

# The Law Foundation of Ontario Connecting Region: Final Evaluation Report

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## REPORT SUMMARY

### Background and Context

In 2008 The Law Foundation of Ontario commissioned a report to identify responses to two key barriers to access to justice: language barriers (for people who do not speak English or French) and barriers faced by people living in rural and remote areas. The report, *Connecting Across Language and Distance* (Cohl & Thomson, 2008), became the basis for the Foundation's Connecting Project.

In 2009 the Foundation began implementing recommendations from the Connecting report. In 2010 they issued a call for proposals for consortiums to apply for a grant to implement a regional planning model, as recommended by Cohl and Thomson – that is, a “Connecting Region”. Three consortiums were awarded seed grants to develop models in their regions. These included:

1. **Connecting Ottawa:** this group, spearheaded by Community Legal Services of Ottawa, focused on linguistic minorities and proposed a model which included a network of legal and non-legal organizations and having both a social worker and lawyer on staff to build capacity for service providers and create a more holistic system to respond to the complex needs of the focus populations.
2. **The Access to Justice Project (A2JP):** this group included four community legal clinics in the counties of Grey-Bruce, Simcoe/Haliburton/Kawartha Lakes, Muskoka, and Peterborough. The Community Legal Clinic – Simcoe, Haliburton and Kawartha Lakes took the lead on this project which focused on people living in rural and remote areas. They proposed a model that would have a multi-layer decision-making group in the region and which focused on developing a transportation strategy, implementing videoconferencing and conducting an outreach campaign.
3. **The Five County Connecting Region Project – Legal Education & Advocacy Regional Network (LEARN):** this group was comprised of four community legal clinics, a university law student clinic, and a regional office of Legal Aid Ontario in southeastern Ontario, and, like the Simcoe group, focused on people living in rural and remote areas. They proposed to create the Legal Education and Advocacy Regional Network – LEARN to raise awareness of legal issues and resources and to build the capacity of trusted intermediaries.

Each of these groups conducted consultations in their regions/communities and submitted a final report, proposing the outline of their regional models, to the Foundation in 2011. Connecting Ottawa was ultimately selected to be the Connecting Region.

In 2016 the Foundation decided to conduct a formal evaluation of Connecting Region to explore and determine the success of the Connecting Region Project in improving access to justice for the focus populations. The evaluation included two components: 1) an evaluation of the Connecting Ottawa program, its outcomes and process; and 2) an evaluation examining outcomes for the other two sites that received seed grants to develop Connecting Region models. This report is the culmination of the evaluation.

## Connecting Ottawa

Connecting Ottawa's goal is to improve access to justice for linguistic minorities; people who are not proficient in English or French or who face communication challenges as the result of a disability or sensory impairment (the focus populations). Connecting Ottawa strives to build the capacity of partner agencies who work with the focus populations to provide information on legal issues and facilitate access to services and other resources to resolve clients' issues swiftly and efficiently. Connecting Ottawa also aims to demystify access to justice by increasing accessibility and reducing referral fatigue for the focus populations. They do this by building the capacity of trusted intermediaries, including front line workers, and by increasing connections among organizations that work with the focus populations.

The Connecting Ottawa network partners, staff from partner organizations and other project stakeholders provided information through surveys and interviews that have resulted in numerous learnings with regard to Connecting Ottawa's outcomes and the strengths and weaknesses of the model.

### Outcomes and Impacts - Conclusions

**The results of the evaluation show that Connecting Ottawa is building the capacity of community and legal organizations in Ottawa to help the focus populations improve their access to justice.** While the extent of the impact across Ottawa is difficult to measure, the staff from partner agencies and other network members emphasized that Connecting Ottawa is having an impact and indicated that more of their clients from the focus populations are obtaining legal information and being referred to services more often than they were before Connecting Ottawa was implemented. More legal issues are resolved and fewer people are falling through the cracks. Community and social organizations are more aware of legal issues and the importance of dealing with them and there is a forum to discuss the legal aspects of the issues that the focus populations face. Further, the interest in Connecting Ottawa and the resources it provides is increasing and the Connecting Ottawa team is reaching increasing numbers every year.

*"I wouldn't have any kind of knowledge of what to expect or what not [to expect]... so Connecting Ottawa has helped me increase my knowledge in those areas. Maybe even increased my ability to know what the rights and responsibilities are for our clients who have no status. That way, I was able to empower the clients more."*

There are at least three ways that Connecting Ottawa works to improve access to justice for members of the focus populations:

- **Direct work of the case consultations:** The Connecting Ottawa team provides resources and efficient referrals that connect clients to additional supports and ensure that the case is dealt with more effectively and efficiently. Legal organizations are also able to provide a more holistic approach and be more effective and efficient in accessing necessary resources for the focus

populations. By December 2016, Connecting Ottawa had been involved in at least 1600 consultations.

- **Capacity-building efforts:** These include educational events, direct case consultation while staff is present, newsletters, and the website. Staff in non-legal organizations are much better equipped to identify legal issues, and know where and how to find the information they need. They are also more knowledgeable about the resources available and about where to refer when necessary. These community workers, who are often the first point of contact for many members of the focus populations, have become trusted intermediaries who have ongoing support to help their clients increase their access to justice.
- **Enhanced coordination of services and improved relationships among service providers:** Staff from the partner organizations often described Connecting Ottawa as a systems navigator connecting agencies through referrals and legal information. Connecting Ottawa brings legal and non-legal organizations together in a more coordinated way to ensure a more seamless system, and more efficient and effective resolution of cases. Improved coordination happens to a large extent through the case consultations where the Connecting Ottawa team links all the organizations involved in a case so that the services are more seamless and efficient. Increased coordination also happens because of improved relationships and increased connections through network activities such as the Advisory Committee, the conference, the newsletters and other events.

Outcomes do differ for non-legal and legal organizations and service providers. This is not all that surprising given that a main focus of the project is building the capacity of trusted intermediaries – those non-legal frontline staff who are often the first point of contact for the focus populations. Nonetheless, the model did focus on supporting legal services organizations to provide services to the focus populations within a framework that acknowledges issue complexity. While we were able to document some outcomes in terms of capacity building in the legal sector through the frontline interviews, a few key stakeholders reported that the uptake of the legal sector has been slower than from the partners in the community sectors.

The reach of Connecting Ottawa was difficult to measure, but it is clear that Connecting Ottawa does partner with many organizations, they work on maintaining existing relationships, and they strive to grow to meet the needs of the focus populations. The evaluation was not able to determine relative levels of legal need among different linguistic populations or if Connecting Ottawa's reach into different populations is appropriate given the depth of the legal need. The program is working to full capacity and Connecting Ottawa is fulfilling its mandate with partner organizations and continues to reach out to other organizations. Therefore, if Connecting Ottawa were to expand its reach much beyond the current partner organizations, these efforts would require expanded resources or limiting work in some areas.

Not every partner in the network has the same level of involvement or engagement with the project. Those organizations and staff with whom the project is more closely connected, are more apt to use the services and resources, consult with staff, and see the impacts on the focus populations more directly.

## The Project Model - Conclusions

Connecting Ottawa was designed to be a “Connecting Region” – a regional planning model in which a group of legal and non-legal organizations work together to test strategies to improve linguistic access to justice. **The results of the evaluation indicate that Connecting Ottawa’s model is strong and includes numerous successful strategies that facilitate access to justice.** The core staff and sponsoring organizations have worked diligently to outreach to many community organizations that work with the focus populations.

Organizations in the network have different levels of involvement. Some are simply kept up to date through newsletters and might attend the annual conference or other education events. Some organizations may not work extensively with the focus populations and, therefore, their contact with Connecting Ottawa is more intermittent. Other organizations are more involved, using many of the Connecting Ottawa resources and services, such as consulting the website, case consultations and attending education events. Those organizations that are most involved are also represented in the Advisory Committee that makes decisions on the direction of the project and identifies issues for advocacy, as well as gaps and needs.

The Advisory Committee represents diverse voices and is a platform to bring together the legal and community/social services sectors and to identify issues and gaps and create a forum to problem solve. The results indicate that the Advisory Committee works well and that Connecting Ottawa uses the Committee as a way to direct the project in a way that is responsive to diverse community needs.

While Connecting Ottawa has tested numerous strategies since its initiation, it is the holistic approach that is created by the implementation of these strategies together that is what creates access to justice for the focus populations. It is evident, however, that the core of the model is the lawyer and social worker team who consult with and support frontline staff, as well as occasionally clients directly, to access justice. In some instances the Connecting Ottawa team is intensely involved when it is a complicated case with many aspects to coordinate, but in some cases it is a simple conversation with a frontline staff member to help the staff access the information they need or to make a referral. Through each of the consultations, whether intense or brief, frontline staff learn and their capacity is built so that they may help future clients. The case consultations by both the lawyer and staff were rated by frontline staff as the most effective strategies in helping the focus populations’ improve access to justice.

The educational events such as Lunch and Learns, presentations, and the annual conference also appear to be very effective strategies in increasing capacity for frontline workers and managers in organizations. In

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*“One of the problems in Ottawa is there hasn’t traditionally been a hub or a central point where workers could contact someone if they needed to make referrals for clients to legal or non-legal resources and Connecting Ottawa helps serve that function...I think Connecting Ottawa is a neutral point ... and ... workers from different agencies who might not talk to one another, can come to Connecting Ottawa to get better information and better referrals for their clients.”*

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addition, public legal education events are effective strategies in improving access to justice for the focus populations, by providing direct education.

The website, while not stated to be a critical strategy, was nevertheless mentioned by most evaluation participants as a very useful and efficient way to obtain information, whether direct legal information, information on programs and services, or a quick way to access phone numbers. Participants who commented on the website expressed the consistent message that it was easy to use and informative.

The rack cards and other printed material produced by Connecting Ottawa are seen by some as an excellent resource to enhance the work carried out in the case consultations. More attention needs to be drawn to these resources, however, so as to increase their utilization.

The least utilized of the strategies developed by Connecting Ottawa was the volunteer facilitator component. The rationale for the development of this strategy was that, for many clients from the focus populations, there can be a gap between the point of referral and the point of legal services delivery; clients never actually connect with the services to which they have been referred. Many evaluation participants who had used this resource for one of their clients reported that it was very helpful. A majority, however, had either never heard of this component or had never used the resource. The volunteer facilitator component, however, needs more resources to improve coordination – to make it easier for frontline workers to access and to recognize times when volunteer facilitators would help. This component also needs to be better promoted.

The Connecting Ottawa model works because there are numerous embedded principles or effective practices. Staff that is knowledgeable, connected to the community, dedicated, persistent, and who possess great problem solving skills is critical to the success of the model. Other effective practices include flexibility, a holistic approach, and outreach and building strong relationships.

Another critical piece of the model and critical to its sustainability is having a champion who has the skills and commitment to oversee the project and keep it going. For Connecting Ottawa, one person has been there since its inception and it has been his commitment that has ensured that Connecting Ottawa continued despite staff and Advisory Group changes.

One of the strengths of the Connecting Ottawa model is its focus on capacity building for frontline service providers who work with the focus populations. This ensures that at its core, it is a model built to have a lasting effect. Evaluation stakeholders did report that Connecting Ottawa is creating a lasting impact. Many evaluation participants described the Connecting Ottawa role as part of

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*“They understand our clients the way we understand our clients. It is like there doesn’t need to be policies or anything because they are already seamlessly coming into what we do.”*

*“They are a resource that allows us to basically go further with the processes with our clients... It is definitely their knowledge, the way that we have learned how to work together. It is the fact that they are accessible at our location.”*

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their infrastructure – a navigator that frontline staff can access to build their capacity to help their clients with the legal issues they experience.

The evaluation did identify a number of areas within the Connecting Ottawa model and its process that could be improved on. There also appears to be more limited involvement with the disability sector. Several evaluation participants reported further support is needed for communities within that sector. Most of the other project limitations or areas for improvement identified through the evaluation relate to the expansion of what Connecting Ottawa is doing. The evaluation results show that while Connecting Ottawa is doing outreach and they are having a strong impact on those that are connected, more needs to be done to expand on the network and enhance the involvement of some members that are less connected. It is clear, however, that it takes resources to do further outreach and expand services and that, with limited staff, doing any more outreach than what is presently happening would be difficult.

## Seed Grants

The results of the evaluation indicate that the seed grant resulted in some positive impacts and outcomes. These impacts occurred during the time of seed grant process as well as after that process ended and include:

### 1. Improving Access to Justice for the Focus Populations

Stakeholders in both groups that received seed grants believed that access to justice for the focus populations had been improved by the seed grant process. They believed that the outreach conducted during the seed grant process:

- Increased awareness of legal issues and services
- Resulted in better referrals
- Helped with accessing services because of location of services (i.e., co-locating with other services, satellite offices) and the partnerships developed
- Led to better results with legal issues

### 2. Capacity Building for Trusted Intermediaries

For the A2JP project, particularly for communities served by the Simcoe clinic, and to a lesser extent the Peterborough clinic, key informants reported that through the outreach conducted during the seed grant process staff at the different social and community organizations became more knowledgeable about legal information and legal resources. Because of this knowledge staff at these organizations make better referrals which increases access to justice services, as mentioned above.

*“... thinking back to the focus group that we did in Campbellford -- we made a connection with the Salvation Army there. They run a soup kitchen. Now our satellite [office] runs at the soup kitchen. So ... you don't know where the connection might lead or when you might need it but it's good to have those opportunities.”*

For communities served by the Simcoe clinic, the outreach conducted was instrumental in developing relationships with a number of organizations and those partnerships have continued post-seed grant. As a result, therefore, the capacity built for service providers has not faded and has continued to grow. The clinic maintains ongoing communication with these organizations and is involved in different planning tables as well. As well, the staff lawyer most involved with these organizations has conducted workshops on different topics (e.g., consumer law), since the seed grant phase, at their request.

For the LEARN project, the model that was proposed by the Five County Network included a capacity

*“[The seed grant] gave us the money to bring people together and since then we have maintained contact with them, delivering material, holding workshops, participating in the activities of their agencies (for example, as directors) and basically stopped by from time to time to chat about what is going on in the community.”*

building component -- LEARN Law. The objective of LEARN Law was to increase the capacity of non-legal service providers (trusted intermediaries) to identify when clients had legal problems, provide them with basic legal information, and/or provide warm referrals to appropriate legal services. During the seed grant process that work began, through the consultations and workshops. The Five County Network used an action research approach during the seed grant so that once a need was identified, then they would organize something to address that need. Post-seed grant, a lot of energy was put into capacity building for trusted intermediaries in the communities serviced by the five legal clinics in the Five County Network.

The seed grant enabled the Five County Network to conceptualize and develop aspects of the LEARN model which served as blueprint for moving forward after the seed grant was completed. Although they could not implement other components of the model, as originally envisioned, they were able to focus attention on LEARN Law. At the end of the seed grant process, they presented their report/model to Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) and were successful in receiving grants from LAO to implement a number of initiatives over the years. Stakeholders provided a couple of examples of capacity-building projects they have worked on over the years that stemmed from the seed grant process; these included:

- **Family Law Paths to Justice Guide Working Group:** This group developed a Family Law Resources Guide and a day-long learning event opened by a local family court judge. Workshops were also conducted and brought together service providers from the Client Service Centre, LAO Duty Counsel, mediation services, and the Family Law and Resource Coordinator from the Family Law Information Centre.
- **Librarians and Access to Justice Outreach Project:** As a result of a focus group that was held during the seed grant with staff from four of Hastings County’s fourteen public libraries, libraries were identified as key partners in providing access to legal information. After the end of the seed grant, the Library Outreach Committee was formed and undertook a number of initiatives over the years which centred on ensuring that the librarians had easy access to legal information resources and were kept up-to-date. This local initiative was eventually scaled up provincially through a one-day

forum and later into an online 8-week training course for librarians, which was funded by The Law Foundation of Ontario.

### 3. Partnerships and Service Delivery

The most significant impacts on partnerships and service delivery for the A2JP group were experienced by the Simcoe clinic. The developments that occurred as a result of the seed grant process included:

- **Co-location of services:** Haliburton Highlands Mental Health Services (HHMHS) offered the legal clinic space in their office. The result is that the legal clinic has improved its ability to provide services to low-income residents in Haliburton County and the City of Kawartha Lakes.
- **Involvement in Community Planning Tables:** The staff lawyer responsible for doing much of the outreach conducted during the seed grant process was invited to join the Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee (HSJCC) for Haliburton County. That committee has put her and her Community Legal Worker in touch with a variety of service providers as the Committee includes representatives from a wide range of organizations and agencies.
- **Improved Relationships among Service Providers:** Key informants also reported that the seed grant process, through the community meetings and the regional conference, had helped open up dialogue between different service providers.

Key informants interviewed from the Five County Network reported that because of the seed grant process, the Five County Network itself became more focused and the partnership was strengthened – they moved beyond simply information sharing and became more action oriented. Relationships and partnerships between individual clinics in the network also grew, as well as opportunities to work more collaboratively with Legal Aid Ontario and university student legal clinics, which were unique features of this project.

Through the outreach and consultation conducted, the seed grant also resulted in more partnerships with organizations with whom they normally would not partner. As well, the resources that the seed grant afforded allowed the smaller clinics to do outreach and make connections with service providers in more remote areas of their region and led to better working relationships with community agencies and organizations. Further, the theory and promising practices that were developed through the action research process led to transformative changes in approaches for the four community legal clinics involved in the Network.

Given the outcomes that resulted from the seed grants – both at the time of the process as well

*“We sat in the room with people [from] Ontario Works and Ontario Disability that we advocate [with]. That’s our job ... and I think sitting in a room and ... at the same table or listening to what people were saying ... just [bringing] everyone together like that for the same purpose definitely smoothed some paths to other partnerships and I think that city social services was one of the big ones for us. .... It opened dialogue for us to continue with that and have better processes for our clients and make it easier for the staff at say Ontario Works to provide help for our clients because they understood where we were coming from a little bit better. It was quite mutual. And it still is that way today.”*

as subsequently – there appears to be real value in awarding these grants. These seed grants provided the legal clinics involved with resources that allowed them to do outreach and build relationships. That work resulted in better working relationships, and also partnerships, between legal service providers and between legal organizations and non-legal organizations.

Those relationships and partnerships helped build the capacity of those who act in the role of trusted intermediaries: the seed grants allowed the legal clinics to work with trusted intermediaries to build their awareness of legal issues and of legal resources and services. The partnerships led to changes in service delivery that had positive impacts for clients; for example, more satellite offices, thereby making it easier for more rural clients to access services. Capacity building also led to better referrals and reduced referral fatigue. Clients were directed to the services they needed. The sharing of resources between legal clinics improved access to different legal issues in different communities.

All key informants interviewed saw the value in providing seed grants to rural communities. The most significant impact they reported was that these grants provide them the resources to be able to do work that they cannot do with their core funding alone. It allowed them to do outreach and consultation and time to build and nurture relationships. Those relationships are key: they can result in immediate action and results, innovation in service delivery, and future initiatives and partnerships.

## Final Thoughts and Recommendations

There are many effective practices and lessons learned from this evaluation project that should be shared. Other regions looking to improve the ways in which legal and non-legal organizations work together could learn from the experiences of Connecting Ottawa, as well as the Five County Network and A2JP projects. Initiatives in other regions, however, should be locally developed and locally driven. Although there are broad lessons to be learned, what works in one community may not work in another. The process needs to be somewhat organic and capitalize on the strengths of their local communities. For example, there may already be existing social planning tables or committees that could serve as a starting point for a new initiative. Having a champion to drive any new initiative is key: that person has to be committed to working collaboratively, listening to others, and have the energy and skills to bring people together and continue to move the project forward.

What we learned from all three sites – Connecting Ottawa, the Five County Network, and the A2JP project – was that, first and foremost, legal service providers worked collaboratively to respond to the needs of frontline staff and clients. What do they require in order to truly have access to justice? For those living in rural and remote areas, that might mean more legal clinic satellite offices and more drop-in hours, easy access to “tip sheets”, and easier ways to process documents (rather than traveling long distances to file paperwork). For linguistic minorities that might mean more availability of interpreters, more skill-building among agencies that work with newcomers, or more resources in clients’ first languages. Any coordinated response by legal and non-legal organizations, to improve access to justice, needs to start there: consult and listen.

The idea of “trusted intermediaries”, as originally conceived by Cohl and Thomson, made sense to key informants from all three groups. Frontline staff working in social and community organizations are often the first contact for people; for legal information and services to be accessible, those service

providers need to be trained to identify legal issues and to respond effectively. Other regions in Ontario looking to implementing a Connecting Region model would need to include capacity building and training for those trusted intermediaries. Identifying, and strategizing, on how to deal with systemic issues would also need to be addressed. As Cohl and Thomson reported, problems often occur in clusters; vulnerable individuals may be dealing with multiple issues. A “silo” approach does not work, can lead to referral fatigue, and issues may not be resolved. A coordinated response is required. For Connecting Ottawa, having the lawyer/social worker team has helped ensure that coordinated response and that cases do not fall through the cracks.

Based on our learnings from this evaluation, the report outlined recommendations to help Connecting Ottawa and The Law Foundation of Ontario to move forward in continuing to improve access to justice for linguistic minorities and people who live in rural or remote areas. The recommendations are intended to build on the strengths of the Connecting Region and to take into account the demands on Connecting Ottawa and the Foundation. **The recommendations can be found in Chapter 4 of the report.**

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

## 1.0 Background and Context

### 1.1 Connecting Region: How it all Began

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*“Most legal problems are inextricably linked with other issues. For that reason, linguistic and rural access to justice cuts across both the various elements of the justice system and the many community organizations that serve other needs. Improving linguistic and rural access to justice therefore requires a systemic response....”<sup>1</sup>*

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The Law Foundation of Ontario is a non-profit corporation established by provincial statute in 1974. The Foundation has a unique mandate to help more people understand the law and use it to improve their lives. Enhancing access to justice, “paying particular attention to groups who have experienced injustice or inequity – past or current – and those who have experienced exclusion or barriers in society”<sup>2</sup>, is an underlying objective of all of the Foundation’s work. In 2008 the Foundation commissioned a report to identify responses to two key barriers to access to justice: language barriers (for people who do not speak English or French) and barriers faced by people living in rural and remote areas. The report, *Connecting Across Language and Distance* (Cohl & Thomson, 2008), became the basis for the Foundation’s Connecting Project.

In 2009 the Foundation began implementing recommendations from the Connecting report. In 2010 they issued a call for proposals for consortiums to apply for a grant to implement a regional planning model, as recommended by Cohl and Thomson – that is, a “Connecting Region”. Three consortiums were awarded seed grants to develop models in their regions. These included:

1. **Connecting Ottawa:** this group, spearheaded by Community Legal Services of Ottawa, focused on linguistic minorities and proposed a model which included a network of legal and non-legal organizations and having both a social worker and lawyer on staff to build capacity for service providers and create a more holistic system to respond to the complex needs of the focus populations.
2. **The Access to Justice Project (A2JP):** this group included four legal clinics in the counties of Grey-Bruce, Simcoe/Haliburton/Kawartha Lakes, Muskoka, and Peterborough. The Community Legal Clinic – Simcoe, Haliburton and Kawartha Lakes took the lead on this project which focused on people living in rural and remote areas. They proposed a model that would have a multi-layer decision-making group in the region and which focused on developing a transportation strategy, implementing videoconferencing and conducting an outreach campaign.

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<sup>1</sup> Cohl, K. and Thomson, G. (2008). *Connecting Across Language and Distance: Linguistic and Rural Access to Legal Information and Services*. The Law Foundation of Ontario.

<sup>2</sup> Law Foundation of Ontario DEI statement, online: <http://www.lawfoundation.on.ca/who-we-are/our-vision/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-statement/>

### 3. The Five County Connecting Region Project – Legal Education & Advocacy Regional Network

**(LEARN):** this group was comprised of four legal clinics, a university law student clinic, and a regional office of Legal Aid Ontario in southeastern Ontario, and, like the Simcoe group, focused on people living in rural and remote areas. They proposed to create the Legal Education and Advocacy Regional Network – LEARN to raise awareness of legal issues and resources and to build the capacity of trusted intermediaries.

Each of these groups conducted consultations in their regions/communities and submitted a final report, proposing the outline of their regional models, to the Foundation in 2011. Connecting Ottawa was ultimately selected to be the Connecting Region.

## 1.2 Current Evaluation

In 2016 the Foundation decided to conduct a formal evaluation of Connecting Region to explore and determine the success of the Connecting Region project in improving access to justice for the focus populations.

The evaluation included two components: 1) an evaluation of the Connecting Ottawa program, its outcomes and process; and 2) an evaluation examining outcomes for the other two sites that received seed grants to develop Connecting Region models.

This report is the culmination of the evaluation and is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2 – Connecting Ottawa:** this chapter describes Connecting Ottawa’s project model, the evaluation methods and participation rates, the outcomes and impacts, the strengths and weaknesses of the model, and our conclusions.
- **Chapter 3 – Seed Grants:** this chapter describes the other two projects that received seed grants in 2010/2011, the outcomes and impacts of those seed grants, and our conclusions.
- **Chapter 4 – Final Thoughts and Recommendations:** in this chapter we review the findings in context of the evaluation questions, describe the overall lessons from both components, and provide recommendations for the Foundation and for Connecting Ottawa.

