

# THE ALBERTA LEGAL SERVICES MAPPING PROJECT

Report for the

GRANDE PRAIRIE JUDICIAL DISTRICT

November 25, 2010



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## Acknowledgements

The Alberta Legal Services Mapping Project is a collaborative undertaking made possible by the generous contributions of many Albertans. We are grateful to the Alberta Law Foundation and Alberta Justice for the funding that makes this project possible. The project is guided by Research Directors representing the Alberta Law Foundation, Alberta Justice, Calgary Legal Guidance, the Canadian Forum on Civil Justice, Edmonton Community Legal Centre, Legal Aid Alberta, and the Alberta Ministry of Solicitor General and Public Security. We are also indebted to our Advisory Committee which is made up of a wide group of stakeholders, and to the Community Service Providers and Focus Group for their valuable input and support. We also thank all members of the Research Team and everyone who has dedicated their time as a research participant in order to make this Report possible.

**Disclaimer**

This report and its appendices have been prepared by the Canadian Forum on Civil Justice and the Alberta Legal Services Mapping Team and represent the independent and objective recording and summarization of input received from stakeholders, service providers and members of the public. Any opinions, interpretations, conclusions or recommendations contained within this document are those of the writers, and may or may not coincide with those of the Alberta Law Foundation or other members of the Research Directors Committee.

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# **THE ALBERTA LEGAL SERVICES MAPPING PROJECT: Report for the GRANDE PRAIRIE JUDICIAL DISTRICT**

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The Grande Prairie Judicial District is the tenth of eleven Alberta Judicial Districts to be mapped as part of the Alberta Legal Services Mapping Project (ALSMP). The ALSMP is a large-scale, multi-year endeavour, designed to gain an understanding of the legal needs of Albertans and of the legal services available in Alberta.

The goals of this project are to:

- Collect and share information about existing legal services in Alberta.
- Gain a better understanding about the characteristics of people and communities across Alberta and their legal needs.
- Identify strengths and gaps in current legal service delivery and resources.
- Strengthen relationships between legal service providers through the sharing of knowledge and expertise.

The report for the Calgary Judicial District, the pilot region for the ALSMP research, includes a detailed introduction to the project and details of the research methodology and can be accessed from the Canadian Forum on Civil Justice (the Forum) website at <http://cfcj-fcjc.org/docs/2009/mapping-calgary-en.pdf>. A combined and condensed version of the original Legal Services I and II and the Brief Legal Questionnaires was used in the Grande Prairie Judicial District (Appendix A). This instrument was created after we reviewed our experiences in the pilot District and were able to condense the questionnaire to those questions that best elicit the information we require.

I travelled to the Grande Prairie Judicial District in October 2010. I held a Community Focus Group meeting in Grande Prairie. I also conducted interviews with legal and related social and health service providers in Grande Prairie via telephone.

## **1.1 Outline of the Report**

In this project we strive to address the following major research questions:

1. What programs, services and facilities relating to the administration of justice, public access and public understanding, are available in each Alberta judicial district?

2. What do we know about the users of current legal education, information, advice, representation and support services?
3. How can current legal services be enhanced to better meet client needs and how can service gaps be effectively filled?

In this Report we will first describe the relevant characteristics of this Judicial District, and then discuss the existing legal and related services in Grande Prairie. We will then discuss the predominant legal needs followed by identified gaps in legal and related services, noting the challenges, good practices and creative approaches of service providers. We will conclude by making recommendations designed to support good practices, remove barriers and fill identified gaps in needed services. Suggestions for how they might best be achieved are also provided.

## **1.2 Strengths and Limitations of the Research**

The Project is an ambitious undertaking that involves the collection of valuable quantitative and qualitative data. The result is a combination of facts and figures with qualitative themes to provide context and explanations for the trends that emerge. The strengths of this Project are:

- it produces a large amount of useful data regarding what legal and related services exist,
- it engages people who live and work in the District and gains from their insights and experiences,
- it relies on mixed methodology and can thus provide a more complete picture of the topics that are addressed, and
- it takes a holistic approach to examining legal and related needs.

That said, there are always limitations when conducting research:

- we were not able to interview representatives from every legal and related service in the District, and
- we were not able to interview members of the public due to time and financial constraints.

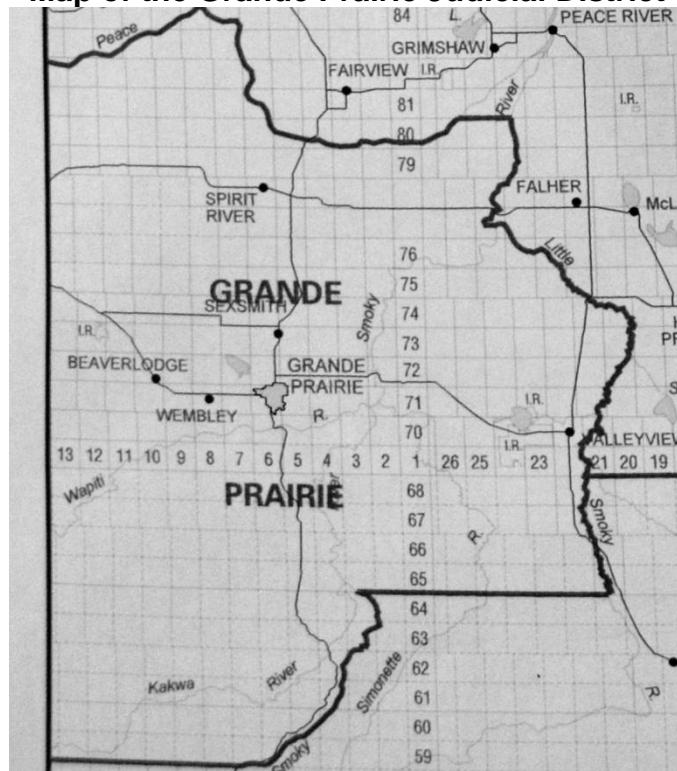
## **1.3 Database**

One of the deliverables of this Project is the creation of a database that provides information about all of the mapped legal and related services in Alberta. The database contains basic information about services such as mandates, as well as details about location, eligibility criteria, required documentation and accessibility. The administrative interface for this database can be viewed online by project partners by going to [www.albertalegalservices.ca/admin/](http://www.albertalegalservices.ca/admin/) then entering *guest* as the user name and *mappingdata* as the password.

Beyond the scope of this project, but very closely related, will be the development of a website that will be user-friendly and available to members of the public as well as service providers. There is a significant amount of interest in this next step, and the Team is currently seeking suggestions about where the data should ultimately be housed and how the public interface should be developed.

## 2.0 ABOUT THE GRANDE PRAIRIE JUDICIAL DISTRICT

**Figure 1 –  
Map of the Grande Prairie Judicial District**



### 2.1 Population

The population of the city of Grande Prairie was 47,076 as of the last Census (Statistics Canada, 2006). One participant estimated that it is currently at 50,000. There are approximately 4,365 people living in this city who self-identified as being of Aboriginal descent.

Increased immigration in this area was noted by all participants, especially a significant increase in the Somali population. According to Statistics Canada (2006), there were at that time approximately 2,985 immigrants and 285 non-permanent residents in the city of Grande Prairie. The majority of people who self-identified as visible minorities were:

- Filipino (23%),

- South Asian (20%), and
- Chinese (18%).

At that time, Black<sup>1</sup> people, which include the Somali population, came in fourth at 14%.

It was also suggested during interviews that the population is relatively young (average 45) and transient, meaning that they do not stay in this area long. One participant estimated that many people stay for 3 years or less). According to Statistics Canada (2006) the largest proportion of the population falls between ages 20 – 34.

The estimated population of the remainder of the Judicial District is 51,912:

- Beaverlodge (population 2,264),
- Birch Hills County (population 1,470),
- Fairview (population 3,297),
- Grande Prairie County No. 1 (population 17,970),
- Hythe (population 821),
- Municipal District of Big Lakes (population 5,805),
- Municipal District of Fairview No. 136 (population 1,432),
- Municipal District of Greenview No. 16 (population 5,464),
- Municipal District of Peace No. 135 (population 1,487),
- Municipal District of Smoky River No. 130 (population 2,442),
- Municipal District of Spirit River No. 133 (population 662),
- Saddle Hills County (population 2,458),
- Sexsmith (population 1,959),
- Spirit River (population 1,148), and
- Valleyview (population 1,725).

There are also three reserves in this Judicial District. One is the Duncan No. 151 Reserve. The population is 102. The second is Horse Lake Reserve, which is located approximately 75 kilometers from Grande Prairie. The population is 335. The final and largest of these three is Sturgeon Lake, with a population of 1,071 (Statistics Canada, 2006). No Métis Settlements are located in this District. Thus, the total estimated population, based on the 2006 Census data, is 98,988.

## 2.2 Education

Participants perceived the level of education in this District as low (Table 1). Some pointed to the fact that many people move to the District to work in the oil and gas

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<sup>1</sup> Term used by Statistics Canada.

industry. Additionally, this is the first District in which learning and cognitive disabilities – and lack of resources/supports – was reported as a significant barrier (Section 4.2.3).

**Table 1 –  
Educational Attainment for Grande Prairie**

Education	Alberta		Grande Prairie	
	Total %	Aboriginals %	Total %	Aboriginals %
Less Than High School	14	26	24	37
High School	24	25	30	27
Trade	12	18	13	13
University/College	48	27	32	23

Source: Statistics Canada (2006)

Confirming participants perceptions, rates of high school dropouts and people who report high school as their highest attained level of education, are significantly higher than provincial averages. Furthermore, university and college completion rates are significantly lower than provincial averages. The high school dropout rates are significantly higher for Aboriginal peoples, and university or college completion rates are also significantly lower than provincial rates for Aboriginal residents.

## 2.3 Employment & Industry

Statistics Canada (2006) reported the labour force participation rate in Grande Prairie as 80.8% and the unemployment rate as 3.6%. This fell well below the 2006 provincial rate of 4.6%. The main three industries are:

- Agriculture and resource-based,
- Business services, and
- Retail.

The occupations that employ the largest proportion of the work force are:

- Trades and transportation (24%),
- Sales and service occupations (23%), and
- Business and finance (15%).

The occupations in which the majority of those in the work force are employed are:

- Sales and services (29%),
- Trades and transport (27%), and
- Business and finance (9%).

## 2.4 Cost of Living

In a 2007 *Place to Place Comparison Survey*, Central Alberta.ca (<http://www.centralalberta.ab.ca/index.cfm?page=CostofLiving>) reported that Grande Prairie and area is one of the more affordable areas in Northern Alberta to live (Table 2). It is more expensive than Districts in Southern Alberta – Drumheller, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat – which are the most affordable areas in which to live.

**Table 2 –  
Housing Price Trends in Alberta 2001-2007**

	Red Deer	Edmonton	Calgary	Wood Buffalo	Grande Prairie	Lethbridge	Medicine Hat
2001	\$183,922	\$188,630	\$239,437	n/a	n/a	\$159,660	\$171,215
2002	\$181,618	\$204,922	\$242,386	n/a	n/a	\$162,688	\$178,474
2003	\$196,960	\$223,507	\$267,104	\$313,267	\$168,550	\$173,845	\$199,450
2004	\$217,048	\$242,175	\$285,243	\$297,629	\$187,842	\$187,963	\$222,485
2005	\$239,337	\$266,728	\$315,796	\$462,451	\$210,937	\$215,335	\$255,256
2006	\$257,261	\$304,894	\$353,662	\$517,524	\$254,350	\$244,486	\$263,102
2007	\$270,494	\$338,636	\$414,066	\$463,239	\$264,791	\$229,646	\$249,268

Source: Central Alberta.ca

All participants mention a lot of poverty, and extreme contrast between the poor and the well-to-do. Some participants indicate that poverty is in part due to alcohol and addictions among two income families, whereas in other cases it is associated with being a single parent or living in a rural community or on reserve. Interestingly, all interviewees mentioned addiction as a key *demographic* factor (Section 4.2.3).

