



Manitoba's Peer Support  
Program for Lawyers

## **Annual Report, 2022**

It was a wonderful inaugural year for Law(yer) Strong. Our mission is to promote lawyers' wellbeing through education, peer support and community building.

We started with one part time coordinator and a volunteer Board of Directors and administrative professional support, made up of caring and experienced members of the legal community and therapeutic community.

**Thank You.** Without the support and generous giving of their time, experience, and insights, Law(yer) Strong Inc. would not exist. Thank you to all of our Board Members, and Administrative Professional.

We also would like to acknowledge and thank the Law Society of Manitoba, who's financial and general support of this program to address in a pro-active way, the challenges relating to mental health and wellbeing that we experience in our profession, is essential.

Thank you also to the Manitoba Bar Association and Benchers who voted to support this program and continue to offer wisdom and support throughout.

This report will highlight our accomplishments of the past year and set out our vision for the coming year.

The 2023 year will use four goals as guideposts for our work:

### **Build – Connect- Community – Educate**

**Build:** stable sources of funding, our team, our infrastructure. Create safe and welcoming office space for peers seeking support and volunteers; Build our team to one full time staff and one part time staff. Develop a fundraising committee and proactively seek sources of funding to allow this program to tap into its' tremendous potential.

A site for a possible office space has been located, which is on Osborne street, close to downtown yet far enough from downtown and is discrete, not close to any law firms for confidentiality. Large group training and meeting space and community event space are available.

**Growing:** the increase of original part-time contract to a full-time position, with one half time position will allow greater efforts to develop sources of funding, greater programming development, and greater outreach throughout the province. We are developing a newsletter, further programs, drop-in supports, and increasing our presence in the community as we build a team of supportive lawyer volunteers.

**Connect:** with lawyers in all sectors, stages of our profession and geographical locations by actively reaching out to members of profession and offering presentations to firms and other legal organizations in Manitoba; Drop In Zoom support sessions; and monthly visits to the University of Manitoba law school. We will reach out to the northern legal community by presenting on mental health and outreach, this will be a goal in 2023.

**Community:** community engagement develops further through coming together. Promote healthy and active community events, running/walking groups, zoom drop-ins, mindfulness Mondays, and engage volunteer base to go out and spread the word about Lawyer Strong in their workplaces and communities. Friendships are developing in our Monday Run Club events. We will have further events to build relationships among our volunteers and our community in 2023.

**Educate:** Promote health and wellbeing through education about mental health, de-stigmatization, talking about mental health and normalize mental health challenges as universal human experience. Promote strategies that improve health and wellbeing. Promote and normalize recognizing and asking for help when one needs support. Research, learn and share information about addressing the root causes of distress in our profession and develop ideas for deeper structural and cultural change in our profession through dialogue with big firms, small firms, individual lawyers, members of the profession from all spheres.

## 2022 Year in Review

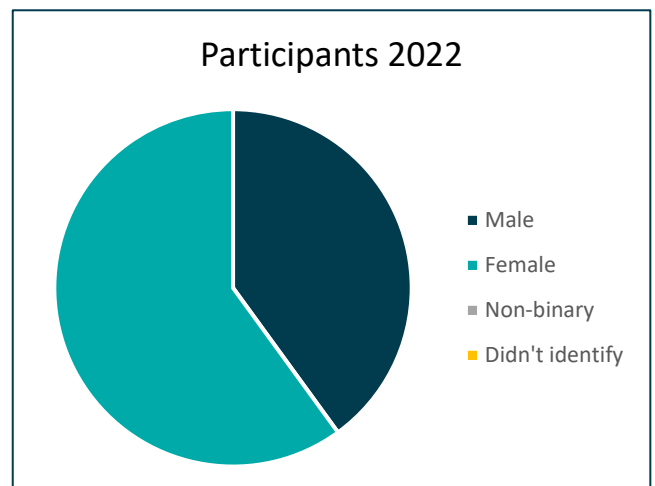
### Building a Community of Support

10 individuals supported

- 40% male
- 60% female
- all with 0-9 years of practice
- students

26 volunteers trained in 2022

- 2 training sessions
  - August 24: 4 trainees, in person
  - November 18: 22 trainees, via Zoom



- 10 volunteers registered for next training date in February, 2023

- 215 volunteer hours spent

5 lunch-hour Zoom drop in sessions

- November, 2022 – December, 2022

## Community Engagement and Events

Terry Fox Run

- 2<sup>nd</sup> largest fundraising team for Cancer research, we had 12 participants and a greyhound mascot.
- Shirts and hats donated by Taylor McCaffrey LLP who was our event sponsor

Santa Shuffle

- December 10<sup>th</sup> at the Forks, we had 10 participants and were the highest group fundraising team.

Monday Run Club

- varying amount of participants from 2 – 6
- 20 weeks in 2022
  - May to July, September to mid-December

## Robson Hall Outreach

Monthly lunch hour drop ins at Robson Hall Common Room

- 100-300 participants
  - September to March 2023
  - We have supported and matched two students with Peer Support volunteers since we started this outreach.
  - We are normalizing taking care of oneself to be a thriving lawyer and talking about when we are not thriving and need support with the next generation of lawyers.
  - We are hoping to build a sense of belonging and community
  - Every attendance has been followed by new students reaching out for support. 1-2 each time.



## 10 Presentations to the Legal Community

### Midwinter 2022

- Video Presentation over the lunch hour.

### Taylor McCaffrey

- Via Zoom

### Crown Wellness Education Conference

- Via Zoom

### Manitoba Bar Associations Universal Firms

- Via Zoom

### Myers LLP

- In Person

### Legal Aid Wellness Conference

- Via video live conference

### ADRIM – Conflict Resolution and Mental Health

- In Person

### Defense Lawyers Conference (December 2022)

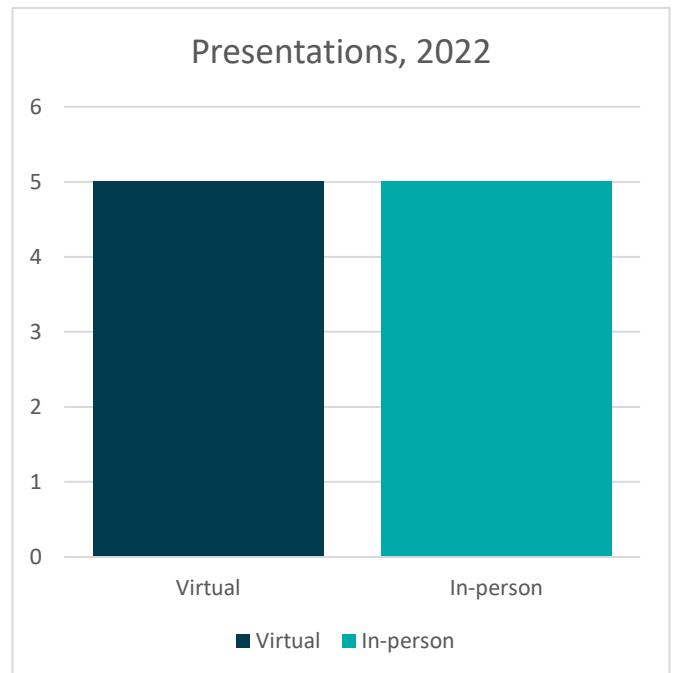
- In Person

### MLT Aikins (December 2022)

- In Person

### City of Winnipeg

- In Person (December 2022)



## Education Courses -Program Coordinator

We recognize that building capacity and skills to better support our peers and volunteers in the program is essential, and learning will be ongoing throughout the year. Here are some of the courses taken in the past year.

#### Mental Health First Aid

- 2 days, Certificate

#### Applied Counselling Skills

- Levels 1 and 2
- University of Manitoba Applied Counselling Skills Certificate Program
- Courses ongoing, Extended Education

#### Doron Gold - Mental Health presentation in Midwinter

Canadian Mental Health Association, presentation of Mental Health in the workplace at 2022 Midwinter

#### BCLAP Courses

- Mindfulness
  - Online
- Creating Culture of Change in Legal Profession

#### Law Society of Manitoba

- Mental Health and Legal Profession
  - online program

#### Women's Forum

- Retention of Women in Legal Profession

### **Goals for the Coming Year:**

1. Increase our staff from one part-time contract to one full-time and one part-time position;
2. Find suitable office space which provides a confidential and welcoming environment for in person meetings and events.
3. Research and develop funding proposals for grants to increase our financial resources;
4. Develop long-term funding arrangements with the professional legal community.
5. Increase our connections with our Northern community through presentations, reaching out to members, and working with Legal Aid Manitoba and the Provincial Crown.
6. Increase our connections with the Judiciary.

7. Develop a regular newsletter and mailing list in our community.
8. Apply for a Charitable Number. The hurdle is that we provide services to an exclusive professional community, which normally would prevent a charitable designation. In our application we will focus on the education we provide and the benefit to the greater public when lawyers are functioning optimally, and risks to the public from mental health crisis are decreased.
9. Continue to tirelessly work to break down the stigma associated with mental health challenges and address barriers preventing people from reaching out for support.
10. Provide at least one mental health session for several different focused community groups reflecting the diversity in our profession;
11. Increase awareness of our peer support program by social media; newsletter; website; word of mouth as our community of supporters grows; volunteer training sessions and community presentations and wellness events.
12. Continue to provide training sessions for new volunteers.
13. Hold our first Annual Retreat Day for volunteers in June of 2023.

### **Goals for Year 3-5:**

1. Law(yer) Strong will have a stable funding platform from a combination of sources: Law Society; Law Firms; Individual Members; public grants;
2. Increase staff to 2 full-time and one part-time position.
3. Have an active volunteer base of 75 or more trained peer support volunteers.
4. Continue Robson Hall outreach Program
5. Offer online courses related to wellness, practice/stress management; topics relevant to our community;
6. Increase volunteer involvement and leadership opportunities to expand our program and build/strengthen connections among volunteers and others in our community.
7. Continue Monday Run /Walk Club and other community activities that promote health. Continue Mindfulness Mondays
8. Offer in person and zoom support drop-ins for lawyers.
9. Continue to work with Blue Cross counselling services to ensure lawyers can access staff with relevant background to assist lawyers. Develop a list or panel of qualified therapists who have worked with lawyers effectively for purpose of referral.

10. Have a strong presence throughout Northern and Southern Manitoba as we continue to engage by presentations, in person and virtually;
11. Share our newsletter with all lawyers in Manitoba.

### **In Conclusion:**

It has been an exciting year! Creating a new program from scratch is a rare opportunity. We believe our program potential is limited only by our collective engagement, imagination and will as a community.

We have been fortunate to have such colleagues as Cyndi Kindret (as Board Member of the Blue Cross Employee Assistance Program) on our Board, and with whom we developed a full day comprehensive volunteer training program.

We are also appreciative of our friends at Alberta Lawyers Assist, and BC LAP who offer excellent online programs to all lawyers regardless of province, as well as Doron Gold of Homewood Health and the Ontario Peer Support Program, all of whom shared generously their experience and advice.

The potential of this program is largely untapped, and close to infinite. If we can engage our professional community throughout the province in the public and private sectors we will effect cultural and personal health changes that will benefit all lawyers, and the public we serve, while leaving a legacy to future generations of lawyers.