



On April 10, 2024 allegations of the Registrant's professional misconduct were referred to the Discipline Committee for hearing, on a date yet to be fixed. Please see the Notice of Hearing below:

**ONTARIO COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORKERS
AND SOCIAL SERVICE WORKERS**

IN THE MATTER OF Sections 26 and 28 of the *Social Work and Social Service Work Act*, 1998, S.O. 1998, Chapter 31;

AND IN THE MATTER OF a hearing directed to be held by the Discipline Committee of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers under the *Social Work and Social Service Work Act*, 1998;

AND IN THE MATTER OF allegations respecting the professional conduct of Laura Dowler, a Social Worker and registrant with the said College;

NOTICE OF HEARING

TAKE NOTICE that a hearing will take place on a date to be fixed by the Registrar at the hour of 9:30 o'clock in the forenoon (or as soon after that time as a panel can be convened for the purpose of conducting the hearing) electronically, in writing or in person at the Board Room of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers, 250 Bloor Street East, Suite 1000, Toronto, Ontario before the Discipline Committee of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (to be confirmed). The hearing will be held pursuant to the provisions of sections 26 and 28 of the *Social Work and Social Service Work Act, 1998* (the "Act") and pursuant to the Regulations made thereunder, for the purpose of hearing and determining allegations of professional misconduct against you, Laura Dowler, which allegations were referred to the Discipline Committee pursuant to section 25(1) of the Act.

AND TAKE NOTICE that you are alleged to be guilty of professional misconduct within the meaning of section 26(2) of the Act in that you are alleged to have engaged in conduct that contravenes the Act, Ontario Regulation 384/00 (the "**Professional Misconduct Regulation**"), Schedule "A" to By-law No. 66 of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers, being the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers Code

of Ethics (the "**Code of Ethics**"), and Schedule "B" to By-law No. 66 of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers, being the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers Standards of Practice Handbook (the "**Handbook**")¹.

I. The following are particulars of the said allegations:

1. You are, and were at all times relevant to these allegations, a registered social work member with the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (the "**College**").
2. At all material times, you were in private practice, practising at Grand River Counselling (the "**Facility**"), which you owned. You provided counselling services at the Facility.

A. Client A & B

3. You began providing individual counselling to A ("**Client A**"), a male [job title], in or about 2019. You began providing individual counselling services to B ("**Client B**"), Client A's spouse, in or about 2019. You also attended and/or supervised couples counselling sessions with Client A and Client B in or about 2019-2020.
 4. From about June 21, 2019 to about September 30, 2022, you provided you provided social work services, including, but not limited to, counselling services, to Client A (the "**Relevant Period A**").
 5. To your knowledge, Client A was a vulnerable client whose history was well known to you, including a history of trauma, and/or had difficulties with his marriage.
- i. Sexual Abuse and Boundary Violations and Related Misconduct
6. During the Relevant Period A, you engaged in sexual abuse and/or boundary violating behaviours that were not appropriate to the service provided and/or were in a conflict of interest and/or a dual relationship. These violations include, but are not limited to:
 - a. hugging;

¹ By-law 24, as amended by By-law Nos. 32 and 48 and revoked effective July 1, 2008 by By-law 66, continues to apply to conduct which occurred prior to July 1, 2008.

- b. exchanging text messages of a personal nature and inappropriate to the service provided;
 - c. purchasing ice cream for Client A;
 - d. telling Client A that you used LSD as a teenager and/or about your struggles in life;
 - e. arranging for session(s) to take place at Client A's home; and/or
 - f. attending at Client A's home for approximately four (4) hours between approximately 10:30pm and 2:30am.
7. On or about September 29-September 30, 2022, you engaged in sexual touching and behaviour and/or made remarks to Client A of an inappropriate and/or sexual nature that were not appropriate to the service provided, some or all of which you engaged in without Client A's consent, including:
- a. kissing;
 - b. putting your hand on Client A's thigh and/or lap;
 - c. putting your head on Client A's shoulder;
 - d. cuddling Client A;
 - e. rubbing Client A's genitals through his clothing;
 - f. telling Client A you wanted to have sex with him, and/or vigorous sex, and/or shower sex;
 - g. telling Client A you fantasized about him;
 - h. unbuckling Client A's belt;
 - i. unzipping Client A's pants;
 - j. referencing your breasts and/or telling Client A you had great breasts and/or that he would like your breasts;
8. You attended Client A's home on September 29, 2022 at approximately 10:30pm. You did not leave Client A's home, despite being asked to leave. Eventually, you left Client A's home on September 30, 2022, at approximately 2am.

