Law Society of Nunavut Newsletter Summer 2022

The Polar Barristers





Interview with Julie Bedford

Law Society of Nunavut Representative on the Legal Services Board

Julie Bedford ended up working as a Criminal Defense Lawyer in Nunavut by happenstance. In 2013 while working in The Greater Toronto Area, she came across a post for a staff lawyer position with the Nunavut Legal Services Board (LSB). Julie loves to travel and had always wanted to see the North. This was the perfect opportunity to combine her passion for travel and advocacy, so she jumped on it.

The initial plan was to be in Iqaluit for two years, but she fell in love with it. "There was such a sense of community that I loved, I ended up staying for four years." However, her family and partner were back in Ontario and the distance and long stretches away became too much. In 2018 she made the decision to return to Toronto, but was eager to maintain a connection to the North. These days Julie splits her time between Ontario and Nunavut.



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Julie continues to work as a private panel lawyer for the LSB doing criminal defence work and 'filling the gap' as needed. "There is currently a shortage of staff and resident counsel," says Julie. "Private panel lawyers provide coverage wherever LSB needs it. This could include court in Iqaluit, traveling to one of the communities for circuit court, working on assigned files, or covering bails."

"It is a real privilege to be working in Nunavut," remarks Julie. "I have been able to enjoy the beauty of the land while also getting to know the communities. On one occasion I had a very memorable commute to work. I was attending circuit court in Kimmirut and had the opportunity to travel there by skidoo. It was such a beautiful trip. Being out on the land, away from town, was very peaceful."

Julie also spoke about a particular jury trial that had a very memorable reaction from the community. "We arrived expecting a jury trial. However, on the eve of the trial we were informed that the Crown would not be proceeding with the charges.," says Julie. "The following morning, when we arrived at the hall, the room was

filled with members of the public who had been summonsed for jury selection. The Court explained to the packed court room that the charges were being dismissed and everyone was free to leave. What happened next was something I had never experienced before. The hall erupted with cheers and applause. It was very apparent that there was a general sense of relief or contentment that the trial was not going ahead." For Julie, this reaction highlighted the strong ties within the communities throughout the North. "In the smaller communities, generally everyone knows each other and what is going on within the community; they have a better sense of what is happening than we do as outside observers flying in for court."

Julie has been a member of the Law Society of Nunavut (LSN) since her arrival in 2013. Earlier this year she was confirmed as the LSN's representative on the LSB Board of Directors. Being on the Board is something that is near and dear to her heart. "Legal Aid plays such an important role in the justice system, ensuring that the disadvantaged and vulnerable members of society "It is a real privilege to be working in Nunavut. I have been able to enjoy the beauty of the land while also getting to know the communities." are well represented and have meaningful access to justice. The lawyers and staff at LSB do amazing work and I have immense respect for them," says Julie. "It truly has been a privilege to be working alongside them in my role as a panel lawyer, and now to be involved at the policy level as a member of the Board."

"My role on The Board is to represent the LSN's interests and to keep the LSN Executive informed of changes and developments at LSB. The interests of LSB and the LSN are very much intertwined. Both are committed to ensuring that Nunavummiut are well served by competent and qualified legal counsel, and both are very much interested in promoting access to justice," says Julie. "It is my pleasure to be the LSN representative and I am looking forward to the second term."

Julie has also been involved in a number of projects, including a review and update of the Nunavut Statutes Exam. This exam assesses general knowledge and understanding of core legal concepts applicable to the practice of law in Nunavut. Students-at-law are required to write the exam before being admitted as a member of the Law Society of Nunavut. "It is an exam that had not been updated in a long time," comments Julie. "It was interesting working on this project because it forced me to go back and look at everything I had to review when I first came to Nunavut, including statutes not directly related to my area of work. This was an important project because we want to ensure that lawyers practicing in Nunavut are informed and understand territorial statutes and related legal sources."

Julie has also been involved in other access to justice initiatives such as delivering workshops in the communities. "It is important that we provide information and create spaces to discuss topics of law when we can. People need to be aware of their rights, and how to access resources and help when they need it," says Julie. "When there is time on circuit, I look for opportunities to deliver public legal education and engage with the community. On several occasions my colleagues and myself have been able to go to the local high schools to talk about various legal issues and answer questions the students may have. We often include an overview of our roles and the court process. We try to get creative and reach as many people as we can. There was one occasion where we did a community radio show in Pangnirtung. Anytime there is an opportunity to provide access to justice at the community level, I am keen to get involved." "In the smaller communities, generally everyone knows each other and what is going on within the community; they have a better sense of what is happening than we do as outside observers flying in for court."

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.

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