



Pearl McKenzie

## SPOTLIGHT ON GOOD WORKS

# The Vision of BC CEAS:

## All Seniors in British Columbia Have the Right to Live with Dignity, Safe from Abuse of Any Kind



**O**n September 29, 2008, BC CEAS held a grand opening for its new Elder Law Clinic\*.

Staffed by a lawyer, this clinic builds on our well-regarded paralegal information and advocacy program to allow us to provide legal advice and representation for Seniors. People eligible for this service are those over the age of 55 who are not able to access justice because of low income or other barriers.

Priority will be given to situations where an older person is being (or has been) abused and where legal

intervention is needed. Other priorities include assistance to access benefits and housing in the community, as well as issues related to care and safety in residential facilities.

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Since 1984, members of BC CEAS have been creating educational materials and working with community partners to ensure services are available for older people who are abused or neglected. The Notary Foundation of BC has provided financial support at critical times over the years.

During the development of the Adult Guardianship Legislation, funding from the Notary Foundation allowed us to consult with people around the province about recommendations for laws, policies, and practices. At the same time, we developed a speaker's kit describing the legal issues that older people said most affected them. This work gave a voice to Seniors and helped establish the need for laws and legal services to meet the needs of older people.

Here are excerpts from a letter written September 18, 1995, by Margaret Stocks, then-President of BC CEAS, to Stan Nicol, then-Executive Officer of the Notary Foundation.

Your financial support is also allowing us to work with Seniors to implement some action steps to prevent and stop abuse of Seniors. For instance, Seniors attending a conference held in June in Abbotsford to develop a provincial action plan identified raising public awareness about the rights of Seniors as a priority. ...[Your funding] will enable us to mount a provincial campaign

BC CEAS made another big announcement this year. Although the acronym of BC CEAS remains the same, our name has changed from BC Coalition to Eliminate Abuse of Seniors to BC Centre for Elder Advocacy and Support. This change reflects our commitment to provide a continuum of services to older people, ranging from public education and information and support to legal advocacy and representation.

With good information, people can usually resolve their own problems, but sometimes more assistance is needed, especially when difficulties are longstanding and complex or when a person's safety or assets are at serious risk. The Elder Law Clinic enhances our ability to provide help in those serious situations.



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to increase public knowledge and recognition of Seniors' rights and how violation of those rights leads to abuse. Almost 50 people representing communities and Seniors' organizations from all over the province have agreed to form a network to consult with BC CEAS and continue to share information and ideas.

One of our most important goals in forming as a society was to become a provincial organization that represented and spoke from the voice of Seniors. It seems we are well on our way to meeting that goal.

Now, 13 years later, there is increased interest in elder law and Seniors' rights. We continue our efforts to make sure older people have the information they need to understand their options and make informed decisions.

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And BC Notaries share that commitment. In 2005, the Notary Foundation gave BC CEAS a \$7500 Grant to develop a booklet entitled "Strategies for Notaries Working with Seniors." We are very grateful to our funding partners and the people with whom we work in communities for supporting us over the years.

There is still much more work to be done but thank you for this opportunity to reflect on what we have accomplished together.

\*The Law Foundation of British Columbia funds the Legal Advocacy Program and the Elder Law Clinic. Referrals to these services are made by calling the Seniors Help and Legal Information Line. ▲

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