



The Polar Barristers



Interview with Lana Walker President of the Canadian Bar Association – Nunavut Branch

**Director of the Nunavut
Law Program**

Living in Iqaluit, Nunavut is quite different from living in Kamloops, BC. For Lana Walker, President of the Canadian Bar Association – Nunavut Branch, and the Director of the Nunavut Law Program, she loves calling Iqaluit home. "Growing up in Kamloops I never imagined that I would live in Toronto, let alone the Arctic – but I've made a career in both places, and have built lasting and meaningful relationships through my work. Those relationships are so important to me on both a personal and professional level. Iqaluit is now home for myself and my family and I'm proud to be part of the legal community here," says Lana.



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Lana didn't move straight to Iqaluit from Kamloops. She first moved to the east coast and attended law school at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia. After graduating, she articulated at the Toronto law firm, Hicks Adams LLP. “It was a great place to learn the practice of law”. During her time at Hicks Adams, she practiced criminal law with a focus on trial litigation in the Ontario and Superior Courts of Justice.

After three years with Hicks Adams LLP, she wanted to scale back from the long hours and demands of working for a larger law firm. She set out to become a sole practitioner. For the next three years, she ran her own practice and set up shop in the King Law Chambers in downtown Toronto. The Chambers provided support for sole practitioners and housed many young criminal lawyers struggling through the highs and lows of solo practice.

Running her own practice proved to be a fantastic experience. However, after seven years into her career, she decided she wanted to refocus. “Working as a sole practitioner, you are responsible for running a business. I wasn't interested in spending time on running my business anymore. I wanted to focus more on my clients and the law,” says Lana. She was ready for another challenge.

IQALUIT, NUNAVUT

While working for Hicks Adams LLP, she attended the National Criminal Law conference in Victoria, BC. Networking at the conference, she met with lawyers from the Nunavut Legal Services Board and ended up spending quite a bit of time with them talking about their experiences working in the North. She was intrigued with all they shared with her.

Then in 2011, a close colleague who once articulated alongside her at Hicks

Adams LLP reached out and suggested that Lana consider looking at becoming part of the private panel of Legal Services Board in Iqaluit. This close colleague had since left Hicks Adams LLP and relocated to Rankin Inlet. She spoke of how much she enjoyed the lifestyle change from life in Toronto and encouraged Lana to seriously consider the opportunity. Lana remembered the conference in Victoria and the conversations with the lawyers from the Nunavut Legal Services Board. In the back of her mind, relocating to Iqaluit quickly becoming an option for the future and a possible next step in her career. She saw the move as an opportunity to take on a new challenge and shift gears in her career – something she had been wanting to do.

Several months later, Lana became a member of the Legal Services Board's private panel and landed a small, short term contract in Rankin Inlet. She completed the contract and returned to her practice in Ontario. However, she had a new focus, and five months later, Lana was packing up her life in Toronto for life in Iqaluit.

LIVING AND WORKING IN IQALUIT VS TORONTO AS A LAWYER

“Criminal law has many different areas that you can focus on. As a criminal lawyer, the North is a fantastic place to practice, although the pace can be challenging for a lawyer just starting out. Circuit court, for example, is one of the unique experiences of working as a criminal lawyer in the North,” says Lana. “One of the biggest challenges with circuit court is that it is hard to prepare for a client when you can't actually meet with them until, most often, it's right before they appear in court. There just isn't the time to build that relationship with your client. You don't have the time for all the meetings you'd like to have. Timelines are tight because



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you are only in the community for a short period of time.”

While practicing law in the south, Lana had the opportunity to meet multiple times with the client and collaborate – to build that relationship. There was the time to work with the client to help them understand what to expect through the court process; to review strategy and disclosure. In circuit court you don't have the luxury of time and have to do what you can within a limited period.

“It is possible to adjourn client matters, but you also have to consider the release conditions that the client may be subject to,” says Lana.

“These conditions may make them vulnerable if there is considerable time between circuit court visits to the community. There is a lot of pressure to get things done quickly. You have to think fast. You have to be strategic on your feet. And you always have to have your client's interests in mind.”

This is a very challenging way to practice the law.

However, there are benefits to being part of circuit court. “You get to travel and see all of the territory as well as meet many wonderful people,” says Lana. “From a professional perspective, circuit work will get you well immersed into practicing the law, and quickly.”

Lana also cautions new lawyers who come to Nunavut. “As a non-Inuit lawyer there is a responsibility to learn about the culture. It is important to sit back and observe and take it

all in. What works in the south will not necessarily work in the north. Being a powerful advocate does not mean having the loudest or most assertive voice in the room. To me, effective advocacy starts with taking the time to understand: the culture, context, background, and unique circumstances of the community that you live and work within. Connect with the people you meet and learn from them."

They also assist with client contact and interpretation during and in between circuits when lawyers cannot meet their clients face-to-face.

