



NOVA SCOTIA
BARRISTERS' SOCIETY

MEMORANDUM TO COUNCIL

From: Emma Halpern, Equity & Access Officer and Jane Willwerth, Strategy & Engagement Officer

Date: May 11, 2016

Subject: Equity & Access Office Year-End Update

Date –	Executive Committee	
Date –	Council	

INTRODUCTION

2015-2016 saw the Society’s Equity Office become the Equity & Access Office. This name change reflects an evolution of the work of the Office following the 2010 amendment of the *Legal Profession Act* to include a requirement that the Society regularly engage with Nova Scotia’s diverse communities.¹ The work that the Office has done to meet this legislative obligation has altered both its priorities and the breadth of the work it is expected to undertake. The Office’s evolution has also been heavily influenced by priorities identified by Council through the 2013-2016 Strategic Framework that require the Society to advocate for enhanced access to legal services and the justice system for equity-seeking and economically disadvantaged Nova Scotians.

This year-end update shows how this change has lead the Office to update its programming in ways that have had a demonstrable positive impact for the Society, its membership and the general public.

Drivers of Change:

Transforming regulation

The Society’s continuing shift to a regulatory model that is principled, proactive and proportionate has lead the Equity & Access Office to restructure the role community engagement plays in how our program is designed. By deepening relationships within both the profession and the community, we have become

¹ Section 4(2)(d)(i): *In pursuing its purpose, the Society shall seek to improve the administration of justice in the Province by regularly consulting with organizations and communities in the Province having an interest in the Society’s purpose, including, but not limited to, organizations and communities reflecting the economic, ethnic, racial, sexual and linguistic diversity of the Province*

better able to proactively identify problems before they become crises and to proportionally distribute time and financial resources on the most pressing areas of need.

The Racial Equity and Gender Equity Committees

The Racial Equity and Gender Equity Committees have played an important role in keeping matters of equity and diversity at the forefront of the Society's regulatory framework. See below for further details.

Outcome measurement

This year has seen a substantial shift in the outcome measurement approach of the Equity & Access Office. Our engagement work has shown that the evaluation of individual programs does not define whether or not we have succeeded in fulfilling our mandate. Instead, it is our ability to create, restore, maintain or improve relationships among those involved in our system that determines our success.

Traditional outcome measurement will continue to play an important role in many of the Office's educational programs and in events promoting diversity in the profession. However, the overall work of the Office requires a new approach, described below in further detail.

MAJOR ACTIVITIES

Below is an overview of major Equity & Access Office activities for 2015-2016. They fall under three thematic pillars: community engagement, cultural competence education and equity in the profession.

Community engagement: These activities involve consulting with individuals and community groups regarding their experiences with the justice system and how they would like to see it work differently.

- ***#TalkJustice***

Last year marked the debut of #TalkJustice, a platform for members of the public, particularly from equity-seeking and economically disadvantaged communities, to share the barriers and challenges they face when trying to access the justice system. This phase included two major projects: a social media campaign and a live event at the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre.² This year, #TalkJustice activities sought to act on the lessons we learned during the first phase. #TalkJustice activities in 2015-2016 include:

- Formalizing learning from success in #TalkJustice through development/enacting of new principles of sound community engagement practice called *Triple-S*: We seek to ensure that all of our community engagement activities are **sincere** in motivation; **substantive** in methodology; and **sustained** in commitment to relationship building and keeping promises.
- Sharing these lessons with other interested parties in the justice system, including the Federation of Law Reform Agencies of Canada and the Nova Scotia Access to Justice Coordinating Committee (see below)

² For a detailed description of this phase refer to last year's annual report.

