Annual Report

2025-26

LEGAL **HELP** CENTRE

LEGAL HELP CENTRE

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LEGAL HELP CENTRE

Who We Are

What is Legal Help Centre (LHC)?

LHC provides access to legal and social service resources for under-served community members by providing free legal support, education and referrals, in partnership with students and volunteer lawyers. We are ready to listen to your concerns, answer questions, and explore the best ways to assist you.

Vision

No barriers to justice.

Mission

Empowering under-served individuals to navigate legal issues, offering guidance and connections to resources.

2025-28 Strategic Plan

WHERE WE'RE HEADED, WHAT WE DO, AND THE VALUES THAT GUIDE US.

We imagine a future where there are no barriers to justice —a future where everyone, regardless of their circumstances, can understand and act on their legal rights. Every day, we work toward that goal by empowering under-served individuals to navigate legal issues, offering guidance and connections to resources.

Our approach is grounded in a set of values that shape how we work, make decisions, and support the people we serve. These values reflect not just what we believe, but how we show up in our relationships, our services, and our commitments to community.



ACCESSIBILITY
We will strive to provide all programs and services, policies and procedures, and methods of operation as inclusively as possible.



EMPOWERMENT
We aim to empower those we work with by sharing information, expanding knowledge and providing tools to navigate systems in a way that builds confidence.



COLLABORATION
We embrace an interdisciplinary approach, learning from one another, recognizing the strength in our diversity, and valuing every individual's contribution.



RESILIENCE
We will approach our work and the challenges we encounter with flexibility. We will start with openness, looking for how we help. Our empathic approach will be creative, innovative and will draw on various resources.



LEARNING
We believe in continuous learning, and honour each individual. We walk alongside them with empathy and respect.

Together, our picture of the future, our purpose, and our shared values form the foundation of this strategic plan. They guide not only what we aim to achieve, but also how we work in pursuit of a meaningful and lasting impact. With this foundation in place, the following strategic priorities outline the key areas we will focus on over the coming years.

2025-28 Strategic Plan

This past year, the Legal Help Centre undertook the development of a new Strategic Plan that will guide our work through 2028. Grounded in our commitment to improving access to justice and supporting underserved individuals through legal information, education, referrals, and collaborative service delivery, the plan establishes a clear roadmap for strengthening our impact, expanding partnerships, and responding to the evolving needs of our community. As part of this process, we also renewed our mission and vision statements and revisited our guiding principles to ensure they continue to reflect our values, priorities, and goals for the future.

We extend our sincere thanks to the Manitoba Law Foundation for its generous support of this important initiative. Their investment enabled us to engage in a thoughtful planning process that incorporated many perspectives and positioned the Legal Help Centre for continued growth and innovation. We are grateful for their commitment to strengthening access to justice and for helping us build a strong foundation for the years ahead.



President's Message

Dear Members, Partners, and Friends of Legal Help Center,

As I reflect on this past year, I think of Mattie Stepanek, a young man who overcame many challenges in his short life. He shared, "Unity is strength…when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved." Such clearly defines the work of the Legal Help Center; a dedicated team of staff and volunteers engaging in interprofessional collaboration to enhance access to justice for members of our community.

Students from the Faculties of Law, Social Work, Criminal Justice, and Human Rights receive the professional support and guidance necessary to prepare them to become the professionals of the future, and to continue this important work.

I acknowledge the passing of one of our most valued and long-time volunteers this year, Justice Gerald Jewers. His support for the Legal Help Center helped advance our work.



Legal Help Center welcomed our first clients fifteen years ago. Since then, we have embraced innovation and expanded our availability to better meet the needs of the community. These efforts have advanced our goals and reinforced trust placed in us by those we serve, and those who support us. Our commitment remains unwavering.

To my fellow Board members and staff, I extend my heartfelt thanks for your time, dedication and commitment to supporting access to justice. To you, the community that supports us, I acknowledge Mattie's comments that working together, "…wonderful things can be achieved."

Respectfully,

Dr. Tracey Bone, RSW
President, Board of Directors

Executive Director's Message

This has been a year of meaningful transition and momentum. We successfully completed our move to co-locate with Welcome Place, another committed, mission-driven non profit organization. It's an exciting step that is already strengthening collaboration and enhancing the support available to our community as we await the completion of the Legal Aid Manitoba Justice Hub.

