

**LEGAL INFO**   
NOVA SCOTIA



# ANNUAL REPORT 2020

APRIL 2019-MARCH 2020

# ANNUAL REPORT

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## OUR VISION

- **The Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia is access to justice in action.**
- **LISNS provides legal information, resources and referral options in traditional and innovative ways to enable Nova Scotians to understand their legal rights and responsibilities.**

## OUR MISSION

**LISNS empowers Nova Scotians to identify, prevent and solve legal issues.**

LISNS set ambitious objectives for this year in support of its mission and was very successful. The advent of COVID-19 has reinforced how LISNS business model is ideally suited to nimbly adjusting to meet the avalanche of post-pandemic legal information needs that have ensued. LISNS sets the standard for remote service delivery through a flexible telework model that focuses on individual service providers applying their expertise to help the public while maintaining a strong ethic of teamwork. We have been operating in a telework environment for some time which has helped us achieve savings in overhead while investing in staff and our programs and ensuring superior service delivery to the public. The result of COVID-19 is that we are busier than ever and our innovative programs and services, available by phone and web, are meeting the myriad legal information needs brought about by the challenge of COVID-19.



**Heather de Berdt Romilly**  
**Executive Director**  
**Legal Information Society**  
**of Nova Scotia**

## Key highlights:

- Increased core funding by \$143,300 and leveraged project funding to strengthen our program service delivery to respond to the significant demand for help through our legal information helpline, livechat and e-mail services;
- Successfully competed for project funding in the amount of \$720,000 (of which \$549,000 has been realized in 2019-20) to advance LISNS' work in key areas of focus including helping Seniors with critical estate planning documents through a Senior Navigator Project, addressing Sexual Harassment in the Workplace, developing Investor Protection materials, and updating Family Law content;
- Developed and launched a new Personal Directive App which has proven to be a critical resource for pandemic planning;
- Developed new representing yourself videos in the LISNS Small Claims Court App to respond to the significant demand by self-represented individuals which the Courts of NS directly embedded into the new online small claims court forms available on the Courts of NS website;
- Responded to the significant demand for family law legal info support by developing and delivering 12 family law legal information sessions to 194 front line community service workers at locations across the Province so they can provide family legal info navigator support to their clients on the most critical family law issues; and
- Continued our drop-in legal info clinic at the IWK to support strong demand by patient-clients and staff through the IWK Family Legal Health Program.



**+ \$143,300**  
CORE  
FUNDING



**+ \$720,000**  
PROJECT  
FUNDING



**+12** family law legal  
info sessions  
**194** front line community  
service workers



**New "Representing Yourself"**  
videos in the  
LISNS Small Claims  
Court App



**NEW PERSONAL  
DIRECTIVE  
APP**

## WEBSITE / ONLINE APPS / SOCIAL MEDIA

### Page views:

317,020

### Sessions:

213,276

### Top 5 pages:

1. Common law relationships
2. Jury Duty
3. Tickets – Speeding
4. Sexual Abuse
5. Ask a legal question

### App Usage:

Small Claims: 5,660 views

Personal Directives: 5,263 views

Wills: 3,052 views

### Personal Directive App Completions: 339

### Social Media Followers:

Twitter: 1,187

Facebook: 771

## LEGAL INFORMATION LINE, LAWYER & MEDIATOR REFERRAL SERVICE

**Legal Info Line:** 3363

**Emails:** 1220

**Live chat:** 838

**Total:** 5,421

### Top 5 areas of law:

1. Family
2. Wills & Estates
3. Criminal
4. Employment
5. Landlord/tenant (residential)

### Referrals to:

Lawyers: 981

Mediators: 7

**# of self reps:** 1,826

### # of volunteers

Law Students: 11

IT Students: 2

Paralegal Interns: 2

High School Student: 1

**# of Dal Law Student Placements:** 3

## CLINICS, OUTREACH & INFORMATION SESSIONS

### Family Law Navigator Training Sessions

- 12 family law legal info sessions presented across the province.
- 194 attendees – all front line community service workers.
- 91% of attendees reported the session to be excellent

### Small Claims Court Navigator Project

- The Courts of Nova Scotia embedded our Small Claims Court App and representing yourself videos on their new online Small Claims Court Forms.
- Pro Bono Law Students assisted self-reps at Small Claims Court in Halifax.

