



LEGAL AID ONTARIO

AIDE JURIDIQUE ONTARIO



Legal Aid Ontario and You Partners in Justice

COURT

“Providing legal aid to low-income Canadians is an essential public service. We need to think of it in the same way we think of health care or education. The well being of our justice system - and the public's confidence in it - depends on it.”

**Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin
Supreme Court of Canada**



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Legal aid - options for your legal career.

New lawyers face a myriad of choices. So as you consider the first steps of your legal career, take a closer look at what legal aid work can offer.

Many lawyers choose legal aid as an alternative to working in a large corporate law firm. As you read the following profiles of lawyers active in communities across Ontario, you will see how legal aid can be a rewarding part of any law career.

Legal aid work offers significant benefits to new lawyers. It provides an opportunity to contribute toward improving Ontario's justice system by helping some of our society's most disadvantaged

people. Legal aid is also an excellent way to make professional contacts and gain courtroom experience, and for many lawyers, the flexibility of legal aid work is an attractive career and lifestyle choice.

You can make legal aid work a part of your career in many different ways. If you think legal aid may be a good fit for your career goals, please talk to us at Legal Aid Ontario. We would be delighted to help you.

Legal Aid Ontario wishes you every success as you begin your legal career.

George Joseph

Criminal Law, Thunder Bay



A Balanced Practice that Includes Legal Aid

George Joseph, a criminal certificate lawyer in Thunder Bay, handles many different cases through legal aid. He has the chance to work on cases that would not reach his desk if he did not accept legal aid certificates.

George represented a mentally deficient woman with two daughters. It was discovered that a work associate is a convicted sex offender and she was advised by her mental health worker not to leave her daughters alone with this man.

The youngest daughter was under the care of this man's wife one day, when he came home and sexually assaulted the seven-year-old girl. When the mother heard the news, she was devastated.

As a result of this event, the man was charged with sexual assault. The Children's Aid Society (CAS) charged the mother with abandoning her child and they apprehended her two children.

This loving mother had to cope with the tragedy of her child being sexually assaulted, while simultaneously facing charges of abandonment.

Because of George's involvement with legal aid, he had the opportunity to assist this mother through this difficult time and was able to convince the court to acquit her.

A University of Saskatchewan graduate, George was called to the bar in 2000 and works at the law firm Petrone Hornak Garofalo Mauro.

He had his first taste of legal aid work while articling at the same firm and it now makes up about 40 per cent of his practice.

George tries to balance his practice between legal aid work and private clients. He also practices civil and administrative law and believes it is important for lawyers not to preclude themselves from different aspects of the law by focusing too narrowly on one area at the start of a career.

George is in court nearly every day, and with close to two-thirds of his clients appearing in criminal courts, he finds he needs to remain as flexible as possible. "You pretty much need to be ready to go at a moment's notice sometimes."

George has a good relationship with the local Legal Aid Ontario office in Thunder Bay, especially in terms of exchanging information and providing him with resources for his work.

He looks back on his career decisions and is content with the amount of legal aid work he does. His clients are from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and he finds criminal law work very gratifying.

"If there's a sense of right and wrong in the law," George adds, "it is in the criminal justice system."

LEGAL AID CERTIFICATE PROGRAM



Certificates allow clients to receive legal services from their choice of lawyer and are available to clients for a variety of legal problems, such as criminal, family, immigration and some civil law matters (for example, appeals from the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board and mental health law proceedings). You can help persons accused of crimes, victims of domestic violence, parents litigating family law issues and refugees through certificate work.

When you accept a legal aid certificate, it's your guarantee of payment from Legal Aid Ontario at the rates and limitations set out in the legal aid tariff. You will have the satisfaction of knowing you can make a difference to the most disadvantaged people in society, while at the same time working in private practice.

As a certificate lawyer you will also gain valuable experience representing clients in courts and tribunals on interesting and important legal issues.

Legal Aid supports lawyers doing legal aid work through services such as LAO LAW, which provides free online research services and a mentor service. With online billing through Legal Aid Online, submitting accounts is fast and easy. You will also receive help and support from the Lawyer Service Centre.

As a member of the bar in Ontario, it's easy to get started with legal aid work. Talk to your local legal aid office about getting a legal aid solicitor number and putting your name on the legal aid panels. Once you're on the panels, you can begin accepting certificates immediately.

Michael Crane

Immigration law, Toronto



Legal aid provides foundation for practice

For Michael Crane, representing legal aid clients has always come with the territory.

Michael, a Toronto immigration lawyer, has spent more than a decade advocating for the rights of new Canadians as they seek to establish themselves in this country.

