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Law Students Provide Legal Information to Flood Victims

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Matter commented on:

Flood Relief Legal Information Sessions

In the days following the July flooding of Calgary and other areas of Southern Alberta, the various U of C law student Facebook pages lit up with offers of help for fellow law students. My classmates offered up their spare bedrooms and just like countless other Albertans, they offered up their time and energy. Some helped out their neighbours while others spent days removing mud from Calgary parks so that summer festivals could take place. And perhaps not surprisingly my classmates also harnessed their newly acquired legal skills, which came coupled with a vibrant enthusiasm.

As the 2013 - 2014 [Pro Bono Students Canada \(PBSC\) Calgary](#) Program Coordinator, I am very fortunate in that I get to spend my summer working with many remarkable organizations and passionate individuals in Calgary's public interest law community. Although I usually work with one or two organizations at a time, following the flooding, I had the privilege of working with many of these organizations in tandem and the cooperation and teamwork that transpired was inspiring.

In the weeks following the flood, [Pro Bono Law Alberta](#) (PBLA), [Calgary Legal Guidance](#) (CLG), [Legal Aid Alberta](#), PBSC, [Student Legal Assistance](#) (SLA), [University of Calgary Faculty of Law](#), and [Alberta Civil Liberties Research Center](#) came together and partnered to plan free Public Legal Education and Information Sessions (PLE) for Albertans affected by the flood. We hoped the sessions would alleviate some of the increased demand for legal information resulting from the flood. The idea was partially based on PBLA and its partners' use of PLEs in [Slave Lake](#) following the fire in 2011. So far there have been two sessions in Calgary and two in Okotoks.

At the PLEs, legal information was provided through the distribution of frequently asked legal questions sheets (FAQs --- copies of which can be found [here](#)), panel presentations by lawyers, public question and answer periods with the panel lawyers, and one-on-one summary advice sessions with volunteer lawyers. Much of the legal information provided centered around the legal areas of landlord and tenant, debtor and creditor, employment, insurance, social benefits, and family law.

The FAQ documents provided useful and accessible general information as well as direction through which people could consider legal issues that may have affected them in ways that they were not yet aware of. This was also true of the panel presentations during which the lawyers summarized pertinent legal issues.

The Q&A sessions provided an opportunity for members of the public to gather more information in a way that reflected their personal situations. This aspect of the PLEs also provided a valuable forum that allowed members of the public to offer information to one another along with added hope and support for those in similar situations.

Putting all of this together was a lot of work and many people deserve recognition. From the PBSC side of things, our involvement rested on the work of law student volunteers and every cohort was involved, from incoming 1Ls to members of the 2014 graduating class. As the PBSC Coordinator, I found the students' willingness to participate incredibly gratifying, as a central mandate of [PBSC Chapters](#) across Canada aims to encourage the next generation of lawyers to make *pro bono* service an everyday part of their practice.

Behind the scenes, students researched background legal information for the FAQ documents and at the PLEs, students greeted the public, handed out FAQs, and directed questions that were not addressed in the FAQs to the volunteer lawyers. SLA students and CLG took on the additional roll of holding intake clinics at each of the sessions. Overall, University of Calgary law students played a significant role in maximizing the amount of information available to the public.

Following the first four events, it was recognized that more work could be done and more information needed to be circulated, particularly as some local communities reached out to the various partner organizations with additional flood related legal concerns.

In the following week, our team met with members of the Siksika Nation and attended a community town hall meeting in Bowness. These meetings were not PLEs but rather a chance for us to connect with these communities and start a dialogue concerning the ways that the Calgary and area legal community might help.

It is clear that the need for legal information relating to the flood will be ongoing, especially in the areas of insurance law, landlord and tenant, and estates more generally, as based on our findings these areas of law were the more frequently discussed. It has also become apparent that many members of the public still have questions about the various appeal processes that are associated with insurer and government decisions in regards to property.

I would like to thank the many organizations, lawyers, and law students for all of their amazing work. It is clear that Calgary has a caring and committed legal community.

Another PLE is scheduled for August 7th 2013 at the Bowness Community Center in Calgary starting at 4 p.m. Information about the upcoming event is currently available on [PBLA](#)'s websites.

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