

# Students participating in Community Legal Aid

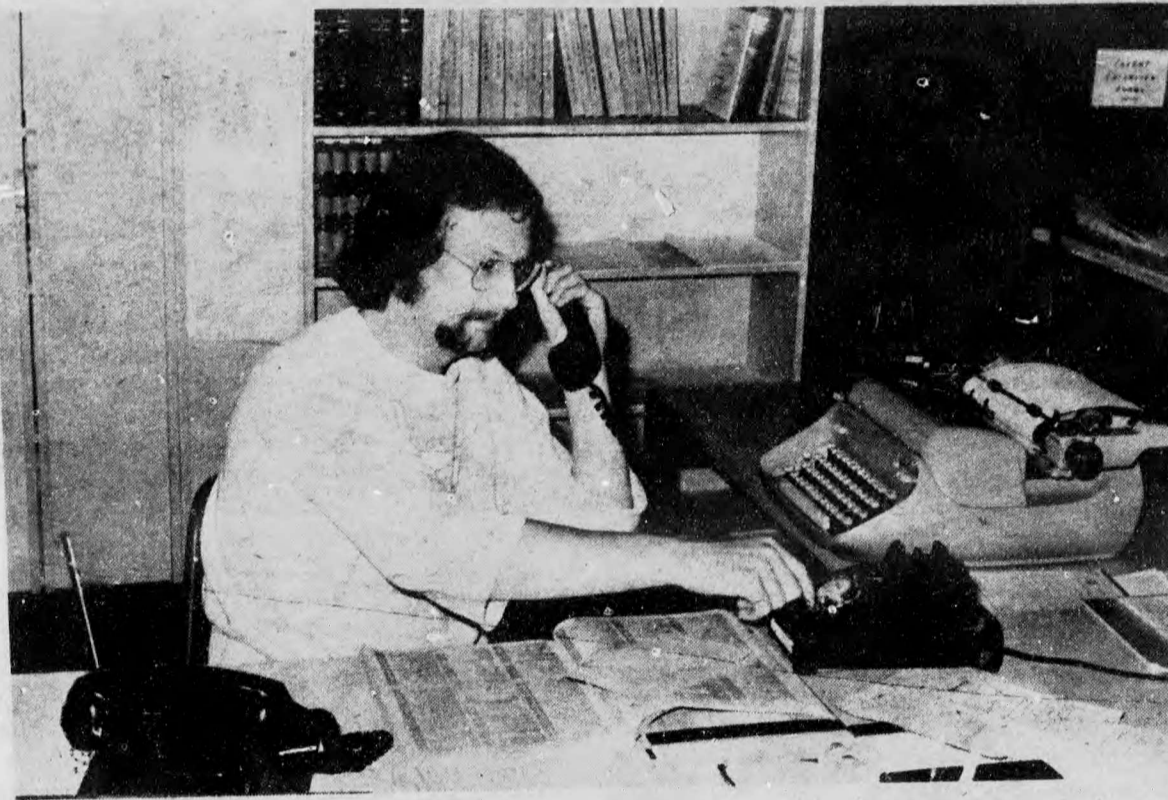


Photo by Bob Boyes

Community Legal Aid has finally got what seems to be a permanent foothold in Fredericton, thanks to a number of Law students. Shown above is Bob Lutes, one of these UNB students, working at the Aid Centre.

By RICHARD KENT

Contrary to opinions, some of the gentlemen of the lofty confines of Ludlow Hall are community minded. In past years there have been repeated attempts at forming and maintaining a Legal Aid Centre in Fredericton. All previous endeavors were aborted either because of non-support from the New Brunswick Bar or more likely our previous graduates thought doing a service for nothing was beneath them and were not sincere in their efforts.

This year however, mainly due to the hard work and co-operation of many, and the initiative of

three people in particular, Community Legal Aid Services (475-7988) at 65 Regent Street seems permanent. Chuck Ferris a third year law student from Penniac Station with Alec Mills, a full time Community Aid Lawyer in Saint John, and John Oliver originally with Civil Liberties and now a Town Planner, have transformed the idea into a reality. In conversation with Chuck Ferris much of the credit belongs to "the good people at N.B. Civil Liberties and their president, John Oliver, who provided money in the embryo stages."

February through May the office was maintained with volunteer

labour and money from Civil Liberties, then under the auspicious name of New Brunswick Neighbourhood Legal Services, the office was maintained this past summer with a \$26,000 grant from Opportunities For Youth, with 18 aspiring young lawyers receiving \$90 weekly.

At the present time the office receives a substantial grant from the Federal Department of Justice which sustains their comfortable office and a full time secretary. In the beginning an overwhelming majority of Legal Aid's clients were students but the pendulum seems to be swinging towards a more Community-oriented office benefiting those people less fortunate than most students on campus. However, this is not to be

construed as meaning students are not welcome.

Community Legal Aid is designed to handle only civil law infractions. Anybody with criminal law problems will be referred to Legal Aid New Brunswick. The most frequent cases dealt with have been marriage problems, divorce or otherwise, landlord tenant violations, consumer problems, personal injury through working, and adoption and custody.

The structure and operation of the office is, in the words of the student co-ordinator, "cumbersome and perhaps not the most efficient but allows maximum participation." Approximately fifty first year students, one student per afternoon, are engaged in taking client information.

Then, during Wednesday and Thursday evening clinics, about 30 second and third year students, together with a town lawyer, review and advise on the case.

Some students and lawyers are more sincere in helping than others while some believe it is good for their public image. As Ferris aptly stated, "there are still some lawyers around who believe any Legal Aid is taking away paying customers." The downtown office does have good rapport with the City Lawyers and the New Brunswick Bar Association, which is important for their survival.

Summary advice will be offered to anyone. At the same time, Ferris stated, "that advice may be, go see a lawyer." People who apply for Community Legal Aid fill out a confidential form designed to determine in a material sense every penny you're worth. Ferris said: The office tries to

follow guidelines outlined in the Social Services Act to determine eligibility. In most cases though they will not delve too much into a person's past.

No students are likely to be refused.

The help offered in civil law will be the most beneficial to lower income groups and students said Ferris. It has not been unheard of for students to have paid up to \$1,000 for Lawyer services during divorce proceedings only to have their divorce application rejected.

Also some lawyers may not be too helpful with problems such as Landlord - Tenant violations. Some are treading on the verge of being called slum landlords.

However, Community Legal Aid does face the problem of how to make Fredericton's lower income families aware of their existence. Ferris hopes this shortcoming will be solved through an advertising campaign about to get underway.

In the opinion of Ferris, "a lot of students, from all faculties have a misconception of the great amount of poverty that exists in this province." This attitude most of us are guilty of and should be doing much more in our respective interests to alleviate it. Ferris experience from attending the law and poverty conferences and working with New Brunswick Welfare Services seems to give him a suitable background to run community Legal Aid. Concerning his work he says, "There is nothing more gratifying than to keep someone in his house when he unjustly is in danger of eviction."

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