

INVESTING IN WOMEN'S EQUALITY...

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West Coast LEAF

555 - 409 Granville Street,
Vancouver, BC V6C 1T2

T: 604.684.8772

T: 1.866.737.7716

www.westcoastleaf.org
info@westcoastleaf.org



LEAF/et

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

SPEAKER: SHASHI ASSANAND
Executive Director, Vancouver & Lower
Mainland Multicultural Family Support
Services Society

Thursday, June 24

SECTION 15 OF THE *FAMILY RELATIONS ACT*: A critical dialogue

By Shahnaz Rahman

For the past 15 years, West Coast LEAF has conducted research and outreach in the Family Law Project. The project's goal is to look at the intersection between women's equality and the family law system, and to work closely with community organizations, family law practitioners and academics in the development of long-term strategies for addressing the issues that emerge.

The *Family Relations Act* is the BC law that governs guardianship, access, spousal and child support, and the division of property when marriages and common-law relationships break down. As such, it has many important short and long term impacts on BC families, such as custody and access issues.

One challenging area of the act is described in legal circles as 'Section 15 testing'. Section 15 of the *FRA* allows the courts in BC to request that an expert (such as a psychiatrist, psychologist or family court counselor) make recommendations on custody arrangements that are in the best interest of children. All parties relating to the child may be included in the study.

The Section 15 report is intended as a recommendation, but in many cases ends up being used as the sole factor in a decision. In high conflict litigation, the negative impact can be huge, and the potential long-term consequence of the report on the lives of women and children is devastating.

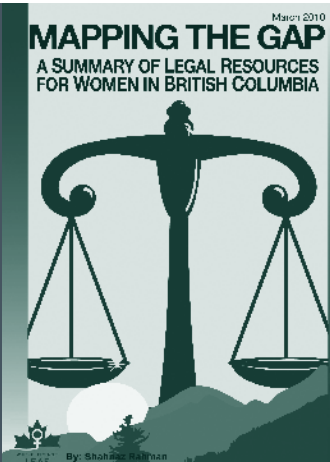
With the generous support of Vancouver Foundation, West Coast LEAF is currently conducting a study around the use and application of Section 15 reports. We'll engage in a consultation with the mental health sector, analyze policy and best practices in both the legal and mental health sectors, look at the gender impacts of those practices, and make recommendations. These recommendations will be made to government, professional bodies such as the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the Law Society, community organizations with knowledge and experience, and our own organization.

Some issues that will be reviewed and reported on include:

- costs associated with the study in the context of a broken legal aid system, and inconsistencies in assigning costs;
- delays caused by reports that impact children and custody and access issues;
- language barriers that may influence test results; and
- the lack of understanding of dynamics of family violence.

We foresee this report as critical to a dialogue between professional and community groups, and addressing these issues and their impacts on women and children.

MAPPING THE GAP



In March, West Coast LEAF published "Mapping the Gap: A Summary of Legal Resources For Women in British Columbia", written by Shahnaz Rahman, Manager of Community Outreach - Family Law Project, and funded by the Notary Foundation of BC. The report summarizes existing legal resources for women in BC, legal services available in community organizations around the province, and emerging gaps in the legal system, and allows West Coast LEAF to link legal resources and information providers with other public legal information programs and services.

CARBON NEUTRAL?

Equality impact analysis of the Carbon Tax Act

By Mia Taghizadeh

In January, West Coast LEAF began work on its second Equality Impact Statement project.

The Equality Impact Statement (EIS) is a gender audit of a piece of BC legislation, to study differing impacts the legislation might have on various groups such as women, men, rural and low income communities.

Analyzing the *Carbon Tax Act*, Policy Intern Mia Taghizadeh is researching questions such as:

- Do the intentions of the Act – namely behavioral changes for individuals and businesses, and protections for low-income households – match the impact it is actually having?
- Are we seeing those with the largest carbon footprint carry the largest burden?
- How does the impact change when considering the different responsibilities and income levels of men and women?

Taking a closer look at the tax exemptions provided by the Act, gendered transportation patterns, and exceptions to price sensitivity for consumers in rural and water-locked geographic areas, issues have begun to arise as to the fairness of the legislation.

If you are interested in getting involved in this gender auditing process, we will be presenting and work-shopping the findings of this report in June. Please email policy@westcoastleaf.org for more details.

