

Free legal advice a phone call away

BY KATHRYN LEGER, FREELANCE MARCH 25, 2011

Free legal advice for individuals and businesses located anywhere in Quebec will be served up by telephone all day Saturday and Sunday and for four days the week after next from April 4 to April 7 in person in downtown Montreal.

This weekend's telephone clinic - the number to call from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. is 514-954-3448 or 1-866-433-3204 outside of Montreal - is designed to assist anyone who has any kind of legal question and those who call in will benefit from an exchange of 15 minutes or so with a practising lawyer.

"It is important to reach people who cannot afford to have a lawyer, or who are unsure whether or not it is worth it to have a lawyer, or if they should go before a court," said Jos ane Chr etien, the Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP litigator who is president of the Young Bar Association of Montreal, which has organized the annual public assistance and outreach project for the past 23 years.

"The 15 minutes will give people a better idea of their claim or what they might want to do about their problem," said Chr etien, expressing the hope that at least 1,500 people call in and use the services of close to 100 lawyers who are volunteering their time at call centres set up in Montreal, Quebec City and Sherbrooke.

Of the 1,213 people who called in last year, close to half had questions about contract obligations, such as those with communications service providers. Some had queries about condo fees and what happens when a condo owner does not agree with spending decisions proposed by the board of directors representing owners. Other questions covered wills, estate planning, and disputes with neighbours or landlords (spring is the time many serve rent increase notices on tenants).

In some cases, such as those involving problems with employment, it might be a question of pointing people in the right direction, say to take their case to the Commission des relations du travail.

In others, added Chr etien, it may help people simply to move on: "I can think of cases (in previous years) where people have a dispute that happened more than 10 years ago. You want to do something, but you just don't do it and are still thinking about it but you may no longer be able to go forward with a claim."

Close to 100 lawyers will also dispense free legal advice in person on any subject in 20-minute time slots at Complexe Desjardins from Monday, April 4, to Thursday, April 7, from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Montreal Bar's 14th annual Salon Visez Droit event. The full program of other activities is available at www.barreaudemontreal.qc.ca

Family law questions were among the most popular, representing 180 out of the 1,000 requests for legal information at last year's event, said Montreal Bar spokesperson Gislaine Dufault. But there were also requests for help on labour law issues, the R egie du logement (Quebec rental board), immigration, criminal law questions, and business consultations about insolvency and bankruptcy, tax and

