

LawMatters

A Courthouse Libraries BC Program

Community Legal Information Forums: A Planning Guide

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LawMatters Community Legal Information Forums A Planning Guide

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Background and History

The LawMatters Community Legal Information Forums are an initiative of the LawMatters program of Courthouse Libraries BC, funded by the Law Foundation of BC. The goal of these forums is to create opportunities for library-engagement with other community agencies and organizations who provide legal information services to the public and/or their clients. More information on the LawMatters program may be accessed on our website: <https://www.courthouselibrary.ca/our-programs/lawmatters>

Community Legal Information Forums were originally designed to be held in-person. Two pilot forums were held in 2009: the first was hosted by the Chilliwack branch of Fraser Valley Regional Library on May 27, and the second forum was hosted by Squamish Public Library on October 21. Although the forums ceased in 2015 due to lack of staff time and funding, they began again in 2019 when LawMatters received a significant funding increase. The forums planned for 2020 were again halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, a desire to connect public library staff and community advocates with the goal of addressing local gaps in service led to a partnership between LawMatters/CLBC, Legal Aid BC, and PovNet. The three groups held a virtual Community Forums series throughout 2021, hosting 13 forums in all.

The content of this Planning Guide incorporates lessons learned and best practices determined from the 2009 in-person forums and the 2021 virtual forum series. It is expected that the guide will be revised periodically as forums continue to be held, as it was in 2016 and 2019. We hope it is helpful to those looking to host their own forums to support connections between libraries, local community organizations, legal advocates, and other trusted intermediaries.

Please feel free to adapt the following materials to suit your library; they are provided to be informative rather than prescriptive.

Goals of the Forums

LawMatters staff have used the **Community-Led Libraries Toolkit** (2007) <http://www.librariesincommunities.ca/> [PDF 148 pp] to guide our planning and set out core principles for library involvement with the community. Also see [Appendix I](#).

In accordance with this, the primary goals of the LawMatters' original forums initiative were to:

1. Provide an opportunity for local legal information providers to meet, update information, discuss local legal information issues, and provide a framework for possible future meetings or consultations.

"A Community-Led Service Planning Model focuses on working collaboratively with the community. Building relationships and partnerships with the community in order to consult with them is the foundation of this model. Understanding the community's needs as the community expresses

and prioritises them is essential to developing and enacting the Community-Led Service Planning model.”

“The Community-Led Service Planning Model emphasises connecting, consulting, and collaborating with community members in order to build relationships and partnerships. This is the first and most critical step toward creating an environment that lets library staff listen to and understand community needs. Building respectful and trusting relationships lets library staff see the library through community eyes.”

- Community-Led Libraries Toolkit, p. 26 - 27

2. Highlight legal information resources of the local library, identify useful resources which might be added to the library’s collection, situate the local library as a safe, reliable place for accessing legal information.

“Community asset mapping focuses on learning about the organised or formal groups in a community. It helps you learn about the services provided in the community and identify potential community partners, providing a launch pad for you to enter the community.”

- Community-Led Libraries Toolkit, p. 53

3. Share information from the LawMatters program, Clicklaw website (www.clicklaw.bc.ca), and Courthouse Libraries BC as may be appropriate.

The goals of the 2021 virtual Community Forums were similar; all three organizations (Legal Aid BC, PovNet, Courthouse Libraries) had been notified of local knowledge gaps by their front-line service staff. The forums aimed to bring trusted intermediaries in pre-determined geographic regions together into one virtual space to:

- Provide the opportunity to connect with other service providers;
- Learn what services their counterparts provided;
- Impart helpful information from the host organizations, and;
- Ultimately, make more effective referrals for members of the public seeking legal assistance.

Preparation for Holding a Forum

The guidelines below reflect forums that were hosted by local libraries with LawMatters staff involvement or hosted in partnership by LawMatters/CLBC, PovNet, and Legal Aid. Although the mediums for these forums differed (in-person vs. virtual), the same basic steps were followed in the preparation for each. We welcome libraries or other organizations to make use of these guidelines when hosting forums in their own communities.

- 1. Determine date and venue:** Discuss potential dates, venues, possible participants, and any other

issues (length of forum, catering, etc.). If there are key organizations you'd like to attend, you may want to check with them before finalizing the date.

2. Determine guest list: Assemble the guest list [see [Potential Participants](#) for starting points] and forum agenda [[Appendix III](#) for example]. If there are any inter-agency meetings currently taking place in the community, you can publicize the forum through them. Invitees may also know of other potential participants who would like to attend.

3. Send invites: Send out invitations [see [Sending Invitations](#) and [Appendix II](#)] and keep track of who is coming. It may be helpful to create a document to track who is responsible for sending out invites to which guests. Registration can be tracked in a similar document. Ideally, invites will be sent out 1 month prior to the forum. If some considerations regarding the forum may take longer to resolve but the date has been determined, send out 'save the date' notices to invitees ahead of proper invites to provide adequate notice. You can also send reminders to invitees, generally 2 weeks before and 1 week before the forum.

4. Finalize forum particulars: Particulars can include the structure of the forum (small discussion groups, large discussion, round table, etc.), agenda, roles of hosts, and post-forum evaluation method. In the virtual forums, the hosts recorded minutes and provided facilitators for small group discussion, so that participants could focus on the discussion. Note that the structure of the forums may need to shift depending on the number of participants. For example, a round table for introductions may be difficult with a large number of participants due to constraints of time. Finalizing these details may need to be done closer to the forum date.