- Increasing our presence at community meetings and events, both through staff attendance and through representation by our community engagement consultants
- Presenting our findings to journalism students at the Nova Scotia Community College (see Prestons Land Issues, below)
- Documenting this work publicly via our social media channels

2016-2017 will see #TalkJustice's impact grow even further within Nova Scotia's justice system. The Nova Scotia Access to Justice Coordinating Committee recognizes the impact #TalkJustice has had on our ability to bring the public voice to the centre of our work. As a result, the Committee has tasked the Equity & Access Office with developing its own community engagement program, which will be formally integrated within #TalkJustice. This work is already underway. This partnership provides new energy, expertise and resources to #TalkJustice, and it will continue to be our most effective way of advocating for enhanced access to legal services and to the justice system for equity-seeking and economically disadvantaged Nova Scotians.

Working with partners in government will require us to generate more robust statistical data from our community engagement work. To this end, the Equity & Access Office plans to use SenseMaker, a research software designed to gather large numbers of stories and present them in such a way that can reveal otherwise hidden patterns and relationships. Critically, it is a system that "puts the public first": participants tell stories in their own words, and provide them with the tools necessary to explain their story's meaning. This removes the chance that the researcher's unconscious biases change the context of a participant's story. SenseMaker's output is statistical data. This means that it is able to take stories, a highly qualitative research method, and from them create the quantitative data that is often required to begin systems-level change.

It is important to note that this new direction requires expertise in research methods, statistical analysis, knowledge management and monitoring and evaluation. The addition of the Strategy & Engagement Officer provides the Equity & Access Office with this expertise.

- *Prestons Land Issues*

In 2014, Society staff and members of the Racial Equity Committee met with community members in North Preston, East Preston and Cherrybrook to learn how they are affected by the justice system. They expected to hear mostly about crime and relationships with the police. Instead, they heard about how many community members did not have clear title to land on which they pay taxes and where their families had lived for generations. They recognized that further research and engagement was required to determine how best to resolve the issue.

That summer, the Equity & Access Office hired Angela Simmonds, a Dalhousie law student from Cherrybrook, to carry out a research and engagement initiative on the issue. Ms. Simmonds spent two months gathering stories from residents, who described how the lack of clear title affected their lives. The stories are described in Ms. Simmonds' final report, entitled [*This Land is Our Land*](#).

As Ms. Simmonds completed her work the Society began a series of related collaborative initiatives: It helped convene a stakeholders' group including key staff from the Department of Natural Resources, Communications Nova Scotia, Nova Scotia Legal Aid, and the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage with the specific goal of making the Land Title Clarification application process more user friendly and effective; it began to identify lawyers who are willing

to undertake some of these files pro bono; it collaborated with DNR in June to hold a professional development session for lawyers on the land titles legislation and application process; and collaborated with the Schulich School of Law through Professor Jamie Baxter, who provided support through information and education on community landownership and land preservation. The Society also worked with the Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia and community leaders to create and distribute information brochures on land title, taxation and wills and estates.

Meanwhile, the Equity & Access Office had begun its #TalkJustice engagement project and among the attendees of our first event was Erin Moore, a journalism instructor at the Nova Scotia Community College. Ms. Moore was moved by the stories she heard at the event, especially with respect to how African Nova Scotian communities were portrayed in the media. She reached out to the #TalkJustice team, and in September 2015 they went to Ms. Moore's class to offer them suggestions for stories to investigate that were based on community feedback. The class opted to complete an investigation into the land title clarification issue, and released their [documentary web series](#) on February 22.

The students' work captured media attention locally and nationally and inspired a number of lawyers and surveyors to offer pro bono services to residents.

2016-2017 will see the rollout of a land title clarification pilot project in North Preston. Twelve lawyers have volunteered to provide legal service and advice to community members. Angela Simmonds will also return to work on the project, working with the Equity & Access Officer to serve as a liaison between the community and the volunteer lawyers, to provide cultural competence instruction and to assist in the triage of community members' legal problems.