## 3.0 EXISTING LEGAL AND RELATED SERVICES IN GRANDE PRAIRIE

At the time of the *Self-Represented Litigants Mapping Project* (SRLMP; <http://cfcj-fcjc.org/publications/mapping-en.php#srl>), the Grande Prairie Judicial District did not have a Law Information Centre (LInC), a Family Law Information Centre (FLIC) or a Community Legal Clinic. Opinion was divided as to whether a Community Legal Clinic or self-help centre was the priority. Now Grande Prairie has both and participants seem to value them highly, while also emphasizing their limited capacity (Section 3.3).

The SRLMP also heavily emphasized the importance for LInC and Community Clinics to have phone-in access to assistance and strong outreach programs. Participants this time reported that, although there is a push for people to phone in or apply online for legal services currently, there are barriers that impact rural residents' ability to do so (Section 3.5).

As with the SRLMP, the Team began research in the Grande Prairie Judicial District by mapping all legal services that could be found on the Internet and in any directories.

Legal services were categorized into one or more of the following categories based on the definitions provided below:

- **Advice** – individualized answers about how the law will apply to a person’s particular case, what outcome is likely, or what option the person should pursue. Legal advice can only be given by a lawyer or a law student.
- **Enforcement** – the application or regulation of a law, carrying out of an executive or judicial order or ensuring observance of or obedience to laws.
- **Legal Information** – the provision of one-on-one information concerning procedural and substantive law that directly pertains to the individual’s personal legal needs. Legal information can only be provided by a lawyer or law student.
- **Representation** – a lawyer, law student or paralegal recognized by the Court, preparing legal documents (pleadings, Affidavit, etc.) or appearing on behalf of a client. Legal representation includes duty counsel and unbundled legal services, a possible example of which includes drafting of pleadings.
- **Support** – services that offer court support programs or any other support/help finding or talking to legal and related services on behalf of clients needing legal assistance.
- **Public Legal Information and Education (PLEI)** – the provision of ‘one-to-many’ general information about the law, about the options that are available and about basic court processes. The information can be in the form of written materials (pamphlets, brochures, websites), educational programs, or telephone/in-person services.

Social or health services that provide any kind of formal or informal legal support (eg. advocacy or referrals) or see large numbers of clients with existing or potential legal needs were also mapped.

A selection of legal and related social and health services were identified for interviews.<sup>2</sup> Of these, seven participants representing five services in Grande Prairie agreed to participate in interviews and a Focus Group: three were sole-purpose<sup>3</sup> legal and two were a cross-over legal and social/health services.<sup>4</sup> The follow-up Focus Group that was held in Grande Prairie was held as a working rather than research meeting to review the themes that had emerged regarding barriers and gaps in services as well as to develop and prioritize recommendations for this District.

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<sup>2</sup> The Team has developed a prioritization process, which is described in detail in the methodology discussion of the Calgary Judicial District Report at page 13, footnote 16. <http://cfci-fcjc.org/docs/2009/mapping-calgary-en.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> “Sole-purpose” is a term used for the purposes of this Project, to differentiate legal services that do not have any social or health service components and social or health services that do not have any legal service components.

<sup>4</sup> A commitment of the ALSMP is to confidentiality. As we are now only able to include a very small number of participants we are no longer listing service representatives that have been interviewed.

### **3.1 Identification of Legal and Related Services**

The Team mapped 57 organizations that offer a total of 155 legal and related services in the Grande Prairie Judicial District (Table 3). Based on population, this District is the most sparsely serviced of the Districts that we have mapped thus far. Of the services mapped:

- 77 are sole-purpose legal services,
- 39 are cross-over legal and social/health services and
- 39 are sole-purpose social/health services.

**Table 3 –  
Services Available within the Grande Prairie District  
by Area of Law & Service Type<sup>5</sup>**

<b>AVAILABLE LEGAL SERVICES<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>City of Grande Prairie</b>	<b>Other Communities</b>	<b>Outside Judicial District</b>
<b>Administrative Law</b>			
<i>Advice</i>	1	-	2
<i>Enforcement</i>	1	-	9
<i>Representation</i>	-	-	-
<i>Support</i>	2	-	3
<i>PLEI</i>	7	6	36
<b>Civil Law</b>			
<i>Advice</i>	2	-	1
<i>Enforcement</i>	8	2	5
<i>Representation</i>	1	-	-
<i>Support</i>	6	1	2
<i>PLEI</i>	13	7	33
<b>Criminal Law</b>			
<i>Advice</i>	7	1	1
<i>Enforcement</i>	14	5	7
<i>Representation</i>	5	1	-
<i>Support</i>	29	7	6
<i>PLEI</i>	32	12	23
<b>Family Law</b>			
<i>Advice</i>	2	-	1
<i>Enforcement</i>	4	2	2
<i>Representation</i>	2	-	-
<i>Support</i>	21	3	3
<i>PLEI</i>	21	9	23

Participants spoke about a general lack of services that offer advice and representation for Family Law matters, which is supported by the numbers reported in Tables 3 and 4. There are also few local options for advice and representation for Civil and Administrative matters, with a general absence of Administrative legal services. Participants were nonetheless much more focused on the need for additional Family Law services.

<sup>5</sup> Categorizing types of service is not straightforward. For example, the Native Counseling Court Worker Program is classified as “support”, although court workers are able to appear on behalf of clients. A service was only counted as providing PLEI if substantive information was offered about laws, rights, responsibilities or procedures. Not all advice and representation services also met the PLEI requirements.

<sup>6</sup> Some services offered multiple types of services in more than one area of law. Therefore numbers are greater than the total number of *different service organizations* mapped and interviewed.

### 3.2 Geographic Location of Services

The majority of legal and related services that are located in the Grande Prairie Judicial District are located in the town of Grande Prairie itself (Table 4). Most are located on or near the City Centre and within easy walking distance of each other. This makes the services very accessible for people who need to access multiple services and who live in or have easy access to the town.

**Table 4 –  
Physical Locations of Legal and Related Services**

Location	Legal Services		Social or Health Services
	Sole Purpose	Legal & Social or Health	
Beaverlodge	1	3	1
Clairmont	-	-	-
Grande Prairie	32	25	32
Hythe	-	-	-
Sexsmith	1	1	1
Spirit River	1	2	-
Valleyview	8	5	-
Wembley	-	1	1
<b>TOTAL Service Locations in District</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>TOTAL Service Locations Outside District</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>TOTAL PHYSICAL LOCATIONS</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>41</b>

As can be seen in Table 4, over half of the legal services that are available to residents are physically located outside of this District.

### 3.3 Capacity of Existing Services

There are a variety of available services and has been an increase in available legal services – particularly for Self-Representing Litigants -- since the SRLMP was conducted in 2006. The new additions such as the LInC, FLIC and Community Legal Centre are clearly valued.

*We have a ton of resources in the community but sometimes it is a 2-3 week wait. For example, Family Justice Service is a month wait now. Therefore, the people will either heat up, stay the same or give up. [04, Legal Service Provider]*

Participants seem aware of and very positive about the legal and related social support services in Grande Prairie, but they report that many are at or over capacity. Understaffing is noted by all participants as a problem. For example, the LInC is soon to lose one of its two staff members and the sole Family Court Counsellor is going on leave, and there will be delays before they will be replaced.

*We have one Family Court Counsellor who is going on maternity leave on October 19th [2010] and they are not filling her position. And she has an ENORMOUS case load. When I was at court at 4 o'clock yesterday, she was still there – she hadn't left since the morning ... and they don't stop for lunch. Having her position vacant for a year is going to be very detrimental to this community .... We have a LInC office and they have two staff, but lost one as of Sept 13<sup>th</sup> and so they are down to one person. [03, Social Service Provider]*

It is also clear from participants' descriptions of their current duties, that they are generally over-extended. As with other Districts, the recent restrictions to Legal Aid Alberta (LAA) are increasing pressure on other services, especially the Community Legal Clinic.

The courts do not appear to have the capacity to handle trials in a timely manner, due primarily to the small number of judges serving this District. This seems to apply most particularly to child protection matters, and Queen's Bench family trials.

*We have significant delays in court times. Kids are sitting in foster homes for 6 months before we know if we have TGO on them. For PGO's...gee...I have one case where we made application 12 months ago and it is going to trial 6 months from now. We did another application in May that will go to court in March of 2011. That is HUGE .... We just had one more judge added to the roster in the North. He was our lawyer, actually, so he's left a gap in that regard. There will be probably two judges retiring soon and we will need those positions filled. [03, Social/Legal Service Provider]*

As is illustrated in Section 3.4.2, there are few lawyers who are actually based out of the Grande Prairie area, especially those practicing Family Law.

*There are so few lawyers in Grande Prairie, there a lot are coming from out of town; travelling from Edmonton, for example. That makes it really hard for clients to spend any time with them [preparing] .... Yesterday, in court, I overheard some people who were there for a parenting and access matters and they were saying that no lawyers in Grande Prairie were taking new clients at this time. LAA told me that if we came in with a TGO or PGO they would work at getting the family a lawyer within 48 hours. If it is a parenting dispute, though...good luck. [03, Social/Legal Service Provider]*

### 3.4 Key Services in the Grande Prairie Judicial District

Some of the most widely known about and utilized legal services in the Grande Prairie District are:

- Legal Aid Alberta (LAA)
- Lawyers
- Court House Services
- Alberta Law Libraries (ALL)
- Law Information Centre (LInC)
- Native Counselling Services of Alberta (NCSA)
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)
- Grande Prairie Legal Guidance (GPLG)

#### 3.4.1 Legal Aid (LAA)

LAA is funded by the Government of Alberta, Alberta Law Foundation and Government of Canada to provide legal advice and representation to low-income individuals. As of April 2010, very significant changes have been made to the Legal Aid Alberta (LAA) service delivery model that affects all areas of Alberta, but in differing ways. These changes are recent and complex, with pilot Legal Service Centres located in Edmonton and Calgary currently offering services not yet available elsewhere in the province. For these reasons, we consider it appropriate to provide a detailed overview of LAA services and as much clarity as possible about eligibility guidelines and access processes.

In November 2009 a Legal Aid Alberta Review (<http://cfcj-fcjc.org/clearinghouse/publication.php?id=22322>) made 19 recommendations to the Minister of Justice, including substantial service delivery changes. This review was not targeted at doing more with less, but the financial downturn intervened.<sup>7</sup>

In order to continue as much service as possible and at the same time respond to the Review recommendations for service change and increased efficiencies, after long

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<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed summary of the recent changes to LAA, refer to the ALSMP Report for the Edmonton Judicial District. (<http://cfcj-fcjc.org/docs/2010/mapping-edmonton-en.pdf>)

debate, the LAA Board decided to reduce eligibility guidelines by 30% for a saving of \$5.5 million. This means (based on previous usage numbers) that approximately 6,000 people will now not qualify for a certificate. Clients will no longer have the right to choose their Counsel. In part, this change is to facilitate a client pathway that first goes to Duty Counsel for evaluation of legal need, with a certificate being issued only if the matter cannot be addressed by other available service options. As well, LAA was concerned that clients sometimes choose Counsel without sufficient experience to address their case and it is hoped that the change will allow LAA to assign lawyers best suited to client needs.

LAA is now focused on assessing clients' legal needs and providing services that best suit those needs. Appointing a lawyer for a client is no longer the main goal of LAA. It may be decided, for example, that mediation is the best way for a client to resolve a family law issue. If LAA staff determines that mediation is an appropriate first step, they will guide clients through that process.

