

**Annual General Meeting
Tuesday October 27, 2026 – 6:30 p.m. In Person and via Zoom**

A G E N D A

1. Welcome – Gillian Reiss, Incoming Executive Director
2. Land Acknowledgment – Lynn Wheatley, Chair
3. Guest Speaker – Nir Gepner, Staff Lawyer
We All Belong Here: The Law & Changing Attitudes Towards Immigrants

Business Meeting

4. Approval of Agenda – Lynn Wheatley, Chair
BIRT the agenda be approved.
5. Minutes of 2025 Annual General Meeting & Business Arising – Lynn Wheatley, Chair
(pages 2 - 5)
BIRT the 2025 Annual General Meeting Minutes be approved.
6. Treasurer's Report for Fiscal Year Ending March 31, 2026 – Mike Cowan, Treasurer
(pages 6 - 17)
BIRT the 2025-2026 Treasurer's Report be approved.
7. Appointment of Auditor for 2025-2026 – Mike Cowan, Treasurer
BIRT Truster Zweig Raithatha LLP Chartered Professional Accountants be appointed as WCLS's auditor for 2026-2027.
8. Annual Report – Joe Myers, Executive Director **(pages 18 - 36)**
9. Election to Board of Directors **(pages 37 - 38)**
10. Thank you to Joe Myers, Outgoing Executive Director
11. Adjournment (There will be a brief meeting of the Board of Directors following the Meeting)

Please note that only those who have been WCLS members for 30 days or more may vote at this meeting.

Willowdale Community Legal Services

Annual General Meeting

Tuesday October 28, 2025 – 6:30 p.m. in person and via Zoom

AGENDA

1. Welcome – Joe Myers, Executive Director, WCLS
2. Land Acknowledgment – Lynn Wheatley, Chair, WCLS Board of Directors
3. Kahoot Game – Gillian Reis, Managing director, WCLS
 - Winners: 1st: Adrian Merdzan; 2nd: Lynn Wheatley; 3rd: Becca Ward
4. Guest Speaker: The Landscape and Gaps in Disability Benefits
Adrian Merdzan – Staff Lawyer at Income Security Advocacy Centre

Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC)

- ISAC is a specialty legal clinic in ON that addresses broader income security and anti-poverty issues

Landscape of Disability Benefits

- Federal
 - o Disability Tax Credit: you can claim credit at tax time; may reduce taxes; it is the gateway to other benefits and supports
 - o Canada Disability Benefit: direct financial support to those between 18-64; maximum of \$200 monthly
 - o Registered Disability Savings Plan
 - o Child Disability Benefit: tax free monthly payment made to families caring for a child under 18 with disability
 - o Canada Pension Plan – Disability: eligible if you've made enough contributions to CPP program; average monthly benefit amount is just under \$1200
- Provincial
 - o Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)
 - Can also think of Ontario Works (OW) as a disability benefit because not everyone who is disabled qualifies for ODSP, so OW becomes a disability benefit
 - o Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities: monthly financial assistance benefit for parent/caregiver
 - o Special Services at Home: reimbursement for support for child to participate in day-to-day activities, to participate in activities that support growth and development and support for caregivers
 - o Enhanced Respite for Medically Fragile and/or Technology Dependent Children and Youth

Gaps in Disability Benefits (ABC's)

Approach Flaws

- Even though government did consultations, many of the decisions ultimately made did not reflect what came out of the consultations
- No lived experience of disability among drafters of legislation
- Many people have very complicated relationships with medical system and yet the CDB heavily relies on medical system
- Disability benefit systems are often punitive and often result in people feeling there is high surveillance and policing of benefit
- Power mismatch: government vs. the individual; the government has full control of the program

Blueprint Flaws

- "Welfare wall": situation where those earning little or no income have strong disincentive to work, because it will reduce all benefits available to you
- Inaccessible: identification requirements make benefits almost inaccessible for unhoused people, those without ID; it includes legal jargon and hard to navigate on your own
- Procedural/legal imbalance: the government is the one who drafted the legislation; legally onerous for people to jump through hoops to navigate; designed to keep people away from the benefit scheme
- Medically onerous to prove one's disability; lots of times, doctors don't even understand the forms; the forms are then scrutinized by government officials

Coverage Flaws

- Benefits are inadequate; if you were able to get access to all the available benefits, you still would not be at the poverty line
- Emphasis on costs rather than savings: government focused on how to cut costs rather than looking at what savings take place when you have a strong social assistance system (costs to medical system, policing, jails, etc.)
- Surveillance: creates difficulties for those experiencing domestic violence
- Definitions of disability are exclusionary; hard to demonstrate certain types of disabilities over others, so it gets tiered
- When developing the CDB, there originally was a definition that was proposed but then the gov't realized it would make it too easy for people to get onto the benefit, so they changed the requirement

Call to Action

- Angela Davis: "I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept."
 - o Ways in which we can change what we can't accept: public legal education, community organizing, litigation and law reform, policy advocacy

Business Meeting

5. Approval of Agenda

Moved: PJ Dawda

Seconded: Sara Sepillo

6. Minutes of 2024 Annual General Meeting (pages 2-6)

BIRT 2024 Annual General Meeting Minutes be approved

Moved: Misha Hossein

Seconded: PJ Dawda

7. Treasurer's Report 2024-2025 (pages 7-18)

BIRT 2024-2025 Treasurer's Report be approved

Moved: Gemma Coppins

Seconded: Sara Sepillo

8. Appointment of Auditor for 2025-2026

BIRT Truster Zweig Raithatha LLP Chartered Professional Accountants be appointed as WCLS's auditor for 2025-2026

Moved: Gemma Coppins

Seconded: Jill, Member

9. Annual Report – Joe Myers, Executive Director, WCLS (pages 19-42)

- Joe thanked staff, board members and LAO
- Reflection on the importance of legal clinics and the critical role they play, imbedded in their communities, partnered with organizations, makes a significant difference
 - o WCLS has been doing this through Build a Better Fairview to contribute to the conversation with the city and developers in the area; keeping the voice of the community present
 - o Nothing better than serving our community and getting to call it work; JM reflected on how things have never been worse for poor people in Toronto right now
 - o Last week, provincial government proposed the removal of security of tenure; immediately community groups organized and pushed back, and it was revoked; this was a success thanks to community advocates

10. Election of Board of Directors (pages 43-45) – Lynn Wheatley

- Kelsey Miki and Gemma Coppins are both stepping down
- Nomination: Elvis Prifti

BIRT Elvis Prifti to be acclaimed as a Director to the Board of Directors

Moved: Lynn Wheatley

Seconded: Ben Torres

11. Other Business

- Sara Sepillo: expressed significant gratitude to all the staff and Board of Directors
 - o Drawing attention to page 28 of the report, highlighting the clinic casework statistics and case stories from staff starting on page 30

12. Adjournment (There will be a brief meeting of the Board of Directors following the Meeting)

Moved: PJ Dawda

Seconded: Misha Hossain

Please note that only those who have been WCLS members
for 30 days or more may vote at this meeting.

WILLOWDALE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES
Financial Statements
Year Ended March 31, 2026

WILLOWDALE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES
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Year Ended March 31, 2026

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INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT

To the Board of Directors of Willowdale Community Legal Services

Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of Willowdale Community Legal Services (the "organization"), which comprise the statement of financial position as at March 31, 2026, and the statements of operations, changes in fund balances and cash flows for the year then ended, and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies.

In our opinion, the accompanying financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the organization as at March 31, 2026, and the results of its operations and cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations (ASNPO).

