



BUILDING THE BEST TEAMS:

Naming and Nurturing the “Fire in the Belly” in Legal Clinic Staff

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1) Introduction

a) What is a “fire in the belly”?

“Fire in the belly” has been described as “the call to action that arises out of one’s inability to stand by in the face of unfairness, inequality, and oppression.”¹ Some are more comfortable describing “a fire in the belly” as a “passion of the heart”. It can be whatever motivates or inspires us to take action or be involved. Many people involved with legal clinic work identify with this term as best describing their passion for their work.

b) What was this project about?

The Fire in the Belly Project was first conceptualized by a small group of people who were developing Legal Aid Ontario’s first international conference on Clinic Law “Connections and Directions” in 2003.² We wanted to find a way to capture, encourage and reflect the energy, enthusiasm and commitment that Ontario community legal clinic staff and members of their Board of Directors bring to the work with and on behalf of low-income clients and communities. We knew that the last few years had been difficult and discouraging for clinic staff. Many hard won gains for our client community had been eroded by government action and societal inaction. Furthermore, we had been facing conflict and uncertainty in our new relationship with Legal Aid Ontario, the principal funder for community legal clinics in this province.

The project gave us an organized opportunity to exchange stories and reflect on the past, present and future of our work as poverty law advocates. What motivates us? What sustains us? What strengthens, weakens or extinguishes the fire in the belly? What can we do to re-ignite smoldering embers? How can we support each other to keep our passion strong?

The other objectives of the project were to:

- Foster a greater understanding of how and why our peers approach our shared work

¹Ada Shen-Jaffe, Executive Director of Columbia Legal Services, “The Management Information Exchange Journal” (Spring 2002).

² Program committee members providing initial encouragement included ARCH Board member Sandi Bell, LAO Conference Organizer Ian Morrison, the LAO Policy Department’s Mary Marrone, Parkdale’s Academic Director Professor Janet Mosher and clinic Executive Directors Michael Cormier, Terry Hunter, and Michele Leering. The “Fire in the Belly” project team included Mary Collins (then articling student with a private firm, currently Clinic Lawyer), Richard Ferriss (Clinic Lawyer), Michele Leering and Jody Maltby (Community Legal Worker).

- Create a collection of inspirational ideas and articles to invigorate present and future staff and Board members
- Encourage recruitment and employment practices to foster highly motivated staff and Board members to join or continue in our work

One of the most important parts of the project was the process we followed to encourage people to reflect on their involvement in this work and to share these stories and reflections with others. The work of the project included:

- Creating an on-line survey which attracted more than 50 respondents³
- Finding out who worked in community legal clinics – who is on our work teams?⁴
- Developing and disseminating an inspirational and eclectic collection of articles and quotes⁵
- Creating a visual display of some of the survey responses and inspirational quotes in a quiet reflection area at the June 2003 conference
- Facilitating several focus groups held prior to the conference
- Designing and facilitating a well-attended workshop at the conference that attracted approximately 50 participants including Board and staff members.

As we reviewed the survey responses, the input and ideas shared by participants in the focus groups, and the June 2003 conference workshop, it became clear that we needed to create a mechanism to "tell our stories" as advocates for justice. The depth of commitment and vision shared by respondents and workshop participants was itself inspirational. It became clear that the reflective exercise we had started had become a capacity building one for the clinic system – and had resonated with many participants. This participatory, reflective and visioning exercise needs to continue to develop and become part of our shared history and lexicon. Allowing us to name why we do this work and the opportunity to "listen for a change" has been motivating and thought-provoking. We created this report as a way to "share our stories".

³ The majority of survey respondents were legal clinic staff. Responses from all five staff groups were received. There was a more limited response from Board members and Student Legal Aid Society staff and students.

⁴ At the time we requested the information, few statistics were available. Clinic Services Office provided this brief overview of the demographics of legal clinic staff.

- The youngest clinic employee is 19 and the oldest is 73. The average age is 45.
- The number of years working in the clinic system varied from 0-32 years.
- Fifty percent of the employees have been employed for less than 10 years and the other half for more than 10 years.
- The gender breakdown is 130 males and 405 females.
- 530 positions as follows: 108 Community Legal Workers, 151 Lawyers, 80 Lawyers/Executive Directors, 68 Office Managers, and 87 Support Staff.

⁵ These were posted on the project's web pages, were included in a package provided to every legal clinic and to every workshop participant, and on the conference CD distributed in April 2004. Some are included in Appendix III.

Reflecting on the findings can help us to begin to create a positive vision for the future. We need to be constantly seeking ways to unleash the "people power" (sometimes described as "social capital" in management circles) that energizes our work for clients and community so that it can be used to its fullest potential.