At the Legal Services Centres (LSCs) there will now be access to brief legal advice in person and by telephone.<sup>8</sup> Telephone intake will be available across the province. Expansion of the Duty Counsel program is planned as soon as fiscally possible, and LAA wants to proceed with the Review recommendation to pilot civil assistance, especially for debt.

### **Regional Offices**

LAA has divided the province into eleven regions, each with a Regional Office. Regional staff travel on circuits to many surrounding communities. Due to the recent changes, some circuiting will be reduced. Regional Officers will now be able to do intake over the phone. This will improve the ability to make a LAA application for those Albertans who live in remote areas and are still eligible under the revised financial guidelines. Prospective clients may make first contact either with Regional Offices or with Duty Counsel at courthouses where this service exists. The basic eligibility guidelines are listed in Table 5.

**Table 5 –  
LAA Basic Income Eligibility Guidelines**

Household Size	Monthly Net Income Level	Annual Net Income Level
1 person	\$919	\$11,000
2 persons	\$1,140	\$13,680
3 persons	\$1,620	\$19,440
4 persons	\$1,750	\$21,000
5 persons	\$1,883	\$22,596
6+ persons	\$2,014	\$24,168

<sup>8</sup> Brief services may include document review and preparation; third party contacts for clarification or issue settlement; settlement advocacy; and coaching for clients who can self-represent.

These guidelines may be increased somewhat within the ranges below if the applicant makes a contribution to the cost (Table 6).<sup>9</sup> If net income falls within the following ranges, legal aid coverage may be granted on the condition that payments are made (eg. down payment, monthly payments). Clients may be asked to start making small payments right away, or provide some kind of security agreement even before a lawyer is assigned to their case.

**Table 6 –  
LAA Income Guidelines if Clients Pay a Portion**

Household Size	Monthly Contribution Range	Annual Contribution Range
1 person	\$919 - \$1,225	\$11,028 - \$14,700
2 persons	\$1,140 - \$1,516	\$13,680 - \$18,200
3 persons	\$1,620 - \$2,158	\$19,440 - \$25,900
4 persons	\$1,750 - \$2,333	\$21,000 - \$28,000
5 persons	\$1,883 - \$2,508	\$22,596 - \$30,100
6+ persons	\$2,014 - \$2,683	\$24,168 - \$32,200

### **Legal Services Centres**

Effective April 6, 2010, the Edmonton office of Legal Aid Alberta (LAA) changed how it provides services by launching the first Legal Services Centre (LSC). That was followed by Calgary in June 2010. These LSCs are operating as pilots and it is not known yet whether additional LSC's will be opened or where they will be located.

In accordance with the priorities set out in the 2009 LAA Review, LSC's will provide services in the following areas of law;

- criminal, including both adult and youth,
- family, including child welfare,
- immigration and refugee, and
- civil, including housing, income support, employment and debt.

Clients will be able to access legal information, referral services, brief services, legal advice and appropriate streaming to one of LAA's other legal services.

The eligibility guidelines provided above apply to the issue of a certificate for legal representation. There are, however, different eligibility guidelines for other programs available through the LSCs (Table 7).

<sup>9</sup> Although cost contributions are requested, LAA report only recovering eleven cents on the dollar. Clients may make a subsequent submission concerning inability to pay if their financial circumstances change, and accounts are written off if the client makes a case not to pay. LAA representatives also report that it has been suggested that increasing the amount recovered would improve their financial situation, however they resist this course of action because people accessing legal aid are the poorest of the poor.

**Table 7 –  
Income Guidelines to Receive Referrals Only**

Family Size	Monthly Net Income
1 person	\$2,700
2 persons	\$3,200
3 persons	\$3,850
4 persons	\$4,175
5 persons	\$4,500
6+ persons	\$4,800

If income falls within the guidelines in Table 8, clients will be eligible for legal advice by LAA staff lawyers, brief services (such as assistance with court forms), information that will help them resolve their issue and better navigate the justice system, and referrals to other agencies that may be able to assist. These clients will not be eligible for full representation by a lawyer in court, but LAA staff lawyers will be able to provide advice to assist clients in knowing what steps to take.

**Table 8 –  
Income Guidelines to Receive Legal Advice, Brief Services,**

Family Size	Monthly Net Income
1 person	\$1,750 - \$2,700
2 persons	\$2,165 - \$3,200
3 persons	\$3,085 - \$3,850
4 persons	\$3,340 - \$4,175
5 persons	\$3,585 - \$4,500
6+ persons	\$3,835 - \$4,800

**Legal Services Centre (formerly Alberta Law Line)**

The toll-free Law Line number (1-866-845-3425) is still operational and calls from outside Edmonton will be accepted. However, former Alberta Law Line staff are now part of the LSC in Edmonton, providing in-person and telephone services. Calls from LInCs are received on a priority basis. There is also a priority call pilot program with nine women’s shelters across the province.<sup>10</sup> LAA management acknowledge that response time to individual callers may be delayed, resulting in lengthy wait times. We note that:

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<sup>10</sup> This pilot project runs until December 2010, at which point it is anticipated that both organizations will be making recommendations with respect to future directions.

- there continues to be no eligibility criteria for gaining information and referrals via a direct call to the Law Line,
- the old [higher] eligibility levels apply for brief advice [as per those listed above],
- LAA is attempting to monitor discrete calls and waiting times.

### **Local Perspectives about LAA**

The local LAA staff person serves a large geographic area (Valleyview, Fox Creek, Beaverlodge, Hythe, Spirit River and Rycroft). However the vast majority of clients are from the city of Grande Prairie. The one staff person (with the help of one Administrative Assistant) has a lot of duties, not only dealing with all legal needs served by LAA, but also chairing the Appeal Committee.

Participants reported some accessibility concerns. The local LAA office moved from the provincial building to an 11<sup>th</sup> floor office about 18 months ago. It is reported that people find it hard to find and often still go to the old location. Participants also reported only limited telephone access for people who are not fluent in English. Furthermore, rural residents have limited physical access to telephones (participants report that many use cell phones with limited minutes) and the Internet. Service providers reported that, unless individuals call from the dedicated LAA line at the LInC office, it is often very difficult to get through.

The cuts to LAA financial eligibility were the subject of concern and comment.

*There is also a general gap in legal services here. This is created by LAA's strict criteria. There are people on AISH who don't qualify. Now, that's a problem. [Grande Prairie Focus Group]*

*I mean, [LAA} only have what they have in their pot of money. You understand they're tied but really the working poor can't afford a lawyer and aren't eligible for Legal Aid. What happens to them? [Grande Prairie Focus Group]*

In a recent 211 Support Network presentation in Edmonton<sup>11</sup>, a LAA representative who was speaking about the changes that have taken place with LAA's services in 2010 corroborated the perceptions that these service providers had about the limitations involved in receiving LAA services. The representative reported that a single person on AISH was covered, but not a couple. In fact, only the very basic single AISH allowance would qualify and many AISH recipients get additional allowances related to their disability needs, so would actually be over the cut off. At the Presentation, the LAA representative also acknowledged that wait times to phone in had been excessive, but stated that LAA is working to resolve this problem.

<sup>11</sup> The Support Network (<http://www.211edmonton.com/>) holds a regular speaker series in Edmonton for public and service providers that features a variety legal, social and health providers.

### 3.4.2 Lawyers

Participants from towns in this District report few practicing lawyers who are taking on clients, particularly LAA certificate clients. The actual numbers from the Law Society confirm that there are low numbers of locally-based lawyers (Table 9) outside of the City of Grande Prairie.

**Table 9 –  
Lawyers who are Practicing in the Grande Prairie District**

Location	Bar Members		
	Registered <sup>12</sup>	Government	Private
Beaverlodge	1	-	1
Clairmont	-	-	-
Grande Prairie	51	6	44
Hythe	-	-	-
Sexsmith	-	-	-
Spirit River	-	-	-
Valleyview	-	-	-
Wembley	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>45</b>

As already identified, the most urgent need is for lawyers who practice Family Law. Participants also said that there is a need for lawyers to be locally available to provide brief legal advice on a face-to-face basis.

*We are also facing having the lack of lawyers going into Family law. I only have two. So that means I have to go out of town. Then the client has to deal with long distance charges and has to track their lawyer down in other places like Edmonton. [04, Legal Service Provider]*

*A lot of lawyers are based out of Edmonton. Not many are actually based here. There needs to be more accessibility to lawyers. [Grande Prairie Focus Group]*

### **Experiences with Lawyers**

A recent poll conducted by Ipsos-Reid for the Law Society of Alberta (<http://www.lawsocietyalberta.com/#survey>), reported that most Albertans were satisfied with the services of lawyers in meeting everyday legal needs such as matters concerning real estate and Wills and estates. However, public participants that have been included in the ALSMP (Edmonton and Calgary Judicial Districts) and previously in the SRLMP and *Civil Justice System and the Public* (<http://cfcj->

<sup>12</sup> In some cases, the total number of registered Bar members may be higher than the sum of those in government and private practice. This is because those practicing in corporate settings have not been included in this Table.

[fcjc.org/publications/cjisp-en.php](http://fcjc.org/publications/cjisp-en.php)) were generally not satisfied. These participants tended to be involved in contentious civil and family court cases or criminal matters, though. These represent a small minority, and the most complex of legal needs, which can have serious financial and other personal consequences. Clearly, such cases are more likely to generate dissatisfaction.

It should be noted that the Law Society's survey was conducted more recently than any of the other research I have referred to. Additionally, it cannot be assumed that the opinions expressed in other Judicial Districts apply to this District.

Participants in this District did not speak much about experiences with lawyers. They focused on the lack of lawyers. It was reported that it is especially difficult to find lawyers who are willing to work with LAA clients.

*Well, it is no secret that some LAA clients can be difficult to work with. Family law especially is very draining and I understand why most lawyers only last 5-10 years in that area .... Family law is very hard. Also, I think the way people do their jobs is changing. There is more of that work-life balance going on [for lawyers]. There is no more of the "I am going to work 50-70 hours a week." [04, Legal Service Provider]*

### **3.4.3 Court House Services**

The main courthouse in this District is located in the City of Grande Prairie and includes Provincial Court as well as the Court of Queen's Bench. The key courthouse services that participants referred to were Duty Counsel and Family Justice Services, as well as Alberta Law Libraries and the LInC (to be discussed separately in the next two Sections).

Participants spoke positively of the court house staff.

*We have a great clerk system at our courthouse. They are very helpful and informative. The LInC addition has been a huge help from what I have heard from other people ... The addition recently of one extra court day a month was very helpful but we need one more. [03, Social/Legal Service Provider]*

There is also a courthouse located in Valleyview, which holds provincial court only.

#### **1) Duty Counsel**

There is Duty Counsel available for Family and Criminal Provincial Court as well as the Court of Queen's Bench in Grande Prairie. There is no financial eligibility testing for assistance through this program. Duty Counsel provides free legal advice and

assistance to people making their initial criminal or family court appearance unrepresented by counsel.

Currently Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer and Lethbridge have staff Duty Counsel available to deliver the new service model in which Duty Counsel will have expanded hours with availability to also meet and assist clients once court has concluded sitting for the day. The goal is to achieve better outcomes for clients. This change has not happened in the Grande Prairie District yet.

Wherever this service is available, LAA encourages clients to first contact Duty Counsel as they are best able to make an immediate assessment of the matter and facilitate prompt connections to relevant service components, including a Certificate for representation when appropriate.

In the larger centres, Duty Counsel services are provided in:

- Adult and Youth divisions of Provincial Court
- Family Court (Provincial Court)
- Domestic Violence Court
- Drug Treatment Court
- Mills/O'Connor applications
- Duty Counsel service is also available for persons requiring assistance for Mental Health Review Panel hearings and Institutional Disciplinary Hearings.

