



## A Busy Fall



The fall tends to be the busiest season for the OCR and this year has been no exception. In September, Barry traveled to the West Coast and attended a conference on aging in Corner Brook. He was the guest speaker at Western Health's Annual General Meeting in Burgeo, and met with numerous citizens during scheduled outreach meetings.

In October, the OCR celebrated Good Governance Week. We hosted a coffee for our departmental contacts, constituency assistants and members of non-governmental organizations. The event provided a good opportunity for attendees to network and share ideas for improving service to the public. We also hosted a cake-cutting ceremony to acknowledge our 10<sup>th</sup> year anniversary.



*Citizens' Representative, Barry Fleming*

In November, we drafted an extensive submission in response to Service NL's request for input on possible amendments to the *Residential Tenancies Act*. These submissions can be accessed on our website at [www.citizensrep.nl.ca](http://www.citizensrep.nl.ca). Barry traveled to Bonavista North to visit with a variety of seniors' groups to provide information about the work of the Office. We also released our fifth Annual Digest which highlights some of the work of the Office over the past fiscal year.

## The OCR Evolves

In the September Edition of *OCR Insights* we described the re-introduction of the ombudsman concept in Newfoundland and Labrador throughout the passage of the *Citizens' Representative Act*. After Mr. Frazer March's short tenure as Citizens' Representative, Mr. Robert Jenkins was appointed to the role in an acting capacity on October 25, 2005. Mr. Jenkins was a retired senior public servant. His personal traits and work experience enlivened the Office's staff and instilled a sense of purpose for its work. He introduced a system of departmental designates within the public service who were responsible for responding to the OCR's complaints. His extensive management experience aided in reducing the back log of complaints which had accumulated over the first turbulent years of the Office.

In December 2006, by a unanimous resolution of the House of Assembly, Barry Fleming was appointed Citizens' Representative. Under his tenure, the Office has expanded upon the work of Mr. Jenkins. Internal management controls were introduced to track the Office's progress on concluding effective investigations. An emphasis was placed on outreach. This entailed traveling the

Province and giving citizens from outside the Northeast Avalon an opportunity to meet with Mr. Fleming. A series of clear and concise promotional materials were drafted and circulated to citizens and community groups. An effort has been made to train staff which has resulted in staff retention and the existence of corporate knowledge which enhances investigative efficiency.

The Office of the Citizens' Representative is well positioned to undertake the ombudsman function in the future. With an emphasis on the guiding principle that the OCR and public employees serve the same citizens, staff are eager to assist citizens in seeking fairness and finding solutions as they use government policies and programs.

### Did you know?



Our staff have backgrounds in social work, law, economics, political science, environmental health, paralegal studies and business administration.

## The OCR Launches a Book Drive



***"Books are the quietest and most constant of friends; they are the most accessible and wisest of counselors, and the most patient of teachers". ~ Charles W. Eliot***

An idea for a book drive originated during our Good Governance Week Essay Contest. The Contest was open to all Grade Six Social Study Students in the Province. Through the Good Governance Essay Contest we wanted to hear from students about what they considered to be good governance practices by the provincial government and how important good governance is to them.

We received an entry from St. Peter's School in Black Tickle, which spoke of a student's love of reading and the fact that there is no library in the community. The student wrote that "I find it a shame that we don't have a library packed tight with books like other communities or city has. Man, I like to have a library in Black Tickle so I and everyone else can read all kids books everyday".

The essay submission lead the OCR to initiate contact with the Principal of St. Peter's School to inquire about the school's library facilities and to determine if they were able to accommodate new reading materials. The principal acknowledged that their school had received some funding this year for new books; however, they would gladly accept a donation of books for their library.

The OCR launched a book drive within our office building and was overwhelmed and very appreciative of the response we received. Contributions came from various employees in the Beothuck Building, St. Andrews Elementary, Beachy Cove Elementary and the Portugal Cove - St. Philips Lions Club. Some private citizens made monetary donations which were used to purchase new books for the school. Our book drive collected approximately 200 new and gently used books which were shipped to St. Peter's School.



*Assistant Citizens' Representative, Bradley Moss and Karen Burse, Investigator*

**This day in.....1989**

Our final tribute to our forerunner office, the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner, is this excerpt of a case description from Mr. Ambrose Peddle, who held the Parliamentary Commissioner’s post from 1975-1990. In this case Mr. Peddle showed that the Ombudsman Office does not always agree with the truth of the allegations laid before it. Mr. Peddle wrote to a complainant in response to an allegation by a citizen that child welfare officials were “misleading, callous, heartless and uncaring.”

“While I can make no comment on the Adoption Agencies in other Provinces... I totally reject any suggestion that the Child Welfare Division of this Province is misleading, callous, heartless or uncaring. This Division is staffed by professional and dedicated people who over the years have established an enviable reputation for demonstrating qualities which are exactly opposite to those which you attribute to them. They have a very heavy responsibility with regard to the proper placement of children and I think that, on thinking the matter over, you should agree in fairness that your remarks are unwarranted.”

**Seeking Fairness**

In a case of exercising discretion when discretion is called for, a mom called to complain that her daughter had been denied a new provincial MCP card because, as per policy, she was not in possession of a birth certificate documenting the correct spelling of her name. The problem developed because her previous MCP card had her name listed as “Ashlin”, however, she was properly named “Ashlen.” The mom felt that the requirement of applying and paying for a new birth certificate for the sake of a vowel was onerous. The

OCR agreed to make inquiries about the policy and Ashlen’s case, specifically. A senior official in the Department considered the OCR’s inquiry and advised that a government issued photo identification card with the correct spelling would be acceptable in the case of Ashlen’s renewal. She attended with her provincial driver’s permit and was immediately issued a new MCP card.



**Finding Solutions**

An MHA referred a disadvantaged couple to the OCR after they were advised that their co-pay amount on prescription drugs was 68.2% and that coverage would be terminated within the next 30 days. The OCR inquired of the Department of Health and Community Services and during the discussion, it was noted that the couple’s income had declined, and that certain documents from the Canada Revenue Agency and an updated prescription history were required to conduct a full assessment of the couple’s situation. The OCR facilitated transmission of the required documents and when the assessment was complete, the co-pay amount was reduced by over 35% and coverage was extended for an additional six months.



**Season’s Greetings and Best Wishes for the New Year!**

**Barry Fleming & Staff**



**Questions? Comments?**

Is your department, agency or community group interested in learning more about the OCR, its services and processes? Do you have a suggestion or question to be addressed in a future edition of *Insights*? Call us at 1-800-559-0079 or (709) 729-7647, or e-mail [citrep@gov.nl.ca](mailto:citrep@gov.nl.ca).

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