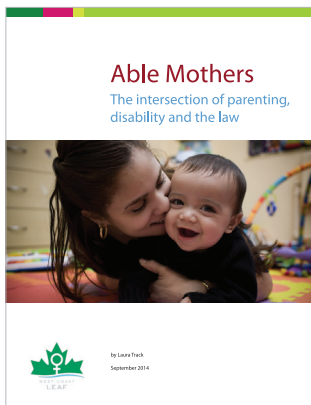


# LEAFlet

PROVOCATIVE • OPINIONATED • PERSUASIVE



**NEW REPORT** about mothering with disabilities available / page 2



Sign up for news alerts on our website



facebook.com/  
WestCoastLEAF



@WestCoast\_LEAF



555-409 Granville Street  
Vancouver, BC V6C 1T2  
t: 604-684-8772  
t: 1-866-737-7716  
e: info@westcoastleaf.org

[westcoastleaf.org](http://westcoastleaf.org)

2015 EQUALITY BREAKFAST KEYNOTE: MINNIJEAN BROWN TRICKEY

## FORCING A SOCIETY TO LIVE UP TO ITS IDEALS

On September 4, 1957, teenaged Minnijean Brown headed off to her new school, Central High in Little Rock, Arkansas. She was nervous, and with good cause. She and eight other black youths were slated to become the first black Americans to attend all-white Central High. They became known as the Little Rock Nine.

The Supreme Court had ruled segregated schools unconstitutional in its landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. Expecting opposition especially in the southern states, the Supreme Court did not establish a timeline for the implementation of its ruling.

However, after still more hearings, in 1955 the Justices did hand down a plan: desegregation in schools was to proceed with "all deliberate speed."

The school board of Little Rock cautiously developed a court-approved plan to integrate its segregated school system. The Little Rock Nine and many other students signed up to attend Central High School, a premier school known for its academic excellence and stellar facilities. "I wanted to attend Central High School to get a better education, and I was one of the students chosen for having good grades," Minnijean explains. However, over the summer that initial list of 75 selected students dwindled as the youth were warned they would not be able to participate in extracurricular activities and their parents' jobs would be at risk. The threat of violence also grew heavier as September approached.

A crisis erupted when the Governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus, called the National Guard on September 4 to prevent the Little Rock Nine from attending Central High.



*continued on page 4*

## ABLE MOTHERS RELEASE ENHANCED BY AGM DISCUSSION

In late September, we published *Able Mothers: The intersection of parenting, disability and the law*. We followed the launch with a fascinating panel discussion as part of our Annual General Meeting.

Attendees had the privilege of hearing from three women with diverse expertise on issues relating to mothering with disabilities: Jewelles Smith, a gender and disability rights researcher; Judith Mosoff, a UBC law school professor specializing in disability law; and Tammy Gray, a proud mom to two sons who has been deaf since birth.

Each speaker was incredibly knowledgeable and compelling, but one story that stood out was told by Tammy Gray, who described navigating the family law system as a deaf mother who lacked the resources to hire a lawyer. She encountered barriers at every turn, from a lack of sign language interpretation at her appointment to apply for legal aid, to the legal education videos she couldn't use because they aren't captioned. Her strength and perseverance in the face of these challenges was inspiring.

Many disabled parents are not so fortunate. Our research shows that too often, discriminatory assumptions about the capacity of people with disabilities to parent inform the decisions of social workers, judges, and others involved in their lives, with negative repercussions for both parents and their children. For women, who continue to bear disproportionate responsibility for child rearing and



**2014 AGM** L-R: Legal Director Laura Track and Executive Director Kasari Govender, with panel discussants Jewelles Smith and Judith Mosoff, Board Chair Francesca Marzari, and panel discussant Tammy Gray. PAIGE THOMBS PHOTO

face scrutiny of their behaviour and choices as parents that most men do not, the stakes are particularly high.

Like all mothers, mothers with disabilities need support to provide for the best interests of their children. Rather than removing children from their disabled parents, government should be providing the supports and services necessary so that parents can provide a safe and nurturing environment for their children. In fact, it has a legal obligation to do so—a legal obligation that is going unmet.

We will continue to advocate for the legal rights of both children and their mothers: the rights of children to be raised in a supportive and loving environment, and the rights of mothers not to be discriminated against.



L-R: Melina Buckley, Sharon Matthews, Francesca Marzari, and Kasari Govender at the Supreme Court of Canada.

### LITIGATION UPDATE

## TWO VICTORIES FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY

In our September edition of the LEAFlet, we told you about two cases that we intervened in at the Supreme Court of Canada. This fall, the Court decided both of these cases – and both were victories for women's equality.