## **CHAPTER 2: CONNECTING OTTAWA**

## Part A: Background and Context

### 2.1 What is Connecting Ottawa and What do they do?

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*“Whenever we’re in unknown [legal] territory it’s always good to have somebody ... or a tool that makes us a bit more comfortable in approaching that territory. I think Connecting Ottawa does that quite well - whether through the resources or through the staff. It makes service providers feel at ease ... to [access]... legal advice or get legal information or just know how to do that. Connecting Ottawa does a good job of removing that barrier for service providers who can then remove it for our clients.”<sup>3</sup>*

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Connecting Ottawa provides frontline support to a partnership of local and non-legal organizations that work together to improve access to information and services at a regional level. Connecting Ottawa aims to improve access to justice for linguistic minorities, people who are not proficient in English or French, and those who face communication challenges as the result of a disability or sensory impairment (the focus populations). The Connecting Ottawa model recognizes that in order to improve access to justice you need to recognize that legal problems are usually part of a larger constellation of issues and that the focus populations are more likely to approach trusted intermediaries at community and social service organizations about legal issues they might be experiencing. Therefore, in order to increase access to justice for the focus populations, Connecting Ottawa has created a system that includes partnerships of legal and non-legal organizations to work towards a holistic approach and to build the capacity of non-legal organizations to help their clients with legal issues they might experience.

Access to justice based on the Connecting Ottawa vision includes access to information on legal rights and legal issues as well as access to legal and other services that will help the focus populations resolve their legal issues. The goal of Connecting Ottawa is to build the capacity of partner agencies who work with the focus populations to do both those things (provide information on legal issues and facilitate access to services and other resources to resolve the issue) swiftly and efficiently. Connecting Ottawa aims to demystify access to justice by increasing accessibility and reducing referral fatigue for the focus populations. They do this by building the capacity of trusted intermediaries, including frontline workers, and by increasing connections among organizations that work with the focus populations.

To meet its goals Connecting Ottawa has undertaken the following specific strategies:

1. Connecting legal services and social services to build sufficient capacity for legal services to work in closer cooperation with community health and social services, local agencies serving immigrants, and services for disabled persons. The purpose of building these connections is to ensure a more integrated service response for clients from the focus populations and also to build capacity to advocate at a systemic level whenever the system itself has created barriers to accessible legal services. To achieve this objective, Connecting Ottawa has both a social worker and lawyer available to advise and consult

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<sup>3</sup> From a frontline staff interview.

with frontline providers of information, assessment, and referral services to the focus populations. The staff lawyer and social worker are mobile and frequently spend time in the offices of social service organizations that are part of the network. Connecting Ottawa also supports the network, provides student placements for social work and law students, and supports complimentary projects.<sup>4</sup> **From January 2013 to December 2016, approximately 1615 case consultations between the social worker and/or the lawyer and a service provider occurred.**<sup>5</sup>

2. Public legal education (PLE) events are geared to trusted intermediaries and the focus populations to increase access to legal information. These include Lunch and Learn events, presentations at specific organizations (e.g., at a team meeting) as well as other education sessions. **From January 2013 to December 2016 Connecting Ottawa conducted approximately 132 presentations.**<sup>6</sup>
3. Sharing lessons learned with peers and colleagues so that the system of legal services is strengthened and is more readily accessed by the focus populations. This includes an annual conference, presentations at professional events, and a regular newsletter distributed to Network partners. **From January 2013 to December 2016 Connecting Ottawa hosted 5 conferences, distributed at least 15 newsletters, and presented at approximately 50 professional events**<sup>7</sup>.
4. The Connecting Ottawa team supports and promotes 211 Eastern Ontario (delivered by a partner, the Community Information Centre of Ottawa, or CICO) as a centralized hub for assessment, information and referral services for all partners, to ensure the first point of service for the focus populations. This was a focus of the project in the earlier years (from 2012-2015) as Connecting Ottawa promoted CICO, trained their staff, kept their information updated, and developed a direct feed from the CICO database to the Connecting Ottawa website.
5. The development and maintenance of a website to supplement the on-line information available from Your Legal Rights and the Community Information Centre of Ottawa that includes comprehensive and current information about local legal services, and by sharing information about the Connecting Ottawa project and the ways in which it can support project partners to ensure access to justice for the focus populations. **From January 2013 to December 2016 there were a cumulative total of 62,867 page views on the Connecting Ottawa website.**
6. The development of a pool of facilitators who act as informed and trusted intermediaries trained and supported to problem solve with the client to systematically overcome the barriers to connect to services. **From January 2013 to December 2016, approximately 71 clients were assisted by volunteer facilitators.**

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<sup>4</sup> Most of the students are co-placed and co-managed with the involved partner agencies.

<sup>5</sup> In the Connecting Ottawa reports, staff identifies that not all consultations are logged because some are very brief; therefore, the numbers reported are a minimum. The case consultations also range considerably in terms of involvement.

<sup>6</sup> These included Lunch and Learns, presentations at community events presentations to individual organizations and their staff, presentations at academic institutions (e.g., law classes, social work classes), and supporting partner agencies in their capacity to service refugees through PLEs.

<sup>7</sup> The presentations and newsletter numbers are approximate as they are based on reports in each of the reports to the Foundation.

## 2.2 Evaluation Methods and Participation Rates

The evaluation included an examination of both outcome and process questions. The outcome evaluation was focused on the outcomes, impacts and benefits to organizations that are members of the network and who work with Connecting Ottawa and the outcomes, impacts and benefits for the focus populations. The process evaluation was focused on how the project model works, who they are reaching, what has been learned, understanding the potential for long lasting effects of the project, and the policies and processes required to improve the ability of Connecting Ottawa and The Law Foundation of Ontario to share information with others about what is working. The following questions guided the evaluation:

### 2.2.1 Outcome and Impact Questions

1. What impacts has Connecting Ottawa had in improving access to justice for the focus populations?
2. What impacts has Connecting Ottawa had in building the capacity of agencies and organizations to work together to improve access to justice for the focus populations?
3. What impacts is Connecting Ottawa having on relationships between other organizations in the network?

### 2.2.2 Process Questions

4. How does the overall project model work (governance, how network operates, project partners, relationship to clients)?
5. Which populations is Connecting Ottawa serving and who are they not reaching?
6. What has been learned so far about how the project operates – what is working well and what can be improved?
7. To what extent is Connecting Ottawa building the potential, or the capacity, for the benefits of the Connecting Ottawa program to have a lasting impact?
8. What processes and policies could be implemented to improve the ability of Connecting Ottawa and The Law Foundation of Ontario to understand and share information about what is working to the benefit of communities and organizations across Ontario?

### 2.2.3 Methods

The evaluation of the Connecting Ottawa initiative included data collection from key project stakeholders, frontline staff from partner agencies, key representatives of network organizations, several volunteer

facilitators, a review of key documents, and case examples. The table below outlines the different data collection methods, a description of those methods, and the participation rates or numbers.

**Table 1: Connecting Ottawa Evaluation -- Data Collection Methods and Participation Rates**

Data Collection Method	Description	Participation Rates/Numbers
Program Documents Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Documents provided by Connecting Ottawa and by The Law Foundation of Ontario were reviewed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>These included the proposals submitted for funding, activity reports, and renewal applications</li> </ul>
Stakeholder Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews conducted with Advisory Committee members</li> <li>Interviews conducted with current and past Connecting Ottawa staff and key staff from the sponsoring community legal clinic</li> <li>Topics explored included outcomes and impacts, critical program components, and project process (network functioning, target population reach, strengths and weaknesses)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15 stakeholder interviews                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7 interviews conducted with Advisory Committee members (included all but 1 of the Advisory Committee member who had recently left the organization)</li> <li>Remaining 8 interviews included 3 current Connecting Ottawa staff, 3 past Connecting Ottawa staff, and 2 key informants from the sponsoring community legal clinic</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Network Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online survey distributed to all network members</li> <li>Topics explored included impacts on the organization, impacts on the focus populations, system-level changes, population reach, strategy effectiveness, and network involvement and connections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>52 network members were sent the link to the online survey</li> <li>23 surveys were partially or totally completed; a 44% participation rate</li> <li>Respondents included:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Management in non-legal or legal organization: 43%</li> <li>Lawyer: 13%</li> <li>Paralegal or legal worker: 17%</li> <li>Staff in a non-legal organization: 17%</li> <li>Other: 9%</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Conference Evaluation Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online survey distributed to all who attended the Connecting Ottawa conference in May 2017</li> <li>Topics explored included impacts, learnings or benefits of attending the conference, ratings on the usefulness of different sessions, and an overall rating of the conference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>22 surveys were completed of the approximate 75 attendees who received a survey; a 29% participation rate</li> <li>Respondents were from legal (32%), health (32%) and the social service (37%) sectors and included:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Management: 37%</li> <li>Supervisor/coordinator: 14%</li> <li>Frontline staff: 45%</li> <li>Other: 4%</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Data Collection Method	Description	Participation Rates/Numbers
Staff Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online survey distributed via email to all frontline staff whose email addresses Connecting Ottawa had on file; network members were also contacted and asked to distribute the survey link to their staff</li> <li>• Topics explored were capacity building impacts on the staff, impacts on the focus populations, system-level changes, population reach, and strategy/component effectiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is unclear how many staff received the link to the survey, since network members were asked to share the survey with others within the organization and this was not tracked; however, approximately 110 staff were sent the link directly based upon email addresses they had on file</li> <li>• 55 surveys were either partially or totally completed</li> <li>• Respondents included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Immigrant or settlement services organization: 45.5%</li> <li>– Legal services organization: 27.3%</li> <li>– Community health centre: 14.5%</li> <li>– Community services organization: 9.1%</li> <li>– Services for persons with disabilities organization: 3.6%</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Staff Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews conducted with staff from community and legal organizations partnering with Connecting Ottawa</li> <li>• Topics explored included outcomes and impacts, critical program components, and project process (focus population reach, effectiveness of each component, strengths and weaknesses)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22 staff interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Staff represented 10 different community agencies that use Connecting Ottawa resources</li> <li>– 6 lawyers or paralegals working in community legal clinics</li> <li>– 16 staff from settlement agencies, community health centres, multi-service agencies and advocacy organizations.</li> <li>– 2 of the 16 staff from community agencies worked with people with disabilities and the others with refugees and newcomers</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Case Study Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of case examples outlined in Connecting Ottawa's reports to The Law Foundation of Ontario between January 2013 to December 2016</li> <li>• Collection of case examples as told by staff from legal and non-legal organizations during the frontline staff interviews conducted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 17 case examples outlined in Connecting Ottawa's reports to The Law Foundation of Ontario</li> <li>• 14 case examples as told by staff from 3 legal clinics and 7 community/health organizations</li> </ul>
Volunteer Facilitator Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews conducted with volunteer facilitators</li> <li>• Topics explored included their role, assignments, impact of this component of the project, training and support, and feedback on the process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 volunteer facilitator interviews</li> <li>• Each had worked on at least 4 assignments and were still involved with Connecting Ottawa at the time of the interview</li> </ul>

## Part B: Connecting Ottawa's Impact on Improving Access to Justice for the Focus Populations

A main focus of this evaluation has been to assess whether Connecting Ottawa has had an impact on increasing access to justice for the focus populations, and if so, how. **The evidence collected shows that Connecting Ottawa is having a positive impact on the focus populations' access to justice.** The results of the evaluation indicate that access to justice is improved in three main ways: through direct case consultations for the focus populations; through capacity building for service providers; and through improving service coordination.

The following sections address the outcome and process questions listed in Section 2.2.1 and summarize the main results from the evaluation.

### 2.3 How the Focus Populations Experience Increased Access to Justice

#### 2.3.1 Evidence from Stakeholder Interviews

In the stakeholder interviews, participants were clear that Connecting Ottawa helps communities that are isolated from mainstream services access to the justice system through front line staff from the organizations they do access. Stakeholders were not able to tell us with certainty how much of an impact Connecting Ottawa is having and it is clear that the focus populations continue to experience unmet legal needs even with the support of Connecting Ottawa.

Connecting Ottawa staff reported that the numbers of calls they receive and the connections the Connecting Ottawa team make with front line workers have been increasing. Through these consultations, legal issues that would not be resolved in the past are now being resolved, the pathway to justice is shortened, and frontline workers who have increased knowledge are identifying legal issues and providing legal information more often.

According to stakeholders who work for organizations that work directly with the focus populations, clients frequently seek help for legal issues. For example for one of the settlement agencies represented on the Advisory Committee, it is the third largest client request for information. Legal issues can be complex and settlement workers may not have the expertise or resources necessary to adequately help clients. Connecting Ottawa's mandate is not to serve the focus populations directly but, by

## Glossary of Terms

### Stakeholder:

With respect to interviews conducted, we are referring to the members of the Advisory Committee, current and past Connecting Ottawa staff, and key staff from the sponsoring community legal clinic.

### Network Member:

Referred to when describing the network survey results. These individuals include those who responded to the network survey: the majority were management, but also included lawyers, paralegals and community legal workers, and frontline staff.

### Frontline staff:

Referred to when describing the frontline staff survey and the frontline staff interviews. These staff are from organizations, both legal and non-legal, who partner with, or have connected with, Connecting Ottawa. These organizations include community legal clinics, immigrant and settlement agencies, community health centres, community services organizations, or organizations serving those with disabilities.

working on case consultations with agency staff and by being a consultative resource to agencies, they both build the capacity of agencies to be trusted intermediaries and help resolve legal issues for the focus populations. The stakeholders' observations are that in the past, fewer issues were resolved for their clients without the expertise and support of the Connecting Ottawa team. They also reported that frontline workers from their agencies are providing more legal information to their clients. By engaging in case consultations and public legal education sessions with the Connecting Ottawa team, frontline workers gain a better understanding of what a legal issue is and can then help clients resolve issues or at least seek legal help. For example, if a client is evicted from their home, the frontline response in the past would have been to find the client new housing. The impact of Connecting Ottawa on clients of the organizations with whom they work is that now the frontline response would be to also help such a client access legal advice to address the housing issue.

*"...Access to justice means you can sometimes give somebody the tools to do things themselves but with a vulnerable population who doesn't know the system and doesn't know their rights and doesn't even know what kind of questions to ask, it's a bit more than providing them with the tools. It's more like ... walking with them and showing them how to do things and sometimes even speaking for them and advocating for them where they might not do it themselves."*

Stakeholders also reported how legal issues are also resolved in a more timely way as staff can quickly consult with the Connecting Ottawa team or access information through the website. The increased knowledge on the part of staff also leads to more timely access to legal advice or resolution of issues.

In addition to receiving support from trained frontline workers, the focus populations have access to the rack cards that provide some legal information in various languages. Those who can read English or French can access the website directly for current and easily accessible information. Those who cannot read English or French can access the information through frontline workers and trusted intermediaries.

### 2.3.2 Evidence from the Frontline Staff and Network Member Surveys

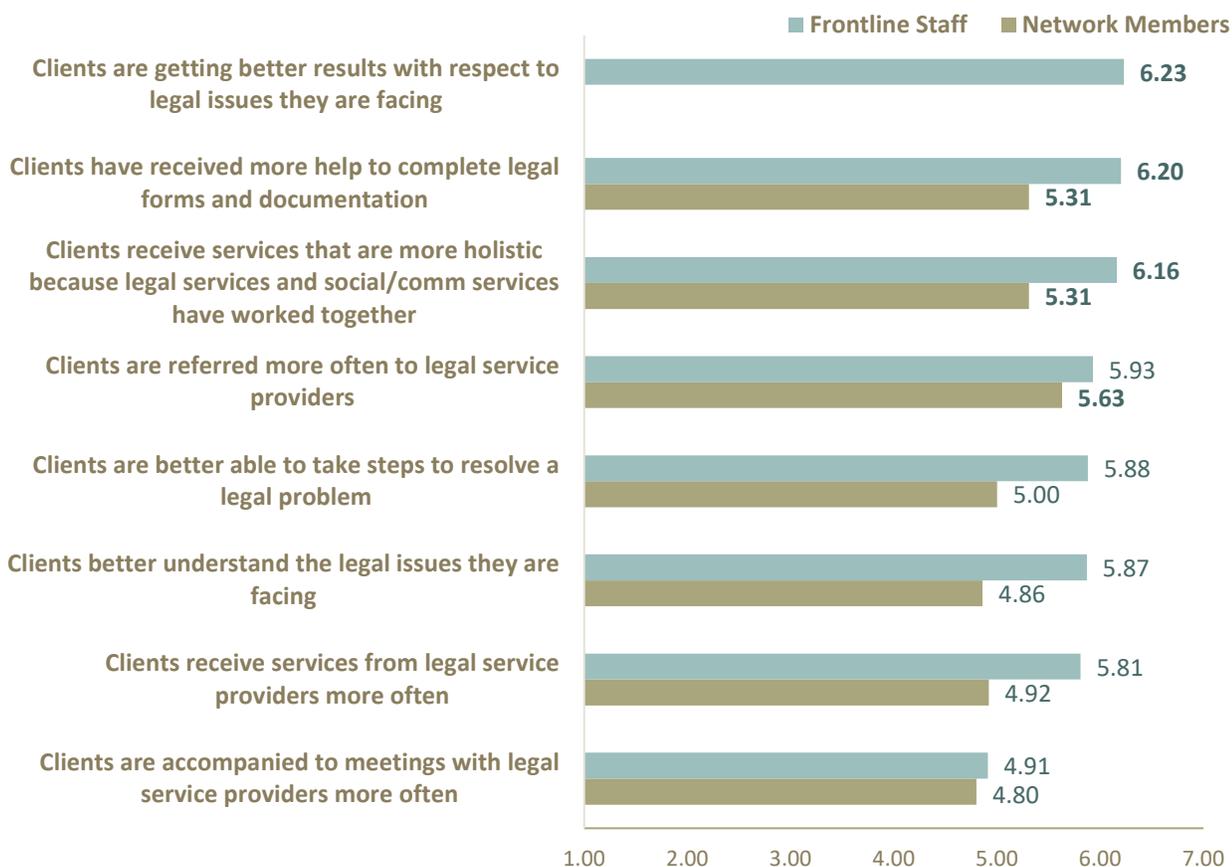
In the frontline staff survey staff from community/social organizations, and from legal organizations, were asked several questions about how many of their clients fell within the focus populations and then the impacts that Connecting Ottawa had on their clients who fell within the focus populations. Most staff from community and social organizations reported that they work with a fair proportion of clients who face legal issues. **About 60% of the staff from community and social organizations reported that at least one-quarter of the clients they work with face legal issues; about one-third of the staff reported that one-half or more of their clients face legal issues.** Of the clients who do face legal issues, about 70% of staff reported that at least one-quarter of them fall within the focus populations; 43% reported that one-half or more of those clients fall within the focus populations. More than one-half of respondents (54%) reported that **at least one-half of these clients were directly helped** because of their organization's access to Connecting Ottawa's services and resources. The same proportion – 54% – reported that **at least one-half of these clients were also indirectly helped** because of their organization's access to Connecting Ottawa's

services and resources (i.e., because staff’s capacity to respond to and support clients with legal needs had been built).

Respondents to the frontline staff survey from community/social organizations were then asked a series of questions about the extent to which they believed access to justice for their clients (who fall within the focus populations) had improved because of Connecting Ottawa. Most of these same questions (7 of 8) were also asked of respondents to the network survey (mostly management).<sup>8</sup> Results from both surveys are shown in the figure below.

### Figure 1: Results from Frontline Staff Survey (Community/Social Organizations) and Network Survey - Impacts on Focus Populations

*Frontline staff reported greater impact on clients from the focus populations than did network members, providing slightly to moderately higher ratings on most items. Respondents rated the greatest improvement for getting better results, receiving help with legal forms, receiving services that are more holistic, and being referred more often to legal service providers.*



<sup>8</sup> Those who had answered that although they were interested in Connecting Ottawa’s activities they had not used their services much were not asked since it was felt they would not have sufficient information upon which to rate the items. A total of 14 respondents answered these items.

As seen in Figure 1 **frontline staff respondents and network member respondents reported significant improvements in a number of areas for clients from the focus populations.** For frontline staff, with the exception of clients being accompanied more often to meetings with legal service providers, all items received an average rating of close to, or greater than, 6 on the 7-point scale (where 7=significant improvement). Network members rated most of the items lower (although still positive) than the ratings given by frontline staff. Nonetheless, at least 70% of both the frontline staff respondents and the network member respondents rated at least a moderate improvement on all outcomes.

About 70% of legal service providers in the frontline staff survey reported that at least one-half of their clients fell within the focus populations. Fewer legal service providers, than service providers from community/social organizations, reported that their clients who fell within the focus populations were helped (directly or indirectly) by Connecting Ottawa. Approximately one-third of the respondents felt that **at least one-half or more of their clients had been directly helped** because of their organization's access to Connecting Ottawa's services and resources. Approximately 40% of the respondents felt that **at least one-half or more of their clients had been indirectly helped** because of their organization's access to Connecting Ottawa's services and resources.

Respondents to the frontline staff survey from the legal organizations were then asked to rate the extent to which access to justice had improved for clients they serve within the focus populations and the extent to which their clients in the focus populations had received services that were more holistic, because of Connecting Ottawa.<sup>9</sup> **Legal service providers rated both items approximately 5.7 on the 7-point scale.** Compared to the community/ social service respondents, the outcome on services being more holistic was rated a little lower (5.7 compared to 6.1); however, approximately the same proportion of both groups (70%) answered at the high end of the scale (6 or 7). Other items rated by community/social service provider respondents related to improved access to justice were rated as 5.8 to 6.2, again, a little higher than the item on increased access to justice rated by legal service providers (5.7).

Eleven frontline staff survey respondents from community/social organizations also provided examples or comments on how access to justice was improved for their clients in the focus populations as a result of Connecting Ottawa. Some provided specific examples of how Connecting Ottawa staff had helped their clients (e.g., help with power of attorney documentation for a family of speech-impaired newcomers; help with a work permit so that client's job was secured; help understanding tenant rights so that a client could take legal action against a landlord), while other comments were more general about the help provided by Connecting Ottawa.

Six frontline staff survey respondents from legal organizations provided specific examples or comments about how access to justice was improved for their clients. Of the six respondents, two gave examples of specific clients who Connecting Ottawa had helped in connecting them to necessary resources. Other respondents talked about access being improved because there was a more holistic approach and there was greater knowledge among legal providers about what is available in the community.

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<sup>9</sup> They rated two items on a 7-point scale from 1 (no improvement) to 7 (significant improvement); 4 was "moderate improvement".

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*“Connecting Ottawa improves the capacity of our students and clinical legal supervisors to provide effective assistance to clients in the target populations. Connecting Ottawa also directly assists these clients through participation in our service events. Connecting Ottawa supports the holistic approach we take, while connecting us to the holistic services required.”*

*“Access to justice improved for clients who otherwise would not have had known the resources available to assist with their legal issues. When connected with the right organizations, clients’ legal issues have been resolved more quickly and efficiently because of the support and community connections of Connecting Ottawa.”*

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### 2.3.3 Evidence from the Frontline Staff Interviews

During the frontline staff interviews, staff from organizations that work with Connecting Ottawa were asked detailed questions about whether partnering with Connecting Ottawa had helped improve access to justice for the focus population and, if it had, in what specific ways access had been improved. **All interviewees believed that access to justice was improved as a result of the supports and strategies of Connecting Ottawa.**

All staff that we interviewed in the frontline staff interviews reported that they have consulted or worked directly on cases with the Connecting Ottawa team. Staff from the Catholic Centre for Immigrants (CCI) and Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO) reported that when they have a complex case they make appointments with the Connecting Ottawa lawyer or social worker. This is facilitated by the fact that the lawyer and social worker are mobile and have set office hours onsite at CCI and OCISO each week. They also contact the Connecting Ottawa staff by e-mail or phone when they have other questions about issues their clients are experiencing that might involve a legal component. Those working at the Vanier Community Service Centre have direct access to the Connecting Ottawa staff when they are in the office (since the Connecting Ottawa Staff is housed there). Other staff from community, social and legal organizations reported that they call or email with questions or sometimes

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*“So the information part, me knowing more about it, helps me disseminate to other people as well so those clients can benefit from that knowledge that I have. It helps them a great deal because people who come here, who are new Canadians or refugees, they have no clue how things work. They don’t understand the Canadian legal system at all, so to have someone come in and say this is what they are looking at, this is what they need, this is what this term means... [that is] invaluable for them ....”*

*“Obviously the barriers would make it so they wouldn’t be getting anything so whether they are being helped right at Connecting Ottawa or Connecting Ottawa refers them, someone is taking time to listen to the situation and figure out what service will best serve their needs.”*

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refer clients directly. During these case consultations Connecting Ottawa helps staff deal directly with complex cases that they might not be able to solve on their own. Connecting Ottawa also ensures seamless and more efficient access to justice by referring the clients or connecting them to lawyers and other necessary services in order to facilitate access to justice.

For lawyers and paralegals from legal organizations, the Connecting Ottawa team supports them in providing a more holistic service by facilitating connections to community organizations and supports for issues that can exacerbate legal issues and impede access to justice.

A few frontline staff interviewed did not provide direct support to clients in the focus populations, but rather provided information. These frontline staff did report that they had learned more about legal issues and legal information from their contacts with Connecting Ottawa (e.g., discussions, PLEs), but they also reported that they sometimes refer clients directly to them. Although Connecting Ottawa is primarily a capacity building model for trusted intermediaries, there are certain circumstances under which clients are referred directly to them and which they assess on a case-by-case basis.<sup>10</sup> When these referrals are received, Connecting Ottawa will try to connect with another agency and provide consultation and referral services.

The interviews with frontline staff provided a great deal of evidence and data on the specific ways in which the supports provided by Connecting Ottawa leads to improved access to justice for members of the focus population.

