

## 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.



## JOIN THE THEMIS MONTHLY GIVING CLUB!

The Themis Monthly Giving Club is our fastest-growing group of donors! 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 Stephanie Sersli at 604.684.8772 ext. 113 for more details.

## SPONSOR OUR SUPREME COURT CHALLENGE FUND

Started in 2011, this fund is specifically earmarked for West Coast LEAF to take our equality arguments all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada in cases involving important issues such as access to justice and ending exploitation of women and girls. This fund enables us to conduct rigorous research and supports in-house counsel, travel, and other activities associated with legal challenges. Please contact Stephanie Sersli at 604.684.8772 ext. 113 for more details.

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### Q: What community development projects are you currently supporting?

**A:** We support projects locally and abroad. For example, the Ethical Bean Scholarship Fund supports two non-profit organizations: Child Aid and Project Somos. Child Aid provides children in Guatemala with the finances for school registration fees, uniforms, shoes, school supplies, textbooks, health care for a year, and transportation. Project SOMOS is a Vancouver based non-profit committed to building a village in Guatemala for abandoned and orphaned children. When completed, the village will have homes for children, organic gardens and orchards, buildings for art and music workshops, a library, a large playground and soccer field.

### Q: Why is supporting the work of West Coast LEAF important to you?

**A:** Ethical Bean supports the economic, social, and environmental rights of communities. We have always promoted Fair Trade and Organic certified procurement strategies, which include a strong focus on the democratic rights of all coffee growers and gender equity. We also support local organizations pursuing similar goals. We applaud West Coast LEAF's mandate to assist women in their full social, economic, and political empowerment.

## Themis Club Monthly Donors

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# LEAFlet

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## 2012 EQUALITY BREAKFAST

Tuesday, March 13, 2012  
Fairmont Hotel Vancouver

**Keynote Speaker**  
**Journalist & political raconteur**  
**Chantal Hébert**

## POLITICS POACHED, BASTED, BOILED

### Chantal Hébert serves it up at the 25th Equality Breakfast



We're winding up for the biggest social event of the year at West Coast LEAF — our 25th Annual Equality Breakfast. Every year the Breakfast draws like-minded women and men who support the pursuit of legal equality in BC and Canada. We would be delighted if you joined us.

Our keynote speaker will be journalist and political pundit Chantal Hébert, whom many consider to be Canada's best political columnist. Hébert writes for The Toronto Star and Le Devoir, and is an outspoken

member of CBC's The National's weekly At Issue panel. She brings a strong understanding of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to analyze proposed legislation, while bringing first-hand knowledge of the dynamics that shape the decisions on Parliament Hill. Hébert has become one of the nation's most beloved pundits, and has even been parodied on the satirical TV show 22 Minutes.

"I'm thrilled that this year's keynote speaker is Chantal Hébert," says Melanie Ash, a West Coast LEAF Board member. "I'm a big fan of her insightful political analysis, which is always delivered in a smart, humorous, and thoroughly entertaining way."

"Chantal Hébert is usually the only woman in a panel of men analysts, and she is a serious, knowledgeable, and experienced one," says Catalina Rodriguez, West Coast LEAF's President. "I think she will bring a perspective that reminds us of what it is to be a Canadian today — among many things, it is embracing our own differences, our different roots and backgrounds."

Complementing this prominent media personality, we welcome award winning investigative journalist Kathy Tomlinson as our Mistress of Ceremonies. A reporter adept in exposing wrongdoing, injustice, and incompetence, Tomlinson hosts CBC Vancouver's *Go Public* news program. Based on the experiences of ordinary citizens, *Go Public* stories aim to hold businesses and government accountable for unjust actions, bureaucratic bangles, and unfair policies.

The Equality Breakfast is a meeting of minds where we draw inspiration from the friends of West Coast LEAF. It funds and inspires our endeavors into the new year. We hope you can attend.

*More information about the Equality Breakfast, tickets, and silent auction is found on our website, [www.westcoastleaf.org](http://www.westcoastleaf.org).*



## MAPPING THE GAP

### Charting Aboriginal women's unmet legal needs in BC

By Ashly Hubert

#### Mapping the Gap



Linking Aboriginal Women with Legal Services and Resources

By Shahnaz Rahman

*"Mapping the Gap: Linking Aboriginal Women with Legal Services and Resources", written in 2011 by Shahnaz Rahman, Manager of Community Outreach for the Family Law Project, is a followup to our initial 2010 "Mapping the Gap" report.*

West Coast LEAF is excited to announce that our 2011 report, "Mapping the Gap: Linking Aboriginal Women with Legal Services and Resources" is now available. The goal of the report is to focus much-needed attention on the availability and accessibility of legal resources and services for BC's Aboriginal women.

The 2011 project is a followup to our 2010 "Mapping the Gap" report, which provided a general overview of the legal resources available to women in BC in light of legal aid cuts and barriers to justice.

The "Mapping the Gap" project provides a snapshot of available legal services while also documenting unmet legal needs and recommendations for improvement. The project's findings were acquired through survey results, phone interviews, consultations with community organizations serving Aboriginal women, and internet-based research.

Overall the report highlights two main issues: first, there is a serious need for more in-person and one-on-one legal support; and second, that Aboriginal communities are facing significant legal needs that need to be addressed.

Many of the Aboriginal legal advocates that we consulted indicated that they were usually the only resource person in their community. They also told us that they often feel isolated, and identified a need for networking and dialogue with other advocates.

