



CONNECTING REGION / OTTAWA

INTRODUCTION

The Law Foundation of Ontario (LFO) provided resources to this Ottawa planning group to develop a network of legal agencies and community organizations to specifically focus on improving the local delivery of legal information, referrals and services to Ottawa residents who speak neither English nor French or who have difficulty communicating due to sensory impairments, speech or language disorders. This project, *Connecting Region/Ottawa*, has been guided by an Advisory Committee of partner organizations, led by South Ottawa Community Legal Services and with representation from social planning agencies, community information services, multi-service community resource centres, cultural interpretation services, agencies serving immigrants, and agencies serving persons with disabilities.

This report offers

- a description of project outcomes, including
 - a list of member organizations in *Connecting Region/Ottawa*,
 - a mandate for *Connecting Region/Ottawa* that includes a description of
 - principles,
 - goals,
 - priorities, and
 - identified gaps in service
- a description of proposed governance structure for *Connecting Region/Ottawa*,

OUR APPROACH

The *Connecting Region/Ottawa* project used the following approach to achieve the necessary outcomes:

- The proposal development working group engaged a project coordinator;
- A Project Advisory Committee was appointed, with 12 members representative of community legal services, social planning agencies, community information services, multiservice community resource centres, cultural interpretation services, agencies serving immigrants, and agencies serving persons with disabilities, and approved Terms of Reference and a work plan.
- We implemented various community engagement strategies to identify local system assets and challenges:
 - an online survey generated a 52% response rate, 27 respondents from 21 organizations;
 - interviews and focus groups gathered input from 47 key informants from our targeted service sectors; and
 - a solutions-focused workshop with 21 stakeholders to develop a common vision and recommend priorities for process improvements.
- We documented gaps in services, and drafted a plan to bridge the gaps;
- We drafted a constellation model of governance to guide stewardship, decision-making and planning processes;
- We identified 50 prospective organizational partners to support network development and an integrated service response to priority issues;
- We developed a communications strategy to inform prospective organizational partners about the proposed *Connecting Region/Ottawa* network and their potential role to improve access to legal services by our focus populations;
- We hosted a full day conference to engage with prospective partners and obtain their endorsement of a vision, principles, goals, priorities, a preliminary plan to bridge identified service gaps, and a model for stewardship and decision making related to future collaborative projects that would improve access to legal services.
- We invited organizations that are well positioned to positively impact the client experience of our focus populations when accessing legal services to sign a Partnership Agreement, indicating their commitment to participate as a member of the *Connecting Region/Ottawa* network.

OUR OUTCOMES

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

As of 9 March 2011, 28 organizations have signed an agreement to partner as a member of *Connecting Region/Ottawa*; 11 community services agencies, 8 immigrant services agencies, 5 legal services agencies, 3 agencies that serve disabled persons, and 1 organization that provides interpretation and translation services. Other organizations have expressed intent to join the network but their governance processes have delayed a formal confirmation.

MANDATE

The expressed purpose of the network is to

- build capacity within the community health and social services sectors to identify legal issues and provide basic legal information and timely referral for persons who speak neither English nor French and for persons who have a significant communication difficulty as the result of a sensory impairment or a speech or language disorder,
- promote collaboration among legal services and community health and social service organizations,
- improve opportunities for sharing and exchange, and to
- support and foster strong community-based partnerships.

VISION

Partners have a common vision for the project; that is, "... by working collaboratively, a network of legal agencies and community organizations will improve access to legal information, referrals and services by Ottawa residents who speak neither English nor French or who have difficulty communicating due to sensory impairments, speech or language disorders".

VALUES & PRINCIPLES

Although partnering organizations function using different service models in different service sectors, there is general consensus that

- all people should be aware of their rights & entitlements and responsibilities & obligations under the law and have access to timely & affordable legal services and justice,
- service delivery should be client centered, flexible, fully accessible, inclusive, and responsive to local needs, and that
- Ottawa's diversity is valued.

Further, all partners have accepted the general principle that

- they will bring the resources of their respective organizations and commit the time necessary to address the issues identified as priorities by the project, and
- be available and responsive to communications from the other partners.

