

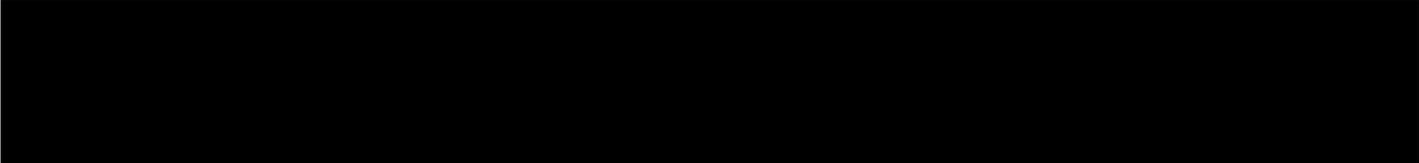
2010 IMPACT REPORT

RAPPORT D'IMPACT 2010



Funded by





March, 2011

As President of the Board of Directors of South Ottawa Community Legal Services, I am pleased to send you our annual Impact Report. It offers an excellent snapshot of how our community's legal clinic made a difference in 2010 for the low-income residents of southern and eastern Ottawa.

Trying to measure "success" in community legal work is difficult. For many reasons, measuring results in a simple way is not always possible. For example, achieving positive results for our clients is one of our primary goals, but sometimes it is equally important to seek justice for vulnerable clients even if there is a limited chance of success. Every day, Ontario's legal clinics make these judgment calls about which clients we can assist, how we can help and which legal battles to engage in.

We are proud of our staff members' work. We hope this report provides a sense of their real impact for our clients and communities.



Russell Sheridan
President
Board of Directors

South Ottawa Community Legal Services

2010 Impact Report

Our legal clinic provides a variety of services all aimed at bringing justice to our community. We offer a range of assistance on legal issues for low-income residents of southern and eastern Ottawa, including:

- legal information and advice;
- representation before courts and tribunals;
- referrals to appropriate agencies;
- presentations to groups on legal issues;
- working closely with other community organizations and groups; and
- “law reform” aimed at improving the lives of the people we serve.

We focus our work in these areas:

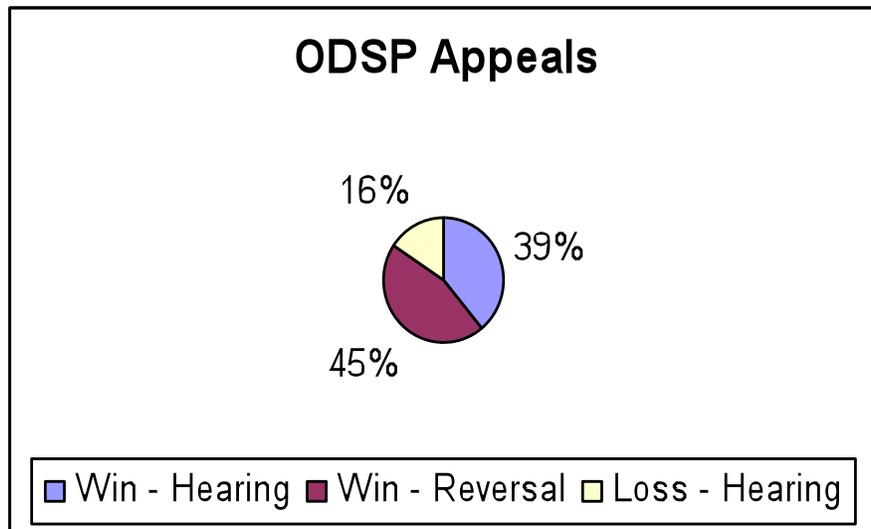
- Rental Housing issues;
- Immigration and Refugee Law;
- Ontario Disability Support Program benefits;
- Ontario Works benefits;
- Workers' Compensation benefits for injured workers;
- Employment Insurance benefits;
- Child Tax Benefits;
- Canada Pension Plan and Old Age Pension benefits.

This report offers a snapshot of how our work made a difference to our clients and community in 2010:

- ✓ More than \$438,000 in lump-sum, retroactive disability benefits placed in the hands of Ottawa’s low-income households; plus increased “basic needs” benefits of over \$27,600.00 per month (\$331,512 per year);
- ✓ 82 housing evictions prevented;
- ✓ Collaborating on projects to improve Ottawa tenants’ rights;
- ✓ Helping newcomers to secure their futures in Canada;
- ✓ Working with our community partners to establish an Ottawa-based community agency network to improve access to legal services.

Putting Money into the Hands of People with Disabilities

We help clients appeal decisions denying disability benefits from the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) or the Canada Pension Plan (CPP). In 2010, of all the ODSP appeal cases that we planned to take to a tribunal hearing, **84%** were successful, either by a positive decision after a hearing or by ODSP agreeing, before a hearing, to overturn a negative decision.



Winning disability appeals means our clients receive more money to live on than when they receive Ontario Works (social assistance) benefits. In 2010, our clients' successful ODSP appeals led to **additional "basic need" payments of \$27,446 per month (or \$329,352 on an annualized basis)**, plus more money for rent and utilities. On average, that is **\$398** more per month for food, clothing and other necessities for each household that we assisted.

Due to the long delays in the ODSP appeal process, a successful appeal also means that each client receives large retroactive disability benefits to which they are legally entitled. In 2010, our work put a total of **\$438,000** in lump-sum, retroactive "basic needs" money into our clients' hands, plus additional amounts to pay the rent and utilities. The average retroactive payment was **\$6,350** per household. For disabled people who had been receiving social assistance benefits, this payment is often their only way to pay off debts, buy household items or save for their family's future expenses.

Who in Our Community Needs ODSP Benefits?

Our clients come to us from every conceivable situation. Some were born here and have deep roots in Canada. Other clients came here more recently, hoping for a better life. Some clients had to stop working due to injury. Others struggle, against the odds, to keep working. Some clients have spent many years raising their children and have no work experience outside their homes. We see men and women, young adults, middle-aged people, and those in their sixties and seventies.

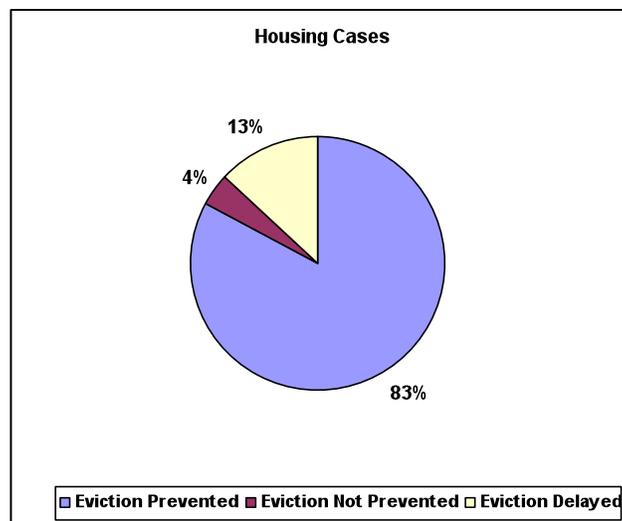
Some clients have been barely coping with mental health problems: panic attacks, major depression, anxiety that locks them in their homes. Others have painful physical conditions that have dragged on for years. Most clients have several medical conditions – perhaps they could have handled one set of symptoms, but the overall impact of their many problems has overwhelmed them. Frequently, these problems do not show up on an x-ray, MRI or blood test, which is often why their applications for disability benefits were denied in the first place. However, the effects of their health problems show up in the stories they tell us about their lives.

All clients facing an ODSP appeal have one thing in common: medical problems have limited their ability to work, and they have ended up with very low incomes, having to depend on government income support programs. Few of our clients expected to be facing these difficulties.

