

INVESTING IN WOMEN'S EQUALITY...

West Coast LEAF is grateful for the ongoing support we receive from our donors, members and the Law Foundation of British Columbia. We also receive project support from our public funders. Thank you to Ethical Bean for kindly supplying our office with coffee and tea.



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West Coast LEAF's Equality Rights Library is generously supported by Nathanson, Schachter & Thompson LLP, a Vancouver law firm specializing in corporate and business litigation.

For information about sponsoring the Equality Rights Library, please contact West Coast LEAF at info@westcoastleaf.org.

JOIN THE THEMIS MONTHLY GIVING CLUB!

Monthly Giving is the best way to support West Coast LEAF. It provides sustainable revenue, reduces administrative costs, and helps us to plan for the future. Please contact Fiona York at 604.684.8772 ext. 113 for more details.

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Leaving a Legacy Gift to West Coast LEAF transforms the lives of women for future generations. Legacy Gifts can be made for now or for the future – there are options that allow you to benefit both yourself and a charity now and options that allow you to present a lasting gift in your will.

West Coast LEAF strongly encourages you to seek professional legal, estate planning and financial advice before deciding on a course of action.

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IMAGINE CANADA ETHICAL CODE

West Coast LEAF has joined Imagine Canada's Ethical Fundraising Code Program. By adhering to this Code, we are complying with generally accepted practices and a detailed protocol for managing donations. You can also download the Ethical Code itself by going to www.imaginecanada.ca



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LEAFlet

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Legal Education & Action Fund

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Thursday, June 25
6:00 - 9:00 PM
YWCA, 535 Hornby Street

Keynote topic:
Trafficking and the Olympics

RENEWING OUR COMMITMENT TO LEGAL AID: A Town Hall Forum

At a town-hall forum on legal aid in April, participants approved the following resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Provincial Government should act with all deliberate speed to hold public hearings with a view to renewing the commitment to the legal aid system in British Columbia.

Panelist Stephen Owen, a former executive director of the society that administers legal aid in BC (the Legal Services Society), explained that BC's legal aid system was established in the 1970's as a result of extensive public consultation. Since then, significant changes have been made to the system, including the elimination of poverty law services and major reductions in family law and immigration law services in 2002 and again in 2009 – all without any public consultation.

After the early 80's recession hit and the LSS budget was first cut, public meetings were held around the province. The public voice was expressed in a ringing endorsement for legal aid. Again in 2005, an Ipsos Reid survey found that 97% of British Columbians believe that everyone should have access to the justice system. Constitutional lawyer Melina Buckley added that surveys in Alberta and Ontario have resulted in the same vote of confidence for legal aid, and that other studies have shown the financial burden of inadequate legal aid systems.

Shelagh Day, Director of the Poverty and Human Rights Centre and the first Human Rights officer in BC, agreed: "Eroding social programs doesn't cost us less and it may cost us more! We can't have a society of equality without a system of legal aid. With diminished legal aid – we are accepting inequality."

She added that Canada has failed to make access to justice a reality and live up to its human rights obligations. The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights criticized Canada in 2006 for failing to discharge its international human rights obligations because of inadequate access to civil legal aid, and the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women expressed specific concern in 2008 about the impact of cuts to legal aid on women in British Columbia.

"The true measure of any society is the treatment of the most vulnerable members. Access to justice is a right, not a privilege, and must not be determined by level of income nor social status. Let's get our priorities straight!"

Respondent, Access to Justice petition
www.thepetitionsite.com/1/access-to-justice

As previously reported, West Coast LEAF is responding to that concern and other comments from the UN CEDAW Committee with a Report Card measuring BC's compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Measurements include a number of important legal and policy areas, such as access to justice, violence against women – particularly Aboriginal women – and the social assistance scheme. The Report Card is intended as a media-friendly, publicly accessible tool that will also pressure government to make changes *between* CEDAW reporting periods, rather than leaving all pressure until just before Canada's report is due to the Committee. Watch for West Coast LEAF's first annual CEDAW Report Card, to be released on September 30, 2009.

West Coast Leaf's Speakers Bureau: Speaking for Equality

Expect to learn about:

- West Coast LEAF and LEAF's work before the courts in advancing women's equality,
- The contributions you can make to advance women's equality provincially and federally,

Topic areas include: reproductive rights, family law, single mother's human rights and women's equality and religious freedom.

West Coast LEAF is continuing to develop presentations for organizations, clubs and companies. We are currently looking for a few organizations that might be interested in working with us to pilot our presentations. If you are interested in inviting a West Coast LEAF representative to speak to your group or organization please contact Deanna Ogle, Education Manager, at 604-684-8772.



GENDER PRINCIPLES FOR FULL POTENTIAL Gender Audits at work

As the fiscal year draws to a close for many organizations, financial audits are standard operating procedure for responsible governance and public accountability.