VOLUNTEER PROFILE

Robin Folvik

By Mieka Buckley-Pearson



Robin completed a Bachelor of Arts in (Honours) in Women's Studies with a minor in History at Mount St-Vincent University in Halifax, before moving to Vancouver a few years ago. She is now completing her Masters in History at Simon Fraser University while completing several research projects, as well as volunteering for organizations such as West Coast LEAF.

One of Robin's projects is in partnership with West Coast LEAF and the SFU Centre for Labour Studies. It is a graphic novel concerning the history of young workers in BC as well as their current rights in the workplace. Robin believes that youth in the workplace do not have enough access to information regarding their rights, and hopes this project will provide a much needed source.

Robin found West Coast LEAF almost nine months ago when she was searching for a local feminist community and group. Since then she has been a part of many volunteer projects for West Coast LEAF, including organizing and creating a database for our library, and getting involved with our 23rd Annual Equality Breakfast.

Robin hopes to develop a career where she can incorporate her passion for feminism, equality and history in a research or consulting position.

YOUTH IN THE WORKPLACE

By learning about workplace rights, young people gain tools to shape their world and assert their dignity and rights. Youth in the Workplace is a West Coast LEAF public education program that explores workplace rights and safety, stereotypes that lead to discrimination in the workplace, and introduces youth to the existence of legal rights.

For information about Youth in the Workplace and other educational workshops, please contact Education Manager Deanna Ogle at 604.684.8772 ext 114 or at education@westcoastleaf.org.

DONOR PROFILE

Jean Elder

By Joan Morris

Jean Elder, a retired history professor who specializes in medieval history, has been a supporter of West Coast LEAF since its inception in the 1980s. She was introduced to the new organization during her tenure at the University of B.C. She initially became a donor, at the request of Lynn Smith, a UBC law professor and West Coast LEAF founder. Years later, Jean served a couple of terms as a West Coast LEAF board member.

Jean was raised in Medicine Hat, Alberta, with the belief that everyone should help to make their communities better. She helped found or served on various committees and associations at UBC, and the Academic Women's Association honor her with their annual Jean Elder awards for dissertation excellence. She remains involved in community organizations such as Salt Spring Women Opposed to Violence and Abuse (SWOVA) which focuses on creating curriculums to help prevent violence, and is akin to West Coast LEAF's No Means No program.

Jean appreciates how "West Coast LEAF seems to attract good legal minds, and the legal focus is very useful to the cause of equality." Jean recalls the time she took her mother to visit the suffragette memorial behind the Houses of Parliament in London, England. Her mother had been a girl when the "votes for women" train had arrived in Winnipeg. She had fostered the hope that women's votes would make a transformative difference, but decades later, the political leaders were still predominantly male. Jean thought then and now that we can do better, and she appreciates the efforts of West Coast LEAF, especially when it comes to maintaining equality when our freedoms and rights conflict.

Jean has recently generously donated 90,000 aeroplane points to West Coast LEAF. Aeroplane points will be used to better serve the regional communities of BC, and for possible case-related travel.

For more information on donating your aeroplane points or on how to make other forms of contributions through West Coast LEAF please contact Sara Gortari at 604.684.8772 ext 123 or at development@westcoastleaf.org.



23rd annual Equality Breakfast, held on March 19, 2010 at the Fairmont Hotel Vancouver

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO CHANGE THE WORLD?

By Mieka Buckley-Pearson

West Coast LEAF's 23rd Annual Equality Breakfast was our most successful ever! Nobel Peace Prize winner Jody Williams gave an empowering speech about international law, the need to make change through peaceful activism, and current global events that are affecting human rights and equality.

"I believe in a world of globalization where we talk about globalized society and we talk about universal rights. In order to make those universal rights real at every level, you have to have enforcement and implementation at every level, and what West Coast LEAF is doing is trying to make that happen."

"What does it take in 2010 to change this world? It takes the work of organizations like West Coast LEAF. It takes the work of volunteers, and all of you who are here supporting the work of West Coast LEAF. It's about community, it's about civil society – we are the ones who will change the world. We have to press governments, we have to push them kicking and screaming all the way to real equality."

Jody Williams received the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize for her work with the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. In 2006, Williams, along with six other women Nobel Peace prize laureates, established the Nobel Women's Initiative to showcase and promote women's rights researchers and organizations working towards the advancement of peace and justice on a global scale.



"Making a choice to support organizations like West Coast LEAF is a decision to support women working for women's equality, and when women are more equal, men are more equal."

Jody Williams