The scope of this article is restricted to reporting on what we learned about legal clinic and Student Legal Aid Society staff as they comprised the majority of the survey respondents. All the quotes are taken from the written survey responses. The feedback from the focus groups and the workshop deliberations provided the basic foundation for the recommendations. A discussion about how to build the best Board teams is beyond the scope of this article.

The authors offer their thanks to the many people who took the time to complete the on-line survey, or attend the focus groups or workshops. Without their time, effort, self-reflection and honest sharing, this project would not have been possible.

2) What we learned about...

a) How do people come to choose legal clinic work?

Most respondents indicated there were many reasons why they came to be involved in clinic work. Drawing out themes has been a difficult task as the survey responses are highly varied and complex. Some of these reasons included:

- they had experienced poverty directly themselves
- they had witnessed poverty or injustice and its effects and felt an increased desire to try and make a difference and were motivated by a desire to assist others
- they were drawn to the work by their desire to increase access to justice
- they had become involved in clinic work through some personal contact with another individual connected to clinic work
- many of the lawyers rejected traditional legal practice because it did not meet their needs
- a significant trend amongst lawyer participants was exposure to Student Legal Aid Society work at law school

i) Direct Experience of Poverty

A significant number of respondents had experienced poverty directly themselves. This trend adds another whole dimension to the concept of legal clinics being grounded in their communities through local volunteer Boards of Directors overseeing their operations. Clinics are also rooted in the community by being staffed by a large number of individuals who have come from that socioeconomic community.

What they said:

- *I was a single parent on Family Benefits trying to cope with benefit rates and battling overpayments...I began to advocate for myself and others with the assistance of a community development worker...life became an opportunity.*
- *Raising two kids alone on a combination of Mother's Allowance and part time work made me keenly aware of the injustices in the system and angry enough to want to change it.*
- *I had a personal experience wherein I had to rely on Family Benefits. I see it as mandatory to assist others who are in similar situations. I continue to serve my clients with a personal passion for the work clinics do.*
- *I was a single mom on welfare 21 years ago. I needed the help of a clinic, and was excited to make a contribution. I was also doing volunteer organizing and advocacy; so getting a paid job to learn how to do this stuff better was like a dream for me.*
- *I originally came into contact with the clinic system as a client, well before I went to law school...*

ii) Growing awareness of poverty, injustice and privilege

Many respondents had witnessed poverty and injustice and its effects and felt compelled to become involved in clinic work as a result of these experiences. Most respondents have become involved in clinic work out of a desire to assist others in meeting their needs.

What they said:

- *I saw in the courts that marginalized people, poor people, were not able to get the same service as others.*
- *I had an opportunity to spend a term at ... Legal Clinic...it fed my desire to work with those who were in need of help but couldn't find it.*
- *As part of my training I was required to participate in a field placement in a social service agency and.. I ended up at the legal clinic.. I came to understand more clearly that my own life experience had been one of privilege based only on the luck that I was born into a family that could financially and emotionally support me. I began to reflect on what it really means to live in a community and to be responsible for each other's well-being.*

- *I work with frail, elderly people, many who have been abused. I found inspiration in knowing that I could be part of the picture that gives assistance to these seniors.*
- *I thought about a law job where I could try to do something (however little) about some of the problems that we (as a society) all face and the huge inequities in society...the legal clinic system seemed to be the best answer.*

iii) Access to justice

Many respondents were drawn to the work by their desire to work towards ensuring greater access to justice or social justice. Legal clinic work gave them a long-awaited opportunity to make this wish concrete.

What they said:

- *I had no interest to use my law degree in any other way. Working at a community clinic, working for the community (rather than for myself or some rich client), was the only option. Community clinics were, and are, the right answer to dealing with the legal problems of the powerless and dispossessed.*
- *I went to law school because I had this idea that law could be used as a tool for social change... I felt that I would be frustrated if all I could do was band-aid over systemic injustice as a social worker.*
- *The path that got me into a clinic was started early in life, with weekly attendance at Sunday School, where nobody explained that Christianity is just for Sunday.... Added in with the influences of the late 60s... I was doomed forever to believe in social justice and equality....*

iv) The nature of the work

Many respondents were simply drawn into clinic work by the work itself. This supports the notion that clinic work is intrinsically satisfying and that staff are motivated by a desire to assist others.

What they said:

- *I was inspired by the focus of the work of the clinic itself. I recognized the need for an agency which is clearly an agent for change and an advocate for people who have had their own voice taken from them.*
- *I had to somehow find a way to help make a difference to people who really needed it. I can't be more specific - it's just a sense that I have to be doing this kind of "social justice" work because it is the right thing to do.*

- *I was inspired to get involved in clinic work from my past life doing community development work.*

v) Personal contact or were influenced by others

A large number of respondents had become involved in clinic work through some personal contact with another individual, or were influenced by others.