### VG-Estate Planning Legal Health Program

- free estate planning documents for eligible patients who have a life-limiting illness
- 14 patient-clients served (wills, PoA, PD)
- Huge thanks to the 8 volunteer lawyers

### IWK Family Legal Health Program

- free legal help for eligible IWK patients – families (where Legal Aid not available)
- 35 patients-families served
- 2 referrals to partnering law firm, McInnes Cooper
- LISNS has a drop-in legal info clinic at IWK first and third Tuesday of the month for patient-clients and staff (since Mar 17 2020 telephone or virtual service only)
- Health Law Placement student Jan-Mar
- 4 legal info sessions for IWK staff

## CLINICS, OUTREACH & INFORMATION SESSIONS *(continued)*

### **Wills Clinics for Disadvantaged Seniors and Families in the Preston Communities**

- 11 clinics held
- 41 clients served (wills, POA, PD's completed)
- Most lawyer honorariums were donated to the East Preston Resource Centre

### **Wills Clinics for Land Title Claimants in Guysborough County:**

- 4 clinics held
- 4 wills, POA and PD's completed

### **Publications Distributed**

- It's In Your Hands: Legal Information for Seniors and their Families – 1,160 books
- Leaving an Abusive Relationship: 12 Tips – 250
- Healthy Family Relationships – 250
- Abuse is Wrong in any Family – 500
- General LISNS bookmarks – 1000

### **Legal Information Presentations: 300 attendees Caregivers NS Wellness Retreat**

- Adsum House in partnership with Dal Legal Aid (wills & estates)
- Retired Teachers' Organization of NS, Wellness Symposium
- NS Seniors' Advisory Council
- Service NS Staff Lunch and Learn – wills & estate planning
- Partners for Legal Education – 6 sessions – info series for newcomers to Canada: sessions on Estate planning, Becoming a Citizen, Family Violence, Family Law, Landlord/Tenant, Family Reunification

## SOME SERVICE USER COMMENTS

"What a fantastic help...Being able to get assistance on the phone pretty much immediately was very much appreciated...Without (the Legal Info Line) my ordeal would have been far more difficult and costly. Thank you to all." – *Legal Info Line feedback from Oct 2019.*

**4.75/5** overall chat rating based **451 total reviews.**

"That was the best experience, couldn't have been more helpful, friendly, pleasant, competent, (and) articulate: thanks!" – *Chat feedback from Nov 2019.*

**86%** email user satisfaction rate based on 93 total reviews.

"Your response was more than I expected, very detailed and opened doors to other questions, other information I need to gather. Thank you!"  
– *Email feedback from Jan 2020.*

"So much useful information! (You) cleared up a lot of misinformation that gets spread."  
– *Jan 2020*

"(The information) was presented in a way that even though I do not have a law degree I could 100% understand all that was talked about."  
– *Dec 2019*

"(Your presentation) clarified and summarized a lot of information. It was interesting, useful information and the presenter was engaging, informative and funny!" – *Nov 2019*

"I was full of questions and just needed to understand if I even have a legal issue, and if it should be pursued, and if so, where to start."  
– *May 2019*

"Having the family court process broken down very simply was helpful. The presenter also had the knowledge to elaborate on questions."  
– *Apr 2019*



## FINANCIAL SUMMARY – REVENUES & EXPENSES

Fiscal year April 1 2019 to March 2020

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### REVENUE

#### GRANTS

<i>Law Foundation of Nova Scotia</i>	\$	172,000
<i>Department of Justice Canada</i>		163,300
<i>Department of Justice Nova Scotia</i>		50,000
<i>Department of Justice Nova Scotia Emergency Funding</i>		25,000

#### FUNDRAISING

21,225

#### OTHER

88

#### SUB-TOTAL

431,613

#### PROJECTS

549,017

#### TOTAL

\$ 980,630

### EXPENSES

#### PROGRAMS

<i>Publications - Content Review</i>	\$	14,910
<i>Publications - Printing</i>		6,779

#### COST OF RAISING FUNDS

1,213

#### PROJECTS

549,017

#### ADMINISTRATION

406,748

#### TOTAL

\$ 978,667

#### INCOME (LOSS) FOR THE YEAR

\$ 1,963

A copy of our financial statements is available upon request



## FINANCIAL SUMMARY – ASSETS & LIABILITIES

Fiscal year April 1 2019 to March 2020

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### ASSETS

#### **CURRENT**

<i>Cash</i>	\$ 142,085
<i>Accounts Receivable</i>	55,874
<i>Prepaid Expense HST</i>	3,611
<i>Receivable</i>	28,994
	230,564

#### **CAPITAL ASSETS**

<i>Furniture and Office Equipment</i>	<u>2,007</u>
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<b>TOTAL</b>	<u>\$ 232,571</u>
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### LIABILITIES

#### **CURRENT**

<i>Accounts Payable &amp; Accrued Liabilities</i>	\$ 114,248
<i>Deferred Revenue</i>	<u>113,027</u>

<b>TOTAL</b>	<u>\$ 227,275</u>
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### NET ASSETS

<i>Investment in Capital Assets</i>	2,007
<i>Unrestricted</i>	6,711
<i>Contingency</i>	<u>\$ 10,000</u>

<i>Net Asset Deficiency</i>	<u>\$ 5,296</u>
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<b>TOTAL</b>	<u>\$ 232,571</u>
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*A copy of our Financial Statements is available upon request*





## GOLD STANDARD PROGRAMMING

### Legal Information Line, E-mail and Live-Chat Service (supported by the Lawyer & Mediator Referral Service):

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Having a sustainable core staff complement makes a big difference to serving the public efficiently and effectively. With increased core funding (received from the Law Foundation of Nova Scotia and the Government of Canada) and project funding, LISNS was able to increase its program staffing complement from 1.5 staff to 3 staff effective mid-year.

The result was that LISNS was able to respond to **38% more inquiries** during that six month period. For the year, that translated into responding to 18.5% or 851 more inquiries from Nova Scotians' in need of legal information help.

For the first half of the year, while operating on a reduced staff capacity, LISNS averaged 89 responses to the public per week (19% reduction in line with the reduced staffing). Effective October with all core funding received, we doubled that program delivery capacity which permitted each of the direct services (telephone, livechat and email) to the public to be staffed at a level that directly relates to demand for those services.

With the increase in funding our service delivery rate jumped dramatically to **123 responses per week** for the remainder of the year which represents a **38% increase**. Significant is the fact that we were only able to offer LiveChat consistently for the past six months with the increased staffing and we were able to respond to an increasing demand for service via that medium. Without the increased resourcing in the Fall we would not have been able to assist as many Nova Scotians' requiring assistance.

There was a significant increase in the number of self-represented individuals seeking assistance rising from 456 last year to **1,826**, and more time was required by staff to respond to inquiries which have become increasingly complex. We were able to successfully assist more people directly through legal information with lawyer referrals being made for 18% of inquiries this year compared to 24% the previous year.

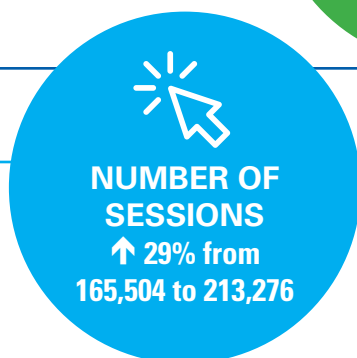
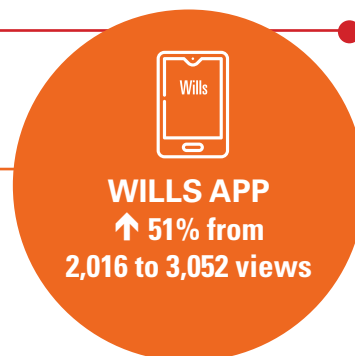
**LISNS Service Delivery receives praise from those receiving legal info help.** LISNS provides a free telephone hot-line service available daily, Live-Chat on a regular schedule along with email inquiries (response provided within 3 business days). The public receives expert legal information help from a legally trained legal information counsellor and may be triaged to other helping resources, or to a lawyer in private practice through the volunteer Lawyer Referral Service through which member lawyers provide an initial 30 minute consultation for a \$20 fee.

Every person served by Live-Chat and e-mail has the chance to provide us feedback through an embedded evaluation form. A similar format is being introduced for the line service. Evaluation feedback is evidence of the high quality service delivery being provided by LISNS staff: Live-Chat has a 95% approval rating, E-mail has an **86% approval rating** and anecdotal feedback from line callers indicates a strong level of satisfaction and trust in the service.

## Website Service Delivery

We continue to have strong traffic to our website which provides comprehensive information on all areas of the law. The website is an important resource for our legal information counsellors when responding to the public. Feedback from users via our online survey indicates the website is helpful and easy to navigate.