The link between legal aid and immigration law, he says, is unique to this area of practice. “Legal aid makes it possible to represent people who would not otherwise have access to a lawyer,” he says. “Immigration can be a very big deal. In some cases, it can mean life or death.”

Helping new Canadians is a particularly rewarding part of his work, says Michael. “You can help them stay in Canada – they wouldn’t have had a shot if you hadn’t been there.”

After graduating from the University of Ottawa in the late 1980s, Michael worked briefly at Immigration Canada. Called to the bar in 1989, he then decided to pursue private practice in immigration law in Toronto.

But rather than starting from scratch, he was able to locate a colleague who had been appointed to the Immigration and Refugee Board and was leaving his practice. Michael took over his clients and started working with Legal Aid right away, practising immigration law appeals.

More than a decade later, 75 per cent of his files still consist of legal aid cases. And Michael has furthered his role in the legal aid process by joining the Toronto Area Committee that decides, in particular, whether funding should be given to appeal cases.

Michael's work with his legal aid clients has helped him learn the business and expand his practice. He strongly advises new lawyers to take advantage of the benefits that legal aid offers.

“It’s a huge asset to do legal aid work if you’re just starting,” he says. “Straight out of school, many lawyers are not aware of the business dynamics involved in running a practice. Legal aid reduces that stress.”

Michael is very happy with recent changes at Legal Aid Ontario. Recent changes to billing procedures, he says, make the system “very transparent” and “well organized.”

“I’d definitely choose working with Legal Aid again,” he says.

Nirmala Persaud

Family and Criminal Law, Toronto

A Little of Everything

“For young, sole practitioners, legal aid is a good way to get experience,” Nirmala comments. “I was called to the bar in 1995 and that same day I opened my own practice in Scarborough. I didn’t have any clients so I began by accepting certificate cases.”

Nirmala is now a sole practitioner of family, estate and criminal law. She also works with Legal Aid Ontario in certificate and duty counsel assignments and her role stretches into other areas as part of the Legal Aid Advice Lawyer panel. During her seven-year career doing legal aid work, she has gained credibility and built relationships.

“Legal aid was a great way to start. I could develop a client base, and get courtroom experience through duty counsel,” Nirmala says. “This was attractive to me as a new lawyer.”

“I still believe there are benefits to working with legal aid. I get to be in court everyday. I have a diverse caseload, a network of colleagues and I am able to rely on the resources provided by Legal Aid Ontario,” comments Nirmala.

As a mother of four, Nirmala juggles a tight schedule at home and at work. A flexible workweek allows her time with her family in addition to responding to clients' needs. Over the past two years, Nirmala has also taught family law in the Bar Admission Course.

“In a nutshell, I have my own practice, I have kids, I meet with clients on the weekend and in the evenings – I accommodate,” says Nirmala. “Some lawyers wouldn’t do that. But if you are happy and satisfied, it isn’t a burden.”

“I take the time to show my clients how the law works so they can make informed decisions,” she explains.

“When clients tell you that they appreciate the way you deal with them, it is very rewarding.”



Vinay Jain
Clinic law, Hamilton

Making a Difference

Ask Vinay Jain about his work with legal aid, and he'll proudly tell you that for the past six and a half years, he's worked tirelessly to make a difference in the lives of his clients.

Vinay volunteered at the student legal aid clinic while studying law at the University of Ottawa. After his call to the bar in 1996, he expected his future career would be in litigation. But once he started litigating, he realized that for him, something was missing.

"Most days, I was fighting about a narrow point of law," he says. "The people were forgotten, really."

So he switched his focus, began volunteering at Hamilton Mountain Community and Legal Services and a year later began working at the Renfrew County Legal Clinic, located about an hour outside of Ottawa.

Now Vinay spends most of his time on the front lines at Dundurn Community Legal Services, answering questions and giving advice.

Vinay enjoys clinic law because it allows him to help disadvantaged people and it provides him with an interesting variety of legal work. "You're not just doing casework,

you're informing people so they know the law and their rights," he says.

Part of the clinics' mandate is to assist in community development. "Clinic law takes a more holistic approach by educating and empowering your own community," says Vinay, "and everything we do is interconnected."


Clinics provide public legal education through talks and presentations to agencies, clients and individuals. "We actively participate in various community groups as part of our work, which is not something you normally do in the course of a legal career," notes Vinay.

Clinics also participate in law reform by making submissions to provincial or federal committees for new laws that are being written and debated. "In 1996/1997 clinics made submissions to the legislative committees regarding the *Tenant Protection Act* and the *Social Assistance Reform Act* in an effort to make them more productive for communities and individuals," says Vinay.

"This work is something I like. It's important, and it's necessary," he says. "so I'd deem it successful."

