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Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia - Student Report 2026

Placement summary

I was placed at the Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia (LISNS) for my practicum this semester alongside another practicum student. We worked under the supervision of Heather de Berdt Romilly, Kelly Eagles and Nicole Slaunwaite, three of the six team members at LISNS. LISNS operates completely remotely, and communication with our supervisors occurred exclusively over email and Zoom. Relatedly, this placement was largely self-directed, with the team providing projects to complete on our own time. Regardless, our supervisors were always available in case we needed guidance, direction or help. Although the work was largely remote, there were opportunities to participate in some in-person events and clinics run by the organization.

About LISNS

LISNS is a charitable organization that provides Nova Scotians with free, accessible legal information and resources that empower people to identify, prevent and solve their own legal issues. LISNS believes that accessible legal information is a fundamental aspect of an equitable and fair justice system. Accessibility doesn't just include availability; it also means that information is written in plain, understandable language, the website is easy to navigate, and it

can be exited quickly if someone is escaping violence at home. The website provides comprehensive legal information on criminal, family, and employment law, to name a few, offering a multitude of online resources, including books, pamphlets, and short videos that explain how people can best exercise their legal rights and address legal situations in their lives.

They draw a clear distinction between legal information and legal advice, with legal information encompassing general laws and legal processes, legal rights and responsibilities and information that applies to everyone. Contrastingly, legal advice is based on one's unique circumstances, such as how the law will apply to a specific situation or a prediction of what a court will decide. LISNS focuses on providing legal information, and individuals can ask a legal question by phone, email or live chat, depending on availability and staffing capacity. This distinction is extremely important because the line between legal information and legal advice can easily blur, and legal advice can only be given by lawyers.

LISNS runs in-person clinics that provide people with free, accessible avenues to exercise their legal rights, including monthly notary clinics across Nova Scotia. Individuals can come in with wills, immigration documents, affidavits, and more to be notarized by one of LISNS's staff members. This service saves individuals time and money that would otherwise be required by a paid lawyer, which is both expensive and time-consuming.

They also provide free, accessible web applications on their website, such as their separation agreement app, and estate planning tools where people can create wills, powers of attorney and personal healthcare directives. These documents are typically expensive to create, especially if done under the guidance of a lawyer. Although LISNS clarifies that some situations require the help of a lawyer, such as those creating a will who have complex personal, financial

and property situations, these apps remove barriers for individuals to access important documents that uphold their rights after death or incapacitation.

Overview of placement and contributions

Before our first meeting, we were given a general overview of our overarching project for the duration of the placement. Our project was to help LISNS kick-start their Estate Navigator clinics, which would use volunteers to help individuals, namely those lacking digital literacy or who otherwise had questions about the process, complete the wills, powers of attorney and/or personal healthcare directive apps. Our job was to help work out the logistics of starting these clinics, including coordinating where they would take place, recruiting and training volunteers, and ensuring people's privacy rights were upheld due to the sensitive nature of personal finances and family circumstances. Our first task was to complete each app on the website and their online Estate Navigator training tool, to ensure we understood what these processes entailed.

During our first meeting with Heather and Kelly, they gave an overview of the organization, its mandate and their ultimate goals for the Estate Navigator clinics. Our initial task was to conduct preliminary research that answered the following questions:

- 1) Can volunteers be used in settings involving sensitive and personal information?
- 2) If so, how should volunteers be screened and trained to ensure compliance with volunteer best practices?
- 3) Are there other local and community organizations that we could reach out to to advertise our clinics, and possibly find interested volunteers?

Upon a preliminary research scan, I found a plethora of information regarding best practices for volunteers, with the Government of Canada providing comprehensive guides on the

subject. We quickly determined that volunteers can be used in settings involving private and personal information if they are properly screened and trained on how to uphold these standards. I then did a quick search for organizations whose demographics may benefit from the Navigator clinics, such as Caregivers Nova Scotia, the Alzheimer's Society of Nova Scotia, Aging Well Nova Scotia and interestingly, the SPCA.

After doing this research, we met with Heather and Kelly again to develop a plan of action. This included outlining our goals and the steps we needed to take to accomplish them. Heather and Kelly suggested that the public libraries were the best location to eventually host the Navigator clinics, providing an accessible, comfortable and community-recognized space. Therefore, our first big task was to contact the library and iron out the details of our proposed clinics.

I contacted a representative of the Alderney Gate Public Library in Dartmouth, who agreed to meet with me to discuss details of potentially hosting our Navigator clinics. In this meeting, she explained the logistics of what the library could and couldn't provide. After coming up with a loose framework, we had a follow-up meeting with our supervisors and the library rep to iron out the details and begin formulating a timeline for volunteer recruitment, including advertising, screening, interviewing and training volunteers.

It was around this time that the end of the semester was approaching, and we were given some final materials to put together in preparation for volunteer training. These included drafting interview questions suitable for a 5 to 10-minute phone interview that ensured volunteers understood the difference between legal information and advice, the diversity of people they'd be working with, and the importance of protecting clients' privacy. Further, we were tasked with drafting an internal policy for LISNS estate navigator clinics. We were also asked to research

how to advertise these services to young people, as inevitably, the demographic of these services is largely seniors.

Due to the inevitable timing constraints of waiting for email responses and organizing meetings that accommodate multiple schedules, the planning process was slow at times. During these periods, we were given events to participate in and small tasks to do in the meantime. One task was to create an infographic about family violence for an online webinar that one of my supervisors was presenting at with the Immigrant and Migrant Women's Association of Halifax. I was asked to create a resource for the webinar attendees about LISNS resources and services related to gender based violence and sexual harassment. Creating this document with help from Nicole really highlighted the importance of plain, concise language for legal information to be accessible to everyone, differing from the typical writing assignments undertaken in my studies. It also showed me the unique social and legal barriers immigrant and migrant women face when dealing with family violence in Canada. The other student working with me had the opportunity to present at the webinar, where she showed the attendees how to locate LISNS services on the website.

I also attended one of the notary clinics LISNS holds at local libraries across Nova Scotia. I helped the LISNS staff member, who is a lawyer certified by the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, by witnessing documents and ensuring they had the required stamps of approval to prove they had been notarized. This was an extremely interesting experience, and I had the opportunity to meet a diverse group of people and see a plethora of unique documents they needed notarized. I had the opportunity to read many of these documents myself, and the LISNS representative made sure to explain everything she was doing in the process. Some of these documents included wills, travel authorization for children, immigration documents, a separation

agreement and even a check for a class-action lawsuit related to medical malpractice. I also got to see lots of different passports, which was extremely interesting!

Concluding thoughts

I had a positive and educational experience at LISNS, participating in hands-on work that I knew was making a direct impact on the lives of Nova Scotians. Working under the guidance of Heather, Kelly and Nicole, I learned how and why the law is largely inaccessible for many Canadians, often manifesting implicitly. Contributing to the development of the Navigator clinics provided a space where I could hone what I had learned throughout my LJSO studies in a non-academic environment, and learn the behind-the-scenes process of organizing volunteer programs. Further, as someone who had volunteered at other organizations before working at LISNS, it was interesting to see a different perspective on the importance of volunteers in communities, who play a crucial role in providing important, sometimes lifesaving, services. I know that I will take what I have learned at LISNS into my future legal career, furthering my interest in attending law school one day. I would recommend a practicum placement with LISNS to students interested in the law and facilitating access to justice, who work well in self-directed environments, take initiative and are open to meeting and learning from a diverse cohort of people.