### **Referred more often to legal/community service providers**

Consistent with the strong results from the frontline staff survey, all community staff we interviewed reported that clients they connected with on legal issues were referred more often to legal services as a result of the different resources provided by Connecting Ottawa. Frontline staff reported that in the case consultations, depending upon the legal issues the clients are facing, Connecting Ottawa will provide options on where to send clients and what support they need. Frontline staff also reported that because Connecting Ottawa is supporting the community worker in making the referral (“warm referrals”) clients’ access to these services is greatly facilitated and made more efficient and effective.

Frontline staff also reported that it is important to point out that there are gaps in terms of legal services (to be discussed in a later section) and therefore Connecting Ottawa’s support is even more critical in terms of facilitating access. While Connecting Ottawa will not provide direct representation, when there are gaps, they work to find the right services for which the client is eligible. They will also, in a few critical situations, provide limited legal services and advice when there is a service gap in the community and in cases where time is critical.

In most cases the community service provider works with Connecting Ottawa on the case and workers observe that their clients are actually getting support from the lawyers to whom they are referred. In some less complicated cases, however, staff refers directly to legal service providers based on the advice of Connecting Ottawa staff and they do not always know if the clients follow through on the services. Therefore, while clients are referred, there is limited knowledge of whether or not they followed up on the referral.

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<sup>10</sup> More information about how Connecting Ottawa operates, its strengths and its challenges, is included in Section 2.8.

In the interviews with frontline staff, we also heard that the supports provided by Connecting Ottawa are not just about referring and ensuring a client gets to the right service. One interviewee explained how even when a worker accompanies clients to lawyer appointments, clients may still require additional support. The Connecting Ottawa team helps clients understand what their case is about, and answer questions, so that clients are better prepared for the meeting with the lawyer.

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*“There was a lot of clarity provided by the social worker explaining [information] to us; the available resources were not sufficient. So it became easier for the lawyer to explain [things] to us once I was prepared [and] organized with questions. So [the Connecting Ottawa social worker] said to organize the documents this way and it made more sense ... and we felt that it was very beneficial to us.”*

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### **Better results with their legal issues**

Consistent with the results of other components of this evaluation, when we asked frontline staff about the outcomes for members of the focus population, all staff responded that because of the support and resources provided by Connecting Ottawa, members of the focus populations are getting better results with their legal issues. They reported many positive outcomes for clients - from being able to access social assistance to resolving issues around sponsorship so they can stay in Canada. Lawyers also described better outcomes because they were able to connect the client to community services so that there was a better long term outcome. One lawyer, for example, described how there was better success with refugee hearings because of the support that Connecting Ottawa offers.

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*“...For my clients to access justice, for example, if they are going through the refugee system, they need to be at point where they are in a stable enough situation to be able to prepare effectively and testify effectively at a refugee hearing or, if they are trying to remain in Canada on humanitarian grounds, they need to demonstrate that they are doing their very best to work and to integrate into the community, to study, to volunteer and things like that. To do those things, to have the best chance at success in those immigration applications, there are a lot of other pieces that have to fall into place - things like housing, counselling, education, and accessing all of those resources. And so by being able to communicate with Connecting Ottawa whenever I need assistance on getting people to the right place so that they can stabilize in terms of housing, or counselling or things like that, then we have a better chance of actually succeeding on their immigration case.”*

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Frontline staff described that often the legal issues the clients face are because of a lack of understanding of their rights and responsibilities. Learning about those rights and responsibilities through a consultation with Connecting Ottawa, or through information directly from the community service provider, gives them confidence, prevents future issues, and reduces their stress.

### **Support in completing legal forms**

Staff was also asked if through the supports and resources of Connecting Ottawa members of the focus populations have increased support in completing legal forms. The results were mixed with some frontline staff saying that there was increased support, but not specifying how this had improved. A number of frontline staff were also not sure if Connecting Ottawa had helped in this area.

### **Accompanied to meetings with legal service providers**

Connecting Ottawa provides support in accompanying clients to legal appointments through the volunteer facilitator component. Many of the frontline staff we interviewed reported that they had not accessed a volunteer facilitator for their clients and some were not sure if their clients from the focus populations had increased access to support in being accompanied to appointments. A few frontline staff interview participants did report that Connecting Ottawa staff had set up some volunteer facilitator appointments for accompaniment and that this had been very helpful to their clients.

### **More holistic services**

The results of the frontline staff interviews provide some evidence that, because of Connecting Ottawa, clients in the focus populations who face a legal issue are receiving more holistic services. Staff from community, health and legal organizations indicated that because of the supports and referrals that Connecting Ottawa is able to provide, members of the focus populations for whom they seek help, are having their legal issues dealt with in a more holistic way. When consulting with the Connecting Ottawa staff lawyer, the case is addressed more holistically and the worker is able to see that the legal issues have other layers that need to be addressed. Both the Connecting Ottawa lawyer and social worker at Connecting Ottawa connect clients with appropriate supports.

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*“And I think that is critical that clients receive holistic services and that has been a huge problem .... In general, lawyers are not looking at the other service piece because they simply don’t have the time and they all have too many clients so I think that definitely Connecting Ottawa is trying to fill that gap.”*

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### **Reduced referral fatigue**

The frontline staff interviews indicate that the support from the Connecting Ottawa team in case consultations, and the increased knowledge gained by staff from community organizations, clearly helps members of the focus populations access necessary services and reduces the likelihood of having to go from place to place. A client will access a service they are familiar with and most likely comfortable with (e.g., settlement service) and the staff from that organization will be able to check-in with Connecting Ottawa and sometimes refer the client on the spot or book an appointment for a case consultation. Community

workers reported that through the connections, extensive knowledge, commitment and diligence of the Connecting Ottawa team, members of the focus population are less likely to get lost in the system. The increased coordination of services that results from the case consultations reduces the referral fatigue. Clients are also supported in accessing services and do not need to search on their own.

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*“They are very specific and intentional which is great because again that ping pong stuff can drive me nuts. When I’m doing those calls for people, they feel like they’re back at square one, no one is here to help them, and it can get really discouraging for some clients. But with Connecting Ottawa, no, I haven’t had that. Most of the time they are like ‘here are two options but if you want to go to this person here or here I know she’ll do a great job.’”*

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### **Increased knowledge of rights and responsibilities**

Numerous staff that were interviewed described how, through the support of Connecting Ottawa, refugees and other newcomers were becoming more aware of their rights and responsibilities. They reported that their clients’ understanding and sense of responsibility has increased. One staff person described the information as preventative since when the focus populations understand how things work and knows their responsibilities (e.g., timeliness of completing documents) they are less likely to experience legal issues. As clients hear through word-of-mouth that there is a trusted intermediary at a community agency that they can go to with a legal issue, they are more likely to seek help and information from that person or agency and as they become more knowledgeable they pass along their learnings to other members of their community.

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*“I think that what [Connecting Ottawa does] is empower our staff.... [Staff] are the first people to know what [client] needs are, so if you understand better what their needs are we’ll be able to refer them to any resource in the community or any resource available within Connecting Ottawa.”*

*“I would say there’s been an improvement in the community about strengthening those relationships and informing people that may not have known. There’s a lot of demystifying. People sort of look at the lawyers as unapproachable or you don’t go there until the problem is huge. I think that Connecting Ottawa has sort of shown or tried to show the social services agencies and settlement agencies that we’re people and we’re problem solvers and we can work together and we can help you.”*

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## 2.4 How Staff and Organizational Capacity is increased to Support the Focus Populations in Accessing Justice

### 2.4.1 Capacity Building for the Trusted Intermediaries in the Social/Community organizations

#### *Evidence from the Annual Conference Survey and Stakeholder Interviews*

In the stakeholder interviews, Advisory Committee members from community and social service agencies reported that frontline staff in their agencies are gaining both the knowledge and confidence necessary to become trusted intermediaries and help their clients with legal issues, through the case consultation process, public legal education sessions, and the Connecting Ottawa website. The capacity is being built in the following ways:

- Frontline staff has increased knowledge of what a legal issue is and are more able to identify legal issues when a client presents with a problem.
- Frontline staff is empowered and gain confidence to help clients by increased knowledge of legal information and legal services and resources.
- Frontline staff has increased knowledge of where to get legal information and where to go for help on different legal issues.
- Legal issues are demystified for frontline staff and lawyers and legal services have become more approachable.
- The Connecting Ottawa team provides interpretation of the law in a plain and accessible way to community workers who, in turn, pass it on to their clients.
- The connections with the Connecting Ottawa project have increased frontline staff's interest in learning more about legal issues.

In the stakeholder interviews, the Connecting Ottawa team reported observing increased capacity in some of the agency staff with whom they consult. They reported that some specific workers are calling less frequently for information and they are spending less time with them when they do call for a consultation. They have also observed increased confidence and competence in dealing with complex legal issues on the part of some frontline workers.

The Connecting Ottawa annual conference also plays a role in increasing staff capacity to work as trusted intermediaries. In the 2017 conference evaluation form, 81% of respondents reported that generally the conference had increased their capacity to help their clients to access legal information or services, 95% reported that they would share the information and tools they had gained through the conference with others in their organizations, and 95% reported that they would use the information and tools they had gained through the conference in their work. Most respondents also reported that capacity had been increased in various ways:

- Conference sessions had increased their understanding of the roles and opportunities of community navigation for supporting clients to access legal information and services (86%).
- Through the conference sessions they had learned new approaches and best practices surrounding community navigation for supporting clients to access legal information and services (82%).
- Through the conference sessions they had an increased understanding of the legal boundaries and opportunities for providing legal information (82%).
- Conference sessions had introduced them to tools that they could use to help clients navigate through legal problems (81%).
- They had gained an understanding of how to integrate what they had learned into their organization (77%).

### *Evidence from the Frontline Staff and Network Member Surveys*

In the frontline staff surveys, respondents from community and social service organizations were asked a number of questions about the extent to which different services were part of their job, with respect to legal issues. More than one-half of respondents indicated that the following services were at least somewhat part of their job (that is, they answered at least 4 “somewhat or some of the time” on the 7-point scale).<sup>11</sup>

- Referring clients to legal service providers (86%)
- Identifying legal issues a client is facing (78%)
- Providing basic information about legal rights and procedures (69%)
- Working with legal service providers to solve clients’ problems (73%)
- Helping clients to take steps to resolve a legal problem (59%)
- Helping clients to complete legal forms and documentation (53%)
- Accompanying clients to meetings with legal service providers (51%)

A much smaller proportion, though still significant, (18%) reported that “accompanying clients to tribunals or court hearings” was a part of their job (answered “somewhat” or higher).

If these services were part of their jobs then these frontline workers were asked to indicate the extent to which Connecting Ottawa helped with these services on a 7-point scale from 1=not at all to 7=significantly. In the network survey respondents from the community and social services organizations (N=9) were asked to rate the extent to which Connecting Ottawa had helped their organization’s staff in many of these same ways. Results for both surveys are shown in the figure below.

As shown in Figure 2, the results were positive - staff from community and social service organizations in both the frontline staff survey and the network survey (mostly management-level staff) rated most items above 4.5. In general, network member respondents provided higher ratings than did the frontline staff. The items that both groups gave the highest ratings to included: Referring clients to legal service providers

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<sup>11</sup> The proportions shown are those that answered 4 or higher on the 7-point scale.

and providing basic information about legal rights and procedures. In addition to those two items, respondents to the frontline staff survey also gave a high rating to “identifying the legal issues a client is facing”. Respondents to the network member survey also gave a high rating to “helping clients to take steps to resolve a legal problem”. Both groups were in agreement that accompanying clients to tribunal or court hearings showed the least impact: frontline staff survey respondents and network member survey respondents gave an average rating of less than 4 on the 7-point scale. These results are not surprising since Connecting Ottawa does not have a specific mandate or strategy related to this.

### Figure 2: Frontline Staff (Social/Community Organizations) and Network Member Survey Results - Connecting Ottawa's help with providing legal-related services

*Results were positive with both groups rating most items 4.5 or higher. For frontline staff the items that received the highest ratings (5 or 6) included identifying the legal issues a clients is facing, referring clients to legal service providers and providing basic information about legal rights and procedures. For network members, the highest rated items included referring clients to legal service providers, helping clients take steps to resolve a legal problem and providing basic information about legal rights and procedures.*



In the frontline staff survey, community/social organization respondents were also asked the extent to which Connecting Ottawa had helped build their capacity in a number of areas related to legal issues and working with the focus populations. See Figure 3 below.

### Figure 3: Frontline Staff Survey Results (Community/Social Organizations) - How Connecting Ottawa has helped

*All of the items received at least a rating of 5.2 on the 7-point scale. The items that received the highest ratings (5.9 to 6.2) included having greater knowledge about legal information in general, and about the differences between legal information and legal advice, and knowing where to go to access legal information.*



**As shown in the figure above, service providers from community/social organizations rated the capacity building in all areas very strongly and consistently. For all nine items, 50% or more of the respondents answered 6 or 7 on the 7-point scale.** Connecting Ottawa has helped staff most with knowledge of legal information, the difference between legal information and legal advice, and knowledge of where to go or where to access legal information. For those three items, 95% or more of the respondents answered at least 4 and 70% or more answered 6 or 7.

Twenty-one respondents also provided examples or comments of how Connecting Ottawa helped them in the work that they do, including:

- Providing information (in person, by phone or on the website) and being available for quick check-ins (n=7)
  - Ensuring appropriate referrals are made/ help with navigating (n=4)
  - Help with complex cases (n=3)
  - Help with immigration cases (n=3)
  - Help with making partnerships (n=1)
- 

*“Connecting Ottawa has provided lots of information and resources to me, specifically in housing issues that came up with clients.”*

*“So many times we are faced with glaring gaps in services and specifically of knowledge in status/rights and procedures [and] access to health care for not straightforward status/ documentation [cases]. [The Connecting Ottawa social worker] has ... been such a gift in these situations in working with other community workers and stakeholders.... I have referred several community workers and social workers to [her]. [She] has supported these people in gaining ... knowledge of access and rights, navigating a tough system [and] action planning....”*

*“I do a lot of partnership brokering in my work... Having Connecting Ottawa helped me to start a series of info sessions geared to clients of one organization and they were very happy about the outcomes.”*

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### ***Evidence from the Frontline Staff Interviews***

The results from the surveys with frontline staff and network members regarding capacity building are supported by the interviews conducted with frontline staff. In the interviews, participants reported that they gain capacity to work with the clients on legal issues through the case consultations, easy access to information through the website, e-mails or calls to Connecting Ottawa staff, as well as through Lunch and Learns and legal education events (both general and those geared to their organization). Many frontline staff reported that their capacity in relation to legal issues had been increased. They also reported that they learn from the case consultations and described the case consultations as “ongoing training”. The interviews provided some detail on how staff’s capacity to work as trusted intermediaries is increased as a result of using the resources provided by Connecting Ottawa.

#### **Gained greater knowledge of legal information and the legal system**

Most of the frontline staff from community and social service organizations that we interviewed reported that they had gained knowledge of legal information. The specific areas they reported learning about included:

- Immigration and refugee law
- Housing law
- Labour and employment law
- Family Law
- Sponsorship issues and rules related to domestic violence situations

- How the legal system works
- Conflict of interest issues
- The difference between legal advice and legal information
- The steps in working through basic legal cases with a client

### **Knowing where to go to access legal information**

In the frontline staff interviews, community and social service organization staff reported that the Connecting Ottawa team through consultations and educational events had helped them learn where to quickly get legal information in order to help members of the focus populations. Connecting Ottawa staff teach community organization staff how to access information. The regular newsletters also provide information on community resources.

### **More comfortable providing legal information**

Most of the frontline staff from community and health organizations reported in the interviews that since partnering with Connecting Ottawa they felt more comfortable providing legal information to clients. A few staff cautioned, however, that they were comfortable providing basic information, but were not comfortable when clients faced more complex situations. They said that for these cases the ongoing consultation with the Connecting Ottawa team was essential in order for clients to receive efficient and effective supports required to resolve the legal issues they were experiencing.

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*“They organize Lunch and Learns and that’s also a very good service that they provide. It’s free and so you can brush up and deepen your knowledge about legal issues that you don’t really have all that much time to start doing a whole bunch of research into.”*

*“When things are explained to the client, we learn. So, it is very helpful to know how the legal system works and the barriers to accessing legal services and where to refer for community resources and also much more on rights and responsibilities. So this is my professional development as well as helping clients in the same regard.”*

*“[I have] a better understanding of a lot of the immigration laws, specifically having to do with humanitarian applications for when you are denied asylum and then you apply for humanitarian reasons... I’ve benefitted from [the lawyer’s] explanation to the client and what the client can do and what I can do to help the client which has helped me later on when I have other clients in the same situation, I don’t need to run to her (Connecting Ottawa staff) quite as often anymore.”*

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*“So learning more about legal stuff also involves knowing more about when to stop because if you provide this information, there may be some legal consequences.”*

*“After she helped with the employment related case, I helped another client with what is a severance pay and another one... I was more comfortable to say this is the information since I got it from the link [the Connecting Ottawa social worker] sent to me.”*

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### **More effective and efficient in providing information to clients**

In the frontline staff interviews, most of the participants from community and health agencies reported that since partnering with Connecting Ottawa they were more effective and efficient in providing information to clients. They discussed how when consulting with the Connecting Ottawa team their clients receive more efficient referrals and supports and more cases are resolved. They also reported that since they themselves are more informed they are able to identify issues and provide information in a more effective and efficient way.

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*“I think there is a difference when you are cold calling an agency for support versus when you’ve been connected by somebody else. It is very valuable when someone else that already has a relationship with that provider is able to say ‘I have a colleague, she has this case, can you talk to her?’ That kind of connection really makes a huge difference in being able to get the support faster and more in depth.”*

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## **2.4.2 Capacity Building for Staff in the Legal Organizations**

### *Evidence from the Frontline Staff and Network Member Surveys*

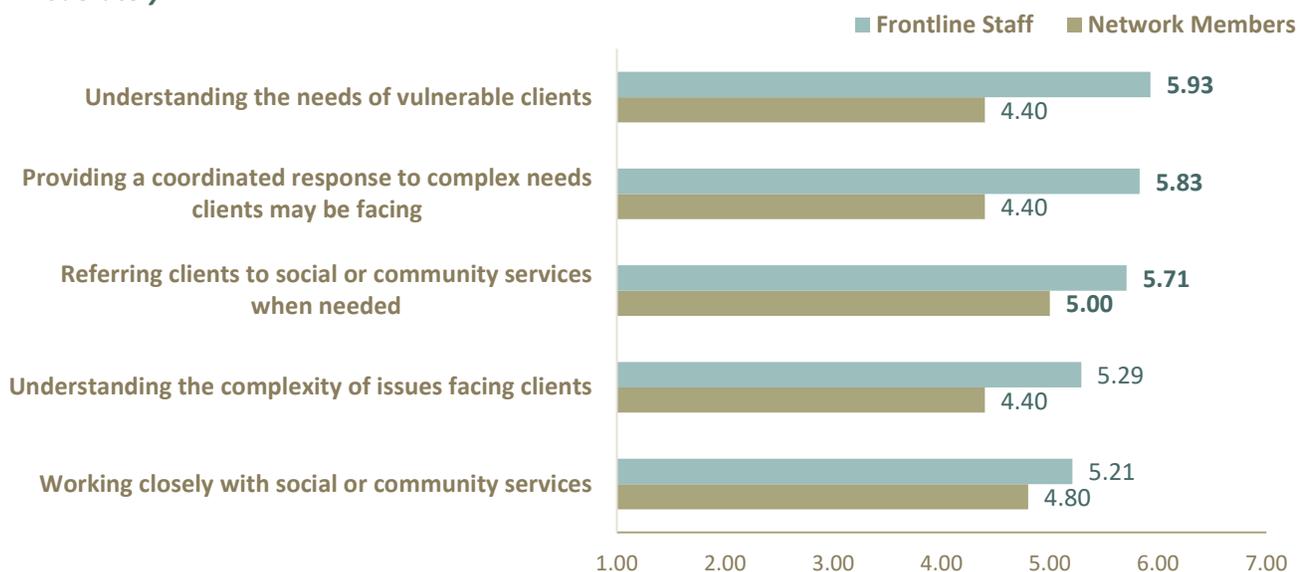
In the frontline staff survey, respondents from legal organizations were also asked questions about the extent to which different services were part of their job, and then how much Connecting Ottawa may have helped them with these different services. Most or all of the legal service providers indicated that each of the following was a significant part of their jobs – proportions shown are those who answered that this was a significant or regular part of their jobs (responded 6 or 7 on the 7-point scale):

- Understanding the complexity of issues facing clients (100%)
- Working closely with social or community services (79%)
- Understanding the needs of vulnerable clients (67%)
- Referring clients to social or community services when needed (53%)
- Providing a coordinated response to complex issues clients may be facing (50%)

Respondents from legal organizations to the frontline staff survey were then asked to indicate, on a 7-point scale (from 1=not at all to 7=significantly), to what extent Connecting Ottawa had helped with each of these items. Network members from legal organizations were asked the same questions in the network member survey. Respondents to both surveys were asked to rate a number of outcomes with respect to capacity building for legal service providers. As shown in Figure 4 below, frontline staff rated these five items quite positively and higher than the average ratings provided by the network members. **The frontline legal service providers reported that Connecting Ottawa had been helpful with each of the services: 75% or more of respondents answered at least 4 on the 7-point scale for all items.** Network members from legal organizations rated moderate improvements in these areas; however, the number of people who responded to these questions in the network survey was quite small (N=5), making it difficult to draw conclusions for that sample. Please see Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4: Frontline Staff and Network Member Survey Results (Legal Organizations) - Connecting Ottawa's help with providing social/community-related services**

*Results for the frontline legal staff were quite consistent and positive across the five items: all received at least a rating of 5.2 on the 7-point scale. The items that received the highest ratings (5.7 or higher) included understanding the needs of vulnerable clients, providing a coordinated response to complex needs clients may be facing, and referring clients to social or community services when needed. Network members from legal organizations rated these items more moderately.*



Legal organization respondents to the frontline staff survey were also asked the extent to which Connecting Ottawa had helped them on a number of items related to social/complex issues and working with the focus populations. **Legal service providers reported that Connecting Ottawa had been helpful in working with clients in the focus populations and had helped them be more effective and efficient in addressing both the legal and social needs of clients in the focus populations (average of 5.8 rating for all items).** Two-thirds or more of the respondents (67% to 73%) answered 6 or 7 to each of the items. The average rating

for reducing referral fatigue was a little lower (4.8). For that item, a greater proportion (20%) answered at the lower end of the scale (1-3) than they did for the other three items (7%). Nonetheless, close to 50% of the respondents (47%) answered at the high end of the scale for that item as well.

**Figure 5: Frontline Staff Survey Results (Legal Organizations) - How Connecting Ottawa has helped**

*Legal service providers answered three of the four items very consistently and positive: they answered 5.8 (out of 7) for working with clients in the focus populations, and being more efficient and effective in addressing both the legal and social needs of clients.*



Some frontline legal service providers also provided specific examples or comments on how Connecting Ottawa had helped them in the work they do:

- Helping to understand and navigate the various social and community services and resources for their clients
- Helping to train students placed with them and providing help to clients via placement students
- Helping to obtain necessary resources and services for their clients or making necessary referrals
- Increasing their familiarity with the various services available
- Help with immigration issues that legal clinics cannot provide
- Building their capacity regarding dealing with social/community services and helping vulnerable clients

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*“In the past our office hosted a social work student placement. The students also worked closely with [Connecting Ottawa]. Having this direct, in-house connection to social work was very helpful for some of my clients. I recall having one case in which the student assisted my client to arrange for a hospital-type bed that they needed in their home. It would not have been possible for me to have the time to assist the client with those issues if the student was not available to us. There were several other cases in which the social work student was directly involved, which allowed us to expand the type of service that we offered our clients.”*

*“Connecting Ottawa has helped me in my work by providing resources and training. The website assists me assessing possible areas where clients can receive additional support and provides enough detail so that I can refer clients to resources at the court house or in the community. Further, an in-person training with a Connecting Ottawa staff person helped me consider new approaches to file management and client interviews based on a trauma-informed care perspective. The training provided concrete examples of how to handle specific situations as well as take away resources. Very helpful!”*

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### *Evidence from the Staff Interviews*

In the frontline staff interviews, staff from legal organizations echoed the results of the surveys. They reported that their capacity was increased by having Connecting Ottawa as a resource or tool that supports their work. Most said that even though they are already aware of the issues faced by vulnerable populations and try to take a holistic approach, they do not always have the time or resources to reach out as efficiently as they could to the community supports that their clients need. Therefore, most of the lawyers we interviewed did report that using the resources Connecting Ottawa offers does make their work more efficient and effective because they have a link to get clients into other services as needed and to address both the legal and social needs of the focus populations. Most agreed that they had an increased understanding of the availability and location of social services. They reported that the Connecting Ottawa social worker connects them to the service and tells them who they should speak to, resulting in a more effective, efficient and holistic service than they would be able to provide without that support.

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*“I tend to take the perspective that you really can’t fully address the legal issue unless you address everything holistically because there is no way that you’re going to succeed, for example, on a case where a client needs counselling to ... get to a point where they can testify and you’re not getting them counselling... I’m always trying to find a way that I can be more efficient and have other resources to assist me in doing those other things.”*

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### 2.4.3 Increased Organizational Capacity to Improve Access to Justice for the Focus Populations

#### *Evidence from Network Members*

The results of the network member survey suggest that Connecting Ottawa is having an impact on organizational capacity or the way individual organizations operate or deliver services to clients. Ratings on numerous items indicated that Connecting Ottawa has helped the staff of community and social services organizations to increase their knowledge and ability to deliver legal information. Respondents from legal services organizations reported a small change in increased expectations of lawyers and legal staff to work more effectively with clients. There was less impact on intake practices/processes and policies. Although Connecting Ottawa strives for inter-sectoral collaboration, and a more comprehensive and coordinated response to clients in the focus populations, they do not have specific goals to effect change on these processes. These questions were included to explore the possibility that there may be impact in these areas.<sup>12 13</sup> [See Figure 6.]