"If you're truly concerned with justice and access to justice, then practicing clinic law and working with clinics is it."

Working for your community



Lawyers who work with community legal clinics help:

- persons on social assistance;
- tenants; and,
- injured workers.

Legal Aid Ontario's 79 independent community legal clinics assist over 200,000 clients every year by offering poverty law services including social assistance, income maintenance, workplace injury claims, housing laws, human rights, mental health and more.

Community legal clinics address the unique legal needs of low-income people and communities and provide a broad array of services. These services can range from traditional casework representation to summary advice, self-help, public legal education, community organizing, test cases and other forms of law reform initiatives.

Clinic staff work with the elected board of directors to determine local needs and to prioritize their services. In most general service clinics, income maintenance and housing rights are major areas of practice, whereas in specialty clinics, the areas of practice are generally linked to the area of clinic specialization.

As a clinic lawyer you have the opportunity to gain experience working in courtrooms and tribunals.

Sixty-two general service clinics cover each geographic community in Ontario and 17 specialty clinics are geared towards specific areas of law and client groups, for example aboriginal services, tenants, persons with disabilities, accident victims and more.

"Many of us have chosen this honourable profession because we want to contribute to society; we want to make a difference. One of the best ways of doing that is by participating in the legal aid system, and ensuring that low-income Ontarians have access to the legal services they need to access justice."

**Professor Vern Krishna, O.C., FRSC, FCGA
Former Treasurer, The Law Society of Upper Canada**



Johanne Léger

Supervising Criminal Duty Counsel Lawyer, Ottawa

Achieving Work-Life Balance

Johanne Léger chose to pursue a career with Legal Aid Ontario because it gave her what she wanted: hands-on legal experience, access to a diverse client base and the chance to make a daily difference in people's lives.

Johanne's work as a supervising criminal duty counsel lawyer in Ottawa allows her to balance her career with her family life as a working mother. Johanne, who was called to the bar in February 1997, says that working for Legal Aid allows new lawyers to gain in-depth knowledge of the criminal justice system and experience in the courtroom.

"I have had the opportunity to interact with and come to know all the judges, Crowns, and community organizations that are important to most of my clients' and to their well-being in Ottawa," she says.

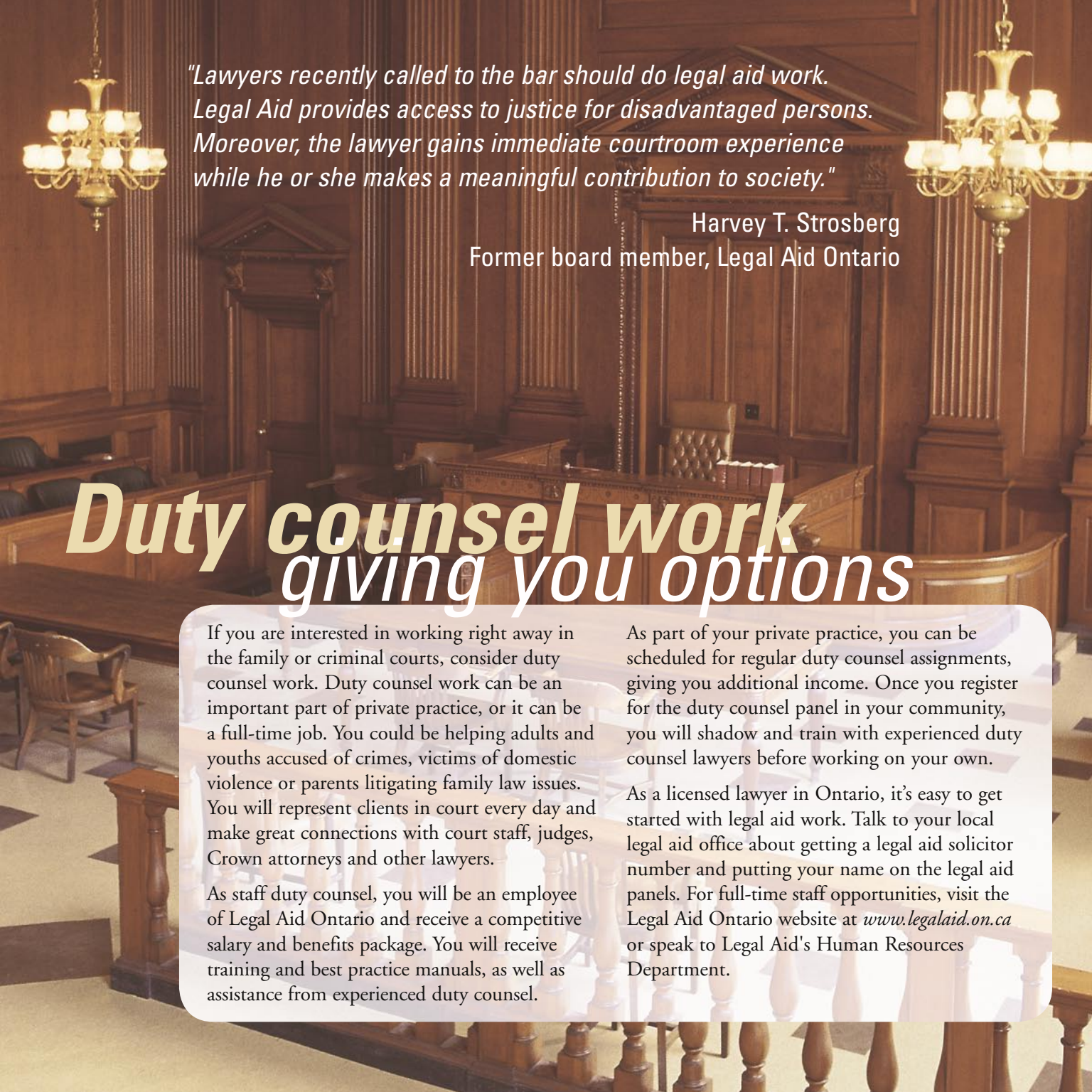
"Everyday is different, and everyday is rewarding," Johanne says. "By the nature of the profession, legal aid lawyers must be ready to face all kinds of people, from all walks of life and all levels of society."

