

Intensive Program in Poverty Law at Parkdale Community Legal Services 2018-2019

In Brief

Parkdale Community Legal Services, a community legal clinic serving the Parkdale community in downtown Toronto, was established more than forty-five years ago as one of the first community-based storefront legal clinics in North America. Since its inception, Osgoode students have been integral to PCLS and its work with the low income community in Parkdale. Students who participate in the Intensive Program in Poverty Law at PCLS will join over 1,700 Osgoode graduates who have benefited from this enriching and challenging experience as part of their legal education.

Many of the problems facing people in the Parkdale community are systemic. As such, PCLS strategies to redress individual legal problems are integrated with those designed to facilitate broader systemic reform. Indeed, the vision guiding our work is to “build and mobilize an ever increasing community movement for social change, to create the social and economic conditions to eradicate poverty and oppression and to improve quality of life in the communities we work with.” The change-oriented work at PCLS takes many forms including law reform, public legal education, community development, coalition building, community organizing, and media strategies. We work with people in the community to identify issues and challenges that are facing them collectively and to develop strategies to address these issues.

“The poverty law intensive was the best experience I had at Osgoode. Not only was I granted the opportunity to develop an understanding of the basics of poverty law, I was also given a chance to learn from the brilliant staff and lawyers at PCLS. I am proud to call myself an alumni of PCLS.”

PCLS student '17

“Overall, it is difficult to capture in words the impact that Parkdale has had on my life. The clients, other students and supervising lawyer have significantly contributed to my personal and professional growth and made me far more prepared for my post-law school career than any class ever could have. I am so grateful for the opportunity to be at Parkdale and to serve the clients and would do it again in a heartbeat!”

PCLS student '16



How Does the Program Work?

The Application Process

Applications are made online through the centrally administered Osgoode process. Applications are due on January 24 at 4:00pm. Applicants will receive instructions about how to complete online video interviews, which will be available over a 24-hour period on January 29. An open house will be held at the Clinic on February 6 from 5:00pm-7:00pm, which all applicants are encouraged to attend.

Criteria for selection include the following:

- interest in working for social justice in a poverty law context
- ability to work collaboratively and to take instructions
- patience and respect for community members
- equity
- law school marks
- program of study & year of study

Learning Objectives of the Program

By the end of the program, among other things, students will be able to

- critically evaluate law's relationship to poverty and oppression
- analyze lawyering models that seek to facilitate positive social change
- engage in practices consistent with community lawyering, a self-reflective style of lawyering that aspires to ally the lawyer with individuals, communities and social movements in common cause to effect positive social change
- demonstrate sound ethical judgment
- carry out effective client interviews
- engage collaboratively with clients in holistic problem-solving
- formulate a sound theory of the case
- design and deliver public legal education workshops
- capably manage client and community work files
- work collaboratively with other students, staff and community partners
- effectively engage in formal and informal advocacy

Assignment to a Division

Students are assigned to one of four divisions.

Housing Rights Division

Casework in this division is highly litigious and involves frequent appearances before the Landlord & Tenant Board on behalf of tenants. Students in this division benefit from extensive exposure to various aspects of civil litigation and alternative dispute resolution. They quickly develop and enhance advocacy and negotiation skills through direct involvement in representing tenants at different stages in the problem solving process.

The community work of the division includes work with a variety of tenant organizing projects, including specific buildings in the neighbourhood and the Parkdale Tenant's Association. The division also frequently presents tenant rights workshops to groups of tenants, newcomers, and social agency workers.

"30-plus years after graduating from PCLS, I still feel that the people in law who most interest me and with whom I have the most in common come from Parkdale!"

Barbara Hall
Chief Commissioner of the Ontario
Human Rights Commission
Former mayor
City of Toronto
PCLS student '76



"Parkdale was one of the most interesting and satisfying experiences of my legal education."

Andromache Karakatsanis
Supreme Court Justice
PCLS student '80

Immigration Division

Students in the Immigration Division assist our clients with a variety of immigration applications. We help the refugee community and caregivers obtain permanent resident status and reunite with their families in Canada. Our files include applications for permanent residence on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, pre-removal risk assessment applications, and a variety of temporary residence applications. We do some representation at the Immigration Appeal Division of the Immigration and Refugee Board and appellate work in the Federal Court. We have also successfully intervened at the Supreme Court of Canada.

Students participate in community development work that supports systemic reform and positive social change. This includes community organizing and community legal education; working on law reform initiatives which might include efforts to support the Roma community fighting to stay in Canada; delivering public legal education workshops, particularly to the Tibetan and Roma communities; and assisting the Caregivers' Action Centre in their organizing of caregivers. Immigration Division students also recently launched a petition calling on the federal government to prioritize refugee family reunification.