**Figure 6: Network Member Survey Results - Changes to Organizations**

*Respondents saw the biggest changes in staff's knowledge and ability with respect to legal information - particularly in increasing staff's knowledge of the difference between legal information and legal advice.*



<sup>12</sup> The number of respondents for each item varied with some leaving the item unanswered or answering “not applicable”: this ranged from 5 to 13.

<sup>13</sup> Items were rated on a 7-point scale from “not at all” to “significantly”.

### *Evidence from Frontline Staff*

In the frontline staff interviews, participants reported that, as they gain knowledge and have increased capacity to address legal issues, the organizational capacity to address issues also increases. Staff reported numerous ways in which their organization's capacity to help the focus populations access justice had been improved.

- Several staff reported how they were now “a go-to person” in their organization for other workers who required information on a case involving a legal matter.
- As staff consult with the Connecting Ottawa team about complex cases, the general capacity of the organization to ensure members of the focus population do not fall through the cracks improves.
- Legal issues are more at the forefront in the organization and are discussed more often.
- They are more cautious when giving out legal information now.
- Made it easier to get clients the services they need and as they are able to support clients with legal issues the word gets out and more members of the focus population seek out the services of the organization.
- The Connecting Ottawa team understands the issues faced by the focus populations and understands accessibility issues. Connecting Ottawa is an integral part of how they do their work – it is one of the tools they use.
- The organization's confidence in being able to help members of the focus populations with access to justice is increased.
- The Connecting Ottawa team are navigators of the legal system and reduce the barriers to accessing legal information that organizations sometimes face.
- Has brought more of social work perspective to the community legal clinics (e.g., learning from Connecting Ottawa about trauma informed care).
- Allows legal clinics to be more holistic in their approach to serving vulnerable populations that have many social needs that legal clinics are sometimes too busy to address.

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*“During our staff meetings we raise the issue of legal advice and legal information a lot.”*

*“I think it reflects on the capacity of our organization because a lot of people find us through word of mouth. So if they are satisfied, and they are served and they are successful with the issues that they bring in, they will recommend us as an organization to their friends and new people.”*

*“[It] increased our confidence towards the system. There might be someone or some agency to help our clients and we trust the system more. That encourages us to encourage our clients to speak up if you are facing some discrimination. This initiative gives us hope for the justice system. We were just disappointed, frustrated before.”*

*“It broadened our options to support clients because otherwise we would not be able to navigate the system. We would not be able to even know where to refer or what to do in certain cases, we would feel stuck.”*

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Some of the frontline staff we interviewed are from organizations that have more limited roles in serving the focus populations so while they described an impact it was not as great as for the larger organizations. Some do not do direct client work but rather give out information to clients.

## 2.5 Increased Coordination among Agencies in Ottawa

### 2.5.1 Evidence from the Frontline Staff and Network Member Surveys and Stakeholder Interviews

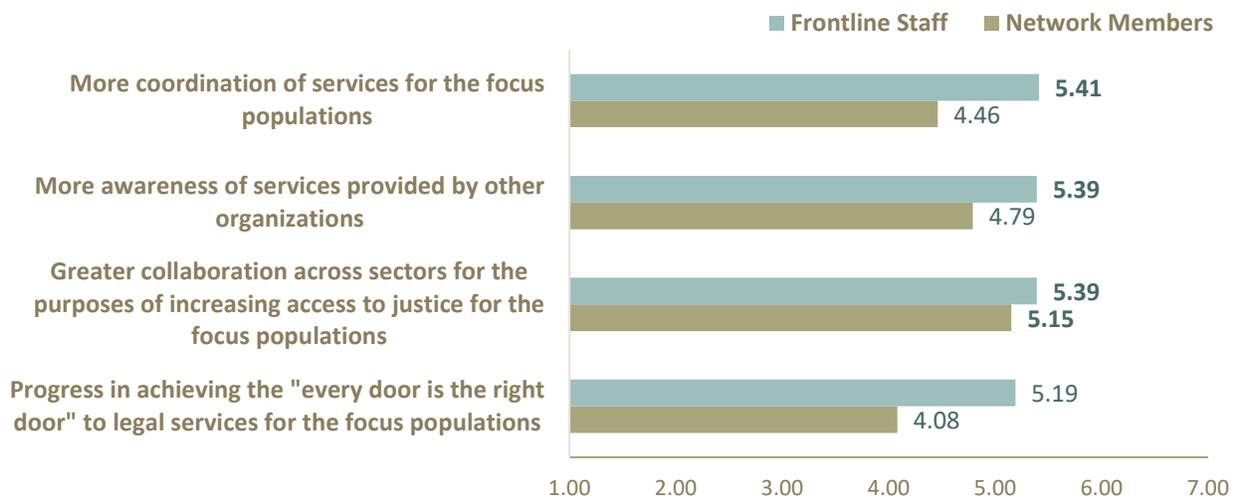
**The results of the network survey, frontline staff survey, and stakeholder interviews show that staff and network members believe there is greater collaboration across sectors, more awareness of services, and greater service coordination because of Connecting Ottawa.** For example, ratings on the two surveys indicated that Connecting Ottawa is having a moderate impact on coordination and collaboration amongst agencies working with the focus populations. As seen in Figure 7, according to both groups of respondents, Connecting Ottawa has had an impact on awareness of services, coordination of services, greater accessibility to legal services, and greater collaboration across sectors. Both groups gave high ratings (5.15 and 5.39 for the network and staff respondents, respectively) for sectors collaborating together for the purpose of increasing access to justice for the focus populations.<sup>14</sup>

*“We deal with the same problems, so it’s a matter of exchanging information – how other people deal with things we deal with. I think even the Connecting Ottawa Advisory Committee is a platform for us to put new concerns on the table and look at how we can support each other or how we can be a united voice in the community... So certainly [there has been] a decrease of isolation of each organization....”*

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that the sample sizes were smaller for these items for both respondent groups. For the network member survey, approximately 52% to 61% answered these items; for the frontline staff survey, approximately 56% to 66% answered these items.

### Figure 7: Network and Frontline Staff Survey Results - Awareness, Coordination and Collaboration among Service Providers

*Results show moderate impact on these items by both groups of respondents. For those frontline staff respondents who provided ratings, their responses to the four items were positive and consistent (from 5.2 to 5.4). Network members responses ranged from 4.1 to 5.2 and they gave the highest rating to 'greater collaboration across sectors'.*



Approximately one-half of the comments on the network survey, in response to a question on coordination and collaboration, also touched on improved coordination of services and/or greater collaboration across sectors. For example:

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*“The two staff from Connecting Ottawa has done a lot of service coordination with more than one service provider with clients who have multiple needs.”*

*“The Connecting Ottawa staff members have been helpful in linking our staff members to the right people in other organizations who could assist on issues that our lawyers could not take on. For example: the Connecting Ottawa staff members assisted a hearing-impaired client in trying to resolve immigration-related issues.”*

*“Training and Connecting Ottawa workshops bring agencies together....”*

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In the stakeholder interviews, participants reported that before Connecting Ottawa, coordination between organizations that work with the focus populations was ad hoc, and now it is more strategic. Connecting Ottawa brings organizations together through conferences, public education legal events (including Lunch and Learns), regular newsletters that update network members on community events and happenings, and the Advisory Committee. Not all organizations in the network have the same interest, goals or capacity to

be involved – nor do they gain as much from the network. Outcomes in terms of increased connections vary across members.

### 2.5.2 Evidence from the Frontline Staff Interviews

In the frontline staff interviews participants reported that the case consultations help them learn about other community resources and helps coordinate services and bring organizations together to work on issues their clients face. In addition to the case consultations, staff described other ways in which different organizations are brought together, forming relationships so that service coordination is enhanced. These include:

- Connecting Ottawa staff participate in networks, bring issues that affect the focus populations to the forefront, and bring issues to the network (e.g. bed bug resource from Toronto).
- Connecting Ottawa sends out e-mails and newsletters that contain information on other organizations and what they do.
- Organisations find out about each other through the annual conference hosted by Connecting Ottawa, the Lunch and Learns and other education events.
- Connecting Ottawa brings organizations together to address issues as they arise (e.g. changes in ID for refugees).
- The Advisory Committee brings together members of different organizations to set priorities and provide direction to the Connecting Ottawa initiative.

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*“It’s good to be connected with them. Sometimes the developmental/intellectual disability groups tend to be very isolated and always kind of speaking to the same crowd and.... partnering with Connecting Ottawa is one step outside of that. It expands our relationships. It expands contacts. It gives us more resources....”*

*“[Connecting Ottawa] helps to build up the partnerships and referral services and understanding of services. Like when different agencies sit in their different offices then they need somebody to tell them ‘This service is given here, you can refer your client for this service to this place’ or ‘That agency is better in doing this’. So in that regard I believe we have better relationships and partnerships and collaboration between the agencies.”*

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## Part C: Connecting Ottawa Process, Model and Critical Components

In addition to looking at the outcomes and impacts of Connecting Ottawa, another main focus of the evaluation was the focus on process. The following sections we address the process questions listed in Section 2.2.2<sup>15</sup> and summarize the main results from the evaluation of Connecting Ottawa's critical components, what was learned about what strategies and activities have been most effective, and its reach into the focus populations.

### 2.6 Components, Strategies and Activities: What has been learned about what is working well?

The Connecting Ottawa model uses various strategies, activities and approaches in order to work towards its goal of increasing access to justice for the focus populations (see section 2.1). In this section we review survey results (from both the network and frontline staff surveys) with respect to respondents' ratings of their awareness, usage, and effectiveness of different Connecting Ottawa services and resources. The effectiveness of these different components, and stakeholders and frontline staff perceptions from the interviews of Connecting Ottawa's critical components, are also reviewed.

#### 2.6.1 Evidence from the Frontline Staff and Network Member Surveys

In both the network and frontline staff surveys, respondents were asked if they were using, or had used, the various services and resources offered by Connecting Ottawa. **The vast majority of both groups (67% or more) had used the website for general information and attended PLE events and presentations.** Network members were more likely to have attended the annual conference and used the website resources. Frontline staff were more likely to have consulted with the social worker on cases. More than one-half of the frontline staff and network respondents had used most of the services or resources shown in Figure 8 below. Both groups were least likely to have used the volunteer facilitators.<sup>16</sup> [See Figure 8.]

The case consultation, website and educational events are critical to the Connecting Ottawa model in terms of building staff capacity. In addition to these, however, the program has developed other resources and initiatives that can facilitate and support the process of frontline staff helping their clients to access justice. Results indicated that frontline staff survey respondents were more likely to be unaware of various resources and services than were the network survey respondents. When asked about usage, less than 20% of network respondents answered "not aware" for most of the items (the exception was "presentations and communiqués" – 23%). However, for frontline staff survey respondents, the following resources and services were unknown to more than one-quarter of respondents:

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<sup>15</sup> The final process question posed in Section 2.2.2 (Question 8) will be addressed in Chapter 4.

<sup>16</sup> Network members were not asked about the website as a portal to other organizations' services nor were they asked about the hard copy resources.

- Volunteer facilitators (45.2%)
- Rack cards (34.1%)
- Website resources (34.1%)
- Annual Connecting Ottawa conference (33.3%)
- Hard copy resources (27.9%)

**Figure 8: Network and Frontline Staff Survey Results - Usage of Connecting Ottawa Services and Resources**

*The largest proportion of respondents, for both groups, reported that they had used (past or current) the website for general information. Frontline staff were more likely than network members to report that they had consulted with the social worker or attended presentations or received communiques. Network members were more likely than frontline staff to have used the website resources and to have attended the annual conference. Both groups were least likely to have used the volunteer facilitators.*

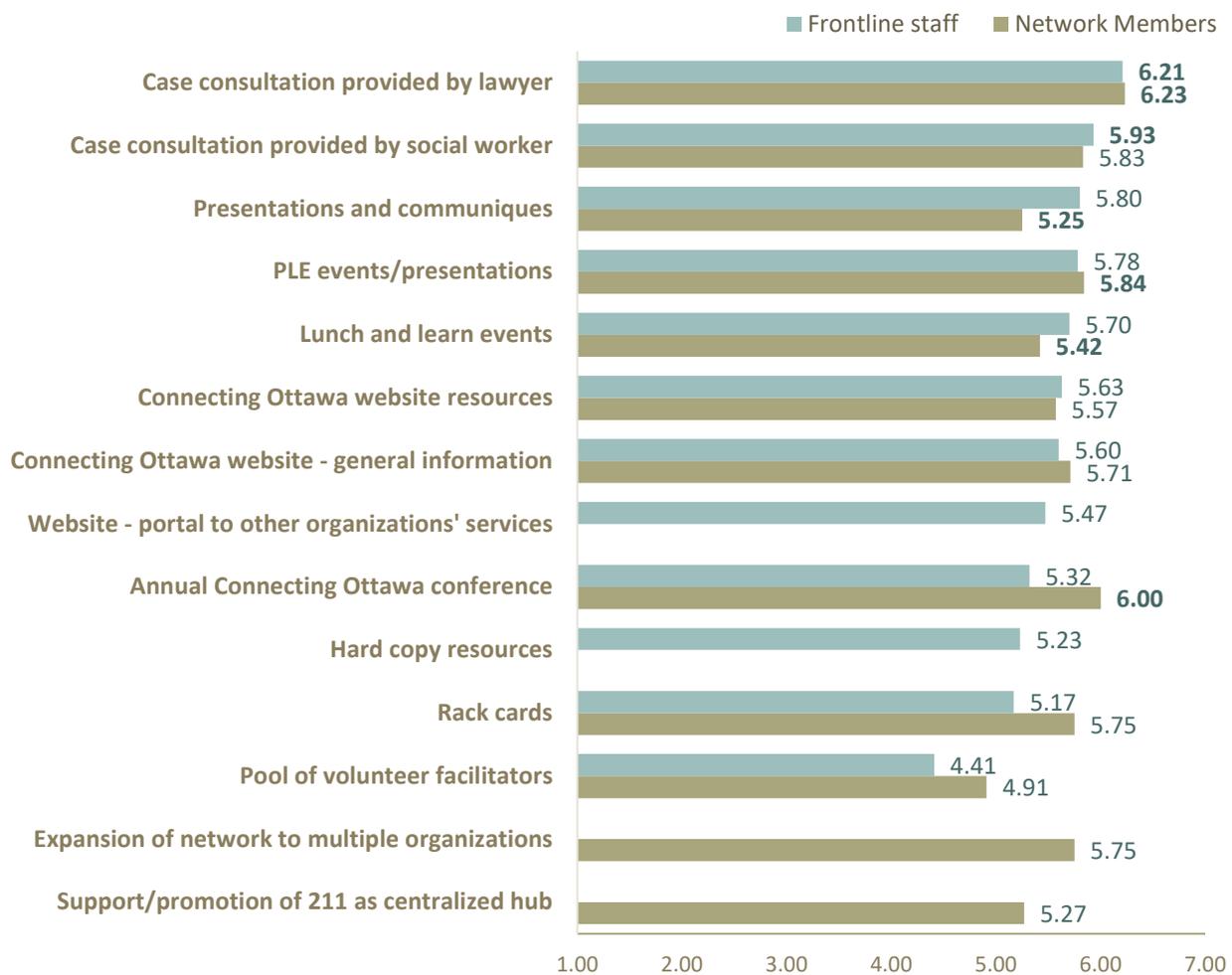


Respondents to both the frontline staff and network surveys were also asked to rate the effectiveness of strategies, resources and services of Connecting Ottawa. With the exception of volunteer facilitators, both

groups of respondents rated all strategies, resources and services as at least 5.1 on the 7-point scale. Both groups rated the case consultations, by both the lawyer and social worker, and the PLEs very highly (5.8 or higher). Network members also rated the annual conference very highly (6).<sup>17</sup> [See Figure 9.]

### Figure 9: Network Member and Frontline Staff Survey Results - Effectiveness Ratings for Connecting Ottawa Strategies, Resources and Services

*Respondents rated the effectiveness of each of the strategies, resources, and activities highly - with all but one item receiving a rating of greater than 5 on the 7-point scale. All respondents (frontline and network) rated the case consultations and PLEs highly. Volunteer facilitators were given a rating of between 4 and 5 from both the frontline staff and network members.*



<sup>17</sup> There were some items that applied to one group of respondents but not the other. Expansion of the network and the support/promotion of 211 as a centralized hub applied only to the network members – these were strategies that were tried with that group. Two items were added to the frontline staff survey in consultation with Connecting Ottawa: the website as a portal to other services and the hard copy resources. Note as well, that the sample sizes for the “effectiveness” items varied for the frontline staff because more of them were not aware of certain services and resources (N=17 to 35).

## 2.6.2 Evidence from Stakeholder and Frontline staff interviews

What we heard in the stakeholder interviews about the critical components or strategies of Connecting Ottawa echoes the positive results for all the strategies queried in the network and frontline staff surveys. Stakeholders were hesitant to name one or two critical components of the Connecting Ottawa model. When asked about critical components or strategies, stakeholders usually named numerous components and reported that the model is strong and works because it is holistic and includes numerous approaches and strategies.

In the frontline staff interviews the feedback on the Connecting Ottawa model overall and its process was very positive. For the three organizations where Connecting Ottawa works on-site (CCI, OCISO and Vanier), the access to information was described as very efficient. For others, it seems that Connecting Ottawa is still very accessible and the team is quick to respond to requests and relay information. Interviewees seemed to have a very positive relationship with the Connecting Ottawa staff; everyone praised them and said they have a wealth of information, and are flexible, accessible, and a pleasure to work with.

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*“...All of these strategies, they are not meant to be exclusive. They complement each other...the holistic approach.”*

*“I mean I think if I speak for... our clinic in general, overall I think it’s really useful to have this service. I’m trying to picture what it would be like if there wasn’t a Connecting Ottawa now, and I think there would be a lot of people falling through the cracks definitely. There is only so much that the clinic lawyers can do. I think it’s good when you know you have people who have that expertise and know how to deal with these types of situations and where they can get the clients the help that they need because it’s not just legal issues. Clients are dealing with so many other issues. I can’t keep up with all the services in Ottawa, there are so many and [the Connecting Ottawa team] are so knowledgeable about everything. It’s incredible.. “*

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Results from the frontline staff and stakeholder interviews indicate that each strategy used in Connecting Ottawa has different strengths and plays a role in increasing access to justice for the focus populations.

### *Case Consultations*

- **Among frontline staff interviewed, case consulting was the most well-known and useful of all of the components and the one that helped most in improving access to justice for the focus populations.**
- Provide direct interaction with frontline staff – being able to call them and quickly help solve a problem.
- The flexibility of the Connecting Ottawa team to go to other offices makes it more accessible for focus populations and frontline staff.

- Frontline staff from community and social organizations appear to call on the social worker and lawyer interchangeably. Whom they contact may be the result of a previous relationship with one or the other or, if they require someone speaking Spanish or Creole, then they will contact the lawyer.
- Frontline staff from legal organizations most often called on the Connecting Ottawa social worker when consulting about services. Lawyers described receiving support on a variety of issues (e.g., information on shelters, child care and other subsidies, school issues for children, information on ESL programs).
- Lawyer/social worker team are navigators – they help agencies navigate through “difficult waters of legal issues.”
- The case consultation provides one-on-one training for frontline workers while supporting/helping the focus populations with their legal issues.
- The Connecting Ottawa team models a holistic approach for frontline staff.
- Sometimes the Connecting Ottawa team fills a gap when there are no adequate resources to help the focus populations – prevents them from falling through the cracks.
- Helps focus populations and frontline staff see that there are solutions to legal issues.
- Creates a partnership between Connecting Ottawa team and agency staff.

### *Public Legal Education and Lunch and Learn Events*

- **Educational events are useful to staff in a variety of ways including learning new information and keeping up-to-date with changes in legal information, and meeting and networking with staff from other organizations. Staff reported that PLEs are a critical component for increasing their knowledge.**
- Raise awareness but also provide an opportunity to promote Connecting Ottawa and make resources available.
- Help to build trust and build relationships.
- Reach more people versus one worker at a time.
- Increase referrals for case consultations.
- Are used by non-legal service providers more than legal service providers.
- Are most useful for frontline staff when they occur at their own organizations as it is difficult to make the time to attend them when they occur off-site.

### *Website*

- **Frontline staff and stakeholders reported that the website was used and was useful, describing it as local and relevant, up-to-date, and user-friendly.**

- Website is a focal point – a tool that everybody can use.
- Website is helpful for frontline staff in finding timely information about a range of topics.
- Frontline staff's clients who can read English or French can also use the website to find legal information and resources.
- Connects resources, information, and services relevant to each legal category (one stop for information).

### *Resources and Publications*

- **Frontline staff reported that resources – either from the website, rack cards, or other written material – were not used as much as other components.**
- Few stakeholders and frontline staff that were interviewed were familiar with the rack cards; however, there were some that did use these resources to distribute to clients or to use for their own reference and found them to be very useful.
- Many frontline staff that were interviewed did report that they received emails and newsletters from Connecting Ottawa and found them helpful. One person reported that he translates information received through emails and the newsletter and sends this information out to refugees.

### *Advisory Committee*

- Builds connections and relationships.
- Brings people together to discuss and problem solve issues and barriers in the community.

### *Annual Conference*

- **The annual conference brings people together for networking – it is a connector.**
- Reaches a lot of people and increases knowledge.
- Promotes the work of Connecting Ottawa.
- Was not as well known among frontline staff as it was for network members, but for those frontline staff who had attended they found it very helpful for networking, getting to know service providers from different sectors, and getting new information.

### *Volunteer Facilitators*

- **They are relatively unknown and not well used by frontline staff.**

- Frontline staff who had not heard of the volunteer facilitators did find it to be a useful idea in helping members of the focus populations in ways that staff did not have time for (e.g., accompanying them to appointments).
- For a couple of frontline staff that had used the facilitators, they reported it to be a little time consuming and difficult to coordinate for their clients.

### 2.6.3 The Volunteer Facilitator's Perspective

Connecting Ottawa developed the Volunteer Facilitator component to address the gap that can exist between the point of referral and the point of legal services delivery where clients never actually connect with the services to which they have been referred. The intent was that this gap could be bridged by trusted intermediaries who are volunteer facilitators trained and supported to problem solve with the client to systematically overcome the barriers to connection. Connecting Ottawa recruits and trains a pool of volunteer facilitators who are matched with clients on the basis of gender, culture, languages spoken, and availability. Volunteer facilitators can also engage in outreach to their communities. Volunteer facilitators receive honoraria for their assignments. Connecting Ottawa promotes the service to the network partners and other organizations they might work with. When a frontline worker is seeking a volunteer facilitator they contact Connecting Ottawa who facilitates the match.

Connecting Ottawa's screening and orientation process includes interviews, information sessions, an Ottawa Police Service Record Check for volunteers working with vulnerable populations in community non-profit agencies, and the completion of a full-day training session. The training includes content on active listening, problem solving, cultural competencies, roles and responsibilities and maintaining personal boundaries. Volunteers sign a Volunteer Agreement that outlines the expected relationship between Facilitators and Connecting Ottawa. In December 2016 Connecting Ottawa outlined in their report to the Law Foundation that they had 21 trained volunteer facilitators with the capacity among them to speak 19 languages.

Interviews with three volunteer facilitators explored the role of the volunteer facilitator and the strengths and weakness of this component. Each of the volunteer facilitators had worked on at least four assignments and reported that the assignments were not too frequent. One who had volunteered at Vanier Community Service Centre said that when she was there the assignments were more frequent because the staff had very easy access to her. The assignments they described included:

- Providing emotional support and helping a woman proofread her documents
- Facilitating communication with a service provider and interpretations
- Accompanying clients to lawyer appointments and other meetings
- Presenting during public legal education events
- Helping with completion of forms
- Helping with clients who have complex needs and when communication is very difficult
- Accompanying clients who did not know how to get to a meeting
- Helping clients to understand their referral, what is expected of them, and when and how to get to the appointment

The volunteer facilitators believe that Connecting Ottawa is an important initiative for members of the focus populations, especially linguistic minorities and newcomers. They reported on numerous access barriers to legal services experienced by people from their communities' experience, including language, not knowing about services, isolation, racism, fear and cultural differences.

As people who were newcomers themselves, the volunteer facilitators described their understanding of access to justice and how Connecting Ottawa helps improve access to justice and reduce barriers that members of the focus population experience.

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*"... there was a time where I didn't know where to go and who to ask. There were language barriers and four of those clients that I have helped I can see through them that when they have someone who speaks their own language and you explain to them the resources that is available to them, you can see the differences that you are making to someone's life. So it is a huge thing, and it is quite important."*

*"Information means a lot for newcomers because...when I came, it was hard because you don't know where to start. You need someone to give you information to show you the steps of the way you have to go."*

*"We can say that we have a lot of resources in Canada but even though we have those resources not a lot of people have access to them. So some people are afraid to go to use those resources and some people are not able to communicate... I say that this is one of the main reasons I got involved with Connecting Ottawa because I might be able to help people in my community who don't speak English and who don't speak French to get access to justice. I meet a lot of people and they have a bunch of problems but they are afraid to go and they don't know we have these kinds of services. One of the things I like about Connecting Ottawa is the outreach program, because they do the workshops and you can tell the people that we have this service. It's a free service. We have free services and you can get access to justice."*

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At least one of the volunteer facilitators reported that she also shares information learned with others in her community and thus that is one way in which the volunteer facilitator program can help increase knowledge of legal issues in the focus populations.

