



ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 2014 – MARCH 2015

Helping Nova Scotians, for over 30 years, get the legal information they need!

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Even for people that have formal legal education, the law and our legal system can be a difficult road to navigate; for those that do not have such training, even determining where to start can be a daunting task. Fortunately, for more than 30 years, the Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia (LISNS) has been providing Nova Scotians with easy to understand information about the law, and this past year has been no exception.

LISNS is thankful for the donations of our individual and corporate donors that support our work and to our core funders: the Law Foundation of Nova Scotia, the Department of Justice (Canada) and the Department of Justice (Nova Scotia). However, we recognized that we are operating in difficult financial times and that it is necessary for us to use our limited resources in the most effective manner. Over the last year, LISNS has reached out to numerous stakeholders and community organizations to ensure that we understand the needs of the communities we serve and to identify opportunities to work with our partners to improve access to justice in Nova Scotia. Initiatives such as the LISNS Pro Bono Symposium and work with the IWK to coordinate free legal advice are just a couple of examples of the great work that the LISNS team has undertaken this past year.

It has been a pleasure to be a member of the Board of Directors of LISNS over the last five years and to be its President for the past two years. I have learned a great deal about access to justice issues during this time and have been consistently impressed with the commitment to access to justice demonstrated by my colleagues on the Board. Demand for legal information is not likely going to decrease. However, through the dedication of LISNS knowledgeable staff and volunteers and the guidance of our Executive Director, LISNS will continue to ensure that Nova Scotians have access to legal information that is necessary for them to make informed decisions about their legal rights and responsibilities.

Michelle Higgins, President

STRATEGIC HIGHLIGHTS

- Engaged over 120 stakeholders across the Province to discuss legal information needs and LISNS role – this consultation process validated the importance of the personal legal support provided through LISNS Legal Information Line.
- Held the first LISNS Pro Bono Symposium on March 27, 2015 which successfully engaged over 130 lawyers and members of the public for a discussion of the role of lawyers and the needs of self-represented individuals. Media coverage through television and radio interviews with LISNS staff provided important attention to this issue. High profile speakers from across Canada attended pro bono to participate in the Symposium.
- Partner in delivering the IWK Family Legal Health Program which provides qualifying sick children and their families with access to free legal services. A social work practicum placement through the University of Victoria supported an interdisciplinary approach to successfully delivering legal information sessions to clinicians and social workers at the IWK.

- LISNS triage role continued to be validated through the Pro Bono Project which will see the provision of free legal services delivered through LISNS clinics being integrated into LISNS core services.
- Demand for LISNS core services continues to increase with demand for legal information services resulting in approximately 6,000 individuals being served (representing 60% of demand); LISNS improved resourcing of the line with the hire of a part-time legal information counselor and expanded hours to full-time business hours.
- Traffic to LISNS website continues to increase with almost half a million visitors in 2014-15. LISNS is a critical resource navigator for people in conflict requiring help.
- LISNS introduced a new sponsorship policy to facilitate law firms and organizations interested in supporting LISNS work through the legal information line and website; Eastlink became LISNS first sponsor of the Legal Information Line in 2014-15.

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

LISNS has a tiny budget within which it delivers core services to a significant number of Nova Scotians. Recognizing 70% of people's legal issues can be resolved through legal information, LISNS is providing excellent value for the money it receives. LISNS maintained a break-even situation for 2014-15 through tight financial management which will continue into 2015-16. The LISNS Philanthropy Committee has been actively involved in identifying appropriate relationships to further LISNS work. With the three year Pro Bono Project having ended May 2015, LISNS continues to seek new avenues to support the continuation of free legal information clinics.

LISNS STRATEGIC FOCUS – PROVIDING A ROADMAP TO JUSTICE

LISNS continues to expand its role as a triage navigator to assist linking the public with legal resources and identifying opportunities for collaboration amongst legal service providers to meet Nova Scotians legal information needs. Two priority initiatives for 2014-15 include:

- ❖ **Public Navigator Program** – non-legal community members will be trained to provide legal information support to self-represented individuals considering or going through proceedings in the Supreme Court in regional court houses outside of HRM; this program appears to be the first of its kind in Canada and has the support of Chief Justice MacDonald and both the Nova Scotia and Federal Departments of Justice.
- ❖ **Executor Navigator Program** – a legal information literacy strategy to respond to the strong need expressed by the public for information on wills and estates. This will include a **Wills Project serving Seniors in Underprivileged Communities** which is a partnership with the Schulich School of Law, Pro Bono Students Canada and CBA Wills & Estates and Elder law chapters to deliver wills and estates legal information sessions and clinics to seniors in underprivileged communities.