Basis for Opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with Canadian generally accepted auditing standards. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the *Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statements* section of our report. We are independent of the organization in accordance with ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in Canada, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Responsibilities of Management and Those Charged with Governance for the Financial Statements

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial statements in accordance with ASNPO, and for such internal control as management determines is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, management is responsible for assessing the organization's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless management either intends to liquidate the organization or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

Those charged with governance are responsible for overseeing the organization's financial reporting process.

Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statements

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with Canadian generally accepted auditing standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

(continues)

Independent Auditor's Report to the Board of Directors of Willowdale Community Legal Services
(continued)

As part of an audit in accordance with Canadian generally accepted auditing standards, we exercise professional judgment and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit. We also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the organization's internal control.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by management.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the organization's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the organization to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

We communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

Markham, Ontario
June 23, 2026

Truster Zweig Raithatha LLP
Chartered Professional Accountants
Licensed Public Accountants



WILLOWDALE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES
Statement of Financial Position
March 31, 2026

	General Fund	Legal Disbursements Fund	Capital Fund	2026 Total	2025 Total
ASSETS					
CURRENT					
Cash	\$ 5,302	\$ 1,705	\$ -	\$ 7,007	\$ 8,257
Government remittances	6,271	33	-	6,304	6,444
Prepaid expenses	17,475	-	-	17,475	15,549
Interfund receivable (Note 3)	895	2,112	-	3,007	1,170
	29,943	3,850	-	33,793	31,420
CAPITAL ASSETS (Note 4)	-	-	382	382	764
	\$ 29,943	\$ 3,850	\$ 382	\$ 34,175	\$ 32,184
LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCES					
CURRENT					
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	\$ 20,354	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 20,354	\$ 14,730
Interfund payable (Note 3)	2,112	895	-	3,007	1,170
	22,466	895	-	23,361	15,900
FUND BALANCES	7,477	2,955	382	10,814	16,284
	\$ 29,943	\$ 3,850	\$ 382	\$ 34,175	\$ 32,184

APPROVED ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD

Lynn Wheatley

 Director

Chairperson

 Director

WILLOWDALE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES

Statement of Operations Year Ended March 31, 2026

	General Fund	Legal Disbursements Fund	Capital Fund	2026 Total	2025 Total
REVENUES					
Legal Aid Ontario - Direct receipts	\$ 1,035,332	\$ 7,300	\$ -	\$ 1,042,632	\$ 1,022,331
Legal Aid Ontario - Indirect receipts	103,707	-	-	103,707	84,530
Other	8	-	-	8	31
	1,139,047	7,300	-	1,146,347	1,106,892
EXPENSES					
Accommodations	84,370	-	-	84,370	80,156
Amortization	-	-	382	382	6,670
Communications	6,863	-	-	6,863	9,850
Equipment	3,656	-	-	3,656	4,059
Indirect payments	103,707	-	-	103,707	84,530
Legal disbursements	-	12,279	-	12,279	12,889
Library	-	-	-	-	188
Professional dues	11,688	-	-	11,688	11,211
Professional fees	5,403	-	-	5,403	4,521
Salaries and benefits	902,698	-	-	902,698	868,749
Supplies and services	15,829	-	-	15,829	17,589
Travel	1,447	-	-	1,447	1,103
	1,135,661	12,279	382	1,148,322	1,101,515
EXCESS (DEFICIENCY) OF REVENUES OVER EXPENSES	\$ 3,386	\$ (4,979)	\$ (382)	\$ (1,975)	\$ 5,377

WILLOWDALE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES
Statement of Changes in Fund Balances
Year Ended March 31, 2026

	General Fund	Legal Disbursements Fund	Capital Fund	2026 Total	2025 Total
FUND BALANCES - BEGINNING OF YEAR	\$ 7,586	\$ 7,934	\$ 764	\$ 16,284	\$ 19,837
Excess (Deficiency) of revenues over expenses	3,386	(4,979)	(382)	(1,975)	5,377
Transfer to Legal Disbursements Fund	-	-	-	-	-
Repayment of prior year surplus	(3,495)	-	-	(3,495)	(8,930)
FUND BALANCES - END OF YEAR	\$ 7,477	\$ 2,955	\$ 382	\$ 10,814	\$ 16,284

WILLOWDALE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES
Statement of Cash Flows
Year Ended March 31, 2026

	2026	2025
OPERATING ACTIVITIES		
Excess (deficiency) of revenues over expenses	\$ (1,975)	\$ 5,377
Item not affecting cash:		
Amortization	382	6,670
	(1,593)	12,047
Changes in non-cash working capital:		
Government remittances	140	244
Prepaid expenses	(1,926)	(1,381)
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	5,624	(37,770)
	3,838	(38,907)
Cash flow from (used by) operating activities	2,245	(26,860)
FINANCING ACTIVITY		
Repayment of prior year surplus	(3,495)	(8,931)
DECREASE IN CASH FLOW	(1,250)	(35,791)
Cash - beginning of year	8,257	44,048
CASH - END OF YEAR	\$ 7,007	\$ 8,257



WILLOWDALE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES
Notes to Financial Statements
Year Ended March 31, 2026

1. PURPOSE OF THE ORGANIZATION

Willowdale Community Legal Services (the "organization"), is incorporated without share capital under the laws of the Province of Ontario. The organization was formed to provide equal access to quality legal services for the low-income citizens in the Willowdale community and is primarily funded by Legal Aid Ontario.

The organization qualifies as a not-for-profit organization under the Income Tax Act and is exempt from corporate income tax.

2. SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICIES

The financial statements were prepared in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations. These standards are in accordance with Canadian generally accepted accounting principles and include the following significant accounting policies:

Financial instruments

The organization initially measures its financial assets and liabilities at fair value, except for certain non-arm's length transactions, which are recorded at the carrying or exchange amount depending on the circumstances. The organization subsequently measures all financial assets and financial liabilities at cost or amortized cost.

Financial assets measured at cost consist of cash, government remittances and interfund receivable.

Financial liabilities measured at amortized cost include accounts payable and accrued liabilities and interfund payable.

Fund accounting

The organization follows the restricted fund method of accounting for contributions. The funds described below, except as noted, are restricted under various agreements between the organization and Legal Aid Ontario ("LAO") and title to the organization assets vests with the funder.

General Fund

These funds are used to provide a range of legal and paralegal services, including information, advice and representation, to low-income individuals and families.

Legal Disbursements Fund

These funds are used to provide certain direct expenses incurred in representing the organization's clients in legal proceedings.

Capital Fund

This fund holds the capital assets of the organization that have been funded by Legal Aid Ontario.

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WILLOWDALE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES
Notes to Financial Statements
Year Ended March 31, 2026

2. SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICIES (continued)

Revenue recognition

Restricted contributions, consisting of LAO direct receipts, are recognized as revenue of the appropriate fund and deferred until expended for its intended purpose. Unrestricted contributions are recognized as revenue in the year in which they are received or receivable and collection is reasonably assured.

Disbursements recovered from clients are recorded in revenue when received.

Capital assets

Capital assets are recorded at cost. Amortization is provided for over the assets' estimated useful lives as follows:

Computer equipment	3 years	straight-line method
Office equipment	5 years	straight-line method
Leasehold improvements	term of the lease	straight-line method

The organization regularly reviews its capital assets to eliminate obsolete items. Government grants are treated as a reduction of capital assets cost.

Capital assets acquired during the year but not placed into use are not amortized until they are placed into use.

Use of estimates

The preparation of financial statements in accordance with Canadian generally accepted accounting principles requires management to make estimates and assumptions that affect the reported amounts of assets and liabilities at the date of the financial statements and the reported amounts of revenues and expenses for the reporting period. Significant areas requiring the use of estimates include the measurement of revenue recognition and accounts payable and accrued liabilities.

