to these essential services without the need for intermediary involvement.

The Community Support Team has successfully continued its student social worker program, hosting two 4th year BSW students from Toronto Metropolitan University from Fall 2023 to Spring 2024. The students provided direct casework services to clients, conducted research on community programs and resources, addressing the needs of the client. We welcomed a new BSW student, Tien Huynh, again in September 2024.

In the following year, we aspire to enhance and solidify our community relationships through direct service and collaboration with other local agencies. The Community Support Team also intends to increase awareness on pressing issues in the community such as housing, access to healthcare, barriers accessing social assistance, and more, through direct client advocacy and assisting the client while they are navigating these oppressive and harmful systems.

Former team members in 2023-2024:

**Julie Karakkattu**, BSW Student  
**Shauna DeSouza**, BSW Student

# SCLS IN THE COMMUNITY

This year, our community development initiatives included:

- **Monthly Drop-In Services:** We introduced a monthly drop-in at East Scarborough Storefront to provide legal services including notary/commissioning documents and public legal education workshops.
- **Continued Engagement with Toronto Public Library:** We grew our partnership with the Toronto Public Library, ensuring continued access to legal resources and information.
- **Community Presence:** We participated in various community events, including tabling at community meetings, Homeless Connect’s Community Connect Event, Afro Carib Fest, KGO Neighbourhood Arts Festival, Let’s Celebrate Pride Scarborough, 2 Spirited People of the First Nations 3rd Annual Pow Wow, and Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities’ Tamil Heritage Month celebration, among others. These events allowed us to connect with community members and provide essential legal information.

Community development and outreach are part of our ongoing efforts to ensure that residents of Scarborough have access to the legal information and services they need and to strengthen our presence within the community.



**THE COMMUNITY GUARDIAN**

## AMAZING PLACE

KGO NEIGHBOURHOOD ARTS FESTIVAL  
May 25th & 26th, 2024, 12 pm - 3 pm  
Multiple Locations

**Saturday, May 25th, 2024**  
BGC East Scarborough  
100 Galloway Road

**Sunday, May 26th, 2024**  
Cedar Ridge Creative Centre  
225 Confederation Drive

East Scarborough Storefront  
4040 Lawrence Avenue East

Native Child and Family Services  
156 Galloway Road

**GALLERY SHOW**  
Cedar Ridge Creative Centre  
May 11th - May 29th, 2024  
Mon - Thurs: 9 am - 10 pm  
Fri - Sun: 9 am - 4 pm



## Community Connect

**ACSA Community Services**  
4155 Sheppard Ave E #100,  
Toronto, ON M1S 1T4

Wed. May 22nd, 2024,  
10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

**Services Available**

- Hearing Assessments
- Foot care
- Dental Care
- Animal Services
- ID Clinic
- Employment Services
- Library Outreach
- Legal Supports
- Hygiene Kits
- Clothing and Shoes

**50 YEARS**  
ACSA COMMUNITY SERVICES

Heritage Skills Development Centre presents

# THE 13TH ANNUAL AFRO-CARIB FEST

**AUG 24-25, 2024**

**Thomson Memorial Park**  
1005 Brimley Road,  
Scarborough

**12:00 PM-9:00 PM**

LIVE PERFORMANCES & CULTURAL PARADE

VENDOR MARKETPLACE & BEER TENT

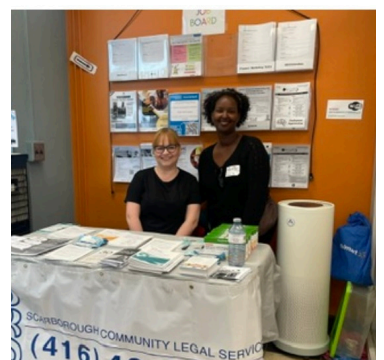
DANCE COMPETITIONS & PRIZE GIVEAWAYS

3 SPIRITED PEOPLE OF THE 1ST NATIONS

# SAVE THE DATE

**3RD ANNUAL 2-SPIRIT POWWOW**

SATURDAY JUNE 1, 2024  
DOWNSVIEW PARK, TORONTO



# LET'S CELEBRATE PRIDE

## SCARBOROUGH

**FRIDAY, JUNE 7 3:00 PM TO 7:00 PM**  
MALVERN TOWN CENTRE PARKING LOT,  
31 TAPSCOTT RD, SCARBOROUGH, ON M1B 4Y7

**FREE ENTRY**

# ADMINISTRATION TEAM REPORT

This year brought transition and progress for our Administration team at Scarborough Community Legal Services. With Brad Evoy's departure, we welcomed Tapradi Ntogaiti as our new Administration Manager in August. Despite the changes, our team stayed focused on supporting the clinic's mission.