Heather de Berdt Romilly, LISNS, Executive Director

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

FISCAL YEAR APRIL 01, 2014 - MARCH 31, 2015

REVENUE

GRANTS

<i>Law Foundation of N.S.</i>	\$ 134,995
<i>Department of Justice Canada</i>	70,000
<i>Department of Justice Nova Scotia</i>	50,000

PROGRAMS

<i>Publication Sales</i>	105
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FUNDRAISING	23,218
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OTHER	<u>162</u>
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SUB-TOTAL	278,480
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PROJECTS	<u>175,844</u>
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TOTAL	<u>\$ 454,324</u>
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EXPENSES

PROGRAMS

<i>Legal Info Line & Lawyer Referral Service</i>	\$ 67,257
<i>Dial -a - Law</i>	3,820
<i>Publications</i>	8,779
<i>Community Programs</i>	17,648
<i>Website</i>	51,341

COST OF RAISING FUNDS	14,131
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PROJECTS	175,844
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ADMINISTRATION	<u>113,123</u>
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TOTAL	<u>\$ 451,943</u>
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INCOME (LOSS) FOR THE YEAR	<u>\$ 2,381</u>
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A copy of our Financial Statements is available upon request

Funders and Sponsors

THANK YOU TO ANNUAL GRANTORS

- Law Foundation of Nova Scotia
- Department of Justice Canada
- Department of Justice Nova Scotia

THANK YOU TO MAJOR PROJECT FUNDERS

- Law Foundation of Ontario
- Department of Justice Nova Scotia
- Province of Nova Scotia (Raising Awareness of Consent Laws)
- Government of Canada (Elder Abuse Awareness Project)

THANK YOU TO LISNS SPONSORS

LISNS LEGAL INFORMATION LINE

- ❖ Eastlink



LISNS WEBSITE (legalinfo.org)

- ❖ Nova Scotia Legal Aid
- ❖ BOYNECLARKE
- ❖ Nova Scotia Provincial Lotteries and Casino Corporation
- ❖ Wagners



LISNS PRO BONO SYMPOSIUM

- ❖ CBA – NS Branch
- ❖ Niche
- ❖ Public Libraries



Volunteers

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Executive:

Michelle Higgins, President
Jim Rossiter , Vice President
Jonathan Gallant, CA, Treasurer
Donald McDougall, QC, Secretary

Members:

- Michelle Chai
- Pauline Doucette
- Caron Ferguson Eagan
- Shelley Hounsell-Gray
- Nila Ipson
- Adrian Lake
- Justice Beryl MacDonald
- Kevin MacDonald
- Annemarie van Vuren
- Sarah McGrath-White
- Lisa White

WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS FOR 2015 – 2017

- ❖ Elizabeth Butt
- ❖ Basia Dziezranowska
- ❖ Mark Gosine
- ❖ Lora MacEachern
- ❖ Anil Mohan

THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEER LAWYERS WHO SUPPORT ACCESS LEGAL HELP NS AND THE LAWYER REFERRAL SERVICE!!!!

The Lawyer Referral Service (LRS) is only possible through the support of our volunteer lawyers, and we can't thank them enough. The Lawyer Referral Service continues to be a crucial part of access to justice for Nova Scotians. Lawyer Referral Service members generously volunteer their time to offer a 30 minute initial consultation for a nominal cost. True to their public spirited ethic, many of the lawyers on the Lawyer Referral Service waive the \$20 fee that they would otherwise be allowed to charge for the initial consult, and offer a range of fee arrangements for clients who might not otherwise be able to afford a lawyer.