What they said:

- *(Naming a particular legal clinic lawyer) – whose work, dedication, and wisdom have inspired so many others.*
- *I had earlier on worked for a criminal defence lawyer who took on a number of Legal Aid matters. I became aware of how many people are in need of Legal Aid assistance in defending their matters... Deciding to come and work at a legal clinic was easy..."*
- *My mother was a trade union lawyer who always fought against injustice. My father was a civil servant who worked with the Ministry of Labour.*
- *I am the child of two lawyers; both of who have made it their life's work to provide access to justice regardless of the monetary benefit it may provide them.*
- *Some of the amazing people who have dedicated their entire lives to this work as a "calling" or a vocation rather than a job.*
- *I met people (at Parkdale Community Legal Services) who, despite their advanced age - some of them might have been in their fifties but they were certainly over thirty - had been taking on those injustices for decades and were still going. Even more surprising, they were interested in what I and my youthful colleagues had to say about social issues.*

vi) Rejection of traditional legal practice

Many of the lawyers who participated in the survey indicated that rejection of traditional legal practice was one of the reasons they decided to become involved in clinic work. The general trend was that legal clinic work was more meaningful and provided a greater opportunity to make a difference.

What they said:

- *I articulated in a corporate commercial firm and I had to attend L&T Court on behalf of a management company for an eviction matter. I was dreading going and dreading that the tenants would show up. When I got to court that day, I saw someone from a Clinic acting as tenant duty counsel and helping all the people*

who were being evicted... It became clear to me that I only wanted to be the kind of lawyer who was helping people in trouble, not making things worse.

- *My principal in articling was a lawyer in sole practice who was infuriated by all injustices and had a wonderful social conscience. Then I went to a 20-lawyer firm where the lawyers were dutifully outraged only with respect to the wrongs for which the client retained us, and only for the period for which we were retained - it became like a factory. I could not continue in this type of practice of law, and looked around for alternatives.*
- *In my first few years of practice I worked for a large Bay Street firm drafting commercial agreements. Although everyone there was totally consumed by the importance of that work, it was quite unreal. It occurred to me that I was simply a caretaker of money and that I could go my whole working life without doing anything related to justice, goodness, or fairness. I began looking for a way that I could do something very real that in a small way could make a difference in the world.*
- *I hadn't planned to go work in a clinic. I didn't even know what the clinics actually did before I applied for a job ... I was frustrated in private practice for two main reasons -- One: I saw people that needed legal help or had a problem that had a potential legal solution (although not a traditional one such as one that could be obtained through a court application or application to a tribunal) but they couldn't afford the fees to pursue the remedy or my firm didn't want to try to pursue the remedy because it wasn't straightforward. Two: The real solution to the problems that these people presented were more than a "victory" for them-- there were systemic problems that would never get fixed just by pursuing a remedy for the single client... its a wonderful career that has real meaning.*
- *My desire to truly help people rather than being over concerned about achieving high billings.*

vii) Exposure to Student Clinics

Another significant trend among lawyer respondents was that exposure to Student Legal Aid Societies (SLAS) and university legal clinics played a significant role in getting them involved in clinic work. Thus, in addition to providing important services to their communities, these clinics appear to provide a fertile environment for the creation of future clinic lawyers.

What they said:

- *I remained sane only because of the SLAS at my school where I met others involved in social justice and where I had an epiphany: law school is about law, not justice; the only folks talking about justice are the staff and students to the Legal Aid Clinic.*

- *When I went to law school, I was naively surprised to learn how non-progressive the majority of my classmates and professors were. I became known as a left wing outspoken feminist, and as a result, I was recruited by a like-minded soul to work at the student clinic for the summer.*
- *As an idealistic law student in the 1970's, I had an opportunity to spend a term at the London legal clinic, the clinic affiliated with Western's law school that no longer exists. I enjoyed the experience and it fed my desire to work with those who were in need of help but often couldn't find it.*
- *Upon entering Community Legal Services I obtained a first hand understanding of the importance of providing access to justice to the group John Kenneth Galbraith calls the "functional underclass".*
- *I set off to law school with a vague idea that I was going to learn something which was going to help me turn the youthful anger that I felt about the injustices of the world into some kind of skill that would be useful for fighting those injustices and changing the world. After two interesting and enjoyable years in law school..I was starting to think that I had made a mistake in going to law school. Out of desperation, ignorance or some other less-than-noble impulse, I applied for Parkdale's Clinical Education Program and was accepted. ... Once I settled in...I began to realize that THIS was why I went to law school, and that I might be able to find a place in the system to fight the injustices that I saw out there.*
- *My initial experience in clinic work was as a student at Parkdale CLS. Though I had little involvement in social justice work prior to this, the effectiveness of being able to provide representation - even from a "novice", made a difference in protecting the rights of our clients.*
- *My last summer job prior to entering law school was a summer job at Chrysler's. I almost lost a hand in an accident. Two weeks later I entered law school and found that there was a specialty student legal clinic dealing with injured workers. I immediately signed up. I discovered that helping people in need was the best thing in the world, and that I was developing some really great skills to help people that needed help.*

viii) Other reasons that were identified

What they said:

- *I must admit, I fell into clinic work. Needed a change and had always worked in the not-for-profit sector - didn't fancy the business sector. Once at the clinic I became deeply involved with our immigration work - I was hooked. It is deeply frustrating, soul-wrenching work, but when you get a positive decision it fuels you for months.*

- *I got involved in Community legal clinic work more out of chance than commitment or political agenda. But I stay in community legal clinic work because I discovered that the work had meaning, that I could affect change, that I could make a difference, that I get more out of this work than I put into it.*
- *I was inspired by the job-sharing arrangement at another clinic.*
- *Doing the work I do, I never have to apologize for being a lawyer.*

We have excerpted a few remarks from each of these themes.

b) What makes this work unique or important? What sustains people in this work?

Key themes emerged from the survey questions including:

- a desire to make a difference and the belief that we do make a difference
- clinic work is a flash point for social justice issues
- the inspiration of others who have fought injustice
- working directly with clients is invigorating
- the broad variety of work we are able to do and the methods we can employ to assist clients including community development, systemic advocacy and law reform is inspiring
- a collegial working environment within a legal clinic and being fortified by the existence of a legal clinic system is very important
- having a belief system is important

i) Making a difference

Many respondents identified a desire to make a difference as central to the importance of this work. Success is measured by the impact their actions have in their clients' lives and on the community rather than by any personal gain.

A few remarks:

- *The knowledge that some of the work we do does make a difference. In some small way, we are creating change that will make the world a better place and we might relieve a little suffering along the way.*
- *My profound belief that being a lawyer is to use one's talents to help others especially those who need help because of their inability to help themselves*

ii) Injustice

- Anger at injustice spurred on many respondents.

- Frustration and emotional responses to the problems faced by their clients.
- They turn those responses into action by using their careers to challenge injustice.

A few remarks:

- *The area of law that I mainly work in is a flashpoint for social justice issues. It would be hard not to stay incensed. I get intrigued when I can see the links between various forms of injustice and oppression, and then seeing how that plays out in individual lives. I feel fortunate that we have the flexibility at the clinic to do what we can for people on a case by case basis and also on a more macro level, though we often give the macro stuff short-shrift.*
- *Seeing and hearing about people who fight injustice fuels my own resolve.*

iii) Clients Invigorate

We are invigorated by: our relationships with clients; appreciation shown by clients; building trust; and, keeping in touch with past clients. Seeing clients manage through difficult times provides motivation to get through our own difficult times. We have non-monetary rewards that would not be available in other areas of work. The emotional drain of the work is balanced by the love for the work.

A few remarks:

- *As a clinic lawyer, we have a huge opportunity to observe and participate in a huge number of life experiences.*
- *The thank you notes I receive from clients I have helped. The smiles of relief when I help resolve a problem for a client. When I can motivate clients to stand up for their rights...*
- *The tremendous difference we make to people who really need us... The faith clients have in us makes it all worthwhile...*

iv) Variety of work and methods to fight injustice

The variety of work available in legal clinics encourages creativity, and provides the flexibility to identify systemic problems and to employ the best course of action to reach the desired end. This multi-pronged approach also brings balance to the work and renewed energy for the long haul. Respondents identified:

- Law Reform and Systemic Advocacy
- Client Work
- Community Legal Education and Community Development

A few remarks:

- *Working at the clinic gave me opportunities to work for and with individual clients to help them resolve their problems but also to do the necessary systemic work in policy, research, law reform and public legal education to affect real and long lasting change.*
- *Clinic work allows for a lot of creativity. I appreciate the ability to approach our work with such variety – from helping individual clients, to preventative work, to organizing individuals and communities, to systemic advocacy and law reform.*
- *Doing casework keeps me in touch with the real and immediate problems people are suffering and why we are here. Doing law reform, organizing, public education and other forms of systemic advocacy lets me meet more people outside the clinic system, and sometimes brings a few larger victories that motivate renewed efforts. The variation in the kinds of skills and tactics involved in different approaches means there is always something new to learn.*

v) Clinics and the Clinic System

The importance of healthy working relationships within legal clinics and the strength offered by a strong community or system of legal clinics were often cited as factors important to sustaining energy for our work. Themes identified included:

- Collegial relationships with co-workers
- The support of community Boards of Directors
- Hearing success stories and celebrating success
- The ability of the clinic system to allow us to learn from each other and build upon each other's successes
- The importance of genuine and positive feedback from others
- The importance of working with people with positive energy, who are committed to being involved in a positive way
- The importance of email list serves, networking and study groups and training sessions
- A shared sense of "professional pride" in knowing they do their job well

A few remarks:

- *As in "the early days", what sustains me is the spirit of collegiality and common purpose that I get from working - and spending leisure time - with people working in the clinics or other forms of progressive law practice. Rather than falling into despair over the injustices we see every day, we are able to hold them up to the ridicule they deserve. And when there are successes, we are able to share those brief moments when the system appears to work.*

- *I have also been inspired by many of the people who have volunteered to serve on the Boards of the clinics I have worked at. Especially in times of crisis I have seen people on Boards contribute vast amounts of time and energy to keeping an idea alive and flourishing with the only payoff being the benefits to the community that come from having a clinic to speak for them.*
- *And I was inspired because (and it took me a few years to understand how truly significant this really is) clinics don't just stand alone – clinics collectively form more than just a system. We are part of a movement.*
- *I love the atmosphere of clinics and working groups which foster group-problem solving.*
- *We value our clients and colleagues – we celebrate, support and nurture each other informally. We want and need more structured and/or formal opportunities to do this at a local, regional and clinic-wide basis.*
- *Working with people who have the same goal in life - to help people empower themselves; to improve or help sustain someone's life.*

vi) Importance of vision or an individual belief system

A number of respondents said that political ideology or faith or spiritual beliefs sustained them. Developing a personal vision helps guide and sustain staff through difficult times.

A few remarks:

- *There is a spiritual element to what keeps me going. I come from a faith community that believes...in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and giving rest to the weary. ... No one is alone in this work.*
- *My father always said that if by my work I could improve even one individual's life for the better then my purpose in being born is fulfilled.*
- *My faith has been a great source of inspiration to me... My faith has been my foundation to carry on with the work.*

c) What makes this work difficult or discouraging? What dampens people's inspiration or motivation for the work?

Respondents had varied responses to this question. The main themes emerging were:

- Intransigence of political and legal systems to change - a regression in the past years

- Society's increased stigmatizing and marginalizing of the poor
- Overwhelmed by the workload and the desperation of our clients' lives
- Feeling that their skills and work are not appreciated
- Diverted from spending time on client or clinic justice work because of increasing administrative responsibilities

i) Intransigence of the political and legal systems to change

- Changes in law by government can undermine years of law reform work
- At times we can do very little to influence the larger legal system
- Changes in government have a major impact on our work

A few remarks:

- *The last 8 years .. have really got me down. Watching our hard won gains stripped away is heartbreaking.*
- *When the focus of the policies are not to help the people in the long term but band-aid solutions for the popular vote.*
- *How much can be reversed by one stroke of the pen from the law makers... Years of law reform work in the areas of tenants' rights and workers' rights were quickly nullified...*
- *... to consult for months and years with government bureaucrats, developing reasonable policy alternatives and compromises, only to have them slash rates and ban people from assistance for life...at those times I just want to retreat into my office and go through the motions of my job.*

ii) Increase in stigmatization and marginalization of the poor

It is disheartening to see increasing intolerance of the rights of vulnerable citizens. There is a perceived lack of compassion by society for our clients and their needs and capacities.

A few remarks:

- *The way that many in society don't really seem to care much about those around them. Too many in government and too many in society don't see the need or don't care and are more inclined to criticize those who try to help. Some days that lack of care can be overwhelming.*
- *Injustice committed towards low income people and attack on their dignity by the drafting of bizarre laws which are only applicable to the low-income community.*
- *.. the dampening effect of the beating up.. of the poor*

- *The increasing poor-bashing and intolerance, the loss of community and vision in our province. Wearying sense of "us and them" at every level.*

iii) Work load

There are concerns that there is never enough time and there is a lack of support and resources in the face of overwhelming need. Additionally, people expressed that caseload pressures can overtake other forms of work.