Social Assistance, Violence and Health (SAVAH) Division

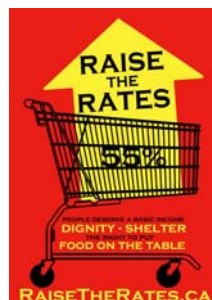
Students in this division carry caseloads primarily in the areas of social assistance and disability benefits. They advocate on behalf of clients with social assistance authorities and represent clients before the Social Benefits Tribunal and occasionally the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario. Some of the issues in SBT appeals include disability benefits, status, overpayments and human rights. Students in this division also sometimes represent victims of violence (including violence against women, and racist or homophobic assault) before the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

The community work of this group includes participation in community organizations and activities, including the Parkdale Anti-Violence Education Working Group (PAVE), and the Raise the Rates campaign. Students also work with women and families leaving abusive relationships, and help organize social assistance recipients to demand better services. In addition, students develop legal educational materials and facilitate public legal education workshops.

Workers' Rights Division

Workers' Rights students advise and represent low-waged and non-unionized workers in a range of employment and human rights issues. Students assist workers who have been wrongfully dismissed or whose employers have violated the Employment Standards Act or the Ontario Human Rights Code. Students also assist people with Employment Insurance appeals, Occupational Health & Safety Act reprisal claims, and Canada Pension Plan Disability benefits. In addition to informal advocacy and support, students often participate in formal negotiations or hearings at Small Claims Court, the Ontario Labour Relations Board, the Human Rights Tribunal, or before tribunals established to adjudicate EI or CPP-D matters.

Students frequently work on cases that are part of community-based campaigns to address particular workplaces, workplace abuses, or questions of employment law reform. Students will be involved in building campaigns to improve wages, working conditions, and labour legislation. This work includes supporting the Workers' Action Centre and Caregivers' Action Centre, and participating in delegation visits to support workers' demands



Student Responsibilities

“I enjoyed the litigation aspects of the work. It was a really hands on experience. Also, I enjoyed contact with clients, and working together to resolve issues and build trust.”

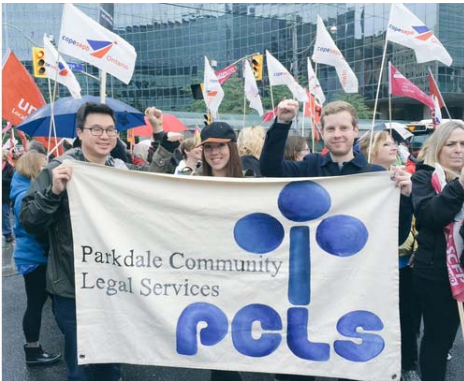
PCLS student '15

Summer Jobs

Twenty students are employed each summer by PCLS. They will begin work in late April and continue until late August. Roughly one third are students who have completed the academic program, one third are students enrolled in the subsequent fall term and one third in the subsequent winter term. These positions are included within a certified collective bargaining unit, and they require union membership. Salaries and other terms and conditions of employment are set through a collective agreement.

Skills Training Program

At the beginning of their term at PCLS, students are required to attend a clinic-based Skills Training Program (note that we are no longer running a separate Skills Training Week in the last week of the summer term). Skills Training Program sessions – most of which are held in the first two weeks of the term – introduce students to key skills and familiarize students with work processes at PCLS. Students are also introduced to the communities of Parkdale, the social and political context of the injustices experienced by members of these communities, and how the social justice vision of PCLS translates into the work we do with individuals and with others in mobilizing for social change.



A Term at PCLS

Students enrolled in the Poverty Law Intensive spend a full academic semester at the Clinic (either the fall or winter), and receive 15 academic credits. On Wednesday mornings, an academic seminar is held from 9:30 to 12:20 at Osgoode. Three credits are allocated to the academic seminar, which includes a research paper. Students receive a letter grade for this portion of the program. The remaining 12 credits are graded on a credit/no credit basis, pursuant to evaluations by the student's supervising staff lawyer and community legal worker.

During their time at PCLS, students:

- are the front-line faces that members of the community meet when they come to the Clinic
- have hands on responsibility for developing cases and legal arguments
- have daily opportunities to learn and develop skills in interviewing, counseling and negotiating
- may represent people at hearings before Administrative Tribunals
- participate in community organizing, law reform and other strategies designed to facilitate social change

“Parkdale has been my best experience in law school thus far. In no other place is there the same sense of community among the students and I appreciated being given space in the academic seminar to critically reflect on the work we do at Parkdale.”

PCLS student '15

“I appreciated the trust in students at PCLS, and the degree to which we were able to prove our resourcefulness without being micromanaged. I feel like I picked up great skills in terms of working with clients, managing expectations, and building interviewing skills.”

PCLS Student '16



Arif Virani, MP @viraniarif · Jul 8

Great hearing from @LegalAidOntario lawyers&students at @ParkdaleLegal re how to improve #immigration policy #parkhp

“PCLS is best part of law school! I was not new to clinic work, but the emphasis on community organizing gave me a new understanding about the role law can have in addressing poverty. I thought I knew broadly what it meant to organize workers. I now realize that I had a very limited conception of the ways people, and workers in particular, can band together to resist oppression. My time at PCLS broadened my horizons.”

PCLS Student '17

REFUGEE RIGHTS DAY

Panel Discussion Refugee Advocacy in Parkdale: Taking Stock and Moving Forward

Monday, April 4, 2016
11:00 am – 12:30 pm
PIA, 1365 Queen St. W.

