

LCO / CDO

LIAISON

LIAISON ONLINE!

With this issue, we launch Liaison Online, the LCO's e-newsletter featuring more news, updates and extended versions of our print stories. Visit www.lco-cdo.org.



Mohan Sharma

CHANGING FACES

A Counsel-in-Residence, a dean and five students are among the changing faces at the LCO this fall. Mohan Sharma, Counsel with the Office of the Chief Justice, Superior Court of Justice and a specialist in civil justice reform initiatives, takes over as Counsel-in-Residence. Lorne Sossin succeeds Patrick Monahan as Osgoode's dean and member of the LCO Board of Governors. And a fond farewell to LCO research lawyer Julie Lassonde and community outreach coordinator Margaret Hageman.



Lorne Sossin



Julie Lassonde

Message from the Executive Director



As we move into the last year of our first mandate, we are in full throttle. You'll want to read the stories inside about the persons with disabilities and the law consultations, the fifth Annual Canadian Elder Law Conference

and our family law project consultations. Keep watch over the next few months for interim reports on a number of our projects, as well as new consultation papers and a final report.

With this issue of Liaison, we're also introducing an on line version that includes more extensive stories and updates. Check it out at www.lco-cdo.org.

Since the LCO was launched, we've made it our goal to extend our public sector reach. Thank you to our contacts at the Ministry of the Attorney General for facilitating my attendance at a meeting of ministry legal directors and at a meeting of deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers. I've been chatting with people from other ministries with a particular interest in our work, including the senior management in community and social services. This is a great beginning to our strengthened ties with government ministries whose views on our projects are crucial to the development of feasible recommendations.

Happy and Healthy 2011 to our friends and partners from all of us at the LCO!

Patricia Hughes

in this issue . . .

- Elder law goes global
- Reflecting family realities
- Ontario's dis-Abled speak out



Elder law conference has international appeal

Two-day conference attracts 150

Thanks to a national conference with international reach, more than 150 academics, lawyers, advocates and students are talking about elder rights, ageism and the law, access to justice and law reform for older persons.

Such was the focus of the fifth annual Canadian (International) Conference on Elder Law, October 28-29. Hosted by the Law Commission of Ontario, the Canadian Centre for Elder Law (CCEL) and the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly (ACE), the conference aimed to promote and advance the discussion of elder law issues.

“Often when I talk to people about elder law, they dismiss it as a capacity issue,” says Judith Wahl, executive director of ACE and a conference organizer. “The LCO has realized it is so much more than that. We need to get more people to look at the bigger implications of how it affects things like access and rights.”

She credits the conference and the LCO with helping to do just that.

“We approached the issue of elder law from the perspective of access to justice,” explains LCO staff lawyer Lauren Bates. “Our goal was to raise the profile and encourage scholarship around these issues.”

“It really opened my eyes to how the issues cross the professions,” agrees University of Ottawa law student Flora Stikker. “Treating people with dignity, protecting the interests of vulnerable clients, abuse, consent and capacity — lawyers can’t handle it all on their own.”

Pioneered by the CCEL — a national non-profit centre dedicated to exploring legal issues of significance to older Canadians — the annual conference is helping to inform a larger Law Commission of Ontario project on the law as it affects older adults. An interim project report, including highlights from the conference and feedback on the LCO’s research reported last winter, will be published in early 2011.



Law reform agencies compare notes

The LCO had much to learn and much to share at the 2010 meeting of Canada’s law reform agencies, October 26-28. The Federation of Law Reform Agencies of Canada symposium featured representatives from law reform agencies in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario and Nova Scotia, along with a member of the New Brunswick government.

“The LCO’s commitment to social justice and public consultation sets us apart,” says LCO research lawyer Kirsten Manley-Casimir.

But when it comes to issues of governance and project selection, every law reform agency faces a similar challenge. Explains LCO Board member Justice Stephen Goudge: “We had interesting discussions about how to define projects and build a representative board.”

“There are many ways to approach law reform in Canada,” adds Manley-Casimir. “I learned important lessons on different ways to effect meaningful changes in the law.”

Domestic violence expert says report rings true

Consultation results to help shape recommendations

A report by the LCO on Ontario's family law system is an accurate reflection of the realities faced by parents, children, social workers and health professionals, says a 20-year veteran of the field.

"Every day, I meet women who are very much challenged and marginalized by the present system," says Marianne Park, a group facilitator, trainer and researcher in the field of violence against women who serves as an Advisory Group member for the project. "I wasn't involved in the consultations, but I could imagine women saying those things. It rang very true."

The consultation results, released in September, highlight the experiences of 100 social workers, lawyers, judges, counsellors and individuals involved in family law. They will be paired with the LCO's own research, commissioned background papers and other public and constituency input to help the LCO develop recommendations on family law reform.

"Participants shared invaluable information about how they were affected by the family justice system and brought to light issues that will warrant further consideration in the final stages of the project," explains LCO executive director Patricia Hughes.

The LCO is now inviting feedback on the consultation results available at lco-cdo.org. The next step is an interim report, which will be released for feedback.

"They're lending credence to what many of us have been saying for years," says Park. "At last we have the political will and influence to make change happen."

Disability consultations span province

Close to 200 persons with disabilities and representatives of government, advocacy groups and service providers will have a voice in the LCO's consultation paper on the law as it affects persons with disabilities. Due for release this winter, the paper will reflect experiences and opinions shared during 17 focus groups in five centres from Thunder Bay to Ottawa.

"The laws aren't the main issue," says LCO staff lawyer Lauren Bates. "It's what happens around them — how they are implemented, supported and communicated."

Services for persons with disabilities seldom meet the needs of diverse communities, explains Raihanna Hirji-Khalfan of the Ethno-Racial People with Disabilities Coalition of Ontario and a participant in the consultations. "We need a legal framework that acknowledges the rights and needs of persons with disabilities from racialized communities."

Establishing just such a framework is the ultimate goal of the LCO. "This paper will definitely push the conversation to the next step," says Bates.

The Law Commission of Ontario is funded by:



LAW COMMISSION OF ONTARIO
 276 York Lanes
 York University
 4700 Keele Street
 Toronto, ON M3J 1P3
 Tel: 416-650-8406
 Toll Free: 1-866-950-8406
lawcommission@lco-cdo.org
www.lco-cdo.org

And supported by the Faculties of Law at:
Queen's University, University of Ottawa
(Common & Civil Law Sections), University of Toronto,
University of Western Ontario and University of Windsor.