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“PBSC’s Family Law Project is one of the most important access to justice initiatives of the last 20 years. The North York family court is one of the biggest and busiest family courts in the country. Without the assistance of the PBSC volunteers, it would literally implode.”



Trailblazing and innovation: these have been the hallmarks of Justice Harvey Brownstone’s illustrious career. From pioneering new support enforcement tools while Director of the Family Responsibility Office for Ontario, to being Canada’s first openly gay judge when called to the provincial bench in 1995, to writing a book to help families get through divorce without harming the kids, Justice Brownstone, the first and only sitting judge in the world to host a public education television show, has never stopped promoting access to justice in new ways.

In 1997 Justice Brownstone opened the door to the creation of PBSC’s Family Law Project (FLP) by speaking at the University of Toronto law school about the “major problem with access to justice in the family court”. He explains: “The judges were all aware that we were drowning in self-represented litigants. But at that time, nobody was talking about what to do about it.”

In response to Justice Brownstone’s speech, PBSC – which at that time was in operation only at U of T – formed the FLP. Today, it is a multiple-award winning project that operates in dozens of schools and courts across Canada.

Justice Brownstone describes the FLP as “the most important initiative in the last 20 years that has made a direct and positive impact on access to justice in family law.” Having spent many years presiding at the North York Family Court, he says: “this is one of the biggest and busiest family courts in the country. Without the assistance of the PBSC volunteers, it would literally not be able to function. It would implode”.

Now a justice on Ontario’s criminal court, Brownstone is determined to blaze yet another trail. With almost half of all cases in family court involving a criminal component, he has a new goal. “We need an integrated system for cases where families are involved. I’ve got five and a half years left and that’s going to be my next mission,” he says. “One judge. One family. That’s my motto.”

In May of 2016, to mark the occasion of its 20th anniversary and to honour all that he has achieved in promoting access to justice, PBSC presented Justice Brownstone with a PBSC Supporter Award. The award is given out once every 5 years to an individual who has gone above and beyond in their support for PBSC. The inaugural award, presented during PBSC’s 15th Anniversary celebration, went to PBSC’s founder, Ronald J. Daniels.

The Honourable Justice Harvey P. Brownstone,
Ontario Court of Justice & Recipient, PBSC Supporter Award