Looking ahead, our team remains dedicated to supporting SCLS, optimizing processes, and delivering top-quality service. We're excited to build on our progress and make an even greater impact next year.

Our team members are some of the first folks you'll meet within the Clinic and are here to support you. We are always excited to connect with our valued clients and look forward to once again finding new ways to serve you better in the year ahead.



**Renee Griffin**  
Executive Director



**Tapradi Ntogaiti**  
Administration Manager

**Maggie Abebe**  
Admin Assistant

**Valerie Johnbull**  
Admin Assistant

**Lana Kroutskikh**  
Office Administrator

Former team members in 2023-2024:

**Brad Evoy**, Administration Manager

**Muhammad Kutubuddin**, Admin Support Worker

Our office pups, Syd and Andre, make a ruff day into a pawsome one!



## THANK YOU TO OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Our clinic is governed by an independent Board of Directors, accountable to both the membership and the community we serve. The Board ensures the financial health of the organization, oversees adherence to bylaws and policies, and provides direction and supervision to the Executive Director.

For 2024-25, our Board members include: Daniel Greanya (Chair), Andrea Ajurias (Vice Chair), Canice Mok (Treasurer), Sal Santos (Secretary), Sephira Amo, Kimberley Covey, Piraveena Ganesarasa, Ultra Gautam, Neville Jacobs, Anees Munshi, Kris-Andre Smith, Steven Torresan, and Nadia Umadat.

We extend our sincere thanks to all our volunteer Board members, whose tireless efforts continue to support the clinic's mission and enrich the community we serve.

Complete audited financial statements are available.  
Please contact us to request a copy.

# FINANCES

For the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024

## SCARBOROUGH COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES

### Statement of Financial Position

March 31, 2024

	General Fund	Legal Disbursement Fund	Capital Fund	Non-LAO Fund	2024 Total	2023 Total
<b>ASSETS</b>						
<b>CURRENT</b>						
Cash	\$ 4,976	\$ 5,125	\$ -	\$ 31,500	\$ 41,601	\$ 12,113
Amounts receivable	-	-	-	3,607	3,607	1,679
Government remittances	13,371	88	-	-	13,459	10,550
Prepaid expenses	30,283	-	-	-	30,283	31,520
Interfund receivable (Note 3)	3,793	-	-	-	3,793	1,471
	52,423	5,213	-	35,107	92,743	57,333
<b>PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT (Note 4)</b>	-	-	2,339	-	2,339	6,123
	\$ 52,423	\$ 5,213	\$ 2,339	\$ 35,107	\$ 95,082	\$ 63,456
<b>LIABILITIES</b>						
<b>CURRENT</b>						
Bank indebtedness	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 7,515
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	120,002	-	-	-	120,002	130,377
Deferred income (Note 5)	20,764	-	-	30,709	51,473	-
Interfund payable (Note 3)	-	-	-	3,793	3,793	1,471
	140,766	-	-	34,502	175,268	139,363
<b>FUND BALANCE (DEFICIT)</b>						
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	(88,343)	5,213	2,339	605	(80,186)	(75,907)
	\$ 52,423	\$ 5,213	\$ 2,339	\$ 35,107	\$ 95,082	\$ 63,456

## REVENUES

2022-23 Total: \$ 2,010,810

2023-24 Total: \$ 2,113,476

## EXPENSES

2022-23 Total: \$2,022,335

2023-24 Total: \$ 2,116,968

## LAO CALCULATED SURPLUS

2022-23 Total: \$787

2023-24 Total: \$ (2,132.34)

# THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS

We thank our primary funder, **Legal Aid Ontario**, for their continued support of our work. We also thank the **Law Foundation of Ontario**, **Government of Canada - Employment and Social Development Canada** and the **City of Toronto** for their project funding over the last year.



Government  
of Canada

Gouvernement  
du Canada



# WE REMEMBER...



Improving conditions and ensuring dignity for those living in poverty is at the heart of all our work. As we continue to work towards these goals, we are inspired by the memory of Al Gosling who died in 2009 at the age of 82 when he became homeless after he was evicted from his subsidized apartment by Toronto Community Housing. As we reflect on the last year, we remember Mr. Gosling and all those who have died as a result of poverty and homelessness.

## **Scarborough Community Legal Services**

695 Markham Rd, Suite 9

Toronto, Ontario M1H 2A5

Phone: 416-438-7182

Fax: 416-438-9869

[www.scarboroughcommunitylegal.ca](http://www.scarboroughcommunitylegal.ca)