



CLINIC PROFILE

Parkdale Community Legal Services (PCLS) is a legal aid clinic that supports low-income members of the Parkdale-Swansea neighbourhood through community development and engagement, legal representation, summary legal advice and community legal education.

PCLS was founded in 1971 by Parkdale neighbourhood residents, community organizations, and Osgoode Hall Law School, establishing one of the first community legal clinics in Canada. By the late 1970's the PCLS model was adopted in other neighbourhoods that then became the community legal clinic system in Ontario. As a teaching clinic in partnership with Osgoode Hall Law School, PCLS embodies excellence in clinical legal education. We are a non-profit charity, led by a Board of Directors with community and Osgoode Hall Law School representatives.

At PCLS, we understand that the roots of poverty, discrimination, and oppression are systemic and intersecting. To address this, we undertake projects and provide services based on community need and the indicia of oppression, especially poverty, racism, violence, and systemic discrimination. PCLS supports community organizing to build and mobilize an ever-growing community movement for social change and to create the social and economic conditions to eradicate poverty and oppression.

Respecting our relationships

At PCLS we take our commitment and responsibility to the Parkdale-Swansea community seriously. Having been a member of the Parkdale community for 51 years, we know that good work is based on having good relationships. PCLS has the luxury of working in a community that has a variety of successful partner organizations also running creative programs and generally has a lot of good will and a great reputation in the community at large. The students bring optimism and energy. The staff bring experience, commitment, and a deep connection to the community.

We believe:

- in community-based and governed poverty law services
- in the agency of our community members and their ability to determine what's best for their lives
- in treating people with dignity, respect, and compassion
- that access to justice is a right
- that traditional legal strategies are of limited utility in working to eradicate poverty
- in respecting equally the work done by, and the role of, each member of the team
- in working collaboratively with the community while offering a variety of poverty law services

- in engaging and actively participating in the community to facilitate and create social and economic conditions that will eradicate poverty and oppression
- in an anti-racist, anti-oppressive approach that understands and adheres to the racial, cultural, and social needs of our community
- in being committed to advancing racial, cultural, and social equity in our work with the community

We recognize that the last three years have been challenging. Deep cuts to the Clinic's legal aid funding in 2019 forced PCLS to lay off a number of staff at the same time that the Clinic was forced to move out of its space. For two years the Clinic worked out of two temporary locations, one of which was outside of Parkdale. Between the dislocation this caused, and the disruption to in-person services caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we appreciate that relationship building in the community is a top priority.

In the fall of 2021, we celebrated the move into our new offices which has reunited the entire PCLS staff and students in the Parkdale community with our client-facing office at 1229 Queen Street West and our student offices at 366 Dufferin Ave.

PCLS' Program

The focus of the Clinic's work is defined by the four Divisions – Housing Rights, Workers' Rights, Immigration and Migrants Rights, and Social Assistance, Health, and Anti-Violence (SAVAH). Each division has a lawyer and a team of five student caseworkers. The Clinic has three Community Legal Workers supporting community organizing within and across these areas of law, with a particular focus on housing rights, worker rights, and immigration. The Housing Rights division also has a paralegal who doubles as PCLS' Intake Coordinator. The non-divisional staff members are two administrative staff members, one Program and Operations Director, and one Finance Officer.

Human resources

All Clinic staff except the Clinic Director, Program and Operations Director, Finance Officer, and lawyers are unionized in two bargaining units represented by OPSEU Local 525.

Academic Program

The academic program is a unique feature of PCLS. Twenty new students arrive every four months. Within each fall and winter term there are several students who have worked at PCLS in the summertime. The change over time is a major transition for the Clinic and the clients. The program is overseen by the Academic Director who is a faculty member of Osgoode Hall Law School. The Academic Director is appointed by Osgoode, in consultation with PCLS.

PCLS Funding

Through a Memorandum of Understanding, Osgoode also provides some core funding to the Clinic. But Legal Aid Ontario is our most significant funder. PCLS is unique as a legal aid clinic because of the academic component and because it has maintained a strong component of Community Legal Workers who have a focus on organizing and community engagement.