- *The year ahead*

2016-2017 will see the Equity & Access Office move beyond community engagement, towards a restorative approach. The past year has taught us that by approaching community engagement as a process of relationship building, we learned about pressing issues that never would have reached our table otherwise. Land title clarification is not something most people think of when they consider how to improve access to justice in Nova Scotia. In historic African Nova Scotian communities, however, the issue is considered part of a long history of systemic racism and broken promises. Additionally, building relationships in a variety of communities can lead to progress in unexpected ways, as the Society's relationship with Ms. Moore through #TalkJustice shows.

This work has also shown us that issues revealed through engagement must be resolved through collaboration. There are few issues discovered through community engagement that can be solved by a single organization or department. Our work across the justice system is inherently collaborative. Consequently, our work this coming year will focus on collaboration with our partners in justice system, primarily through the A2JCC. Together, the bodies that make up the A2JCC will work collaboratively to improve relationships at all levels of our system. These include relationships between individuals, their communities and the state; between communities and the state; between the different bodies that make up the justice system; and between justice and the law.

Cultural competence: These activities involve improving the knowledge, skills, attitudes and actions required for lawyers working with Nova Scotia's diverse communities.

- *The Equity Portal*

In collaboration with Library & Information Services, the Equity & Access Office has launched a resource portal for lawyers and law firms seeking guidance on issues of employment equity and cultural competence. The portal gathers valuable online toolkits, training and information materials created by the Equity & Access Office, and relevant items from the Barristers' Library.

Included on the Portal is the Equity & Access Office's cultural competence video series, produced and launched this year. The Office has received increasing demand for cultural competence instruction, particularly from lawyers who live outside of HRM. These short videos cover a wide range of cultural competence topics, both general ("Why Cultural Competency?") and specific ("Trauma-Informed Lawyering for Sexual Assault Victims").

The Portal has been featured in local and national media, with a December article in [*The Chronicle Herald*](#) and a January article in [*The Lawyers Weekly*](#).

The Portal has a growing role to play in Society legal services regulation. It allows lawyers and legal entities to identify unique needs based on area of practice, size of firm, their client base or other issues. The Portal also plays an important role in the Society's efforts to fulfill Call to Action 27 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

2016-2017 will see the Portal publish more video content from external sources and as Society moves forward with legal services regulation, we will publish more material specifically to help navigate the MSELP as it relates to equity, diversity and cultural competence.

- *In-person cultural competence instruction*

The Equity & Access Officer completed another busy year of cultural competence instruction. This included annual instruction provided in the Skills Course, to incoming students at the Schulich School of Law, and at the Annual Meeting.

This past year has also seen this office fulfill requests for cultural competence workshops from the Society staff, Council and Committee Chairs, and all members of the Hearing Committee. These requests are a welcome sign of the dedication to equity, diversity and inclusion on the part of all who do work on behalf of the Society. Next year will see this schedule expand to include instruction for the Nova Scotia Public Prosecution Service.

- *The year ahead*

The 2015-2016 cultural competence instruction schedule was the Office's busiest to date. We anticipate that this demand will continue to grow as the TRC Calls to Action, news media coverage and increased general awareness have lawyers seek out such instruction in greater numbers.

As demand continues to increase outside of Halifax in particular, the year ahead will see the Equity & Access Office focus more resources on providing educational materials that can be accessed remotely via the Equity Portal. Additionally, the Office plans to partner with community and government organizations to increase access to education about trauma-informed lawyering.

This effort begins June 1, with a conference organized by South Shore community organization Be the Peace, at which the Equity & Access Officer will be a speaker. The conference, titled “*The Power of Our Voices – Survivors and Justice Professionals Together*” is being held during Victims and Survivors of Crime Week and aims to empower survivors, service providers and justice system professionals to use their voices and experiences to influence positive change.

Equity in the Profession: These activities involve supporting lawyers in their efforts to meet obligations related to Regulatory Objective #5: *to “promote diversity, inclusion, substantive equality and freedom from discrimination in the delivery of legal services and the justice system”.*

- *The Equity Portal*

In addition to the cultural competence resources listed above, the Portal also provides information specifically related to equity in hiring, retention, promotion and performance management. Tools found in the Portal will help legal entities design accommodation policies, assess their performance on equity matters and reduce the influence of unconscious bias in the workplace.

- *Events promoting diversity in the legal profession*

The Equity & Access Office organizes three annual event designed to promote equity and diversity in Nova Scotia’s legal profession:

- Strength in Leadership – Remembering Dara Gordon QC: Through the strength of her leadership and as a highly regarded lawyer, Dara Gordon QC made many contributions to her country, her province and her profession. This annual leadership event, held in her memory, provides the opportunity for lawyers to come together to discuss women’s leadership in the legal profession. This year’s speaker was Lydia S. Bugden, CEO and Managing Partner of Stewart McKelvey.
- Race and the Law Paper Prize & reception: This award recognizes and encourages outstanding scholarship by law students in Nova Scotia, on topics pertaining specifically to issues of race and law. It is presented by the Society’s Racial Equity Committee and sponsored by Stewart McKelvey. This year’s prize was won by Dalhousie law student Robin Vernest for her paper “*Land: Inherent to Indigenous Sovereignty – The Crown must honour their solemn promises.*” The prize is awarded at an annual reception recognizing racialized lawyers’ Call to the Bar.
- Pride reception: The Society and the Nova Scotia branch of the Canadian Bar Association have jointly hosted an annual reception every year since 2003. The event is viewed as an opportunity to celebrate diversity within the legal profession, to show support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender lawyers in Nova Scotia, and to allow lawyers to learn about the unique legal issues faced by the LGBTTI community. This year’s guest speaker

was Craig Scott, Member of Parliament for Toronto-Danforth and Official Opposition Critic for Democratic and Parliamentary Reform.

- *Integration of Internationally Trained Lawyers (ITLs) in Nova Scotia: The Observership Program*

In 2008 a multi-stakeholder working group model was created in Nova Scotia for Internationally Trained Lawyers (ITLs). This working group includes supporting partners from government, academia, regulatory bodies, as well as many non-governmental organizations. The Nova Scotia Barristers' Society (NSBS), Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services (ISIS), and other members of a multi-stakeholder working group identified that a number of challenges and barriers existing for ITLs who were making their way through the pathway to licensure in Canada. Among many other challenges it was identified that there was little opportunity elsewhere for these potential new Canadian lawyers to connect with the local legal profession in order to learn about the practical and procedural aspects of practicing law in Canada.

In 2013 the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education funded a one-year pilot project for an Internationally Trained Lawyer Observership Program situated within the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society. The project was conceived in order to address the above-mentioned challenges that internationally trained lawyers face using an observership model. This model pairs an ITL with a Supervising Lawyer and is designed to expose ITLs to all facets of legal practice in Nova Scotia, thus facilitating their entry into the legal profession. ITLs were invited to participate in a variety of activities including attending client meetings, visiting the Courts, or observing day-to-day procedures of a variety of legal workplaces.

Two internationally trained lawyers participated in the program this year, bringing the total number of participants to 17.

- *The Ku'TawTinu: Shared Articling Initiative*

Currently the number of Mi'kmaq and Aboriginal lawyers practicing within the province of Nova Scotia is low. Through the *Ku'TawTinu: Shared Articling Initiative* we hope to create meaningful articling opportunities that will prepare Mi'kmaq and Aboriginal articling clerks for successful legal careers in this Province.

The goal of the *Ku'TawTinu: Shared Articling Initiative* is to create articling positions that will provide a well-rounded articling experience, which will focus on contemporary Mi'kmaq and Aboriginal legal issues. The purpose of the initiative is to provide Mi'kmaq and Aboriginal law students an opportunity to substantively engage in the process and practice of Aboriginal Law specifically related to legal research and litigation within Aboriginal communities.