These estimates are reviewed periodically, and, as adjustments become necessary, they are reported in the period in which they become known.

Interfund transfers

Transfers between funds are made when resources of one fund have been authorized by the Board of Directors to finance activities and acquisitions in another fund.

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WILLOWDALE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES
Notes to Financial Statements
Year Ended March 31, 2026

2. SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICIES (continued)

Employee benefit plan

The organization offers a defined contribution plan with OPSEU Pension Trust, where it is required to fund up to a maximum of 3% of employees' annual earnings which is matched by deductions from employee salaries for a total of 6%. The organization's total expense under this plan during the year was \$23,238 (2025 - \$22,964) and is included in salaries and benefits.

3. INTERFUND RECEIVABLE AND INTERFUND PAYABLE

The amounts owing between funds are non-interest bearing, unsecured and have no fixed terms of repayment.

4. CAPITAL ASSETS

	Cost	Accumulated amortization	2026 Net book value	2025 Net book value
Office equipment	\$ 8,687	\$ 8,687	\$ -	\$ 1
Computer equipment	59,078	59,078	-	-
Leasehold improvements	13,297	12,915	382	763
	\$ 81,062	\$ 80,680	\$ 382	\$ 764

5. INDIRECT RECEIPTS AND INDIRECT PAYMENTS

LAO administered and made payments on behalf of the organization for the following expenses and computer equipment:

	2026	2025
Supplies and services	\$ 103,546	\$ 84,425
Library	-	4
Salaries and benefits	161	101
	\$ 103,707	\$ 84,530



WILLOWDALE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES
Notes to Financial Statements
Year Ended March 31, 2026

6. COMMITMENTS AND CONTINGENT LIABILITIES

- a) The organization has indemnified its past, present and future directors, officers, employees and volunteers against expenses (including legal expenses), judgments and any amount actually or reasonably incurred by them in connection with any action, suit or proceeding in which the directors and officers are sued as a result of their service, if they acted honestly and in good faith with a view to the best interests of the organization.

The nature of the indemnity prevents the organization from reasonably estimating the maximum exposure. The organization has purchased directors' and officers' liability insurance with respect to this indemnification. Historically, the organization has not made any payments under such or similar indemnification agreements. At this time, the organization is not aware of any claims under these guarantees and, therefore, no amount has been accrued in the financial statements with respect to these guarantees.

- b) The organization is committed under an operating lease expiring March 31, 2030 for the rental of its office space. The annual commitment for base rent (exclusive of other occupancy costs) for the next five years is as follows:

2027	\$	44,980
2028		44,980
2029		46,364
2030		46,364

7. FINANCIAL RISK MANAGEMENT

The organization is exposed to various risks through its financial instruments. The following analysis provides a measure of the organization's risk exposure and concentration as of March 31, 2026.

(a) Credit risk

Credit risk is the risk that one party to a financial instrument will cause a financial loss for the other party by failing to meet its obligation. The organization is not exposed to credit risk.

(b) Liquidity risk

Liquidity risk is the risk that an organization will encounter difficulty in meeting obligations associated with financial liabilities. The organization is exposed to this risk mainly with respect to its accounts payable and accrued liabilities. The organization maintains adequate cash reserves and generally settles its liabilities within thirty days.

(c) Market risk

Market risk is the risk that the fair value or future cash flows of a financial instrument will fluctuate because of changes in market prices. Market risk comprises three types of risk: currency risk, interest rate risk, and other price risk. The organization is not exposed to any of these risks.



Annual Report

October 2025 to September 2026

WCLS at a Glance

Willowdale Community Legal Services (WCLS) opened in February 1987. WCLS is one of approximately 70 community legal clinics throughout Ontario and receives its funding from Legal Aid Ontario (LAO). Many clinics are general service clinics like ours, which serve a specific geographic area. Others provide specialized legal help in areas such as income maintenance or environmental law, or serve a particular community, such as Aboriginal peoples or seniors.

Our clinic provides summary advice, information and referrals, client representation, public legal education, law reform, and community organizing and development. Tenancy, social assistance/income maintenance, and immigration law are our main areas of practice. We also may assist with matters concerning domestic violence and debt.

Board of Directors

We are governed by a community-based Board of Directors as an incorporated non-profit. Our Board consists of a diverse group of volunteers, most of whom live or work in our community. WCLS is fortunate to have such committed Directors; we value and appreciate their contributions. Our Board plays an essential role and is responsible for:

- providing direction on policy issues;
- planning and evaluating;
- overseeing personnel and financial management;
- reporting to the community; and,
- reporting to LAO.

Directors are elected at our October Annual General Meeting. For the past year, our directors have been: **Lynn Wheatley** [Chair], **PJ Dawda** [Vice-Chair], **Michael Cowan** [Treasurer], **Kyn Barker** (started February 2026), **Susy Guadron**, **Misha Hossain** (ended April 2026), **Sarah Modesta Sepillo**, **Astha Priya** (started June 2026), **Irma Spahiu**, and **Ben Torres**.

In addition to our monthly Board meetings, we held our annual Board & Staff Planning Meeting on April 28, 2026. Staff shared casework stories, we reviewed the Malatest report assessment of our catchment area, and we discussed our outreach plan.

WCLS Staff 2025-2026

Joe Myers	Executive Director
Gillian Reiss	Staff Lawyer / Managing Director
Nir Gepner	Staff Lawyer
Sara Ageorlo	Staff Lawyer
Rebecca Ward	Staff Lawyer
Rola Hamdan	Community Legal Worker
Louie Jane Reducto	Office Administrator / Intake Worker
Heena Liqa	Intake Worker / Administrative Assistant
Carol Drumm	Staff Lawyer – Contract (started March 2026)
Maryam Rafieefanood	Staff Lawyer – Contract (started Sept 2026)

WCLS strives to provide in-house translation when possible. Rola is fluent in Arabic. Jane is fluent in Tagalog and Bisaya. Heena is fluent in Dari. Sara and Maryam are fluent in Farsi. Nir is fluent in Hebrew. Gillian can provide basic service in French.

Student Placements

WCLS contributes to our legal community by providing placement opportunities. Students support the work that we do while learning about poverty-law, which we hope impacts their future career decisions. In 2025-2026 we hosted the following students:

- Paralegal Students → We regularly provide placement opportunities for paralegal students from Seneca College. We hosted two such students last year.
- Pro Bono Law Students → We regularly hold placements for Pro Bono Canada law students. Last academic year we hosted two law students from the University of Toronto. These students provided research and case support in immigration law. We are hosting two students this academic year.
- Osgoode Hall's Public Interest Requirement → Osgoode Law students are required to volunteer 40 hours of their time to a public interest organization. Last academic year we once again hosted students who assisted with JusticeMakers and casework. We are hosting a new student this academic year.
- High School Co-Op Students → WCLS hosted seven students over the past year from Georges Vanier Secondary School, Notre Dame High School, and A.Y. Jackson Secondary School. The students were supervised by our Community Legal Worker and worked closely with WCLS's support staff. The students provided support with public legal education sessions, outreach, social media, non-legal research, and admin support. One of the placement students played a valuable role in supporting the development of our new website, which will be launching soon to replace our existing site.

Anti-Racism Anti-Oppression Activities

WCLS staff continue to engage in anti-racism and anti-oppression training monthly. Among other initiatives over the past year, we focused on connecting with speciality legal clinics who provide legal services to dedicated demographics. We hosted the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario, ARCH Disability Law Centre, the Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, and The Centre Francophone du Grand Toronto to learn more about the unique services provided by these clinics, the importance of legal clinics that serve clients of specific communities, and the best ways in which WCLS can collaborate with these services to assist our clients.