Stopping Evictions

We defend low-income tenants against evictions from their housing. We also participate in the Ottawa legal clinics' "Tenant Duty Counsel" program, in which low-income tenants can get immediate legal advice and assistance on the day of their hearing at the Landlord and Tenant Board.

In 2010, our clinic assisted in resolving 82 eviction cases, keeping stable housing for both adults and children and, for some families, avoiding potential homelessness. We also assisted 13 tenants to negotiate a later eviction date, which is important in helping tenants to manage their affairs when they are forced to move.



Resolving Housing Repair Problems

- We represented a family that had rented an apartment that was infested with bed bugs and had other maintenance problems. The result was a Landlord and Tenant Board order that the landlord pay \$7,200 to the tenant, largely due to the landlord's neglect in dealing with the bed bug problem.
- In response to large numbers of tenants with housing repair problems not being adequately addressed, we co-ordinated our efforts to resolve these issues with the office of an Ottawa City Councillor.

Organizing Ottawa Tenants Conference

We assisted in organizing the Third Annual Ottawa Tenants Conference, held at City Hall. The Fourth Annual Tenants Conference is planned for September, 2011.

Helping Newcomers to Canada Secure their Futures

In 2010, our successes led our clients to be reunited with their families after years of forced separation:

- After last year's earthquake in Haiti, we obtained status for a mother and son who had been waiting six years for a decision on their humanitarian and compassionate application for permanent residence. We then worked with the Canadian Council for Refugees to bring our client's two vulnerable teenaged daughters (who had been living alone in a tent camp in Haiti after their house was destroyed) to Canada on special permits, avoiding another long delay in the sponsorship process.
- Three cases involved successful sponsorship appeals where our clients had been separated from their spouses for many years. Our work meant reuniting not only spouses, but parents and children.

Our work also ensured that our clients could remain in Canada to rebuild their lives and, having resolved their immigration obstacles, to bring their close family members to live with them:

- We assisted five families to remain in Canada on "humanitarian and compassionate" grounds, allowing them to apply for permanent residence from within Canada and avoid having to return to unstable countries.
- We helped six families obtain permanent residence who were at risk of having their applications refused because they were "inadmissible." Applicants for permanent residence in Canada can be found "inadmissible" for a number of reasons; one relates to having a "serious medical condition". Depending on the applicant's country of origin, refusing them permanent resident status in Canada can mean returning them to a country where there is insufficient or no health care available to treat their condition (a possible death sentence). Four of our clients had serious medical issues, and our efforts have ensured that they will remain in Canada where medical treatment will continue to be provided for them. Two other clients were wrongfully alleged to belong to terrorist organizations. We proved that those allegations were wrong.
- Two clients succeeded in their "Pre-Removal Risk Assessment" applications, allowing them to remain in Canada rather than being deported to countries with a serious risk of torture. Less than 2% of these applications across Canada are successful.
- We were also successful in three refugee claims, representing particularly vulnerable women with complex cases, including domestic violence and gang-related sexual violence in Central America.

Building a Network of Community Partner Agencies

With funding from The Law Foundation of Ontario, we worked with community agencies to build the foundation for an Ottawa-based network of community agency service providers. Called "Connecting Region/Ottawa," the network's goal is to develop improved ways to give access to legal services to people who do not speak English or French or who have communication-related disabilities. With this foundation now in place, the network's 2011 goal is to find new resources to turn our plans into action.

Feedback from our Clients

"Clearly you have the commitment to help the helpless and stand up for justice for all."

"Je trouve que le travail que vous faites est excellent."

"Everyone is so supportive that you make the client feel at ease."

"Very good and easy to use."

"...went above and beyond what was required to help me and ensure I was treated fairly."

"Happy, pleasant staff."

"You have no idea how much stress you relieved."

"Your kindness was a light in the darkness during those first few very difficult days."

"The stress experienced during this unfortunate [housing-related] situation has decreased due to the steps we have taken, coupled with your accurate advice and suggested direction. You have made a difference for someone in your community and it is recognized and personally appreciated by both me and my family."