

Alisa Noda



Foundation Grants: Spotlight on West Coast LEAF

The Notary Foundation has made an important contribution to the equality rights of women in Canada through two Grants it has made to the West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund (“West Coast LEAF”).

West Coast LEAF is a non-profit society incorporated on July 3, 1985. Like its national counterpart, the Legal Education and Action Fund, West Coast LEAF was founded in the hopes that the equality provisions in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* would be effective tools for making women’s equality a reality. The vision of the “founding mothers” was to shape the application of the *Charter* to address the legal inequalities experienced by women in Canada. The means to attaining that vision were to represent a feminist equality perspective in the courts, as well as educate the public and government about the equality rights of Canadian women, so that laws could be reformed to meet the standards set by the *Charter* and the courts.

A Board of up to 15 women work closely with the staff of West Coast LEAF, located at Suite 1540 – 409 Granville Street, Vancouver, BC. Executive Director Audrey Johnson

provides direction and support to Office Administrator Doina Buculei, Program Director Alison Brewin, and others who work for West Coast LEAF on project contracts from time to time.

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1. One Grant of \$7,500 in 2000 was put toward the writing, publication, and distribution of *Transforming Women’s Future: A Guide to Equality Rights Theory and Action* (the “Guidebook”). The Guidebook was the third phase in West Coast LEAF’s millennium project.
- The first phase involved focus groups and community outreach to learn about the range and impact of issues affecting women in Canada.

- The second phase brought together women from equality-seeking backgrounds and organizations to share their struggles, successes, hopes, and fears. For two-and-a-half days in November 1999, at Vancouver, BC, women from across Canada participated in plenaries and workshops, evaluating what the women’s equality movement had accomplished, and anticipating the challenges in the next century.
- Phase three, the Guidebook, synthesized their work and presented strategies, resources, and ideas to assist equality-seeking organizations. Thanks to funders like The Notary Foundation, the Guidebook is now available in French, English, and large print, in hard copy, on the West Coast LEAF Website and on CD-ROM.
- 2. The Notary Foundation’s second Grant of \$7,500, made in 2001, made it possible for West Coast LEAF to develop the “No Means No” project. Designed for use in elementary schools, and facilitated by grade 12 students who are trained as part of the project, “No Means No” explores fundamental issues

about consent to sexual activity, gender stereotypes, and violence and exploitation against girls. The project is a natural and creative extension of the work LEAF has done in the courts in the case of *R. v. Ewanchuk*. That case involved a 30-year-old man sexually assaulting a 17-year-old job applicant; he claimed she had consented despite the fact the victim said “no” repeatedly. The Alberta Court of Appeal, with a vigorous dissent by the one woman on the three-judge bench, said that the victim was “not exactly dressed in crinolines” and that the accused’s behaviour was more “carnal than criminal.” All nine judges of the Supreme Court of Canada disagreed. LEAF argued, and the Supreme Court of Canada upheld, that there is no such thing as a defence of “implied consent” and that “no” still means exactly that.

West Coast LEAF has been working with the BC Teachers’ Federation to bring the “No Means No” project to Lower Mainland schools. It has already been piloted, and the first student facilitators trained. Additional funding is being sought so that the program can be offered to other students in the province.

West Coast LEAF is grateful to The Notary Foundation for its support of our mandate to “make Canada an equal place for all women.” It is encouraging to know there are others in our community who also envision a society in which everyone is equal before and under the law. ▲

Alisa Noda volunteers as President of West Coast LEAF and Chair of the Board of Directors. She practises aboriginal law.

West Coast LEAF
Voice: 604 684-8772
Fax: 604 684-1543
exec@westcoastleaf.org