We made 685 referrals to the Lawyer Referral Service last year, and the number of lawyers on the Lawyer Referral Service increased by 30%, on the heels of LISNS Board eliminating the annual fee for lawyers to join the Service. Our toll-free number for accessing the LRS and LIL, 1 800 665-9779, is now North America wide, thanks to Eastlink, one of our sponsors. To make effective referrals, and better meet the needs of the public and lawyers, we not only have information about each member lawyer's practice areas, but also issues such as languages spoken, membership in another law society, whether telephone consultations and/or meetings at a location convenient to the client are available, and whether the lawyer is able to consider flexible fee

arrangements such as Limited Scope Retainers. And, last but not least, the LRS registration form is now online, so now it just takes a few minutes to fill out and submit the LRS membership form online!

THANK YOU TO OUR EVENT, COMMITTEE, RESEARCH, WRITING AND LEGAL INFORMATION VOLLUNTEERS:

Nicholas LeBlanc	Paulina Munroe
Amanda Lutz	Jillian D'Alessio
Kelsey Lothian	Becky Fallis
Cassandra Lilley	Nicole Campbell
Mario Garcia	Josh Bearden
Liam O'Reilly	Andrea Baldwin
Cal Hunter	Julie Chamagne
Beth Legge	Kyle DeYoung
Constantine Fabrikis	Claire Milton, QC
Samantha Ratnam	George Ash
Linda Wood	Megan Deveau
Bob McCuaig	Carlye Stein
Tanya Jones	Fiona Traynor
Louis Matorin	Angus Campbell
Ed Gores, QC	Madison Foster
Mary Burnet	Lindsay Logie
Caitlin Meiklejohn	Stephanie Smolensky
Melissa Trowsdale	Sarah Walsh
Mitch Broughton	Maria Sanderson
Leslie Whittaker	

THANK YOU TO ALL SPEAKERS BUREAU MEMBERS AND MEMBERS OF OUR PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEES:

Access Legal Help Pro Bono Students:	Access Legal Help Advisory Committee:
Scott Gorski	Maria Franks
Maria Sanderson	Wendy Turner
Melanie Gillis	Julia Crabbe
Veronika Killbrand	Emma Halpern
Mario Garcia	Sarah McGrath-White
Sarah Walsh	Archie Kaiser
Melissa Trowsdale	Heather de Berdt Romilly
	Justice Walter Goodfellow
	Ned Chase
	Margo Fulmer
	Shelley Wood
	Nicole Slaunwhite
	Jen Pink
	Chuck Ford

We are Making a Difference!

Website	Access Legal Help (Pro Bono Project)	Legal Information Line & Lawyer Referral Service	Dial-a-Law	Publications
Different Visitors: 456,004 (11.35% increase from previous year) Total Visits: 524,383 (11.66% increase) Pages viewed: 697,345 (8.76% increase) Top 5 pages: 1. Common law relationships 2. Custody 3. Grandparents rights 4. Tickets 5. You and the police	Pro Bono Legal Advice Clinics delivered: 36 total clinics including: Plus 10 phone conferences Clients served: 75 (11 returning clients) Most requested topics: 1. Wills & Estates 2. Civil Litigation	Total # of Legal Information Line calls: 5,409 Top 3 areas of law: 1. Family 2. Criminal, tickets 3. Wills & Estates # of referrals to the Lawyer Referral Service: 685 # of callers representing themselves: 764	Online audio listens (48 titles): 32,101 Top 3 areas of law: 1. Family 2. Credit, Debt, Consumer 3. Wills and estates Phone system listens (81 titles): 1,388 Top 3 areas of law: 1. Family 2. Wills and estates 3. Criminal	LISNS Publications distributed: 10,293 Top 3 topics: • It's In Your Hands: Legal Information for Seniors & Their Families • Youth Criminal Justice • Building Awareness of Domestic Violence for Newcomers

SPOTLIGHT ON LISNS LEGAL INFORMATION LINE COUNSELLORS:



Helping People Figure out What Help they Require!

When folks call the Legal Information Line (LIL), perspective on their legal issue is most often what they are looking for. When you find that you have wandered into the heart of the corn maze, it is disorienting, and it is nearly impossible to find the perspective you need to see some way out! The Counsellors on the LIL, all legally trained, are positioned around that maze. Their education, life experience, and years of service on the Line give them the elevation to see the bigger picture.



