## The Polar Barristers







## Interview with Sara Siebert

Council member at the Federation of Law Societies of Canada

## JOURNEY TO NUNAVUT

Sara Siebert holds the distinction of being able to say that she worked at Canada's most northern legal aid clinic. In 2014, Sara accepted a position as criminal defence counsel with the Kitikmeot Law Centre - Canada's most northern legal aid clinic. Located in the hamlet of Cambridge Bay, the Kitikmeot Law Center serves the communities of the Kitikmeot region of Nunavut, providing legal services and access to justice to community members. In her time working at the Kitikmeot Law Centre Sara held the positions of Clinic Director and Lead Criminal Counsel for the Kitikmeot region.

"I enjoyed my time immensely working in the Kitikmeot region," says Sara, "but I wanted to expand my practice and work throughout the territory - in all of Nunavut's 25 communities." To help facilitate that goal, in 2016 Sara moved to Igaluit where she transitioned from legal aid



The Polar Barristers | Fall 2021 page 2

to becoming a sole practitioner. "I wanted to explore different areas of the law and I knew becoming a sole practitioner would afford me those opportunities," says Sara regarding her transition to private practice.

Sara currently maintains a practice based in Iqaluit where she focuses primarily on criminal defence litigation. "There are very few of us in private practices here in Nunavut," says Sara. "Nunavut offers so much to someone in private practice. I have had many opportunities to develop personally and professionally as well as grow my practice as a sole partitioner – opportunities that I couldn't take advantage of when I was a staff lawyer with legal aid."

Sara's private practice in Iqaluit has expanded to include administrative law, parliamentary law, and elections law. She is Counsel to the Chief Electoral Officer and to Elections Nunavut, the Deputy Law Clerk at the Nunavut Legislative Assembly and sits as a member of the Nunavut Criminal Code Review Board and of the Labour Standards Board.

In addition to her law practice, Sara is a member of the Law Society of Nunavut's (LSN) Discipline Committee as well as Special Counsel and Senior Project Advisor to the LSN. She also formerly served as Director of the Canadian Council of Criminal Lawyers representing Nunavut.

From the start, Sara has always sought out challenges, educational as well as professional, ensuring a varied legal practice. Her resume includes clerking for Justice Louis LeBel at the Supreme Court of Canada from 2004 to 2005, and served in the role as a Legal Officer (Reserve) with the Office of the Judge Advocate General of the Canadian Armed Forces from 2007 to 2014, which included deployments as a legal advisor on Canadian Forces operations overseas.

Prior to arriving in western Nunavut, Sara started her legal journey on the east coast of Canada in Nova Scotia. It was here that Sara graduated from Dalhousie University with a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Political Science and International Development Studies in 1999. She then went even further east to attended Trinity College, University of Dublin in Ireland. Here Sara received her LLB in 2003 and a Masters in Letters (MLitt) focusing on International Criminal Law in 2005. In 2003 she completed the Federation of Law Societies of Canada's National Committee on Accreditation's course of studies. Sara also graduated from Carleton University in 2009 with a degree in International Affairs from the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs.

opportunities to develop personally and professionally as well as grow my practice as a sole practitioner...



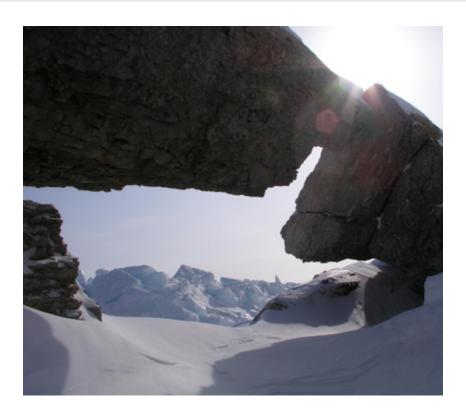
The Polar Barristers | Fall 2021 page 3

"I really enjoy the people I work with, and together, we do good work."

Sara was admitted to the Law Society of Upper Canada (now Law Society of Ontario) in 2005, and to the LSN in 2014.

For Sara, practicing law in Nunavut is both challenging and rewarding at the same time. She also willingly admits that working as a lawyer in the North is not for everyone. "Good colleagues and good relationships with those in the justice system make the job easier. I really enjoy the people I work with, and together, we do good work." Sara points to the different pace from practicing law in the south. Specifically, the system of circuit court in Nunavut. The court travels from community to community and the court is only in any one community for a relatively short period of time on each Circuit. As such, a significant amount of work must be dealt with within that period of time. "Court circuits are intense. We often have to contend with a high volume of files, a significant amount of travel, weather delays, and technological challenges. We also must respect that many of us are outsiders who are relatively privileged. Our work requires us to practice trauma informed lawyering. Despite all these challenges, I have had great experiences because of the people I work with."

Lawyers need to be able to build trust and relationships with the community as well as their clients when conducting circuit court. For Sara and many of her colleagues, it is important that Nunavummiut have trust in their counsel. "We don't get to spend a lot of time with them because of the nature of circuit court," says Sara. "Many of us are also from outside of Nunavut and not Inuk. It takes a lot of courage for our clients to put



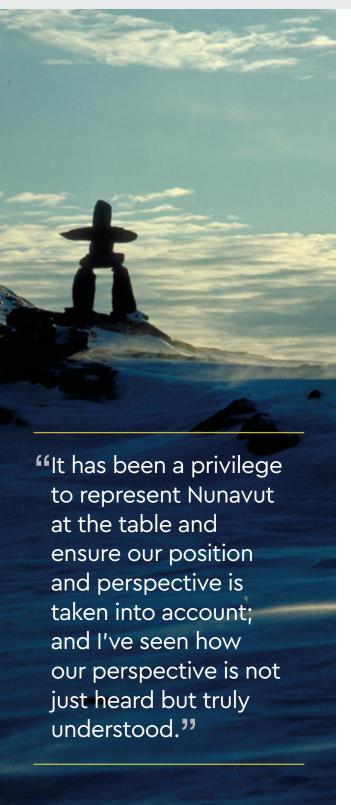
their trust in the lawyers assigned to represent them." Sara believes that to be a competent lawyer in the North, individuals need to be aware of the privilege of that trust and have respect for the culture and the people.

## LAW SOCIETY OF NUNAVUT'S REPRESENTATIVE ON THE FEDERATION OF LAW SOCIETIES OF CANADA

Sara is also the member nominated by the LSN to the Council of the Federation of Law Societies of Canada. The Federation of Law Societies of Canada (the Federation) is the national coordinating body of the 14 law societies, including the LSN. Every lawyer in Canada and notary in Quebec is required by law to be a member of a law society and to be governed by its rules. Furthermore, the Federation promotes the development of national standards, encourages the harmonization of the 14 law society rules and procedures, and undertakes national initiatives as directed by its members, among other activities. Each of the 14 law societies has a Representative who serves as the voice for their law society at the national table. Since 2018, Sara has been the LSN's Representative.

Sara was nominated by the LSN's President and CEO to bring forward Nunavut's position to the national discussions and to ensure the unique features of Nunavut are taken into account when setting national standards. "While the Nunavut Bar is relatively small, Nunavut's perspective matters on the national stage. When the Federation is developing standards, Nunavut has an equal voice like all other Federation members," says Sara. "The Federation is committed to having all of Canada – from coast to coast to coast – represented around the table."

The Polar Barristers | Fall 2021 page 4



It is the responsibility of the LSN to ensure that Nunavummiut are served by lawyers who meet high standards of competence, learning and professional conduct; and, to uphold the independence, integrity and honour of the legal profession. More so, ensuring access to justice for Nunavummiut is a top priority. To achieve this, the LSN ensures Nunavummiut are served by a legal profession that is independent, responsible, and responsive to the needs of the public it serves. Through its Representative at the Federation, Nunavut does what it can to influence national programming and initiatives to meet the needs of the legal profession and ensure access to justice territorially.

"The mandate of the LSN is to regulate the profession in the public interest," says Sara. "Lawyer regulation is about the public we serve and the people who are coming to the courts to access justice." Nunavut has unique needs and challenges in ensuring Nunavummiut have access to justice. For these reasons, it is imperative that the LSN continues to engage with the Federation and that Nunavut's voice is heard and its needs are understood.

The Federation has undertaken a number of national initiatives, all of in which Nunavut has had a voice in shaping. More so, these initiatives in turn help improve access to justice for Nunavummiut. Examples of just a few of the national initiatives include: the National Discipline Standards, the Model Code of Conduct and national admission standards to ensure consistence across the country for Canadian law school programs (including any future law programs offered in Nunavut). Most recently, the Federation issued a statement on Reconciliation and has confirmed fostering reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, Metis and Inuit as one of its strategic priorities. To ensure that the goals of reconciliation are embedded in all work, and that the work in informed by indigenous perspectives, the Federation established an Indigenous Advisory Council (IAC) to provide guidance and advice on the Federation's reconciliation initiatives.

"It has been a privilege to represent Nunavut at the table and ensure our position and perspective is taken into account; and I've seen how our perspective is not just heard but truly understood," says Sara. The LSN is proud to have Sara as the Nunavut Representative at the national table and commends her dedication to ensuring Nunavut is equally represented and Nunavummiut continue to have access to justice.

Please note that the Law Society of Nunavut is the governing body of legal profession in Nunavut and does not provide legal services or advice to the public.









THIS NEWSLETTER WAS PUBLISHED BY:

