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Lawyer rides ‘self-represented’ wave

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By Rick Drennan

MISSISSAUGA — Family lawyer Andrew Feldstein has launched FamilyLawHelp.ca, an information-packed website designed specifically for Self-Represented Litigants (also called Unrepresented Litigants or Do-it-Yourselfers) who are thinking of ending their marriages or common-law relationships. It’s located on Semenyk Court in Mississauga.

“Comprehensive legal services are best, but if you can’t afford that during your separation and divorce, FamilyLawHelp.ca is a very good, second best option. Clients can get educated, get started on their family law matter right away, and save money by doing a lot of the work themselves,” says Feldstein.

“Clients can now purchase only those services they choose—or the services they feel they can afford,” he adds.

Record numbers of Canadians are appearing without a lawyer in family court all across the country. University of Windsor law professor Julie Macfarlane estimates that as many as 80 per cent of family court cases in Canada involve Self-Represented Litigants; that’s up by half from 1993.

Judges, however, still hold Self-Represented Litigants to the same standard of work quality and following court processes as they would expect from a lawyer.

“We have been working on this vast website for quite some time because I strongly believe in improving access to justice in Canada. FamilyLawHelp.ca is intended to be a straight-forward resource for Self-Represented Litigants,” explains Feldstein.

Feldstein explains that in his 20 years as a divorce lawyer, most people seriously misunderstand the process, the costs, the obligations, and responsibilities of getting separated and divorced.

The website explains step-by-step the Canadian separation and divorce process including, spousal support, division of property, child support, child access, and child custody,” adds Feldstein.

The site offers “unbundled legal services” where instead of providing comprehensive services to a client, a lawyer only handles the aspects that a client chooses. For example, clients can get any one of these, or a combination of these written: applications, answers, notices of motion, affidavits, and offers to settle. And the spouse handles the balance, to the best of his or her abilities.

Ontario residents can buy unbundled services such as coaching, drafting, legal research, legal opinions, and representing clients in court, or at a mediation or arbitration.

There are also helpful articles, frequently asked questions (FAQs), and actual court forms for free download. It can be accessed for free. There is no need to register on the site in order to read the hundreds of sections, hints, tips, and insights.

Feldstein says it provides Canadians with a private, discreet, source of information they can explore on their own, just to understand their rights and obligations if they decide to separate and divorce.

Feldstein is founder and managing partner of Feldstein Family Law Group, with offices in Mississauga, Markham, Toronto, and Vaughan.

He also launched an advocacy initiative in Fall 2013 — www.ItsTimeForJustice.ca. It wants to reduce bureaucracy, increase efficiency, and adoption of electronic documents.

<http://www.mississauga.com/news-story/4518471-lawyer-rides-self-represented-wave/>