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JHSO LAUNCHES NEW FREE ONLINE TRAINING HUB TO BETTER SUPPORT FRONTLINE STAFF AND HELP INDIVIDUALS GET THE CIVIL REMEDIES THEY DESERVE

NEW PROGRAM WILL HELP FRONTLINE WORKERS WHO SUPPORT JUSTICE-INVOLVED POPULATIONS PROVIDE TIMELY ACCESS TO LEGAL INFORMATION AND SERVICES

TORONTO – Today, the John Howard Society of Ontario (JHSO) launched a first-of-its-kind in Canada free [online civil legal training and education platform](#) for frontline staff who serve justice-involved individuals in Ontario, to help break down barriers to accessing civil justice.

“This brand new online platform – the JHS Learning Hub – is all about better equipping and empowering frontline workers with the knowledge to spot and respond to their clients’ common civil legal issues, like evictions or loss of income assistance, earlier, and as a result, prevent their escalation. By intervening sooner and connecting them more effectively to local legal supports, frontline workers can help stop the costly cycle of collateral justice consequences,” said Aileen Simon, Education and Strategic Initiatives Coordinator, JHSO.

These free training and public legal education resources directly address information gaps identified in JHSO’s 2020 research [report](#), *Legally Bound: Addressing the Civil Legal Needs of Justice-Involved Ontarians*. That study revealed that unaddressed housing, employment, and other civil legal issues negatively impact the lives of justice-involved Ontarians long after they exit the criminal justice system, and that the lack of awareness and access to legal support to resolve such issues is undermining reintegration.

The report also found that justice-involved individuals tend to harbour distrust for legal systems, and that when they encounter legal challenges in their day-to-day life, they tend to reach out first to trusted frontline social service staff at community agencies. “We know from a growing body of Ontario-based research that frontline staff at social service agencies build a rapport and trust with their justice-involved clients and tend to be the people those in need turn to in times of crisis,” adds Simon. “These resources help ensure that these frontline staff are well-positioned to act as ‘trusted intermediaries,’ improving access to legal information, and providing warm and supported referrals to legal help.”

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Some of the key features of the new JHS Learning Hub include:

- Engaging training modules, organized by category, that represent the most common civil legal issues facing justice-involved populations, such as housing, income assistance, employment and accessing legal aid;
- Short, animated training videos that walk users through how to spot common civil legal issues and provide actionable steps they can take to help clients address them;
- A suite of complementary written handout resources that summarize key points or processes within the civil legal system, including COVID-specific changes to legal processes;
- An Interactive FAQ that can be used to search specific topics and get easy, quick answers to common questions;
- A certification option for professional development, where users will be able to track their progress as they work through the training videos and earn certificates once they complete a set of videos within a particular module, should they choose to register.

The new online training hub will act as a centralized resource to guide frontline staff in the justice-serving sector through the process of making quality referrals to relevant community legal information, advice and resources. JHS Learning Hub users will also be able to access the site's referral map which highlights some of the key referral locations based on each local JHS office across the province.

In building the JHS Learning Hub, JHSO benefitted from the advice of its Civil Legal Needs Advisory committee, which is comprised of a diverse range of legal and social service experts from across the province, who bring a wealth of experience providing a range of Legal Aid, community legal clinic services as well as specialty legal services. The resources were also piloted and evaluated among JHS frontline staff, and refined based on evaluation findings.

Quotes

"People who have been involved with the criminal justice system often have other legal needs. These legal matters can have nothing to do with criminal charges, but they can worsen and exacerbate the cycle of poverty and incarceration, making it even more difficult for someone to return to a law-abiding life. This resource will help address these issues before they become insurmountable. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

-Keith Taller, Counsel, Legal Aid Ontario

"The JHS Learning Hub aims to assist front-line staff with training, resources and referrals to justice-involved individuals, who often experience intersecting legal issues and consequences. Especially, in the time of COVID-19, and given what we know about the prevalence of anti-Black racism in various legal institutions, this hub is crucial in helping front-line staff spot collateral legal issues in a timely and meaningful way."

-Fareeda Adam, Staff Lawyer, Black Legal Action Centre



“The resources on the JHS Learning Hub are timely and essential for helping people who are justice-involved navigate the challenges of their lives. This is such an innovative and proactive approach to improve the lives of people who really need it, a need we identified in our recent research study, [“Stymied, Stigmatized, and Socially Excluded.”](#) The Hub will help trusted intermediaries respond to the problems around housing, income security, and work being experienced by people who have been incarcerated. Building legal rights awareness, red flagging legal issues, and making good referrals for legal help will make a real and significant difference.”

- Michele Leering, Executive Director, Community Advocacy & Legal Centre

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For more than 90 years, the John Howard Society of Ontario has worked to keep the humanity in justice. Through 19 local offices across Ontario, the JHSO delivers more than 80 evidence-based programs and services in support of those affected by the criminal justice system. In doing so, we help build safer, more resilient communities. JHSO’s Centre of Research & Policy specializes in bridging the gap between analysis and frontline service delivery. By collaborating closely with our local offices, the Centre’s team develops policy positions that truly reflect the needs of each community, advances those positions to governments and other organizations, educates the public on the critical issues, and evaluates program efficacy to guide future work.

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