9. You used information that you learned during your professional relationship with Client A and/or Client B to encourage Client A to engage in sexual touching with you, and/or for other purposes such as to coerce, improperly influence, harass, abuse or exploit Client A, including as follows:
 - a. During counselling sessions with Client A and/or Client B and/or both, you learned that Client A and Client B engaged in ‘vigorous’ sex. You later told Client A you wanted to have ‘vigorous’ sex with him.
 - b. On or about September 30, 2022, you told Client A that, if he terminated his counselling relationship with you and/or did not engage in sexual touching with you, he would be deprived of support and/or counselling services, and/or that it would threaten his WSIB entitlement.

ii. Conduct During the Investigation

10. The College Investigator requested copies of text messages from you that you exchanged with Client A. The College Investigator also obtained copies of text messages from Client A.
11. The copies of text messages that you provided had certain text message(s) missing and/or deleted and/or altered.

iii. Conduct During Prior Complaint Investigation

12. On or about July 23, 2021, you were advised that the College received a complaint from Client B, which included but not limited to allegations that you were in a conflict of interest when you provided individual counselling to Client B and Client A, and oversaw their couples counselling. Client A was interviewed by the College in the investigation.
13. During the investigation of Client B’s complaint, you violated boundaries, and/or failed to conduct yourself in a manner which demonstrates respect for both the complainant and the College, and/or used your professional position of authority to coerce, improperly influence, and exploit Client A, by:
 - a. discussing a College investigation into your conduct with Client A; and/or
 - b. communicating with Client A about his response(s), and/or information he provided (or was going to provide), to the College Investigator.

iv. Record Keeping Deficiencies

14. Your clinical records in relation to Client A did not contain the text messages that you exchanged with Client A.
15. Your clinical records in relation to Client A were incomplete and/or did not facilitate monitoring and evaluation, or outline the effects of the service/intervention, and/or the clinical assessment and plan.

Client C

16. You began providing individual counselling to C (“**Client C**”), a male [job title], in or about 2020.
17. From about February 7, 2020 to about November 25, 2020, you provided social work services, including, but not limited to, counselling services, to Client C (the “**Relevant Period C**”).
18. To your knowledge, Client C was a vulnerable client whose history was well known to you, including substance abuse and other mental health concerns, and/or had difficulties in his marriage.
19. During the Relevant Period C, you engaged in boundary violating behaviours that were not appropriate to the service provided and/or were in a conflict of interest and/or a dual relationship. These violations include, but are not limited to exchanging text messages, and frequently having two (2) hour treatment sessions.
20. During and/or after the Relevant Period C, you engaged in sexual touching and behaviour and/or made remarks to Client C of an inappropriate and/or sexual nature that were not appropriate to the service provided, including:
 - a. kissing,
 - b. sexual touching;
 - c. engaging in oral sex; and/or
 - d. telling Client C you loved him and/or had feelings for him.
21. You had an intimate/sexual relationship with Client C that started in the fall of 2020 and ended in or around the winter of 2021.
22. Your clinical records in relation to Client C did not contain the text messages that you exchanged with Client C.

23. Your clinical records in relation to Client C were incomplete and/or did not facilitate monitoring and evaluation, or outline the effects of the service/intervention, and/or the clinical assessment and plan.

Client D

24. You began providing individual counselling to D (“**Client D**”), a male [job title], in or about 2019.

25. Beginning on or about November 27, 2019, you provided social work services, including, but not limited to, counselling services, to Client D (the “**Relevant Period D**”).