In addition to the usefulness of Connecting Ottawa in improving access to justice for members of the focus populations, the volunteer facilitators also reported that the program benefitted them personally. They reported more confidence, more knowledge of laws and the legal sector/field, a better understanding of barriers to accessing justice and/or the complexity of issues faced by the focus populations, increased experience in working directly with clients and service providers, help in achieving their own goals and aspirations, and networking opportunities with agencies in Ottawa.

The volunteer facilitators were happy with their role and the training and support they had received from Connecting Ottawa. One volunteer facilitator, however, explained that it is difficult to coordinate the assignments. Since the cases and their timing are unpredictable it also becomes difficult for the volunteer

facilitators to coordinate their schedule. She suggested that volunteer facilitators communicate their schedules and availability clearly so that the Connecting Ottawa team can access facilitators more efficiently.

The three facilitators explained that while they thought that Connecting Ottawa was doing a good job of improving access to justice for the focus populations, they should conduct more direct outreach to communities. They did acknowledge, however, that the initiative was already doing a lot and more outreach might be beyond their capacity.

*“All the training is only for the staff facilitator and then the facilitators have to go [to] their own community to make a difference. It would be better if in the future we start giving the information or training to the ... people ... directly - the newcomers themselves and give them the information/ the training.”*

## 2.7 What are the Critical Components and Best Practices of the Connecting Ottawa model?

*“I think that flexibility adds to the connecting part ... There’s a lot of need so when things are really complex, people don’t want to deal with it. [For example] ...you have a legal immigration settlement issue and the person doesn’t know English and French and then you add another [issue] - like they might have a mental disability or mental capacity issue, then nobody wants to deal with this. So having at least someone ...when ...clients get pushed away because it’s too hectic, at least bringing them back in and connecting to where the services are is very important... [The] focus on the communication barrier ... that’s really important.”*

*“Being here, tailoring the legal advice to the situation.... To me this is true access to justice, the tailoring... Connecting Ottawa can be very specific, very unique in that way... We go with Connecting Ottawa because we value the fact that there is an assessment taking place, there [are] quality questions being asked....”*

The stakeholders and staff we interviewed identified some critical components, and best practices, of the Connecting Ottawa model, including:

### The right staff

- **Having the right staff is critical:** fully bilingual in French and English, experience and understanding of cultural difference and barriers, experience working with vulnerable populations, flexible, and resilient. Given the small size, team members need to work well together – there needs to be a good fit.

- Frontline staff reported that the Connecting Ottawa staff are very knowledgeable and connected to community resources, and they appreciated when the information provided is geared to client's specific case.
- Frontline staff also appreciated the efficiency, accessibility, and dedication of Connecting Ottawa staff – they respond quickly (in person, email or by phone) and will do what they can to help.
- Having the Connecting Ottawa staff to problem solve with was also greatly appreciated by frontline staff (i.e., not just having online or written information).

### **A mobile team/flexibility**

- **A mobile team – going to where clients are at** (i.e., community agencies). This helps the frontline workers who have limited time available to help individual clients and because it provides one-on-one training for them. It also helps the focus populations: they can access help in an agency that they know and are comfortable with, increasing their confidence that somebody is going to help them, that they are getting the assistance they need, and that their issues will be resolved.
- **Flexibility is a core best practice.** This includes being available to frontline staff at agencies when needed (not having to book appointment). This flexibility was critical in helping agencies connect with the project.

### **Holistic and tailored**

- Having multiple approaches and strategies is important and helps create more holistic services.
- Service is tailored to individual cases during consultations with lawyer and social worker, rather than being dealt with in a general way. This ensures that the right questions are being asked and answered and that the case is dealt with more effectively and efficiently. The team also has to think outside the box and develop creative strategies to increase access to justice.

### **Building relationships/outreach**

- Building the relationships between Connecting Ottawa and partners and establishing a core group is critical to keeping the project going, to help identify the gaps, and to develop a vision.
- Increasing awareness of services among partners, and building relationships between partner agencies, also helps in increasing access to services, for the focus populations, and reducing referral fatigue.
- Ongoing outreach is critical – it increases awareness about legal issues and access to Connecting Ottawa resources.

### **Having a champion**

- A champion, who has the skills and commitment to oversee the project and keep it going, is necessary. For Connecting Ottawa, one person has been there since its inception and it has been his commitment that has ensured that Connecting Ottawa continued despite staff changes and Advisory Group changes. This type of project requires that there be at least one person (or organization) who commits to being highly engaged for the long-term.

- The champion needs to build relationships and find people who are willing to commit to the project and develop a vision.

## 2.8 How is the Overall Project Operating?

### 2.8.1 Strengths

**The evaluation data suggests that Connecting Ottawa has gained recognition in the Ottawa community and is a well-respected initiative.** Connecting Ottawa has built trust with legal clinics, health organizations, and social and community service organizations.

Partners from non-legal and legal organizations view Connecting Ottawa as a valuable resource, as described in previous sections of this report.

The Connecting Ottawa team is responsive to community needs. One of the ways they do this is through the Advisory Committee. For example, an Advisory Committee member reported in a stakeholder interview that when the Connecting Ottawa team sees a legal issue arise frequently in consultations, they will develop and deliver a public legal education event related to that issue. Advisory Committee members also reported that their input into the work of Connecting Ottawa is taken seriously and while they do not direct the project, the project's direction is determined by their input. The Connecting Ottawa team also reaches out to organizations to be part of the Advisory Committee and carefully thinks about ensuring that different perspectives are represented. Further, as one Advisory Committee member reported, during meetings they focus on maintenance, innovation and modification - always reviewing weaknesses.

All of the Advisory Committee members interviewed reported that they think that the Advisory Committee is functioning well. They reported on the following strengths of the Committee:

- It is a platform to put new concerns on the table.
- There is ongoing and effective communication from the Connecting Ottawa team on the program, its highlights and its struggles.
- The committee represents diverse interests and groups.

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*“One of the strengths I can mention is the fact that we in the Advisory Committee are from many backgrounds... and representing different communities and from different linguistic communities because each community has a different challenge from another one. But when we come together it is a way to address the issues that are faced by our community. So each one around the table is able to know what ... issues are faced by other communities, and we can - if it's necessary - propose some actions...”*

*“I think the way it is decided is that there is a certain ownership in the community. I think that's a key element because whatever Connecting Ottawa would like to either introduce or implement they don't do it themselves. They consult with key representatives from the community organizations that it works with.”*

*“I feel completely that my opinions are heard... When we say anything, when we have any opinions like this is actually taken into consideration so it just makes it seem like they're actually listening to the community and they're actually providing a service and tailoring it to meet the needs so it works very, very well”.*

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- It connects the legal sector and community/social services sectors through ongoing meetings and communications.
- Members feel ownership.
- Opinions are heard, respected, and when possible acted on.

It also appears that Connecting Ottawa is doing a good job at maintaining or increasing the level of involvement of network members. Approximately 45% of network survey respondents indicated no change in their involvement and approximately 40% indicated they were more involved than in the past. A small proportion, about 14%, was less involved currently than in the past. Some of those who had increased their involvement did so because they now had a better understanding of Connecting Ottawa and its services.

### 2.8.2 Challenges and Areas for Growth or Improvement

Most evaluation participants (network members, stakeholders and frontline staff) had very positive things to say about the value of Connecting Ottawa. All groups, however, were asked if there were any recommendations or ways in which services could be improved. The challenges identified, and the recommendations or suggestions for improvement, are summarized and reported below.

#### *Evidence from Network Members and Stakeholders*

Many of the participants in the stakeholder interviews reported that while Connecting Ottawa is doing a good job of communicating and doing outreach and is having a strong impact on those that are connected, **more needs be done to expand on the network and enhance the involvement of some members that are less connected to the network.** They suggested, however, that it takes a lot of resources to do this and that with limited staff more outreach than what is presently happening would be difficult. Calls for consultations and public legal education events have increased over the years and between this work and the fluidity of the network which requires ongoing outreach and support just to maintain, more resources would be needed to expand on the work Connecting Ottawa currently does.

Stakeholders also identified some challenges and noted some Connecting Ottawa strategies that still need some work.

- There is still work to be done to promote the model as a capacity building model and not a legal service.
- Although the program operates as a capacity building model, there are times when Connecting Ottawa needs to be flexible in order to meet unmet legal needs and to ensure clients in the focus populations do not fall through the cracks. When these circumstances occur, Connecting Ottawa assesses these on a case-by-case basis to determine what can be done to help the clients. Responding directly to clients who contact them, or responding to case workers who require timely legal advice and cannot access it, are examples of when direct service to clients is provided. Walking the tightrope between being true to the program model and ensuring that some clients in the focus populations receive the legal information and services they require, has been an ongoing challenge – and one that is not easily addressed.

- It is an ongoing challenge to balance the number of legal education events. Each session increases the number of calls to the Connecting Ottawa team and with limited resources it is challenging to meet the increasing demands for case consultations.
- Advisory Committee members believe that the Lunch and Learn events are very useful; however, attendance is not always good, making it challenging for staff that put work into planning and facilitating the events. Locations change for the sessions, which is a strength because it can bring staff from different agencies together; yet, it can be a challenge for some frontline staff to get to the location during their lunch hour.
- According to stakeholders, the two Connecting Ottawa staff involved in case consultations (lawyer and social worker) were both reported to be very strong players in the Connecting Ottawa model and its outcomes. A few stakeholders, however, were confused about the role of the social worker. While the two play a role in case consultations and the social worker adds a holistic perspective and helps connect to appropriate resources, it was not clear to some what the different roles were.
- Stakeholders believe the volunteer facilitator component is an important part of the Connecting Ottawa model, helping reduce access barriers for the focus populations (e.g., by accompanying them to appointments). Limited resources, however, have made it difficult to promote this component and it has been underutilized.

### *Evidence from Frontline Staff*

In the frontline staff survey, respondents were asked if there were any other resources or services they would recommend Connecting Ottawa explore or provide. Most respondents left this question unanswered; approximately 10 respondents provided comments and suggestions. During the staff interviews, participants were also asked for their suggestions on what Connecting Ottawa could do to better respond or to better improve access to justice for the focus populations. Comments from both the frontline staff survey and the frontline staff interviews have been amalgamated here.

#### **Expansion of Services**

The most common suggestion made in the frontline staff survey and frontline staff interviews, was that Connecting Ottawa should expand services, including:

- Connecting Ottawa should be present at different locations where there are large communities with language barriers who require more information and orientation (e.g., a local school where ESL classes are run, community centres).
- Connecting Ottawa should have more resources including more time spent at agencies on case consultations and reaching out to more people and more organizations.
- The focus populations should have more direct access to the Connecting Ottawa's team consultation services.

- The volunteer facilitator component should be enhanced and made more accessible to people.
- Bring in more interpreters because settlement workers can't always be there with clients.
- Lunch and Learn topics are interesting and should be longer and provide more in-depth information.

### **Additional Resources and/or Information Required**

Frontline staff identified some additional resources that could be offered by Connecting Ottawa, or areas where more information is required, including:

- A clear step-by-step guide on how to access the justice system, depending on the legal issue faced and which court needs to be accessed.
- Additional formats used to provide information on the website, incorporating videos in different languages, including ASL.
- Increase the language capacity by translating more pamphlets into different languages and if new staff is hired, expand the number of languages in which they can communicate.
- Create a booklet with Ottawa services and with legal information and responsibilities as a newcomer/refugee claimant/landed immigrant that can be distributed to clients and in the community.
- Information on the difference between arranged and forced marriages: consent and options around marriage.
- Greater awareness of identity scams and how to protect against such scams; what to do if your ID needs to be replaced

### **Outreach and Partnerships**

- Partner with community organizations to provide PLE events in different languages other than French or English.
- Increase reach to smaller organizations and directly to ethnic organizations.

### **More Focus on Disabilities' Sector**

- Several respondents to the frontline staff survey reported that further help was needed for those with disabilities – for example, greater awareness that communications' issues are still used against clients and more support for family members supporting cognitively challenged individuals.

## Gaps in Legal Services

The legal literature indicates that there are significant gaps and unmet legal needs. In order to understand further some of the gaps in legal services faced in the Ottawa region, frontline workers were asked to report on what they observed to be gaps in services for their clients (not just those in the focus populations). Identifying these gaps can help to further understand the challenges that Connecting Ottawa faces in its work to improve access to justice for the focus populations.

- There are several areas of law where frontline staff identified gaps including:
  - Family law services
  - Immigration legal services
  - Support in completing Service Canada forms
  - Addressing consumer protection complaints and small civil matters
- There are few Spanish-speaking lawyers available through legal aid in Ottawa.
- Lack of affordable legal services for people who do not qualify for legal aid but who are living on a low income and cannot afford a lawyer – especially for immigration issues.
- Lack of coordination between family lawyers and immigration lawyers.

### 2.8.3 Sustainability/Lasting Impact

The Connecting Ottawa model focuses on capacity building for frontline service providers who work with the focus population and is, at its core, a model built to have a lasting effect. By training trusted intermediaries (i.e., the frontline workers), instead of concentrating directly on the focus populations, the objective is that they will be able to support people even when they do not access the direct services of the Connecting Ottawa team. **From the evidence collected, we heard that capacity building of trusted intermediaries was happening and that this does lead to lasting effect, to some extent.** We heard examples of staff that were more knowledgeable and comfortable now with providing legal information and referring their clients to appropriate services. For some staff and for organizations as a whole who have put legal issues more at the forefront, there will be long lasting impact.

**Network survey respondents who were at least somewhat involved with Connecting Ottawa, agreed on the long lasting effects of the model.** The respondents who answered a question about how Connecting Ottawa was building the potential, or the capacity, for the benefits to have a lasting impact reported an average rating of 6.1.<sup>18</sup> One-half of the respondents gave the highest rating possible (7 – “significantly”).

Another way in which the potential for long-lasting impact is built is through the training of social work and law students. Connecting Ottawa has relationships with both Carleton University’s School of Social Work and the University of Ottawa’s Faculty of Law. The training received by students in both programs is

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<sup>18</sup> The item was rated on a 7-point scale from “not at all” to “significantly”; 10 of the 15 respondents who were at least somewhat involved with Connecting Ottawa answered this question.

enhanced and they bring that knowledge forward into their future work. Law students benefit by being exposed to complex cases and learning how to approach them more holistically. Social work students benefit by learning more about legal issues and about legal services. The programs at both universities are also enriched from exposure to the program.

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*“I think it’s critical because you’re getting [social work] students in there ... they know nothing about legal services..... I think that [the] students that we had with us, it’s been an incredible experience for them to ... have an understanding of the legal issues surrounding the clients that they’re going to be serving and what’s a legal issue and what isn’t.... And not only just the individual students that we’ve had but also being able to sort of educate the [social work] program and have ... fruitful conversations about what legal services are ....”*

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The relationship and partnership building that occurs as part of the model, through the network and through the team’s work with different organizations, also helps build the potential for long-lasting impact. Frontline staff have become more aware of different services and resources and connections have been made. Those new connections and relationships may lead to greater coordination and collaboration.

The Connecting Ottawa model, therefore, does appear to have long-lasting impact through the training and capacity building, and through the connections and relationships that are built. Although there is evidence that the model does have long lasting impact, there are issues with respect to sustainability. First, although capacity is being built among staff and in organizations, stakeholders report that since legal information is complex and changes over time, and since many issues faced by their clients are unique and complex, frontline workers will continue to have to consult with the Connecting Ottawa team. Staff turnover among frontline workers at community agencies and new partners also contribute to an ongoing demand for consultation and legal education events for staff at partner agencies; therefore, the need for actual interaction with the Connecting Ottawa team will continue.

Second, Connecting Ottawa like other small community programs has experienced considerable staff turnover since the program was first funded, and given the small team size, this turnover had a significant impact.

## **2.9 Who is Connecting Ottawa Reaching and Not Reaching**

In this evaluation, we examined the extent to which Connecting Ottawa had reached their focus populations – those who are not proficient in English or French or who face communication challenges as a result of a disability or sensory impairment. This was a difficult undertaking and we were not entirely successful in answering this question. We relied upon the self-reports of those involved in the Connecting Ottawa network, and frontline staff who had a connection, relationship or partnership with the program. Most respondents found it difficult to answer questions about “reach” because they were really only familiar with the clients served by their own organizations and agencies; thus, they could only comment on the reach of Connecting Ottawa, inasmuch as their own organization reaches those groups. Another

challenge was interpreting the data within the broader context of unmet legal needs for Ontarians, which the legal literature indicates is significant. The data simply does not answer the question about whether Connecting Ottawa is reaching all of the linguistic groups it needs to nor whether there are some groups, within the focus populations, that have more unmet needs than the general Ottawa population.

**Therefore, the results presented below are best described as “exploratory”; nonetheless, the findings do indicate that Connecting Ottawa is doing a good job of trying to reach and respond to the needs of clients in the focus populations.**

### 2.9.1 Evidence from Network Members and Stakeholders

The network member survey asked if Connecting Ottawa was reaching the focus populations, sub-groups of the focus populations, and if there were any groups or sub-groups that Connecting Ottawa was not reaching but should be.<sup>19</sup> Relying on the most recent census data (2011), the most prevalent language groups in Ottawa were identified. Network members were asked to indicate the extent to which people in each of the language groups, as well as people with different disability or sensory impairments, had unmet needs that required resources provided by Connecting Ottawa and the extent to which Connecting Ottawa was reaching each group.<sup>20</sup>

Many respondents did not believe they were well enough informed to answer some of these questions. Most respondents answered the first part of the question – extent of unmet needs – but most were not able to answer the second part of the question. As a result, it is difficult to draw conclusions about network members’ perceptions of Connecting Ottawa’s reach into these different language groups.

For each of the language groups queried, respondents believed that there was at least a moderate level of unmet needs amongst each group indicating that perhaps there may be greater unmet needs for clients from these groups. Two-thirds or more of the respondents rated the level of unmet legal needs as at least 4 on the 7-point scale. These included<sup>21</sup>:

- Farsi: 91% of respondents reported that Farsi-speakers had at least a moderate level of unmet legal needs
- Somali: 91% of respondents reported that Somali-speakers had at least a moderate level of unmet legal needs
- Arabic: 75% of respondents reported that Arabic-speakers had at least a moderate level of unmet legal needs
- Spanish: 67% of respondents reported that Spanish-speakers had at least a moderate level of unmet legal needs

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<sup>19</sup> These questions were asked only of network members who were at least somewhat involved with Connecting Ottawa.

<sup>20</sup> Disability and sensory impairment groups included clients who were deaf, deafened or hard of hearing, had a vision impairment, a speech impairment, cognitive impairment, or any other sensory or communication disability or impairment.

<sup>21</sup> Sample sizes were small: 9 (Spanish), 11 (Farsi and Somali), and 12 (Arabic).

As shown, network members who responded to the questions did report a moderate to high level of unmet needs for these language groups, with perhaps greater need being identified for Farsi and Somali speakers. That said, we are not sure if that is because those who responded are more familiar with those groups because they are their primary clients; therefore, we are unable to conclude if the extent of unmet legal needs is greater in these groups than in the focus populations in general.

It should be noted that two other language groups were queried – Chinese and Vietnamese; however, the majority of respondents answered either “unsure” or left the item unanswered. Similarly, most respondents did not feel well enough informed to rate Connecting Ottawa’s reach into groups that cannot communicate due to a disability or sensory impairment. Fewer than five respondents could answer these questions.

Respondents were also asked about the extent to which Connecting Ottawa was reaching different groups within the focus populations including: all genders, different age groups, racialized groups, LGBTQ community, Indigenous groups, newcomers, and those living in rural areas.<sup>22</sup> As with the questions above, more than one-half of the respondents answered “unsure” or left the question unanswered. The responses were limited; but when they did answer, respondents reported significant reach (from 5.9 to 6.4 on the 7-point scale) for all genders, racialized groups and newcomers – the latter receiving the highest rating (6.4). **For network members who responded then, they reported that these groups were being well supported by Connecting Ottawa.**

Some of the stakeholders interviewed believed that Connecting Ottawa has been more effective in building the capacity of agencies that work with those who do not speak English or French than with those who have communication barriers as a result of a disability or sensory impairment. Relationship building has developed more slowly with agencies that serve those populations (disability/sensory impairment). Stakeholders also reported that while a large number of people are being reached by Connecting Ottawa, there are others that are not being reached. Clients of organizations that work most closely with Connecting Ottawa are being well served; however, there are some organizations whose clients are not benefiting to the same extent. Stakeholders reported that there are more people in need of improved access to justice; but as documented through the results of this evaluation, Connecting Ottawa currently does not have the resources and capacity to do further outreach or reach all members of the focus populations.

### 2.9.2 Evidence from Frontline Staff

As with the network members, frontline staff were asked to rate, based on their experience, the extent to which different language and disability groups had unmet legal needs and could benefit from the services and resources provided by Connecting Ottawa. As a follow-up to that question, respondents were asked to what extent Connecting Ottawa was supporting these groups.<sup>23</sup>

Similar to the network members, most frontline staff did not feel they had enough knowledge of the reach of Connecting Ottawa to provide ratings; by far, most left these items either blank or answered “don’t know/unsure” (anywhere from 50% to 80%).

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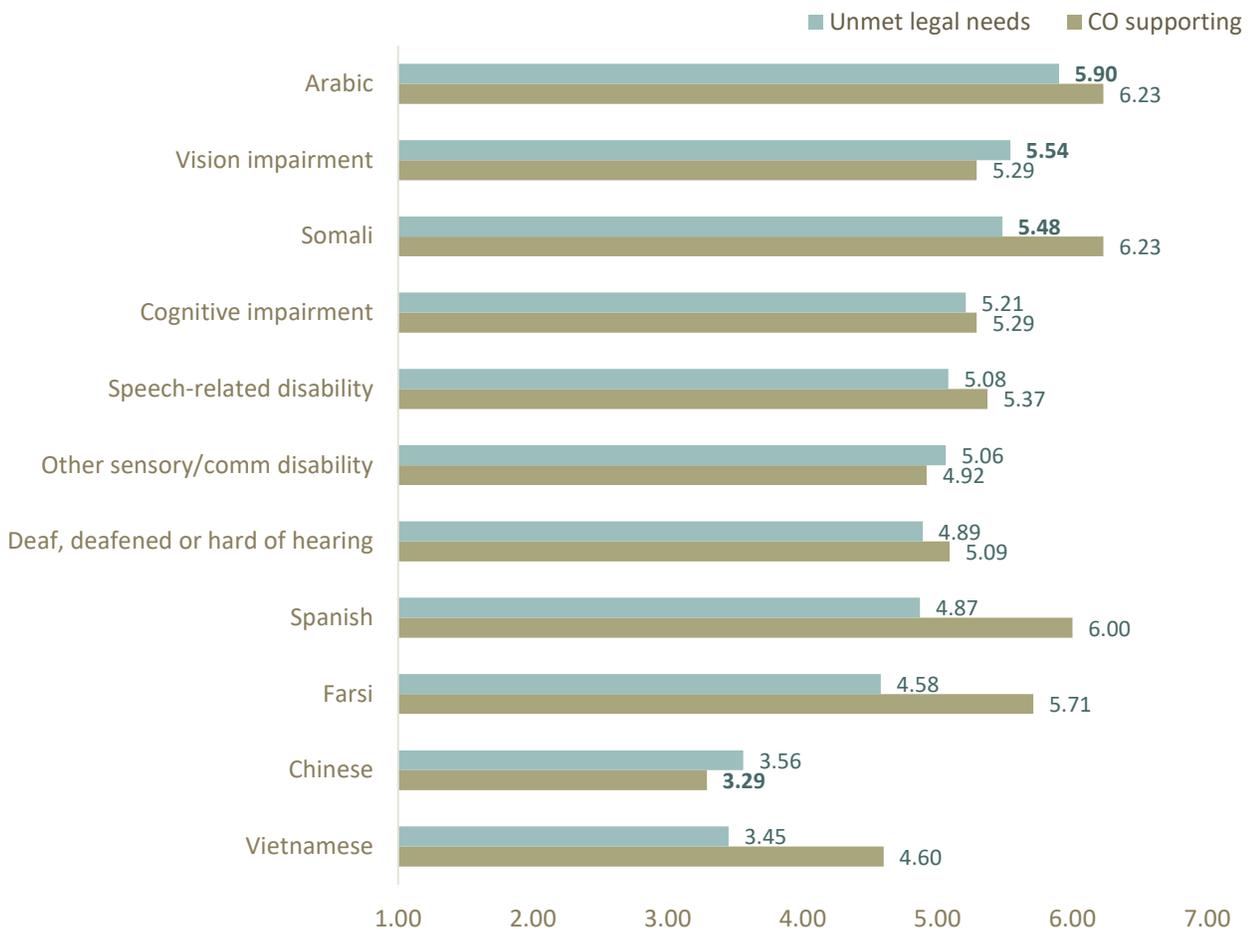
<sup>22</sup> Respondents rated on a 7-point scale from “not at all” to “significantly”.

<sup>23</sup> Both questions were asked on 7-point scale from “not at all” to “significantly”.

The figure below shows the average ratings, for each group, for both questions: the level of unmet needs and the extent to which Connecting Ottawa is supporting these groups.