LEADERSHIP

The *Connecting Region/Ottawa* network has determined (Agreement, §4, §8-13) that South Ottawa Community Legal Services will continue to be the lead organization for the project and accountable for contracted outcomes under any future funding agreements with the Law Foundation of Ontario. However, it is also understood that leadership will be balanced among all participating partners through the use of self-organizing action groups (for more information, see the description of the proposed governance structure, below).

ISSUES IDENTIFIED

The geographic focus of *Connecting Region/Ottawa* is the City of Ottawa. In this area our focus populations – people who have difficulty communicating in English or French and people who

have difficulty communicating because of a sensory impairment or disabling condition – are significant.

- There are 180,000 immigrants in Ottawa (22.3% of the population)
- 28,000 of these immigrants settled within the past 5 years and may not have mastered one of the Official Languages.
- Ottawa has a highly diverse linguistic profile:
 - There are 69 mother tongues in the city (Chinese, Arabic, Somali, Spanish, Farsi constitute the “top 5”).
 - 89,000 residents speak a non-official language at home.
- 150,000 people have a disability in Ottawa (17.7% of the population); of these
 - 30% have hearing impairment
 - 17% have vision impairment
 - 10.6% have a speech-related disability
- 25% of people with disabilities are also immigrants.
- The focus populations described above also face social & economic barriers and lack the power to influence outcomes, especially with regards to Immigration, Family & Criminal Law matters:
 - 18% of immigrants, 37% of *recent* immigrants, 17% of persons living with disabilities have incomes that are below the poverty line (LICO).
 - They are particularly vulnerable to problems that have a legal component: income security, housing, victimization, discrimination, and issues related to schools and young offenders.

Through its consultation processes, *Connecting Region/Ottawa* network has identified five priority issues to be addressed:

Awareness: The focus populations are unaware that a particular issue may have a legal component that would benefit from legal information, legal advice or some other legal service.

Assessment: The focus populations want legal information, legal advice or a legal service but do not know how to access it.

Affordability: Services (legal services, interpretation, translation, augmentative communication devices/ services, transportation) are unaffordable to the focus populations.

Complexity: The focus populations have complex issues and may not be well served by legal services alone.

Barriers to Access: The focus populations often face barriers to timely and appropriate access to interpretation/translation services and/or augmentative communication devices/ services.

GAPS IN SERVICE

- Although there is a program of community legal education in Ottawa, this is currently primarily reactive, not proactive.
- Community legal education programs in Ottawa lack an appropriate media and program delivery strategy to reach out to the focus populations.
- Community engagement for the purposes of community legal education presently focus on knowledge transfer as opposed to dialogue and knowledge exchange.
- There are no common service protocols or training standards for front-line service providers related to
 - identifying when a client from the focus population needs access to a legal service,
 - referring to a legal service, and
 - supporting that referral to ensure that a connection is actually made with the appropriate legal service;
 - appropriately connecting clients from the focus population to interpretation, translation and/or augmentative communication resources, when required;
 - diversity training.
- Although “211” was recently adopted by Ottawa as a comprehensive community information service with the capacity to support system navigation, it has not been promoted as a resource to our focus populations and is not well used by them as a point of access to legal services.
- Many clients from focus populations require escort, advocacy or other assistance to act on a referral to legal services.
- Interpretation/translation services are available but often unaffordable, not only for clients from our focus populations but also for many of our network partners.
- The focus populations cannot readily access Legal Aid certificates; private bar legal services are unaffordable.
- Public transit options may not always be available to the focus populations, and not always affordable when they are available, creating barriers to accessing timely services.
- There is insufficient capacity for legal services to work in closer cooperation with community services, immigrant services and services for disabled persons to ensure a more integrated service response for clients from the focus populations. This is important for issues related to housing, employment, family violence, youth in conflict, child welfare issues, mental health, disability, etc.
- Although there are many cultural interpreters/translators in Ottawa, not all are certified or have training in legal issues & terminology.

- There is only a limited capacity to advocate at a systemic level whenever the system itself creates barriers to accessible legal services for the focus populations.

GOALS

To address these issues, the *Connecting Region/Ottawa* network is committed to achieving the following goals:

- (1) Provide information that will help the focus populations (and their family, friends and neighbours who act as trusted intermediaries) understand their legal rights, especially regarding social assistance, landlord & tenant law, refugee & immigration law, employees' rights, family law, elder abuse, consumer rights, women's issues, and laws affecting young people; and provide information about the legal services available to help the focus populations to exercise those rights.
- (2) Ensure that “every door is the right door” to legal services by training and supporting intake, information/assessment/referral (IAR) professionals and other front-line service providers to identify when a client from the focus populations requires a legal service and then to connect the client to the appropriate legal service.
- (3) Ensure the availability of affordable legal services and access to affordable interpretation, translation, augmentative communication devices/services.
- (4) Support legal services organizations to provide services to the focus populations within a framework that acknowledges issue complexity; that is, that the legal issue may be compounded by social and economic issues (threats to personal safety & security, homelessness, precarious employment, low income, indebtedness, family breakdown, etc).
- (5) Ensure that the focus populations have timely and appropriate access to interpretation and translation services and/or augmentative communication devices and services by systematically removing barriers to access.

GOVERNANCE

It is proposed that strategic planning, stewardship and other decision making processes of the *Connecting Region/Ottawa* network be guided by a constellation model of governance.

The constellation model of governance has been described by Tonya & Mark Surman as follows:

Constellations are self-organizing action teams that operate within the broader strategic vision of a partnership. These constellations are outwardly focused, placing their attention on creating value for those in the external environment rather than on the partnership itself. While serious effort is invested into core partnership governance and management, most of the energy is devoted to the decision making, resources and collaborative effort required to create social value. The constellations drive and define the partnership.

The model is built upon three principles:

- It is “lightweight”; that is, it is driven by process rather than structure, with meetings held only to achieve a particular and defined purpose.
- It functions with self-organizing action-focused constellations of partner organizations designed to ensure that leadership and responsibility is distributed throughout the network and builds on the strengths of the existing system.
- The importance of third party coordination via a secretariat that is “owned” by no single partner but acts to support the capacity for collaboration throughout the network of partners as a whole.

ADVISORY GROUP

The Advisory Group will operate as a constellation of *equal* organization partners with a purpose similar to the current Project Advisory Committee. Although South Ottawa Community Legal Services has been identified as an appropriate lead partner, any partner could assume the lead role with the consent of *Connecting Region/Ottawa* partners. The Advisory Group will be representative of partners and of the sectors that provide community services, legal services, immigrant services, interpretation and translation services, and services to disabled persons. No fewer than seven partners will serve on the Advisory Group; the Group may change over time, as members join or depart according to the project cycle and with the expertise required at each stage of the project.

The primary responsibility of the Advisory Group is stewardship; its members will act as stewards of the public interest and the work that is being undertaken by the network and will not be expected to act as representatives of their organization’s interests. The Group will meet regularly to provide guidance on any aspects of the project requested by partners. It is expected that the Group will play a key role in overseeing all aspects of project implementation, monitoring progress and ensuring that all partners are appropriately informed about matters requiring consultation.

Generally, the Advisory Group is responsible for

- ensuring that the project remains focused on its primary purpose and meets the criteria as approved by the funder,
- ensuring that the project makes the best use of its limited assets,
- assisting with the resolution of issues as they arise,
- approving or rejecting any changes to the project that will have a high impact on timelines and budget,
- assessing project progress against the work plan and approved milestones,
- providing timely advice and guidance to the project Secretariat, and
- generally implementing and assisting the project to achieve its outcomes.

Partnering organizations have agreed that the current *Connecting Region/Ottawa* Advisory Committee (established in April 2010 to guide the implementation of Phase 1 of the Project) will constitute the Project Advisory Group during the period of transition to the next phase of implementation, to be triggered by the approval of renewed funding.

ACTION GROUPS

The actual work of planning for the positive system changes that will ensure access to legal services by our focus populations will happen via self-organizing action groups. The key principles underlying these work groups will include a focus on action planning and local oversight for implementation and partnerships built on equity in participation and democratic decision making.

Each action group will have a “lead partner”; this “lead” is any person or organization that is willing and able to bring focused attention to a priority issue and develop an action plan in collaboration with other interested and committed parties. The membership of these action groups will be dynamic; although the “lead” and two or three other partners can create a stable core, other partners will come and go as the need for their particular skills, capacity, expertise, etc. is required. Partners will cluster for solutions-focused discussion and action related to (for example) *Interpretation, Immigrant Services, Accessibility, Legal Education, Information & Referral, and Community Connections*. However, depending upon emerging priorities, action groups could also evolve to address local issues specific to the deaf community or to a particular ethnic or language group, or to respond to the needs of immigrant youth in conflict with the law, or to improve access to information about consumer law, for example.

SECRETARIAT

A *Connecting Region/Ottawa* secretariat will operate as a third party intermediary staffed by a person or persons who are familiar with the collaborative work required to achieve the project goals but who is not a “Partner”. The responsibility of the Secretariat will be to support the process of collaboration by guiding planning processes, facilitating meetings, supporting the development of new action groups, seeking funds for joint initiatives, mediating conflict, helping information to flow, and providing administrative support services necessary to build upon the overall capacity of the network to work towards successful goal attainment. The Secretariat will operate with a focus on process rather than content; the partners will focus on contributing content to the project and the Secretariat will focus on the collaborative processes that will drive the project forward. The Secretariat will be accountable to the Advisory Group.

CONNECTING REGION PARTNERS AT MARCH 28, 2011

Community Services

211/Community Information Centre

Housing Help

Hunt Club-Riverside Community Resource Centre

Orleans-Cumberland Community Resource Centre

Overbrook-Forbes Community Resource Centre

Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre

Sandy Hill Community Health Centre

Social Planning Council

Somerset West Community Health Centre

South-East Ottawa Community Health Centre

Vanier Community Service Centre (CSCV)

Immigrant Services

Catholic Immigration Centre

Conseil Economique et Social d'Ottawa-Carleton (CESOC)

Immigrant Women Service Organization

Jewish Family Services

OCISO

Ottawa Public Library / Immigrant Settlement Partnership

Somali Centre for Family Services

Sexual Assault Centre / Women & War

Interpretation & Translation Services

Cultural Interpretation Services for Our Community (CISOC)

Legal Services

ARCH Disability Law Centre

Community Legal Services Ottawa Centre

South Ottawa Community Legal Services

University of Ottawa Community Legal Clinic

West End Legal Services

Services for Disabled Persons

Aphasia Centre of Ottawa

The In Community

TOH Rehabilitation Centre

THE PROPOSED PLAN

VISION

By working collaboratively, a network of legal agencies and community organizations will improve access to legal information, referrals and services by Ottawa residents who speak neither English nor French or who have difficulty communicating due to sensory impairments, speech or language disorders (“the focus populations”).

NETWORK

The network will be composed of community organizations and agencies acting under a Partnership Agreement. The following sectors will be involved: Community Services, Immigrant Services, Services for Disabled Persons, Interpretation & Translation Services, and Legal Services.

ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

1 – AWARENESS

Focus population is unaware that a particular issue may have a legal component that would benefit from legal information, legal advice or some other legal service.

GOAL

To provide information that will help the focus population (and their family, friends and neighbours who act as trusted intermediaries) understand their legal rights, especially re: social assistance, landlord & tenant law, refugee & immigration law, employees' rights, family law, elder abuse, consumer rights, women's issues, and laws affecting young people.; provide information about legal services available to help exercise those rights.

SOLUTION

- 1-a Expand current capacity for a *proactive* program of community legal education.
- 1-b Directly engage focus populations via multicultural & faith organizations, settlement centres, LINC programs, rehabilitation centres, self-help organizations for persons with disabilities, etc. to confirm the most appropriate media & program delivery strategies.
- 1-c Outreach to focus population; deliver information in accessible formats; encourage dialogue; evaluate results.

POTENTIAL LEADS

LEGAL SERVICES, COMMUNITY SERVICES, IMMIGRANT SERVICES, SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES; COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION ONTARIO (CLEO), ARCH DISABILITY LAW CENTRE, AUGMENTATIVE

COMMUNICATION COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS CANADA (ACCPC).**RESOURCES**

1-a Budget to expand capacity.

1-c Explore role for Alternative Career Transitions (ACT) for International Legal Professionals, (CIC) as legal services outreach workers.

2 – ASSESSMENT, INFORMATION, REFERRAL

Focus population wants legal information, legal advice or a legal service but does not know how to access it.

GOAL

To ensure that “every door is the right door” to legal services by training and supporting intake, information/assessment/referral (IAR) professionals and other front-line service providers to identify when a client from the focus population requires a legal service and then connects the client to the appropriate legal service.

SOLUTION

2-a Train front-line service providers to identify when a client from the focus population needs access to a legal service, to refer and then support that referral such that a connection is actually made with the appropriate legal service.

2-b Train front-line service providers to appropriately connect clients from the focus population to interpretation, translation and/or augmentative communication resources, when required.

2-c Ensure that network partners access diversity training for front-line service providers.

2-d Promote “211” as a linguistically accessible source of community information & referral.

2-e Simplify system navigation; encourage the development of common Assessment/Referral Protocols for clients from focus populations; support the sharing of “best practices” among Network partners

2-f Encourage Network partners to comply with AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2005) standards.

2-g Develop & support a role for “advocates” that can ensure that a client from the focus population actually connects with the referred legal service. Explore role for Alternative Career Transitions (ACT) for International Legal Professionals, (CIC).

POTENTIAL LEADS

Community Services (especially 211 and Community Health & Resource Centres - CHRCs), Immigrant Services, Services for Disabled Persons.

RESOURCES

2-a/b Budget to build capacity for IAR training.

2-c Budget to build capacity for diversity training for Network partners.

2-d Targeted social marketing strategy.

2-e Budget for regular knowledge exchange opportunities re: processes of assessment & referral of focus population to legal services (e.g. workshop/conference, webinars, online network exchange, peer reviews, etc.)

2-g Budget to build capacity for advocates that can ensure connection to legal services.

3 – AFFORDABILITY

Services (legal services, interpretation, translation, augmentative communication devices/services, transportation) are unaffordable.

GOAL

Ensure the availability of *affordable* legal services, access to affordable interpretation, translation, augmentative communication devices/services, and access to transportation subsidies for focus population.

SOLUTION

3-a Subsidize purchase of interpretation/translation services by Network partners .

3-b Facilitate access to Legal Aid certificates by focus population.

3-c Build capacity for trained/supported volunteers/intermediaries, in kind & *pro bono* services.

3-d Subsidize use of public transit to legal services, when required.

POTENTIAL LEADS

Interpretation & Translation Services, Legal Services.

RESOURCES

3 Budget for purchase of services/subsidies.

4 – COMPLEXITY

Focus population has complex issues and may not be well served by legal services.

GOAL

Support Legal Services to provide services to the focus population within a framework that acknowledges issue complexity; that is, that the legal issue may be compounded by social and economic issues (threats to personal safety & security, homelessness, precarious employment, low income, indebtedness, family breakdown, etc).

SOLUTION

4-a Build capacity for Legal Services to work in closer cooperation with Community Services, Immigrant Services and Services for Disabled Persons to ensure an integrated service response for clients from the focus population.

4-b Integrate social services capacity within Community Legal Services.

4-c Establish common protocols to ensure that every client from the focus population has a designated case manager with the responsibility to coordinate services.

POTENTIAL LEADS

Legal Services, Community Services (especially CHRCs), Immigrant Services and Services for Disabled Persons.

RESOURCES

4-a Support learning opportunities for Social Work/Social Services student placements with Community Legal Services.

4-b Budget for pilot project to integrate social work resource with Community Legal Services.

5 – BARRIERS TO ACCESSING SERVICES

Focus population knows how to access the desired legal service but there are language/communication and related accessibility barriers to overcome.

GOAL

Ensure that the focus population has timely and appropriate access to interpretation/translation services and/or augmentative communication devices/services.

SOLUTION

5-a Build capacity for qualified interpreters/translators trained in legal issues & terminology.

5-b Develop & support a role for “advocates” that can ensure that a client from the focus population actually connects to and communicates effectively with the referred legal service. Explore role for Alternative Career Transitions (ACT) for International Legal Professionals, (CIC).

5-c Build capacity for advocacy at the systems level whenever the system creates barriers to accessing legal services.

POTENTIAL LEADS

Services for Disabled Persons, Interpretation & Translation Services

RESOURCES

5-a Budget to build capacity for training qualified interpreters/translators.

5-b Budget to build capacity for advocates that can ensure connection to legal services. (cf: 2-g)