26. To your knowledge, Client D was a vulnerable client whose history was well known to you, including a history of emotional issues including stress and anger.

27. During the Relevant Period D, you engaged in boundary violating behaviours that were not appropriate to the service provided and/or were in a conflict of interest and/or a dual relationship. These violations include, but are not limited to:

- a. exchanging text messages;
- b. accepting gifts from and/or purchasing gifts for Client D, including a safe and/or coffee and/or tea.

28. You knew that Client D’s hobbies included collecting and/or refurbishing safes. You mentioned to Client D that you would like to have a safe. Client D later purchased a safe for approximately \$200.00, and gifted you that safe.

29. You failed to assume full responsibility for demonstrating that Client D was not exploited, coerced or manipulated, intentionally or unintentionally, by you.

30. Your clinical records in relation to Client D did not contain the text messages that you exchanged with Client D.

31. Your clinical records in relation to Client D were incomplete and/or did not facilitate monitoring and evaluation, or outline the effects of the service/intervention, and/or the clinical assessment and plan.

ii. Conduct During the Investigation

32. The College Investigator requested copies of text messages from you that you exchanged with Client D. The College Investigator also obtained copies of text messages from Client D.
33. The copies of text messages that you provided had certain text message(s) missing and/or deleted and/or altered.

It is alleged that by reason of engaging in some or all of the conduct outlined above, you are guilty of professional misconduct as set out in section 26(2)(a) and (c) of the *Act*:

- a) In that you violated **Section 2.2 of the Professional Misconduct Regulation** by failing to meet the standards of the profession, including (but not limited to): **Principle I of the Handbook (commented on in Interpretations 1.5, 1.6 and 1.7)** by failing to be aware of your values, attitudes and needs and how those impact on your professional relationship with clients; by failing to distinguish your needs and interests from those of your clients to ensure that, within your professional relationship, clients' needs and interests remained paramount; by failing to maintain awareness and consideration of the purpose, mandate and function of the organization by which you were employed and how these impact and limit professional relationships with clients.
- b) In that you violated **Sections 2.2, 2.6 and/or 2.10 of the Professional Misconduct Regulation** by failing to meet the standards of the profession, including (but not limited to): **Principle II of the Handbook (commented on in Interpretations 2.2, 2.2.1, 2.2.2, 2.2.3, 2.2.4, 2.2.5 and 2.2.8)** by:
 - i. failing to ensure clients are protected from an abuse of power during and after the provision of professional services, and/or failing to establish and maintain clear and appropriate boundaries in a professional relationship;
 - ii. engaging in a professional relationship that constitutes a conflict of interest and/or in a situation in which you ought reasonably to have known that the client or former client would be at risk in any way; failing to evaluate professional relationships and other situations involving clients or former clients for potential conflicts of interest and seeking consultation to assist in identifying and dealing with such potential conflicts of interest; failing to avoid conflicts of interest and/or dual relationships with clients or former clients that could impair your professional judgment or increase risk of exploitation or harm to clients; failing to declare a conflict of interest and taking appropriate steps to address it and to eliminate the conflict;

- iii. engaging in sexual relations with clients;
 - iv. failing to co-operate fully with all policies and procedures of the Complaints, Discipline and Fitness to Practise Committees and/or failing to conduct yourself in a manner which demonstrates respect for both the complainant and the College;
 - v. soliciting or using information from clients to acquire, either directly or indirectly, advantage or material benefits;
 - vi. failing to ensure you do not use your position of authority to coerce, improperly influence, harass, abuse or exploit a client;
 - vii. engaging in conduct that could reasonably be perceived as reflecting negatively on the profession of social service work;
- c) In that you violated **Section 2.2 of the Professional Misconduct Regulation** by failing to meet the standards of the profession, including (but not limited to): **Principle IV of the Handbook (commented on in Interpretations 4.1.1 and footnote 3)** by:
- i. failing to record information in a way that conforms with accepted service or intervention standards and protocols within the profession of social work and social service work, relevant to the services provided, and in a format that facilitates the monitoring and evaluation of the effects of the service/intervention;
- d) In that you violated **Section 2.2 of the Professional Misconduct Regulation** by failing to meet the standards of the profession, including (but not limited to): **Principle VIII of the Handbook (commented on in Interpretations 8.1, 8.2.1, 8.2.2, 8.2.3, 8.4, 8.6 and 8.7)** by:
- i. failing to ensure that sexual misconduct did not occur;
 - ii. engaging in physical sexual relations with a client;
 - iii. touching, of a sexual nature, of the client by the member;
 - iv. engaging in behaviour or making remarks of a sexual nature towards a client, other than behaviour or remarks of a clinical nature appropriate to the service provided;
 - v. failing to state clearly that behaviour of a sexual nature is inappropriate by virtue of the professional relationship;

