

CALGARY POVERTY REDUCTION INITIATIVE
JUSTICE SECTOR CONSTELLATION
SYNOPSIS UPDATE
NOVEMBER 23, 2015

The original mandate of the Justice Sector Constellation was to make recommendations to the Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiative Secretariat on a poverty-reduction strategy in the context of the legal system. These recommendations are set out in the Constellation's report dated March 19, 2013, which is entitled "Intervening at the Intersection of Poverty and the Legal System" (see at <http://www.vibrantcalgary.com/uploads/enough-for-all-2013/Justice-Sector-Constellation-Final-Report.pdf>).

Over 90 percent of the recommendations developed by the Constellation had previously been made, directly or indirectly, in other reports regarding the legal system and the justice sector. In light of that, the members of the Constellation agreed to continue to work together on implementing the Constellation's recommendations, despite having completed their original mandate. Since April 2013, the Constellation has been actively working on implementing a number of its recommendations. The Constellation's main focus is currently on the following projects:

1. **Service Provider Capacity Building project:** Service providers and intermediaries outside of the justice sector may not recognize that their clients have legal issues or may not know where to refer clients who have such issues. This project seeks to increase awareness by service providers and intermediaries of potential legal issues as part of client needs, and increase awareness of and referral to appropriate justice sector services and resources. Funding has been obtained to develop and pilot training for service providers and intermediaries (e.g., community and faith community workers and volunteers) to that end. Training pilots commenced in fall 2015, and the training has been well-received. The Constellation has conducted a survey to provide baseline data to evaluate the effects of the training over time.
2. **Database project:** Appropriate and timely access to justice sector services requires knowledge of what services are available. The goal of this project is to develop a current, comprehensive database of justice sector service providers and justice sector services, available to both the public and other service providers. After reviewing three existing databases and consulting with relevant stakeholders, the Constellation recommended integrating two of the databases into the InformAlberta database. Stakeholder agreement for the integration has been obtained, and resources for the integration are being sought.
3. **Legal Advice versus Legal Information project:** Those in the justice sector authorized to provide legal information may err on the side of not providing such information for fear of providing legal advice, which they are not authorized to give. This project seeks to educate justice sector service providers on the difference between legal advice and legal information, so as to encourage them to provide as much legal information as possible. Resource materials have been developed, and the first presentation was given in October 2015.
4. **Collaboration with Educators project:** The goal of this project is greater understanding within the justice sector regarding vulnerability to legal issues, the interaction between poverty and the legal system, and the need for lawyers and other legal professionals in poverty law. To that end, presentations have been made to educational institutions which provide training for justice sector service providers (e.g., lawyers, police officers, and corrections and probation workers). Specifically, the Constellation has advocated to have issues regarding the legal system and poverty included in

materials for existing courses, and for the development of a credit and/or continuing education course on poverty and the law. As a result of these presentations, a new poverty and the law course is being developed at one Calgary university.

5. By-laws Project: One of the issues identified by the Constellation is that the impact of receiving a fine for by-law and other infractions is more significant for those living in poverty. In light of this, the Constellation recommends that the policy underlying infractions that have a disproportionate impact on those with low income be reconsidered. Legal analysis will be conducted and quantitative and qualitative data will be gathered, to provide an evidentiary and analytical basis for such a reconsideration. The Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre will conduct the legal aspect for the project, and a research partner has been identified for the social science aspect of the project. Key stakeholders have expressed their interest in and offered support for the project.

In addition to these projects, the Constellation has conducted a needs assessment at the Calgary Courts Centre regarding how best to assist people coming into the courthouse to get them to their court or service and respond to their questions. Recommendations regarding signage, mapping and training of service personnel have been made, and are being considered.