This year saw two articling clerks successfully complete the program. Two articling clerks are scheduled to begin the program in 2016-2017.

- *The year ahead*

A legal career remains one of the most common roads to many of the most powerful positions in Canadian society including the judiciary, the boardroom and elected office. Consequently, we have a special obligation to ensure that the profession is reflective of the population it serves.

The coming year will see the introduction of a second shared articling initiative to serve students from African Nova Scotian communities, an increase in ITL Observership participation and a continued role in the design of the Management System for Ethical Legal Practice (MSELP) and other aspects of transforming regulation (see below).

ONGOING WORK: INTERNAL

In addition to the major projects described above, the Equity & Access Office plays an important role in supporting the work of Society committees and providing advice and guidance to all Society staff on matters of equity, diversity and access.

- *The Gender Equity Committee & Racial Equity Committee*

The Office provides administrative support and expertise to the Gender Equity and Racial Equity Committees and assists them in carrying out their priorities. The Committees support Council in the governance of the Society and advancing Council's strategic framework by monitoring and advising on programs and policies that address issues of discrimination in the legal profession and in the administration of justice. They develop policy and program options that promote equity and diversity in the legal profession in Nova Scotia and assist the Equity & Access Officer in raising awareness of equity and access issues.

The Gender Equity Committee similarly supports Council in the governance of the Society by monitoring and providing advice about matters that address issues of gender in the legal profession. This year's Gender Equity Committee activities included:

- Advising Council on the provision of cultural competence education going forward to ensure membership is receiving cultural competence education
- Advising Council and the Entity Regulation Steering Committee on how to integrate equity and diversity into legal services regulation.
- Hosting *Strength in Leadership – Remembering Dara Gordon QC* (see above)
- In collaboration with the Schulich School of Law, creating an initiative to analyze survey data and develop and present a module of information on discrimination and harassment in the workplace within the legal profession to the members of the profession.
- Supporting the creation of an Equity & Diversity Law Office Management Standard

2016-2017 will see the Equity & Access Office support the work of the GEC in the organization of the next *UnCommon Law*, which will focus on gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment and trauma-informed lawyering.

The Racial Equity Committee monitors and provides advice about programs that address issues of racism and discrimination in the legal profession and in relation to access to justice, including programs to increase access to the legal profession. This year's Racial Equity Committee activities included:

- Advising Council on the provision of cultural competence education going forward to ensure membership is receiving cultural competence education;

- Advising Council and the Entity Regulation Steering Committee on how to integrate equity and diversity into legal services regulation;
- Creating an education and awareness initiative to encourage racialized members of the Bar to consider applying to the Bench. This included education for the Judicial Appointment Committee; consultation with the Minister's Office and the Office of the Nova Scotia Judiciary; and support and promotion of the judicial application process among racialized and aboriginal members;
- Supporting the Equity & Access Office in delivering of support services to internationally trained lawyers, including through the Observership Program;
- Working with the Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia (LISNS) to offer our skills, knowledge and support in providing legal information to racialized and Aboriginal communities;
- Continuing collaborative work with the Tripartite Justice Committee;
- Supporting the work of the Equity & Access Office in efforts to resolve land title issues in the Prestons;
- Supporting the inclusion of equity issues in the Criminal Standards;
- Providing an instructional video by REC co-chair Josie McKinney on Gladue Reports, that is being distributed to membership via the Equity Portal.

2016-2017 will see the Equity & Access Office support the work of the REC in the creation of an aboriginal law and cultural competence education module for lawyers throughout the Maritimes. This module would be created in collaboration with the Law Societies of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island and will represent an important step in fulfilling our obligations under Call to Action #27 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The REC has also resumed participation in the Aboriginal Child Welfare Working Group after a brief hiatus. The Working Group is a productive partnership of lawyers, community organizations and the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services. Together, it is bringing a collaborative approach to projects designed to improve Aboriginal child welfare, including possible standards, regulations and a risk assessment tool. The REC is supporting the Working Group on amendments to legislation and possible standards for working with aboriginal children and families.