In addition, LAA Duty Counsel provides legal services as required when Emergency Protection Orders have been granted, to assist clients in reviewing and opposing the Orders, and dealing with breaches of these Orders.

## **2) Family Justice Services (FJS)/Family Law Information Centre (FLIC)**

FJS/FLIC was launched in 2005 and is a group of programs and services that are offered by Alberta Justice and the Alberta Courts. They focus on providing free or low-cost services to members of the public with family law needs. There are currently four programs that are available to residents of this District through FJS.

The **Parenting after Separation** course is a free six-hour workshop that was developed in Alberta by the Court of Queen's Bench and Alberta Justice and is now used nationally and internationally. The purpose of the workshop is to assist parents in understanding the process and effects of separation and to encourage parents to make positive choices about how they will continue to parent their children after separation. This program is voluntary for parents who are in Provincial Court but mandatory for parents who are in the Court of Queen's Bench.

**Family Court Counsellors** provide information about options and services for resolving family matters that are alternative to going to court. They also offer assistance completing court documents and arranging court dates. In order to qualify, at least one dependent child must be involved and at least one party must reside in Alberta.

The **FLIC** provides information about:

- child support Guidelines, including the tables for each province;
- how to calculate child support;
- how to apply for or change a Queen's Bench Order in various family law matters; and
- how to oppose a family law application in the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta.

The FLIC website is: <http://www.albertacourts.ab.ca/familylaw/>. Litigants can also access booklets and forms through FLIC.

The **Focus on Communication in Separation Program** is a six-hour, skills-based communication course teaching parents how to communicate effectively while living apart. This program aims to enhance the communication skills of parents, reduce parental conflict and improve long-term outcomes for children. Upon completing the course, parents will be able to reduce conflict through good communication and problem solving skills, decrease tensions arising from conflicts and decrease stress for children and parents (2009 Alberta Court Calendar). This voluntary program is for separated or divorced parents of young children.

Other FJS services available in Red Deer or Calgary include:

- Brief Conflict Intervention (where mediation is unsuccessful);
- Child Protection mediation;
- Child Support Recalculation (this is different from the Child Support Resolution Program);
- Focus on Communication in Separation Course,
- Open Parenting Assessments;
- Parental Conflict Intervention (where mediation is unsuccessful); and
- Parenting/Contact evaluations.

Participants spoke of the importance of have more of these services available locally - particularly mediation services - and emphasized that legal processes are quite stressful for people experiencing family law-related matters and that they really need ample available support. Additionally, a portion of court cases could be avoided with effective mediation options.

#### **3.4.4 Alberta Law Libraries**

Alberta Law Libraries are also located in the courthouse in Grande Prairie, and provide important resources to members of the public as well as members of the Bar and Judiciary. This Service will be described further in Section 6.1.3, in the discussion about PLEI providers.

### **3.4.5 Law Information Centre (LInC)**

The LInC was launched in Grande Prairie in 2007 as an effort by the Government of Alberta to provide a “gateway” into the justice system for the public to begin finding out how to address their legal needs.<sup>13</sup> The LInC mandate is to help people understand the Alberta court system.

The Alberta Justice website describes the LInC as being able to help individuals get the information they need for all civil and criminal matters. Staff members will help members of the public understand Alberta’s legal system. They will help individuals:

- learn about general court procedures,
- locate and explain court forms,
- learn about legal advice options, and
- find out about alternatives to court.

LInC can:

- provide information about civil and criminal matters,
- explain what court forms can be used,
- explain the steps to take in making a legal application, and
- refer individuals to legal and other resources in the community.

LInC cannot:

- give legal advice,
- help choose how to solve your legal problem,
- help make legal applications, or
- tell people what to say in their court forms.

Staff cannot provide legal advice or representation, but will provide information about general court procedures, legal advice options and alternatives to court. Individuals can also access public legal information and education (PLEI resources), particularly about civil and criminal law. Staff will facilitate access to legal forms.

Since April, 2007 the LInC has also had a dedicated legal advice line to LAA. This service was developed jointly by LAA and Alberta Justice, and is available for all LInC offices. As part of this development, Alberta Justice ensured that a private room with a dedicated phone was available for the provision of legal advice in most of the LInCs. LInC staff triage the clients and only the ones they direct are able to access this service. In return, the service was designed so that these callers have priority over regular Legal Services Centre callers. LAA provided legal advice to almost 900 LInC clients through

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<sup>13</sup> LInCs were also established in Edmonton and Red Deer that year, and in Calgary in 2009.

this partnership in 2009-2010. The LInC staff also provide in-person, telephone and Internet services to various rural communities in this District.

Participants reported that the addition of the LInC has been very helpful for them and the community. However, they stated that the LInC has a very limited capacity.

*Right now, we are in a bit of a crisis. The LInC and FJS are experiencing staff turnover and some of these people are not being replaced and this is either going to result in current workers being busy out of their minds or clients having to be shuffled off to other service providers. Clients will get bounced around because people don't have time .... LInC and FJS are really important with respect to assisting clients. [04, Legal Service]*

One Focus Group participant stated that the LInC was difficult to notice in the court house. The signage is minimal and it appears to be another court counter rather than obviously a separate service.

### **3.4.6 Native Counselling Services of Alberta (NCSA)**

NCSA was launched in 1970, with a mandate to promote fair and equitable treatment of Aboriginal peoples. NCSA is primarily funded by Provincial, Federal and local governments and the Alberta Law Foundation, and strives to plan and deliver culturally sensitive programming and public education about legal needs as well as rights and responsibilities as they apply to Aboriginal peoples.

NCSA has offices throughout Alberta with the head office located in the city of Edmonton. NCSA offers more than 20 programs and services that are aimed at providing support to people who are going to court with criminal or family matters, as well as people who are facing parole or probation orders. NCSA also prioritizes the prevention of legal needs by offering educational services about the Canadian legal system. Additionally, healing and strengthening family and community relationships are the focus of multiple programs.

NCSA is probably most well known for the **Courtworker Programs** offered across Alberta. There are Criminal, Youth and Family Courtworker Programs. They offer clients in- and out-of-court support and advocacy. Courtworkers cannot provide advice or representation but will help prepare cases, assist with LAA applications and facilitate inter-service transitions or referrals as well as translation/interpreter services.

NCSA also offers public legal education and information (PLEI) through a program called the **Bearpaw Legal Education and Resource Centre**, which is a merger of the Aboriginal Resource Centre and the Alberta Aboriginal Legal Education Centre.

Service providers spoke positively about NCSA but said that NCSA has been forced to reduce its services due to lack of resources and staff in this District. The Courtworkers

are currently focusing on Aboriginal clients. The John Howard Society has stepped in to offer support to non-Aboriginal clients who are going to court.

*We also work well with NCSA. They have had cut backs in services, too, though. Their focus is now on Aboriginal clients. We have a really good rapport and do work well together for Aboriginal clients. [04, Legal Service Provider]*

We were not able to obtain participation from NCSA or any other Aboriginal representatives in this District. The information provided here is based on NCSA's website and general information provided by NCSA staff in the Edmonton Judicial District. For further detail, refer to Section 3.4.7 of the Edmonton Report.

### **3.4.7 Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)**

The RCMP Detachments in the Grande Prairie Judicial District are organized into 11 sections and units. These units work together to promote public safety and awareness, enforce Federal, Provincial and Municipal laws and provide an overall sense of security to residents.

- [General Duty](#)
- [General Investigation Section](#)
- [Traffic Services](#)
- [Community Policing / Victim Services](#)
- [Police Dog Services](#)
- [Forensic Identification Section](#)
- [Domestic Violence Unit](#)
- [Community Response Unit](#)
- [Organized Crime Unit](#)
- [Enhanced Policing](#)
- [Municipal Employees](#)

The RCMP offer six main services to communities in this District.

The **Auxiliary Police Program** is a volunteer program intended to enhance community-based policing and provide an opportunity for citizens to participate in law enforcement on an organized basis. Auxiliary constables provide a complementary service to the RCMP.

Duties that an auxiliary constable may perform under direct supervision of a regular member of the RCMP are widely varied, and include, but are not limited to:

- community policing programs (ie. Neighborhood Watch, Bicycle Safety, Child Identification),
- guarding crime scenes to protect evidence,
- searching for missing persons,

- routine crowd, traffic or parade control,
- operational ride-alongs,
- routine general duty patrols and traffic patrols,
- office duties (i.e. computer queries, Detachment front desk duties, answering phones), and
- routine duties as assigned by the Detachment Commander (from website).

**Crime Stoppers** is a well-known community program that combines the police, the media and the public in a co-operative crime-solving effort. It combats two major obstacles to the reporting of crime within a community - apathy and fear – by offering cash awards and anonymity (from website).

The **Aboriginal Policing Services** is responsible for the development of culturally sensitive policing services which are acceptable to Aboriginal peoples, and promotes the recruitment of Aboriginal people into the RCMP. The RCMP delivers police services to Aboriginal peoples through the First Nations Community Policing Service (FNCPS). The RCMP-FNCPS model incorporates the following principles:

- Service levels equivalent to those of non-First Nations communities;
- Compatibility and sensitivity to First Nations culture and beliefs;
- Flexibility to accommodate local variations in policing needs; and
- A framework which allows for the transition to an independent First Nations-administered police service or a Community (from website).

The philosophy of the **Community Advisory Committee (CAC)** is one of commitment and service to people through communication, working with people, and sharing information and resources to solve problems which the community sees as important.

Community Advisory Committees consist of various community service departments including Family and Community Services, Recreation and Culture, the Library, the RCMP and Fire Services. The structure of the committee enables a collective effort from all aspects of the community in contributing to the prevention and resolutions of problems that affect the community's safety and quality of life. The committee is advisory in nature and is not solely responsible for resolving community problems, but will assist in the development of plans with the aim of targeting resources and organizing involvement of other community agencies and groups (from website).

**Project KARE** is an RCMP 'K' Division led initiative that commenced in October 2003 and provides services throughout Alberta. It is a joint forces operation with the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) with secondments from time to time of several other Alberta law enforcement agencies. It is tasked with aligning several current investigations involving deaths of high-risk victims in the Edmonton area and to pursue other investigations emerging from the completion of The High Risk Missing Persons Project. There are currently 33 RCMP members and two EPS officers assigned to Project KARE. At full strength Project KARE team will consist of 35 regular and civilian RCMP members, four EPS members and eight support staff. The project numbers

expand from time to time with special initiatives such as the modernization of historic high risk missing persons files (from website).

Finally, **Community Policing Services** are available in all communities in this District. Traditional policing such as crime investigation, law enforcement and maintenance of order are still part of policing under this philosophy, as well as attempting to address unique needs and problems with the people and communities they serve (from website).

One comment made by participants about the RCMP is that they could possibly benefit from some of the same additional training about marginalized populations and some of the social and health barriers they face.

*I wish that the RCMP who already refer to me understood more about how underlying issues effect behaviour. [05, Legal Service Provider]*

It should be noted, though, that we were unable to obtain an interview with an RCMP representative in this District, so are unable to speak to their training or experiences providing services.

#### **3.4.8 Grande Prairie Legal Guidance (GPLG)**

Grande Prairie Legal Guidance (<http://www.gplg.ca/>) is a non-profit joint initiative between [Pro Bono Law Alberta \(PBLA\)](#), the Community Village<sup>14</sup> and various lawyers in Grande Prairie. It was established in 2009. Volunteer lawyers from the Grande Prairie community donate their professional time to meet with clients and provide legal guidance and information.