- The **overall page** views on our site increased by **22%** from 259,911 to **317,020**
- The **number of sessions** increased by **29%** from 165,504 to **213,276**
- Views on the **Wills app** increased **51%** from 2,016 to **3,052 views**
- Views on the **Small Claims App** increased **55%** from 3,637 to **5,660**
- Views on the **Personal Directive App** rose dramatically **post-COVID** providing an important pandemic planning tool. The increase went from 1% of unique page views Pre-COVID to over **69%** of views Post COVID. The last weekend of March, the 3,562 unique page views of the Personal Directive App greatly exceeded the weekend average of **1,000** total unique page views for the entire website.



## Launch of Personal Directive App – supporting Pandemic Planning

- LISNS continues to demonstrate its ability to anticipate and deliver services that are critical to Nova Scotian's well-being. A personal directive is a critical need in a time of pandemic when people are alone in hospital and have no one to speak for them. LISNS worked in partnership with Dr. Jocelyn Downie, Schulich School of Law and elderlaw scholar, assisted by Graduate Student, Victoria Appold, and launched the free Personal Directive App (PD App) in Fall 2019 which produces a completed document. The Personal Directive has had a surge in traffic since the arrival of COVID with hundreds of Nova Scotians using the app to complete a personal directive.



PRIOR TO MARCH 2020 / COVID-19

**33 times**  
or **1.25/week**

POST-COVID (MARCH 15-31, 2020)

 **306 times**  
or **126/week**

- Prior to COVID-19 becoming a reality in March 2020, the PD App was completed **33 times** or **1.25/week**. Post-COVID (March 15-31, 2020) the PD App was completed **306 times** or **126/week**. This increase occurred following significant media coverage (which interviews are available at LISNS website under the media page: [www.legalinfo.org/what-is-lisns/media](http://www.legalinfo.org/what-is-lisns/media)). As of the time of writing, the % increase in our completion rate since the arrival of COVID in Nova Scotia (March 15, 2020) is **5452%** or **54.5 x** our original completion rate. Statistics indicate that less than 1 in 5 Canadians have an advanced care plan in place. LISNS will continue to promote the PD App through its comprehensive network of stakeholders and supporters.

### Will, Power of Attorney & Personal Directive INTRODUCTION

LEGAL INFO<sup>1</sup>  
NOVA SCOTIA



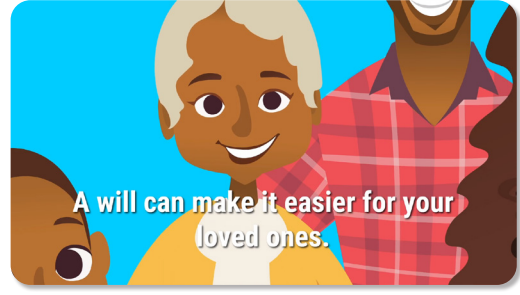
VIDEO: Introduction to the LISNS Wills, Power of Attorney and Personal Directive apps. Click to view. Video will open in **vimeo**.



VIDEO: The LISNS Personal Directive app. Click to view. Video will open in **vimeo**.



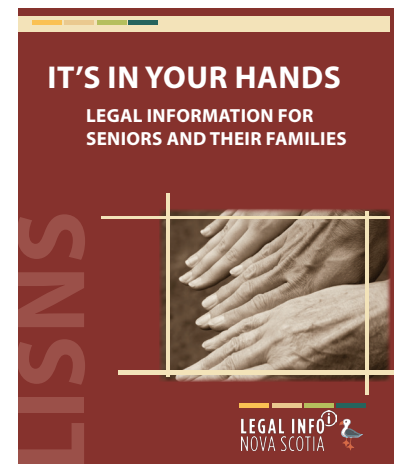
VIDEO: The LISNS Power of Attorney app. Click to view. Video will open in **vimeo**.



VIDEO: The LISNS Wills app. Click to view. Video will open in **vimeo**.

- Further to the updating of content for LISNS' most frequently requested publication, **It's In Your Hands Guide for Seniors and their Families** (thanks to the Nova Scotia Department of Seniors for providing project funding in 2018-19 for this critical update), LISNS' was able to promote hard copy access for the public to this resource by providing copies to all provincial public libraries as a reference resource, NS Members of Parliament, NS Members of the Legislature, Retired Teachers' Organization of Nova Scotia Executive (members located across the Province), and NS Seniors' Safety Coordinators.

- A Seniors' Navigator Project was launched February 2020 which will train community volunteers to assist seniors and others needing help in rural locations with making a personal directive using the PD App. The Project will also support the making of a will and power of attorney with the launch of those apps in fall 2020. LISNS has been providing leadership in responding to the COVID crisis by utilizing technology to continue this work uninterrupted. LISNS has been working with supporting lawyers to provide support for execution of estate planning documents using digital means to ensure the public can have the protection they require during the time of pandemic.



### Family law website content

- **Updated family law website content** related to Bill C-78 changes to the Divorce Act coming into force this year with funding from Justice Canada.



## Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Project

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- Launch of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Project valued at \$2.1 million over years (2019-24) with funding support provided by the Department of Justice Canada. We are proud to have the NS Human Rights Commission as a project partner. The funding announcement was made by the Honourable David Lametti in July 2019 in Halifax: [Government of Canada supports initiatives to address workplace sexual harassment and improve access to justice in Nova Scotia](#). LISNS received the project funding in early Fall through which it will deliver, during the life of the project, workplace training to employees and employers supported by a free lawyer referral service for complainants of workplace sexual harassment and website content.
- Our ambitious first-year objective was met when we successfully developed an **online training platform** on LISNS website through which we **delivered training for lawyers on the SHWP Lawyer Referral Service**. LISNS is proud to have assembled an amazing team of experts who worked collaboratively to develop quality materials which were delivered remotely instead of in-person due to the arrival of COVID. Special recognition to Dr. Wayne MacKay who is the Project Advisor, and Allison Smith, SHWP LRS Coordinator, who is on secondment to LISNS from the NS Human Rights Commission. The training has been shared with colleagues across Canada and has received very positive feedback from lawyers participating on the SHWP LRS. We have also been proud to work collaboratively with stakeholders which are also working to effect change in this area including the Canadian Bar Association NS Branch, NS Barristers' Society, and Council of NS University Presidents, Curriculum Committee, which representatives have been provided with our training.



*Haley Brittain (Dal Law Student); Heather de Berdt Romilly (LISNS ED); The Honourable David Lametti, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada; Christine Hanson, LISNS Board Chair, CEO NS Human Rights Commission; MP Andy Fillmore; Dr. Wayne MacKay, Professor Emeritus, Schulich School of Law, LISNS Expert Advisor; Wendy Turner, LISNS Manager of Legal Info Services; and Allison Smith, LISNS SHWP LRS Coordinator (on secondment from NSHRC).*



## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

### Free Wills Clinics

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- **Free Wills Clinics** (with funding support from the NS Department of Lands and Forests) – We express our appreciation for the generous time and expertise provided by our volunteer lawyers and students and for the support provided by East Preston Day Care Centre and staff at MLA Keith Colwell's office in addition to Land Titles staff responsible for the initiative.
  - **Seniors and Disadvantaged Families in the Preston Communities** – we held 11 clinics which served 41 clients through 3 lawyers and 2 students! Each client received a will, power of attorney and personal directive.
  - **Land Title Claimants in Guysborough County** – we held 4 clinics which served 4 clients through 1 lawyer and 1 student. Each client received a will, power of attorney and personal directive. A scheduled weekend wills blitz to serve all of the land title claimants requiring a will during the last weekend of March had to be postponed due to COVID. We are ready to reschedule when it is once again safe to meet in person.

### Medical Legal Health Partnerships

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- The **IWK Family Legal Health Program** is a medical legal partnership that offers free legal help to eligible IWK Health Centre patients and family members when a legal issue is affecting the patient's health. The program served 35 patients-families and made 2 referrals to supporting partner, McInnes Cooper. LISNS provides on-site legal information at the IWK Health Centre twice a month at drop-in clinics, and telephone and email support at other times. Four legal information sessions were provided to IWK staff which sessions were well attended and received positive feedback. ***Since 2015 the IWK Family Legal Health Program has assisted 122 families.***
- The **Estate Planning Legal Health Program**, a pilot medical legal partnership between the Nova Scotia Health Authority and LISNS, served 14 patients-clients providing free estate planning documents including wills, powers of attorney and personal directives. The Program is available to lower income patients who have a life-limiting illness, and who are receiving care through the Victoria General Hospital, QEII. Our sincere thanks to the 8 lawyers who are supporting this important work; and to the NSHA staff, social workers and healthcare providers who continue to support and highlight the need for this service. ***Since the pilot commenced in November 2018, 26 clients have been served.***

### Family Law Navigator Initiative

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- Building on the success of our pilot of family law information sessions for front line community service workers in 2018, the Nova Scotia Association of Family Resource Centres (FRC) partnered with LISNS through funding provided by the NS Department of Community Services to offer similar sessions across the regions of the Province. We delivered 12 sessions to 194 front line community service workers at locations around the Province which received rave reviews. Additional topics have been identified by FRC for future sessions.



