

LEAFlet

RAISING OUR VOICES FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY

THANK YOU for supporting the 2016 Equality Breakfast / page 4



Equality Breakfast speakers Michele Landsberg and Ilana Landsberg-Lewis



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RISE WOMEN'S LEGAL CENTRE FILLS GAPING HOLE IN PUBLIC LEGAL SERVICES

Rise Women's Legal Centre has finally opened its doors to students and clients! The initiative, a partnership between West Coast LEAF and UBC's Allard School of Law, aims to "put justice back on the map" by providing women-centred legal services to clients. Run as an independent community legal clinic, Rise offers different levels of service, including summary advice, assistance on a limited retainer, and in some cases full representation.

Legal services are being delivered this summer primarily by four wonderful UBC law students who have taken family law as a prerequisite course prior to starting their externship at Rise. Alongside their clinical experience, students will be learning practical legal skills such as interviewing clients and drafting affidavits. We hope that by providing students with the opportunity to gain hands-on experience with family law and with clients, they will be inspired to approach their future legal practices with compassion, nuance, and a commitment to social justice and substantive equality.

Rise Women's Legal Centre is the culmination of years of dedicated research and passionate advocacy for access to justice by West Coast LEAF. Since the legal aid system was gutted almost 15 years ago, women-serving organizations have been struggling to meet the overwhelming need of women engaged in family law disputes. For example, West Coast LEAF's Jane Doe Legal Advice Clinic has been providing legal advice to women fleeing violence. However, the Centre is the first of its kind in BC as a nonprofit law firm providing the full range of legal services to women, including much needed legal representation in family law and related areas.



RISE WOMEN'S LEGAL CENTRE: Seated, L-R: Vandana Sood, Kim Hawkins, and Raji Mangat; standing, L-R: law students Candice Minnaar, Floriana Costea, Ana Mihajlović, and Miryam Burns.

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COMMITMENT TO EQUALITY ACROSS GENERATIONS

Lawyers don't often have the chance to have their families join them in the courtroom to watch them work. When the opportunity arose for Kasandra Cronin to invite her family to travel to Ottawa to witness her submission for West Coast LEAF at the Supreme Court of Canada, it was too good to pass up. Watching from the courtroom gallery that January day was Kasandra's husband Dan, daughter Monica, and mother Hilarey. West Coast LEAF Director of Law Reform Kendra Milne joined Kasandra in court.

Kasandra's interest in law started early. "I wanted to be a lawyer from when I was pretty young. In Grade 6, I went to a summer law program started by one of our teachers who was going to law school. It was a criminal law seminar during the summer months that all my friends thought I was crazy to do. I went to soccer camp – and I went to criminal law camp. It's something I was interested in from when I was probably nine or 10."

Her early commitment developed organically, she said. "We don't have any lawyers in the family, so I'm the only lawyer... I've always found it's interesting [to] get to live vicariously through all these different lives that I would never actually want to live in.... [I]t's super fascinating to be able to learn about all these different parts of your society. It's never boring."

The case in question, *R v Lloyd*, challenged a mandatory minimum jail term for drug possession. West Coast LEAF argued that the mandatory minimum sentence at issue in this case has disproportionately negative consequences for women. The case was decided favorably in April, with the mandatory minimum sentence being struck down. Kasandra acted as pro-bono co-counsel on the case with Joana Thackeray.

The implications for substantive equality were a clear draw, Kasandra said. "I always feel like female offenders are an afterthought. To be frank, most of my clients are men. Women represent a small percentage of the offending population, which is reflected in why there are fewer facilities, fewer jails, fewer drug treatment centres, and all of that cascades down to fewer resources... Women who offend and end up in custody typically have horrendous backgrounds and all kinds of different abuse and end up in places and committing



Dan, Monica, Kasandra, and Hilarey at the Supreme Court of Canada in January 2016.

crimes for reasons often different from why men offend. That's why I believe the courts have to have discretion at the trial judge level to allow for those things to be considered, particularly for women."

Having her family in Court was a special highlight. "It was important for me to have my daughter see me in the Supreme Court of Canada.... And she looked up at the bench and of our nine judges, four are women and our Chief Justice is a woman. I wanted her to see that."

By phone, Kasandra's 10-year-old daughter Monica said that she was excited to visit Ottawa for another reason. "I was excited because I wanted to meet Justin Trudeau, but I didn't. I was just excited, I've never been to Ottawa, so I thought it would be cool."