PRESIDENT OF THE CANADIAN BAR ASSOCIATION - NUNAVUT BRANCH

Appreciating the need for new lawyers to embrace the culture and to help them be successful,

way they always have someone to turn to for advice, to talk something through, or even just socialize," says Lana.

"Our Executive is currently working on a mentorship initiative to match recent calls and articling students with mentors in specific practice areas. The idea is in the initial stages, but our hope is to expand our reach and build relationships between our members and lawyers across Canada. We will provide more information to our membership on this initiative as it develops."

Nationally, the CBA has a Young Lawyers Section for lawyers under age 40 or who have been at the Bar for 10 years or less. "I'm hoping to create a local Recent Call/Young Lawyers Section, to promote the interests of new calls. The CBA is great because local sections can connect with National sections and assist with relationship and knowledge building on a wider scale," says Lana. The proposal for a new Section will be brought forward for consideration either through a special meeting or at the AGM in October.

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To help orient new lawyers to the territory, the Legal Services Board offers cultural competency training as part of their onboarding and orientation. The Legal Services Board also employs court workers in all communities that hold circuit court, and the court workers are invaluable to the lawyers.

the Canadian Bar Association (CBA) under Lana's leadership, offers professional development in areas that are relevant to the North and promotes building relationships between lawyers. "Establishing a collegial network for our members so they feel supported and connected is important. That





UPCOMING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

While COVID 19 has impacted professional development delivery for the time being, the first quarter of this year was very good for CBA professional development offerings. They were able to pivot and run everything online during lockdowns. Like many organizations, the CBA has embraced Zoom technology to help deliver training. "Now everyone is on the same playing field. With Nunavut being as vast as it is, with lawyers spread throughout the territory, Zoom technology has allowed us all to get together easily," says Lana.

"Our Branch currently has four Sections – Criminal Law, Environmental, Energy and Resources Law, Family Law, and Indigenous Peoples and the Law. Our section chairs have worked very hard this year to provide our members with several professional development offerings, all of which have been well attended by our membership."

Presently with the recent outbreak and lockdown, the CBA is adjusting and figuring out what is next, but a major focus will be on supporting the new cohort of articling students. As public health restrictions ease, the CBA plans to host an "Articling Year Kick-Off" to get students together to welcome them to the legal community, share stories, and access mentors. "This will hopefully turn into a monthly event – our goal is to create a safe, supportive and educational space for students to feel connected to each other and the legal community throughout their articling year".

Another upcoming opportunity for all members is Equity, Diversity and Inclusion training. This is to address cultural biases in the legal profession. This three hour offering will be delivered in person sometime during the fall.

CANADIAN BAR ASSOCIATION AND THE LAW SOCIETY OF NUNAVUT – WORKING TOGETHER TO SUPPORT LAWYERS

Embracing the Northern spirit of collaboration, community and supporting one another, the CBA and the Law Society of Nunavut (LSN) partner on professional development opportunities where it is deemed to be mutually beneficial to its membership.

Recent examples include the event on March 5th where the CBA, LSN and the University of Saskatchewan (USask) College of Law brought in Dr. Carwyn Jones from New Zealand via Zoom to deliver a presentation on Māori Law and the New Zealand common law to the Nunavut Law Program students. The LSN and CBA members were participating / attending from a conference room in the Aqsarniit Hotel and Conference Centre. After the lecture, the Nunavut Law Program students were invited to the hotel conference room for a networking reception.

DIRECTOR OF THE NUNAVUT LAW PROGRAM

Come this June, the graduates of the Nunavut Law Program will be convocated. During the final year of the four year program, Lana served as the Program Director. "It has been a great honour to be part of the program," says Lana. "This has been such an incredible learning opportunity for not only the students but for myself – through this past year, I've learned so much from the students, the USask faculty and Executive team. I have always loved working with and mentoring students and junior lawyers at the start of their careers, so I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to really focus on that through this role. I am incredibly proud of the program and to be able to support the students through this last, and difficult year."

As if undertaking a four year law program wasn't challenging enough, the pandemic also made it difficult. In the end of the third year and all of the final year of the program, students experienced several disruptions due to lockdowns. "The third and fourth years of the Program both ended in lockdowns, and we also experienced a lockdown mid-semester in November. It says a lot to the dedication of the students and their motivation to complete the program and earn their JDs," says Lana. "Watching them persevere through a very challenging last year, they have really demonstrated their commitment to achieving their goals. They were able to recalibrate and re-adjust multiple times."

When asked what advice she might have for the new grads, Lana offers, "Take any opportunity that is available to observe, learn, and make connections. There are learning opportunities in everything in law – even in the mundane. Take the time to build relationships with colleagues and mentors. These relationships will get you through difficult times. Practicing law is both challenging and rewarding and you can't do it alone. Mentors can really make a difference."



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

THIS NEWSLETTER WAS PUBLISHED BY:

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