In addition to deepening our connections with speciality legal clinics, we learned about recent federal changes to immigration policy. We also individually attended events for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to continue to learn about and reflect on how colonization impacts peoples and people in Canada.

WCLS staff also participated in external anti-racism and anti-oppression trainings and educational sessions. The sessions were provided by organizations including other legal clinics, Legal Aid Ontario, the North York Community Cluster, the ACLCO, The Law Society of Ontario and the City of Toronto.

We continue our involvement with North-East Toronto Local Immigration Partnership (NETLIP) on fostering relationships with Indigenous leaders and enhancing cultural competency among service providers in the community. We were an active member of the “Newcomer & Indigenous Task Group” led by NETLIP. While NETLIP is currently undergoing restructuring and developing a new strategic plan, we remain committed to continuing our collaboration and partnership with NETLIP, particularly on initiatives focused on building meaningful relationships with Indigenous Peoples and strengthening cultural understanding and competency among service providers.

This year our Board made a commitment to developing an Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression and Decolonization policy. To that end, our Staff Lawyer / Managing Director attended an ACLCO training that provided a guide on ARAO-D policy development. We will be implementing the resulting toolkit in the coming years.

Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) Funding

WCLS receives our funding exclusively from LAO. Our financial year runs from April 1 to March 31. Each year, we submit a report to LAO outlining the previous year's activities and request funding for the next year. Our service proposal (funding application) for 2026-2027 is due January 4, 2027. We also provide to LAO quarterly statistics and financial reports.

In 2018-2019 the clinic's funding was reduced for the first time in its history by approximately

7%. In the subsequent years WCLS received small increases. In June 2024 the clinic was informed that it would receive an additional 5.5% funding increase.

In June 2025 LAO announced that the budget for Ontario's community legal clinics for 2025-2026 would increase by 4%. LAO said that each clinic would receive a funding increase, but the percentage increase for each clinic would not be the same. To determine the most equitable way to distribute the funding increase, LAO hired a consultant to come up with a funding formula. LAO hired Malatest, a Canadian market research and evaluation firm. They developed a method for calculating community legal needs scores and created tools for future resources allocations. Factors include percentage of populations that receives social assistance, Indigenous populations, access to health care, remoteness, access to affordable housing, homeless population, visible minorities and newcomers, etc. Based on the Malatest formula, WCLS received a funding increase of 2%.

LAO did not commit to additional funding to WCLS or other legal clinics in 2026-2027 or moving forward. We are waiting to hear if LAO will increase our funding for the current fiscal year, even by a cost-of-living measure. Stable, on-going funding that accounts for increased costs and the developing complex needs of our community allow us to provide consistent core services and additional responsive services to help meet our community's needs.

Community Partners @ WCLS

Toronto East Employment & Immigration Law Services (TEEILS)

In 2015 WCLS joined with the then-five other clinics in Toronto east of Yonge Street to assist the many precariously employed low-income earners who required employment law services throughout east Toronto. We applied to LAO for permanent funding with an added immigration component and received approval for the Toronto East Employment and Immigration Law Services (TEEILS) program in 2017. Don Valley Community Legal Services receives the funding and administers the program. Currently the TEEILS staff consists of Kanika Gupta (employment lawyer), John Wigle (employment lawyer), Allison Krochak (immigration lawyer) and Jennifer Wan (immigration lawyer).

Each TEEILS clinic uses the program's services to meet its own needs depending on the level of service in employment and immigration law that the clinic otherwise offers. WCLS uses TEEILS to provide employment law services to our community. The main employment law areas that TEEILS covers are statutory entitlements, Employment Insurance (EI), human rights, and common law entitlements for non-unionized employees. TEEILS has also provided services in the Canada Emergency Response Benefit Program (CERB) and the Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB).

WCLS is one of the TEEILS' program's busiest catchment areas for employment law services.

The program receives up to ten intakes a week from WCLS. Employment law clients from WCLS are diverse. Many do not speak English, as well as are precariously employed working “gig work” or shift work jobs. A TEEILS employment law lawyer works out of our office once every other week so that WCLS clients can meet their lawyer in their own community.

Senior management of the member clinics meet regularly. Managers are in the process of updating the Memorandum of Understanding. Training opportunities are also held among staff members who work in immigration and employment law.

Settlement Services

WCLS continues its partnership with The Neighbourhood Organization (TNO) to provide settlement services. TNO settlement workers work from our office and meet with members of our community to assist in providing a range of settlement services, including assisting community members with applications to various agencies and government ministries. TNO settlement workers offer services in multiple languages including Arabic, Mandarin, and Armenian.

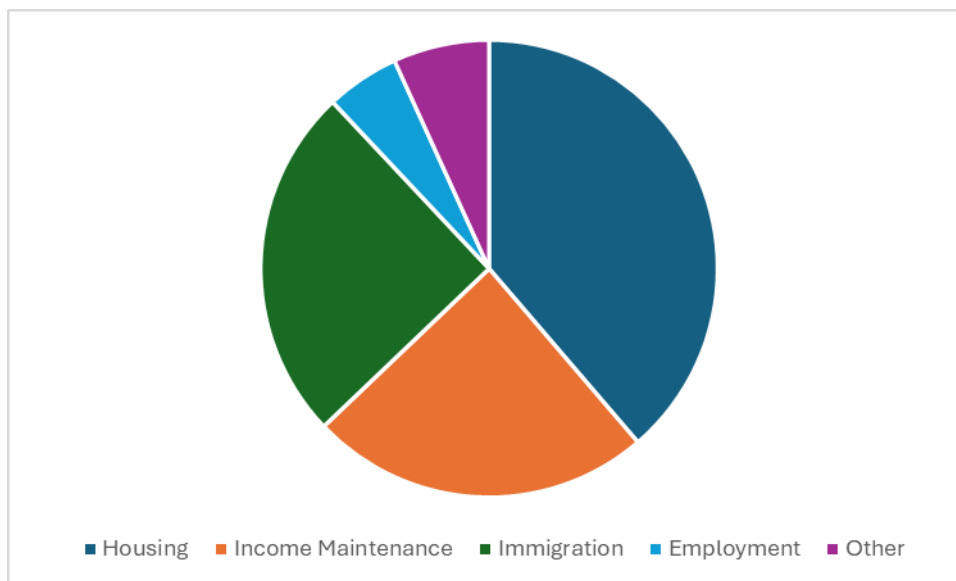
Clinic Casework and Initiative Statistics

(October 1, 2025 to September 30, 2026)

We record our statistics using LAO's data program, CIMS.

Case and Brief Service, and Referral Statistics

From October 1, 2025 to September 30, 2026 WCLS had a total of 5360 contacts from clients. Of those contacts, we provided legal assistance to clients on 3190 matters.



Legal issues in the area of housing accounted for 39% of cases, income maintenance 24%, immigration 25%, and employment 5%. Roughly 7% percent of cases fell into the category of other (human rights, debt, affidavit, notaries, etc.).

Of the 3190 cases, 508 became files that took over two hours of work to complete. The remaining matters were dealt with as advice or brief services, each taking less than two hours. Housing accounted for 217 files, income maintenance 152 files, and immigration 135 files.

WCLS and TEEILS staff make regular appearances at courts and tribunals, including the Social Benefits Tribunal, Social Security Tribunal of Canada, Landlord and Tenant Board, and Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario. Staff also appear before the Immigration Appeal Division, Federal Court of Canada and Ontario Superior Court.