But what if government actions, legislation and policy were analyzed the same way, in order to ensure that formal commitments to human capital are articulated and equity principles are acted upon?

West Coast LEAF was founded on the principle that to hold governments to their promise, we needed strategies that included litigation, public legal education and law reform. But our law reform work has been primarily a responsive activity – making submissions to government when opportunities arise.

Recently, however, West Coast LEAF recognized that a proactive tool exists in the world of international development – Gender Auditing.

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DONOR PROFILE

Sherry Fraser

By Melanie Perez

As a self-proclaimed “feminist from way back,” Sherry Fraser has always been aware of issues surrounding women and equality in the workplace. She says she now realizes that she and other women had “sort of thought we made changes, but later learned that we hadn't made a lot of advancements at all.”

While Sherry acknowledges that her words could apply to any woman, she is speaking from her own personal experience.

Growing up on a farm, she went to high school in a little town called Erickson, Manitoba. Moving to BC in 1974, Sherry started working for BC Tel as a night-time operator while going to college in the daytime. She has a diploma from Douglas College and studied human resource management at BCIT and sciences and computer science at VCC. This year marks her 30th anniversary with BC Tel/Telus and she has worked in almost every area of the company from operator and sales to her current work as a network technician.

In the late 1990's as a member of the Telecommunications Workers Union (TWU), Sherry became involved in a bitter pay equity complaint between the union and BC Tel.

The dispute was settled in 2005 with the ratification of a collective agreement between Telus and the TWU. Telus and the TWU agreed to a one-time Pay Equity Award for all eligible employees. But Sherry feels that the money was obtained by “giving up the fight without achieving any real advancement or progress for women.”

Sherry wanted to invest in an organization that would continue the same fight. “I am a mom and grandmother and I really admire the work West Coast LEAF is doing. Your organization is a beacon for change for women's rights and family law.” Sherry is donating her pay equity award, which will be doubled by Telus' employee matching gift program.

In an open letter to her union, Sherry quoted from Margaret Mead: “'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.' Let's try to change the world together.”

VOLUNTEER PROFILE

Amanda Winters and Kas Pavanantharajah

By Rachel Bybee



Amanda and Kas (left to right) worked together as Volunteer Coordinators at the 2009 Equality Breakfast.

Amanda Winters became involved with West Coast LEAF as an Equality Breakfast volunteer in 2008 and then joined the Law and Policy Committee, which ties in well with her work at a personal injury law firm. Amanda feels West Coast LEAF gives her the opportunity to make her voice heard on important legal decisions and speak about issues facing women in BC. Her goal is to positively impact the way women's issues are viewed by Canadian citizens.

Amanda's other main love is synchronized swimming. Not only has she been a synchro swimmer and judge for almost twenty years, but she is currently coaching with the Vancouver Masters Synchro Team and volunteers with Vancouver Pacific Wave Synchro.

Amanda also writes a monthly column for a B.C. publication, and says she finds that the secret to living well is to focus on goals and aspirations instead of sweating the small stuff.

Kas Pavanantharajah brings a wealth of talents and enthusiasm to West Coast LEAF. A Toronto native of Sri Lankan descent, Kas is currently majoring in criminology at Simon Fraser University. Her interest in gender equality stems in part from her concern over women's rights in Sri Lanka. Although she eventually plans to become involved in international law, she is also passionate about empowering women through education at home.

Consequently, Kas just finished her second year of participating in West Coast LEAF's Equality Breakfast and works part-time organizing large-scale fundraisers on behalf of the BC Cancer Foundation.

In her spare time, Kas loves to run, hike, and travel. She recently learned to surf in Tofino and is traveling to Barcelona this summer to embrace her love of photography and Catalan culture.



UN Training Centre's "Gender Audit Facilitators" class in Turin, Italy, April 2009. West Coast LEAF Executive Director Alison Brewin is in the centre row, fifth from left

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We have been building our expertise in applying these international practices and concepts on our work here at home – learning from organizations around the world (many of which are funded by the Canadian government – as they should be).

“Gender Auditing” is a way of systematically analyzing government legislation and policies to look at the different outcomes of that policy or legislation on women and men – including the diversity among women and men. Although governments are obliged to undertake this work as part of the commitment to equality under the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and International Law, our recent law reform work on family law, legal aid, access to justice and CEDAW demonstrates that both Provincial and Federal governments are failing in this area.

Recently, West Coast LEAF was able to send Deanna – Education Manager – to a week-long gender training seminar in Toronto put on by Gender Equality Inc. Alison – Executive Director – with support from the Notary Foundation, Tides and Vancity Community Foundation, was able to attend the UN Training Centre's “Gender Audit Facilitators” class in Turin, Italy. Both brought home a wealth of information and knowledge from experts around the globe.

West Coast LEAF hopes to apply international standards and concepts to the legislation and policy impacting British Columbians, to help bring our province into the global community in which gender equity is front and centre.