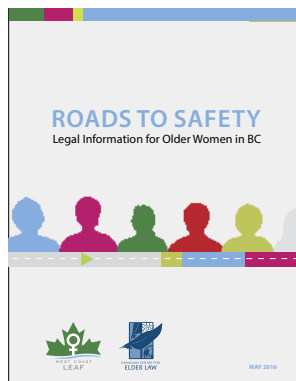
Kasandra's mother Hilarey said she couldn't miss the opportunity to see her daughter present to the Supreme Court. "To me, it spoke to the honour of being asked to present on behalf of [West Coast] LEAF. That in itself was an honour that she certainly felt and I felt, as well. That said a lot to me about her integrity and how she is as a person and as an attorney. And that it went as far as it did ... it was just a wonderful experience for her, and I wasn't going to miss it."

To Hilarey, modeling meaningful work for her children was important. "The effect on girls of having a working mother, research has shown to be very, very positive.

ROADS TO SAFETY: LEGAL INFORMATION FOR OLDER WOMEN EXPERIENCING ABUSE

Announcing our newest public legal information resource! West Coast LEAF and the Canadian Centre for Elder Law are proud to present *Roads to Safety*, a 97-page plain-language handbook addressing legal challenges that impact older women who are survivors of violence.

Roads to Safety was conceived in response to concerns raised by participants in our Older Women's Dialogue Project. Older women face high rates of violence and unique barriers to safety; there is a shortage of accessible legal information about their rights and options. Recognizing that diverse older women face overlapping legal challenges and need access to a wide range of legal information in one place, we created a handbook that touches on subjects as varied as capacity and decision-making rights, immigration,



pensions, protection orders, property division after separation, and more.

As a companion piece to *Roads to Safety*, we have also produced a multilingual wallet-sized resource listing sources of support for older women in BC. A version focusing on specialized services for Indigenous women will also be available.

We are grateful to the many older women, frontline service providers, and lawyers who shaped this project. Thanks also to the BC Council to Reduce Elder Abuse for funding our work to provide older women with the targeted legal information they need to seek safety.

Download *Roads to Safety* at westcoastleaf.org/roads.

CLINIC, CONT'D FROM PAGE 1: The Centre is committed to collaborating and building upon existing services to ensure that more women get access to justice.

Alongside the focus on providing direct legal services for women, Rise's mandate includes working with West Coast LEAF's new Litigation Director Raji Mangat to identify systemic legal issues that have the potential for impact beyond a particular client. West Coast LEAF now has the capacity to improve substantive equality for women in a way that we never have before: not

only as interveners in a case, but also building cases from the ground up that have the potential to change the law and ensure equality for all.

Staff and students are excited to welcome clients to Rise's new space at 201–456 West Broadway. Joining Executive Director Kim Hawkins on staff is Supervising Lawyer Vandana Sood and Operations Manager Sheila Schierbeck. The Rise website is under development, but contact information can be found at westcoastleaf.org/2016/05/24/rise-womens-legal-centre-open-today.

KASANDRA, CONT'D FROM PAGE 2: "I was a single mom and Kasandra saw me working, and working on advanced degrees, and progressing in a profession. There were some things that were hard about that, I'm not dismissing that, but I'm saying that the role model was, 'This is what you do.' It's not even something you need to talk about. And Monica has that role model [too]. It's helpful for girls to see their mothers, their grandmothers, their aunts, their uncles – people like them who are working, or who have a profession. What Monica will do with this experience, I don't know.

Maybe nothing, but it has value. She sees that her mother is valued and has value and that can only be good."

Those life lessons start early and make lasting impressions. "When Kasandra and my son and I lived in Vancouver, we went on peace marches and marches for teachers for a contract – at one point we [teachers] didn't have a contract. There's been an involvement in as much as possible with doing the right thing to further equality for everybody. I'm very proud of that."



PROGRAM: 24 pages of news and thanks.



Over 700 guests filled the Fairmont ballroom.



Emcee Erica Johnson listens to keynote speakers Michele Landsberg and Ilana Landsberg-Lewis, with ASL interpretation by Lysz Keallen. KAYLA ISOMURA PHOTOS

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Our amazing volunteers were on hand to answer questions.

INVESTING IN WOMEN'S EQUALITY

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