We make referrals for matters in areas of law that our clinic does not handle, for people who do not qualify financially, and for people who live outside our catchment area. We make legal

referrals to other legal clinics, LAO, and the private bar. We also refer clients to agencies, government offices, and service providers.

Initiative Statistics

An initiative is work that is not individual client casework. The clinic opened 90 initiatives between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026. Initiatives consisted of: public legal education – 22, outreach – 15, training/professional development – 7, partners/networks – 12, community development – 5, community organizing – 4, governance – 9, advocacy – 2, and other – 4.

During the past year, WCLS staff delivered more than 30 public legal education workshops. Sessions were provided to community members and service providers from organizations such as Homeless Shelters, Support Enhance Access Service Centre (S.E.A.S.), Fairview Public Library, Working Women Community Centre, Federation of Metro Tenants Associations, and Newcomer Women's Services Toronto.

We produced materials or provided information in writing to community agencies and government offices, which included distributing more than 1,500 pamphlets. We also post items of interest, community events and legal issues on our website (www.willowdalelegal.com), Twitter (@LegalWillowdale), Instagram (@LegalWillowdale) and Facebook page. Over the past year our website had 11,525 visitors and 21,162 page views. We received 264 intakes on our website.

WCLS's listserv has a total of 820 subscribers, with 41 joining this past year. We participated in 34 email campaigns and sent out a total of 2460 emails as part of those campaigns.

Our staff members consistently attend conferences, webinars and workshops to hone our skills and expand our knowledge. Staff members were involved this year in providing several trainings to legal clinic caseworkers and the private bar.

Case Stories

Looking at our statistics gives an overview of numbers but does not give a sense of the relevance of our work to individual clients. The following are brief examples of some of the clients and cases with which we were involved in 2025-2026.

INCOME MAINTENANCE CASES

Poor access to medical care impacts ODSP application

WCLS assists many clients with denials of ODSP benefits due to medical ineligibility. As part of the ODSP application, a health practitioner, who is usually the client's family doctor, must complete an application that explains the health conditions a client has and how those health conditions impact the client's ability to do daily living activities. It is very difficult to be approved for ODSP just based on the application. A strong ODSP application requires a client to have medical records, such as specialist reports, to support the application their doctor completes.

Many of our clients do not have access to high-quality health care. The barriers that they experience when accessing health care include language barriers, difficulty navigating health care services, mistrust in the health care system due to previous negative experiences and lack of culturally appropriate services in the area. These barriers often result in ODSP applications that are not well completed and do not have supporting medical records.

Longstanding, Untreated Mental Health

A's family doctor, who she has seen for over 30 years, completed her ODSP application. The only condition listed on the application was a left ankle fracture. The family doctor stated that there were no mental health conditions. A told us that she has struggled with depression and anxiety for years in the context of numerous challenging life events including losing family members to drug overdose, suicide and cancer. She said that her doctor is aware of her mental health difficulties and years ago had prescribed her anti-depressants but never renewed the prescription. She wants to see a psychiatrist, but her family doctor never made the referral. Shortly after her doctor completed the application, A was admitted to the hospital due to suicide risk. While she was in the hospital, she finally saw a psychiatrist and social worker who prescribed her medications.

We asked the family doctor to add the mental health conditions to her ODSP application. Her family doctor refused, stating he was unsure if her anxiety and depression would last for more than a year, despite her long history of struggling with these conditions. A would be unable to discuss her depression and anxiety at the hearing without a doctor verifying these conditions. We were able to get the psychiatrist who she saw in the hospital to verify the conditions despite the psychiatrist only recently meeting the client. The psychiatrist thought it was

obvious that her conditions would last for at least a year given A's history. We represented the A at her ODSP hearing, where she had to explain why her anxiety and depression were significant conditions despite her family doctor saying there were no mental health concerns and despite only recently seeing a psychiatrist. A won her appeal and was approved for ODSP benefits. The Tribunal recognized that her mental health conditions were significant despite the family doctor's opinion.

Difficulty communicating with OW and ODSP caseworkers

Clients regularly tell us that they are unable to get in touch with their OW and ODSP caseworkers. We have difficulty reaching caseworkers ourselves. We have also noticed that many clients have new caseworkers. The combination of caseworkers being inexperienced and difficult to reach results in many issues with clients' benefits. It also means that we are having to start legal processes to challenge caseworkers' decisions which could easily be resolved through a phone call.

Arbitrary Reduction

C received ODSP benefits for many years. As part of her benefits, she received 4 pairs of knee braces every year without any issues. Recently, her ODSP caseworker changed. C's doctor completed the necessary paperwork that indicated that she required another 4 pairs of knee braces this year. Despite the doctor's opinion, and ODSP's long history of providing the client with 4 pairs of knee braces, the caseworker only issued the client benefits for 2 pairs of knee braces. The caseworker told the client that she thought 4 pairs of knee braces was excessive and suggested that the client just wash her knee braces.

We called the caseworker on behalf of the client and explained that the doctor had completed the appropriate paperwork for the client to receive benefits for 4 pairs of knee braces. The caseworker continued to refuse to provide the client the benefits. We filed an internal review of the caseworker's decision and contacted the manager of the office about the issue. Two months after the client contacted us about this issue, the caseworker reversed her decision and provided the client with benefits for 4 pairs of knee braces.

Other cases

Trying to understand the CRA's policies on debt recovery

F is a survivor of intimate partner violence and coercive control. She relies on the Canada Child Benefit and ODSP benefits to meet her basic needs. F arrived in Canada several years ago as a permanent resident with her ex-husband and two sons. She gave birth to her daughter in Canada. Her ex-husband exercised total control over all aspects of her life. He prevented her from accessing her bank account, did not let her have her own phone number and did not allow her to keep any of her identification with her. Her ex-husband forced her to return to her home country two times. He kidnapped her two sons. She still does not know where her sons are.

F moved back to Canada in 2023 with her daughter. She advised the CRA of her separation from her ex-husband and the circumstances leading to that separation. The CRA informed the client that she had a Canada Child Benefit overpayment of \$49,000 as she was issued benefits while she was living outside Canada. F never received a single dollar of the benefits the CRA is requiring her to repay. She believes her ex-husband applied for the benefits using her information.

F contacted our clinic as the CRA was deducting 50% of her ongoing Canada Child Benefit payments towards the overpayment debt, which was causing significant financial hardship. With the assistance of F's Member of Parliament, we were able to reduce the collection to 15%. However, a month after the CRA agreed to reduce the collection to 15%, they sent F a letter stating they were increasing the collection back to 50%. The decision letter provided no explanation for why the CRA would not maintain the 15% recovery rate nor why an increase in the recovery rate was appropriate.

With the assistance of the Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC), we filed an application for Judicial Review in Federal Court of the CRA's decision to increase recovery back to 50%, arguing that the decision is unreasonable and procedurally unfair. This case is still ongoing. We are hoping to have the collection reduced to 15% again and to learn more about what policies the CRA uses when determining the appropriate level of collection as none of these policies are publicly available.

IMMIGRATION CASES

WCLS continues to respond to the needs in the community as they arise. Our clinic assists people in the community to arrange their status in Canada, avoid removals and reunite with families. We also assist with various routine front-line applications.

Our clinic currently represents several clients in Humanitarian applications for PR status. We represent a client in a refugee claim. We are advocating for a client not be removed from Canada. We are representing clients in several applications to reunite with family members abroad.

Increased processing times and bureaucratic delays mean that many of our clients require additional support during their immigration processes – these include work and study permits, TRP applications and more.