VIDEO: Family Law  
Navigator Info Session  
materials will open in  
**vimeo.**

## Small Claims Court Navigator Pilot

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- Small Claims Court Navigator Pilot was launched with the support of the Halifax Small Claims Court. The pilot showcased the LISNS Small Claims Court App which included new Representing Yourself videos produced in 2018 (with thanks to funding from the NS Department of Justice). The pilot was staffed by law students and volunteers who were trained over the summer 2019. The initiative has been successful in supporting self-reps and has evolved into a “Bring a Buddy” to Small Claims Court where self-reps can have a public navigator (trained by LISNS) attend the hearing with them and sit at the table before the adjudicator to provide a supporting (non-speaking) role). The pilot is continuing with the support of adjudicators and court staff, and self-reps providing very positive feedback.



PDF LINK: [Form will open on the Courts of NS website.](#)

## Legal Information Presentations: 300 attendees

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- Caregivers NS Wellness Retreat
- Adsum House in partnership with Dal Legal Aid (wills & estates)
- Retired Teachers’ Organization of NS, Wellness Symposium
- NS Seniors’ Advisory Council
- Service NS Staff Lunch and Learn – wills & estate planning
- Partners for Legal Education Legal Info Series - In partnership with Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia and a number of generous volunteer speakers from the community, LISNS helped coordinate and present 6 legal information sessions for a Spring and Fall series for newcomers to Canada on a range of topics, including Estate planning, Becoming a Citizen, Family Violence, Family Law, Landlord/Tenant, Family Reunification. LISNS has a number of publications for newcomers on various topics that are available in multiple languages on the LISNS website.

## Students supporting LISNS

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- This year LISNS hosted 19 students from various programs including 2 Schulich School of Law Students through the Public Law Placement and Health Law Placement, 1 Schulich School of Law Summer Student Placement, 11 Pro Bono Dalhousie Schulich School of Law students; 2 IT Students; 2 paralegal interns, 1 Citadel High student volunteer.





## FINANCIAL UPDATE

- LISNS achieved a balanced budget for 2019/20. Particular thanks to our anonymous donor who pledged \$4,000 to support our work. Many thanks to all LISNS donors for helping advance our work.
- For 2020-21, funding support has been confirmed for the following:
  - Department of Justice Canada – Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Project (2019-2024)
  - Law Foundation of Ontario, Access to Justice Fund, Investor Protection Project (2020-21).
  - Department of Justice Canada – Family Law Content Updating for Divorce Act revisions
  - NS Department of Seniors – Seniors’ Legal Information Navigator Project
  - Government of Canada, New Horizons for Seniors - Seniors’ Legal Information Navigator Project
  - Department of Lands and Forests – continuing to deliver free wills clinics to disadvantaged seniors and families in the Preston Communities; supporting land title claimants in Guysborough County through pro bono wills.



## THANK YOU TO OUR CORE FUNDERS FOR THEIR ONGOING SUPPORT

- LAW FOUNDATION OF NOVA SCOTIA – Thank you for continuing to support our legal information work and providing consistent and strong endorsement of our quality service delivery and the important role of LISNS in providing Nova Scotians with access to justice.
- NOVA SCOTIA DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE – Thank you to the Department and the officials with whom we are partnering on the Small Claims Court Navigator Pilot Project.
- DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE CANADA – Thank you to the Department for recognizing and supporting our work in providing Nova Scotians with quality legal information.



## THANK YOU TO LISNS STAFF

LISNS Staff are the reason LISNS delivers on the objectives that meet our mission. Each staff person is very competent and is committed to making a positive difference through their work. Notably, each person has a strong central core while having an ability to work as part of a team that is seamlessly innovating while working remotely. LISNS staff know our objectives and how to achieve those objectives in a coordinated integrated manner. At LISNS we know we have to continue to innovate to be relevant. It is with pride that LISNS celebrates the staff each one of whom is an innovator, contributor and dedicated worker.





## THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEER BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### LISNS Executive:

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**Christine Hanson,**  
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Human Rights  
Commission

PAST PRESIDENT



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Family Division



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**Tammy Wohler,**  
NS Legal Aid