At the same time, the need for our services continues to grow. We have seen a continued rise in client numbers, reflecting both increased awareness of our work and the pressing challenges many individuals are facing. Through it all, our dedicated staff and students have remained steadfast, helping clients move forward with greater clarity, confidence, and hope.

We also continue to build thoughtfully for the future, guided by the creation of our new 2025-2028 strategic plan and a commitment to responsive, community-centered service.

Our work is made possible by the generous support of our donors, partners, volunteers, and community champions.



We are especially grateful to the volunteer lawyers and law firms who generously contribute their time, expertise, and commitment to advancing access to justice. We deeply value our ongoing partnership with the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Law, as well as the contributions of students from the Faculty of Social Work, and the University of Winnipeg. To our donors, volunteers, community partners, and supporters, thank you for your dedication and generosity. Your contributions and collaboration make this work possible and strengthen our shared impact.

We are deeply thankful to have you alongside us. Together, we are helping ensure that more people receive the support they need, when they need it most.

With sincere appreciation,

Kasia James
Executive Director

Our Team

2025-26 Board of Directors

Dr. Tracey Bone
Katherine L. Bueti, K.C.
Adonia Manaigre
David Silver
Robin Dwarka
Nick Slonosky
Dr. Richard Jochelson

Dawnis Kennedy
Jennifer Nembhard
Lindsey Kilcup
Ghislaine Alleyne
Lily Deardorff
Dr. Matthew Hamilton
Nicole Smith

LHC Staff
as of March 31, 2026

Kasia James, Executive Director

Shasta Benaim, Legal Director

Daniel Hildebrand, Staff Lawyer

Norm Yusim, Staff Lawyer

Gillian Findlay, Articling Student

Andrea Acero, Administrative Assistant



Team LHC

Navigating Change Together

It is a privilege to write to our members, volunteers, staff, and students as Legal Help Centre enters its 15th year.

This milestone is also deeply personal for me. Of the 15 years LHC has served the community, this marks my 14th year with the organization. During that time, I have engaged with LHC in many roles: volunteer, law student intern, articling student volunteer, volunteer lawyer, board member, Staff Lawyer, and now Legal Director. At every stage of my career, LHC has shaped how I understand the legal profession and my responsibility within it.

If my own career is any indication, investing in the growth of young law students and lawyers, including those from diverse backgrounds, is essential to the health of our justice system and to advancing Access to Justice in Manitoba. We are grateful to the retired and experienced lawyers who have chosen to give their time to LHC by mentoring the next generation alongside our core LHC staff.

If there was one defining theme of our 15th year, it would be change, something that has long been a constant at LHC. Over the past year, much of LHC's change was physical, including our relocation and co-location with Welcome Place.

Looking ahead, we are excited about 2026-27 initiatives that respond directly to community need. In partnership with the Manitoba Law Library, LHC will assist self- represented parties at court with navigation assistance, connecting them to the legal or social resource that best fits their needs every Monday during the summer months. Our Estates Pilot Project will support individuals with estate administration and probate matters, addressing a long-standing barrier for families navigating the court system. Our Northern Pilot Project will explore how LHC can best support Northern communities in meaningful, authentic, and sustainable ways.

This year, we renewed and strengthened relationships across the community, recognizing that this work cannot be done in isolation. Many organizations and clinics are doing exceptional work, and by working together, we are stronger than any one program alone.

As our Justice Hub moves forward with connection at its core, I often reflect on LHC's early days nearly 14 years ago in a small space at the University of Winnipeg, consisting of little more than a modest reception area. Seeing where we are now, and where we are headed, I am confident that the future of LHC is bright.

Shasta Benaim
Legal Director

LEGAL HELP CENTRE

Mission Impact
In our client's words

" I would like to sincerely express my gratitude to the entire team at the Legal Help Centre for the outstanding support you have provided me throughout my case. I truly felt supported and heard (.....) Your work is not only meaningful for individuals like me, but also incredibly impactful for the entire community. The way you serve, uplift, and advocate for people who need support is truly admirable. Your commitment brings real change, and I am so grateful to have received your help."

