

NOVA SCOTIA LEGAL AID COMMISSION ABORIGINAL JUSTICE STRATEGY 2016/2017



Cathy Benton, QC, Mi'kmaq woman and NSLA lead on our Aboriginal Strategy thanking the CBA NS for the Equity and Diversity award to NSLA.

Introduction

The Nova Scotia Legal Aid Commission has developed an Aboriginal Justice Strategy to prioritize our commitment to help Aboriginal Legal Aid applicants and clients.

A Working Group currently chaired by Cathy Benton, QC, manager of the Bridgewater Legal Aid Office and composed of 5 NSLA First Nations Lawyers, a Commissioner and an Articled Clerk is working with the Office of the Executive Director to establish and move forward an Aboriginal Justice Strategy. The initial strategy was created in 2014/15.

Nova Scotia Legal Aid is committed to working with our First Nations Communities to address issues facing these communities including over-representation in child protection matters and before criminal courts¹.

The Aboriginal Justice Strategy will advance our responsiveness to Aboriginal Nova Scotians who need our services².

¹ In Nova Scotia, 6% of the child population is Aboriginal, and 23% of the children in care are Aboriginal (Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group: Report to Canada's Premiers, July 2015)

² NSLA delivers service in 3 core areas: Criminal, Family and Social Justice (help with EI, CPP Disability, Income Assistance, Residential Tenancies and Housing)

AJS Platform

The Aboriginal Justice Strategy has three platforms:

- Community Consultation
- Cultural Responsiveness in Service Delivery
- Cultural Competency of Staff

Action Plan

Community Consultation

1. Continue to liaise with other Justice System stakeholders re Aboriginal peoples.
2. Continue building relationships with MLSN.
3. Continue participating with Health Directors, Barrister Society meetings, tripartite and child welfare specialist.
4. Meet with Off-Reserve community organizations (Friendship Centre - Pam Gloade-Derosches and Native Council - Grace Conrad).
5. Consultation and Collaboration with First Nations Communities as opportunities arise.

Cultural Responsiveness in Service Delivery

6. Services into Eskasoni, Gold River, Yarmouth and expand services in the Friendship Centre.
7. Collaboration with Chiefs/Tripartite on regulation and policy developments re CFSA legislation.
8. Consultation with Mi'kmaq communities on how NSLA can best serve them.

9. Further development of Legal Information (such as wills, hunting/fishing and status issues).
10. Collaborate on ER project for child welfare in Halifax region.

Cultural Competency

11. Continuing professional development in cultural sensitivity.
12. Enhance and continue recruitment strategy for hiring more Aboriginal employees.
13. Intentional mentorship of new Aboriginal employees.
14. Promotion of Aboriginal Social Worker within NSLA and within communities (both clients and stakeholders).
15. Prepare and promote list of available resources in Aboriginal organizations.

“I applaud NSLA’s Aboriginal Justice Strategy in its efforts to become more responsive to the needs of our Mi’kmaq and Aboriginal populations it serves.”

- Chief Prosper