The puzzles laid out before our callers are endless in their variety and complexity: interventions by Family and Children's Services, police requests for polygraph statements, private and government collection pressures, denial of private or government disability benefits, injuries sustained or ongoing due to

incarceration, loss of driver's privileges due to unmanaged illness, points accumulation or impaired driving, fisheries offences, weapons offences, unsecured child or spousal maintenance payments, foreclosures, unresolved matrimonial property issues, challenges to wills, probate procedures, negligent automotive work, foreign language documentation, immigration issues, sudden job termination, criminal charges, procedural puzzles for self-represented litigants, land title mysteries, neighbour disputes, noisy tenants, nosy landlords.....



Helping People in Vulnerable Situations

“The Legal Information Line is an important service for people who are in a vulnerable situation and do not understand their legal rights and responsibilities. For example, we frequently receive calls from survivors of domestic violence who are not sure where to turn to understand court processes, issues relating to custody and access, and other legal concerns. Often these callers do not know what resources are available to them, such as emergency protection orders and various services that are provided by transition houses.

For people who have experienced partner violence or other traumatic life events, the Legal Information Line is a safe space where they can talk about their concerns and have their questions answered compassionately and confidentially. Many of our callers have expressed that the Legal Information Line has been the first place where they could really talk through their problem and leave the conversation knowing what direction to take. “



Self-Represented Individuals – Early Support

In our last fiscal year 764 callers were self-representing in court or before a tribunal. It isn't just about court though. People are often trying to figure out a legal problem without a lawyer, often well before the issue gets to court. That's a much larger proportion of our callers. They are asking themselves: What are my rights? Do I have a legal problem? Can I get help? Where do I go? What can I do? At this early stage they may just be dealing with a tiny spark. Worrisome, yes, but it can still easily be snuffed out so it won't burn the house down. If people don't get the support, legal information and advocacy tools they need at this point, that tiny spark of a legal problem may become a raging fire. One of our key roles as Legal Information Counsellors is to help people snuff out that spark well before it catches fire, so that hopefully they will never have to go to court.”

FEEDBACK FROM LEGAL INFORMATION LINE CALLERS



Testimonials from “anonymous” callers to the Legal Information Line validate the value-added nature of the personal legal information services which LISNS is able to deliver.

<i>"I have been dealing with this foreclosure case for months, and you are the first person who has actually helped and explained this to me in a way I can understand. You were very plain and clear, and I really appreciate it. Now I know my next steps."</i>	<i>"I didn't know the Legal Information Line existed. This is a great service. I called a law firm and they told me to call you. I'm so emotional right now and I don't really know what's going on or where to start, so it helped to tell my story and get some idea of where I stand. I can gather my thoughts now and take them to the lawyer you referred me to, knowing what questions to ask and some of my options."</i>	<i>"You gave me a practical common sense approach to Children's Services that has helped me accept what happened in my case and move on with peace of mind. I'm going to contact the counselling service you suggested."</i>
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FEEDBACK FROM CLIENTS SERVED THROUGH ACCESS LEGAL HELP CLINICS



Members of the public served through the Pro Bono Project reported that the “services are very helpful” and provide a necessary starting point in moving forward with difficult legal issues. Lawyers have also commented positively upon their experience with the program: “I love to volunteer. It’s a real privilege to be a lawyer. People can’t afford to pay for lawyers and make too much to qualify for legal aid. This (project) is a way for me to help.” Sandra Barss

TESTIMONIALS FROM CLIENTS

"I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the Access Legal Help NS Program. The volunteer

legal staff were pleasant, helpful and professional from the very moment I made inquiries into the program. As a single Mother dealing with ongoing sensitive legal issues, the support, advice and guidance I received during my first clinic was extremely comforting, reassuring and very useful. Thank you to the Legal Information Society of NS for offering such a valuable program! "

"It is wonderful that you offer this program. It is great for someone who has never used a lawyer before, great to learn about the court process and to learn about the process of meeting with a lawyer. It gets the jitters out talking to someone. I used the advice at the clinic with the lawyer I eventually went to and paid for to carry on my case. I commend the program and I hope that my positive experience is helpful in keeping the program going."

"I needed help and some much needed hand holding in order to navigate through this process. This program provided that and helped me make informed decision so I could move forward. A great program and much needed. Many thanks to all the staff."

"I have been deep in crisis since this issue began and the exact moment where I got my head above water was after receiving legal advice at LISNS. If it wasn't for that, I don't know if I'd be in the same place right now. The information removed some of the oppression and allowed me to reposition myself. The situation was so bad, just a little stress removed helped so much and allowed me to push forward[...].

The lawyer [...] went through the information I brought and even ended up going over the hour...a little over an hour and a half. I left the appointment feeling less burdened...but I also felt like a human being again. [...] I was empowered by the information I received and it allowed me to get my head above water...things did not materialize quickly but if it weren't for LISNS, they may not have materialized at all. Their assistance allowed me to reposition myself and had I not received their help, I would have likely continued down the same path."

FEEDBACK FROM NEWCOMERS TO CANADA WHO ATTENDED THE "PARTNERS FOR LEGAL EDUCATION 2015" LEGAL INFORMATION SERIES FOR IMMIGRANTS:

"I plan to inform my family about what I have learned and also to give directions to others and inform them of where they can get help on different legal issues"

"I've got a lot of information about Canada's laws and I would like to attend more sessions in future about laws"



Class of 2015

"I will advertise this series and encourage newcomers to attend next time. I will come to attend this series again whenever possible. I would like to suggest that you use this series as part of the training for interpreters. It should be their professional development training."

LISNS Project Work – Access to Justice for Nova Scotians

LISNS MADE A DIFFERENCE TO THE LIVES OF NOVA SCOTIANS THROUGH OUR PROJECTS IN 2014-15:

LISNS PRO BONO PROJECT - FREE LEGAL ADVICE FOR QUALIFYING MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Successful Pro Bono Clinics Held in HRM

Work continued on a three-year pilot project to develop a **Pro Bono Legal Services Hub for Nova Scotia**. LISNS is currently offering clinics in Halifax and the success of these clinics led to the project being extended until May 31, 2015. Lawyers in HRM and the public libraries are important partners on the project. The project is funded through an Access to Justice Fund administered by the Law Foundation of Ontario.

LISNS Enters into First Medical-Legal Partnership in Atlantic Canada

LISNS entered into a medical-legal partnership with the IWK Children's Hospital and a private Atlantic Canada law firm, McInnes Cooper, to provide triage navigation services to support qualifying sick children/families who need to access free legal services.

Public Navigator Program – Helping Nova Scotians Help Themselves!

Broad-based consultations with community groups, regional lawyers and regional courthouse staff have identified the need for a **public navigator program** (using non-legal volunteers) to triage self-represented individuals to legal and non-legal resources. This project is commencing in 2015-16 and is supported by the Chief Justice of Nova Scotia.

LISNS Pro Bono Symposium

A successful Pro Bono Symposium was hosted by LISNS on March 27, 2015 which included presentations by high profile speakers from across Canada and engaged lawyers and the community in the discussion of pro bono and the legal needs of Nova Scotians. LISNS has been appointed to represent Nova Scotia on the National Pro Bono Canada Steering Committee.



We were privileged to have the Honourable Dennis O'Connor (Ontario) as our keynote speaker and also on the key note panel which included Chief Justice MacDonald, Lynn Burns ([Pro Bono Law Ontario](#)) and Kristy Foreman Gear (Federal Government Pro Bono Coordinator, British Columbia). Nikki Gershbain of [Pro Bono Students Canada](#) from Ontario attended for the panel discussion regarding pro bono students and opportunities with law firms.

The afternoon session was open to the public and moderated by [Norma Lee MacLeod](#), host of [CBC Maritime Noon](#), Radio One, who graciously provided her expert services pro bono for which we are most appreciative.

ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS – Vital Signs Workshop and Online Tool



We completed work on the 2-year project to **Raise Awareness of Elder Abuse for Healthcare Professionals** and developed a resource with input from seniors, [*Vital Signs: Elder Abuse Awareness for healthcare Professionals*](#). Sadly, it is estimated that between 4-10 percent of older adults will experience abuse at some time. To help raise awareness

about abuse LISNS consulted with seniors and their families and worked with the [Nova Scotia Centre on Aging](#), [Mount Saint Vincent University](#), and the [Nova Scotia Department of Seniors](#) to develop a website and workshop for healthcare professionals. The website provides information on abuse, communications strategies and resources available in communities. You can visit the site at www.legalinfo.org/ElderAbuse

The Vital Signs materials were launched to much positive feedback at Camp Hill Veterans' Memorial Hospital with the geriatrics rounds last June 2014 in recognition of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day with the Deputy Minister of Health providing opening comments.

The Vital Signs workshop and online tool were developed with input from older persons and healthcare professionals to address these challenges by providing healthcare professionals with information about elder abuse including:

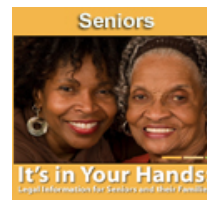
- Indicators
- Communication strategies
- Laws
- Resources

You can access information at www.legalinfo.org/elderabuse/index.html

To support delivery of the Vital Signs workshop, we developed and piloted a Workshop Facilitator's Guide, to support facilitators conducting workshops throughout the Province. The facilitators reported that the training was very helpful and LISNS will be providing ongoing support to the trained facilitators as they undertake the training in 2015-16. The on-line tool can be viewed at www.legalinfo.org/elderabuse/index.html.

The project was funded by the Government of Canada *New Horizons for Seniors Program*.

LISNS takes this opportunity to recognize and thank the many seniors who have contributed to the development of our resources by participating in consultations and focus groups to share insights and experiences and by serving on advisory committees. These resources include *It's in Your Hands: legal information for seniors and their families*. This resource provides information on wills, powers of attorney, and personal directives their limitations and strategies for safeguarding against their abuse. It also provides information on grandparents' rights, scams and elder abuse. *It's in Your Hands* is available in print (call 902-454-2198) and online at www.legalinfo.org.



CONSENT LAWS AND PRIVACY AMONG YOUTH

We completed work on **Raising Awareness of Consent Laws and Privacy among Youth Project**. The project involved a scan of existing programs that address consent issues and consultations were held with youth and adult stakeholders in five areas of the province to explore the problems, seek input on initiatives, challenges and barriers, leaders and possible solutions. Despite the current programs, there is a lack of understanding around consent laws both among youth and adults. It is evident that there needs to be a wide range of options and that lessons needs to be reinforced continually both within and outside of the formal education setting. Parents also need opportunities to learn about how to communicate about sexuality, as well as substantive education on the issues of consent and privacy issues. The vast majority of adults lag behind youth in their understanding and mastering of social media and ever-changing technologies and this is a major challenge.

We found that although there is some good work being done, there is still a long way to go. There are many agencies in many provinces that are addressing issues of consent, healthy sexual relationships and privacy issues. However, the challenge is whether these school-based and community centred programs can survive peer and other pressure in the long-term. Recent incidents in Nova Scotia raise the question of whether and to what extent those who have been found or are alleged to have participated in harassment and abusive behaviour received education on healthy respectful relationships and, if so, what influences them to act contrary to what they have been taught.

There is a lack of consistency and availability across the province both in the classroom and in the community. As well, most sexuality education is delivered prior to grades 10-12 and youth in these older grades may have little exposure to formal sexuality education at a time when they may becoming more sexually active and be preparing for higher education and in many cases living away from home for the first time. We identified the potential for cooperation among PLEI groups in the Atlantic region. Such cooperation is seen as positive because it could provide more tools and opportunities for Pan-Atlantic youth engagement. As well, the issue of consent lends itself to a joint initiative, because it involves federal criminal legislation, and is an issue of concern in all provinces. The project was funded through the province's *Acting Together on Sexual Violence / Bullying Initiative*.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia

5523B Young St, Halifax, NS B3K 1Z7

Tel (902) 454 – 2198 (administration line only)

Fax (902) 455 - 3105

Legal Information Line & Lawyer Referral Service: 1 800 665-9779 or 455-3135

Web: www.legalinfo.org

The Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia (or LISNS) is a charitable, not-for-profit organization. We've been providing Nova Scotians with easy to understand information and resources about the law for over 30 years. You'll find lots of legal information online at legalinfo.org



Seacil the Legal Seagull