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NUNAVUMI MALIGALIUQTIT
NUNAVUT LAW FOUNDATION
LA FONDATION DU DROIT DU NUNAVUT

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Winds of change blowing at the Nunavut Law Foundation as Marie Belleau becomes its new Chairperson

The Nunavut Law Foundation helped Marie Belleau go through Law school and now she will help the organization reach out to even more people, as their new Chairperson. “We have very good impact on individuals and that is good. I want to maintain and enhance our programs, but I also want to find ways to be more strategic and maximize our positive impact in the community,” says Belleau.

Marie Belleau studied law in both Quebec and Ontario and launched her legal career in Iqaluit in 2013. Since then, she has been working as a legal counsel for Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI), the organization that represents Inuit under the Nunavut Agreement. Belleau describes how she first got involved with the Foundation 4 years ago: “Like many other places, but maybe even more so in Iqaluit, volunteering plays a very important role in the community. There are many needs and opportunities to give time and when I came back to Nunavut after my studies, I wanted to get involved in the legal community, and I always thought the mandate of the Law Foundation was very positive,” says Belleau. Having been a recipient of the Foundation’s awards and sharing common values with the organization’s mission, she naturally got interested in joining the board.

The mandate of the Law Foundation is to provide grants and funding for legal education, community justice, legal research and law reform. As the new Chairperson, Belleau wants to continue the good work that has been done so far, and help bring the Foundation further. She would like the organization to get a little more strategic by identifying some needs and setting priorities, “get past the *reception-reaction* mode” as she puts it.

One area the Foundation could improve is public education and communications in general. Belleau wishes to better communicate with the public and try to find ways to have a deeper impact on the community. On that front, there also needs to be more work done on the use of Inuktitut in the justice system.

“With our recent history of colonialism and social traumas, our justice system is facing several deep challenges. I would like to help demystify this justice system that is not always well understood by many people. This system with its police, courtrooms, lawyers and prisons might be foreign to our land, but it is here to stay. It does not mean it cannot be improved or better adapted to the needs of Nunavummiut. I believe it is important to facilitate access to justice, and better the whole experience within the system, and its perception. Public education is not the responsibility of only the Law Foundation, many organizations and individuals must participate, but I would like the Foundation to do more to this end despite having limited resources.”

The Law Foundation also adopted its first ever strategic plan two years ago and Marie Belleau anticipates making good use of it during her mandate. This tool will help her make sure the board works towards achieving the goals and objectives identified.

Another thing Marie Belleau will work on with Nalini Vaddapalli, the Foundation’s Administrator, is the financial side of things. The Law Foundation has a budget of just over \$3,000 per year, collected largely through each lawyer’s membership fees with the Law Society of Nunavut. Other Law Foundations in Canada receive their funding through the interest generated from the large base of resident lawyers’ trust accounts (IOLTA revenues). The resources generated by these trust accounts cannot even remotely compare with IOLTA revenues generated in Nunavut which is less than 20 dollars per year. . Only one third of the Law Society’s members in Nunavut are actually residents of the territory, according to Vaddapallibut Nunavut has huge challenges and lots of opportunities to make positive changes. There might be ways to help Nunavut be better equipped to respond to the many demands.

On a related matter, Belleau says about the new Nunavut Arctic College Law Program involving 25 students in Nunavut that: “It is good that the opportunity is there to receive legal training locally. Our financial awards are available to support them and also Nunavut law students who study in southern cities. We encourage all Nunavut law students to apply”.

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