

The Mile End Legal Clinic

ACTIVITIES REPORT *2013 - 2014*



*Activities Report for the period
between October 1st, 2013 and
September 30th, 2014*

An overview of the Clinic

For more than 12 years, the Mile End Legal Clinic has operated as a network of lawyers and law students dedicated to making justice more accessible to citizens. We believe that no one should have to face legal problems without the knowledge needed to protect and assert their rights. Since its beginnings, the Clinic has assisted a large number of people by educating them about their rights, and offering them support through the various stages of the judicial process. Preliminary consultations take place every Wednesday from 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm.

While we do our best to welcome every person who enters through our doors, we target individuals and families who cannot afford the services of a lawyer and are ineligible for legal aid. Our clients come from different neighbourhoods in Montreal as well as from outside the city of Montreal. Our clients' problems touch upon many different areas of the law.

We train future lawyers by offering internships to law students from McGill University and the University of Montreal. The students are supervised and guided by volunteer lawyers who have offered their time to provide free legal information and advice to our clients.

Our motivation

The financial status of an individual should not determine their ability to understand and defend their rights. We aim for a justice system that is more accessible and that can more effectively meet the needs of communities. We thus dedicate ourselves to helping low-income individuals and families navigate their way through the judicial system.

Our partners

Cooperation with the community:

In 2013-2014, the Clinic continued its partnership with the Mission Communautaire of Mile End.

Since 2002, this organization has allowed us to use their premises, where our volunteers welcome the public on Wednesdays for free legal consultations. The social workers of the Mission continue to refer to us to their own members who have no, or low-income, and need legal information and advice.

The Clinic also remains connected with the Tyndale St-Georges Community Centre, which has lent us a space for our volunteers to offer legal consultations to the community of Little Burgundy on Monday evenings.

We owe this partnership to Colin Irving, our late Board of Directors' President, who from 2008 until his death in 2013 personally offered legal consultations at the Centre.

The Clinic also has connections with various other legal clinics in Montreal. Since each clinic may have a different mandate and fields of expertise, they refer clients to each other in order to optimize the utilization of limited resources, and to offer the best possible service to the population.

We would like to remind you that the Mile End Legal Clinic stands out from other organizations in that it can render legal opinions due to the generous participation of volunteer lawyers. Thus, in addition to making the law more comprehensible to our clients through the contributions of our law students, our volunteer lawyers can assist clients in preparing legal documents and advise them on viable courses of action.

Cooperation with the university community:

The Mile End Legal Clinic participates in the academic training of students.

The Faculty of Law at McGill University has been a partner of the Legal Clinic since 2005. In the course of 2013-2014, four McGill students completed an internship at the Clinic during the academic year and three more joined the team during the summer.

The Law Faculty at the University of Montreal has also offered its students a credited community internship at the Clinic since 2009. Consequently, the Clinic welcomed three interns from the University of Montreal during 2013-2014.

Students' feedback on their time with the Clinic indicate that they appreciate the field experience because it allows them to engage in practical work; to meet real people with real problems; and to shoulder actual responsibilities.

Our Team

General Staff

During 2013-2014, Christine Paquin, lawyer and Executive Director, directed the Clinic.

Me Paquin assumes the responsibilities of: administration of the Clinic, training of volunteers, fundraising, as well as management of services including training of student interns.

Thanks to a grant from the Ontario Law Foundation, Christine Paquin was able to hire Catherine Hamil, a law student, for 10 hours per week for various administrative tasks. Since September 2014, Talia Joundi has assumed this position.

Since October 2014, Valerie Gobeil, lawyer and former Clinic volunteer, was hired to work at the Clinic for 10 hours per week, in order to assist the Director in the management and follow up of clients.

Board of Directors

At the last annual general meeting, Michèle Moreau joined the Board of Directors. Moreover, the mandates of Allen Mendelsohn and Simon Dupuis were renewed.

Volunteers

In addition to student volunteers, the Mile End Legal Clinic can count on the involvement of approximately thirty volunteer lawyers.

Activities

November 22, 2013 – The Clinic Director participated in a dialogue on access to justice, hosted by Thomas A. Cromwell, Judge at the Supreme Court of Canada. Judge Cromwell presented the report of the national *Action Committee on Access to Justice in Civil and Family Matters*, which aims to promote engagement and coordination between all participants concerned with civil justice.

December 6, 2013 – The Mile End Legal Clinic participated in the annual forum of legal clinics. As a result of this forum, two meetings took place with the *Fondation du Grand Montréal* in order to discuss the possibility of fundraising cooperation between the different organizations whose mission is enhancing access to justice. This discussion is to be continued in the New Year.

January 23, 2014 – The students of the Clinic organized a fundraising dance party. It was very successful and raised several thousands of dollars for the Clinic.

January to March 2014 – Thanks to the collaboration with the Plateau Mont-Royal borough, the Clinic presented several workshops between January and March 2014 on repossessions and evictions, by lawyers specialized in housing rights.

April 8, 2014 – The Mile End Legal Clinic participated in the *Visez Droit* event, which presented information about legal resources to the public at large.

September 7, 2014 – McGill students organized a fundraising bike ride to benefit the Tyndale Legal Clinic. Almost \$6000 was raised, which will be used to implement a project for the Tyndale Clinic.

September 18, 2014: “6 à 9” evening for the Clinic – The Clinic Director organized a 6 à 9 evening at a neighbourhood restaurant called Sanbox. The goal was to bring together and to thank all the volunteer lawyers. Approximately 60 people attended.

October 2014 – One of our volunteer lawyers, Maria Manolakos, presented a workshop on incompetence mandates and wills at *Action Centre Ville*, a community centre, which serves people over the age of 50. Approximately fifty participants attended. Another workshop was held on November 4, 2014. Since then, the Clinic was solicited to offer many more workshops.

Summer opening

Thanks to a federal government program aimed at promoting summer jobs, the Mile End Legal Clinic received three grants to hire three summer students for twelve weeks over the summer months. This support allowed the Clinic to open its doors from May to July, and to prepare an annual information newsletter and report.

Financial partners

The principal financial partners of the Clinic continue to be the following foundations: Bannerman, ECHO, and Ontario Law, as well as the law firm of Irving Mitchell Kalichman (IMK).

The ECHO Foundation supports mental health sufferers. In response to a letter sent by the Clinic team (including Geeta Narang, Alana Klein and Christine Paquin) to this organization at the end of 2013, which outlined in detail the links between our work and mental health, we received the sum of \$10,000.

Ontario Law Foundation project

Thanks to the support of the Ontario Law Foundation, the Clinic Director was able to finalize a new website for the Clinic and a new data entry system. The rest of the project is in progress, in particular, the obtainment of an external legal opinion.

Statistics

Between October 1, 2013 and September 30, 2014, we have helped 454 individuals at the Mile End Legal Clinic. Since January 2014, fifteen additional individuals have benefited from our services at the Tyndale Clinic. Of note is that the Clinic has been attracting an increasing number of people from a wider geographic area since October 2014.

For more details regarding our clients' income or our areas of law, please refer to our annual information report located on our website: www.justicemontreal.org.