GPLG offers free legal guidance to low income individuals who do not qualify for Legal Aid, either because of their income or because their legal problems are in areas that Legal Aid does not address. GPLG uses guidelines similar to the Legal Aid Legal Services Centres (as opposed to certificate services guidelines) to determine whether individuals are able to qualify for assistance.

Legal services at GPLG are offered *pro bono* which means there is no expectation of a fee. *Pro bono* legal services are intended to complement, not to replace, a properly funded legal aid system. Lawyers provide advice in the following areas: landlord/tenant, employment, debt/contact, family, criminal, wills, administrative, traffic, civil and personal injury. However, representation in court is not provided (from website).

Service providers were very grateful for the addition of GPLG but, once again, report that this service is at capacity.

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<sup>14</sup> The Community Village (<http://www.thecommunityvillage.ca/>) is a strategic co-location of cooperative social services designed to provide a respectful environment where marginalized people can access the resources of social purpose agencies and businesses within one location. See Section 6.1.2 for a further description.

*Fortunately for us we have the Grande Prairie Legal Guidance Clinic and they have been a godsend. But they are becoming overburdened by the group [legal aid] are sending plus the general public contacting them on their own .... We really work well with Grande Prairie Legal Guidance. They are [based] out of the Community Village, which houses a number of resources. It has been really helpful to sit down with them. We have developed referral forms for both of us. Thus we know if they have seen a person or not. [05, Legal Service Provider]*

### **3.5 Barriers to Accessing Existing Legal Services**

Service providers emphatically identified specific barriers in the Grande Prairie Judicial District. In fact, they reported far more challenges regarding barriers than gaps in services.

The main barriers that were identified included:

- Lack of Public Knowledge.
- Lack of Transportation.
- Lack of Technology and/or Computer Literacy.

#### **3.5.1 Lack of Public Knowledge about How to Address Legal Needs**

Lack of knowledge about legal rights, responsibilities and processes has emerged as a barrier to the public in every District that we have mapped thus far, and emerged again in Grande Prairie. Lack of knowledge mostly spoken about regarding the general public, but service providers did also mention some misconceptions among their peers about service mandates.

*There are misconceptions about what we do. And sometimes by the time the person gets to our office and we have to tell them that we cannot help them and we get yelled at. It is hard to have to call the other agency and say please look at what we do, so you don't send people here whom we can't help .... The big one for me is clients' unrealistic expectations about what a lawyer and court system can do for them. That is the most frustrating part when you have to tell them 'no.' The Lawyer is there to work for you but you have to listen to what the lawyer says. Often, if clients don't like what a lawyer says they want a different one. And it can be disheartening. The barrier for me is lack of understanding or not wanting to understand. Sometimes you have to put those files to the back burner in order to work with people who are open. I don't like it but it is true. [04, Legal Service]*

Apart from the above comments about misconceptions concerning services, participants also reported that they have difficulties getting people to follow up on referrals they make for them.

As for service providers, there is some degree of misconception, which may also be a by-product of having a lack of options for where the refer people for low cost or free legal services. However, they seem to be generally aware of the services that existed and use and work with them.

### **3.5.2 Transportation**

Participants in Grande Prairie reported that services are pretty central and often can be walked to for residents of the city itself. There are also public buses and taxis. There was virtually no commentary on the experiences of rural residents regarding transportation. Only one participant in Grande Prairie spoke about the need to ask of rides and sometimes pay friends and relative to drive individuals into town.

This lack of transportation was emphasized as a barrier for residents of the reserves in this District. Sturgeon Lake Band, for example, utilizes the Court House in Valleyview – mostly for Criminal Matters when Court is held but they do have access to forms for other legal matters. Family as well as Child Welfare matters must be heard in Grande Prairie so they must travel approximately 110 kilometers each way to get to Court. This can be a problem for persons who do own a vehicle and must rely on others or hitchhike in order to get to Court. This creates problems with missed court dates because individuals are often late arriving for specified appointment times or they don't call and just show up.

### **3.5.3 Technology**

As noted earlier, some participants noted that the move by some legal services to rely on phone and Internet access was a barrier for some people a) because they don't have a phone or Internet access and b) because vulnerable clients cannot always manage the interactions by phone (often due to language barriers) or have the literacy required via the Internet.

*Not everyone has access to a phone, never mind a computer. This is becoming more and more of an issue because government especially is trying more and more to focus in that route, which is great if you are young and urban, but doesn't work for these people. [02, Legal Service Provider]*

They reported that these options, such as online applications, work very well for some people. These are usually young, urban dwellers, however. They are not the people who are living in remote rural communities and on reserves.

It can also be expensive to access internet and telephone service in remote communities. Furthermore, there is not always reliable service in these areas. Despite

our reliance on technology, many people still look for face-to-face interactions when they are in crisis or are trying to figure out what is a very complex legal system.

*The people we are dealing with, I find they really need a lot of help with daily life skills. This can be frustrating. There are expectations that some of these people have access to phones or technology when they cannot. There is a push for them to contact legal aid via internet, for example, and many just aren't capable. [04, Legal Service Provider]*

## 4.0 UNDERSTANDING LEGAL NEEDS IN GRANDE PRAIRIE

The following section contains a discussion about the types and incidence of legal needs that people have, and the services that are available to address those needs.

### 4.1 Statistics

Statistics were provided by Provincial Court Services in Grande Prairie. By referring to these, and to national and provincial statistics about the prevalence of legal problems, coupled with the observations of the service providers and researchers, we are able to provide some insight into the primary legal needs in this District.

#### 4.1.1 National Prevalence

National statistics on the prevalence of legal problems among Canadians paint a picture of vast everyday need (Currie, 2006, 2007, 2009). These surveys have repeatedly found that approximately 47% (11.6 million) of Canadians have a legal problem with potentially negative consequences for their everyday lives. Analysis of the data specific to Alberta places incidence at 52%.

This is evidence of a need to effectively address prevalent legal problems. Table 9 provides a breakdown of legal problems by frequency according to type of problem and compares national and Alberta rates. Participants tended to report more than one legal problem with the average in Alberta and nationally being around three.

As can be seen in Table 10, the general patterns for incidence of problems in Alberta are very similar to the national pattern.<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that family law problems are divided between relationship-related and other matters. When combined, family matters

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<sup>15</sup> The small percentage differences that occur cannot be considered significant because the sample sizes are not comparable. While 600 respondents is a sufficient number to make the Alberta results reliable within the province, it is a mere fraction of the total national sample. Percentages were also provided for the number of each type of problem reported by Alberta respondents (a total of 938). While this changes the numbers within each category, the overall frequency pattern is very similar.

at 7% are the fourth most frequently reported problem in Alberta. When both disability benefits and other social assistance are combined, benefits rank eighth in Alberta, accounting for 2.9% of reported problems.

**Table 10 –  
Prevalence of Legal Problems in Canada and Alberta**

Type of legal Problem	Frequency of Problem <sup>16</sup>	
	National % (N = 8873)	Alberta % (N = 600)
Consumer	22.0	25.4
Debt	20.4	27.0
Employment	17.8	19.0
Wills & Power of Attorney	5.2	6.7
Family: Relationship breakdown	3.6	5.0
Personal Injury	2.9	4.3
Police Action	2.0	3.0
Discrimination	1.9	1.7
Housing	1.7	1.0
Hospital treatment or release	1.6	1.8
Other family	1.4	2.0
Threat of legal action	1.2	1.3
Social Assistance	1.2	1.7
Disability Benefits	1.0	1.2
Immigration	0.6	0.2

Frequency of a problem does not, however correlate with perceived seriousness. By far, respondents considered social benefit problems, followed by family matters, to be the most serious. In contrast, the more prevalent consumer and debt problems were viewed as the least serious.<sup>17</sup> The prevalence of legal problems demonstrated by this research reveals the potential need for legal services as an everyday occurrence for a significant portion of the population. In fact, as the survey focuses on problems already perceived as serious, it likely underestimates actual legal need, which would also include many non-problematic everyday matters such as making a Will or formalizing a contract.

The national research concerning the prevalence of justiciable<sup>18</sup> legal problems

<sup>16</sup> Percentages do not add to 100% because some respondents reported more than one problem within each category. Percentages are not rounded because of the extremely large number of Canadians potentially represented by the national statistics (95% confidence ratio), where 1% equals approximately 250,000 Canadians. National percentages are taken, with permission, from Currie (2007, p.12). Alberta numbers provided in a personal communication from Ab Currie, December 7, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> While it seems intuitive that for the most part consumer problems would not have as serious an impact as many others, the same is not true of debt. Based on the CJSP data reported in Stratton & Anderson (2008), we would suggest that debt is seen as manageable until it precipitates or combines with other problems, such as family breakdown, loss of job, foreclosure, etc.

<sup>18</sup> Justiciable is defined as “capable of being decided by a court.”

(Currie, 2007), provides a foundation of both national and Alberta-specific data within which to consider the ALSMP findings for all Alberta Judicial Districts. These findings indicate a much greater need for legal services than has traditionally been understood.

#### 4.1.2 Service Statistics

The Team requested statistics from all services where representatives were interviewed. To date, Court Services have provided statistics (Table 11). Thus, as had been anticipated might be the case when this project was proposed, it is not possible to draw conclusions about public need and service capacity in this manner. Instead, service providers' interview responses are used to derive qualitative themes about the public's legal and related needs in Grande Prairie. These data are supplemented by the national data and researcher observations.

**Table 11 –  
Grande Prairie Provincial Court Volumes**

Area of Law	2004/05 Volume	2005/06 Volume	2006/07 Volume	2007/08 Volume	2008/09 Volume	Average Annual Volume (2004-2009)
<b>Civil</b>						
Claims Filed <sup>19</sup>	594	504	879	747	649	675
<b>Family</b>						
Actions Commenced	354	206	622	695	713	518
Child Welfare Actions Commenced	456	504	426	334	316	407
<b>Criminal</b>						
Charges Commenced – Adult	19,786	22,027	23,125	29,021	33,721	25,536
Charges Concluded – Adult	18,591	20,682	22,385	26,975	32,758	24,278
Charges Commenced – Youth	1,734	1,802	2,087	2,294	2,357	2,055
Charges Concluded – Youth	1,740	1,588	2,033	2,077	2,380	1,964
<b>Other</b>						
Average Preliminary Hearings per Month	15	25	29	24	18	22
Average Courtroom Time (hours)	1,213	1,475	1,765	1,639	1,886	1,596

These statistics were adapted from Provincial Court Services' Regional Statistical Reports.

The numbers of family cases being commenced in Grande Prairie jumped between 2005/06 and 2006/07 and have remained at similar rates since then. However, family problems come with economic booms and busts as well, which is another contributing factor. As seen in other Districts, criminal charges have also steadily increased over the past five years. Service providers in other Districts have observed that the issuing of

<sup>19</sup> These numbers do not reflect the number of Landlord/Tenant Applications filed each year.

Peace Bonds on Emergency Protection Orders are becoming more common with the increase in family breakdown and violence, both of which were identified as concerns in this District as well. Addictions, which are a major concern for service providers in Grande Prairie, have also been pointed to as very frequently being an instigating factor in legal problems.

## **4.2 Specific Populations and Specialized Legal Needs**

Participants spoke of needs that local residents commonly experience. These include:

- Criminal Matters (theft, drugs, young offenders),
- Family Violence,
- Family Law (divorce, custody and access, international or interprovincial relationship breakdowns),
- Child Protection,
- Mental Health, and
- Debt.

Table 12 helps to provide perspective regarding the services that are available to meet these needs. First, it must be noted that many of the sole-purpose legal services that are offering specialization in working with specific groups of people or with specific types of legal needs are not physically located in this District (refer to Table 3).

There are legal and related services that offer specialized services in the main areas of need that the participants identified. The one significant absence is services that help with debt management.

