



Connection

Ombudsman outreach



Ombudsman Clare Lewis (right) toured the Elgin Middlesex Detention Centre (EMDC) in London earlier in the Fall as part of his commitment to conduct personal visits to the province's correctional facilities. He was greeted by EMDC Superintendent Murray Laird (left) and then Acting Regional Director for the Western Region, Gary Hogarth (centre).

The gauge by which we measure our success in informing others about Ombudsman Ontario's services is not by how many complaints we receive, but rather, by how many people know what the Ombudsman does. Communication with all levels of the community is the foundation of Ombudsman Ontario's outreach program. It is my view that if we are not providing ongoing and sufficient outreach to the various communities that we serve, we are not successfully fulfilling our legislated responsibility.

It is not our role to encourage complaints, but rather to ensure that the public be aware of their right to

complain and of the availability of our service if needed.

While front line staff continue to develop relationships with community-based organizations and conduct information sessions and intake clinics around the province, it is equally important that my management staff also participate in the process. We are embarking on initiatives to provide information sessions about our procedures to government staff as well as M.P.P. constituency office staff. Community education is an important form of outreach and one that is vital to our process. Since the start of the current fiscal year, members of my staff have participated in over 300 outreach

activities.

My own outreach calendar has been heavily booked with many speaking engagements, conferences and media interviews. In September I was pleased to be invited again to participate in the annual International Plowing Match, an event which provides a unique opportunity for me to meet and listen to the concerns of members of the rural and agricultural communities. I was also able to combine that visit to the London area with a tour of the Elgin Middlesex Detention Centre as part of my commitment to conduct personal visits to the province's correctional institutions. I have completed four of these and intend to continue with others throughout the year. These visits allow me to assess significant concerns that we have been monitoring including overcrowding, provision of exercise, healthcare, food quantity and quality and inmate access to my office.

Over the past two years we have re-focused on the importance of public accessibility to our office and have undertaken several initiatives to enhance the broader community's awareness of our service. From the re-design of a more user-friendly and informative web site to the pilot of the Community Education Program, our commitment to reach Ontario's communities remains steadfast. We continue to seek opportunities to establish valuable web site links with organizations whose clients are in need of our service and we recently

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produced and distributed a :30 second public service announcement in both English and French to over 89 television and cable stations around the province.

Recognizing the importance of language in Ontario's growing diverse population, as recently revealed in a Canada census report, Ombudsman Ontario provides information sheets about our services in 31 languages other than English and French. Many of our staff are multilingual with a total of 20 different languages spoken. Interpreter service in any other language is also available to anyone who calls or visits our offices.



Clare Lewis, Q.C., Ombudsman



Ombudsman Ontario's Director of Complaint Services Lenna Bradburn, leading a presentation to Constituency office staff of the Liberal Caucus at their Annual Workshop held at Queen's Park recently. Sessions such as these are part of Ombudsman Ontario's outreach strategy to government and M.P.P. constituency office staff to provide ongoing information about the office's process.

Around the province



Travelling Ombudsman Representative Pamela Young (above) addresses a high school law class in Sarnia. Pamela conducts Intake Clinics and information sessions and presentations throughout the Southwestern region of Ontario. She is based in Windsor.

Ombudsman Clare Lewis (photo on the right) was on hand to hear the concerns of the agricultural and rural community when he participated in the International Plowing Match held in Glencoe, Ontario in September. He is joined by Ombudsman Ontario Representatives, Laura Spiers (left) and Robin Bosworth (right).



Case summaries

Workplace Safety and Insurance Board

Mr. E complained that the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board had not processed his claim and that he had no income and was living off his credit cards. An Ombudsman Representative contacted the Board, which, as a result, made the necessary calculations and processed a benefit cheque in the amount of \$8,746.58.

Ministry of Education

Mr. S complained that he was placed on the Ontario Restricted List (ORL) as he had not declared a portion of his income under the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) requirements. This rendered him ineligible for further OSAP funding. Mr. S contended that the failure to declare the income was an oversight. Mr. S' father had written to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities advising that the income had been received as a dividend from the family company and had been used to pay family expenses. The OSAP application contained information about the consequences of not providing accurate information. Mr. S signed a declaration indicating the information he provided was truthful. The Ombudsman concluded that Mr. S was given ample warning about the need for accurate reporting of changes to income and that the Ministry followed its policies and guidelines. However, the Ombudsman suggested that the Ministry should have a policy regarding income verification

measures. The Ministry agreed that it would consider whether the OSAP appeal board required additional discretion to exercise judgment in responding to individual circumstances.

Ministry of Transportation

Mr. G complained that 12 years ago, as a condition of having his licence reinstated, he was required to provide a medical report to the Ministry of Transportation. Mr. G left the province without reinstating his licence. He returned to Ontario, took a driving course and was ready to do the required Ministry tests. He provided a medical report but was advised by the Ministry that his case would have to be reviewed. Mr. G was upset at this news as he needed to have the licence as soon as possible for a new job. Following the intervention of our office, the Ministry expedited its review and confirmed that Mr. G would be receiving his licence.

Ministry of Correctional Services

A young offender with special needs called our office to ask for our assistance in having his mother present during his eye surgery. According to the young offender, his mother had been denied this request on several occasions and several surgical appointments had been cancelled as a result. His psychologist spoke with our staff and explained that the young offender had difficulty understanding or interacting with

others and, although he was 17 years old, he was still in elementary school. The psychologist advised that in his opinion, a legal guardian needed to be present to make decisions on the young offender's behalf. After our office contacted the facility, it agreed that the mother would be permitted to attend the surgery.

Ontario Works

When Ms R contacted our office she was in receipt of Ontario Works benefits. She had been found eligible for, but was not yet in receipt of, Ontario Disability Support benefits. Her medication costs were \$500 per month and she only had enough medication to last her to the weekend. She was advised that she did not qualify for a drug benefit card. Although the Ombudsman does not have jurisdiction over the municipal administration of Ontario Works benefits, an Ombudsman Representative made an inquiry on Ms R's behalf. The Municipality consequently agreed to provide Ms R with a drug benefit card.

These cases are taken from Ombudsman Ontario's 2001-2002 Annual Report. A complete copy of the Annual Report can be found on our website at: www.ombudsman.on.ca. To have a copy or CD version mailed to you, please call 416-586-3353.

mission

STATEMENT

Working to ensure fair and accountable provincial government service

We Believe

Ombudsman Ontario is guided by the following values in its interactions with its staff, the public and government:

Fairness: treating everyone in a reasonable, equitable and impartial manner

Accountability: providing quality services, taking responsibility, evaluating and improving through innovation

Integrity: demonstrating transparent, honest and ethical practices

Respect: understanding individual differences and valuing diversity

Contact information

1-800-263-1830 - English

1 800 387-2620 - Français

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and deaf**

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For general information, comments on this newsletter or mailing address changes, please call our Communications Office at **416-586-3353**.

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Who We Are

Ombudsman Ontario helps

people resolve problems by

investigating complaints they have with provincial government ministries, agencies, boards, commissions and tribunals. The office cannot deal with matters regarding federal or municipal government, the courts, and the private sector. Ombudsman Ontario is independent of the government and is a place of last resort when other approaches to resolve complaints have been tried. Services provided are confidential.

About our logo

This is the symbol for Ombudsman Ontario. The "O" stands for our name. Inside, three sets of arms come together: one each for the public, the government and our office.



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