Johanne was first introduced to Legal Aid Ontario in 1992, while enrolled in the French Common Law Program in Ottawa. Interested in Legal Aid's role in the community, Johanne became a summer employee at the University of Ottawa Community Legal Clinic.

From 1997 to 1999, Johanne practised family law at Wallbridge and Wallbridge, a private firm in Timmins, Ontario. However, both Johanne and her husband, who is also a lawyer, found that the long hours of private practice were not amenable to raising a family. As a result, they moved back to Ottawa where Johanne joined Legal Aid as a duty counsel lawyer.

Today, Johanne's daily schedule is typically broken into three parts. The majority of her day is spent representing clients and providing criminal legal counsel in court. As duty counsel she provides clients with advice and assistance on legal matters outside the court system. And, in her supervisory role, Johanne has some administrative tasks to complete everyday.

After many years of working in various capacities of Legal Aid, Johanne still feels engaged, interested and challenged in her career. Legal Aid has provided Johanne with the freedom to raise a family, the ability to help the less fortunate and the opportunity to represent clients in criminal court everyday. "Everyone needs to find their own niche," Johanne explains. "Legal Aid is mine."



"Lawyers recently called to the bar should do legal aid work. Legal Aid provides access to justice for disadvantaged persons. Moreover, the lawyer gains immediate courtroom experience while he or she makes a meaningful contribution to society."

Harvey T. Strosberg
Former board member, Legal Aid Ontario

Duty counsel work giving you options

If you are interested in working right away in the family or criminal courts, consider duty counsel work. Duty counsel work can be an important part of private practice, or it can be a full-time job. You could be helping adults and youths accused of crimes, victims of domestic violence or parents litigating family law issues. You will represent clients in court every day and make great connections with court staff, judges, Crown attorneys and other lawyers.

As staff duty counsel, you will be an employee of Legal Aid Ontario and receive a competitive salary and benefits package. You will receive training and best practice manuals, as well as assistance from experienced duty counsel.

As part of your private practice, you can be scheduled for regular duty counsel assignments, giving you additional income. Once you register for the duty counsel panel in your community, you will shadow and train with experienced duty counsel lawyers before working on your own.

As a licensed lawyer in Ontario, it's easy to get started with legal aid work. Talk to your local legal aid office about getting a legal aid solicitor number and putting your name on the legal aid panels. For full-time staff opportunities, visit the Legal Aid Ontario website at www.legalaid.on.ca or speak to Legal Aid's Human Resources Department.

Want to
know more?



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Contact Information:

To sign up for a legal aid panel, speak to the area director at the area office where you plan to practice and obtain a solicitor panel form.

For more information about Legal Aid Ontario, area offices and community legal clinics visit Legal Aid's website at www.legalaid.on.ca.

OR

To speak to an expert about opportunities at Legal Aid Ontario, call one of the following areas:

Legal Aid Ontario Human Resources Department

Criminal Duty Counsel

Family Duty Counsel

Clinic Services Office

Toll Free: 1-800-668-8258

Toronto: 416-979-2352

**Legal Aid Ontario receives financial support
from the Government of Ontario.**

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