A few remarks:

- *The risk of overwork. I have no doubt that burn out is the greatest danger facing people in this line of work.*
- *... the constant flood of needy people...*
- *In the past, before the Clinic expansion, the workload really dampened my inspiration and motivation. I also find that some people feel that Clinic lawyers are somehow "lesser" lawyers and this really is demoralizing. Every now and then you get a client that is really, really difficult, and this can be so problematic that it overwhelms how you feel about your other clients and cases. This is quite a rare situation however.*
- *The constant bombardment of needy cases that come in through intake and a feeling of helplessness as there is not enough time or energy to give to every single case.*
- *Feeling stretched so thin that I'm afraid of making a mistake--Feeling that I could have done a better job on something if only I had more time--Feeling bogged down in casework or summaries not yet completed and using that as an excuse to not turn my attention to the bigger picture stuff--Realizing that poor people have been scapegoated and vilified for some years now, and that I have not made a significant difference in changing that.*
- *To see how we are forced to move away from the community and just do law.*

iv) A need to feel appreciated

It is important to feel that skills and work are appreciated by:

- Clients
- Government
- Society
- Legal Aid Ontario

A few remarks:

- *Lack of appreciation for the work we do. There is an unspoken belief that the people who help low-income people do not have to be "that good at what they do". "They should be satisfied that they get help at all". People in this line of work have to be EXTRA SPECIAL at whatever they do.*
- *What may help me in the future is to know that I am valuable, that there are others like me who are valued and that we have, and will be able to continue to make a difference for our community people.*
- *Recognition of a job well done and very much needed. A good pay raise always helps!*

v) Time not spent on clients

There is a perception that dealing with Legal Aid Ontario issues requires time, which would otherwise be spent increasing a clinic's ability to meet client and community needs. Most of these remarks came from Clinic Managers who also have to balance client service, law reform and community work in addition to their management responsibilities.

A few remarks:

- *Bureaucracy...paperwork...*
- *Increasing bureaucracy...*
- *Every minute of my time spent on "administrivia" is a minute lost to client services.*

d) How can their "fire in the belly" be nurtured?

Many of the responses to the questions above already answer this question. Some new themes emerged when the following questions were posed: *"How do you nurture your "fire in the belly"? What do you do to nurture other people's "fire in the belly"? What might help you in the future?"*

- Self-nurture – that we find ways to nurture our selves and bring balance to our lives
- Acting as a mentor
- Teaching this work to others
- Being able to show compassion for clients
- Being able to be personal and passionate about our work – knowing that we are dealing with real people and not just cases
- Setting short term goals and celebrating attaining these goals

- Flexible work arrangements
- More opportunities for members of clinic Boards and clinic staff to interact

And a few other remarks:

- *I think cross-pollination within our own clinic system and with poverty law advocates within Canada and other countries is a critical way to ignite embers – fan the flames.*
- *Roll up my sleeves and do anything that the team needs done... remember that change takes time (and energy). .. Look for a positive in even the most frustrating aspects of "work" in the system.*
- *In recent years I have found it most helpful to work in partnership with an organization or a group of organizations who are prepared to take on a "big" project. Sharing the work, learning from new contacts, sharing the losses and the wins halves the burdens and doubles the joys!*

3) Recommendations

These recommendations were gleaned from the survey responses, ideas generated in focus groups and, in particular, from the conference workshop, and in post-conference discussions with interested colleagues. These recommendations are not comprehensive. A joint LAO and legal clinic working group to brainstorm and implement other creative ideas would be mutually beneficial.

a) Recruitment Strategies

Most of the feedback received focussed on how to attract highly motivated legal staff to clinic work. (More work is needed to decide how best to recruit for other staff positions particularly community legal workers and support staff. Recruitment tactics to attract Board members is also an issue beyond the scope of this report.) The importance of equity, inclusion and access was stressed.

Efforts to attract potential lawyers to join clinics (and for other positions funded by LAO such as duty counsel, staff office, and legal aid certificate participation) could be improved in a number of ways.

i) Recruitment through the law schools

- Involving legal clinic staff directly at law school career days to speak candidly about their experience, challenges and benefits of their work
- Developing more direct connections between the work of legal clinics and Student Legal Aid Societies (SLAS) would be beneficial. For example, encouraging collaborations on shared projects
- Creating mentoring relationships between clinic lawyers and law students

- Offering reflective opportunities using the “fire in the belly” workshop in law schools
- Funding and creating summer job opportunities in all clinics for law students
- Fostering direct links between students involved in their school’s Pro Bono program and legal clinics
- Expanding significantly the number of articling student positions in legal clinics
- Investigating an initiative similar to the American “Equal Justice Works” program – which organizes, trains and supports public service minded law students and creates summer and post graduate public interest jobs and fellowships

ii) Private Bar

- Clinic staff should maintain good relationships with private bar members with social justice leanings to encourage applications from experienced lawyers when clinic positions become available
- Pro Bono partnerships between firms and legal clinics willing to take articling students for placements should be encouraged
- Developing private bar Articling Principals with a passion for “access to justice” who can inspire their articling students to look outside the traditional practice of law when their articles end

iii) Hiring and specific recruitment practices

- Advertisements for clinic positions should be designed to attract candidates with past experience of working on justice issues
- The resume screening process should reward former students who have SLAS experience
- The interview questions should be designed to identify potential staff with the right motivation and empathy for our clients’ issues
- Look for people with passion and commitment to social justice issues

b) Nurturing the Fire: Within legal clinic teams and inter-clinic groups

- Encourage reflective exercises that build self awareness and team building like “True Colours”, or workshops using the “fire in the belly” questions
- Recognizing that this is an ongoing process – “fire in the belly” might be smoldering but it has to be stoked and fanned.
- Work at understanding each others’ goals and underlying motivations

c) Sustaining the Fire: Creating new ways to appreciate the work of co-workers and colleagues

- Integrate authentic appreciation events into everyday work experience at local and provincial levels
- Create a clinic and office culture where successes are celebrated with regularity

- Appreciate the richness brought by diversity of role, job class, talent, race and gender
- Recognize the unique gifts that each person brings to clinic work
- Provide opportunities to collaborate on projects that bring people with different skill sets together
- Offer clinic staff a “fire in the belly” workshop of their own⁶

d) Looking Ahead: Improving our relations with Legal Aid Ontario and others sharing a vision for "Access to Justice" outside Ontario

Clinic staff interact with LAO employees in local Area Offices and also with staff from the Provincial Office of LAO. Opportunities for improved relationships and understanding are available and creative approaches should be encouraged.

- Increase appreciation, respect and understanding for each other's work by providing job-shadowing for legal clinic staff and Area and Provincial Office employees
- Sharing the results of this research project with Legal Aid Ontario staff and supporting a similar initiative if there is sufficient interest for LAO staff
- More face-to-face contact between clinic and LAO staff
- Creating opportunities for shared visioning regarding mission and vision and values between independent community legal clinics and LAO
- Conferences and workshops that continue to inspire and encourage the passionate commitment of staff to "access to justice" and a shared mission
- Encouraging interaction with others concerned about "Access to Justice" to share ideas and approaches. For example, by making funds available for "scholarships" to permit clinic staff to attend conferences with colleagues in other provinces and countries who are offering poverty law services
- Encouraging and providing support for greater communication and collaboration with other poverty law advocates across Canada

4) Reflective Questions

- Doing “access to justice” work can be inherently motivating. This type of work clearly attracts a highly motivated workforce and a large number of volunteers who are involved in community boards. There is a passionate commitment to doing justice work. How can this energy be sustained and enhanced? How can LAO as the primary funder of legal clinics, and our Clinic Services Office encourage and support the work of clinics by nurturing the “fire in the belly”?
- Dealing with the changing relationship to Legal Aid Ontario takes precious time and energy. The emerging relationship can be fraught with tension and

⁶ A package has been put together to help clinic staff put on their own workshop. The workshop prototype and the names of volunteer facilitators are available from the authors.

misunderstanding. How can a sense of common vision and mission emerge? How can our vision and values be aligned? How can common ground be found with Legal Aid service delivery partners? How can positive synergies be created?

- What kind of leadership or management style works best for staff who are motivated by a “fire in the belly”? Knowing what we do now about how staff are motivated, how can we foster more of this? What are low cost and creative ways we can recognize outstanding staff contributions in ways that respect the deeply held convictions of staff? How can co-workers bring out the best in each other?

Appendix I

The Survey Questions

- Why were you inspired – or what or who inspired you – to get involved in clinic work?
- What helps you now to sustain your “fire in the belly”?
- What dampens your inspiration or motivation?
- How do you nurture your – or what do you do to help nurture other people’s – “fire in the belly”? What might help you in the future?
- Are there any quotes, articles, books, films, practices, songs, etc. that you have found inspirational or motivational for the work you are doing? Please share these with us. (If you have copies of materials you would like to share please contact ferrisr@lao.on.ca).
- Or here, you can tell us anything you want in your own words. A story, a reflection you wish to share, or anything else...

The Conference Workshop Questions

- How did you come to this work? What or who inspired you?
- What makes the work unique or important? What makes it difficult or discouraging?
- How can we nurture the “fire in the belly” in each other?

Appendix II

Quotes, articles, books, films, practices, songs, etc. that people identified as inspirational or motivational.

