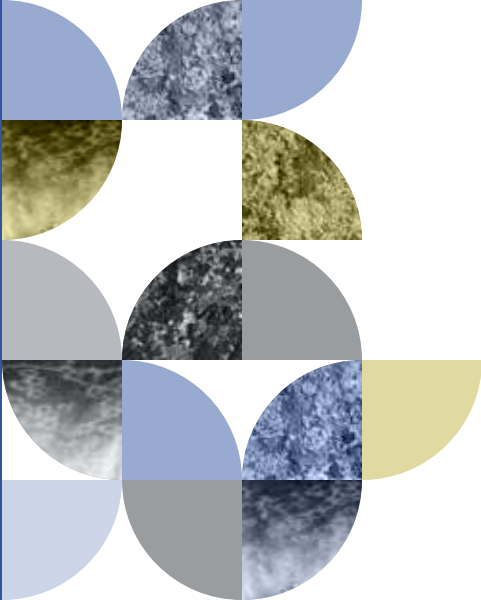


The Polar Barristers



Spotlight on Law Society of Nunavut Member Mia Manocchio

The first time Mia Manocchio set foot in Nunavut she said to herself, "I have to move here some day."

Since 2008, Mia commuted between Iqaluit and Montreal, coming to Nunavut to attend Court proceedings. In 2013, Mia and her new husband chose to come to Iqaluit for their honeymoon. She wanted to show him where she had been working and how beautiful it was.

Finally, two years ago, she decided that commuting was no longer working for her. It got to a point where it felt that working in the south had become less meaningful than it once was, and she wanted to live a different experience. Leaving Montreal behind, she decided to make Iqaluit her home.

"I love living here. I should have done this a long time ago," says Mia. "Life here is different; simpler and less complicated. Life in Montreal is so much more demanding: the traffic, the numerous





“Living in Iqaluit you cannot help but want to be more involved in the community; you want to make a difference.”

courthouses. I feel different here, better and more content. Living in Iqaluit you cannot help but want to be more involved in the community; you want to make a difference. The sense of community is what appeals to me.”

No surprise, the biggest difference between Montreal and Iqaluit is the culture. “It doesn’t take much time to see and feel the difference. The clients are very different, and you need to take a different approach with them,” says Mia. They see her a qallunaat (anyone who is not Inuit) and as an outsider; but Mia laughs it off when a client calls her that and jokingly points out she’s not a qallunaat, she’s Italian. “This is how you start to build a relationship. You show your clients that you are human, you treat them with respect and that you care about what happens to them. From there you can build trust.” Unlike many of her clients from the south, most of the time her clients from the north know why they are in the system. For many, they have gone through so many challenges in their lives and unfortunately, they found themselves in the system. “They don’t try to squirm out of what they did, and will admit it straight out,” says Mia.

Mia is very committed and involved in her work. “One time I went over to the prison five nights in a row during the week, just to go see these guys and talk to them. I wanted to get to know them. It is the people you are here for. It is about being part of the community; to give back and make a difference,” says Mia. She is also committed to being involved in “the roots” as Mia calls it, of the community. “On the Baffin Circuit Court, you do see a lot. Some of the stories and situations are very difficult to deal with, but then you end up meeting so many wonderful people along the way as well,” says Mia. “You need to take the experience you learn from here and when you go back home use it in your daily life.”

She also taught in the Nunavut Law Program. "When I listened to the students and the reason why they are doing this (the program), to hear them talk about how they want to change things; it's just so amazing to hear."

YOU HAVE BEEN A MEMBER OF THE LAW SOCIETY OF NUNAVUT SINCE 2012. WHAT DOES BEING A MEMBER OF THE LSN MEAN TO YOU?

"I joined the Law Society of Nunavut (LSN) because I knew one day I would move up here. I wanted to know what was going on. Being a member was the best way to do that. When you get to know what's going on, you can state your opinion. That is when you can start to make a difference," says Mia. "You can find out which lawyers exist in Nunavut, what's going on, how we can improve things." Mia recommends to any lawyer who is new in town, "If you want to know what's going on, go to the assemblies, sit there and listen. Same thing for the courthouse."

YOU HAVE BEEN PART OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE SINCE 2020. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU AND WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACHIEVE WHILE PART OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE?

To Mia, as a member of the Law Society of Nunavut, everyone has an obligation

at some point to get involved and be on the Board for a period of time. "The Board isn't just lawyers who want to polish their shoes. There are people from the community who care and want to make a difference. There are also lawyers from the Government of Nunavut, lawyers from Legal Aid, public prosecutors and individuals from the public – a really good mix," says Mia. However, while she believes that everyone should have a turn on the Board, it also means that there should be frequent turn over to allow for fresh ideas.

As for what she wants to achieve during her time on the Executive Committee, she would like to see the LSN have more credibility the eyes of the public; it needs to be clear that it exists for their protection. "It is important for the people of society to trust the Law Society. The LSN wants to make a difference for Nunavummiut by providing good, competent lawyers and legal information. The LSN really isn't just about the lawyers. It is about

the public and making the legal system accessible. That is why we have the Access to Justice program and resources that actually help people have better access to justice in areas that are most relevant."

NUNAVUT – STORIES FROM THE LAND

When asked about her experience working in the communities with circuit court, Mia said the most obvious challenge is often the facilities and technology. Bandwidth has been a challenge during the pandemic, especially with the lockdowns. Last year during the first COVID-19 wave, Court closed. The big question was, what are we going to do? "Circuit court only happens a limited number of days a year and I've got 120 guys in jail," explained Mia. Taking clients to court was out of the question due to health restrictions. Mia wasn't going to let that stand in her way. Her solution – deal with each client one at a time. Each case was done over the phone one at a time. "We all pitched in."





“ Providing legal services in Nunavut is always interesting. Everyone comes together and you find a way to make it work.”

"Providing legal services in Nunavut is always interesting. Everyone comes together and you find a way to make it work," says Mia. "The key is to have people that are willing to work this way, to deal with the unexpected. This isn't for everyone. You have to be capable of adapting yourself. Many times, we all travel together: the judge, the prosecutor, the clerk, the defence attorney, etc. We have to plan the circuit together and make sure every case is heard. It's not rare to talk about what needs to be packed for the circuit. It's a real group effort."

"One time, we were getting into court and ready to start only to find out the system didn't work, and we were missing a translator. You have to be flexible and you have to be creative. You also have to

have an open mind because several files we have to deal with are very serious offences, many that you don't necessarily see down south, like bootlegging, for example," says Mia. "When you live here, you understand why it's a serious offence. There are a lot of younger people come up and they get the shock of their life when they realize the difficulties and challenges people face in the system."

RANKIN INLET HEALING CENTER – INMATE SHOT HIS FIRST CARIBOU STORY

What's the most interesting to see is when you realize that an inmate really tried to use his time in custody to work on him/herself. "It always makes me smile when I hear an inmate tell me that he killed

his first caribou while in custody. Of course, not all inmates have that opportunity, but when they do, it helps them find their roots, it helps them rehabilitate themselves. Healing is a very important thing Nunavummiut taught me. Another very satisfying moment is when a client, who has been in custody for quite some time, gets released and tells you they want to show the court and the community that they are a better person now. That they've worked on themselves, they have learned from their mistakes and that they are ready to make a positive difference. "It happened to me in a case last week, the client was crying and telling me that she will show everyone that she's capable of being a good person, a good mother."

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.

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