**Figure 10: Frontline Staff Survey Results - Connecting Ottawa's Reach**

*The groups rated as having the highest unmet needs included Arabic-speaking clients, vision-impaired clients, and Somali-speaking clients. Respondents, however, did give positive ratings to the level of support provided by Connecting Ottawa to these groups.*



With respect to the language groups, for those that did respond (sample sizes ranged from 11 to 29), more than 80% of the respondents reported at least a moderate level of unmet legal needs for:

- Arabic: 96% of respondents reported that Arabic-speakers had at least a moderate level of unmet legal needs
- Somali: 95% of respondents reported that Somali-speakers had at least a moderate level of unmet legal needs
- Spanish: 87% of respondents reported that Spanish-speakers had at least a moderate level of unmet legal needs
- Farsi: 83% of respondents reported that Farsi-speakers had at least a moderate level of unmet legal needs

Two language groups were rated lower: Chinese (55%) and Vietnamese (64%).

**For the language groups of Arabic, Somali, Spanish and Farsi, at least two-thirds of respondents reported that Connecting Ottawa was supporting these groups to a significant degree (answered 6 or 7).** The proportions for Chinese and Vietnamese were lower – 14% and 20%, respectively. The sample sizes for these two groups, however, were very small (7 and 5, respectively).<sup>24</sup>

For the disability groups, again, the sample sizes were small (from 11 to 18); more than 80% of those who responded reported a high level of unmet needs for all groups. One-half or more of these respondents, however, did report that Connecting Ottawa was supporting these groups to a significant degree (answered 6 or 7).

Frontline staff survey respondents were also asked the extent to which a number of different sub-groups, within the focus populations, required the services and resources of Connecting Ottawa.<sup>25</sup> These sub-groups included youth, the elderly, the LGBTQ community, racialized groups, Indigenous people, newcomers to Canada, and those living in rural areas around Ottawa. As with the other questions regarding Connecting Ottawa's reach, many of the respondents left the items blank or answered "don't know/unsure" (from 38% to 69%). For those who did answer, respondents reported that all of the groups at least "moderately" (answer of 4) required the services and resources of Connecting Ottawa. The groups that received the highest ratings – that is, those that were identified as *most* needing Connecting Ottawa's services included:

- Newcomers: 87% of respondents indicated that there was significant need
- Racialized groups: 74% of respondents indicated there was significant need
- Elderly: 71% of respondents indicated there was significant need

Respondents were asked, of those groups that they indicated do require the resources and services of Connecting Ottawa, did they believe that Connecting Ottawa was reaching and supporting these groups? A total of 20 people responded to the question:

- 70% answered that Connecting Ottawa was reaching these groups
- 15% answered that they were not sure or did not know
- 10% answered that Connecting Ottawa helps some
- 5% answered that they were not reaching a number of groups (undiagnosed and non-apparent or less-common disabilities, people with multiple disabilities, and people who have been misdiagnosed and stigmatized)

**Given the limitations described previously, and the small sample sizes, we cannot draw conclusions about gaps in the reach of Connecting Ottawa. There was some evidence to indicate that there is at least a moderate level of unmet legal needs across some language groups (Arabic and Somali in particular) and**

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<sup>24</sup> The sample sizes, overall, for this question were even lower than for the question about unmet legal needs.

<sup>25</sup> Using a 7-point scale from "not at all" to "significantly".

**across the different disability groups, but we are unable to conclude if these are higher or lower than others in the community.**

**From the point of view of frontline staff in the interviews conducted, Connecting Ottawa is reaching the focus populations that are linguistic minorities.** Connecting Ottawa's efforts are not directed to reaching the focus populations directly, but in building the capacity of organizations to work as trusted intermediaries to provide legal information and to better help their clients resolve legal issues. A couple of staff did report that for people experiencing systemic or structural barriers in accessing the organizations that Connecting Ottawa partners with, there may be some gaps in reach. For example, if the LGBTQ community or very marginalized or isolated communities experience barriers accessing partner organizations, then Connecting Ottawa would also be experiencing the barriers since they connect with agencies and not with clients directly. Connecting Ottawa would need to explore these barriers in order to know if these more marginalized groups are being reached.

**The results of the frontline staff interviews did provide some evidence that Connecting Ottawa had been doing ongoing research and expanding its reach.** Several people we interviewed reported that Connecting Ottawa had reached out to them within the past couple of years to explain their service and see how they can work together to improve access to justice for the people they serve within the focus populations. One of these organizations, for example, is a disabilities advocacy organization. Connecting Ottawa staff reported that they are reaching as many people as they can with the resources they have; with additional resources they could do more outreach. Frontline staff reported a few areas or groups that could use more direct outreach, including<sup>26</sup>:

- People with mental health issues (mentioned numerous times)
- Seniors with communication challenges
- People who have English or French as a second language but have literacy issues
- Within the Chinese community more outreach is needed with more marginalized and isolated groups, and more education is required on workers' rights and seniors' rights

When asked about groups that might be missed in Connecting Ottawa's reach, several interviewees in the frontline staff interviews talked about the importance of understanding the complex needs of newcomers and that even though they might be able to communicate somewhat in English or French, there are other barriers that make communication challenging. Frontline staff reported that Connecting Ottawa understood this and did do some work with people who had challenges in navigating the legal system, and understanding rights and responsibilities due to cultural, literacy or simply complications in their life due to migration.

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<sup>26</sup> We were cautioned that while there are other groups that could benefit from Connecting Ottawa, ultimately it is about capacity – they should only do the outreach if they had the capacity to help.

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*“The mandate for the client who doesn’t speak the language helps but sometimes we have clients who speak the language but are lost...They have been here for so long and sometimes they have so many legal issues that you don’t know where to start. They will come, they lost all their documents, [there are] mental health issues involved, financial problems, housing, it is just so many layers of difficulties [and they do] not necessarily know how to access services because speaking the language and understanding processes are not the same. We have people who are fluent in French or English but they are not literate, they can’t understand a legal document, can’t understand processes so you have to work with them.”*

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## Part D: Case Study Examples

In order to examine in more detail how Connecting Ottawa improves access to justice for the focus populations, we examined 31 case studies – 17 that had been written up in reports from Connecting Ottawa to The Law Foundation of Ontario in progress reports and 14 that were collected through the staff interviews.<sup>27</sup>

### 2.10 The Focus Population Involved in Case Examples

The cases reviewed involved a variety of agencies, including immigrant settlement service agencies, community legal clinics, community health centres, the Canadian Hearing Society, and other community agencies. They were quite varied in terms of the background of the focus population that was reached by the services provided through Connecting Ottawa.

- The examples described mostly case consultations where the Connecting Ottawa team (either the lawyer or social worker or sometimes both) worked with a settlement worker or lawyer to facilitate access to justice or to provide holistic services for a member of the focus population facing complex issues.
- A couple of the cases involved either a person who was directly referred to Connecting Ottawa or a person who had participated in a public legal education event and was then able to get the information they needed to help resolve the issues they were facing.
- The cases reviewed involved numerous linguistic and ethnic minorities, including Kenyan, Burmese, Russian, Arabic-speaking, Hispanic, Syrian, Somali, Western Sudanese, Southern Sudanese, Pashto-speaking, Haitian (Creole-speaking), Chinese, Afghani, and Lebanese.
- A few cases also involved persons with disabilities, including cognitive/intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments and people with mobility issues.

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<sup>27</sup> In this section, when reference is made to a specific case, the name and identifying details have been changed.

- Several cases involved people experiencing depression.
- Several cases involved people who had literacy issues.
- 51% of the cases involved women, 39% involved men and 10% involved couples (a man and a woman).

### 2.10.1 Issues Experienced by the Focus Population

The case studies we reviewed revolved around issues involving different legal areas<sup>28</sup>:

- 30% had an immigration and/or sponsorship component
- 16% had a family law component
- 13% involved government entitlements/benefits and/or taxes
- 13% had a labour/employment component
- 13% had a housing component
- 10% involved health care and health care entitlements
- 1 each involved documentation, criminal law and child protection

Some of the cases involved more than one legal area. In addition to communication barriers, all of these legal issues were complicated by many personal and social issues such as domestic abuse, child sexual abuse, poverty, family conflicts, isolation, mental health issues, poor health, illiteracy, mobility issues, and no phone or ability to maintain contact. Many cases also involved situations that were very time sensitive and some involved situations where the individual did not trust the system or was feeling very hopeless and fearful that they would not get help.

In many of the cases, the individuals being supported by Connecting Ottawa had a lack of understanding of their rights and obligations in numerous areas such as housing, immigration and federal or provincial benefits processes or had misinformation on issues. For example, in the case of Soe, while she considered herself as separated from her husband, it was not clearly a legal separation. Her husband was going back and forth between his place and Soe's. When she came into a settlement agency with her mother about another matter, she told the settlement worker that she had stopped receiving the Child Tax Benefit. The settlement worker assessed that Soe did not have a clear understanding of what she needed to do and that she also needed a statutory declaration of separation. From the perspective of the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), she and her husband shared a common address because he was still technically part of her lease. The issue was complicated because Soe owed thousands of dollars to the CRA for payments that had been made to her as a divorced woman when, in fact, she was not legally divorced. The situation was further complicated because there was huge pressure from her mother and religious leaders in her community to not proceed with a divorce even though she and her children were suffering financially because of this.

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<sup>28</sup> There may be some issues that were missed; therefore, these numbers represent the minimum number of cases in each area. Also, some case examples dealt with more than one issue and, therefore, the total does not add up to 100%.

### 2.10.2 Strategies and Support

In most of the cases reviewed, support was provided by the Connecting Ottawa lawyer or social worker to the client and the referring staff from a community or legal organization. A review of the 31 case studies identified many strategies and actions undertaken by the Connecting Ottawa team in order to support the community worker, lawyer, or client to take action on the legal issues they were experiencing or to deal with those issues in a more holistic way to facilitate access to justice. There are several themes that emerged from the review of the strategies and actions undertaken by the Connecting Ottawa team.

- There were many examples in the cases of the Connecting Ottawa team being advocates for the members of the focus population. For example, advocacy when the client is not eligible for services, to obtain lawyers when they were not eligible for legal representation or to have interpreters when interpreters were not covered.
- The Connecting Ottawa team played a key role in helping clients understand their rights and responsibilities and the complexities of their situations.
- The team helped the community worker and the client unpack all the issues involved in the case – this included not only understanding what the legal issues were, but also what issues they were experiencing that could affect their legal outcomes.
- The cases were usually very complicated and are beyond the capacity of a community worker or legal worker dealing with it on their own. They often involve numerous community services and links.
- The clients are often isolated and marginalized and do not understand the full situation they are experiencing.
- In many cases it is clear that the Connecting Ottawa team – both lawyer and social worker – play a key role in bringing organizations together to solve the case. In playing a coordination role, they bring in services that some of the organizations the clients originally sought help from do not know about.
- In most of the cases collected for the evaluation, the settlement worker or community worker is involved in working with the community team throughout the process.
- Some cases were so complex that both social worker and lawyer become involved.

Mariella had been sponsored by her partner, but when she arrived in Canada, her partner became abusive. Connecting Ottawa facilitated a referral to a shelter and provided other supports, but when the Connecting Ottawa lawyer was making a referral to a legal clinic, they discovered that the legal clinic could not assist because of a conflict of interest. Mariella was hiding from her abusive husband and the Connecting Ottawa lawyer met with her outside of the office on three occasions to collect documents and to meet with witnesses. Due to the short turnaround time of 45 days to gather and submit evidence of the situation to Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), the language barrier, the conflict of interest, and the limited availability of an immigration lawyer at another legal clinic, Connecting Ottawa could not effectively refer this client. Instead, Connecting Ottawa prepared two statutory declarations for Mariella, detailing the domestic abuse.

- In the majority of cases, the Connecting Ottawa team was not the main service provider; rather, the team played more of an education, case coordination, advocacy and support role. There were a few cases where they went beyond their mandate and played a more direct role, either because of the time sensitive nature of the case or because there were no services that could help the client. [See sidebar on previous page for case example.]

In the case of Soe, as described earlier, Connecting Ottawa provided numerous specific services and supports in order to help the settlement worker with the case:

- They provided education about CRA policies (re: understanding of separation for financial purposes).
- They explained the necessary steps to comply with the request from Service Canada.
- The Connecting Ottawa social worker helped in creating timelines and documenting the history of domestic violence.
- The Connecting Ottawa social worker provided resources to support parenting skills, keep children supervised, creating options for learning financial management, and explanation of family law processes.
- Connecting Ottawa assisted in providing a formal proof of a separation document.

While the varied services and supports provided by Connecting Ottawa are too numerous to list, the following are some examples that provide a picture of specific actions used to support clients.

- Conducted research to determine the best place to refer and then referred to legal services.
- Advocated for an interpreter to be at a meeting when agency was not going to provide one.
- Researched possible housing options.
- Referred to a volunteer facilitator who helped with medical history and other health documentation.
- Organized case conferences with all the service providers involved in the case.
- Worked with a legal aid lawyer on a request for Ministerial discretion in a case of a sick client who had no health coverage.
- Supported a client who had an intellectual disability and communicated only in a limited way in his native language (Creole) to prepare for his refugee hearing.
- Provided advice on what steps to take to obtain birth documentation and advocated with the Ontario Student Assistance Program for a young person born in a refugee camp who did not have a date of birth on his birth certificate.
- Explained to a client what he had to do to file a formal complaint against a lawyer who had informed him incorrectly about his refugee hearing and provided advice on an upcoming refugee hearing.
- Wrote a letter to IRCC documenting the abuse a client had experienced and requested permanent residency for the client.

- Developed a case management plan.
- Provided support in accessing programs and services for a family that was working with a community legal clinic lawyer to sponsor four children that were still back home. The family needed to be more stable financially, as well as in other areas, in order for their case to be considered by IRCC.

### 2.10.3 Examples of Access to Justice

The case studies we reviewed contained many examples of how members of the focus populations had been able to access justice as a result of the support provided by Connecting Ottawa. In Soe's case, the Canada Revenue Agency accepted the separation document, she received the Child Tax benefit and she started to contemplate the possibility of divorce. Despite family pressure, with the support of the settlement worker and advice of the Connecting Ottawa team, Soe had implemented suggested changes including creating healthy boundaries between her and her ex-partner.

There were many cases reviewed where it was clear the client had been able to resolve their legal issues or they had received support or a referral to a program or service that would improve their life and ensure a more holistic resolution of the legal and justice issues they were experiencing. For example, Maria was who had one child in Canada was experiencing abuse and wanted to sponsor her other children who were still back home to come to Canada. She was supported by a lawyer from a community legal clinic. The Connecting Ottawa lawyer was able to support the community legal services lawyer to research and refer Maria and her child to a shelter. Being in a shelter was beneficial to the immigration case. One of the reasons why she was not eligible to sponsor her children was because she was not working and she had not been working because her abusive husband had not allowed her to work. Being in a shelter helped the case by demonstrating that Maria was in a domestic violence situation that prevented her from being self-supporting. Because of the domestic abuse, they were able to request an exemption from the financial sponsorship requirements on humanitarian grounds and that was accepted. Maria successfully sponsored her children and the case was dealt with on an expedited basis because the children did not have adequate supervision back home. Maria is now living in her own apartment with all her children.

In another case, Marcelle, who was a cleaner, had legal issues with her company. Marcelle had physical issues which prevented her from performing her duties; she felt that her employer and union were not helping to make her job workable. Marcelle eventually took time off work using sick days and vacation days but did not comply with requests for medical documentation that would have extended her leave. Her employer eventually sent her a letter of termination. Marcelle could not read or write English or French and she had complex social needs. The staff at a legal clinic reached out to the Connecting Ottawa social worker. The Connecting Ottawa social worker provided information and a warm referral for social services' counselling. The social worker conducted multiple consultations with the legal clinic lawyer, collaborated with the intake worker at the social services agency, and advocated with Marcelle's union and employer. At the end of the case consultation time, there was a scheduled and concrete return to work offer for Marcelle and she was much more hopeful about her options. The referring staff person believes that she might have ended her life if he had not received the help that she needed.

There were many examples of clear outcomes like those of Soe, Maria and Marcelle in the reports and in our interviews with front line staff. In many cases, although there had been improved access to services

and support of the legal issue, the resolution was still pending, or the worker and/or the Connecting Ottawa team were not yet clear of the outcomes.

What was evident in most cases was that the support from the Connecting Ottawa team had facilitated access to justice even if the case had not yet been resolved. The following are examples of how clients had experienced increased or improved access to justice for the issues they were experiencing:

- Many clients were referred to a lawyer who could deal with their issue. This was not always easy because of eligibility criteria or other complexities of the case, but in most cases where a referral was necessary the Connecting Ottawa team facilitated that referral.
- In numerous cases a holistic approach was supported by the Connecting Ottawa team. The holistic approaches included advocacy, referrals to community supports, housing and counselling, as well as supporting a man with an intellectual disability for his immigration hearing.
- Assistance, including connecting people to a range of supports, helped resolve legal issues. For example, by helping a client access a social worker and helping navigate a process so that the client was successful in obtaining benefits.
- Connecting Ottawa provided options for a woman who was trying to obtain a birth certificate for her children who were born in a refugee camp. Without this birth certificate stating the actual date of birth and not just year of birth, her children were not eligible to receive OSAP. The settlement worker reported that if the issue was not resolved through the refugee camp, Connecting Ottawa would be supporting the settlement agency in figuring out next steps to obtain the document.
- In one case, Maria had been charged with presenting fraudulent papers when going for her driver's license. She had not gone to the embassy to get the necessary papers for fear of jeopardizing her refugee claim. With the support of Connecting Ottawa, who found her a lawyer, the charges were dropped. If the case had not been successful it would have jeopardized or complicated her case when

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*"[Without Connecting Ottawa] I feel I might have been stuck and completely overwhelmed without proper understanding of Service Canada provisions. It is possible that the client would not be able to resolve financial concerns and move forward from unhealthy dynamics in her relationship."*

*"[Without Connecting Ottawa] I would have had to start calling the city and probably called the wrong place and then tried to figure out how to make a list of the shelters and then had to start trying to call the shelters but it wouldn't have all happened that day.... I wouldn't have known where to put the woman at that point because I would not have wanted to send her home. So it would have been extremely difficult and it probably would have meant that I would have to cancel all of my other clients for the afternoon and tried to just focus on this crisis."*

*"[My client] was happy to find somebody that accepted him the way he was because at no time at all was Connecting Ottawa upset with him or said it was his fault. He was always welcome - it was 'What can we do for you now, where are you now? Take your time, express what you need.' He said he never had people do that for him. He said even his mother got discouraged with him."*

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she applied for citizenship. Connecting Ottawa also helped get disability identification for Maria's son. She was then able to use disability transportation which facilitated getting her to appointments when she was without a driver's license.

#### **2.10.4 Critical Components in Improving Access to Justice**

The case studies provide some understanding of the key components that help improve access to justice for the focus populations. When staff described the cases in the interviews, we asked them what they thought were the critical components of the supports provided by the Connecting Ottawa team that had helped improve access to justice for their clients.

In Soe's case the settlement worker thought that Connecting Ottawa staff was critical in supporting the settlement worker in organizing what had to be done, collecting the facts from the client, creating a plan of action, and helping the client and staff understand the roles and regulations of CRA in plain language.

According to staff, other critical components in cases included the following:

- The knowledge and support provided by the Connecting Ottawa team.
- The consultation provided by the social worker, the amount of detail provided on the client's options, and being realistic about the options.
- The way the information was presented in increments was very helpful so that the client was not overwhelmed.
- The amount of support and advocacy provided by the Connecting Ottawa team.
- The patience and compassion shown by the Connecting Ottawa team.
- All the barriers and hoops that the Connecting Ottawa lawyer worked through in numerous cases.
- Provided additional credibility beyond what a settlement worker can in writing a letter to immigration.
- The persistence and determination provided by the team and insistence on not giving up and providing hope and confidence to the client.
- Using Connecting Ottawa for support instead of trying to get a social worker through a community health centre, helped provide more seamless support and quickly receive a report needed for immigration.
- The lawyer from a community legal clinic, in working directly with Connecting Ottawa social worker, was able to provide services that were more efficient, seamless, holistic and easier to access.
- Legal advocacy and assistance beyond what is provided by summary legal information agencies like the FLIC.
- Bringing various agencies to work together.

As described in the case examples, there are many key attributes and strategies of Connecting Ottawa's team approach that help the focus populations improve their access to justice. These include the interpretation of legal information into simple language, the advocacy, the persistence, the support provided to the worker and client to not give up, the flexibility, the commitment to access, and the connectedness that facilitates seamless referrals and services, and brings together organizations to work on a case. Many staff interviewed said that without the support of Connecting Ottawa, working to resolve a client's issues would have been more complicated, the client's issues would have been resolved more slowly (or perhaps not at all), and the service experienced by the client would not have been seamless.

## Part E: Conclusions

### 2.11 Overview

The Connecting Ottawa initiative was originally conceptualized in 2010-2011 with a seed grant from The Law Foundation of Ontario, and later developed when a grant was received from the Foundation in 2011. As mentioned earlier in this report, Connecting Ottawa's goal is to improve access to justice for linguistic minorities; people who are not proficient in English or French or who face communication challenges as the result of a disability or sensory impairment (the focus populations). Connecting Ottawa strives to build the capacity of partner agencies who work with the focus populations to provide information on legal issues and facilitate access to services and other resources to resolve clients' issues swiftly and efficiently. Connecting Ottawa also aims to demystify access to justice by increasing accessibility and reducing referral fatigue for the focus populations. They do this by building the capacity of trusted intermediaries, including frontline workers, and by increasing connections among organizations that work with the focus populations.

The Connecting Ottawa network partners, staff from partner organizations and other project stakeholders provided information through surveys and interviews that have resulted in numerous learnings with regard to Connecting Ottawa's outcomes and the strengths and weaknesses of the model.

### 2.12 Connecting Ottawa Outcomes and Impacts

**The results of the evaluation show that Connecting Ottawa is building the capacity of community and legal organizations in Ottawa to help the focus populations improve their access to justice.** While the extent of the impact across Ottawa is difficult to measure, the staff from partner agencies and other network members emphasized that Connecting Ottawa is having an impact and indicated that more of their clients from the focus populations are obtaining legal information and being referred to services more often than they were before the Connecting Ottawa was implemented. More legal issues are resolved and fewer people are falling through the cracks. Community and social organizations are more aware of legal issues and the importance of dealing with them and there is a forum to discuss the legal aspects of the issues that the focus populations face. Further, the interest in Connecting Ottawa and the resources it provides is increasing and the Connecting Ottawa team is reaching increasing numbers every year.

### 2.12.1 How Access to Justice is Improved

There are at least three ways that Connecting Ottawa works to improve access to justice for members of the focus populations. One of the primary ways that access to justice is improved is through the direct work of the case consultations. The Connecting Ottawa team provides resources and efficient referrals that connect clients to additional supports and ensure that the case is dealt with more effectively and efficiently. Legal organizations are also able to provide a more holistic approach and be more effective and efficient in accessing necessary resources for the focus populations. Members of the focus populations sometimes receive direct information from Connecting Ottawa through public legal education events, direct outreach, and information from the Connecting Ottawa team, the website, and written materials. The case examples reviewed clearly demonstrate how the resources provided in the case consultations lead to increased access to justice and positive outcomes in very complex cases. While the extent of the outcomes is difficult to measure as mentioned above, by December 2016, Connecting Ottawa had been involved in at least 1600 consultations.

A second way that access to justice is improved for the focus populations is through capacity-building efforts (educational events, direct case consultation while staff is present, newsletters, and the website). Staff in non-legal organizations are much better equipped to identify legal issues, and know where and how to find the information they need. They are also more knowledgeable about the resources available and about where to refer when necessary. These community workers, who are often the first point of contact for many members of the focus populations, have become trusted intermediaries who have ongoing support to help their clients increase their access to justice.

A third way access to justice is improved is through enhanced coordination of services and improved relationships among service providers. Staff from the partner organizations often described Connecting Ottawa as a systems navigator connecting agencies through referrals and legal information. Connecting Ottawa brings legal and non-legal organizations together in a more coordinated way to ensure a more seamless system, and more efficient and effective resolution of cases. Improved coordination happens to a large extent through the case consultations where the Connecting Ottawa team links all the organizations involved in a case so that the services are more seamless and efficient. Increased coordination also happens because of improved relationships and increased connections through network activities such as the Advisory Committee, the conference, the newsletters and other events.

*"I wouldn't have any kind of knowledge of what to expect or what not [to expect]... so Connecting Ottawa has helped me increase my knowledge in those areas. Maybe even increased my ability to know what the rights and responsibilities are for our clients who have no status. That way, I was able to empower the clients more."*

### 2.12.2 Outcomes and Impacts – Barriers, Challenges, Issues and Limitations

While the resources provided by Connecting Ottawa have clearly resulted in improved access to justice for the focus populations, the results of the evaluation also indicate that there are barriers and challenges to improving access to justice. Systemic barriers pose challenges for trusted intermediaries and the Connecting Ottawa team. For example, legal clinics and legal aid do not cover all facets of law and many agencies do not cover the cost of interpreters. Although these challenges exist, Connecting Ottawa staff advocates for the client and works hard to find ways (often thinking outside the box) to get the client what they need. Clients do not get told that they do not qualify; they are given options and feel hopeful.

Outcomes do differ for non-legal and legal organizations and service providers. This is not all that surprising given that a main focus of the project is building the capacity of trusted intermediaries – those non-legal frontline staff who are often the first point of contact for the focus populations. Nonetheless, the model did focus on supporting legal services organizations to provide services to the focus populations within a framework that acknowledges issue complexity.<sup>29</sup> While we were able to document some outcomes in terms of capacity building in the legal sector through the frontline interviews, a few key stakeholders reported that the uptake of the legal sector has been slower than from the partners in the community sectors.

The reach of Connecting Ottawa was difficult to measure, but it is clear that Connecting Ottawa does partner with many organizations, they work on maintaining existing relationships, and they strive to grow to meet the needs of the focus populations. There may be groups (e.g., Arabic-speaking, Somali-speaking, and the disabilities' sector) where there are unmet legal needs. Further, there were a number of evaluation participants that recommended that Connecting Ottawa increase its reach. The challenge for Connecting Ottawa is that given the small staff resources (2.5 FTE), and the demand from their existing partners, it is difficult to extend their reach. The program is working to full capacity and Connecting Ottawa is fulfilling its mandate with partner organizations and continues to reach out to other organizations. Therefore, if Connecting Ottawa were to expand its reach much beyond the current partner organizations, these efforts would require expanded resources or limiting work in some areas.

Finally, one last issue to consider when assessing the extent of impacts and outcomes of Connecting Ottawa, is that not every partner in the network has the same level of involvement or engagement with the project. Those organizations and staff with whom the project is more closely connected, are more apt to use the services and resources, consult with staff, and see the impacts on the focus populations more directly. Some partners also have different roles and may not work directly with focus populations, and Connecting Ottawa works with them to see how they can help improve access to justice for their clients. For example, we conducted an interview with a contact from an organization that is involved in advocacy related to disability issues. Connecting Ottawa has a very different relationship with that organization than they do with a settlement agency that sees dozens of clients every day. With this particular organization, Connecting Ottawa had started doing some workshops for clients with disabilities and consulting with them on what they could do to help increase justice for the communities of people with disabilities.

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<sup>29</sup> From the Connecting Ottawa Program Logic Model.

## 2.13 The Project Model

### 2.13.1 Strengths

Connecting Ottawa was designed to be a “Connecting Region” – a regional planning model in which a group of legal and non-legal organizations work together to test strategies to improve linguistic access to justice. **The results of the evaluation indicate that Connecting Ottawa’s model is strong and includes numerous successful strategies that facilitate access to justice.** The core staff and sponsoring organizations have worked diligently to outreach to many community organizations that work with the focus populations. Connecting Ottawa staff and stakeholders did acknowledge that at times, due to staffing changes, reaching out to organizations was challenging. Yet, there was evidence throughout the interviews and surveys that Connecting Ottawa has an excellent reputation in the community and that it has engaged in ongoing outreach to organizations.

Organizations in the network have different levels of involvement. Some are simply kept up to date through newsletters and might attend the annual conference or other education events. Some organizations may not work extensively with the focus populations and, therefore, their contact with Connecting Ottawa is more intermittent. Other organizations are more involved, using many of the Connecting Ottawa resources and services, such as consulting the website, case consultations and attending education events. Those organizations that are most involved are also represented in the Advisory Committee that makes decisions on the direction of the project and identifies issues for advocacy, as well as gaps and needs.

The Advisory Committee represents diverse voices and is a platform to bring together the legal and community/social services sectors and to identify issues and gaps and create a forum to problem solve. The results indicate that the Advisory Committee works well and that Connecting Ottawa uses the Committee as a way to direct the project in a way that is responsive to diverse community needs.

While Connecting Ottawa has tested numerous strategies since its initiation, it is the holistic approach that is created by the implementation of these strategies together that is what creates access to justice for the focus populations. It is evident, however, that the core of the model is the lawyer and social worker team who consult with and support frontline staff, as well as occasionally clients directly, to access justice. The team helps the frontline workers understand what the client’s legal issues are, helps lay out an action plan, and is key in the referrals and coordination of different services and support that are needed for effective resolution of the issues the client is facing. The team also advocates to ensure the client gets the service needed and that supports and services are provided in a timely way. In some instances the Connecting Ottawa team is intensely involved when it is a complicated case with many aspects to coordinate, but in

*“One of the problems in Ottawa is there hasn’t traditionally been a hub or a central point where workers could contact someone if they needed to make referrals for clients to legal or non-legal resources and Connecting Ottawa helps serve that function...I think Connecting Ottawa is a neutral point ... and ... workers from different agencies who might not talk to one another, can come to Connecting Ottawa to get better information and better referrals for their clients.”*

some cases it is a simple conversation with a frontline staff member to help the staff access the information they need or to make a referral. Through each of the consultations, whether intense or brief, frontline staff learn and their capacity is built so that they may help future clients. In fact, in each of the two settlement agencies most involved with Connecting Ottawa, there is now at least one “go to” staff person. That is, those individuals have developed their capacity to such an extent that other staff in the organization sometimes go to them when they have a client who might be facing a legal issue. The case consultations by both the lawyer and staff were rated by front line staff as the most effective strategies in helping the focus populations’ improve access to justice.

The educational events such as Lunch and Learns, presentations, and the annual conference also appear to be very effective strategies in increasing capacity for frontline workers and managers in organizations. In addition, outreach public legal education events are effective strategies in directly improving access to justice for the focus populations, by providing direct education.

The website, while not stated to be a critical strategy, was nevertheless mentioned by most evaluation participants to be a very useful and efficient way to obtain information, whether direct legal information, information on programs and services, or a quick way to access phone numbers. Participants who commented on the website expressed the consistent message that it was easy to use and informative.

The rack cards and other printed material produced by Connecting Ottawa are seen by some as an excellent resource to enhance the work carried out in the case consultations. More attention needs to be drawn to these resources, however, so as to increase their utilization.

The least utilized of the strategies developed by Connecting Ottawa was the volunteer facilitator component. The rationale for the development of this strategy was that for many clients from the focus populations there can be a gap between the point of referral and the point of legal services delivery; clients never actually connect with the services to which they have been referred. Connecting Ottawa hoped to bridge this gap by recruiting and training a pool of volunteer facilitators that would become trusted intermediaries that could problem solve with the client to systematically overcome the barriers to connection. Many evaluation participants who had used this resource for one of their clients reported that it was very helpful. A majority, however, had either never heard of this component or had never used the resource. This strategy appears to be useful and needed to ensure access to justice for the focus populations beyond what the frontline workers can provide. The case examples and the interviews with three volunteer facilitators outlined areas where the volunteers could help facilitate access to justice for clients. The volunteer facilitator component, however, needs more resources to improve coordination – to make it easier for frontline workers to access and to recognize times when volunteer facilitators would help. This component also needs to be better promoted.

According to evaluation participants, the Connecting Ottawa model works because there are numerous embedded principles or effective practices. Clearly, the people working at Connecting Ottawa are critical to the program's success. Staff that is knowledgeable, connected to the community, dedicated, persistent, and who possess great problem solving skills is critical to the success of the model. Other effective practices include flexibility, a holistic approach, and outreach and building strong relationships. Another critical piece of the model that is important to its sustainability is having a champion who has the skills and commitment to oversee the project and keep it going. For Connecting Ottawa, one person has been there since its inception and it has been his commitment that has ensured that Connecting Ottawa continued despite staff and Advisory Group changes.

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*"They understand our clients the way we understand our clients. It is like there doesn't need to be policies or anything because they are already seamlessly coming into what we do."*

*"They are a resource that allows us to basically go further with the processes with our clients... It is definitely their knowledge, the way that we have learned how to work together. It is the fact that they are accessible at our location."*

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One of the strengths of the Connecting Ottawa model is its focus on capacity building for frontline service providers who work with the focus populations. This ensures that at its core, it is a model built to have a lasting effect. As mentioned earlier in the report by training trusted intermediaries instead of concentrating directly on the focus populations, the objective is that the trusted intermediaries (i.e., the frontline workers) will be able to support people even when they do not access the direct services of the Connecting Ottawa team. Evaluation stakeholders did report that Connecting Ottawa is creating a lasting impact. Many evaluation participants described the Connecting Ottawa role as part of their infrastructure – a navigator that frontline staff can access to build their capacity to help their clients with the legal issues they experience.

Notwithstanding the capacity for sustained and long term outcomes, frontline workers will still have a continuous need to consult with the Connecting Ottawa team since legal information is complex and changes over time, and since many issues faced by the focus population are unique and complex. Frontline staff turnover and new partners also contribute to an ongoing demand for Connecting Ottawa resources.

### **2.13.2 Areas for Improvement**

The evaluation did identify a number of areas within the Connecting Ottawa model and its process that could be improved on. For example, the volunteer facilitator component, as described earlier, needs to be further reviewed and processes put in place to make it a more efficient and effective strategy. There did seem to be a lot of interest from frontline workers in having this developed.

There also appears to be a more limited involvement with the disability community. Several evaluation participants reported further support is needed for those communities.

Most of the other project limitations or areas for improvement identified through the evaluation relate to the expansion of what Connecting Ottawa is doing. The evaluation results show that while Connecting Ottawa is doing outreach and they are having a strong impact on those that are connected, more needs to be done to expand on the network and enhance the involvement of some members that are less connected. The results indicate that perhaps more outreach to marginalized communities is needed and that Connecting Ottawa may need to strategize about connecting with individuals who can act as trusted intermediaries for those vulnerable members of the focus populations who are not accessing community and social services. It is clear, however, that it takes a lot of resources to do further outreach and expand services and that, with limited staff, doing any more outreach than what is presently happening would be difficult. Calls to Connecting Ottawa for consultations and public legal education events have increased over the years and between those two strategies, and the work involved in maintaining the network, Connecting Ottawa is working at full capacity - more resources would be needed to expand on the work Connecting Ottawa currently does.

## 2.14 Limitations of the Evaluation

The results of the evaluation are extensive and provide supportive evidence of the value of Connecting Ottawa. There are, however, some limitations in the data that should be discussed. One limitation is that it was difficult to measure the magnitude of the impact on the community, in general, within the scope of this project. We were able to demonstrate increased organizational capacity and outcomes for the focus populations through surveys and interviews with staff from partner organizations, as well as Connecting Ottawa staff and other stakeholders. We were not, however, able to assess the magnitude of that change across Ottawa nor the reach of Connecting Ottawa across the focus populations in Ottawa. Further, the details on outcomes for the focus populations came directly from staff, as we were not able to collect data from members of the focus populations who had been supported by Connecting Ottawa.

We were not able to answer the question about the reach of Connecting Ottawa definitively. Many evaluation participants simply were not sure. From the available data it does appear that the program does a good job with linguistic minorities. However, we were unable to determine if there are some populations that have greater needs, nor whether Connecting Ottawa is reaching the segments of the focus populations with the greatest needs.

## **CHAPTER 3: SEED GRANTS**

## 3.0 Background and Context

As described previously, in 2009 The Law Foundation of Ontario released the report *Connecting Across Language and Distance* by Cohl and Thomson which recommended the creation of a “Connecting Region”. They envisioned this Connecting Region as a group of legal and non-legal organizations that would work together to improve access to justice for the focus populations (linguistic minorities and those who live in rural and remote areas). In early 2010 the Foundation put out a call for proposals for groups to submit applications to become a candidate for the Connecting Region grant. Three applicants were provided with seed grants to develop a proposal to become the Connecting Region.

Connecting Ottawa was one of the three applicants, and the only one of the three candidates that focused on linguistic minorities as their target population. They were notified of their success in becoming the Connecting Region in 2011 and then began a phase of further model development that culminated in a report to the Foundation in 2012. The initial grant ran for three years from 2012-2015 and Connecting Ottawa has received subsequent annual grants since that time.

The other two candidates received the seed grants that enabled them to work within their communities to develop their proposals (submitted, like Connecting Ottawa, in 2011). One candidate was comprised of four legal clinics in the region of Simcoe/Haliburton/ Kawartha Lakes, Grey-Bruce counties, Muskoka, and Peterborough – the Access to Justice Partnership project or A2JP project. The other candidate was a collaboration between four legal clinics, a university law student clinic, and a regional office of Legal Aid Ontario in southeastern Ontario. This group, called the Five County Connecting Region Project, covered the counties of Northumberland, Hastings, Prince Edward, Lennox & Addington, and Frontenac and proposed the creation of the Legal Education and Advocacy Regional Network (LEARN).

In addition to wanting to evaluate the outcomes and benefits of Connecting Ottawa, the Foundation was also interested in understanding what the impacts and outcomes were of receiving those seed grants for these other two regions. In this chapter we discuss the evaluation of the other two regions that received seed grants: the methods used in this component of the evaluation, a description of the two regions’ seed grant process, and the outcomes and benefits for those regions of receiving these grants.

## 3.1 Evaluation Methods

This component of the evaluation was guided by the following evaluation questions:

1. What impacts did receiving the seed grant have in improving access to justice for the focus populations?
2. What impacts did receiving the seed grant have on building the capacity of agencies and organizations to work together to improve access to justice for the focus populations?
3. What other impacts, benefits, or outcomes (anticipated and unanticipated) have occurred because of the Connecting Region seed grant?
4. How have legal and non-legal entities worked together since the Law Foundation’s process was initiated?

To answer the above questions, the following evaluation methods were used:

### 1. Stakeholder interviews and focus groups

- Through correspondence with each location, stakeholders were identified to be interviewed.
- Five one-on-one interviews were conducted with stakeholders identified for the A2JP project<sup>30</sup>:
  - Staff lawyer from the Community Legal Clinic – Simcoe, Haliburton, and Kawartha Lakes
  - Former Executive Director for Grey Bruce Community Legal Clinic
  - Executive Director for Peterborough Community Legal Clinic
  - Executive Director for A Place Called Home – a shelter in Lindsay
  - Director of Mental Health Services for Haliburton Highlands Health Services Corporation
- For the LEARN project, four focus groups and two one-on-one interviews were conducted. These included:
  - One-on-one interview with a representative from the Community Advocacy & Legal Centre – the lead clinic on the project
  - A focus group with the Five County Network group
  - A focus group with representatives from Legal Aid Ontario’s provincial office as well as Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO)
  - A focus group with participants of the Family Law Paths to Justice Guide Working Group
  - A focus group with public librarians from the region
  - A one-on-one interview with the courthouse librarian who was unable to attend the focus group
- The questions for these interviews focused on:
  - The original project model proposed and how organizations worked together at that time
  - How organizations may have worked together since the development of the proposal
  - Outcomes for organizations and clients
- When consent was provided, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed; otherwise, notes were taken.

### 2. Document review

- Proposals for both of the regions were reviewed along with any supporting documents that were provided by stakeholders.

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<sup>30</sup> Three of the four legal clinics participated in interviews. The fourth clinic was contacted for a key informant interview but declined to participate. The representative reported that their clinic has always done community development work and could not distinguish the time before or during the seed grant process (because it had been seven years) and the time after. They always had close ties to service providers in their region.

## 3.2 Description of the Other Regions' Seed Grants

### 3.2.1 A2JP Project

The Access to Justice Partnership Project (A2JP Project) was developed by a consortium of four legal clinics: Community Legal Clinic – Simcoe, Haliburton and Kawartha Lakes; Grey-Bruce Community Legal Clinic; Lake Country Community Legal Clinic; and Peterborough Community Legal Clinic; and led by the Simcoe clinic. As part of the project, this consortium completed three main activities:

1. Community consultation: they conducted 18 meetings with communities throughout the entire region, consulting with approximately 350 people;
2. Online survey: they conducted an online survey with 55 participants from the community meetings; and
3. Regional conference: the project culminated in the hosting of a regional conference for approximately 125 people.

Each of the four clinics conducted community meetings in their respective regions. At the Simcoe clinic a new staff lawyer took the lead in conducting outreach into different communities throughout the region and did a lot of work in trying to raise awareness of the clinic and of this new initiative.

The other three clinics each conducted some outreach in their communities to raise awareness of the Connecting Region seed grant, leveraging already strong connections to their communities. Further, the Executive Director of the Grey-Bruce clinic, at the time of the seed grant, explained that he had conducted a needs assessment in his region not that long before the Connecting Region initiative (about 8-9 years previous) and, therefore, he was already well aware of the needs that existed in his region.

At the community meetings key questions were asked regarding what legal services were needed, what barriers were faced in obtaining legal information and services, what could be done to overcome those barriers, and what current resources existed to help overcome those barriers and what resources were needed. A list of top 10 barriers was developed which was further consolidated to 5 barriers: transportation, inter-agency collaboration, outreach, public education, and technology. These five main barriers were further explored in the online survey.

Based upon the above results, the A2JP Consortium model was developed. Each of the four clinics brought delegates to a day-long regional conference that built upon the discussions and research findings from the community meetings and online survey. The conference brought together a variety of stakeholders (both justice and non-justice) to explore the opportunities for addressing rural access to justice issues in the region and to present the Consortium model.

The model proposed having four levels of decision-making, with greater and lesser degrees of involvement and decision-making. The model also included the development of the A2JP Toolbox, a list of strategies and activities for increasing access to justice for rural and remote communities. The toolbox allowed for regional collaboration and local customization. The Consortium recommended hiring a full-time Project Manager and a half-time Administrative Support person for one year to develop the regional plan and funding proposal. During that one-year period they proposed to focus on three phases in developing their plan: membership recruitment, A2JP model development, and the

development and submission of the A2JP regional plan and funding proposal. The first 12 months of funding was also to include piloting three main activities: an integrated transportation strategy, videoconferencing, and an outreach campaign.

### **3.2.2 Five County Connecting Region Project: LEARN (Legal Education and Advocacy Regional Network)**

The Five County Network is comprised of four community legal clinics in southeastern Ontario: Community Advocacy and Legal Centre (CALC), Northumberland Community Legal Centre (NCLC), Kingston Community Legal Clinic, The Legal Clinic (serving Lanark, Leeds and Grenville, Northern Frontenac, and Northern Lennox and Addington), as well as the law student clinic at Queen's University Faculty of Law (a Student Legal Aid Services Society) funded by Legal Aid Ontario and known as Queen's Legal Aid, and the Director-General and other staff from Legal Aid Ontario's Durham-Frontenac Regional Office. Three of the four community legal clinics, Queen's Legal Aid, and the Durham-Frontenac Office had met as the Four County Network prior to applying for the seed grant – NCLC was added to the group during this time period.

With the seed grant this network conducted an action research project to identify existing promising practices, which involved a literature review, 14 focus groups with service providers across the region, one-on-one interviews with stakeholders, a focus group with Legal Aid Ontario-funded specialty legal clinics, case study interviews with clients with multiple legal needs, and an assessment of related developments that could have an impact on regional model planning. The purpose of the action research project was to lay the groundwork for an ongoing cross-sectoral collaborative consortium that would develop and deliver programs that would enhance access to legal information and services for low-income residents of the five counties.

The result of this process was a report in which they proposed a regional planning model – LEARN: Learn Education and Advocacy Regional Network to develop and deliver programs that would enhance access to legal information and services through a cross-sectoral collaborative consortium. They also proposed two pilot projects to be funded by The Law Foundation of Ontario: one to increase legal literacy (LEARN Legal Literacy) and one to raise awareness of legal issues and resources and to build community capacity (LEARN LAW). They proposed the hiring of a full-time project manager and a part-time project administrative assistant, to be centrally housed in a lead agency. These staff (the Secretariat) would support the LEARN Executive Committee, Regional Advisory Council and a number of Community Working Groups (made up of service providers in the region). Funding for a third "LEARN" project to enhance legal service delivery to rural and remote communities through greater collaboration between Legal Aid Ontario and clinics was subsequently successfully sought from Legal Aid Ontario.

During the seed grant process, they not only collected information via their focus groups, interviews and case studies, they also developed a toolkit, conducted three community education workshops, published a final report (Paths to Justice: Navigating with the Wandering Lost), and hosted a culminating event for all local, regional and provincial stakeholders.

## 3.3 Outcomes and Benefits of the Seed Grants for the Other Regions

The results of the evaluation indicate that the seed grant resulted in some positive impacts and outcomes. These impacts occurred during the time of seed grant process as well as after that process ended.

### 3.3.1 Improving Access to Justice for the Focus Populations

Stakeholders in both regions believed that access to justice for the focus populations had been improved by the seed grant process. They believed that the outreach conducted during the seed grant process had:

- Increased awareness of legal issues and services
- Resulted in better referrals
- Helped with accessing services because of location of services (i.e., co-locating with other services, satellite offices) and the partnerships developed
- Led to better results with legal issues

These outcomes had resulted because the seed grants had provided the clinics with additional resources which allowed them to conduct outreach that they normally would not have the resources to conduct.

For the A2JP project, the impacts have probably been most experienced by communities served by the Simcoe clinic. Because of partnerships that developed as a result of the outreach conducted (more on this below) they were able to co-locate with a hub of other service providers to provide legal services on-site one day every two weeks. They also learned through the outreach they conducted that it was better for service providers and their clients if they did not have to schedule appointments when legal service providers were on-site at their satellite office in Lindsay – rather to leave the hours as a drop-in. The co-location with other service providers also helped with the completion and filing of legal documents. The lawyer from the Simcoe clinic can scan and send documents to a service provider who can then print and bring those documents to the client during home visits (with the client's permission). This assists clients so that they do not have to physically find a way to get to the legal clinic in order to complete and sign documentation.

The relationships that developed as a result of outreach also led staff at the Simcoe clinic becoming involved in different community tables or meetings, which then led to better partnerships and ultimately better results for clients. For example, they noted an increase in housing referrals at an earlier stage than usual, allowing them to resolve issues without litigation and to prepare many cases in advance of Landlord and Tenant Board meetings. This preparation has resulted in better outcomes for the clients.

A representative from the Five County Network reported that because of relationships developed, resulting from the seed grant outreach, they had made a connections with both the John Howard Society and the Salvation Army which had resulted in improved access to justice for the focus populations. The John Howard Society would not normally be a central partner for a legal aid clinic

because they do not deal with criminal law, but clinics can provide other help that can prevent parolees from violating their parole. The connection with the Salvation Army led to the legal clinic having a satellite office at a soup kitchen. Having satellite offices, in rural communities, are key to improving access to justice.

### 3.3.2 Capacity Building for Trusted Intermediaries

For the A2JP project, particularly for communities served by the Simcoe clinic, and to a lesser extent the Peterborough clinic, key informants reported that through the outreach conducted during the seed grant process staff at the different social and community organizations became more knowledgeable about legal information and legal resources. Because of this knowledge staff at these organizations make better referrals which increases access to justice services, as mentioned above.

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*“... thinking back to the focus group that we did in Campbellford -- we made a connection with the Salvation Army there. They run a soup kitchen. Now our satellite [office] runs at the soup kitchen. So ... you don't know where the connection might lead or when you might need it but it's good to have those opportunities.”*

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*“We used [the seed grant process] as an opportunity to get invitations to speak to agency staff across our area about our practice. We talked about substantive law but the purpose was really to ensure that they understood what we were doing for clients. Once they became more knowledgeable about what we did, we noticed an improvement in the referrals that we received. At the same time, we impressed upon them that there were no bad referrals as far as we were concerned. We made a commitment to assisting every client we could or finding some kind of help for them.”*

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The stakeholder from the Peterborough clinic also believed that capacity was built among non-legal service providers during the outreach conducted, but reported that it is difficult to maintain because of staff turnover. She reported that many organizations don't have core funding which makes it difficult to retain staff and unless there is rigorous institutional memory processes in place, that capacity fades over time.

For communities served by the Simcoe clinic, the outreach conducted was instrumental in developing relationships with a number of organizations and those partnerships have continued post-seed grant. As a result, therefore, the capacity built for service providers has not faded and has continued to grow. The clinic maintains ongoing communication with these organizations and is involved in different planning tables as well. As well, the staff lawyer most involved with these organizations has conducted workshops on different topics (e.g., consumer law), since the seed grant phase, at their request.

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*“[The seed grant] gave us the money to bring people together and since then we have maintained contact with them, delivering material, holding workshops, participating in the activities of their agencies (for example, as directors) and basically stopped by from time to time to chat about what is going on in the community.”*

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For the LEARN project, the model that was proposed by the Five County Network included a capacity building component -- LEARN Law. The objective of LEARN Law was to increase the capacity of non-legal service providers (trusted intermediaries) to identify when clients had legal problems, provide them with basic legal information, and/or provide warm referrals to appropriate legal services. During the seed grant process that work began, through the consultations and workshops. The Five County Network used an action research approach during the seed grant so that once a need was identified, then they would organize something to address that need. For example, they would also do “road shows” around a certain issue – for example, elder law or family law – and hosted sessions in each of the communities served by the four legal clinics. The small clinics have a difficult time organizing things like that with limited resources; the seed grant allowed that to occur. Post-seed grant, a lot of energy was put into capacity building for trusted intermediaries in the communities serviced by the five legal clinics in the Five County Network.

The seed grant enabled the Five County Network to conceptualize and develop aspects of the LEARN model which served as blueprint for moving forward after the seed grant was completed. Although they could not implement other components of the model, as originally envisioned, they were able to focus attention on LEARN Law. At the end of the seed grant process, they presented their report/model to Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) and were successful in receiving small grants from LAO to implement a number of initiatives over the years. These have included grants from LAO’s Client Services Coordination Funds as well as Innovations Funds. The Five County Network has used these funds to improve coordination and collaboration work and to improve the efficiency of legal service delivery and knowledge sharing. Stakeholders provided a couple of examples of capacity-building projects they have worked on over the years that stemmed from the seed grant process; these included:

- **Family Law Paths to Justice Guide Working Group:** throughout the consultations conducted during the seed grant, it became obvious that service providers required help in understanding and accessing family law legal help and resources. A working group was convened and the group developed a Family Law Resources Guide and a day-long learning event opened by a local Family Court Judge. Later, a courthouse tour was organized with the help of the Judge, as well as workshops in Lennox & Addington County and in Hastings County. The workshops brought together service providers from the Client Service Centre, LAO Duty Counsel, mediation services, and the Family Law and Resource Coordinator from the Family Law Information Centre. The workshops enabled everyone present to learn the resources, network with each other, and work together to solve problems and share best practices

- **Librarians and Access to Justice Outreach Project:** As a result of a focus group that was held during the seed grant with staff from four of Hastings County's fourteen public libraries, libraries were identified as key partners in providing access to legal information. After the end of the seed grant, the Library Outreach Committee was formed which included staff from CALC, the CEOs of the four libraries, the courthouse librarian, a lawyer from the Hastings County Law Association, and a representative from CLEO (Community Legal Education Ontario). This group first ensured that existing legal reference holdings in the libraries were up-to-date. They then developed discrete strategies for "pushing" legal information to patrons (because in smaller communities residents would probably be wary of disclosing personal information to librarians). They developed a tip sheet as an easy reference for librarians, and arranged for CLEO materials to be hosted in every library. They worked with librarians to place icons on library computer opening screens to push patrons to CALC and to CLEO resources, for example. They surveyed library staff and determined that staff wanted to receive more training in this area; CALC and CLEO subsequently developed training workshops for library staff. There were many other initiatives undertaken by this group, which centred on ensuring that the librarians had easy access to legal information resources and were kept up-to-date. This local initiative was eventually scaled up provincially through a one-day forum funded by Legal Aid Ontario, and co-sponsored by the Law Society of Upper Canada (as it then was) and CLEO. CLEO built upon the momentum of this committee and the provincial forum and, with funding from The Law Foundation of Ontario, developed, in partnership with Ontario Library Association and the Southern Ontario Library Services, an online 8-week training course for librarians that was recently launched.

### 3.3.3 Partnerships and Service Delivery

#### A2JP Project

At the A2JP Project, the Grey-Bruce clinic was already well connected to their community partners; however, the stakeholder from that clinic did report on a partnership that occurred after the seed grant process. The Simcoe clinic had invited the Grey-Bruce clinic to participate in another initiative (systematizing the Ontario disability support intake interviews) and he believed this partnership came about through their working together on the seed grant.

The stakeholder from the Peterborough clinic reported that the seed grant process had also helped build the relationship with the Simcoe clinic. This key informant also reported that the seed grant process "*strengthened existing relationships with service providers*".

The most significant impacts, however, on partnerships and service delivery were experienced by the Simcoe clinic. The three stakeholders interviewed from the Simcoe/Haliburton/Kawartha Lakes region reported on key partnerships that had developed between the legal clinic and non-legal service providers in the region. The developments that occurred as a result of the seed grant process included:

- **Co-location of services:** Haliburton Highlands Mental Health Services (HHMHS) offered the legal clinic space in their office. The HHMHS office also houses Fourcast Addiction Services, Four Counties Brain Injury Association, and the CMHA/Four County Crisis and if in the same build with the John Howard Society and across the street from the YWCA. The result is that the legal clinic has improved its ability to provide services to low-income residents in Haliburton County and the City of Kawartha Lakes. A staff lawyer is at the HHMHS one day every two weeks and the HHMHS actually schedules appointments for the lawyer on the day that she is there.
- **Involvement in Community Planning Tables:** The staff lawyer responsible for doing much of the outreach conducted during the seed grant process was invited to join the Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee (HSJCC) for Haliburton County. That committee has put her and her Community Legal Worker in touch with a variety of service providers as the Committee includes representatives from a wide range of organizations and agencies.
- **Improved Relationships among Service Providers:** Key informants also reported that the seed grant process, through the community meetings and the regional conference, had helped open up dialogue between different service providers. One key informant also reported that because she had gotten to know the lawyer from the clinic at the HSJCC she felt more comfortable contacting the legal clinic to ask questions and to obtain information for her clients.

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*“We sat in the room with people [from] Ontario Works and Ontario Disability that we advocate [with]. That’s our job ... and I think sitting in a room and ... at the same table or listening to what people were saying ... just [bringing] everyone together like that for the same purpose definitely smoothed some paths to other partnerships and I think that city social services was one of the big ones for us. .... It opened dialogue for us to continue with that and have better processes for our clients and make it easier for the staff at say Ontario Works to provide help for our clients because they understood where we were coming from a little bit better. It was quite mutual. And it still is that way today.”*

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- **Improved Access at Satellite Office:** The Simcoe clinic has a satellite office in Lindsay. During the consultation process they learned that staff from Ontario Works believed it would help their clients if the satellite office could have drop-in hours rather than having to schedule appointments. The staff reported that it would be much easier to simply send clients over to the satellite office rather than to book and schedule appointments. The legal clinic decided to act on this suggestion and it has been quite successfully operating that way since then.

All three key informants interviewed from the Simcoe/Haliburton/Kawartha Lakes area (one from the clinic and the other two from non-legal organizations) reported that the legal clinic is now much better connected to the community and that service providers and residents are more aware of the clinic. The legal clinic is more embedded and involved in poverty reduction efforts in the region than it had been before the seed grant process.

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*“[The legal clinic lawyer] now sits on pretty much every committee that has to do with poverty reduction, anywhere she would be needed to provide information. We sit on a lot of committees together.... It just opens the door for a lot of support and they have been wonderful at bringing us any new information ... all the information we have to help our clients is up-to-date and emails reminding us that this clinic is coming up .... The communication between us and the legal clinic has only grown....Every update to the landlord and tenant act, employment act, all of those things so that we can let our clients know what to expect, what they deserve and that ‘no, you shouldn’t have to deal with this.’ They keep us updated constantly.”*

*“The bottom line is that the service has improved as a result of probably the combination of the [regional conference] and the networking.... We were able to forge the relationships and they’re permanent relationships at this point.... I remember articulating very clearly to [lawyer at the legal clinic] what I thought the needs were and that led to regular and consistent [communication and connection] to services. Maybe a better word is integrated services.”*

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### **Five County Connecting Region Project: LEARN**

Key informants interviewed from the Five County Network reported that because of the seed grant process, the Five County Network itself became more focused and the partnership was strengthened – they moved beyond simply information sharing and became more action oriented. Relationships and partnerships between individual clinics in the network also grew, as well as opportunities to work more collaboratively with Legal Aid Ontario, and university student clinics, which were unique features of this project. For example, two of the clinics entered into a collaboration agreement so that expertise in different areas of law, and referrals, were shared. As well, learnings from the report they developed (Paths to Justice: Navigating with the Wandering Lost) were shared in a Queen’s University course, Professionals in Rural Practice: An Interdisciplinary Approach, that ran for two years.

Through the outreach and consultation conducted, the seed grant also resulted in more partnerships with organizations they normally would not have had partnerships with (e.g., John Howard Society). As well, the resources that the seed grant afforded allowed the smaller clinics to do outreach and make connections with service providers in more remote areas of their region. Key informants reported that the outreach and work conducted at the time of the seed grant also led to better working relationships with community agencies and organizations. The connections made, they reported, can lead to other initiatives.

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*“I can give a ... more recent example [of how]... all the work that we’ve done over the years and reaching out is showing proof.... The Table in Perth ... which is a very active organization spearheaded this rural resilience project and it’s advocating to raise the government’s awareness about issues faced by rural residents..... As a result of the connections with the Connecting Region project, the agency in which I currently have an office partnered with The Table and now the legal clinic to pursue this. So it’s all these little connections that as you strengthen them they yield other initiatives.”*

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The connections that are made, particularly with organizations that are more peripheral, can also lead to more satellite offices. Clients in more remote areas have more difficulty accessing services. Key informants stated that you need to have connections to a variety of organizations to create those satellite offices which are key to improving access to services for rural clients.

Further, the work that began as a result of the seed grant within the Five County Network led to developments and relationships that went beyond the five counties. For example, the Network had begun work on developing a type of legal health checklist and different legal service providers were invited to those meetings. As a direct result of this work, members of the Five County Network co-sponsored a community of practice group, with Connecting Ottawa and interested community clinics, which met in Toronto to develop best practices for intake and legal services. Halton Community Legal Services was one of the partners invited to those meetings and staff from that clinic eventually developed the Legal Health Check-Up, a web-based tool to screen for a client’s legal and non-legal needs. The Network’s earlier work on a similar approach led to a legal health awareness poster that has now been widely disseminated to local public libraries as well as justice and health partners. The theory and promising practices for working with the four distinct groups of trusted intermediaries that were developed through the action research process led to transformative changes in approaches for the four community legal clinics involved in the Network. This conceptualization of how to work most effectively with trusted intermediaries led to a presentation at the International Legal Aid Group with Dr. Ab Curry in 2013 called “Navigating with the Wandering Lost: The critical roles of trusted intermediaries in increasing access to justice”, as well as the publication of several blogs on the PLE Learning Exchange.

### 3.4 Conclusions

Given the outcomes that resulted from the seed grants – both at the time of the process as well as subsequently – there appears to be real value in awarding smaller grants. These seed grants provided the legal clinics involved with resources that allowed them to do outreach and build relationships. That work resulted in better working relationships, and also partnerships, between legal service providers and between legal organizations and non-legal organizations.

Those relationships and partnerships helped build the capacity of those who act in the role of trusted intermediaries: the seed grants allowed the legal clinics to work with trusted intermediaries to build their awareness of legal issues and of legal resources and services. The partnerships led to changes in service delivery that had positive impacts for clients; for example, more satellite offices, thereby making it easier for more rural clients to access services. Capacity building also led to better referrals and reduced referral fatigue. Clients were directed to the services they needed. The sharing of resources between legal clinics improved access to different legal issues in different communities.

All key informants interviewed saw the value in providing smaller grants to rural communities. The most significant impact they reported was that these grants provide them the resources to be able to do work that they cannot do with their core funding alone. It allowed them to do outreach and consultation and time to build and nurture relationships. Those relationships are key: they can result in immediate action and results, innovation in service delivery, and future initiatives and partnerships.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINAL THOUGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

## 4.0 Final Thoughts

The roots of Connecting Ottawa and this evaluation date back to 2008 when The Law Foundation of Ontario commissioned a report on access to justice for linguistic minorities and those living in rural and remote areas.<sup>31</sup> The Cohl and Thomson report confirmed the Foundation's understanding from its own grant-making that these two groups face significant access issues. Among the recommendations provided in that report, Cohl and Thomson recommended the development of a Connecting Region. The Law Foundation acted upon that recommendation and three consortiums in Ontario were awarded seed grants to consult with their communities and develop a Connecting Region model. One of those three consortiums, Connecting Ottawa, ultimately became the Connecting Region. This evaluation has looked back at these past eight years to assess the outcomes and impacts for the two consortiums who received seed grants, and has examined the Connecting Ottawa regional planning model – what was learned about what worked well and what has not.

The results of the evaluation are extensive and provide evidence of the value of both the longer-term Connecting Ottawa project and the shorter-term seed grants.

### 4.1 Key Findings

What we learned is that the seed grants had long lasting impacts. The Five County Network used the grant to conduct an action research project in their communities. They used the momentum created during the seed grant process to implement parts of the regional model they developed with the help of grants received from Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) over the years. The seed grant gave this network the opportunity to create a “road map”; that road map helped secure additional grants from LAO that allowed them to implement pieces of their model (e.g., Family Law Paths to Justice Guide Working Group, Librarians and Access to Justice Outreach Project). The success of the seed grant for this group is also due to the players involved and their motivation, energy and commitment to improving access to justice. Nonetheless, the grant provided them with resources to conduct the action research project that resulted in a plan from which to work in the subsequent years.

Of the four clinics involved in the Access to Justice Partnership Project (A2JP Project), long lasting impacts were experienced mostly by the lead legal clinic (Community Legal Clinic – Simcoe, Haliburton and Kawartha Lakes). The seed grant enabled the clinics to consult with their respective communities. The additional resources allowed the Simcoe clinic, in particular, to make new connections, reconnect with previous partners, and to build their reputation in their region. The relationships developed during the seed grant process resulted in changes in service delivery that helped clients more easily access legal services (e.g., co-location of services, changing satellite office hours to drop-in rather than schedule appointments). The relationship development also helped the clinic become much more connected to what was happening in the region. A staff member from the clinic became involved in different planning groups and tables; essentially this clinic was able to at least partially implement their original plan – that is, the outreach component. Some of these partnerships may have happened anyway. The clinic's

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<sup>31</sup> Cohl, K. & Thomson, G. (2008). *Connecting Across Language and Distance*. The Law Foundation of Ontario.

progress, however, would have been much slower, and may not have resulted in all of the partnerships and connections made, had the seed grant not been received.

The success of that seed grant process is owed, we believe, to the additional resources provided. The resources allowed time to be devoted to developing relationships and consulting with their communities. Working on a concrete project was a catalyst in developing partnerships and trust. Access to justice was improved for those living in rural and remote areas for the region covered by the Five County Network group, and for communities served by the Simcoe clinic.

The consortium for the A2JP project did not continue to meet after the seed grant ended; although key informants believed that the relationships between the clinics was strengthened as a result of the process. This group had not met, as a network or consortium, before the seed grant – they came together as a result of receiving the grant. The Five County Network, however, was a pre-existing group (albeit with four counties, not five). We believe that one of the reasons this network was so successful in implementing more aspects of their regional model was because of this pre-existing partnership. Securing the additional grants from LAO also helped this network succeed in implementing initiatives. Having staff members who are committed to collaboration and access to justice issues was also key to success.

We learned that Connecting Ottawa has been very successful in improving access to justice for their focus populations – those who are not proficient in English or French or who cannot communicate due to disability or sensory impairment. They have effectively trained and built the capacity of frontline staff in social and community organizations to become trusted intermediaries for the focus populations. Connecting Ottawa has also helped legal staff to develop their knowledge of community resources and supports. A more coordinated and holistic approach to working with clients in the focus populations who face legal issues has been created. We heard that there were cases that would “fall through the cracks” because of limitations in the system if it was not for the resources and support of Connecting Ottawa.

Connecting Ottawa has also created a system of legal navigation. That system involves connecting with legal and non-legal organizations in Ottawa. Through the work they do (case consultations, PLEs, annual conference), the Connecting Ottawa team brings the two systems (legal and social/community) together; they help connect staff from these organizations to the right services and legal resources. Their partnership with each organization is different. They are quite involved with some settlement agencies because those agencies serve many clients in the focus populations. For other organizations, who have different mandates and who may not serve large numbers of the focus populations, they build capacity by providing information. All partners are kept up-to-date via regular newsletters and all are invited to the PLEs and annual conference. The PLEs and annual conferences not only convey information to participants but facilitate connections and learning by simply putting legal and non-legal service providers in the same room together. Finally, the system also includes the Advisory Committee who helps Connecting Ottawa problem solve and work on systemic issues as they arise.

Connecting Ottawa is excelling at fulfilling its mandate -- in doing what it set out to do. They are working at maximum capacity and yet there are still gaps, unmet needs, and groups not being reached. There seemed to be an interest and desire amongst many stakeholders and frontline staff to extend the outreach and mandate of Connecting Ottawa. More resources would clearly be needed to expand its

reach and meet the needs of new frontline staff and their clients, while continuing to meet the needs of existing frontline workers and their clients.

There are many effective practices and lessons learned from this evaluation project that should be shared. Other regions looking to improve the ways in which legal and non-legal organizations work together could learn from the experiences of Connecting Ottawa, as well as the Five County Network and A2JP projects. Initiatives in other regions, however, should be locally developed and locally driven. Although there are broad lessons to be learned, what works in one community may not work in another. The process needs to be somewhat organic and capitalize on the strengths of their local communities. For example, there may already be existing social planning tables or committees that could serve as a starting point for a new initiative. Having a champion to drive any new initiative is key: that person has to be committed to working collaboratively, listening to others, and have the energy and skills to bring people together and continue to move the project forward.

What we learned from all three sites – Connecting Ottawa, the Five County Network, and the A2JP project – was that, first and foremost, legal service providers worked collaboratively to respond to the needs of frontline staff and clients. What do they require in order to truly have access to justice? For those living in rural and remote areas, that might mean more legal clinic satellite offices and more drop-in hours, easy access to “tip sheets”, and easier ways to process documents (rather than traveling long distances to file paperwork). For linguistic minorities that might mean more availability of interpreters, more skill-building among agencies that work with newcomers, or more resources in clients’ first languages. Any coordinated response by legal and non-legal organizations, to improve access to justice, needs to start there: consult and listen.

The idea of “trusted intermediaries”, as originally conceived by Cohl and Thomson, made sense to key informants from all three groups. Frontline staff working in social and community organizations are often the first contact for people; for legal information and services to be accessible, those service providers need to be trained to identify legal issues and to respond effectively. Other regions in Ontario looking to implementing a Connecting Region model would need to include capacity building and training for those trusted intermediaries. Identifying, and strategizing, on how to deal with systemic issues would also need to be addressed. As Cohl and Thomson reported, problems often occur in clusters; vulnerable individuals may be dealing with multiple issues. A “silo” approach does not work, can lead to referral fatigue, and issues may not be resolved. A coordinated response is required. For Connecting Ottawa, having the lawyer/social worker team has helped ensure that coordinated response and that cases do not fall through the cracks.

## 4.2 Recommendations

Based on our learnings from this evaluation, we outline some recommendations to facilitate Connecting Ottawa and The Law Foundation of Ontario to move forward in continuing to improve access to justice for linguistic minorities and people who live in rural or remote areas. The recommendations are intended to build on the strengths of the Connecting Region and to take into account the demands on Connecting Ottawa and the Foundation.

### 4.2.1 Connecting Ottawa

1. The results of the evaluation demonstrate that the Connecting Ottawa model is working very well. There are aspects of the model that continue to be unclear or unknown for some. These include the role that Connecting Ottawa plays in providing direct service to clients, the social worker role, and the role of volunteer facilitators. Connecting Ottawa should continue to work with partners to clarify these components of their model:
  - a. The Connecting Ottawa model is a capacity-building one - they help to develop the skills and knowledge of trusted intermediaries. Yet, Connecting Ottawa is flexible in responding to the needs of the community and there are times when direct service is provided. The messaging around this should be more transparent: be clear about when, and under what circumstances, direct service is provided.
  - b. The role of the social worker on the Connecting Ottawa team was unclear to some network members. Frontline staff, who had worked directly with Connecting Ottawa, did not seem to have this same confusion. To some extent, when seeking legal information, frontline staff utilize the services of the social worker and the lawyer interchangeably. The title of “social worker” itself may be part of the issue, as it is not a traditional frontline social work role as some understand that role to be. Connecting Ottawa might consider a new title for that role. Further, Connecting Ottawa should continue to work with partners to clarify the roles of the Connecting Ottawa team members.
  - c. The role of the volunteer facilitators was unclear to some as well, and Connecting Ottawa should continue to work with partners on clarifying this role and how it may help clients. More about this component is discussed in Recommendation 3.
  - d. Continue to promote the resources that Connecting Ottawa offers.
2. The case consultation model implemented by Connecting Ottawa builds frontline staff capacity and facilitates access to justice for the focus populations. It is a critical component of the Connecting Ottawa model, connecting legal and non-legal services to facilitate the resolution of legal issues for the focus populations. According to Connecting Ottawa staff and stakeholders, the demand for case consultations is increasing and case consultations involve a lot of Connecting Ottawa’s resources. Connecting Ottawa should continue with the case consultation, but should consider the following:
  - a. Continue to build the capacity of a few key front line workers so that they can become a “go-to” person in their organizations when others have questions regarding their clients’ legal issues.
  - b. Continue to explore if there are more efficient ways to do case consultations. Perhaps there are others who could lend support and, therefore, reduce the hours involved by the Connecting Ottawa lawyer or social worker (e.g., students, volunteer facilitators, other lawyers).

3. The volunteer facilitator component of the Connecting Ottawa model can be a valuable resource in further improving access to justice for the focus populations. They have been underutilized, however, and their role was unclear to some. This evaluation did not fully answer the questions about this component of the model; further exploration is needed with respect to:
  - a. The strengths and weaknesses of this component and the potential supply and demand for the volunteer facilitators.
  - b. Options for improving the efficiency, effectiveness and coordination of the program (e.g., hiring a part-time coordinator for this component, automated system that facilitators could log into weekly to show their availability and where users could make requests, pursuing funding sources for any additions to this program).
  - c. Impacts the volunteer facilitators have on the focus populations' access to justice.
4. Connecting Ottawa's mandate is to support and work with trusted intermediaries or frontline workers; it's mandate is not to serve members of the public directly. However, numerous evaluation participants suggested that Connecting Ottawa should increase its outreach to members of the public, particularly more marginalized individuals who are not accessing partner agencies. With sufficient resources, Connecting Ottawa could certainly reach out to the public directly or to leaders in communities that may be more isolated and less likely to access services through partner organizations. This would however require a significant change to Connecting Ottawa's mandate. We do not recommend making this change to the mandate. Instead, we recommend that Connecting Ottawa continue to build its network and work on outreach and relationship development with network members with the goal to increase the number of agencies who are more involved (levels 1 and 2). Work to expand the network should consider opportunities to engage with populations that are not as well served by existing partners and thereby expand Connecting Ottawa's reach into different sub-populations.
5. Lunch and Learns and other educational events were highly praised by evaluation participants. They found them to be informative and very useful in building their capacity. There was some feedback, however, on timing, location and suggestions to enhance these events. Connecting Ottawa is encouraged to collect additional feedback on Lunch and Learns from partner organizations, and if warranted (and possible), further enhance these useful resources. One possibility is to explore having partners, volunteer facilitators, and students contribute to the organization of such events.
6. There were numerous references in the interviews and case examples about barriers to interpretation experienced by the focus populations in trying to access legal services. Continue to advocate for funds for interpretation and that every person seeking legal services has access to an interpreter.

7. The impact of the social work students has been documented in this evaluation. Social work students are able to support trusted intermediaries in the time-consuming work of complex legal cases that involve social issues. The learnings these students gain are one clear way of sustaining the effects of the program as they take those learnings into their own work upon graduation. Connecting Ottawa should continue and enhance its formal partnerships with social work schools. The benefits of such partnerships could be far-reaching as more students would be exposed to learnings from the Connecting Ottawa model -- not only through placements but potentially through impacts on the curricula itself.
8. The lawyers from community legal clinics who have used Connecting Ottawa services reported positively about its impact in facilitating a more holistic response to legal needs. Connecting Ottawa should further enhance its impact by increasing its outreach to legal organizations, private bar lawyers, law schools, and other lawyer associations.
9. Ongoing evaluation would help Connecting Ottawa track the project's outcomes and adjust its model to maximize efficiency and effectiveness in meeting its goals. Connecting Ottawa is encouraged to develop a framework for ongoing evaluation.
  - a. Include a component that allows feedback from the focus populations and to assess if they are following up on referrals.
  - b. Include a needs assessment component to further assess Connecting Ottawa's reach into the focus populations. Explore whether there are linguistic groups (e.g., Arabic, Somali, Spanish, Farsi, Chinese), sub-groups (e.g., seniors) and disability groups (e.g., cognitive disabilities, mental health issues), who have substantial unmet legal needs.
  - c. Further explore the volunteer facilitator component.
  - d. Seek out funding sources for the evaluation.
10. Given the demand for Connecting Ottawa services, Connecting Ottawa should review with The Law Foundation of Ontario the results of the evaluation carefully and identify priority areas. Identifying other sources of funding would be necessary to expand the program's services, as Connecting Ottawa is working at maximum capacity.

#### **4.2.2 The Law Foundation of Ontario**

1. The results of the evaluation revealed that the seed grants' processes resulted in concrete long term outcomes in the rural communities involved. Based on the results, we recommend the Foundation:
  - a. Expand this model and make seed funding available for rural communities.
  - b. Continue to ensure that knowledge dissemination is part of these grants; encourage the sharing of lessons and/or mentoring between projects initiated by different groups.

2. There were a number of learnings from the evaluation that should be considered in granting money for new or existing Connecting Region-type initiatives:
  - a. Grantees should demonstrate leadership and commitment.
  - b. It is beneficial that grantees have a history of working together or had previous partnerships; at the very least, they should have shared values.
  - c. A region or initiative should have a champion that is committed to the delivery of the project.
  - d. The lead agency should receive an adequate stipend for coordination, administrative activities, leadership, outreach, and dissemination work.
  - e. Recognize that efforts to develop a connecting region are longer term and, as it has done with Connecting Ottawa, consider longer-term funding for successful seed projects. It takes time to build relationships, trust and partnerships; build that time in to grants.
  - f. Grantees should demonstrate a commitment to flexibility and thinking outside of the box - two practices essential to improving access to justice.
3. Share the learnings from this evaluation, including recommendations for other regions and best practices in developing strategies for improving access to justice. At the same time, ensure that other regions and initiatives know that strategies need to be locally developed and work for the local/community context.
4. The interactive case consultation model is a good way of building capacity for trusted intermediaries and providing a more holistic response to clients with complex needs. Both the legal and non-legal sectors saw the value in this approach. The Foundation may wish to explore how this model could work in different communities and in different regions. For example, how would it need to be adapted to ensure that it fits and would work in rural and remote settings? Exploring this approach in a rural or remote region of the province might be worthwhile.
5. Connecting Ottawa has demonstrated many positive findings and works well in the Ottawa community. The Foundation should continue to work with Connecting Ottawa to further understand the model, its outcomes and limitations, and to continue to refine and improve on it.