**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**September 15, 2014**

**DON’T DRINK THE KOOL AID!**

**Legal Clinic Transformation “Vision” Threatens Access to Justice for Poor People in Toronto**

Legal Aid Ontario is funding a project that is threatening to close all 14 community-based clinics in the City of Toronto and replace them with 3 mega service centres meant to serve all low-income and marginalized people in the entire city!  This proposed “Vision” comes from an initiative called the GTA Legal Clinic Transformation Project.  Originally established to look at ways to improve community legal services, the project has itself transformed into something altogether different.  The proposed “Vision” is a poisoned Kool Aid that, if consumed, would result in community Boards of legal clinics voting themselves out of existence.

For over 30 years, legal clinic staff and community volunteers have worked together in campaigns for tenant protection, workers rights, adequate social assistance, reasonable compensation for injured workers, and justice for immigrants and refugees.  The present recipe of “Transformation” will destroy decades of community history, thousands of professional, social and inter-agency relationships – and kill community-led law reform.  Uninformed by any meaningful or broad-based consultation with low-income communities and clients, the Transformation Project has produced a dangerous Vision which they soft-pedal as a “merger” or an “amalgamation”, but it is actually a destructive “transformation” that will reduce access to justice for poor people.

Legal Aid Ontario and Transformation Project leaders have claimed that 15 of the 17 legal clinics in the GTA support the project.  This is not so.  On Wednesday, September 10th, the Chair of Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Services Board met with the Board Chairs and representatives of 13 GTA legal clinics.  Only 3 of them were strongly in favour of the Vision, while rest had serious concerns about the process and proposed Vision or were outright opposed to it.

Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Services has called a public meeting for Thursday, September 18th at Toronto City Hall to update the community on developments concerning legal clinic “Transformation”.  The meeting will be the beginning of a meaningful dialogue with the community members and partners that will hopefully lead to the rejection of the proposed Vision and the development of more constructive approaches to reforming the legal clinic system.

Guest Speakers at the Toronto City Hall Meeting, September 18th will include:

 Gary Newhouse, Barrister and Solicitor, KBCLS Board Chair

 Mary Jane Mossman, Professor of Law, Osgoode Hall Law School, York University

 Axelle Janczur, Executive Director, Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services

 Kevin Lee, Executive Director, Scadding Court Community Centre

 Bob Luker, Past Coordinator, Community Worker Program, George Brown College

 Oriel Varga, Community Organizer, on issues of Law and Social Justice

The meeting will be held in the City of Toronto Council Chambers, commencing at 7:00 pm.

 For more information, please contact: Timothy Maxwell at KBCLS at 416-924-4244