

Legal Aid Botswana bringing justice to Kgalagadi South

On 6 April 2017, Legal Aid Botswana had the official opening of its Legal Aid Centre in Tsabong, the administrative centre of the Kgalagadi South District in Botswana, located near the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. It is 520km southwest of Gaborone and has an estimated population of 8,939 (Census 2011).



Peter Brits, CEO of Legal Aid Botswana at the official opening of the Tsabong Legal Aid Centre

The Minister of Defence, Justice and Security, Shaw Kgathi, said in his opening address, “Legal Aid Botswana began as a pilot project in 2011 and was established as a permanent independent public entity, through the Legal Aid Act on 1 January 2015.

“It has offices in Gaborone, Maun, Francistown, Kasane and now Tsabong. During the course of the eleventh National Development Plan (NDP 11), Ghanzi and Palapye shall have offices opened to make justice physically accessible to many more people.

“Since its inception in 2011 up to 31 January 2017, over 16 000 people have applied for legal aid services countrywide, which demonstrates the public’s enthusiastic response. Ultimately, every indigent Motswana should have access to justice.

“Legal aid services are provided in three forms. First, there is legal education to equip Botswana with knowledge about their legal rights and responsibilities. Most of us, do not know our legal rights and as such, we become victims at the hands of those who know the law better. For the same reason we can also find ourselves on the wrong side of the law.

“Secondly, Legal Aid Botswana provides legal advice. Indigent citizens are advised to come to one of its offices before they sign any contract if they do not understand the terms. The third area of assistance is legal representation in civil matters. If a matter needs to be taken to court, it will provide a lawyer to represent an indigent citizen in the Magistrates’ Courts, the

High Court, Industrial Court, Land Tribunal and the Court of Appeal.

He concluded, "I urge you all to use these services and this facility. Other events today will provide an opportunity to understand the work and operations of Legal Aid Botswana better. I declare the Tsabong Legal Aid Centre officially opened for your benefit, development and enjoyment, as is your right as a Motswana."

Peter Brits, CEO of Legal Aid Botswana explained that legal aid had been first discussed in 1998, when he had addressed the Botswana meeting of the Commonwealth Conference of Judges and Magistrates on the need for legal aid in developing countries. The expression of interest from the Botswana government had come in 2009 and he had begun the pilot project on 1 April 2011.

"The physical expansion of offices across Botswana is to be strengthened by the introduction of a mobisite that will enable citizens, with basic smartphones, to review the services, download forms or send queries to a lawyer. Later this year, we will have a toll-free number that will also improve our communication abilities. Given that Botswana has a population of two million spread over a country the size of France, it is imperative that we use the latest in technology to serve our clients.

"We are also launching a pilot project in Maun, whereby a camper van will travel across the Okavango Delta area, providing a mobile Legal Aid office. If this is successful, we will use Tsabong as a base to extend our services deeper into the surrounding villages, many of whom are very remote from legal services.

"However, our main strength comes from our teams, who are willing to serve one another and have a passion to bring justice to the people and my thanks go to all of them who have made today possible.

"The Botswana Defence Force defends our country from external threats and Legal Aid Botswana protects its people from legal threats and injustice," concluded Brits.

Through industrial theatre and song, the Legal Aid Botswana travelling roadshow brought home the services that the Legal Aid Centre offers to people who have been fired unfairly or abused. The theme song encouraged everyone to dance, which was followed by a lunch for the community that attended.

Legal Aid Botswana vision statement is 'Justice for the Poor' and its mission is 'taking quality legal services to the poor through education, advice and representation.' It achieves this through its core values of passion for justice; innovation; accountability and good governance; service excellence; and empathy.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>