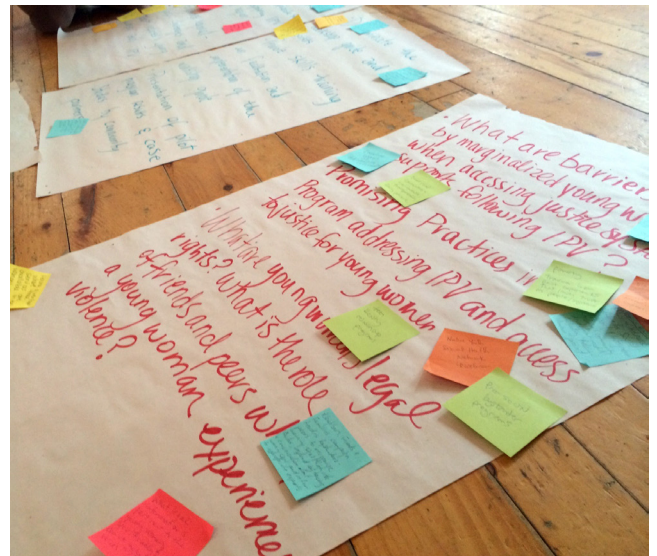
# EDUCATING YOUNG WOMEN ABOUT PARTNER VIOLENCE

In October, our education team traveled to Jouvence, a retreat centre outside of Montreal, as part of our work with the Girls Action Foundation on a project called “Building Bridges to Justice”. This project is bringing together facilitators across the country to develop the framework for a program to educate young women and girls about intimate partner violence. We were invited to participate to bring a legal lens to the project, and because of our history facilitating “No Means No” workshops that educate youth about sexual assault and consent.

The four-day retreat was filled with learnings:

- It is so important to collaborate across sectors if work of this nature is going to be relevant and meaningful. This group brought together front line workers, educators, advocates, RCMP, and more; many perspectives made for incredibly rich conversation.
- Context is important! Playing off the inclusion of multiple perspectives, working with folks from every nook and cranny of the country really showed us that relevant programming about intimate partner violence can look very different depending on where you are coming from (for example, in a small rural community vs. a large urban centre).

The weekend was filled with a sense of hope that came from sharing space with so many motivated, inspiring women doing incredible work across the country. We look forward to sharing the results of the project with you when it is complete.



**The “Building Bridges to Justice” project is bringing together facilitators across the country to develop the framework for a program to educate young women and girls about intimate partner violence.**



CHRISSE ARNOLD PHOTOS

*continued from page 2*

In April, we argued that the imposition of hearing fees in family law cases impedes access to justice, particularly for women, who are least likely to be able to afford the fees. Few people are aware that they will be charged for their use of court in their family law hearing – until they are forced to pay the fees. The Court found that hearing fees are unconstitutional, and very significantly, that access to justice is a constitutionally protected right.

In mid-November, we argued that when an employer offers benefits to new parents, it has to recognize the different experiences of different kinds of parents. Treating women equally means that employers must take the physiological impacts of pregnancy and giving birth into account. In a highly unusual move, the Court delivered its judgment on the same day we argued the case – and restored the labour arbitrator’s decision that the employer’s benefit scheme is discriminatory.

*I've attending WC LEAF's Equality Breakfast for 14 years and I don't believe I have ever enjoyed the event quite as much as I did this morning ... The event as a whole was beautifully executed." — Lindsay Waddell, human rights lawyer*

### **SPONSOR THE 2015 EQUALITY BREAKFAST**

Attended by nearly 800 participants each year, this greatly anticipated event celebrates International Women's Day and the full participation of women and girls in social, economic, and political spheres. Becoming an Equality Breakfast sponsor is an excellent way to demonstrate that you value having women in leadership positions, are committed to corporate social responsibility, and support access to justice.



CHRIS CHEUNG PHOTOS

For information on sponsorship, visit [westcoastleaf.org](http://westcoastleaf.org) or contact Stephanie Sersli at 684-8772, x. 114.

*continued from page 1*

Governor Faubus instructed the Arkansas National Guard to surround the school and keep all black students out. Faubus succeeded on the first day. NAACP lawyers then sought, and were granted, an injunction that prevented the Governor from using the National Guard to deny the Little Rock Nine admittance to Central High.

On Sept. 23, the nine students entered Little Rock Central High School for the first time, ignoring verbal abuse and threats from the crowd outside. When the mob realized the students had successfully entered the school, violence erupted. As the situation deteriorated, school officials, fearing for the students' safety dismissed the Little Rock Nine at lunchtime. The next day, President Eisenhower ordered paratroopers from the 101st Airborne Division to escort the nine students into the school.

Although the Little Rock Nine were finally able to attend classes by late September, the fight wasn't over: throughout the rest of the school year they faced ongoing verbal and physical torment and threats from their white peers.

This act of determination was Minnijean's first step on the path of social and political activism: she's gone on to fight for minority rights and environmental justice in both Canada and the US. With lifelong commitment to peacemaking, youth leadership, gender and social justice advocacy, she inspires countless people with her story, urging them to put themselves on the line in the fight against social, economic, and racial injustice.

Ms. Brown Trickey studied journalism in the US and then later pursued a Bachelor of Social Work in Native Human Services from Laurentian University and Master of Social Work at Carleton University. Recipient of four Honorary Doctorates, she has been awarded the Lifetime Achievement Tribute by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, the International Wolf award, and with the Little Rock Nine, the NAACP Spingarn Medal and the Congressional Gold Medal. She served in the Clinton Administration as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Workforce Diversity at the Department of Interior, and was the Shipley Visiting Writer for Heritage Studies at Arkansas State University. For the past ten years she has been a nonviolence and anti-racism facilitator for Sojourn to the Past, a ten-day interactive history experience for high school students.

**BUY YOUR TICKETS for the Equality Breakfast on March 3, 2015 at [2015equalitybreakfast.eventbrite.ca](http://2015equalitybreakfast.eventbrite.ca)**

### **INVESTING IN WOMEN'S EQUALITY**

West Coast LEAF is grateful for the ongoing support we receive from our donors, our members, and the Law Foundation of British Columbia. We also thank the following project funders.