Shahnaz Rahman, Manager of Community Outreach for the Family Law Project, revealed that the "Mapping the Gap" report helped facilitate this much-needed networking and information-sharing between advocates. The project also helped enhance West Coast LEAF's own dialogue with Aboriginal serving organizations throughout BC and created an opportunity for future collaboration.

**Please visit our website to download the 2011 "Mapping the Gap" report and to learn more about its findings and recommendations.**

## DONOR PROFILE

### Cheryl Davies

Cheryl Davies is currently the Vice-President of Ambulatory Programs at BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre, the largest maternity hospital in Canada and the only facility in BC devoted primarily to the health of women, newborns and their families. She has more than 20 years experience in women's health as a clinician, educator and leader, and is a passionate advocate for women's health agendas and social justice. We asked Cheryl a few questions:

#### Q: Why do you support West Coast LEAF?

**A:** The mandate of West Coast LEAF fully aligns with my own belief that we must address the broader political, legal, economic and socio-cultural aspects of our society if we are to transform the inequalities that women experience in their lives. I have great respect for the staff, membership and volunteers of this organization who all strive to create a more equitable and just society. Additionally, the role that WCL has played in the advocacy, protection and advancement of women's reproductive rights in this province has particular meaning for me, as I have devoted much of my own career to the area of women's reproductive choice. Without the leadership and support of West Coast LEAF, women and health care providers in BC would not have the legal safeguards in place today to ensure their safety and privacy in accessing and delivering abortion services.

#### Q: What, in your opinion, is the most effective way to promote equality?

**A:** The promotion of strategies that impact policy and structural changes to our systems is key to meaningful success towards equality. However, I don't think there is a singular approach given the complex nature of gender, and all the other intersecting factors and diversity in our society.



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<https://twitter.com/#!/EqualityBfast>

## VOLUNTEER PROFILE

### Robyn Trask



Robyn Trask is Legal Counsel with the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) and also acts as an Ethiopia project consultant to the British Columbia Justice Education Society. She represents the

BCTF in various proceedings including labour arbitrations, proceedings at the BC Human Rights Tribunal, and court proceedings.

Prior to joining the BCTF, she worked with a Toronto litigation firm and completed her articles with the Canadian Auto Workers' Union. Robyn has also spent time working with legal organizations in Sierra Leone and Ethiopia. Robyn is a West Coast LEAF Board member, the current Chair of its Legal Committee, and a member of the CBA Labour Law Section Executive Committee.

#### Q: What brought you to volunteer at West Coast LEAF?

**A:** I first learned about West Coast LEAF when I was at law school – I volunteered at the Equality Breakfast while I was a UBC student. When I moved back to Vancouver after working in Toronto for a few years, I joined the Breakfast Committee, and eventually I joined the Board in 2010.

#### Q: Why is volunteering at West Coast LEAF important to you?

**A:** Women's equality is an important issue. The inequalities that continue to exist in Canada and around the world can be quite troubling. Being a member of an organization that is working for positive change is very rewarding.

#### Q: What, in your opinion, is the most effective way to promote equality?

**A:** It is important to have a strategy that combines equality based litigation, law reform, and public legal education – this is exactly the approach West Coast LEAF takes. Litigation and law reform can establish important rights, but you also need to have public legal education so that people are aware of their rights.

## THE POLYGAMY REFERENCE

### A landmark decision on human rights vs. religious freedom

On November 23, 2011, the BC Supreme Court released its decision in the Polygamy Reference case. This was a milestone moment in the decades-long struggle to ensure the safety and equality of girls and women in Bountiful BC – the moment in which the constitutionality of the criminal prohibition on polygamy was upheld. In upholding the law, Chief Justice Bauman pointed to the inherent harms that polygamy, in the form of multiple marriages, heaps on women, children and society as a whole.

The evidence presented to the court of the harms of polygamy was overwhelming. Children had been trafficked across the border to be "married" as multiple wives; women who had never had any money of their own were told what to wear, where to live, whom to marry, and when to have sex and children; and child sexual abuse was rampant.

In West Coast LEAF's view, this is not about a case about the state crushing individual liberties. It is a case about equality and security of the person. Freedom of religion can be limited where the exercise of that freedom infringes on the right to equality.

As an intervener in the case, West Coast LEAF argued that the polygamy provision of the *Criminal Code* is constitutionally valid insofar as it only applies in exploitative circumstances. West Coast LEAF argued that multi-spouse unions are not inherently harmful, but the ways in which they are often practiced, especially in closed communities, often result in harm. For example, polygamy in this context logically results in large age gaps between a man and his later wives, which leads to the sexualisation and sexual assault of young girls in the form of "child brides".

This Polygamy Reference is a victory for women's equality insofar as it sets out that the right to freedom of religion is not without limits, and must incorporate considerations of women's equality, safety and freedom. The *Charter* protects the right to freedom of religion, but does not protect a 'right' to exploit women and girls. Given that the appeal period has come and gone and no one has filed a notice of appeal, Chief Justice Bauman's decision stands strong.

## PARTNER IN EQUALITY PROFILE

### Ethical Bean

Ethical Bean, Vancouver-based supplier of fair-trade organic coffee, is one of West Coast LEAF's longest-standing Equality Breakfast silent auction donors. We caught up with our patron of caffeinated beverages to find out more about the company's social responsibility practices.