

The Polar Barristers

Access to Justice *On Air* in Pangnirtung

On Wednesday February 8th, LSN President Tamara Fairchild and LSN Member Scott Hughes, both criminal defence lawyers with Maliiganik Tukisiinakvik Legal Services in Iqaluit, spent time speaking to the Pangnirtung community after court circuit was done. With help for interpretation offered by their colleague Naimee Akpalialuk, court worker for the circuit, Tamara and Scott took calls from the public at the community radio and provided some public legal education about impaired driving and sexual consent.

Photo, from left to right:

Tamara, Scott and Naimee



IN THIS ISSUE

- Page 2 Second Law School program
- Page 3 **The Spirit of Giving – Niqinik Nuatsivik Food Bank & Qayuqtuvik Food Centre**
- Page 4 Ethics & Unauthorized Practice - a new Nunavut Model Code
- Page 5 **Spotlight:** Meet LSN Member Denford Madekufamba
- Page 6 NuLAP program
- Page 8 **Feature:** Access to Greenland
- Page 10 Access to Justice for people with disabilities
- Announcements:** CBA NU Branch Executive & NU Law Foundation Board of Directors

The Spirit of Giving See page 3

Volunteer for our next sponsored meal...



Thanks to the many volunteers who supported our holiday efforts at the soup kitchen, including the meal service team. Left to right: Jena Montgomery (LSN member project coordinator), Chef Michael Lockley, Madam Justice Sue Cooper (front row), LSN Executive Member Marsha Gay with our young volunteer Mathias, Madam Justice Bonnie Tulloch (back row), LSN Members Yvan Nault and Lana Walker.



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Second Law School Program to Foster Local Legal Talent

An Interview with Justice Beverley Browne

By Thomas Rohner

It's simple, really: If kids grow up with a lawyer in the family, they are more likely to dream of a law career.

But until just a decade ago, most kids in Nunavut were less likely to harbour that dream, said Justice Bev Browne, one of the founders of Nunavut's only legal training program, the Akitsiraq Law School.

Eleven Nunavummiut graduated from the Akitsiraq program in 2005 — the only graduating class the program produced.

Now, with the Government of Nunavut's announcement that a second legal training program will begin in September 2017, even more students can dare to dream.

"I think before Akitsiraq, young people didn't consider law as a career choice because it was just so far from any kind of reality they knew. But now it's a real choice for students who are talking about what they want to be when they grow up," Browne said recently from judge's chambers at the Nunavut Court of Justice in Iqaluit.

"Some of their relatives might be lawyers, and that's huge — that changes everything."

In her 20-year career in Nunavut, Browne, who now presides from the Queen's Bench of Alberta, helped build a criminal and civil court system from the ground up.

Browne, Nunavut's first senior judge, said she was part of a committee that began talking in the 90s about the need for a Nunavut-based law program.

"It became apparent to us that very few students were successful when they went down south to university. I think they struggled to fit in so far away from their families."

Inuit were obviously capable of becoming lawyers, Browne said, so the committee reasoned it would be better to start a program in Nunavut.

"We had some of the highest calibre professors from across the country come up and teach. They were smart enough to adapt the curriculum to reflect the reality in Nunavut, with things like property law and the land claims agreement and all the things that people who are going to be practising law in Nunavut need to know something about."

Nunavut students today might be better equipped to cope with attending post-secondary education in the South, Browne said.

But many of the advantages to training Inuit lawyers discussed before Akitsiraq started up are still true today.

"Lawyers from the South, even those who've never lived in Nunavut, do an excellent job of representing Inuit in court," said Browne.

But the judge said she can't "focus enough" on the value Inuktitut-speaking lawyers would add to Nunavut's justice system, especially on sensitive and complicated matters.

"People don't express themselves as well in a second language when talking about things like serious crimes. To some extent, different languages tell different stories...Court workers and interpreters, they do a great job, but that's a band aid solution to make it work," said Browne.

And having more Inuit lawyers wouldn't only be a boon for the civil or criminal justice systems in Nunavut.

"It's significant to have people with legal training in decision-making roles, for example," the judge said.

"No matter what people do after they get a law degree, they are highly educated individuals who have good critical thinking skills. That plays well for the future of the territory."

"I believe every one of them has used their high level of education to benefit Inuit and the territory."

The graduates of the Akitsiraq program were all in high demand for important jobs, Browne said.

"I'm proud of all of them, still, to this day, for all the things they're doing for the benefit of Nunavut. I believe every one of them has used their high level of education to benefit Inuit and the territory."

And we can expect the reincarnation of the law program in September 2017 to inspire even more Nunavut children to become lawyers, Browne said.

The next Law School¹ which should be welcoming 25 students to enroll in a four-year program, also hopes to inspire young students and youth through funding provided by the Nunavut Law Foundation's Upinnaqtuq Award.

The award is given in honour of Browne for her dedication, passion and leadership during her 20 years in Iqaluit, especially for the benefit of youth.

"We have to take care of our young people, educate and encourage them, so this territory can be the most amazing territory. This award recognizing a youth who is doing well, trying hard and who means well, is very important."

It won't be long, Browne said, until Inuit kids dream not just of being lawyers but judges too.

"The ideal now is to get an Inuit judge, and why not? Akitsiraq grads have been out of school for 10 years now."

¹ The Nunavut Arctic College (NAC) with the University of Saskatchewan's College of Law will be offering the Nunavut Law Program starting September 2017; NAC: <http://www.arcticcollege.ca/education-news/item/6474-nac-to-offer-law-degree-with-university-of-saskatchewan>.