There is a lack of specialization in other areas that were not mentioned by service providers but have emerged as common needs in Currie's research. In addition to debt, Currie found that the most common legal needs relate to consumer issues, wills and estates, employment, and family breakdown.

One legal service advertized specialization in consumer issues and one in employment issues. No legal services indicated any specialization in wills and estates. There are a number of legal and related services that specialize in family matters. However, participants reported that many offer support but cannot offer legal advice, representation or alternative to going to court, and these are the services that are desperately needed.

**Table 12 –  
Specialization of Legal and Related Services**

<b>Specialization</b>	<b>Legal Services</b>		<b>Social/Health Services</b>
	<b>Sole Purpose</b>	<b>Legal &amp; Social/Health</b>	
Aboriginal	3	2	4
Accidents/Injuries	-	-	-
Addictions	-	1	4
Alternatives to Court	5	3	4
Children	6	10	6
Consumer Issues	1	1	-
Crisis Intervention	-	2	5
Debt Management	-	1	-
Disabilities	2	2	1
Employment	1	-	1
Families	9	11	16
Family Violence/Abuse	5	15	1
FASD	-	1	1
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgendered	-	-	1
Housing & Tenancy	7	3	12
Human Rights & Citizenship	11	1	1
Immigrants	1	-	1
Low Income/Poverty	1	-	9
Men	1	3	7
Mental Health	1	6	16
Pensions & Benefits	3	2	1
Seniors	3	2	6
Taxes & Finances	-	1	-
Victims & Offenders	21	17	-
Wills & Estate Planning	-	-	-
Women	2	4	7
Youth	11	11	9

**4.2.1 New Canadians**

As indicated in Section 2.1, this area is seeing more immigrants and visible minorities in recent years. Service providers specifically identified increases in African and Filipino immigrants.

*We are noticing that language barriers are really creeping up. Spanish speaking people, people from Philippines, from Uganda. It is really difficult to deal with people on the phone. They do get frustrated with us because they don't understand what we are trying to say and we don't understand them. Language is a real problem. For those people, instead of taking a phone application we require them to come into the office so we can at least benefit from body language. We have a fairly large Somali community and they are, of course, Muslim<sup>20</sup>. Sometimes when ladies come in they are accompanied by male relatives who do all the talking. We have to be very sensitive in how we communicate with them and sometimes it can be difficult for the individual and for my staff. [04, Legal Service Provider]*

Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs) are only mentioned specifically by one participant, but other participants speak to the regular arrival of people who are working in the oil and gas industry. It is likely that their observations of immigrants include the TFW population.

As with other Districts, low English literacy and vocabulary were identified as barriers to accessing services for New Canadians. This was noted as being a challenge for Filipino people mostly. They also reportedly comprise the majority of the TFWs (almost 300, in total, as per the 2006 Census). Fear of governments is mentioned as a barrier for some immigrants to using government delivered legal services. This is due to negative experiences and distrust that they have had for governments in their home countries.

There is only one sole-purpose legal and one social/health service in this District that specialize in working with immigrants. Participants reported that there is a lack of specialized support and outreach from this community. It should be noted, though, that Alberta Employment and Immigration offers information about legal and related needs online and via telephone.

#### **4.2.2 Aboriginal Peoples**

There are three reserves in this District; Duncan's 151A, Horse Lake and Sturgeon Lake. Sturgeon Lake Reserve is reportedly quite poor. Statistics Canada (2006) confirms an unemployment rate of 41% (this data was unavailable for Duncan's). Horse Lake has an unemployment rate of 31% but reportedly has business interests in the town of Valleyview and is fairing better financially.

Aboriginal peoples are also mentioned as living in the city of Grande Prairie, but there was no specific discussion about their experiences. However, participants speak to addictions and domestic violence problems as general factors in the community, which includes the Aboriginal residents.

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<sup>20</sup> Note: Not all Somali people are Muslim.

### **4.2.3 People Living with Disabilities and Addictions**

Participants reported that mental illnesses and addictions are factors that instigate and exacerbate legal problems in this District. This was actually the first District in which Learning and Cognitive Disabilities were specifically mentioned, in addition to mental illnesses, as being common and contributing to academic failure, social problems and ultimately legal problems. Service providers stated that there is a need to prevention and enhanced supports.

*Legal needs is the outcome. The places that got to you legal needs are mental health or addiction or child abuse .... I think if you actually tell people, " you can spend money on schools, or the legal needs that arise" – people will choose schools. [Grande Prairie Focus Group]*

*Mental health issues. I would say that many of our clients are struggling with mental health issues. So sometimes it is a struggle to get them to the legal services and get them to follow through. [03, Social/Legal Service Provider]*

*One other issue is how to deal with kids who may have psychiatric issues and drug and alcohol issues. The doctor will say I don't want to treat you until you stop using but they are often using to cope or as medication but the treatment centres want them to have counselling before they begin treatment. So those kids often end up in the [criminal court] system .... The biggest [barrier] is the psychiatric. We only have one psychiatrist who ... comes in part time. If it doesn't go well in one appointment, or there is any issue in getting the kid there, they often won't go back or are told not to. They kind of have one chance and there is not a lot of choice over having more than one opinion. If it goes bad, it is just bad, and there is nobody addressing those issues at all. [05, Legal/Social Service Provider]*

The need for increased awareness among legal service providers about mental illnesses was highlighted. However, participants spoke of the challenges in trying to connect individuals who are facing mental illness or addictions with the supports they need. The challenges are mostly related to identifying the need for supports, determining how to appropriately broach the topic with the individuals and how to support them in connecting with appropriate social and health services. All participants emphasized the challenges posed by substance use and addictions in this District.

*Huge, huge, huge addictions and family violence. I don't know if it is connected to oil and gas industry .... We do sit around and try to figure it out. Is it cultural differences? Or money, because everyone was making so much and now many aren't? Or the transient nature? Or the amount of young people? Or the substances? I'm not sure but it is huge. [02, Legal Service Provider]*

According to an AADAC report in 2006, Grande Prairie rated 5<sup>th</sup> out of 28 communities in Alberta for alcohol sales and 6<sup>th</sup> for substance-related criminal charges (Goatcher, 2006).

The need for additional supports for people with FASD was also emphasized. Participants stated that there is a general need for supports that spans legal, social and health needs. When mapping legal and related services in the District, we found two social/health services that offer any kind of specialized supports for people with FASD. One of them offers some legal support in that they refer clients to legal services. Participants reported that there is the need for more educations about FASD (for the public and legal professionals) and that people with FASD require ongoing, intensive support when they are experiencing legal needs in order to ensure follow through, optimal – and appropriate – outcomes as well as to prevent repeated legal problems.

#### **4.2.4 Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence was also noted as being a very common problem in Grande Prairie.

*The domestic violence that is present in Grande Prairie just astounds me .... Last month alone [Children's Services] had 60 domestic violence intakes. [03, Social/Legal Service Provider]*

Participants who had worked in other communities in Alberta reported stark difference in the incidence of domestic violence that they encountered, with Grande Prairie's being much higher. They point to substance use as well as the stressors that many residents experience due to being vulnerable to the highs and lows of the economy as many are working in resource-based professions.

#### **4.2.5 Children and Youth**

Concern about children and youth at risk was perhaps the most discussed topic in the interviews. The main concerns regarding children were exposure to domestic violence and addictions in their homes.

There are some services for youth, such as the Youth Diversion Program (run by Corrections Canada) but, by age 15, vulnerable young people are reported as disconnected from school and family and often difficult to get and keep connected. Participants reported that there is a gap in support services for older teenagers - 15 and up – who have become estranged from their families but are too old for placement with Children's Services. They also lack stable housing options. Finally, a general lack of psychiatrists and psychiatric assessment and services is especially acute for troubled youth. The lack of these social and health services lead to increased likelihood of them engaging in risky lifestyles and behaviours that will result in them having legal problems as victims and offenders.

*We have a lot of programs in this community for youth - AB Health Services, The Breakfast Club, counselors – the problem is getting them directed there. Some are coming from high school and have never been referred and issues are already starting to break down or families are already in major crisis. I think the issue is about getting help earlier .... The one thing we don't have good access to is if kids cannot live at home, [safe] places where can they live. We had a Youth Emergency Shelter – I think it is opened again now – but we need more options. If kids are going from house to house or on the streets, they are more likely to get involved with drugs and alcohol which lead to B & Es, etc. Family Service won't take them at that age (usually around 16) so those are the kids that are left in a bind .... Like I said, a lot of ... kids are just getting to that point where crisis is starting to overtake. So if they get intervention, they won't have problems. But a lot of the high risk kids have psychiatric problems that aren't recognized but are only seen as behaviour problems. The problem with teens is that if they refuse to go see someone nothing gets done and their behavioural issues will lead them to be involved in the system .... You know, ... if you look through [parole] files, almost always there were signs by age 12 or so. They weren't deemed serious so no testing has ever been done but you can see all the signs very early on. Then they come to you at 40 and they are still involved with the [court] system and can see the signs all the way along .... It [early intervention] has to all be put together much better. [05, Legal/Social Service Provider]*

#### **4.2.6 Self-Represented Litigants (SRLs)**

SRLs were not mentioned directly. However, participants repeatedly referred to the lack of lawyers who provide service in that geographic area and in key areas of law, particularly family matters. They also spoke about the barriers to qualifying and receiving LAA certificate services to the point that some service providers are reportedly hesitant to even refer people to LAA currently. These factors undoubtedly impact the numbers of people who are going to court without legal representation, whether or not they actually wish to do so.

### **4.3 Clustering Of Legal and Related Problems**

In this Judicial District, service providers really highlighted how social and health problems can compound and lead to legal problems, as well as how legal problems multiple if not addressed quickly and efficiently.

*With the Crown, yes they dole out consequences but, unless you deal with the roots, the problems will continue. These are kind of both sides of the same coin. You can punish behaviour all you want but if you don't get that shot at trying to figure out what is driving that behaviour it will probably continue. For the kid who has FASD, for example, if you cannot get the family to step up and understand their role in helping that person, they are probably going to get into trouble. Part of it is understanding who needs to step up. [05, Legal/Social Service Provider]*

*I find that a smaller percentage of our clients take more time. They start off with one issue that multiplies. I will give you an example: one client starts off with domestic violence that morphs into child welfare, to divorce...we are finding this more and more. We are trying to find out what assistance we can provide that prevents them from having to come back in to the office, back into the office, back to the office. [04, Legal Service Provider]*

### **Crime and Poverty**

Interestingly, in this jurisdiction, while the presence of poverty among some groups was recognized as a barrier to addressing legal needs, there was more emphasis on the observation that addictions led to poverty, legal problems and crimes. It seemed to be related to the boom-bust nature of local economy where essentially blue-collar families sometimes had lots of money and lots of temptations.

## **5.0 GAPS AND PRIORITIES IN MEETING LEGAL NEEDS**

Service providers based out of Grande Prairie reported that there are not many actual missing legal and related services. What is lacking is adequate staffing and resources for existing services. The gaps and needs in Grande Prairie and area are discussed in this Section.

### **5.1 Lack of Local Options for Legal Services**

In addition to inadequate staffing faced by many existing legal services, the services that are missing from Grande Prairie include:

- Lack of options for legal advice and representation.
  - More local lawyers, especially those who practice Family Law.
- Lack of alternative options to going to court.

#### **5.1.1 Lack of Affordable Legal Advice and Representation**

Recent reductions in LAA service capacity and restrictions to eligibility were of course mentioned as primary factors in limiting the availability of low cost legal advice and

representation for individuals. Participants spoke highly of the Grand Prairie Legal Guidance but said that it does not have the capacity to help all the people that LAA cannot. They also said that the LInC, NCSA and John Howard Society are helpful means of general information and support for people who are going to court.

All participants reported referring clients to the LInC to receive general legal information and referrals to appropriate services. They report that the LInC staff are very knowledgeable and informative. They also reported that the NCSA Courtworkers are very good supports for their clients. Finally, John Howard Society staff have been accompanying clients to court when NCSA staff are unable to accommodate them (due to capacity). However, these do not replace receiving case specific legal advice or representation.

### **Lack of Practicing Lawyers**

From what participants are reporting and the modest number of practicing lawyers who are registered in this area (see Table 4), it seems that even people who could afford to pay for private legal representation have few options for lawyers who are taking clients.

Some lawyers who are based out of Edmonton do provide services in this District. There are not a large number who do so, though, it appears. Also, the distance can limit the amount to access clients have to their lawyers. Even with this pool of lawyers, participants reported that there is difficulty in getting anyone to take LAA certificates.

### **5.1.2 Lack of Alternatives to Court**

Participants also stated that the waits for court dates are too long. This is especially critical in child guardianship and custody matters. Reasons given were too days each month in which cases are heard and too few members of the judiciary managing a very large geographic area with multiple courts.

An additional reason given was the lack of options for mediation services for people who would be willing to consider this approach. There are mediation services for families that have Children's Services involvement, but not for the general population. Participants stated that this option should be more readily available and should be promoted as a constructive alternative to going to court.

## **6.0 IMPROVING LEGAL SERVICE DELIVERY**

Participants were asked to identify services that they felt were excelling as well as aspects about their work experiences that they were happy with and proud of. These were offered as suggestions for good practices to build on and creative approaches to meeting the public's legal needs.

## 6.1 Good Practices to Build On and Creative Approaches

The relationship that services providers in Grande Prairie have with each other is reportedly positive and constructive. Additionally, the work that Alberta Health Services and P.A.C.E. staff are doing with people who have addictions were both mentioned as good practices to build on in this District. The Community Village is also an interesting initiative. Finally, the availability of PLEI is also a strength. However, there is room for improvement regarding increasing awareness about sources of PLEI and dissemination of materials.

### 6.1.1 Networking

Participants really did seem to have a good general idea about with other services were available in this District, and about the challenges services other than their own were facing.

*We are pretty well resourced in Grande Prairie. We have a lot of good resources. We have excellent visitation program for children in domestic violence situations. We have an excellent mental health program and Grande Prairie Legal Guidance and John Howard Society. We have a lot of good services for clients to utilize, it is just getting them there. We will do a gentle referral. If I am listening to my client and hearing that finances are a problem, I may refer them to credit counselling services but leave the choice to them. You cannot insist they go. You are kind of walking a fine line, especially with you see someone may need mental health service or addictions. Some will be polite and take the referral information and then you will see the info crumpled up in the hall later. Others are grateful. Some individuals do agency shopping. We don't run into that too often but, when we do, you kind of have to coordinate your efforts. When we do that I get the client to sign a release so we can coordinate between agencies. [04, Legal services]*

Service providers also seemed to be willing to work together in finding creative ways to meet clients' needs within the limitations that they face. They commented that they regularly witness other service providers going beyond their job descriptions to help people. From the descriptions of their duties given during interviews, it would appear that the same is true of these participants. However, limitations on this good practice are occurring due to under-resourcing.

*I think part of what is missing is ongoing communication between agencies that do exist. Most of us are aware of other services and we always have good intentions to meet but everyone's workloads are so high that it rarely works out. As a result we are not always making accurate referrals. [02, Legal Service Provider]*

### **6.1.2 Services that Were Identified as Examples of Good Service**

The court house staff, LInC, Grande Prairie Legal Guidance, and the John Howard Society were all mentioned as providing good and much-needed services. However, two more services were identified as having a significant positive impact on the supports that people with complex needs receive and being helpful to legal service providers in the area.

#### **Alberta Health Services – Addictions Services**

Addictions Services was identified by multiple participants as being very effective in this District. Participants reported that, in Grande Prairie's Addictions Services staff are very proactive and engaged and helpful with people who are facing legal problems and have addictions.

In Northern Alberta, the services that are provided include:

- Addictions Counselling: Adult Outpatient,
- Addictions Counselling: Youth Outpatient,
- Addictions Detoxification: Adult,
- Addictions Residential Treatment: Adult,
- Addictions Residential Treatment: Adult Transitional Service, and
- Addictions Services: Helpline.

#### **P.A.C.E. Sexual Assault Centre**

P.A.C.E. (<http://grandeprairie.aasac.ca/index.php>) was also identified as a helpful resource for people who have legal needs that are related to sex crimes.

*The final one that we utilize is PACE (Peace Area Crisis...I can't remember the full name). They run the visitation program and we are very involved with them. One of their psychologists sits on the regional committee. This is very nice because it provides us a little more insight. [04, Legal Service Provider]*

P.A.C.E. provides support to individuals and groups who have experienced distress, trauma, suicide, sexual, and/or physical abuse. Programs that are available in this District include:

- Child Abuse Treatment Program,
- Genesis Program (serves adults who were sexually assaulted as children),
- Family Support Program,
- Women's Drop-In Group,
- Crisis Intervention Training Program,
- Public Education,
- Suicide Prevention Resource Centre, and
- The Breakfast Club Program.

The Breakfast Club Program was mentioned specifically as being valuable. This is a co-ed psycho-educational program for adolescents with coping problems, depression, or suicidal thoughts or behaviours. It consists of a weekend retreat, group follow-up and individual support (from website).

**The Community Village**

An additional unique approach to increasing accessibility of particularly social and health services was mentioned by participants. This is The Community Village (<http://www.thecommunityvillage.ca/>). Based near downtown Grande Prairie, this is a co-location of services that specialize in working with marginalized people in the community.

The goal is to house 20 complimentary agencies within the four buildings that are part of this complex. Currently there are 12 services located in the Village. These include:

- Alberta Health Services,
- Canadian Mental Health Association,
- Centre Point Facilitation,
- Gay & Lesbian Association of the Peace,
- Grand Prairie Legal Guidance,
- Grande Prairie Youth Emergency Shelter,
- Healthy Families Program,
- HIV North Society,
- Lesser Save Lake Indian Regional Council,
- Métis Local 1990,
- Multiple Sclerosis Society of the Peace, and
- Suicide Prevention Resource Network.

**6.1.3 PLEI Provision**

There was little discussion of PLEI but a few comments were made. Participants were happy with the addition of the LInC and noted that it has a small resource centre. There is also a branch of the Alberta Law Libraries located at the court house. Someone said there was a Law Information night, but were pretty unsure of the details. Table 13 lists PLEI providers that serve this District and the main types of PLEI that are provided under each of the four main areas of law.

**Table 13 –  
Services That Offer PLEI by Area of Law**

<b>Areas of Law</b>	<b>PLEI Providers</b>	<b>Topics</b>
Administrative	Alberta Appeals Secretariat Alberta Children and Youth Services Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre (ACLRC) Alberta Law Libraries	Civil liberties and human rights Financial benefits (appeals) Forms Immigration and settlement Legislation

	<p>Association des juristes d'expression française de l'Alberta  Beaverlodge Public Library  Court Services  Environment  Finance &amp; Enterprise  Grande Prairie &amp; Area Council on Aging  Grande Prairie Council for Lifelong Learning  Justice and Attorney General  Legal Aid Alberta  Legal Resource Centre of Alberta Ltd.  Municipal Affairs  Native Counselling Services of Alberta  Seniors and Community Supports  Service Alberta  Shannon Municipal Library  Spirit River Municipal Library  Valleyview Municipal Library  Wembley Public Library</p>	<p>Licenses, registration and permits  Pensions</p>
Civil	<p>Alberta Arbitration &amp; Mediation Society  Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre (ACLRC)  Alberta Employment and Immigration  Alberta Health Services  Alberta Law Libraries  Association des juristes d'expression française de l'Alberta  Beaverlodge Public Library  Calgary Legal Guidance  Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)  City of Grande Prairie  Court Services  Grande Prairie &amp; Area Council on Aging  Grande Prairie Council for Lifelong Learning  Grande Prairie Public Library  Grande Prairie Regional College  Justice and Attorney General  Legal Aid Alberta  Legal Resource Centre of Alberta Ltd.  Provincial Court  Seniors and Community Supports  Service Alberta  Shannon Municipal Library  Spirit River Municipal Library  Valleyview Municipal Library  Wembley Public Library</p>	<p>Civil liberties and human rights  Consumer law  Copyright  Debt  Employment law  Forms  Guardianship, power of attorney, trusteeship, personal directives  Homeless rights  Human rights  Landlord and tenant  Legislation  Mediation and arbitration  Protection for persons in care  Real estate law  Rights and citizenship  Self-representation  Seniors  Small claims  Wills and estates law</p>

<p><b>Criminal</b></p>	<p>Alberta Children and Youth Services  Alberta Law Libraries  Association des juristes d'expression française de l'Alberta  Beaverlodge Public Library  Calgary Legal Guidance  Catholic Family Services of Grande Prairie  City of Grande Prairie  Community Corrections  Cool Aid Society of Grande Prairie  Court Services  Grande Prairie &amp; Area Council on Aging  Grande Prairie Council for Lifelong Learning  Grande Prairie Public Library  Justice and Attorney General  Legal Aid Alberta  Legal Resource Centre of Alberta Ltd.  Native Counselling Services of Alberta  Oydssey House Women's Shelter  PACE Sexual Assault Centre  Provincial Court  Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)  Seniors and Community Supports  Service Alberta  Shannon Municipal Library  Spirit River Municipal Library  The John Howard Society of Grande Prairie  Victims Service Units  Valleyview Municipal Library  Wembley Public Library</p>	<p>Abuse laws  Abuse of seniors  Assault  Breaches  Controlled substances  Court procedures and processes, terminology  Crisis intervention  Drug use and addictions  Emergency housing  Family violence  Identity theft  Immigrants and settlement  Impaired driving  Judicial interim release  Mental health  Monitored exchange  Parole  Pre-sentence release conditions  Prostitution  Protection for persons in care  Restorative justice  Rights and responsibilities  Sentencing  Sexual assault and abuse  Sexual exploitation of children and youth  Substance abuse  Traffic violations  Victims and offenders  Victim support  Youth appeals, reviews and youth records</p>
<p><b>Family</b></p>	<p>Alberta Arbitration &amp; Mediation Society  Alberta Children and Youth Services  Alberta Health Services  Alberta Law Libraries  Association des juristes d'expression française de l'Alberta  Beaverlodge Public Library  Calgary Legal Guidance  Catholic Family Services of Grande Prairie  Cool Aid Society of Grande Prairie  Court Services  Family Justice Services  Grande Prairie &amp; Area Council on Aging  Grande Prairie Council for Lifelong Learning</p>	<p>Access/contact  Arbitration and mediation  Child maintenance  Child protection/welfare  Common law  Court orders  Court process and procedures  Custody and access  Divorce  Domestic/family violence  Guardianship  Legislation  Maintenance (child support and spousal support)  Opposing family law applications</p>

	Grande Prairie Legal Guidance Grande Prairie Public Library Grande Prairie Regional College Justice and Attorney General Legal Aid Alberta Legal Resource Centre of Alberta Ltd. Native Counselling Services of Alberta Oydessy House Women’s Shelter PACE Sexual Assault Centre Provincial Court Service Alberta Shannon Municipal Library Spirit River Municipal Library The John Howard Society of Grande Prairie Valleyview Municipal Library Wembley Public Library	Parenting rights and responsibilities, parent education Self-representation Separation Variation of court orders
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Some of these services are physically located outside of the District and their resources can be accessed online or via telephone. Examples include:

- Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre (ACLRC) – Calgary
- Alberta Conflict Transformation Society (ACTS) – Edmonton
- Calgary Legal Guidance - Calgary
- Association des juristes d’expression française de l’Alberta – Edmonton
- Legal Resource Centre of Alberta Ltd. – Edmonton

Some of the major dedicated PLEI providers that have offices located in the Grande Prairie Judicial District include:

- Alberta Law Libraries
- Law Information Center (LInC)

We will provide brief descriptions of each of these services. Grande Prairie Legal Guidance Centre and Native Counselling Services of Alberta (NCSA) have previously been described in Section 3.4 but are also key PLEI providers.