- *“Fire in the belly” is fundamentally about change. If you have this fire, you will be in constant pursuit of ways to effectuate change. You will need to be flexible and creative. You will have to push hard, experiment and take great risk...Fire in the belly leaves no room for the status quo, and it leaves little time for rest.”*

Ada Shen-Jaffe, Executive Director – Columbia Legal Services quoted in the Management Information Exchange Journal, Spring 2002

- *We at the Legal Clinic, both staff and Board, have developed an organization that embraces the values of client power, truth-telling, collaboration, and creativity. We comprise an organization that defines broadly our role as lawyer and advocates (wearing proudly what some see as the “Scarlet A” of advocacy) and places little off-limits as we develop strategies to best advance our clients’ interests. We take seriously what we do, but never place so much importance on the role that we play to have the thought that we alone can make the difference. Sometimes we measure the value of our work less by objective standards of “success,” than by whether we were present to our clients: Did we respond? Did we provide for them an opportunity to find and use their voices? And did we give them the support to make them confident to do so? We answer that oft-asked question, “How can you keep doing this work after all these years?” with a simple “Because we’re not done yet. We will go home, when everyone has a home to which they can go.”*
- *Because we are able to commit to this work, we find ourselves with a fire that burns strong. No, it’s not indigestion after all; without a doubt, it is a wonderful, passionate, inspiring fire, ignited by the heart. It is a fire that we are confident will stay aflame until justice truly is real.*

Patricia Mullahy Fugere, Executive Director – Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless in Management Information Exchange Journal, Spring 2002

- *I believe “fire in the belly” is how some great cause or calling shows up in each of us. “Fire in the belly” is:*
 - *the passion that sustains us over a long period of time, that enables us to stay the course for that noble cause and to be in action toward it every day with a sense of direction and urgency.*
 - *It is the energy that draws others in, that enables us to connect with a very large number of other people.*

- *It is the insight that lets us see how almost everything and everyone can, in some way, help us advance toward our vision.*
- *It is the belief in the fundamental justness of the cause that inoculates us against cynicism and limited expectations.”* Martha Bergmar, Vice President of Programs – National Legal Aid and Defenders Association
- *“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world. Instead, it’s the only thing that ever has!”* Margaret Mead
- *“There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one that is striking at the root.”* Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)
- *“Your work is to discover your work and then with all your heart to give yourself to it.”* Buddha

Appendix III

A collection of some of the inspirational quotes on the original survey website:

- *"Imagination is more important than knowledge."* Albert Einstein
- *"You've got to find the force inside you."* Joseph Campbell
- *"When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist."* Dom Helder Camara [Brazilian Archbishop]
- *"Life is mostly froth and bubbles. Two things stand like stone: Kindness in another's troubles, Courage in our own."* Gordon
- *"The problem is not that there are problems. The problem is expecting otherwise and thinking that having problems is a problem."* Theodore Rubin
- *"If you fall flat on your face, you are still moving ahead."*
- This is a translation of one line of a Bengali song which was one of Gandhi's favourite. *"If no one heeds your call then walk alone."*
- *"We Shall Overcome!"*
- *"Absolute power corrupts absolutely." "Evil can be defined as a total lack of empathy."*
- *The music of Sage (Arlene Mantle), singer/songwriter, single welfare mom, lesbian, long time activist and supporter of all social justice causes, now disabled and pretty much retired but provided vitality and inspiration at many clinic and social justice events over the last twenty years. Sample lyrics: "Hey, Hey, What about class? We've got to address it. We can't let it pass. Hey, Hey, what about class? We have to address it today. Nothing's Gonna Keep Us Down. It's a hard life and at times a lonely road, raising kids on your own, a heavy load, together in harmony, we'll wage our war on poverty. Ain't nothin'...nothin's gonna keep us down"*
- Jean Vanier's "Becoming Human", the poem "Wild Geese" by Mary Oliver (it's a stretch, but it reminds me that what matters is not whether we are good or deserving, but simply that we are alive, also that we all suffer and we can make it better simply by connecting, by being present), Frederick Buechner's quote about vocation *"The place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need."*

- Music of Carolyn McDade, "Uprising of Hope: If we would be as leaven, there could be an uprising of hope" copyright 1998 by Carolyn McDade, www.gis.net/~surtsey/mcdade
- Music of Linda Tillery, "Fire in the Soul" www.culturalheritagechoire.com
- Paulo Freire, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" The Seabury Press, 1968
- Saul Alinsky, "Rules for Radicals, 1971 AGITATE + AGGRAVATE + EDUCATE + ORGANIZE
- Anne Mortifee, song "Born to Live" To me there is no use just existing - you need to have a purpose in life and this song highlights my reasons
- John Sayles' "Mattewan". Non-European or non-American writers. Young artists challenging the status quo through creativity.
- Clarence Darrow's defence of Leopold & Loeb.
- "I have always found the activist songs of Joan Baez and Eric Bogle to be fortifying, but I guess I am aging myself."