



## Summer Newsletter

Issue 24, July 2023

### PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE



Carolyn Leach  
Co-President

Carolyn and I would like to welcome you to this second edition of our reconfigured newsletter, having as its focus the March 4, 2023 Walsh event. Our sincere thanks to Kaitlyn McCabe, Chair of Communications, to the newsletter co-editors, Archana Medhekar and Golnaz Sara Simaei, and to the entire newsletter editorial board for their tireless work in bringing the newsletter to fruition.



Maxine Kerr  
Co-President

When we last wrote to you, it felt like we were still under the shadow of the pandemic that was declared just over three years ago, and which governed the time that followed. We now celebrate WHO's declaration that COVID-19 no longer qualifies as a global emergency. Yet even as we do so, we are acutely aware that many have suffered loss and trauma through and as a result of the pandemic. Everyone's life in the family justice community has been impacted.

Universally, we had no choice but to adjust how we conduct our personal and our work lives. We have experienced transformative change in the way we deliver services to children and families. This is but one measure of the impact of the pandemic. We know the legacy of COVID-19 will continue to reveal itself in the years to come.

We want to update you on some news and developments.

The first is that this year marks our 15<sup>th</sup> as a Chapter! It doesn't seem that long ago that we commemorated our Chapter's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a sold-out Evening of Excellence gala dinner. Although there will not be a gala this year, we do plan to celebrate the milestone at this year's Annual Conference.

*Continued on next page*

### Inside this issue

AFCC-O 15th Annual Conference	4
Member Spotlight: Christina Ninham	5
AFCC-O Parenting Plan Guide: On Divorcemate and Alberta	7
Children's Rights v. Expediency: A Child-Focused Perspective on the New <i>Family Law Rules</i> in Return Order Cases	10
Member Spotlight: Liza Ritchie	14
Top 10 Tips for New Family Law Lawyers	16
Recap of Walsh Family Law Moot & Negotiation Competition	20
Recognizing the Accomplishments of our AFCC-O Members	28
Member Benefits	30

## Presidents' Message —*continued*

Another news item which makes us proud is that Professor Michael Saini of the University of Toronto will be the President of our parent organization for the 2024-2025 term. Congratulations, Michael, on this impressive honour! Diarize now to join us for Michael's investiture at the AFCC Conference in or about May 2024, in Boston.

In other news, on April 1, 2023, our Board participated in a retreat led by Ann Ordway, AFCC Program Director. Co-Chair of the Membership Committee, Fadwa Yehia, generously opened the doors of Jamal Family Law to host the event, for which we thank her. It was terrific to meet in person (and to have Justice Heather Mendes join virtually from Sault Ste. Marie) and to reflect on our strategic direction for the next few years. We discussed at our retreat the experience of mental health professionals in the family justice system, who grapple on a daily basis with unmeritorious client complaints. This, we unanimously agreed, is unacceptable, such that we must spearhead change on this important policy issue. Our action plan is to develop best practices for protecting the integrity of the process for which the mental health professional has been involved and to control the risk of abuses that might undermine the process. A task force has been struck, and the research is underway, with a view to developing standard clauses for court orders and agreements.

On behalf of the Research Committee, we report that Professor Saini and Laura Spivack are the successful recipients of the AFCC-O research grant for the 2023-2025 funding cycle. Their project, *Adapting the Trauma Informed Principles to Family Court: A Survey Examining Professionals Perception*, will examine trauma-informed practices within

*(Continued next page)*



**Back row:** Fadwa Yehia, Chantal Carvallo, Kaitlyn McCabe, Shelley Kierstead, Dr. Kim Harris, Andrea Barclay

**Front row:** Justice Julie Audet, Virginia Workman, Maxine Kerr, Carolyn Leach, Archana Medhekar, Kristy Joplin, Justice Heather Mendes (appearing virtually)

## Presidents' Message —*continued*

the family court system. Michael joined the Board at our in-person meeting and social on June 17, 2023, to tell us more about this research project.

Our Education Committee has been busy this year, and has mounted a full slate of webinars. We are currently midway through a webinar series focused on family violence and family law issues. The first installment (May 25) focused on supporting the health of survivors of family violence and the second (June 21) addressed the topic of litigation abuse. Additional webinars in the series will address advanced issues in intimate partner violence (risk assessment, lessons learned from inquiries/commissions) and, once it becomes available, the Court of Appeal's decision in *Ahluwalia v. Ahluwalia* on the tort of family violence.

The Annual Conference Committee is hard at work, and wants you to know that registration is open for this year's AGM and Annual Conference, scheduled for October 20, 2023. As was the case last year, the format is hybrid, such that attendance may occur in person at the Toronto Reference Library, or virtually, without the need to incur travel and other expenses. Our keynote speaker will be Ontario's Ombudsman, Paul Dubé. In the last few months, the Ombudsman has published two investigations relating to services provided to children and youth in care. The first was published in December 2022, *A Voice Unheard: Brandon's Story*, and the second was published in April 2023, *Missing in Inaction: Misty's Story*. This year's Annual Conference will be packed with the most up-to-date research and cutting-edge practice advice on how to deal with allegations of poor parenting, child abuse and family violence, delivered by a roster of leading experts in the field of family law and child protection.

The AGM and Annual Conference will be preceded by a Practice Skills program on the afternoon of Thursday, October 19, 2023 at The Advocates Society. Join renowned Professor Rollie Thompson, as he moderates a lively panel demonstration on how to conduct a *Voir Dire* to determine the admissibility of a child's statements.

As always, we encourage our members to consider becoming actively involved in our Board Committees, the traditional pathway to Board membership. Whether you are a new lawyer, a sole practitioner or something different, the value of active and engaged membership is without parallel. If you are interested, there is a volunteer application posted on our new and improved website (thanks, Kaitlyn!), or feel free to reach out to either of us or anyone on the Board.

Our thanks to all of our Board members for their work and support throughout our term, and to our administrator, Kristy Joplin. We could not do our work without all of you.

**Carolyn Leach and Maxine Kerr**  
*AFCC-O Co-Presidents*

## THE 15TH ANNUAL AFCC-O CONFERENCE

### OCTOBER 19 & 20, 2023

---

Please join us for the 15th AFCC-Ontario AGM and Annual Conference: ***What's normal and what's abnormal? Best practices in the face of allegations of poor parenting, child abuse and family violence***, which will take place on October 19 & 20, 2023, in Toronto (the program on the 20<sup>th</sup> is also offered virtually).

Legal and Mental Health Professionals are invited to the Practice Skills Program on October 19, as Professor Rollie Thompson moderates a lively panel demonstration on how to conduct a *Voire Dire* to determine the admissibility of a child's statements in relation to poor parenting, child abuse or family violence.

Our conference program on October 20 includes a keynote presentation by Ontario Ombudsman, Paul Dubé, who highlights best practices for family professionals working with children in the wake of his two recent investigation reports: "A Voice Unheard: Brandon's Story" and "Missing in Inaction: Misty's Story". The balance of our program is filled with pertinent information and best practice takeaways in the following areas: decoding child and parent behaviour in high conflict families; forensic interviewing of children and the reliability of children's memories in the context of high conflict; tips on how to properly assess a parent's or child's allegations of abuse, family violence and poor parenting; the genesis and utility of Voice of the Child Reports in that context; and recent and important case law regarding both parenting issues and children's statements.

Our diverse group of accomplished speakers include: Dr. Catherine Horvath, Professor Kim Roberts (Laurier University), Dr. Pushpa Kanagaratnam (University of Toronto), Meredith Kirkland-Burke (Suspected Child Abuse & Neglect Program (SCAN) at the Hospital for Sick Children), Justice Nicole Tellier, Katherine Kavassalis and Shaista Durani (both from the Office of the Children's Lawyer), and Aaron Franks (Epstein Cole LLP).

We look forward to having you join us at what we know will be an informative and memorable conference.

**To register, please click on the link below. AFCC-O members will need to log in to their online AFCC-O account to access the discounted rate:**

**[afccontario.ca/2023-conf/](https://afccontario.ca/2023-conf/)**

**For sponsorship opportunities, please visit:**

**[afccontario.ca/sponsorship/](https://afccontario.ca/sponsorship/)**

## AFCC-O Member Spotlight: Christina Ninham



Christina Ninham is so much more than a lawyer – she is an advocate in the truest definition of the word and a community support to many. Christina is the wife of Robert J. Ninham and the Mother of Lyzee T. Ninham, an awesome, bright, strong teenage daughter who is on a mission to decolonize Turtle Island. Christina is Turtle Clan from the Oneida Nation of the Thames, a Haudenosaunee community near what is now known as London, Ontario. Christina received her B.A. and LL.B. from the University of Windsor and her B.Ed. from Brock University. She was called in 2001, two minutes before her awesome, older sister, Maureen Bulbrook (who is currently Indigenous counsel at the Office of the Children’s Lawyer).



Christina has continued to practice in the areas of Family and Child Protection since her call to the Bar, focusing on the representation of Indigenous and marginalized parents navigating the family court system. More recently, Christina has been granted the opportunity to assist First Nations in the exercising of their inherent jurisdiction in the area of child protection. Having been on the panel for the Office of the Children’s Lawyer since 2004, Christina is in the rewarding position and has had the honour of representing wonderful and exceptional children in both child protection proceedings and custody and access / DMR and parenting time matters. Christina is on the Board for the John Howard Society of London and District (since approximately 2004), the John Howard Society Ontario Board (since approximately 2014) and the Legal Aid Aboriginal Advisory Committee (since approximately 2009).



Christina’s hobbies include beekeeping - she loves bees! Christina has been a beekeeper on her own since her husband’s passing five years ago and about five years with him before that. Christina thinks bees are amazing because in their world, every bee is equal and no one bee is more important than the other bees. Each has a role and responsibility, which is how Indigenous people are. Christina says “As Indigenous people, we are born into roles and responsibilities as

*(Continued next page)*



## AFCC-O MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: CHRISTINA NINHAM—*continued*

opposed to others who are born into rights and privileges." My daughter and I have matching arm tattoos representing us, my husband and the strawberry medicine plant." (P.S. The Bee Movie is a lie. Male bees do not do any work other than mate with a queen.)

Pottery is Christina's second favourite hobby. She loves making pottery on the wheel and usually tries to include Haudenosaunee designs or words. Working with the earth, with clay, takes all the frustration and negativity away and it gets burned off in the kiln. When Christina makes each piece, she starts with thinking about life and the piece with a "Good Mind" to ensure that there is only positive energy and good thoughts put into each pot.

Christina reminds us that "in our ways, we are spiritual beings that choose our parents and come into this world to have this human experience." Christina's family and friends tolerate her high expectations of them contributing to helping others to have the best human experience as possible and they created a "Gr-Auntie and Gr-Uncle" Group to help young parents, usually youth aged out of care. They provide support for those with no support system, including transportation, helping with groceries, supervision of access, etc. They are now the Aunties/Uncle to a number of youth and their children.

When I asked Christina about what she views as the benefit of her membership with the AFCC-O, she responded "The benefit of the AFCC-O for me is the underlying basis of the AFCC-O. The organization is there to make a difference, trying to make life better for everyone and help educate the players in the family court justice system. The focus on children and trying to reduce the harm and trauma that children experience because of their involvement in the justice system is probably the most significant objective of the AFCC-O that I relate to. As a Haudenosaunee person, I am cognizant of the continuing oppression and assimilation that is inherent in the justice system. I believe that the system is not broken, that it was designed to oppress. The AFCC-O is trying to change the basis of the system and bring about change to make the system better for marginalized people, those without a voice. It is here to educate everyone within the system including parents, social service providers, lawyers and judges."



**Imran Kamal**  
*Counsel, Ministry of the Attorney General*



## AFCC-O PARENTING PLAN GUIDE: ON DIVORCEMATE AND IN ALBERTA

---

To support and encourage the making and use of developmentally appropriate, child-focused parenting plans, the AFCC-Ontario had a thirteen-member multidisciplinary Task Force, chaired by Queen's University Law Professor Nicholas Bala, prepare its [Parenting Plan Guide and Parenting Plan Template](#). The Task Force obtained comments on drafts from members of the AFCC-O and other professionals, including members of the Ontario judiciary. The Task Force worked for almost two years, and the present version was completed and posted on the AFCC-O website in January 2022. Thanks to support from the Law Foundation of Ontario, these materials have been translated into French. The materials are available without charge to parents and family law professionals who may be assisting them.



The *Guide* discusses the value of parental co-operation and planning, while recognizing that in cases where there are serious issues of abuse, violence or parental mental health, a court order may be more appropriate and protective than a voluntary agreement. The *Guide* offers developmentally appropriate advice on preparing parenting plans for children of different ages, and with varying histories of prior parenting. Family lawyers and other professionals should be familiar with the developmentally focussed information in the *Guide*, and if clients have children, assigning the reading of the *Guide* to clients at an initial meeting can be useful “homework” especially in helping to orient them to their evolving post-separation roles as co-parents.

The *Template* can be useful for lawyers in drafting parenting plans or sections of a separation agreement that deal with parenting issues. It offers wording of specific clauses for a parenting plan, with alternatives for various clauses to suit different family needs.

### ***On DivorceMate and in Print***

The AFCC-O *Template* materials have recently been incorporated into the DivorceMate and LEAP platforms to facilitate their use by lawyers. The materials are also incorporated in the Ontario Annual Family Law Practice print materials of LexisNexis.

*(Continued next page)*



## AFCC-O PARENTING PLAN GUIDE—*continued*

### *In the Courts*

Ontario judges often refer self-represented litigants to the AFCC-O materials. For example, in *Edwards v. Robinson*, 2020 ONSC 2956, as a result of a request for an urgent motion about parenting during the Covid 19 pandemic, a period of very limited court access, Justice Jarvis ordered that copies of the *Guide* and *Template* be provided to the parties, along with other materials, to help them prepare for the motion, or hopefully make their own, child-focused interim parenting arrangement.

While the materials emphasize the need for individualized assessments and plans, a critical part of the *Guide* provides a useful summary of basic social science knowledge about the effects of separation on children, child development, and parenting. As the materials were drafted by a respected multi-disciplinary group of professionals, many judges are prepared to take “judicial notice” of the ideas discussed, and refer to the materials in making their orders.

Professionals who are involved in a family case, even on an occasional basis, should be fully familiar with the issues and approaches in these materials. Professionals, whether lawyers, judges, mediators or otherwise involved in the family dispute resolution process, should encourage all parents to carefully read these (or similar) materials prior to making parenting plans. It is helpful for parents to read these materials if they are even considering separation.

For a recent example of an Ontario decision quoting from the *Guide*’s discussion of an age-appropriate parenting plan for young children, see the decision of Justice McDermott in *Sribalan v. Dickson*, 2023 ONSC 1254.

### *Heading Out to Alberta*

The AFCC-Alberta Chapter has collaborated with the AFCC-Ontario to adapt the Ontario materials for use in Alberta.

The AFCC-Alberta tasked a five-member multidisciplinary group with adapting the Ontario materials to reflect services, legislation and practices in that province. Professor Nicholas Bala chaired the Alberta group, as he did with the Ontario Task Force. The Alberta group also included: Judith Lake, Family Mediator and President of the AFCC-Alberta; Sonja Lusignan, a Calgary Family Lawyer; Justice Gay Bens of the Family & Youth Division of the Alberta Court of Justice in Calgary; and Evelyn Wotherspoon, a Social Worker in Calgary.

*(Continued next page)*



## AFCC-O PARENTING PLAN GUIDE—*continued*

The Alberta project was supported by the AFCC-Ontario, and its materials acknowledge the work of the members of the Ontario Task Force. The Alberta materials are now posted on the [AFCC-Alberta website](#), and DivorceMate and LEAP are incorporating an Alberta *Parenting Plan Template* in their materials for subscribers in that province.

The Alberta materials intentionally incorporated most of the Ontario *Guide* and *Template*, which should allow judges and lawyers in one province to rely on case law from the other province referring to the materials.

DivorceMate is planning to incorporate the *Template*, with appropriate changes, into its British Columbia web-based materials. Unfortunately, there is currently no AFCC Chapter in that province to collaborate in that project.



**Professor Nicholas Bala**  
*Faculty of Law, Queen's University*

### WHY JOIN AFCC-O?

#### We provide opportunities to connect

Chapters provide members access to a local network and educational offerings tailored specifically for professionals living and working in Ontario. Opportunities include:

- ⇒ Free or discounted access to live and archived webinars
- ⇒ Discounted fees for AFCC-O's Annual Conference
- ⇒ Involvement in chapter committees, and board of directors

## CHILDREN’S RIGHTS v. EXPEDIENCY: A CHILD-FOCUSED PERSPECTIVE ON THE NEW *FAMILY LAW RULES* IN RETURN ORDER CASES

---

Cases involving alleged international child abductions are some of the most difficult in family law. From the child’s perspective, it is often a zero-sum game<sup>1</sup>, particularly if the taking parent is unable or unwilling to return to the country of habitual residence or the left-behind parent is unable or unwilling to join the child in the new jurisdiction<sup>2</sup>.

Proceedings under the Hague *Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction*, and return order proceedings more generally, are aimed at enforcing “custody” rights and securing the prompt return of wrongfully removed or retained children to their country of habitual residence. In *Office of the Children’s Lawyer v. Balev*, 2018 SCC 16, the Supreme Court of Canada identified three purposes served by prompt return: protecting against the “harmful effects” of wrongful removal or retention; deterring parents from abducting children; and ensuring the “speedy adjudication” of the merits of a parenting dispute in the forum of the child’s habitual residence (at paras. 25-27).

The presumptive focus on prompt return animated the recent amendments to Ontario’s *Family Law Rules* which came into effect on October 3, 2022. Rule 37.2, which deals exclusively with “International Child Abduction”, contains a number of provisions designed to streamline the hearing of return applications in both Hague and non-Hague matters. These include the assignment of a case management judge at the outset to monitor the progress of the case (r. 37.2(4)), and to conduct the hearing wherever possible (r. 37.2(8)). They also include the scheduling of a “first meeting” with the judge (in lieu of a case conference) not later than seven days after the commencement of the case (r. 37.2(5)), to set a timetable for the service and filing of materials, as well as a hearing date (r. 37.2(7)).

Significantly, subrule 37.2(3) mandates the prompt disposition of international child abduction cases not later than six weeks after the case is commenced, in matters arising under the Hague *Convention*. This is meant to address Article 11 of the *Convention* which requires judicial authorities to “act expeditiously” in proceedings for the return of children and contemplates the right of the applicant or Central Authority “to request a statement of the reasons for the delay” if no decision has been reached within six weeks from the date of the commencement of the proceedings. Article 11 suggests a recognition that there may be legitimate reasons for delay in some cases. It is notable, however, that the *Family Law Rules* go farther than Article 11, mandating disposition of the case within six weeks rather than a mere explanation of the reasons for the delay if there is no disposition within that timeframe.

(Continued next page)

---

<sup>1</sup>Mediation is more common in jurisdictions outside Ontario in these matters (e.g. the U.K., the Netherlands, Germany, France, Spain, and the U.S.).

<sup>2</sup>There may be a variety of reasons for this, including lack of immigration status and/or employment, pending criminal charges or convictions *in absentia* related to the abduction, concerns regarding a lack of protection from local authorities in relation to family violence concerns, lack of financial support/resources, lack of family support, etc.

## CHILDREN’S RIGHTS v. EXPEDIENCY—*continued*

It should also be noted that the strict six-week timeframe for disposition does not apply to cases involving countries that are not parties to the Hague *Convention* (since Article 11 of the *Convention* does not apply to these cases), although prompt disposition is still necessary. Arguably, greater flexibility is needed in cases involving non-Hague countries since there are no reciprocal treaty obligations and there is no basis to assume that the receiving state will determine parenting issues based on the paramountcy of the child’s best interests (*Geliedan v. Rawdah*, 2020 ONCA 254, at para. 38). “Some non-signatory countries may do so; others may not” (*Ojeikere v. Ojeikere*, 2018 ONCA 372, at para. 61). Greater diligence may be needed to ensure relevant evidence is before the court regarding the country of origin, including evidence regarding the application of the foreign law (*F. v. N.*, 2022 SCC 51, at paras. 86 and 88).

Nonetheless, the Supreme Court of Canada in *F. v. N.* recently reiterated the goals of return orders previously articulated by the Court in *Balev*, including the speedy adjudication of the merits of the parenting issues in the forum of the child’s habitual residence (at para. 95). *Balev* emphasized the need for Hague proceedings to be “judge-led, not party-driven, to ensure they are determined expeditiously” (at para. 89). This was more recently reiterated by the Court of Appeal for Ontario in *Leigh v. Rubio*, 2022 ONCA 582 (at para. 2).

The need for timely disposition is emphasized in subrule 37.2(2) which addresses the interpretative principles behind the rules relating to international child abduction. Significantly, however, while emphasizing the need for timely and efficient dispositions of these cases, this subrule also recognizes that such dispositions must be consistent with the principles of natural justice and fairness to the parties *and every child involved in the case*. In other words, the need for due process, as a fundamental tenet of our justice system, should not be sacrificed at the altar of expediency. This has been recognized in a number of appellate

(Continued next page)

### WHY JOIN AFCC-O?

#### We are interdisciplinary and international

- ⇒ Members include sitting judges, lawyers, psychologists, and other professionals who work with family conflict
- ⇒ Our conferences and events are innovation incubators and friendly networking opportunities
- ⇒ AFCC-O members may attend frequently offered AFCC International webinars and conferences

## CHILDREN’S RIGHTS v. EXPEDIENCY— *continued*

decisions in both the Hague and non-Hague contexts: *A.M.R.I. v. K.E.R.*, 2011 ONCA 417, at para. 125; *Geliedan v. Rawdah*, 2020 ONCA 254, at para. 60; *K.F. v. J.F.*, 2022 NLCA 33, at para. 47. In *A.M.R.I.*, the Ontario Court of Appeal confirmed that, “Expediency will never trump fundamental human rights” (at para. 125), while in *Geliedan*, the Court stated, “While it is important that applications arising from alleged child abductions move with dispatch, this cannot be done at the expense of justice” (at para. 60).

Due process is particularly significant for children who are the subjects of these applications<sup>3</sup> given the “profound and often searing impact” orders in these cases have on the affected child. The new rules contemplate the Office of the Children’s Lawyer (OCL) receiving a copy of every application in an alleged international child abduction case (subrule 8(12)).<sup>4</sup> Under the related Court Services Division Directive, the OCL must also be notified of the first meeting date. The rationale behind these rules is to permit the OCL to send a representative to the first meeting date to advise the court and parties of the OCL’s willingness and ability to accept a request from the court for the OCL’s involvement. This is intended to minimize delay caused by later referrals to the OCL and to ensure the OCL has an opportunity to participate in the setting of timetables for the service and filing of materials, as well as the hearing date.

Even with this early notice, however, it is a challenge for the OCL to complete its work within the compressed timelines of these proceedings, which ideally involves meeting with both parties; meeting with the child-clients on more than one occasion to determine their perspectives on the issues the court must decide (which can include issues relating to their habitual residence; whether they are settled in their new environment; whether a return may expose them to a grave risk of harm/serious harm; and whether a parent was exercising custody rights at the time of removal or retention); obtaining information from relevant third parties regarding the children, as well as the parenting laws in the other country; considering the need for/obtaining expert evidence; and drafting materials.

The OCL is cognizant of the imperative to hear these matters expeditiously and makes every effort to complete its work as efficiently as possible but slavish conformity to rigid timelines in all cases, or worse, a failure to request the involvement of the OCL because of concerns regarding potential delay (or couched as such when the real impetus to exclude a child’s participation may be paternalism, inconvenience and/or the resistance of a party who feels they would not benefit from independent representation of the child’s interests), must be guarded against to ensure outcomes consistent with “fairness to...every child involved in the

*(Continued next page)*

---

<sup>3</sup> *A.M.R.I. v. K.E.R.*, 2011 ONCA 417, at para. 120.

<sup>4</sup> The OCL must, in turn, send a copy of any application under the Hague *Convention* to the Central Authority for Ontario (r. 8(13)).

## CHILDREN’S RIGHTS v. EXPEDIENCY— *continued*

case” (r. 37.2(2)).

Meaningful procedural protections must be afforded to children, including a reasonable opportunity to respond to the case,<sup>5</sup> to avoid harmful outcomes. Given the extraordinary stakes for children in these cases, they deserve no less.



**Caterina Tempesta**  
*Senior Counsel*  
*Office of the Children’s Lawyer*

### ANNOUNCEMENT: NEW INITIATIVE FROM THE CENTRE FOR RESEARCH

AFCC-O is proud to support a new initiative from the Centre for Research & Education On Violence Against Women & Children (CREVAWC) - ***From Awareness to Action: Moving from screening and assessment to developing appropriate parenting plans after family violence in the family justice system.***

This project draws on three complementary frameworks to translate knowledge on general family violence concepts into specific and safe parenting plans: (1) *HELP* Toolkit: Identifying and Responding to Family Violence for Family Law Legal Advisers (Justice Canada, 2022); (2) *SAFER* (Screen, Assess, Focus and Respond; Davis, Frederick & Ver Steegh, 2018), and (3) *RIA* (Project Enhanced Safety: Risk Assessment Framework in Family Court; Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, 2021). Each of these tools has a specific purpose and strengths: *HELP* for screening and safety planning; *RIA* for identification of high-risk family violence and monitoring dynamic risk and the intersecting factors that contribute to risk; and *SAFER* for creating a tailored parenting plan that considers the impact of family violence on family members and the best interests of the child.

AFCC-O supported CREVAWC’s successful funding application to the Department of Justice, which will permit the development of a composite, Canadianized set of guidelines for developing parenting plans in circumstances of family violence. Also planned are learning opportunities to build capacity of practitioners in the field of family law, a national roll-out strategy, and an evaluation plan. AFCC-O Board members Dr. Kim Harris and Carolyn Leach sit on the Steering Committee, which will provide oversight and guidance to the project; provide feedback on the development of the tools and training; and assistance with field testing, and evaluation of the tools.

---

<sup>5</sup> *A.M.R.I. v. K.E.R.*, 2011 ONCA 417, at para. 120.



## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: LIZA RITCHIE



Members are the heart and soul of the AFCC-Ontario, and it is important to introduce you to one of our very dedicated and new generation members, Liza Ritchie.

Liza has been a member since 2014, when she was a university student. She was completing her Bachelor of Social Work at McMaster University and was placed in a therapeutic private practice for her student placement. She was also mentored in the field of family law therapeutic work. In this placement she was introduced to therapeutic work and mediation with families experiencing separation, divorce, and parent-child contact issues. Even as a student, Liza was an active and contributing member of our organization where she volunteered at the Toronto Based International AFCC Conference in 2019 and was an active and treasured member on two conference committees with the most recent in 2021. She was also a wonderful host to the Virtual Pre-conference in 2021 on self-representing litigants.

Liza was proudly born and raised in Sault St. Marie and loves her northern Ontario roots. She graduated from King's University College from Western University with her Masters in Social Work in 2018. After graduation Liza continued her therapeutic work with families experiencing separation and divorce in Hamilton, and in 2020 she began working in the domestic violence sector, and her experience in the AFCC-O has been valuable in her new role. She has maintained her connections to the family Law community and sees the intersectionality of the work with her current and new role as Manager of Integral House, noting her AFCC-O experience has been an investment into her professional future.

Liza continues to be a dedicated member of the AFCC-O and identified that she benefits from being a member of the AFCC-O and enjoys receiving the subscription to *Family Court Review*, AFCC's quarterly academic and research journal. She finds it a great advantage in having access to resources and research, and the excellent conferences and webinars that bring so many professionals together to discuss very difficult and ever-changing work. She enjoys the exposure to different lenses in the work to broaden her own views and education which she believes allows her to offer a better perspective to her staff and clients. She finds that being an AFCC-O member supplies her with some excellent resources to better inform her current work in the area of domestic violence.

Liza is an avid Lord of the Rings fan and has been recently exploring pottery as a new hobby. She and her fiancé reside in the downtown Hamilton core with their cat, Zuko. They enjoy exploring the beautiful outdoor trails of the escarpment in Hamilton, as well as enjoying the numerous micro breweries in the area. We will stay tuned on her evolving ca-

*(Continued next page)*

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: LIZA RITCHIE—*continued*

reer and the exciting new beginnings she embarks on in her life. We suspect Liza's role with the AFCC-O will also evolve and we have had the benefit of her dedication and insight in future years. Thank you, Liza, for your membership, participation, and commitment to the AFCC-O.



**Andrea Barclay**  
*Registered Social Worker,  
Counselling and Consulting*

## ANNOUNCEMENT: AFCC-O RESEARCH GRANT FOR TRAUMA-INFORMED PRINCIPLES IN FAMILY COURT

The Board of Directors is excited to share that Laura Spivack and Professor Michael Saini are the successful recipients of the AFCC-O research grant for the 2023-2025 funding cycle. Their project entitled ***Adapting the Trauma Informed Principles to Family Court: A Survey Examining Professionals Perception*** will examine trauma-informed practices within the family court system.

The researchers indicate that due to ongoing trauma, systemic factors, and mental health diagnoses, many families struggle to fully participate in decision-making about their lives and the lives of their children. These individuals also often feel disenfranchised within the family court system. The researchers suggest that developing a trauma-informed care approach within the family court system, while challenging, would better meet the needs of individuals using the system. Trauma-Informed Care involves five guiding principles: safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, and empowerment (Harris & Fallot, 2001). These principles are commonly applied in various other systems and environments (e.g., mental health, hospitals, residential treatment).

The research of Ms. Spivack and Professor Saini will involve the creation and implementation of a novel survey tool to evaluate adherence to trauma-informed principles within the Ontario family court system. The researchers will then provide recommendations for the Ontario family court system to foster a trauma-informed environment.

## TOP 10 TIPS FOR NEW FAMILY LAW LAWYERS

Family law is rewarding and challenging at the same time. As a [new](#) family law lawyer, not only are you learning the ropes of practicing law, but you are also practicing in a unique area of the law where you will face difficult situations in helping separated families, children and vulnerable individuals. To provide you some insight and guidance, we put together the following **Top 10 Tips for New Family Law Lawyers** that we hope you will find helpful and insightful.

### 1. Build Relationships and Network

Building relationships and networks is essential to your career success and well-being. A robust network includes not only lawyers but also other family law professionals, such as parenting educators, mediators-arbitrators, mental health professionals, and financial professionals. These other professionals will provide you with invaluable insights into your clients' needs and the services that are available to support them and their children. They can also be an important referral source. Strong relationships with other professionals can also help with long-term business relationships and obtaining clients through referrals. In family law, where emotions can run high, lawyer and nonlawyer colleagues can also provide emotional support and a sounding board for difficult cases. Therefore, investing in relationship-building and networking (by attending network and social events, in-person conferences, inviting professionals out for coffee/lunch) should be a priority for any new family law lawyer seeking to build a successful and fulfilling legal career.

### 2. Get a Mentor

All lawyers have faced challenging and unfamiliar situations at some point in their career. When you are starting out as a new family law lawyer, there will be times where you will be faced with situations that you did not learn about in law school or during your articling term. You will benefit from guidance from experienced family lawyers. A mentor can provide you with invaluable advice and encouragement as you progress in your legal career. You may be able to find a mentor through your articling position, a volunteer opportunity, or you can seek out a mentor by approaching a senior family lawyer or non-lawyer professional and ask if there are any research opportunities you can assist with, meetings/attendances that you can shadow and in exchange receive their guidance and mentorship. It is also important to let your mentors know how appreciative and grateful you are for their guidance, and be able to 'pay it back' and mentor other new lawyers when you are in a position to do so.

*(Continued next page)*

## TOP 10 TIPS FOR NEW FAMILY LAW LAWYERS—*continued*

### **3. Let Your Own Experiences Guide You**

You may have heard lots of stories and received lots of advice as a law student and as an articling student. While it is important to learn from what others have experienced and take that into account in your practice, it is also important to allow your own experiences to inform and guide you. There is not one “right” way to practice family law. While it is always helpful to get advice from senior practitioners, it is also important to develop your own style that is true to your personality/values and to trust your own instincts. Keep an open mind. Everyone experiences situations from their own perspective, and it is important that you recognize that your own experiences are important too.

### **4. Don’t Engage in Emotional Communications for Responses**

It is essential to avoid engaging in emotional communications when responding to clients, opposing counsel, or anyone involved in a case. Allowing your emotions to guide your responses can escalate the conflict between your client and their former spouse, undermine your relationships with your clients and colleagues, and ultimately harm your client’s case. It is crucial to remain calm, professional, and objective in your communications; otherwise, it is not possible for you to effectively advise and advocate for your clients. Furthermore, a pattern of emotional outbursts and intemperate responses may permanently damage your professional reputation. It is also important to remember that a lawyer who responds calmly in an emotional charged situation is modelling appropriate behaviour for their clients, which may assist them in dealing with their former partner as they co-parent their child(ren).

### **5. Show Empathy for your Clients**

Clients come to us during one of the most difficult, painful, and challenging times of their lives. They not only have to deal with the legal world of ‘family law’, which is new for them, but they are also dealing with the impact of the breakdown of their relationship and potentially separation from their children. Individuals who are in the throes of a separation are often not presenting their “best selves” to the world, and will need your empathy and compassion as well as your legal advice. You are being trusted with one of the most important aspects of your client’s life. To best serve them, it is important to balance your role as a legal advisor and your role as an understanding and sympathetic counsel. At the same time, it is critical that you not become over-invested in your client’s situation, as this will compromise your ability to provide them with objective and dispassionate advice.

### **6. Take a Personal and Tailored Approach to Each Client**

One size does not fit all, especially in family law. Each client’s situation is different and unique and as an advocate, you are required to assess each case and each client individually. While there may be commonalities in the legal issues or even the facts, no case is the same because no person or family is the same. One of your

*(Continued next page)*

## TOP 10 TIPS FOR NEW FAMILY LAW LAWYERS—*continued*

roles as a strong advocate will be to determine what each client needs in order to effectively represent them and advance their legal issues in a productive way. As counsel, you need to be mindful not to excessively rely on precedents, as it is important to tailor your work product to your client's situation. For example, when drafting a motion, you should be mindful of the relief that accords with what your client actually needs or may be entitled to. It is also important to check-in and assess your client's situation throughout the case and determine what is further needed to assist them and move their case forward to a positive resolution.

### **7. Prioritize Self-Care**

It can be easy to get caught up in the demands of the job and neglect your own well-being. However, prioritizing your physical, emotional, and mental health is critical to your long-term professional success. Working in family law can be emotionally taxing, and taking care of yourself can help you manage stress, reduce burnout, and increase job satisfaction. Making time for activities that promote self-care, such as exercise, mindfulness, hobbies, taking vacation (or even a staycation but having time where you are 'off' from work), setting protocols for disconnecting from your email/phone, and spending time with loved ones, can help you recharge and perform better in your job.

### **8. Take leadership and Initiative**

Taking leadership and initiative in your projects and assignments will help you to succeed and advance in your legal career. You can do this by spotting tasks that need to be completed or pursuing relevant lines of research, without waiting to be asked. Or, for example, coming up with a solution and running it by your supervisor (instead of going to your supervisor with a question), and actively seeking out opportunities to learn and practice new skills or areas of law. This will demonstrate your commitment to cases you are working on and the clients you are helping, and will allow you to stand out.

### **9. Don't Burn Bridges**

It is essential to maintain a professional reputation and not burn bridges in your legal career. In family law, relationships matter, and maintaining positive relationships with clients, and colleagues can have a significant impact on your success. Burning bridges can damage your reputation and lead to missed opportunities, including referrals, professional relationships, and career advancement. While it may be tempting to engage in unprofessional behavior, such as gossiping or engaging in conflict, it is important to remember that your reputation is your most valuable asset. Judges will also take note of disrespectful and unprofessional behaviour, or animosity between counsel, and this will also affect your professional reputation. Instead, focus on building and maintaining positive

*(Continued next page)*



## TOP 10 TIPS FOR NEW FAMILY LAW LAWYERS—*continued*

relationships, even in difficult situations. Treating others with respect and professionalism, even when you disagree, can help you establish a reputation as a trusted and reliable legal professional, leading to long-term success in your career.

### 10. Focus on Settlement

It is important to focus on settlement as a primary goal in resolving family law disputes, where a negotiated resolution is appropriate. While Court Orders may be necessary in some cases, it is often expensive, time-consuming, and emotionally taxing for all parties involved. Settlement, on the other hand, is usually more efficient, more cost-effective, provides clients with more control over the outcome, helps to preserve relationships and reduces the emotional toll of litigation. Focusing on settlement can also help you establish a reputation as a lawyer who prioritizes client interests and seeks to resolve conflict in a collaborative and constructive manner.



**Imran Kamal**  
*Counsel*  
*Ministry of the Attorney General*



**Golnaz Sara Simaei**  
*Simaei Law Professional Corporation*

### WHY JOIN AFCC-O?

#### We fund research that matters

- ⇒ We created the flagship Parenting Plan Guide and Template for use throughout Canada
- ⇒ We funded an extensive review and evaluation of court-based family mediation services throughout the province

## RECAP OF THE 2023 WALSH FAMILY LAW MOOT & NEGOTIATION COMPETITION

---

Undeterred by blizzard conditions the night before, the 2023 Walsh Family Law Moot & Negotiation Competition took place on Saturday, March 4, 2023.



The Walsh, as it is affectionately known, is named to recognize the contributions made by the late Justice George Walsh to the development of family law in the province of Ontario.

Justice Walsh was appointed to the Supreme Court of Ontario in 1978 and immediately put in charge of the Family Law Division. At the time, spousal support was still called alimony and a woman's entitlement to support depended on English law as it existed before Confederation. All divorces had to be heard in court and trials lasted weeks. There was an enormous backlog of cases waiting to be heard. Justice Walsh, together with Justice Gertrude Spiegel, was at the forefront of the work to simplify, expedite and humanize family law. Gowns largely disappeared, and litigants, lawyers, and judges met informally. Discussions, offers and settlement began to occur more frequently as family law belatedly entered the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Justice Walsh's philosophy was resolution where possible; if not timely adjudication. His objective was to reduce the cost of resolving family differences and issues, including the direct cost to the litigant and the indirect cost to the taxpayer, all of which had to be done without in any way reducing the quality or caliber of justice and the availability and timeliness of justice in the community.

The Walsh began as two separate competitions, each spearheaded by a separate group of family lawyers and judges who were looking for ways to attract law students to the practice of family law. Patti Cross, Senior Family Counsel with the Ontario Court of Justice, was the driving force behind the Moot, which was launched in 2013 and organized for the first six years by Toronto family lawyer Steve Benmor. Some time later, Superior Court Justices Jennifer MacKinnon and Heather McGee developed the concept for the negotiation competition and it was brought into fruition in 2015 by Tami Moscoe (Senior Family Counsel to the Superior Court of Justice) and Toronto lawyers/mediators Hilary Linton and Elizabeth Hyde. In 2016, the two competitions were merged and came under the auspices of AFCC-O. AFCC-O has been proud to host this important initiative ever since.

*(Continued next page)*

## WALSH FAMILY LAW MOOT & NEGOTIATION—*continued*

The Walsh was a virtual event in both 2021 and 2022 and, like many online activities during the pandemic, was a somewhat tepid version of a usually vibrant occasion. Planning for the 2023 Walsh began in September 2022; committee members jumped in to work enthusiastically, motivated by the prospect of returning to an in-person event. This is a complex event with many moving parts and there is a great deal to organize: writing problems for the competitions, liaising with the law schools, organizing registration, recruiting judges and volunteers, securing venues and IT support for the online scoring system, seeking sponsors to cover the costs of the event, ordering trophies, managing social media and communications...the list goes on and on.

In keeping with tradition, the 2023 Walsh kicked off with a welcome reception hosted by Epstein Cole on the Friday evening. Students, coaches, volunteers, and competition judges braved freezing rain and dire record snowfall warnings to gather at Epstein Cole's offices for lively conversation, snacks and drinks. We were thrilled to see so many members of the bench

and bar engaging with the students, including Justice Mary Lou Benotto who participated as a moot judge this year.



Saturday morning dawned sunny and clear, although many Walsh participants had to dig themselves out from under 30 centimeters of newly fallen snow before heading downtown.

*(Continued next page)*

### WHY JOIN AFCC-O?

#### We invest in training and new professionals

- ⇒ We created the Intensive Child Protection Training Program and the Walsh Family Law Moot and Negotiation Competition to train students and young lawyers
- ⇒ We produced “Adult Children of Divorce”, a short film used for training across the province

## WALSH FAMILY LAW MOOT & NEGOTIATION—*continued*

### Walsh Family Law Moot

Seven of Ontario's eight law schools participated in the 2023 Walsh Moot, with each school sending a two-person team of Appellants and a two-person team of Respondents. This year's moot case was based on a 2022 Superior Court of Justice case which addressed the issue of whether the choice of a parent with decision-making responsibility to not vaccinate the children against COVID-19 could be overridden by the other parent.

Appellants were required to submit a factum (written statement of the facts and argument in support of their position) in early February. These facta were sent to the opposing teams of Respondents shortly thereafter. Respondents were then required to submit a responding factum within two weeks. Each factum reviewed and scored by three different factum markers, who were lawyers and judges who volunteered their time for this purpose.

The competition then proceeded to the oral argument phase, which took place on March 4. As always, this portion of the competition was held in the splendid surroundings at the Court of Appeal at Osgoode Hall. Mooters, their supporters, and judges were greeted by a friendly team of volunteers, who ushered them to a tasty breakfast. This phase of the competition took place over two rounds, with teams making their arguments in front of two different panels of three judges and against different opposing teams. The judging panels were composed of family court judges and senior family law practitioners, many of whom have judged the Walsh Moot since its inception in 2013. Students are judged on the organization of their argument, their speaking ability and delivery, their responses to questions from the bench, and the development of their argument and overall persuasion.

*(Continued next page)*



## WALSH FAMILY LAW MOOT & NEGOTIATION—*continued*

### Walsh Family Law Negotiation Competition

Meanwhile, over at The Advocates' Society, the 2023 Negotiation Competition was in full swing. Judges and students from six participating law schools enjoyed breakfast, before being ushered to their designated negotiation rooms by a team of volunteers.

The competition is always centered around a complex fact situation that raises a broad range of family law issues: decision-making responsibility, parenting time, child and spousal support, and division of property. The couple in this year's problem separated after an incident of family violence, triggered by alcohol and mental health issues, which resulted in criminal charges.

A week prior to the competition, each team is required to submit a negotiation plan, which is scored by the organizing committee. The competition itself is structured around three one-hour negotiation sessions, each taking place at a different stage of the fact situation, before a different panel of judges and against different opponents. Each participating school sends two teams of two students, each representing a different party in the dispute. The judging panels are composed of family court judges, lawyers, and mediators, and students are evaluated on their ability to, among other items, work effectively as a team, establish a problem-solving relationship with the other side, use active listening and questioning techniques, advance the client's interests effectively, and generate a range of options.

*(Continued next page)*





## WALSH FAMILY LAW MOOT & NEGOTIATION—*continued*

### Awards Ceremony and Luncheon

After an exciting morning of competition, participants headed over to the nearby Hilton Doubletree Hotel for lunch and the Awards Ceremony. They were greeted at the door by volunteers handing out T-shirts featuring the new Walsh logo, designed by committee member Mary-Anne Popescu. Some had the opportunity to mingle with a few of our special guests, including our new Chief Justice Michael Tulloch of the Court of Appeal for Ontario, and Justice Suzanne Stevenson, Senior Judge of the Family Court, Superior Court of Justice.



Over lunch, Justice Heather McGee delivered brief remarks setting out what students could expect from a career in family law. She highlighted both the rigours and the rewards offered by this practice, aptly describing family law as a calling that blends intellect with humanity.

And, finally, the winners were announced. They were:

### Winners of the Moot Competition

**Top Appellant Factum:** Zachary Bowles and Isaac Papsin, Western University

**Top Respondent Factum:** Monica Romero and Sarah Cantos, University of Windsor

**Philip M. Epstein Award for Top Oralist:** Niema Mohammad of University of Toronto

**2<sup>nd</sup> Top Oralist:** Isaac Papsin of Western University

**Top Team:** Toronto Metropolitan University (Jordan Haworth, Lila Mansour, Julie Matheson, and Meagan MacArthur)

**Second Top Team:** University of Ottawa (Miranda Lowe, Carl Dawson, Giselle Alexander, Sapphira Thompson-Bled)

*(Continued next page)*

## WALSH FAMILY LAW MOOT & NEGOTIATION—*continued*

### Winners of the Negotiation Competition

#### *Top Students*

**First (Tie):** Grace Foran, University of Ottawa and Aliyyah Jafri, University of Ottawa

**Second:** Natasha Romero-Atyeo, Osgoode Hall Law School

**Third:** Lauren Walsh-Greene (Not pictured), Osgoode Hall Law School

**First:** University of Toronto – Team 1 (Zoey Chau and Jasveen Singh)

**Second:** University of Ottawa – Team 2 (Genevieve Marquis and Grace Foran)

**Third:** University of Ottawa – Team 1 (Aliyyah Jafri and Caitlin DeSimone)

**Best Negotiation Plan:** Carissa De Marinis and Anna Welch, University of Toronto

An event of this size and complexity would not be possible without the contributions of many dedicated volunteers and sponsors. The members of the organizing committee contributed hours of their personal time between August and March, especially in the two weeks leading up to the competition. Volunteers and judges gave up their Saturdays to participate, no mean feat this year given all of the snow. Finally, the very generous contributions of our sponsors allowed us to deliver a superb event that students will remember for years to come. Over the years, the Walsh has become a wonderful opportunity for the family law community to pull together around a common goal: attracting new lawyers to this intellectually stimulating and personally rewarding area of law.

*(Continued next page)*



## WALSH FAMILY LAW MOOT & NEGOTIATION—*continued*

And we are beginning to see the fruits of our labours. In 2021, we set up a Walsh Facebook page as a means of recognizing and promoting our sponsors, as well as sharing information about the competition. In 2022, we decided to add videos from past Walsh competitors to provide tips to this year's students. I googled our past competitors and was gratified to see that a significant number of them had pursued articles in family law or were working as family lawyers. Many of our current volunteers are past Walsh competitors, as are many of the faculty coaches.

Our message to participating students is simple: You are the future of family law. Come join our ranks; there is a community of lawyers waiting to support you in the early years of your career.

### **Carolyn Leach**

*Senior Counsel*

*Indigenous Justice Division,*

*Ministry of the Attorney General*



# WALSH FAMILY LAW MOOT & NEGOTIATION—*continued*

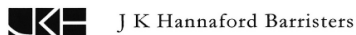
*We thank our sponsors for their continued support*



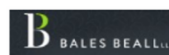
## SILVER SPONSORS

## BRONZE SPONSORS

### AWARDS SPONSORS



Kathy Batycky  
Counsel • Practising in Association  
Stoner & Company Family Law Associates  
[Kathy@scfamilylaw.ca](mailto:Kathy@scfamilylaw.ca)



**JODI L. FELDMAN**  
Professional Corporation



AUDIT  
TAX  
ADVISORY



## RECOGNIZING THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF OUR AFCC-O MEMBERS

---

We would like to take this opportunity to recognize the extraordinary accomplishments of some of our AFCC-O Members. We are incredibly proud to have such accomplished and talented family law professionals as part of our membership. On behalf of the AFCC-O, we wish to congratulate **Andrea Jones, Robert Shawyer, Imran Kamal, and Tami Moscoe** on their accomplishments which we share with you below.

**Tami Moscoe** was awarded the J. Shirley Denison Award by the Law Society of Ontario in March 2023. This award recognizes significant contributions to access to justice and/or poverty issues and was established in 2015 in honour of former LSO Treasurer John Shirley Denison who practised law in Toronto for more than 40 years. Tami is a senior family law lawyer and currently on secondment at the Office of the Children's Lawyer. Tami has been actively involved in AFCC-O activities since she joined the chapter in 2012. In 2019, she received the AFCC-O President's Distinguished Service Award in recognition of her exemplary contributions to AFCC-O through committee participation, education, leadership, and mentorship.

Please read the official announcement for Tami's award here: <https://lso.ca/about-lso/medals,-awards-and-honours/law-society-awards/the-j-shirley-denison-award>

**Andrea Jones** was appointed as Justice of the Peace in Orangeville in December 2022. Andrea has a Master of Social Work degree from McGill University and over two decades of experience working with families as a registered social worker. Since 2017, she was provincial manager of clinical services for the Office of the Children's Lawyer. She also co-developed the Ministry of the Attorney General's (MAG) training on Vicarious Trauma which was delivered to over 8,000 MAG employees. Andrea joined AFCC-O in October 2017. In addition to her contributions to the Ontario Chapter, Andrea was actively involved with our parent organization, sitting on AFCC's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee and the AFCC Task Force for the Revision of the Model Standards of Practice for Child Custody Evaluation.

**Robert Shawyer** was appointed as Justice of the Peace in Toronto in December 2022. Prior to his appointment, Robert was the owner and principal lawyer of Shawyer Professional Corporation, a full-service family law firm. Robert began his legal career practising criminal law and switched to family law in 2010, representing clients in cases involving adoption, child protection, constitutional issues, and domestic issues.

*(Continued next page)*



## RECOGNIZING THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF OUR MEMBERS—*continued*

Robert joined AFCC-O in 2014. He was also a member of the AFCC-O Board of Directors between 2019 and 2022.

Please read the official announcement for Andrea's and Robert's appointments here: <https://news.ontario.ca/en/bulletin/1002609/new-justices-of-the-peace-appointed-to-the-ontario-court-of-justice>

**Imran Kamal** was one of the recipients of the Precedent Setter Awards 2023. Imran began his legal career at the Catholic Children's Aid Society in Hamilton and co-founded the Indigenous Child Welfare Collaborative, which forges partnerships between child-protection agencies and local Indigenous-led services. In 2021, Imran started his work as Counsel with the Ministry of Attorney General. He also currently teaches a course on children in the law at Toronto Metropolitan University's Lincoln Alexander School of Law. Imran has been an AFCC-O member since August 2022. He currently sits on the editorial board for the AFCC-O Newsletter Committee and has also volunteered with the Walsh Family Law Negotiation Competition.

Please read the official announcement for Imran's award here: <https://lawandstyle.ca/career/precedent-setter-awards-2023-imran-kamal>

We are always looking for opportunities to celebrate the accomplishments of our members, and we encourage you, our readers, to let us know of any other awards/recognitions that we can include in our future newsletters.



**Golnaz Sara Simaei**  
*Simaei Law Professional Corporation*

### WHY JOIN AFCC-O?

#### We advocate for change

- ⇒ AFCC-O is regularly invited to provide input on draft legislation, including Bill C-78. We passionately support "Access to Justice" initiatives across the province.
- ⇒ We have organized numerous events that encourage debate regarding family court reforms.

## BECOME A MEMBER OF AFCC AND AFCC-O

### AFCC-Ontario is a chapter of AFCC International

To join AFCC-O:

1. Join [AFCC International](#), then
2. Elect to join the Ontario Chapter

**If you are not a member of AFCC and AFCC-O, now is a great time to join!**

AFCC International provides resources on issues that are important to family law professionals, as well as debates, dialogues, and discussion on ground-breaking research.

Membership includes:

- Webinars and conferences that are free or discounted for members; member-only access to webinar archives
- Free subscription to the quarterly journal, [Family Court Review](#)
- Access to the Member Directory and the Parenting Coordination Network (PCNet) discussion group



**Are you a member of AFCC but not AFCC-O? Consider this: your membership benefits both *you* AND *others in Ontario*. How?**

- You will be part of an Ontario-based interdisciplinary group of family justice professionals that allows you to be involved at the local level and supports you in your career and the profession;
- You will recoup the membership fee with free and discounted rates for participation in webinars and conferences that focus on family justice issues in Ontario; and
- Your membership fee helps fund local research projects and policy efforts to benefit families and family justice professionals in Ontario.

To join, visit <https://www.afccnet.org/Membership/Member-Categories> and select Ontario Chapter!

**Published by:**  
**Association of Family and Conciliation  
Courts, Ontario Chapter**

551 Lakeshore Road E, #124  
Mississauga, ON L5G 0A8  
[info@afccontario.ca](mailto:info@afccontario.ca)

**Newsletter Editorial Board:**

Archana Medhekar, Co-Chair  
Golnaz Sara Simaei, Co-Chair  
Imran Kamal  
Andrea Barclay  
Carolyn Leach  
Jessica Farshait

**Administration, Layout, and Design:**  
Kristy Joplin



**VOLUNTEER**

AFCC-O encourages members to be part of our committees. Often the pathway to board membership is through committee participation.

[Apply Now!](#)



**Follow Us, Like Us, Share Us!**

Facebook @afccontario    LinkedIn afcc-o    [www.afccontario.ca](http://www.afccontario.ca)

Except where otherwise indicated, the articles in this AFCC-O Newsletter represent the opinions and views of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions or views of the AFCC, the AFCC-O, or any of the officers of either organization.