Parkdale Intercultural Association (PIA) and Parkdale Community Legal Services (PCLS) invite you to a discussion of Canada's refugee system in the context of the unique needs of the Parkdale community. With representatives from the legal, political, policy, and service communities, this panel discussion will bring Parkdale specific issues to the fore.

Panelists:
Toni Schweitzer, Lawyer, PCLS
Jennifer Danch, Roma Community Centre
Anif Virani, MP, Parkdale-High Park
Cheri Di Novo, MPP, Parkdale-High Park
Gord Perks, City Councillor, Ward 14
Dr. Smita Sengupta, Toronto District School Board
Clients of PIA & PCLS



Parkdale
Community Legal Services



HOUSING STABILIZATION FUND CLINIC
Tuesday, October 18 at 10:00am
PARKDALE ACTIVITY RECREATION CENTRE DROP-IN
(1499 QUEEN STREET WEST)

DO YOU LIVE IN PARKDALE?
DO YOU RECEIVE OW OR ODSP?
IF SO, THIS CLINIC IS FOR YOU!

YOU WILL GET:
✓ INFORMATION ON WHO CAN APPLY FOR HSF
✓ HELP WITH YOUR OWN APPLICATION
✓ IDEAS FOR HOW YOU CAN FIGHT BACK IF YOU ARE DENIED

While not required to attend, we recommend you bring the following documents with you to include in your HSF application: OW/ODSP check stubs, past 3 months bank statements, and other documents like notice of late rent, lease agreement, or pest control verification.

For more information contact 416-531-2411 ext. 248

HOSTED BY PARKDALE ACTIVITY RECREATION CENTRE & PARKDALE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES

Student Responsibilities (Cont)

Workload and Hours of Work

Parkdale is a full time, full term commitment. Each student will handle a caseload of approximately 15 active files. In addition, students spend a good deal of time on intake, offering summary advice and brief services to clients, or referring them to other appropriate agencies or services. Students are also expected to become involved in the clinic's change-oriented work (community organizing, law reform work, etc.).

As a general rule, students are expected to be at the Clinic during regular office hours – other than on Wednesdays during the fall and winter terms, when students are expected to attend the seminar at Osgoode and to work on their research papers. Community work events often happen in the evenings and on weekends, and hence, students should anticipate some work outside of regular business hours. Intake hours (when the Clinic is open for new walk-in clients) extend into the early evening on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday (until 7:00 pm), as well as on Friday (until 5:00 pm). A detailed schedule for intake is created by students in each division at the beginning of the term. We recognize that outside responsibilities such as childcare require flexibility around hours of work and all students and staff work cooperatively to arrive at a schedule for each division that accommodates such responsibilities.

The work at the clinic can be intense and the amount of work can be unpredictable. While the objective is to ensure that hours are reasonable, because PCLS is a working clinic, spikes in the work do occur. As well, there is quite an intense period at the beginning and end of the term. As a result, it can be difficult to maintain part-time paid employment during a term in the program. If you are considering undertaking outside commitments during a Parkdale term, you should speak to the Academic Director in advance.

Students are expected to attend at the Clinic in advance of their term and to return to the Clinic after their term to participate in file transfer processes. The practice varies by division, but students can expect to spend around two days (both before and after their term) to complete these processes.



“Participating in this program has been the best experience I've had at Osgoode thus far. Being a part of PCLS has been extremely rewarding in a multitude of ways, including: seeing the direct impact of our work on local community members, improving my knowledge of the law, acquiring practical skills related to file work and client management, an lastly, developing relationships with our division and team. Everyone at PCLS has been so helpful and supportive.”

PCLS Student '17

 **Parkdale Legal**
@ParkdaleLegal

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Congratulations to [@RachelNotley](#): the first [#Parkdale](#) alum to become a provincial premier! [#abvote](#) [@OsgoodeNews](#) [@yorkuniversity](#)

Students with Disabilities

PCLS and Osgoode are committed to ensuring that the Poverty Law Intensive is accessible to all students. Students requiring accommodations in the application or selection process should contact the Academic Director or Natia Tucci. After the selection process, all students selected for the program will receive communications regarding how to pursue accommodations for their upcoming term at PCLS. The clinic's aim is to proactively identify and plan for accommodation needs as early as possible after the selection process to ensure that all students have inclusive and productive learning experiences.

Location

The clinic is located at 1266 Queen Street West, near the corner of Queen Street and Dufferin Street.

Who to Contact for Further Details

Academic Director: Professor Sean Rehaag

Email: srehaag@osgoode.yorku.ca



“Learning and working at PCLS was one of the best experiences of my life, never mind law school. The friendships and views formed there are still with me today.”

Amar Bhatia
Assistant Professor, Osgoode Hall Law School
PCLS student '04

“I did not find my place at law school until I found PCLS. Staff and students at the clinic shared my interest in using the law to achieve positive social change. I made lifelong friendships there, as well as learned important lessons that continue to influence the lawyer that I am today. I could not recommend the program more highly.”

Alyssa Manning
Staff Lawyer, LAO Refugee Law Office
PCLS student '06
PCLS Articling Student '08
PCLS Supervising Lawyer '10 & '11