- vi. engaging in sexual relations with a client at the time of referral, assessment, counselling, psychotherapy (including psychotherapy services and/or the controlled act of psychotherapy), or other professional services;
 - vii. engaging in sexual relations with a client or former client to whom the member has provided psychotherapy and/or counselling services, or with respect to whom the members have performed the controlled act of psychotherapy;
- e) In that you violated **Section 2.3 of the Professional Misconduct Regulation** by doing anything to a client in the course of practising the profession in a situation in which consent is required by law, without such a consent;
 - f) In that you violated **Section 2.5 of the Professional Misconduct Regulation** by abusing a client sexually, verbally psychologically or emotionally, including sexually abusing a client withing the meaning of subsection 43(4) of the *Act*;
 - g) In that you violated **Section 2.6 of the Professional Misconduct Regulation** by using information obtained during a professional relationship with a client or using one's professional position of authority to coerce, improperly influence, harass or exploit a client or former client;
 - h) In that you violated **Section 2.10 of the Professional Misconduct Regulation** by providing a professional service while in a conflict of interest;
 - i) In that you violated **Section 2.19 and/or 2.20 of the Professional Misconduct Regulation** by falsifying a record relating to your practice; and/or by failing to keep records as required by the regulations and standards of the profession;
 - j) In that you violated **Section 2.33 of the Professional Misconduct Regulation** by failing to co-operate in a College investigation;
 - k) In that you violated **Section 2.36 of the Professional Misconduct Regulation** by engaging in conduct or performing an act relevant to the practice of the profession that, having regard to all circumstances, would reasonably be regarded by members as disgraceful, dishonourable or unprofessional.

AND TAKE NOTICE that the Discipline Committee may make an order under Section 26(4), (5), (6), (7), (8) and (9) of the Act, or any of them, in respect of any or all of the above allegations.

AND FURTHER TAKE NOTICE that the parties (including the College and you) shall be given the opportunity to examine before the hearing any documents that will be given in evidence at the hearing.

AND FURTHER TAKE NOTICE that if the hearing is proposed to take place in writing, either of the parties (including the College and you) may, in accordance with the procedures set out in the *Statutory Powers Procedure Act*, RSO 1990, c S.22 (the “SPPA”) and the Discipline Committee’s Rules of Procedure, seek to require that the hearing be held electronically or orally by satisfying the Discipline Committee that there is good reason for not holding a written hearing.

AND FURTHER TAKE NOTICE that if the hearing is proposed to take place electronically, either of the parties (including the College and you) may, in accordance with the procedures set out in the SPPA and the Discipline Committee’s Rules of Procedure, seek to require that the hearing be held orally by satisfying the Discipline Committee that holding an electronic hearing is likely to cause the party significant prejudice.

AND FURTHER TAKE NOTICE that at the said hearing, you are entitled to be present and to be represented by counsel.

IF YOU DO NOT ATTEND AT THE HEARING IN ACCORDANCE WITH THIS NOTICE OF HEARING, THE DISCIPLINE COMMITTEE MAY PROCEED WITH THE HEARING, AND MAY DEAL WITH THE ABOVE ALLEGATIONS AGAINST YOU, IN YOUR ABSENCE AND WITHOUT ANY FURTHER NOTICE TO YOU.

Dated at Toronto, the 24th day of April 2024.

By: _____

Registrar and CEO

Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers