



BATTERED WOMEN'S
SUPPORT SERVICES



Safety Changes Everything

JUSTICE CENTRE AT BWSS

2023 - 2024 Impact Report

OUR MISSION

The Justice Centre at BWSS provides enhanced legal supports and education that play a critical role in helping survivors navigate complex legal systems and bridging a gap in services that is often insurmountable without support.



Battered Women Support Services and the Justice Centre is privileged to operate and serve on the unceded, stolen homelands of the $x^w m \theta k^w \acute{a} y \acute{a} m$ (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlílwətaʔ (Tsleil-Watuth) Nations of the Coast Salish peoples. We express gratitude to the Nations for their stewardship of these lands since time immemorial.

THE JUSTICE CENTRE AT BWSS

ABOUT THE JUSTICE CENTRE

In April 2023, we invited our community to celebrate the opening of the Justice Center at BWSS expanding the mandate of the program previously known as Legal Services and Advocacy Program.

As established Justice Center at BWSS is a community-based legal advocacy clinic, providing trauma and violence-informed, multilingual, and culturally responsive legal advocacy services for diverse women who have experienced gender-based violence in BC. The Justice Centre at BWSS is a comprehensive legal advocacy clinic with a funding model that is made possible with funding from The Law Foundation of BC, Federal Ministry of Justice, social enterprise operated by BWSS – My Sister’s Closet and Strategic Interventions and individual donations.





It is a center for survivors, created in response to the urgent need to address systemic barriers that prevent women and gender-diverse people from accessing legal services and obtaining fair and just outcomes. It has been carefully designed to address the increasing needs of the community and is a powerful tool for empowering survivors and promoting justice.

The Justice Center at BWSS has opened up incredible opportunities including ensuring that the issue of intimate partner and/or sexualized violence is taken into consideration throughout the entire legal process; to work towards ensuring that the legal system is accountable to survivors, by advocating with police, lawyers, and others who work within the legal system; to improve legal response to women who have experienced intimate partner violence; to lobby for the right for women to have adequate and secure legal aid, social assistance and safe housing.

SERVICES

By having specialized legal advocates, BWSS applies particular focus to extend services to support Indigenous women, Black women, and racialized and immigrant women who face unique barriers to safety and justice within the Canadian legal and social service systems. The legal advocates at BWSS can better support racialized survivors where services are required in languages other than English.

Full representation files, supporting women at hearings and throughout the trial process, including full trial prep, when they are self-represented,

Accompaniment to Family Maintenance Conferences, Judicial Case Conferences, Family Justice Conferences.

Regularly accompany survivors to lawyer's appointments, legal advocates attend court mediation with survivors they are supporting as well as court accompaniments for immigration, family, and criminal court dates.

Attendance at meetings with the Ministry of Child and Family Development when there is a threat of child apprehension or court for Child, Family and Community Service Act.

Legal advocacy to focus on immigration to assist survivors with immigration issues affecting their status in Canada – sponsorship breakdown, gender persecution etc.

Along with supporting survivors with information and referrals to lawyers and other support services both internally and externally.

SERVICES

Legal Issue	Level of Service			
	Information/ Referral	Advice/ Summary Service	Full Representation Files Closed	Total
Income Security (includes CPP, WCB, Welfare, Disability, EI)	15	12	0	27
Housing (includes Residential Tenancy)	27	0	0	27
Debt	3	0	0	3
Family	801	451	100	1,352
Child Protection	20	15	1	36
Other: Immigration/Refugee, Human Rights	476	198	40	714
Total	1,342	676	141	2,159

PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

In June 2023, legal advocate Tina Ye delivered training workshops the impacts of Keira’s law, and produced an Op-ed “Keira’s Law”: More Domestic Violence Training for Judges But is it Enough?

Beginning in 2023, BWSS connected with survivors and service providers to better understand the difference between family law protection orders, S.812 peace bonds, and no contact conditions. The team spent time conducting surveys and interviews with both survivors and service providers across the province and is in the process of producing a final outcome report: Justice or Just a Piece of Paper – Report on Protection Orders in BC to be released in June 2024.

The Justice Center at BWSS provided **17 training** sessions to approximately **250 people** throughout the year and the topics include:

Family Law 101

Navigating Family Law

Immigration 101

Criminal Justice System

Protection Orders

Ministry of Child and Family Development/Child Family and Community Service 101

Navigating the Child Welfare System

RACIAL JUSTICE

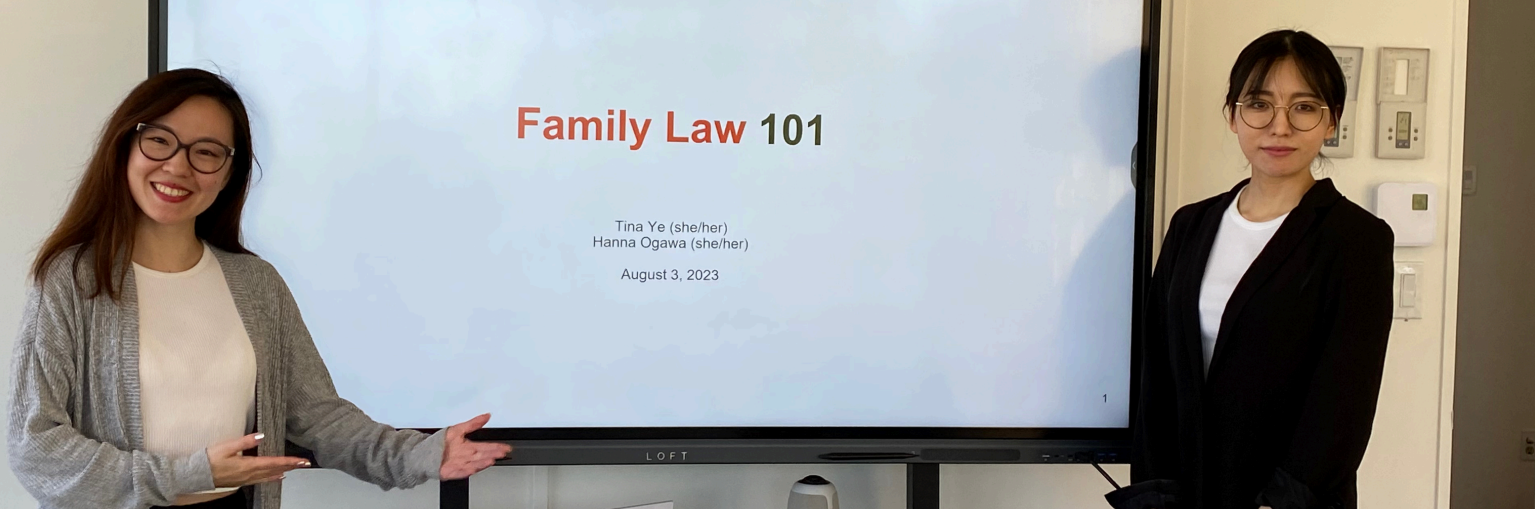
The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms Section 15. (1) Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.





So, our work at BWSS has included acting on gender discrimination and racial discrimination experienced by victim-survivors of intimate partner, domestic and/or sexualized violence when navigating the legal systems. Through our work addressing these intersections we continue to make impact in the visibility of the issues for Black, Indigenous, and racialized survivors who are navigating the legal systems. At the individual, organization, and community level, we continue to bring together Black, Indigenous, and racialized survivors who have experienced violence and their support networks to create and influence new solutions to hold perpetrators, institutions, and systems accountable.

Our overarching goal is to further a race, class, and gender analysis in approaches to improve advocacy for Black, Indigenous, and racialized victim-survivors. At the policy level, we continue to illuminate the influence of race and gender of institutional and systemic response to victims-survivors, to further influence policy. We are committed to continue advocating for more “by and for” interventions advancing racial equity/system change/policy reform. Our work continues to inform practice, deploying strategies to address systemic gaps and barriers that limit equitable access and outcomes.



LEGAL CLINICS FOR SURVIVORS

Currently BWSS runs two family law clinics a month in Vancouver done in tandem with external lawyers where survivors receive information on Family Law.

The legal advocates assist in but less frequently - Criminal, Mental Health, Wills/Estates, Human Rights, Consumer, Employment, and Housing.

The Justice Center at BWSS provides individual appointments to an average of 20 survivors daily.

With an average of 10 survivors a month accessing free legal advice through our family law legal clinics.

Legal advocates at the Justice Center specialize in Immigration, Family, CFCSA, and Criminal law support for survivors.

Court accompaniments for survivors are available 5 days a week, and we receive requests daily from survivors for this support service. Survivors who are dealing with complex trauma and dealing with the intersection of oppression and violence receive support around legal advocacy, court information, and assistance during accompaniments.

Survivors share with us that they feel supported and more able to understand the legal system as they navigate their way through it.

CONCURRENT AND OVERLAPPING LEGAL ISSUES

Legal advocates are responding to more requests from survivors who are dealing with an intersection of legal issues such as both immigration and family law.

In addition, there have been more cases where our legal advocates are seeing survivors who do not have status in Canada losing access to their children to the opposing party who does have status in Canada. In many cases, the survivor is seen as a flight risk, or the opposing party has made a statement that they believe the woman will try to run away with the children because she has no status. In these cases, family court judges are using the fact that the women have no status as a reason to restrict her parenting time or provide the opposing party with primary parenting.

Due to the large backlog in the family court system for survivors under COVID 19; we are now starting to see that backlog catch up and survivors who have been waiting two or more years are now heading into trials. These trials are not set for 14, 20, or 25 days and legal aid is not available for survivors for their trials.





We are seeing more survivors who are forced to self-represent in supreme or provincial court against their abusive partner and their lawyer if the abusive partner can afford one. Survivors are often navigating the impacts of trauma due to the violence they experienced in their relationship so self-representing is very challenging. In response to this, our legal advocates are taking on more full representation files to support women who are self-representing which means attending a full trial, taking notes, at times addressing the court, providing translation, creating direct and cross-questions, prepping witnesses, finding experts, issuing subpoenas, writing closing submissions, and possible applications during the trial that come up. All within a small number of hours a week a full representation file for a 20-day provincial court trial can be more than 100 hours a week of prep and deliverable time which is near impossible for legal advocates to meet yet is it necessary to help support survivors access to a fair trial.

SELF-REPRESENTATION

We are seeing an increased number of abusers choosing to self-represent and be able to cross-examine or communicate directly with survivors for hearings, applications, and trials.

This issue is happening often and many times per year, which each time is re-traumatizing for survivors. We continue to advocate to hold abusive partners accountable in family law proceedings in a way that protects survivors from constantly being re-exposed or re-traumatized from abuse impacting their ability to run their own trial.



OUR TEAM

In April 2023, BWSS celebrated the opening of the Justice Center at BWSS which is a combination of the former LSAP Legal Services and Advocacy Program.

KAREN BATON

Rejoined BWSS in April of 2023 to be the Manager of the Justice Centre. Karen went on to private practice in Dec 2023.

SUMMER-RAIN

Became Manager of the Justice Centre at BWSS in Dec 2023.

TINA YE

Worked as Legal Advocate for a year and a half before going off to article Spring 2024.

MAYRA ALBUQUERQUE

Worked as Legal Advocate since 2018.

HANNAH ELLISON

A recent master's graduate from UBC Law was hired as Legal Advocate Spring 2024.

KIRSTIN IBISTER-SCANSON

Public Legal Education

HARSHA WALIA

Research and Policy

AGNES HUANG

Supervising Lawyer

ROSA ELENA ARTEAGA

Clinical Practice

ANGELA MARIE MACDOUGALL

Executive Director

JUSTICE CENTRE AT BWSS

The Justice Centre represents a significant evolution in our efforts, and the support of the community has been instrumental in its development.

Our funding model is diverse, incorporating contributions from The Law Foundation of BC, the Federal Ministry of Justice, the social enterprise operated by BWSS – My Sister's Closet, Strategic Interventions, and the generosity of individual donors.



[LEARN MORE](#)

Battered Women's Support Services is a
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