The REC has also played an active role in the Legal Strategy Coalition on Violence against Indigenous Women (LSC). The Legal Strategy Coalition on Violence against Indigenous Women (LSC) is a nation-wide ad hoc coalition of groups and individuals formed in 2014 following the murder of Inuit university student Loretta Saunders, to marshal resources that address violence against Indigenous women. The LSC is engaged in legal advocacy and research to urgently address the critical issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women (MMIW). In addition to supporting the call for a public national inquiry on MMIW, the LSC collaborates on research and other activities in order to achieve appropriate government responses to the continuing violence and discrimination experienced by Indigenous women and girls in Canada.

- *Transforming Regulation*

In addition to providing cultural competence education and resources (see above), the Equity & Access Office provides the following supports to the Society's efforts to transform regulation:

- *Resource curation for the Management System for Ethical Legal Practice (MSELP)*

The Equity & Access Office is a major contributor to the creation of the comprehensive list of resources to guide lawyers and legal entities through the MSELP process. Our work ensures that promotion of diversity, inclusion, substantive equality and freedom from discrimination is embedded throughout the self-assessment tool.

- *Standards*: The Equity & Access Office supports this work by assessing need for cultural competence standards specific to areas of law to promote access to justice. This past year has seen the Office assist in the creation of the Law Office Management and Criminal Standards. The coming year will see the Real Estate and Family Standards go through a similar process.

Our efforts to place matters of equity and access at the forefront of legal services regulation have not gone unnoticed by other law societies. Most recently, the Solicitors Regulation Authority in the UK sought guidance from the Equity & Access Officer on these issues after reading *Equity and Diversity in Nova Scotia's Entity Regulation Management System*, a paper prepared by summer student Kevin Hong on behalf of the Working Group on Equity, Diversity, Equality and Inclusion: In & By the Legal Profession.

- *Communications*

The Equity & Access Office is a key contributor to the communications output of the Society. This past year's Equity & Access communications initiatives include:

- #TalkJustice (see above)
- An overhaul of equity & access portion of website nsbs.org;
- Regular features in the *Society Record*;
- Innovation profiles and other equity & access content for the *Legal Services Regulation Update*;
- Contributing to a new interdepartmental team struck to bring a more coordinated approach to the Society's communications efforts

- *Staff support and advice*

The Equity & Access Office provides guidance to staff on matters of equity, diversity & access. This year saw staff take particular interest in improving their skills and knowledge with respect to gender neutral language and the influence of systemic discrimination in the administration of justice.

- *The year ahead*

2016-2017 will see the Equity & Access Office continue to play an important role in transforming regulation. The Society's efforts to create a less adversarial system of regulation have led the Professional Responsibility Policies & Procedures Committee (PRPPC) to consider a restorative model for resolving complaints. The Equity & Access Officer has presented to the PRPPC about restorative justice, and will continue to serve as an advisor throughout the process.

ONGOING WORK: EXTERNAL

- *External Committees*

The Equity & Access Office provides guidance and expertise to the following external committees:

- **The Nova Scotia Access to Justice Coordinating Committee** (see above)
- **NSFamilyLaw.ca**: A website offering information about the law, processes and services that make up family law in Nova Scotia.
- **The Free Legal Clinic**: The Free Legal Clinic is for people who are planning to take their legal problems to court, have already started a legal action, or are already in court but have little or no experience with the court process. It is hosted each Thursday at the Halifax Law Courts.
- **Indigenous Black & Mi'kmaq Initiative (IB&M)**: IB&M, an initiative of the Schulich School of Law, was established in 1989 to increase representation of Indigenous Blacks and Mi'kmaq in the legal profession in order to reduce discrimination.
- **Canadian Bar Association of Nova Scotia Equity committees**: The Equity & Access Officer supports the work of and collaborates with the CBA-NS Equity Committees when asked.
- **The Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Conference (SOGIC)**: The Equity & Access Office and SOGIC jointly host the annual Pride reception (see above).
- **The Criminal Justice Transformation Group (CGTJ)**: A group of justice system actors that works collaboratively to ensure the criminal justice system in Nova Scotia is strategic in bringing forth positive change.
- **Supporting Access to Justice For Children and Youth in Eastern Africa (SAJCEA)**: A project funded by the CBA initiated for purposes of Strengthening Access to Justice for the vulnerable Children and Youth in Eastern Africa, through stakeholder collaboration, institutional development and capacity building and enhancement through sharing of ideas amongst the Justice, Law and Order Sector institutions.
- **The Action Group on Access to Justice (TAG)**: A group catalyzing solutions to Ontario's access to justice challenges by facilitating collaboration with institutional, political and community stakeholders.
- **The Law Societies Equity Network**: a voluntary working group composed of law society staff and equity ombudspersons involved in promoting and encouraging equality, equity and diversity in the legal profession in each of their respective provinces
- **National Legal Strategy Coalition on Violence against Indigenous Women** (see above)

- *Information assistance on matters of equity & access*

The Equity & Access Office is often a first point of contact for members, the media and the general public seeking information on issues of equity, inclusion and discrimination in Nova Scotia's justice system. The Office triages these requests and provides responses or referrals to other organizations as necessary.

Notable this year has been an increase in lawyers making specific requests for advice on cultural competence. This reflects lawyers' increasing ability to recognize and seek guidance for cultural

competence issues and that the Equity & Access Office is a leading provider of this information for Nova Scotia lawyers.

- *Supporting students*

The Equity & Access Office has a small staff relative to its mandate. Consequently, students play a critically important role in allowing the Office to maintain its high level of output. Students help plan and run events, produce much of the Office's research and assist with technical and administrative functions. In return, the Office is able to provide high school, undergraduate and law school students from equity seeking and economically disadvantaged communities with substantive career development opportunities, mentorship and professional references. This past year has seen the Office host:

- two high school students, who assisted with filing, data entry and the Call to the Bar;
- one summer law school student, who authored a research paper on equity and diversity in legal services regulation, filmed and edited the original material in the cultural competence video series (see above) and evaluated the resources currently housed on the Equity Portal; and
- two Pro Bono Students Canada projects: one that produced guidelines for the Society on the use of gender neutral language, and another that produced research to guide implementation of trauma-informed practice in Nova Scotia's legal community.

Next year will see the Office host a law student in the summer and for the first time, an undergraduate practicum student in the fall.

GOING FORWARD

2016-2017 will mark the 20th year of the formal existence of the Equity & Access Office. It will be its busiest year to date. The Office will build on major progress made this year: towards resolving land title issues in the Prestons, new and stronger community relationships, a dramatic growth in interest in cultural competence instruction and a steadily more diverse profession.

It is important to note that all of the work mentioned in this report is done by the two staff members that make up the Office, without dedicated administrative support. The successes the Office has enjoyed this year have resulted in our becoming a leading authority in Nova Scotia's justice system on matters of cultural competence and community engagement. This means that we have increasing demands to provide advice, guidance and instruction, both within the Society and to organizations throughout the province. Meeting these demands is challenging without adequate administrative support to help with the day to day running of the Office.

Nevertheless, the Office's new expertise and resources allow us to create a program that moves our primary focus away from one-off workshops, events or community events, and towards a program that recognizes that legal services are not delivered in a vacuum: rather, legal problems occur within historical and cultural contexts and in ways that intersect with other problems of everyday life.

The recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation of Canada, like those of the Marshall Commission before it, focus not solely on the implementation of individual programs or actions, but on the

reimagining of the complex relationships that create inequity in Canadian society. The law exists within this society, and the Equity & Access Office will move its work forward with this reality driving its program.