Our clinic continues to provide a combination of representation and review/advice work to address the growing and various needs of the community. We work with our local MP's on individual cases. We also support the law reform work of organizations such as the Canadian Council for Refugees and the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers. We provide support independently and as a part of the Inter-Clinic Immigration Working Group.

I. Challenging refusals of applications

Immigration laws in Canada are applied by immigration officers. Often, decisions include errors and create severe difficulties for our clients and their families. Our clinic is committed to challenging erroneous decisions that negatively impact our clients.

For example, G applied for PR status as a sponsored spouse of her Canadian husband. They applied on their own. The couple has three children, one of whom is autistic. They all reside together in Canada. G's PR application was refused. IRCC claimed that they asked her to complete a form, but she never received the request. G's husband is a cancer patient, and the family is dealing with a lot these days. Our clinic assisted G and her husband to file a reconsideration request with IRCC. We provided evidence and submissions about the unfairness and harm caused by the refusal. G's application was reopened earlier this year, and she is awaiting the completion of her landing process.

Another example, M was refused a TRP in Canada for erroneous reasons. Our clinic commenced a judicial review process at the Federal Court, and also filed a new application for M. The combination of these two processes pushed IRCC to issue M a new TRP very quickly. The Federal Court litigation in this case continues to ensure that M benefits from continuous status in Canada (essentially voiding the original erroneous refusal).

II. Compelling needs to stay/remain in Canada

WCLS continues to assist people to remain in Canada due to special needs and circumstances. We routinely file humanitarian applications, TRP's and other process to overcome inadmissibility and/or ineligibility for status in Canada.

V came to Canada to support her husband, a person without status here, who suffered a brain injury while in Canada. V also sustained an injury in Canada when she was hit by a car. Our clinic applied for V and her husband to obtain temporary resident permits in Canada (a humanitarian form of temporary status), and the couple received the permits earlier this year.

TENANCY CASES

Bill 60

This year, the provincial government introduced Bill 60, which made several changes to the *Residential Tenancies Act* (RTA) that erode tenants' rights and remove safeguards for some of our most vulnerable clients. Three of the most significant changes include the reduction in the amount of time in which tenants may file a request to review of an Landlord Tenant Board (LTB) order; the removal of a landlord's obligation to pay financial compensation to a tenant who is being evicted in order for the landlord to move into the rental unit; and the

reduction in the amount of time in which a tenant may pay rent arrears to their landlord before the landlord may file an eviction application at the LTB.

Running out of Time to Review

Prior to Bill 60, a party had 30 days to file a Request to Review an Order if they felt that the order contained a serious error or if they were unable to participate in the hearing proceeding. Bill 60 amended the RTA to require that a Request to Review be filed within 15 days of the issuance of an order. For tenants who are single parents, have capacity limited by health condition or disability, do not speak English, or simply do not know that they have the right to file a Request to Review and that there is a deadline to doing so, it has become significantly more challenging to file these requests by the deadline.

WCLS regularly assists tenants with filing requests to review of LTB orders, especially in situations where the tenant is outside the filing deadline. If the deadline has passed, the tenant is required to also file a Request to Extend the Deadline that must be approved before the tenant's Request to Review will be considered by the LTB.

Unaware of Impending Eviction

This TCHC tenant contacted WCLS on a Monday morning after the Sheriff had knocked on her door the Friday prior and informed her that she would be evicted in five days. The tenant was not aware that there had been an LTB hearing and that the LTB had ordered that her tenancy be terminated. The tenant had not received any prior paperwork related to this because she had lost her mailbox key and had been having difficulty replacing it due to the inability to afford the replacement key. WCLS assisted the tenant with filing a Request to Review of the eviction order as well as a Request to Extend Deadline, as the tenant was now more than two months past the deadline to file the Request to Review. WCLS represented the tenant in the hearing of her review request, following which the LTB granted the tenant's request. WCLS negotiated a settlement agreement with TCHC that allowed the tenant to remain living in her subsidized rental unit.

N12 – Eviction for Landlord's Own Use

Prior to Bill 60, if a landlord wished to evict a tenant because they intended to move into the rental unit, they were required to pay a tenant one month's worth of rent as compensation and give the tenant 60 days notice before they would have to move out. Bill 60 amended the RTA to allow a landlord to bypass their obligation to pay compensation to a tenant they intended to evict by giving the tenant at least 120 days notice. The reality of N12 evictions is that many landlords use them to evict tenants but never move into the rental unit and instead rent out the unit to a new tenant, to whom they can charge significantly more rent. This is especially so if the tenant being evicted is a long-term tenant in a rent-controlled unit who is paying a monthly rent that is well below market rent. The removal of the obligation on the landlord to pay compensation further disadvantages tenants who are being evicted from their homes.

Delaying the Inevitable

WCLS recently represented a tenant in an N12 case in which his landlord was seeking to evict him to move back into the home. The tenant is a single father with four children, two of whom live with him full time. The family rents an entire house from their landlord and have lived in the house for over 12 years. As a result, their rent is well below market rent and is affordable for the father's limited income. The landlord initially filed a case against the family in June. At this point, the landlord was still bound by the pre-Bill 60 rules to pay the tenant one month of compensation. At the hearing, WCLS successfully argued that the application should be dismissed, as the landlord had not made the payment to the tenant by the correct date. The LTB agreed and dismissed the application.

The landlord filed a second application against the family in July. Following the hearing of the second application in August, the LTB concluded that the landlord's application should be granted, however it ordered a delay in the eviction until June 2027. The Board granted a ten-month delay in the eviction due to the evidence put forward at the hearing about the extreme prejudice that would be experienced by one of the tenant's daughters if she were to be evicted during the school year. The daughter attends school in the area, is going into her final year of high school, and lives with severe mental health conditions that would be severely exacerbated if she had to move in the middle of the school year.

Although the household was ultimately ordered to move out of their long-term home, the representation from WCLS provided the family with over a year delay in the eviction, giving the family the time needed to transition to a new living environment as smoothly as possible and ensuring they received the compensation they were previously entitled to under the RTA.

N4 – deadline to pay arrears before LL can file

Prior to Bill 60, if a tenant was served with an N4 Notice of Eviction for Non-Payment of Rent, they would have 14 days to pay to the landlord the rent arrears owing before the landlord was permitted to file an eviction application at the LTB. Bill 60 amended the RTA to reduce the amount of time a tenant may pay to only seven days.

WCLS regularly provides advice and support to tenants who have received an N4 Notice of Termination and are seeking to maintain their tenancy. We make referrals for tenants to Eviction Prevention in the Community, a referral-only service that provides comprehensive support to tenants who are facing eviction due to rent arrears. This past year, WCLS represented many tenants who were facing eviction due to rent arrears, including a grandmother living with her children and grandchild who had recently experienced a decrease in her self-employment income; a single mother who had lost access to financial support from her family due to the war in Iran; a disabled single mother who had her ODSP benefits wrongly suspended; and a woman who fell behind on rent following the removal of

her husband from the household after a domestic assault.

Other cases

Making Noise about Noise

A long time TCHC tenant approached WCLS after trying for years to get her landlord to address a constant noise emitted from a mechanical device attached to the roof of the building. The tenant asked to be transferred to another unit. TCHC acknowledged the noise but refused to take any action as the level of noise did not offend the City's Noise Bylaw. We assisted the tenant by advocating on her behalf and filing a maintenance application at the LTB in which the tenant claimed various remedies including a rent abatement. TCHC responded by offering the tenant a transfer to another more suitable unit in her community, the remedy the tenant sought from the outset.

A Few Days Late after 13 Years

An 82-year-old widow who has lived in her home for 13 years contacted WCLS after her landlord filed an eviction application in 2025 alleging she was not paying her rent on time. Following the death of her husband in 2023, the tenant had lost his additional household income. Living on a fixed income of Old Age benefits, the tenant struggled to adjust to the significant reduction in household income. Despite receiving some financial support from her family, making ends meet and consistently paying her rent on time became increasingly difficult. WCLS assisted the tenant with setting up an agreement with her landlord where she would avoid eviction by paying her rent on time. When the tenant encountered renewed financial difficulties in 2026 and failed to make a rent payment on time, her landlord immediately obtained an eviction order against her. WCLS assisted the tenant with filing a Set Aside Motion and setting up an agreement with her landlord that the tenancy would continue.

This example highlights the increasing number of cases we are seeing in which vulnerable tenants face eviction by a landlord that is a Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT), a company that owns and operates rental buildings to create income for investors. Since the main objective for REITs is not providing suitable housing to people, but instead creating profit for investors, tenants face particularly unforgiving conditions, including the near eviction of an elderly long-term tenant whose only mistake was paying rent a few days late.

EMPLOYMENT CASES

Update on E's Case from Last Year

Last year we provided the summary of a settlement we received for E, a female refugee who lived in social housing with her teenage son. E worked as a cleaner for a recruitment agency. While performing work at one location, she experienced harassment and racial discrimination from a supervisor. TEEILS stepped filed a claim at the Ontario's Human Rights

Tribunal against the recruitment agency, the company she was working at, and the supervisor employed by that company. In 2025, we reached a settlement of \$10,000 with the company. This year, the claim proceeded to a merits hearing against the individual and the recruitment agency. We achieved a nominal monetary settlement with the agency at the beginning of the hearing, and then presented full arguments against the individual, who did not appear. The Tribunal awarded our client \$15,000 from the individual, which she has now received.

Advocacy for Injured Worker at Contested Hearing

Y is an elderly Iranian immigrant who is supported by ODSP due to a long-term back injury and mental health issues. In 2018 he was dismissed from his job due to an injury he sustained at work and because of his need for accommodation in the workplace. TEEILS initially attempted to negotiate a fair settlement for the termination of his employment. The employer denied any wrongdoing and retained counsel to defend against any potential claim. Undeterred by the employer's refusal to admit liability, TEEILS filed a claim at the Human Rights Tribunal for discrimination on the basis of disability and age. The case did not settle at mediation, and delays caused by Covid resulted in years of waiting until a 2-day merits hearing was finally scheduled for September of 2026. We represented the client at the hearing where we spent over a day questioning witnesses with counsel for the company. The Tribunal then requested written closing submissions, which we have recently filed. We are now awaiting the Tribunal's decision in the case, which we expect to be in our client's favour.

Initiatives

Community Outreach

JusticeMakers

JusticeMakers is a group of community residents and WCLS clients that advocate for issues related to people living with low-income in our community.

JusticeMakers workshop facilitators provide skill-building sessions for members to sharpen their advocacy skills and increase their knowledge. This year, workshops have been provided on strategies to use when meeting with elected officials; issues with social assistance rates in Ontario; and an overview of Toronto mayoral candidates' positions on issues such as affordability, transit and housing.

Build A Better Fairview (BaBF)

BaBF advocate that community benefits be included in redevelopment around the Fairview Mall Area, including adequate green space, affordable housing, and the creation of new schools to accommodate the increase in population. On August 8, BaBF hosted a community safety walk around the Fairview area. Attendees were invited to note safety issues along the walking path. Participants highlighted issues including lack of accessibility for mobility devices, feeling unsafe while crossing the road, and poorly maintained spaces. The community's concerns were shared with the City Councillor's office. While it began with a focus on Cadillac Fairview's proposed condominium towers around Fairview Mall on the Northeast corner of Sheppard Avenue East and Don Mills Road, it has expanded to include other projects such as 2600 Don Mills Road.

The City has issued a "Notice of Complete Application" for the proposal to demolish the existing rental apartment building at 2600 Don Mills Road and replace it with four new towers. The developers are currently proposing to build a rental replacement tower ahead of demolishing the existing building, however, BABF is concerned that they have no legal requirement to follow through with this promise. We are focused on ensuring a smooth transition for residents and adequate compensation for any disruptions. On March 4, BABF organized a Public Legal Education session for the tenants in collaboration with Willowdale Community Legal Services, Demovictions, and the Tenant's Union. The Metro Toronto Tenants Association also participated, helping to empower tenants by providing information about their rights and the resources available to them throughout the process. On August 14, BaBF hosted an information session for residence to learn about the proposed development and the possible impacts this could have on their housing. BaBF continues to be in communication with residents about the development.

BABF also participated in Summer Fest, an event attended by more than 400 people, including residents and politicians. We hosted an info table where we engaged with community members, answered questions about ongoing and proposed developments in

the area, discussed their potential impacts on the community, and provided guidance on how residents can raise their concerns with decision-makers.

Cummer Ave. Drop-Inn

The Drop-Inn is a safe, warm and friendly environment where guests have their basic needs met, receive assistance and are referred to community resources. Open every Wednesday year-round, it provides breakfast and hot lunch, along with other on-site services to meet legal, medical and social needs. We are on site once every other month. Program coordinators also refer guests to our clinic when they require legal assistance.

Public Legal Education (PLE) Partnerships

WCLS provides PLE series to various organizations in our community.

We signed a Program Agreement with the Toronto Public Library to deliver a series of monthly sessions from September 2025 through August 2026 at the Fairview Mall Library, which recently re-opened after an extensive renovation. The Fairview Mall Library is a hub of activity in our community and the partnership enables us to connect with our community while providing legal information in a centrally and well-located trusted community space. WCLS also remains committed to delivering our PLE sessions at the Ethennonnhawahstihnen Public library on an as-needed basis.

We continue our partnership with SEAS Centre (Support Enhance Access Service Centre). We provide PLE sessions on a monthly basis accompanied by a Mandarin speaking interpreter for their South East Asian community.

We also provide sessions on demand to other service providers in the community such as FHC, WWCC, The Learning Disabilities Association of Toronto, TNO, CICS, TNG, ACCESS Employment, University Settlement, Newcomer Women's Services Toronto, Lumenus Community Services, and local shelters.

Community Events

WCLS supported the North York Pop-Up Hub Mobile Housing Supports Project, which has received funding for another year. This initiative provided outreach and support to individuals facing housing insecurity in the North York area. We have participated in Pop-Hub events at the Cummer Avenue United Church Drop-In program and the Salvation Army, North York. Our staff have been on-site during events to introduce our services and engage with community members. This continued collaboration strengthens our community presence and bridges service gaps for equity-deserving groups and newcomers.

WCLS supported NeighbourLink Food Hub at 415 Willowdale Avenue. NeighbourLink launched an additional Food Bank at 675 Sheppard Avenue East, which serves approximately 100 households per distribution, with the majority of clients being Farsi-speaking families.

In addition, WCLS participated in the “Taste of North York” festival for the third year. This year’s festival once again drew hundreds of local residents, offering important opportunity to engage with the public, raise awareness about our services, and build relationship within the community.

Toronto Employment & Social Services (TESS) Offices

WCLS has partnerships with both the North York and Bridlewood Ontario Works offices. At North York, we alternate with Downsview Community Legal Services to provide on-site support for Ontario Works recipients once a month. At Bridlewood, we collaborate with Scarborough Community Legal Services and West Scarborough Community Legal Services to deliver workshops to caseworkers about the area of law that we practice so they can make better informed decisions about their client’s eligibility for benefits and refer clients to us when legal issues arise. We also attend their office to meet with clients. The Bridlewood partnership occurs every other month. WCLS has been at the forefront of connecting clinics with TESS offices to best serve our clients.

Policy and Systemic Advocacy

Meeting with Local Politicians

WCLS continued to advocate on behalf of our clients to representatives at all levels of government. We have regular contact with local politicians and their offices, including:

Federal:

- Ali Ehsassi, MP for Willowdale
- Maggie Chi, MP for Don Valley North
- Jean Yip, MP for Scarborough Agincourt

Provincial:

- Stan Cho, MPP for Willowdale
- Jonathan Tsao, MPP for Don Valley North

Municipal:

- Shelley Carroll, City Councillor for Ward 17
- Lily Cheng, City Councillor for Ward 18

Social Assistance – Immigration Status Qualifications

In August 2026 the provincial government changed the regulation that dictates what immigration statuses are required to obtain Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program benefits. The new regulation significantly limits who is eligible for social assistance benefits, excluding people who are in Canada on a long-term basis or cannot leave for reasons wholly beyond their control. WCLS has consulted with the Income Security

Advocacy Centre on advocacy strategies, presented to settlement workers and clinic staff, spoken with TESS senior managers, and engaged with media.

Networks and Workgroups

Our staff are members of numerous workgroups, networks and committees, both with other legal clinic and other organizations in our catchment area. These groups serve a variety of purposes, including: law reform, networking, information sharing, and community development.

Social Assistance Action Committee (SAAC)

SAAC is an inter-clinic working group of clinic legal workers from the GTA who meet monthly to support each other in our work in social assistance and other income maintenance areas and to develop and coordinate systemic advocacy. We attend and participate regularly, as well as Chair the Sub-Committee on Toronto Employment & Social Services Relations.

TNLIP Newcomer Community Advisory & Action Table

WCLS continues to be an active member with Toronto North Local Immigration Partnership, which is now North East Toronto Local Immigration Partnership. We participated in the Settlement & Language group, Newcomer Indigenous Task Group and Data Advisory Group. We also assisted in planning and organizing the annual Faith Forum, and participated in the Mental Health Community Consultation and the Food Leaders Networking event.

Community Coordination Plan - North York Community Cluster

The Community Coordination Plan (CCP) was initiated at the beginning of the pandemic by United Way Greater Toronto and the City of Toronto to support organizations' efforts to delivery services. We are an active member of the North York Community Cluster table, which is comprised of decision-making level representatives of community agencies and other stakeholders supporting vulnerable residents in the Cluster area. We were part of the Housing initiative and we supported the Mental Health & Equity Work.

Fairview Interagency Network

WCLS continues to be an active member of the Fairview Interagency Network (FIN), a network of 35 grassroots organizations to share information, collaborate on addressing issues in the Fairview Community and support local community development work in the Fairview area.

Inter-Clinic Immigration Working Group (ICIWG)

For the past 11 years WCLS has been heavily involved with the activities of ICIWG, which connects immigration lawyers and case workers across Ontario. A WCLS staff member is the membership officer of ICIWG, and over the years, including last year, the clinic organized immigration training sessions to the clinic system through ICIWG.

Willowdale Community Legal Services

Board of Directors – 2025-2026

Board of Directors:

Our Board members are volunteers. Directors are elected from our membership for two-year terms. We have eight to ten Directors.

Directors Who Are Retiring Or Resigning:

Misha Hossein joined the Board in 2024. Misha is also long-term local community resident. She has worked in the social services sector in North York for more than 10 years. Living in WCLS catchment area and working in the social services section has helped Misha develop an understanding of the issues that most impact local low-income residents and the work of WCLS. Misha also sees volunteering on WCLS's Board of Directors as another opportunity to serve the community.

Directors in the Middle of their Terms:

Michael Cowan joined the Board in 2024. Mike is PhD student in political science student at the University of Toronto. He formerly operated his own small business doing home repairs and renovations. He is a community resident with an interest in legal issues that affect WCLS's low-income clients. Mike grew up in the clinic's catchment area and views being part of WCLS's Board as an opportunity to give back to the community. Michael has been a part of WCLS's Outreach Committee since joining the Board.

Susy Guadron joined WCLS's Board in 2024. Susy has lived in the Willowdale community for more than 20 years. She has worked as a law clerk since 2005 and has gained knowledge and understanding of the barriers faced by the BIPOC community. Susy also volunteers with other community organizations. She views being a member of WCLS's Board of Directors as an opportunity to support and advocate for the legal rights of those most vulnerable in our community. In the past, Susy sat on WCLS's Hiring Committee.

Sarah Modesta Sepillo joined the Board in 2024. Sarah works in the social services sector in Toronto and her work touches on WCLS's catchment area. As an immigrant to Canada Sarah understands and appreciates that challenges that immigrants face. Sarah regards volunteering for WCLS's Board of Directors as part of her mission to give more back to her community. Sarah sat on WCLS's Hiring Committee this year and also represented WCLS at the 2024 ACLCO AGM and received the Community Champion Award on behalf of BaBF.

Ben Torres is a long-time WCLS Board member. Ben was re-joined the Board in 2024. Ben has served on the executive committee of WCLS's Board for many years and for a period was Board Chair. Ben has a Master's degree in International Law. He has worked as a certified project manager with more than 20 years consulting experience as a senior project manager, practice director and principal consultant. Ben is committed to the clinic's mission and has volunteered in numerous capacities in the Willowdale area.

Standing for Election:

Kyn Barker joined the Board in 2026. As a Deacon for St Matthew's Anglican Church on Sheppard west of Don Mills, he is involved, and encourages involvement, in community service including Fairview Interagency Network and Build a Better Fairview. He has a Masters of Theology and a Masters of Education. Two out of three of his children and their families live in the Fairview community.

PJ Dawda is also a long-time WCLS Board member. Most recently, PJ was elected to the Board in 2020 and again in 2022. PJ is a strong advocate for the services provided by community legal clinics. He has an LL.B., core subject International Economic Law, and a B. Com. (major in business management) and has for a long time worked in the corporate and travel/leisure fields.

Astha Priya is a dedicated professional currently working as the Community Development Coordinator with the North East Toronto LIP and works in the Willowdale area. She has over 5 years' experience working in the nonprofit and social services sector. Her previous experience includes research, specializing in systems change in health, legal & housing policy, as well as partnership building that supports access to services to low-income residents. She has a strong understanding of the pressing, unique issues and needs of newcomers and vulnerable populations. With her BSc in Health Studies and Master's in international development, Astha aims to make positive strides in the social sector, contributing to impactful projects that support underserved communities and create sustainable solutions. She is driven by her commitment to help others; and is passionate to support the important work done by community legal clinics.

Irma Spahiu has served on WCLS's Board for many years. She was elected to the Board in October 2019 and again in 2021. Irma resigned from the Board in November 2022 to complete a four month Law Practice Placement at WCLS. Irma rejoined the Board in 2024. Irma has a PhD in law from York University and has taught at York University and the University of Toronto. Irma's specializes in privacy rights and has a deep perspective on the issue. She has volunteered with various community organizations in the past.

Lynn Wheatley has served on the Board for many years, and for the last several years as Board Chair. She was elected to the clinic's Board of Directors in October 2018, 2020 and again 2022. Lynn also served on WCLS's Board previously, from 2010 to 2016. Lynn lives in the clinic's catchment area. Lynn worked as a staff lawyer at various legal clinics for many years. She is currently the Administrative Deputy Judge for the Toronto Small Claims Court. As someone who worked in legal clinics in the past, Lynn brings valuable experience to her role as a Board member and is a passionate advocate for the work done by community legal clinics.