

CIF FEATURE STORY: Walk-in Advocacy Clinic



Oct 2019

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Walk-in Advocacy Clinic; Community Legal Assistance Services for Saskatoon Inner City Inc. (CLASSIC)

Community Legal Assistance Services for Saskatoon Inner City Inc.'s (CLASSIC) Walk-in Advocacy Clinic provides full legal representation to people who are otherwise on their own (often referred to as 'self-represented') in their legal matter. CLASSIC was created to address the reality that there is a huge gap between people who qualify for Legal Aid's limited services, and those people who can afford to retain a private lawyer here in Saskatchewan.

"Thanks for treating me like a human being who deserves to be listened to. It's rare these days."

CLASSIC's work focuses on low-income, historically marginalized people. They provide priority to Indigenous people, because of the social realities of Canada's colonial history. CLASSIC practices in approximately 25 areas of law. This distinguishes them from Legal Aid, which practices in limited aspects of 2 areas of law, family and criminal law. The main practice areas through the Walk-in Advocacy Clinic at CLASSIC include landlord-renter law, immigration and refugee law, criminal law, and prison law. Other areas of practice include human rights, social services, wills and estates, guardianship, employment, small claims, and beyond.



"What should justice in Saskatoon look like?"
Trinity Ketchemonia – Age 10

"CLASSIC's client-centered philosophy of practice guides us," shared Joilene Whitehead, CLASSIC. "We recognize that our clients come from many different communities and cultures and that we must learn from these communities and cultures in order to be good advocates. We also recognize that our clients are experts in their own lived experiences. Our clients' legal issues are not always the central challenges that they face and we will seek to understand and approach the challenges faced by our clients holistically, and in context. We work towards relationships that are founded on mutuality, reciprocity, and respect – working with, not "for" our clients. We are aware that legal institutions have too often reinforced inequality and oppression and we may need to challenge these institutions in order to address injustice in our community. We will constantly re-evaluate our work in light of reflection and consultation with the clients and communities that we serve. We will take the time to take care of ourselves, and each other, as we work together towards a more just community."

The Walk-in Advocacy Clinic is important because without it, people are all alone through their legal process and forced to represent themselves. Many legal proceedings are complex, rife with power imbalances and aimed at "efficiency of the system" over individuals' rights.

"Specific examples of how CLASSIC's services through the Walk-in Advocacy Clinic have increased quality of life and wellbeing in community include: assisted people on their social services matters; saved people from being evicted from their home that they rent; got security deposits back that landlords were illegally trying to keep; obtained money for people who were fired without cause from their employment; got people who were charged criminally but were innocent freed of their charges; and assisted people to obtain refugee status because they were fleeing their home-country of persecution based on their political activity, religion, sexual orientation, or other," exclaimed Whitehead. Broadly, CLASSIC increases the quality of life of their clients through their philosophy of practice and how they treat their clients, through listening and giving people agency.

"What CLASSIC does is crucial for the community. ... Vulnerable members of the community have the opportunity for their needs to be heard and appreciated. Without this clinic, many people would be left completely without representation. Often clinical law is focused on for what it adds to a legal education. The theoretical knowledge gained in law school is completely different from the very practical skills I gained at CLASSIC and my experience was invaluable. More than this, CLASSIC is integral for the community. [People] deserve to have the option for legal representation and their voice to be heard."

– former CLASSIC law student