

GTA CLINIC TRANSFORMATION PROJECT

Monthly Newsletter

August 2013

Welcome!

Welcome to the first newsletter of the GTA Clinic Transformation Project. This newsletter will be produced and distributed monthly to keep everyone informed on the work and progress of the Project.

What is the GTA Clinic Transformation Project?

Clinics across the GTA are working together to explore new ways of organizing community legal services to provide better access to justice for people living on low incomes.

Where did this Project come from?

The Project was started by four clinics in Toronto that wanted to plan out their futures. They won an innovation grant from LAO and began to analyze different structures they could use to serve low-income people better. They were soon joined by the other two clinics on the east side of the city.

The Project started with the assumption that no change was worth making if it didn't improve access to justice for people living on low incomes. The analysis they did and the models they came up with, came from looking at how better access is achieved.

The Project drew on the experience of front line staff and community members in the east end of Toronto, and on learnings from community legal clinics around the world. They took time to explore many different possibilities. That led them to some conclusions about what the best structure for community legal clinics could be.

Not all of those conclusions were ones they all expected. Some were ones they were nervous about, but that's where the evidence led them. And if they were serious about serving people well, they decided they had to go where the facts take them.

Now what?

Having looked at how service improvements can be made in the east end of the City, the six east end Clinics realized that the results of their work had larger implications and application beyond their Clinics. As a result, the six east end Clinics proposed a broader GTA-wide project. This has led to 16 of the 17 general service Clinics in the GTA signing onto the GTA Clinic Transformation Project. The Project is now seeking more input from across the GTA. We want to hear from front line staff, community members and service participants from the west end of the City and the 905. More information can lead us to even better conclusions. And what turned out to be true in the east end of Toronto, may not be true everywhere, so we need to re-examine all the evidence in this new context.

Who is in charge?

Every Clinic is encouraged to participate in the process. Every Clinic has a vote on the Steering Committee that will develop any proposed change. That enables Clinics, in consultation with the people we serve, to make the choices about our future and the way we offer services to the community. A Working Group will oversee the day-to-day management of the process. The Steering Committee and Working Group have agreed that Public Interest, a local social enterprise, should be hired to assist in the work.

How does this work?

We have to look at the issues and the evidence and think about how we can explore whatever changes are needed, so we can do the best job possible for the people we serve.

The first step is to look at the demographics of the GTA and the challenges people face. Using 2011 Census data we'll be exploring the distribution of low-income families but also the issues they face – like immigration, family stresses, employment problems and housing challenges. We want to know where the people who need us live so we can make practical, client-centred plans about how we accommodate them.

The Steering Committee will spend September and October exploring that evidence.

Data is great, but any real understanding of how clinics work comes from talking to the people who work in them and who use and rely on them. Front line staff, Board members, clients and community leaders will be asked to join in focus groups and participate in interviews to help paint a richer picture of what works and where there are challenges, what we need to do more of and what needs to change. That first hand experience is invaluable to defining any agenda for change.

The Steering Committee will spend November exploring that evidence.

The next step is to look at the best way to serve people. Around the world people are experimenting with ways to ensure low-income communities have access to justice. We'll be exploring the experience in other jurisdictions and also exploring good ideas right here in Ontario to define a set of good practices that we can use as a guide in planning.

The Steering Committee will spend December exploring that evidence.

Once we know what kind of models work, how the current system works well and faces obstacles, and know where the people who need us are, we're ready to start to talk about change.

You can see we're not in a hurry to rush into something blindly. We want to get all the evidence on the table and then start to plan.

Plans could include new boundaries, new approaches and a change in the number and size of clinics. Or none of the above. We'll go where the evidence takes us.

The Steering Committee will spend January exploring these ideas.

Once we have a model though, we'll need to think about transitions. Change can be hard and there is a duty, to the people who work in clinics and the people they serve, to make sure the changes have the least possible negative impact on everyone. Past transitions in the sector show that including everyone in a thoughtful transition planning process and taking all the little details into account is critical to successful transitions.

The Steering Committee will spend February exploring these ideas.

How do I have a say?

If you are involved with a Clinic, talk to your Clinic's Steering Committee representative about what's happening. If you work at a Clinic you'll be asked to have direct input. If you live in an affected community, we'll be seeing people to participate in interviews and focus groups to give us their guidance, let us know you'd like to participate. And if you just have a really great idea, send us an email at info@GTAclinics.ca.

You can stay on top of all the progress by visiting our website www.GTAclinics.ca, and have input through there as well. In the meantime, we will be putting out this newsletter once a month to let you know what's been happening.

Thanks for taking an interest in the GTA Clinic Transformation Project.