



# The Volunteer Lawyers Service

The Volunteer Lawyers Service (VLS) is a pro bono program that assists eligible non-partisan charitable organizations in obtaining pro bono legal services otherwise unavailable to them due to a lack of financial resources.

VLS matches eligible Alberta charities and non-profits with volunteer lawyers who provide pro bono legal assistance. VLS accepts applications from registered charities and organizations with mandates for charitable purposes as defined under the Income Tax Act.

## “CHARITIES FOR BEGINNERS”

VLS also offers “Charities for Beginners” (CFB) workshops on an as needed basis for local groups and non-profit organizations seeking information on obtaining Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) charitable status.

All CFB sessions are prepared and delivered by a VLS volunteer. Each session takes on a different character depending on the composition and needs of the group and the emphasis of the presenter. Regardless of these variations, each CFB session covers the basics of starting and registering a charity, namely: what is a charity?; what are the benefits of charitable status?; what are charitable purposes?; disqualifying factors and ineligible organizations; overview of the application process; and, provincial requirements under Alberta’s *Charitable Fund-raising Act*.

This spring, the VLS ran “Charities for Beginners” twice, in March and June. Alicia Sarnecki of Borden Ladner Gervais LLP, designed and delivered the March 20, 2009 session to a group of 21 participants, representing interested organizations from in and around Calgary as well as some keen VLS lawyer volunteers new to the field of charity law. Long-time VLS volunteer Robert Omura delivered the year’s second workshop on June 8, 2009 to a smaller, but equally engaged, group of 9 participants. Both sessions were great successes and we are grateful to Rob and Alicia for their contributions to the VLS program.

VLS receives many requests for assistance with charitable status applications; as such, we have opened the CFB sessions up to VLS volunteer lawyers with little charity law experience in the hope that the sessions will pique



their interest and they may later assist an organization with an application. All CFB sessions are open to local groups and non-profit organizations across the province, space permitting.

To date, CFB sessions have only been offered in Calgary.

*PHOTOS ABOVE: from Charities Workshops from the top - (L-R) Amy Cooper, Project Co-ordinator 2008-2009 with presenter Alicia Sarnecki of Borden Ladner Gervais LLP; Robert Omura presenter, with an enthusiastic participant; and finally, a very engaged group of attendees including lawyers and the public.*

We are seeking suitable lawyer volunteers in and around Edmonton to deliver a CFB workshop to non-profit organizations in the Edmonton area. Interested individuals should contact the VLS Coordinator at [info@pbla.ca](mailto:info@pbla.ca), or complete the enclosed Lawyer Roster Registration form, indicating an interest in the CFB workshops.

The CFB workshops feed naturally into VLS’ primary function, being to provide volunteer legal assistance directly to organizations. The workshops help organizations to consider the preliminary pros and cons of applying for charitable status. Groups that opt to submit an application to CRA can then apply to have a VLS volunteer lawyer assist them one-on-one with the application process.

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Lawyers may volunteer to work one-on-one with an organization, to oversee a Pro Bono Students Canada law student at the University of Calgary or the University of Alberta, or to facilitate CFB workshops. The Law Society of Alberta and the Alberta Lawyers Insurance Association (ALIA) have facilitated the extension of errors and omissions insurance coverage for pro bono legal services offered through authorized pro bono service providers, to lawyers not otherwise covered. VLS is an authorized provider pursuant to Rule 148(2.1) of the Law Society of Alberta Rules, so government and corporate counsel, as well as retired lawyers and those on leave, are welcome to volunteer with VLS.

To join the VLS Roster, please complete the Roster Registration form enclosed with this issue of Law Matters, or request a copy by e-mail to [info@pbla.ca](mailto:info@pbla.ca).

## THE VOLUNTEER LAWYERS SERVICE HAS MOVED!

As of August 2009, the VLS is being operated by Pro Bono Law Alberta, whose mission is to improve access to justice by increasing the scope and availability of pro bono legal services for Albertans. PBLA is pleased to be bringing VLS under its umbrella and looks forward to continuing its good work. Inquiries should now be directed to [info@pbla.ca](mailto:info@pbla.ca) or by phone to 403-541-4840.

## THANK YOU

VLS extends its sincere appreciation to this year’s VLS Committee members, Patricia Bond, Bruce Churchill-Smith, Lindell Larson, Mary Leung, Laura Liscio, Eric Miller, Cyndy Morin and Francine Swanson, for their guidance, efforts, innovation and dedication to the program and to the United Way of Calgary and Area, the Canadian Bar Association Alberta, The Law Society of Alberta and the Association of General Counsel of Alberta for their support of VLS.

PBLA would like to thank Amy Cooper for all of her hard work and dedication to VLS and for making the transition to PBLA go so smoothly.

## The Downtown Friendship Centre

Formerly The Golden Age Club, the Centre is a non-profit society and charity looking for a lawyer to sit on our Board of Directors. DFC is the oldest senior’s centre in Calgary, and one of the oldest in Canada, providing services and programs to Calgary’s senior citizens. The Board is a governance model Board and is in the process of undertaking a strategic repositioning and rebranding within the non-profit community. The Board meets on the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of every month at 5:00 p.m. at the Centre, 610- 8 Avenue SE, Calgary.

The Downtown Friendship Centre is facing some major challenges and requires the advice and direction of a lawyer. The Board is comprised totally of volunteers and would provide some interesting challenges to an enthusiastic lawyer. If interested, please contact Don Fisherman, Executive Director, at: Ph: 403-262-6342, ext. 223; Fx: P: 403 - 262-9395; E-m: [donf@calcna.ab.ca](mailto:donf@calcna.ab.ca).