

# Mentorship at the Law Society



## Two different approaches

**“Mentorship plays an important role in the lives of lawyers – starting as early as when they first consider pursuing a legal career, to their time in law school – and continuing throughout their professional lives.”**

*Professor Vern Krishna, Treasurer of the Law Society of Upper Canada*

*To support lawyers in their quest to provide the highest quality of legal advice and services to the public, the Law Society of Upper Canada offers two very different mentorship programs.*

*The Equity and Diversity Mentorship Program encourages more young people of diverse backgrounds to consider law as a career.*

*The Advisory Services Mentorship Program connects lawyers with experienced practitioners in different specialties to help deal with complex legal matters outside of the Law Society’s mandate.*

*Treasurer Krishna says he values the contributions of volunteers who give generously of their time and expertise to be mentors. “As a professor of law, I see the impact that the equity mentorship program has in encouraging and preparing young people for law. As Treasurer, I recognize the tremendous support that mentors provide to their fellow colleagues in the profession.”*

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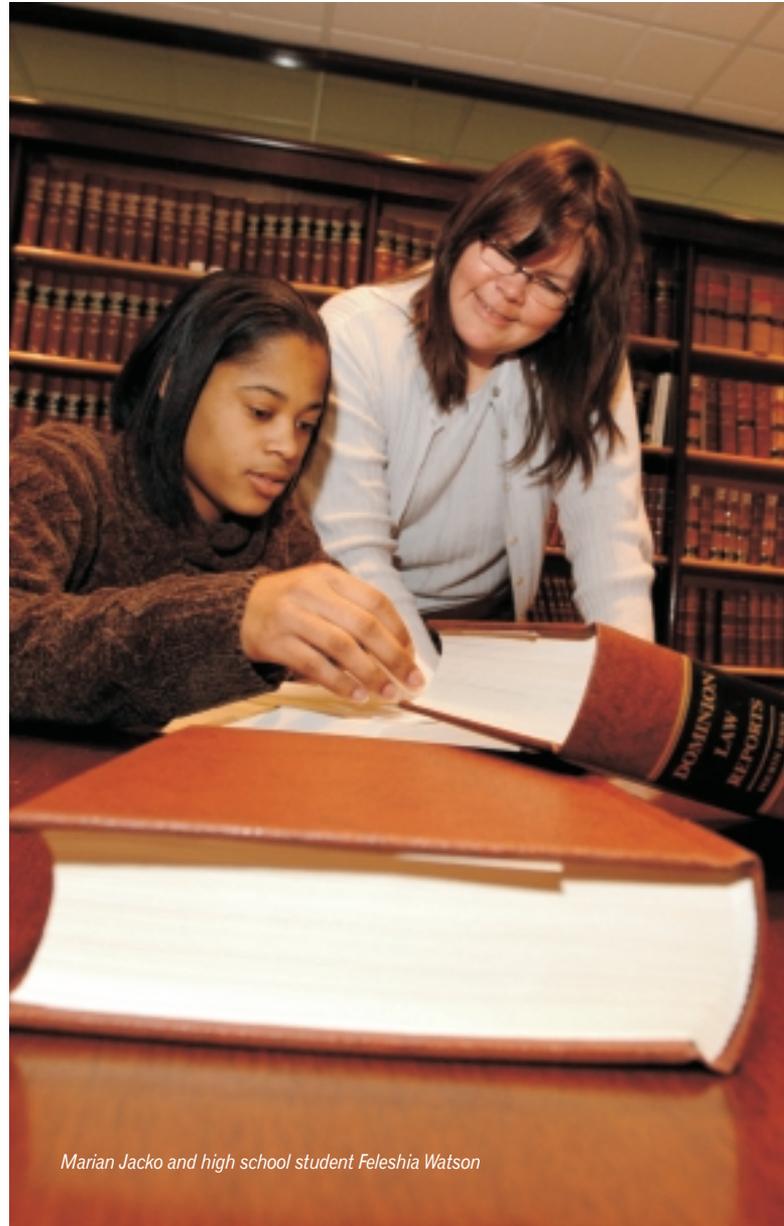
## Law Society Equity and Diversity Mentorship Program

It's important that people entering the profession have a realistic expectation of what the practice of law is all about. The Law Society's Equity and Diversity Mentorship Program helps do that – by giving youth a better understanding of what being a lawyer is really like, and a realistic view of the challenges and ongoing expectations of all lawyers.

The program, launched in 2000, matches lawyers with high school, law school, and Bar Admission Course students, and newly called lawyers from communities under-represented in the profession. It includes arranging informal mentoring, as well as co-op placements, panel discussions on the challenges and opportunities of being a lawyer, and presentations to high school law students.

According to Rachel Osborne of the Law Society's Equity Initiatives department, which coordinates the program, its primary aim is to encourage those from diverse backgrounds to choose law as a career. Also, by providing a better understanding of what the practice of law is all about, it aims to help students better prepare for this career, before going to law school.

"A lot of students have notions of law based primarily on what they've seen on television," says Rachel. "That's a very unrealistic and sensationalized model. It provides no understanding of all that is



*Marian Jacko and high school student Feleshia Watson*

involved behind the scenes – such as managing a practice, regulations, and insurance.” Rachel says programs like this can play a key role in helping youth realize that being a lawyer is more than the courtroom drama they’ve seen on *Ally McBeal*.

Through the program, high school students gain insight by spending time in a lawyer’s workplace, observing courtroom work, and by attending Law Society public education programs.

“Mentors have the ability to inform and inspire just by taking the time to share their experiences and perspective,” continues Rachel. “So many lawyers tell me that they wish they had had a chance to participate in programs like this before entering the profession.”

Marian Jacko, an Ojibway lawyer and Counsel with the Office of the Children’s Lawyer and President of Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto, agrees. She says she entered the profession without a clear understanding of what practice would entail, personally and professionally, and that having a mentor while a student would have been very helpful to her.

She signed on as a mentor for the Equity and Diversity Mentorship Program to share her experiences with youth from under-represented communities, and to help them make an informed choice of law as a career.

Marian says she agrees with the philosophy behind the program and understands the challenges that can exist to becoming a lawyer, becoming employed, and going into practice. “For a student looking at these challenges, it can seem insurmountable. It’s important to me to be able to say to someone who has that view that with support, yes, you can succeed. Programs like this have the potential to provide that support. I see my role as a mentor, not only to act as a role model, but to provide support and encouragement.”

The Law Society initially matched her with a Toronto-area high school student, for informal mentoring. The match proved very suc-

cessful, and led to the creation of a co-op placement for Feleshia Watson in Marian’s workplace that she says provided, “exposure to every aspect of practice, from administrative tasks and responsibilities, to learning how to build a file, and observing counsel and attending court and public speaking events.” Marian also says her colleagues helped offer a variety of perspectives to the student, by providing opportunities for interaction with lawyers practising in different areas of law.

Rachel says students can learn a lot of valuable information through co-ops arranged through our mentorship program, such as the training required, ongoing professional development, and professional responsibilities and fees.

Currently, more than 75 lawyers are involved in the program, says Rachel, including sole practitioners, lawyers from the Department of Justice, legal clinics, firms, banks and the Ontario Securities Commission. “That’s a really great cross-section for our students to draw on and learn from.”

Rachel is working on expanding the program to Ottawa in 2002. She explains that expansion to other parts of the province will depend on lawyers stepping forward to take part. “We’re always looking for a roster of lawyers who are interested and available to participate in numerous ways. If we have enough lawyers available in an area, we’d be pleased to help connect them to students for mentoring and education opportunities,” she says.

### Want to get involved?

Lawyers interested in taking part in the program can visit the Law Society’s web site at [www.lsuc.on.ca/equity/program\\_mentor.jsp](http://www.lsuc.on.ca/equity/program_mentor.jsp), or contact Rachel Osborne at the Law Society at (416) 947-3911, toll-free at 1-800-668-7380, ext.3911, or by e-mail at [rosborne@lsuc.on.ca](mailto:rosborne@lsuc.on.ca).

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*Heather MacConnell is a Communications Advisor with the Law Society of Upper Canada.*

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## Consulting experienced practitioners – Advisory Services Mentorship Program

The Advisory Services team at the Law Society of Upper Canada deals with many member inquiries relating to ethical issues, competence, law practice management or Law Society regulatory interpretations.

In some cases, Advisory counsel are asked questions such as: “I’m drafting a will involving a disabled beneficiary. I have never done this before. Can you give me some guidance on the wording for the trust that should be included in the will?” or “I’m preparing my first appeal and I’m unsure to which court the appeal should be made. Can you help me?” When inquiries relate to substantive law or very specific procedural questions requiring expertise in a particular legal area, Advisory Services will call on its team of mentors to assist.

“Some questions are not within the mandate of Advisory Services, nor the Law Society. However, members may still require advice and direction on a particular file,” says Felecia Smith, Senior Counsel, Advisory Services. “That is why we administer a mentor program which puts lawyers who need this assistance in touch with experienced practitioners in the relevant areas of law.”

### How program works

Advisory counsel screens all calls before referring a matter to a mentor. Once counsel determines the member inquiry is best handled by a mentor, they will advise the caller and offer the option of speaking to a mentor. Counsel will record the nature of the inquiry and select an appropriate mentor with relevant expertise, from a roster of 250 members of the profession, representing seven different areas of legal practice.

Advisory counsel acts as a liaison between the caller and the mentor, by making the connection with the mentor, explaining the caller’s scenario and obtaining the mentor’s agreement to assist with the call. Once agreed, the mentor will either return the member’s call directly or give Advisory counsel permission to provide a contact number to the member.

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*Lisa Reilly is a Communications Advisor with the Law Society of Upper Canada.*

### The lawyer’s responsibility

Before being put in touch with one of the mentors on the list, a lawyer requesting assistance is asked to sign a form acknowledging that the assistance received is not a substitute for the lawyer’s own research, analysis or judgment. The form also acknowledges that the lawyer is required to independently verify any statement of law, practice, procedure or facts and the lawyer assumes full responsibility for any use made of the assistance or advice.

Calls are treated in a priority sequence and members are reminded that each call is issue-based. Felecia explains, “We advise callers that the assistance being provided is in relation to their particular issue only and is not the basis for establishing an ongoing mentor relationship. If the mentor wishes to continue assisting the member, that may be arranged between the two parties.”

“The mentor program has proven effective in providing members with the assistance they need,” adds Felecia. “Our mentors are highly recognized in their particular field, and provide advice and assistance at no charge to assist their colleagues in keeping with the best traditions of the practice. Mentors frequently report tremendous satisfaction from involvement in the program and the lawyers they assist are similarly grateful for the assistance and direction provided.”

### Want to get involved?

Advisory Services welcomes your application to become a mentor. If you’re interested in joining the program, please inquire at 416-947-3369.

Area of Law	# of mentors
Corporate/commercial	12
Bankruptcy & insolvency	11
Environmental	17
Family	62
Immigration	14
Criminal	63
Civil litigation	71
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>