It should be noted that, although some legal service providers have their main offices located in one District, they often have branch offices located in multiple communities and Districts. For example, Alberta Employment and Immigration, Alberta Children and Youth and LAA have branch offices in all of the Judicial Districts. The Government of Alberta also offers a wide variety of PLEI through its departmental websites. However, these sites can be complex to navigate. For a listing of PLEI that the Team has found on government websites refer to Section 6.1.2 of the Edmonton Judicial District Report (<http://cfcj-fcj.org/docs/2010/mapping-edmonton-en.pdf>).

### **The Alberta Law Libraries**

An Alberta Law Library is the lone dedicated PLEI provider that is physically located in Grande Prairie. Alberta Law Libraries were formed in 2009 through the amalgamation of Alberta Court Libraries with Alberta Law Society Libraries. Alberta Law Libraries provide services to the judiciary, members of the Bar, Crown Prosecutors, Justice Department employees, self-represented litigants and the public.

Alberta Law Libraries are located in court houses and provincial buildings throughout the province and are accessible to members of the public in the following communities:

Banff	Fort Saskatchewan	Peace River
Calgary	Grande Prairie	Red Deer
Camrose	High Level	St. Albert
Canmore	High Prairie	St. Paul
Grande Prairie	Hinton	Sherwood Park
Edmonton	Leduc	Stony Plain
Edson	Lethbridge	Vermilion
Fort McMurray	Medicine Hat	Wetaskiwin

The Libraries exist to help Albertans navigate the legal information landscape. A team of legal information professionals work collaboratively to meet the needs of clients in every region of Alberta. Alberta Law Libraries provide expert legal research services to the judiciary, Crown and Justice employees. Members of the public and self-represented litigants are guided to reliable sources of legal information without being given legal advice. Access to legal research assistance and the Libraries' collections is provided to all Albertans free of charge.

The libraries are actively engaged in educating clients on the effective identification and use of reliable legal information sources, both print and electronic, as well as information on the Canadian justice system. In-person seminars, tours and library orientations are offered regularly and a number of research guides and online tutorials are being made available. Alberta Law Libraries also work with other organizations to provide legal information workshops and presentations to members of the public.

Alberta Law Libraries provide Albertans with access to an array of electronic legal research tools and a vast print collection. When the information needed cannot be supplied by the libraries, they will obtain it on behalf of the client or will refer them to the appropriate agency.

Members of the public cannot currently sign out materials, so they must complete their reviews of information at the library or copy all the material they may need. However, library staff are currently exploring the possibility of having a selection of resources that are targeted for the public and can actually be loaned out.

More information on Alberta Law Libraries' collections and services can be found on their website at [www.lawlibrary.ab.ca](http://www.lawlibrary.ab.ca).<sup>21</sup>

**The Law Information Centre (LInC)**

Detailed in Section 3.4.5, the LInC's primary objective is to provide PLEI, particularly about criminal and civil legal matters. While staff cannot give legal advice, they can distribute print PLEI and help individuals find online information and legal forms. They can also help individuals understand court processes.

***Increasing Access to PLEI***

Participants did note areas of improvement in PLEI creation and dissemination, however. It was suggested that a Legal Resource Room located in the LAA office would be beneficial to people who do not find their way to the court house. It was noted that there is a lack of 'how to' resources for people; guides that would lay out step-by-step what a person much do in commonly experienced legal situations. An example that was given is a *How to Go to Court* brochure or handbook.

**7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Recommendations which follow have been developed from a combination of evidence and analysis. Findings have been based on the mapping of services; the perceptions and experiences of interviewees; the observations of the Research Team; and the input of the service providers who attended a meeting to review the ALSMP findings. The eight Recommendations are organized by primary funder to whom they are relevant, and are designed to enhance legal service provision in the Grande Prairie Judicial District (Table 14).

**Table 14 –  
Recommendations for Improving Legal Service Delivery in Grande Prairie**

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Reference Sections of the Report</b>	<b>How to Achieve the Recommendations</b>	<b>Justice Community Partners</b>
<b>Alberta Law Foundation</b>			
1. Enhance access to PLEI.	6.1.3	Provide funding for a resource section at the LAA office.	ALF, LAA, LInC
2. Facilitate the dissemination of procedural PLEI.	6.1.3	Provide funding to the Law Libraries, Legal Resource Centre of Alberta Ltd. (or another appropriate service) create or identify existing "how to" guides for people with basic English literacy.	ALF, ALL, LRC

<sup>21</sup> The Alberta Law Libraries website is currently being updated and current information about the services offered was provided for this Report by representatives.

Recommendations	Reference Sections of the Report	How to Achieve the Recommendations	Justice Community Partners
3. Provide rural residents with improved telephone access to key legal services.	3.5.3	Provide legal services such as LAA, LInC, and Grande Prairie Legal Guidance with funding to offer “call back” services for participants who get placed on hold.	ALF
4. Facilitate increased access to legal support for people going to court.	3.4.1 3.4.2 5.1.1	Consider providing funding for to increase capacity to provide court support to NCSA and/or the John Howard Society.	ALF, NCSA, JHS
<b>Alberta Justice</b>			
5. Ensure adequate access to legal supports.	3.3 5.1.1	Fill the second position at the LInC office in Grande Prairie.	Alberta Justice, LInC
6. Provide adequate supports for people with family law needs.	5.1.1	Provide a second Family Court Counsellor, at least on a circuit basis.	Alberta Justice
7. Provides alternative options to going to court.	5.1.2	Provide civil and family mediation services, at least on a circuit basis.	Alberta Justice
<b>Legal Aid Alberta</b>			
8. Increase accessibility of the Legal Services Centre.	5.1.2	Increase call volume capacity at the Edmonton LSC.	LAA

### **7.0.1 Recommendations for ALF to Consider**

1. Service providers reported that there is PLEI available but there needs to be increased physical accessibility to print and online material.

The LInC has been a welcome addition in this District. However, participants pointed out that not everybody who needs PLEI knows to go to the court house or is comfortable going there. It was suggested that a small “legal resource centre” could be located at the local LAA office in Grande Prairie. This could be as simple as a LInC kiosk that is regularly checked and restocked. This LAA office would have to identify the specific topics that they require information about and identify if LAA already has resources on

each of the topics, or if the resources exist and can be acquired from other legal service providers.

2. Facilitate the production and dissemination of “How To” guides related to procedural law.

Participants stated that they would like to see a series of brochures that outline step-by-step instructions for common legal procedures in very basic English. Examples include:

- How to run your own trial.
- How to abide by parole conditions.
- How to file a civil claim (small claims court).

Participants acknowledged some current information that the LInCs provide but stated that it was more “general information” and less directive than they were looking for. Student Legal Services and NCSA also have brochures that are along the lines of what participants were looking for. However, they felt that these materials need more detail and more step-by-step instructions. One participant went on to explain, “things like when you plead *not guilty* you have an election to make between provincial court or Queen’s Bench justice alone or judge and jury; what are the things to consider [in this situation], etc.”

3. Service providers reported that residents of rural communities face a number of barriers to accessing services via telephone or Internet. Expense is a main barrier that should be addressed.

There are technological and literacy barriers that make it difficult for rural residents to obtain the services they need remotely. However, expense is a major barrier that can be addressed in order to improve accessibility without major expense on the part of funders. Of the individuals who can access telephones, many are using cell phones for which they pay for minutes or borrowing other people’s telephones to call into services. They often cannot afford the cost of calling long distance or remaining on hold, even for toll-free numbers. Participants suggested funding a “call back” service for people who end up in the call waiting queue. Some services that this was suggested as being potentially appropriate for include, LAA, GPLG, NCSA and Court Services.

4. Participants stated that the lack of legal advice and representation is a problem that is exacerbated by the limited access to legal support for people going to court.

They reported that NCSA’s capacity has been reduced to that point that they have had to limit their services by prioritizing Aboriginal participants. The John Howard Society has stepped in to try to cover some of the gap by offering this support to non-Aboriginal individuals as they can. However, JHS is also at capacity. Participants suggested that funders consider providing funding for to increase capacity to provide court support to NCSA and/or the JHS.

### **7.0.2 Recommendations for Alberta Justice to Consider**

5. As emphasized throughout this Report, lack of capacity is an overwhelming problem. Ensuring that staff positions in existing services remain filled is imperative.

One specific challenge that service providers pointed out was that the LInC is losing one of its two staff. Their understanding was that this position will not be filled. The supports that the LInC offers are so invaluable in a District with such limited access to affordable legal advice and representation that the loss of one staff person would significantly impact members of the public as well as workloads of other service providers. Participants prioritized replacing this staff member immediately.

6. Service providers also identified the lack of Family Court Counsellors in Grande Prairie and recommended that this service be enhanced.

People who are going to court here currently have few options for supports if they have not been able to secure help from LAA or the Grande Prairie Legal Guidance. This is especially common and challenging for people with family law matters. They can access help to find out how to begin a legal process or find forms if they enquire with LInC, or go to the Alberta Law Libraries. But they have no supports once they get to court, if they do not have a lawyer. The one Family Court Counsellor that is there is going on leave this month. This person is already very over-taxed. There is going to be a delay in appointing the replacement, which is going to further exacerbate this backlog. A second Counsellor would be an invaluable addition to legal services in this District.

7. Focus group participants also reported that people are often going to court who really would benefit from an alternative solution. However, there are currently limited alternatives.

They stated that there is a need to provide civil and family mediation services – even if on a circuit basis – to give people (and judiciary) additional options for resolving their legal problems in a constructive manner.

### **7.0.3 Recommendations for LAA to Consider**

8. Service providers expressed frustration on behalf of themselves and their clients regarding trying to obtain brief legal advice from LAA's Legal Services Centre and stated that increased capacity would be helpful.

Service providers stated that the only reliable way to get through to the LSC was through the dedicated phone line at the local LInC office. They stated that their clients do not have the time of telephone access to wait on hold for very long periods of time (one service provider mentioned waiting for hours) or having to repeatedly try to call

back. Although, service providers recognized that the optimal solution to increase access to legal advice would be to increase LAA's capacity to provide certificate services, a less costly improvisation is to increase the Edmonton LSC's capacity to answer calls in reasonable amounts of time by increasing staff or reworking duties/procedures for existing staff.

## **8.0 CONCLUSIONS**

Legal and related service providers in this District were very busy and often over-extended. This was reflected in the challenges we had scheduling interviews and the focus group. In fact, one representative was only available the last week in October or early December. This was due to the loss of one staff person and an already incredibly heavy workload. Service providers emphasized repeatedly that they are suffering more from inadequate resources and staffing than missing services.

Despite their heavy workloads, however, the individuals who did participate were informative and friendly. They also had generally positive attitudes towards their work and the communities they serve. They spoke of a general practice of going beyond mandates to ensure that clients get the services they need.

Service providers also seem to be fairly knowledgeable about each other and willing to work together. The interesting thing about this District is that hardly anyone spoke about serving clients who live outside of the urban centre. This was likely because there are so few other communities in the District and their populations are all quite small.

The primary concerns that were expressed were:

- the limited capacity of existing services,
- the lack of lawyers,
- domestic violence rates, and
- addictions.

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