Hanna

"Words cannot express my gratitude for help today. Thank you for going the extra mile and genuinely caring about my plight. This is rare and I appreciate your time and efforts tremendously."

Mohamed

"I wanted to take a moment to sincerely thank you for all your help and guidance troughout my divorce process. I received my divorce certificate today, and truly appreciate the support your team provided every step of the way. Your assistance in preparing the documents and explaning everything so clearly made the process much easier for me. Thank you one again for your time, patience, and kindness."

Kellie

Please note that client names were changed for privacy reasons.

Mission Impact

On a cold day in January, a couple walked through the doors at Legal Help Centre's drop-in clinic carrying a folder whose edges had gone soft from opening and closing. Inside: loan documents, letters, bankruptcy papers and a growing sense that something wasn't right, though they couldn't quite say what.

That day they met a student extern with a gift for untangling complicated facts. As they moved through the documents line by line, he paused. Terms seemed to shift. Legal issues hiding in plain sight. He turned to consult with a volunteer lawyer, Kaisha Thompson, who was generously lending her expertise that afternoon.

What started as a straightforward debt matter opened into serious questions about contractual ambiguity, *contra proferentem*, and the interplay between secure lending and *the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act.*

The questions stayed with them.

Over the months and then the years, Legal Help Centre became a steady presence in the clients' corner. New law students took up the file as others graduated, each adding another piece: researching case law, tracing legal principles, testing arguments. Staff lawyers ensured continuity. Volunteer lawyers stepped in at key moments with the kind of insight only experience brings.

Through drafts and redrafts, through carefully assembled affidavits and refined legal arguments, the clients kept coming back determined, and no longer facing the system alone.

By the time the matter reached the Court of King's Bench, it carried the fingerprints of an entire community.

The Court found in the clients' favour. In his written reasons, the justice did more than resolve the dispute; he acknowledged Legal Help Centre's role in ensuring the case was properly understood and fairly decided. One small paragraph in the reasons. But for everyone who had worked on the file, it was a special recognition.

Because this is what access to justice looks like at LHC.

It looks like a drop-in conversation on an ordinary afternoon. It looks like curiosity, teamwork, and the belief that details matter. It looks like people: lawyers, students, staff, and clients , working together, patiently and persistently.

At Legal Help Centre, we don't know on that first day which files will grow into something larger. But we know this: when people are given proper support, remarkable things can happen.

Mission Impact: Program Highlights

In 2025-26, demand for Legal Help Centre services continued to grow. Client inquiries increased by 16% and initial appointments increased by 25%. We saw more email communications , alongside growth in telephone appointments and follow-up consultations. Although referrals to external organizations decreased, referral quality improved through a more strategic understanding of community resources and client needs. These trends reflect both the strength of our service delivery and the increasing demand for accessible legal assistance.

3634

Telephone and email inquiries



1000+

Hours donated by volunteer lawyers and admin support volunteers



2670

Client appointments (including in-person, telephone and further consultations).



1215

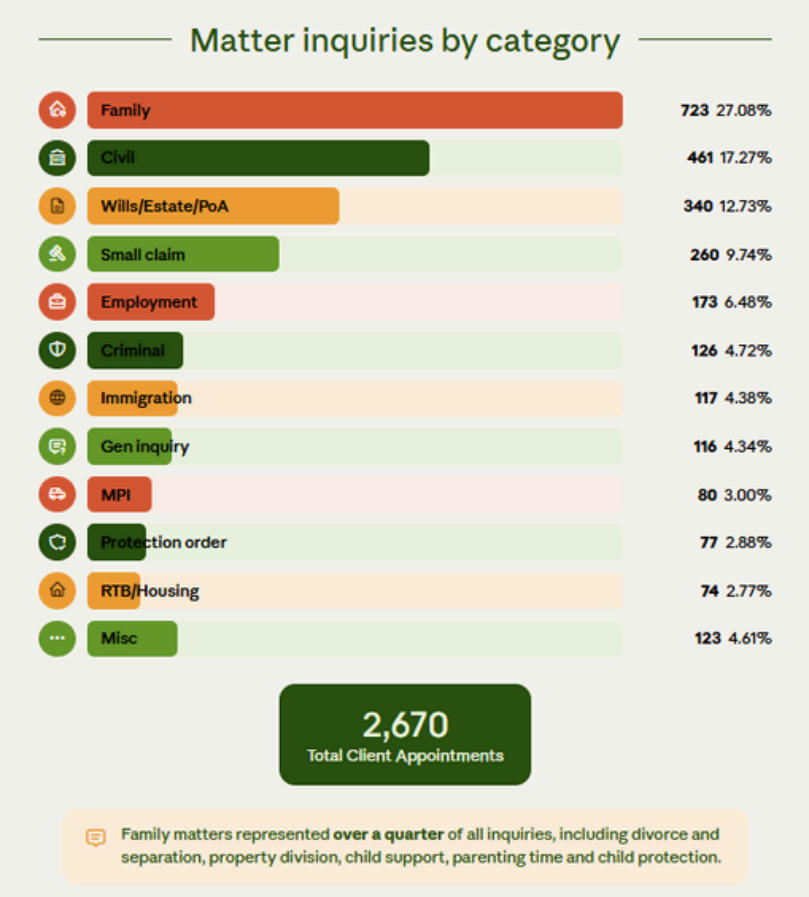
Referrals to community partners



Mission Impact: Program Highlights

Legal Help Centre remained a vital source of assistance for individuals seeking help with a broad spectrum of legal issues. Every statistic we share represents a real person, and a unique journey.

Over half of all client interactions during the reporting period involved family or civil law matters.



Our Students

Our Sincere Appreciation to Our 2025–26 Student Team

Legal Help Centre is continually inspired by the dedication, compassion, and professionalism of our students. Their commitment to supporting individuals facing legal and social challenges is central to our ability to provide accessible and meaningful assistance to the community. We are deeply grateful for the energy and care they bring to our work throughout the year.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the students from law, social work, criminal justice, and human rights programs who contribute their skills and perspectives to our interdisciplinary team. By working together to provide legal information, advocacy, referrals, and social support, they help strengthen the services we offer while gaining invaluable experience and insight. Their collaboration and commitment continue to make a lasting difference for our clients.







Student Testimonial

"My time at Legal Help Centre has been an invaluable part of my legal education. Working closely with clients allowed me to build meaningful skills in communication, advocacy, and problem-solving. I am especially appreciative of the mentorship I received from the staff lawyers. Their guidance helped me grow both personally and professionally. I am truly grateful for this experience, as it has played a significant role in guiding my future career path."

Linnea, LHC 2025-26 Summer Student

Jo-Anne M. Findlay Memorial Award

Legal Help Centre has been marked by dedication, leadership, and a strong commitment to access to justice. From her roles as a summer student and intern to mentoring new volunteers, Chloe consistently demonstrated compassion and a holistic approach to supporting individuals facing legal and social challenges. Her passion for advocacy and her commitment to helping clients navigate complex systems have made a lasting impact on both our organization and the community we serve.

Beyond the Legal Help Centre, Chloe has distinguished herself as a leader and mentor. Through her involvement with Indigenous student mentorship, student governance, and the Manitoba Indigenous Law Students Association, she has worked tirelessly to create opportunities for others and support students from underrepresented communities. Her generosity and dedication to service embody the spirit of this award, and we were honoured to celebrate her achievements and contributions.



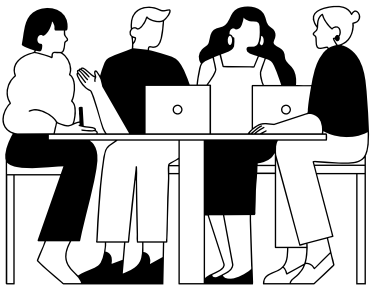
LHC Legal Director, Shasta Benaim, Award Recipient Chloe Dreilich-Girard, LHC ED, Kasia James

Our Volunteers

Our volunteers are at the heart of everything we do. Their dedication, expertise, and generosity make a meaningful difference in the lives of our clients and strengthen our ability to fulfill our mission. Whether providing legal guidance, mentorship, admin suppport or committee input, each volunteer plays a vital role in the success of the Legal Help Centre.

We are especially grateful to our Board of Directors, committee members, and the many practicing lawyers who generously contribute their time and knowledge. Their leadership, advocacy, and commitment help guide our organization while creating valuable opportunities for our student volunteers to learn alongside experienced professionals.

Together, they help ensure that the Legal Help Centre continues to provide high-quality service and support to the community.



Thank you for making a difference!

Our Volunteers

Thank you to our Clinic Volunteer Lawyers!

Mubarak Adebisi
Peter Anadranistakis
Alex Bainov
Mikaela Benn
Kelsey Brooks
Trevor Brown
Natasha Brown
Katherine L. Bueti. K.C.
Joe Caliguiri
Alistair Clarke
Ruphine Djuissi
Paul Edwards
Stacey Ennis
Kali Faingold
Leiba Feldman
Will Gardner
Marvin Giesbrecht
Kendra Goertzen
Sarah Gravelines
David Grohmuller
Sharyne Hamm
Lorne Hanks
Morgan Jackson
Jolomi James
Tanya Keller
Mara Koven-Lapointe
Rocky Kravetsky
Lou Lamari
Corinne Lavallee
Katie Leung
Gordon Lillie
Kelby Loeppky
April Lount
Rhoni MacKenzie
Jim McClandress
Andrew McDonald
Simone Marcoux
Nunziata Masi
Kaitlin Nichol
Alexis Ohms
Rebecca Oman
Robyn Otto
Sandy Phillips
Roy Rabin
Kobra Rahimi
Nalini Reddy
Alicia Sawka
Dean Scaletta
Shimon Segal
Sarah Sharp
David Silver
Christopher Santos
Megan Spencer
Clay Stewart
Victoria Taylor
Gerrit Theule
Kaisha Thompson
Sarah Thurmeier
Chau Tran
Lynda Troup
Leah Unrau

thank you

Our Supporters

Thank you for supporting LHC's mission to make justice more accessible.

Organizations

Aqueduct Foundation
Assiniboine Credit Union
IG Wealth Management
Government of Canada - CSJ Program
Maple Leaf Construction Ltd.
Prairie Dawn Foundation
Pro Bono Students Canada
Red Viking Productions
The Law Society of Manitoba
The Manitoba Law Foundation
The Winnipeg Foundation
The University of Manitoba - Faculty of Law

Law Firms

Bennet Waugh Family Law
Evans Pollock Schofield
Family Law
Fillmore Riley LLP
Hill Sokalski Walsh LLP
MLT Aikins LLP
Pitblado LLP
Taylor McCaffrey LLP
Thompson Dorfman Sweatman LLP
Wolseley Law LLP

Private Donors

Chris Chapman
Marty Donkervoort
Valerie Freeland
Marvin Giesbrecht
Don MacDonald
Devin Morrow
Julia Negrea
Jason Robillard
Dean and Rachel Scaletta
Frank Trachuk
Krista Wiebe
Eleanor Wiebe

Financial Highlights

Condensed Statement of Operations

	2026	2025
REVENUE:		
Donations	$432,581	$349,861
Donations in-kind	-	3,750
Grant revenue	161,818	152,758
Amortization of deferred contributions	5,973	5,973
Interest income	9,044	18,533
Total	$609,416	$530,875
EXPENSES:		
Salaries and benefits	$457,145	$459,637
Administration	31,127	19,370
Amortization	6,770	7,951
Rent	40,432	46,031
Office	62,804	45,650
Other	42,239	8,216
Total	$640,517	$586,855
EXCESS (DEFICIENCY) OF REVENUE OVER EXPENSES	$(31,101)	$(55,980)

These condensed financial statements do not contain all of the disclosures required by Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations. Readers are cautioned that these statements may not be appropriate for their purposes. For more information on LHC's financial position, results of operations, changes in net assets and cash flows, reference should be made to the complete financial statements of LHC as at and for the year ended March 31, 2026 on which Fort Group expressed an opinion without reservation in their report dated June 23, 2026. Audited financial statement are available upon request.

Contact Us





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