

**Justice Sector Constellation  
Synopsis Update  
December 18, 2019**



## **Background**

The Justice Sector Constellation (the “**Constellation**”) seeks to intervene at the intersection of poverty and the legal system so that everyone facing a legal issue can access the justice sector resources and services he or she needs. The Constellation has been working to this end since April 2013, after issuing its report [\*Intervening at the Intersection of Poverty and the Legal System\*](#).

## **Update**

Since the last Synopsis Update, the Constellation has advanced each of its Strategic Plan priority areas.

### **Coordination of Justice Sector Services**

At a recent engagement session, the Constellation prioritized work on two projects that seek to improve coordination of justice sector services.

#### **Childminding Project**

Research conducted for the Constellation supports its hypothesis that a lack of childminding services may present an impediment for individuals seeking to address legal issues at the Calgary Courts Centre (the “CCC”).

The research found that a lack of reliable childcare prevents people from attending the CCC. In addition, those who attend with children are often distracted or not focused on the task at hand. Moreover, the researchers were advised that the CCC is not an appropriate place for children. This is due to personal safety issues as well as exposure to inappropriate and sometimes re-traumatizing content. Having the option of childminding while the adult attends to court business could protect children from this. In addition, it could make a stressful situation less so and also improve outcomes, as the adults would be able to fully apply themselves to their legal issue without the distraction of children.

The next step for the Childminding Project is to identify gaps in available childminding services for those seeking to address legal issues at the Calgary Courts Centre, and facilitate client referrals to available services by justice sector and other service providers.

#### **Post-Release Issues Project**

Individuals remanded in custody or serving time in custody must overcome many barriers to achieve reintegration into society after release from custody.

Within the past year, Constellation members have connected with various stakeholders within the penal system, to identify both the process and available supports, as well as gaps in those supports. In addition, *Justice Sector Services Coordination for the Socio-Legally Disadvantaged: Strategic Directions for Enhanced Access to Justice*, a report commissioned by the Constellation with a view to improving coordination of justice sector services, includes a number of recommendations regarding issues faced by and supports for those released from custody.

There are many actions that can be taken in a collaborative way to ensure those released from custody have basic resources (e.g., identification, transportation, income and housing) to begin their reintegration journey. Better supports could result in more successful integration into society and lower recidivism/reoffending.

The next phase of the Constellation's project will involve:

- preparing a Client Journey Map for each route that may be followed by a person remanded in custody or serving time in custody; and
- identifying points in each journey at which intervention could be made to help ensure better supports for those released from custody at the end of the journey.

The Constellation will use this information to work toward change.

### **Accessibility of the Legal System**

Under the Form Literacy Project, the Constellation is seeking to make legal forms easier to find and understand, and make support for filling out legal forms more accessible. Constellation working groups have compiled information on available form-completion resources for several categories of commonly used legal forms. Once complete, this information will be disseminated to ensure that both clients and service providers are aware of all available form-completion resources.

### **Education and Engagement**

Thanks to funding from the Enough for All Catalyst Fund, the Constellation is developing a Poverty and the Law Educational Module. The purpose of the Module is to sensitize post-secondary students in various disciplines to the issues that arise at the intersection of poverty and the legal system, to better equip them to serve their clients and communities on graduation. The Module will be offered to instructors at post-secondary institutions in various faculties and departments, including criminal justice and criminology, social work, nursing, sociology, education, psychology, and children and youth.

The Module was piloted in the fall 2019 session at Ambrose University, Bow Valley College, and to both Faculty of Law and Development Studies students at the University of Calgary. Feedback from the pilots has been uniformly positive. The feedback is being compiled and will be used to improve the Module.

In addition, PowerED at the University of Athabasca has been retained to convert the Module into an online offering, to increase its availability. An instructor manual will be developed to facilitate instruction of the Module.

### **Sustainability**

Thanks to funding from the Alberta Law Foundation, the Constellation's work will be supported by a Project Coordinator as well an Administrative Assistant in 2020. This support is expected to increase the effectiveness of the Constellation, which should benefit vulnerable Albertans as the ultimate beneficiaries of the Constellation's work.