5. Send agenda to registrants: Provide the agenda and any other preparatory materials deemed necessary to the participants (i.e. discussion questions).

6. Provide follow-up materials after the forum: The library may wish to put together a brochure or resource guide highlighting legal collection or information for participants to take with them [[Appendix IV](#)]. For our virtual forums, participants were given access to a shared Google Drive in which they could share contact information, posters and flyers, and the meeting minutes (recorded by the hosts). Also provide evaluation materials to participants (paper or online survey) to collect feedback.

Potential Participants – Starting Points

A key part of any legal information forum is identifying the participants you'd like to have present. You may already have a strong network or have worked with these organizations before. However, if you are looking for ideas on representatives to invite, here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Provincial service providers: Access Pro Bono, Community Legal Assistance Society, Rise Women's Legal Centre, Legal Aid BC
- Local Legal Aid Outreach Workers or Community Partners
- Local Transition Houses
- Local Courthouse Library staff
- Local Family Justice Centre

- Justice Access Centre
- RCMP Victim Services
- Community Resource Centre
- Youth Advocacy Association
- Specialized Victim Assistance
- Community Response Network
- Elizabeth Fry Society
- Immigration services: MOSAIC, SUCCESS, ISS of BC
- John Howard Society
- Native Courtworkers & Counselling Association of BC
- Native Friendship Centres
- Women's Centres
- Workers' Advisors Office
- Child & Youth Mental Health
- RCMP Community Policing
- Local Services for Seniors Group
- PovNet representative
- Canadian Mental Health Association workers for the region

There are many options and every community is different. This list is not exhaustive but can give you an idea of where to start. Try searching the Clicklaw HelpMap or PovNet Find an Advocate tool for organizations/services in your area.

Sending Invitations

Ideally, invitations will be sent out approximately one month before the forum, with reminders sent closer to the forum date. Those who are interested in the forum but unable to attend could forward brochures or posters for distribution to the participants - for the virtual forums, these were stored in a shared Google Drive. Final notes/meeting minutes and contact information could be sent to these parties after the forum.

You may choose to contact organizations ahead of time to determine who to invite and to establish a relationship. Here are a couple of template examples:

Sample Invitation #1:

INVITATION

Forum on public access to legal information resources in [Location]

Date:

Location:

Co-sponsors: [Library] and LawMatters Program of Courthouse Libraries BC

Purpose: An opportunity for community organizations to identify local legal information services and resources, identify collaborative opportunities, and discuss possible gaps or improvements in providing access to information.

Agenda: [Brief Agenda Outline –Provide Format (e.g. Roundtable, group discussion) and potential discussion topic

Display: Please bring brochures/sample information resources from organization.

RSVP to:

Sample Invitation #2:

Hello,

[Library] will be hosting a community forum [Date] regarding legal information services and resources in [Location/Community].

[Describe the focus of your forum] -

The idea is to gather a number of community groups together to discuss what each group offers in terms of legal information.

Many groups often make referrals to other organizations that offer legal information. We want to make sure we are making the most effective referrals. We also want to identify gaps in legal information in [Location/Community] and discuss how, as a community, and we at the library, can help fill those gaps and meet our communities' legal information needs.

The LawMatters Project of the Courthouse Libraries is partnering with us on this event.

We'd like to invite you to attend and to share your resources. The event will be [Date/Time/Location] - please let me know if you can make it.

For virtual forums, registration can be done through the platform (i.e.. Zoom) you are hosting the forum on. Invites can include the information outlined in the above samples and include a registration link for the virtual session.

Sample Invitation #3 (virtual, large geographic area):

Hi,

I'm reaching out to you today to let you know about an upcoming virtual Community Meeting taking place in your region.

[introduce hosts] LawMatters has been partnering with PovNet and Legal Aid BC this year to deliver a series of virtual Community Meetings, which bring together community library staff, Courthouse Library staff, community advocates, and other front-line workers who assist with legal matters into one virtual space. We've been delivering these regionally throughout BC and are now coming to your region.

[Describe purpose of session] The purpose of these sessions is to increase connections among service providers so everyone has a better idea of the services available locally in their regions and communities and can provide their clients with better referrals for legal help. We've heard positive feedback from participants who attended previous sessions that the event gave them a better understanding of free legal services and helpers in their communities.

[Provide registration details] We're holding two sessions for [region]. We know this is a large region to cover so we wanted to give people a choice of sessions to make sure as many as possible had a chance to attend. The dates we've selected are [date], and [date], from [time] on each day. Participants can choose to attend whichever session is more convenient for their schedule.

Session 1 Registration Link

Session 2 Registration Link

Other example invitations are in [Appendix II](#).

Potential Forum Formats

There are many different formats the forums can take. Some formats are necessarily determined by the number of participants for a forum. Format can also be determined by the ultimate goal of the forum; if the primary goal is to allow participants to network, including an introductory roundtable and discussion may be more appropriate than providing training in resources. Another important consideration is time – if you only have an hour, it may not be possible to do both round-table introductions and discussion groups.

The potential formats listed here are meant to be informative and give general guidance when it comes to planning forums.

Introduction roundtable:

- Works best with smaller groups (25 people or less). Gives everyone an opportunity to introduce themselves and talk about what they provide at their organizations.
- If you have a larger group and still want to capture this information, you can give participants an opportunity to provide it when they register for the forum. This information can be provided to the other registrants prior to the forum date. For the virtual forums, introductory information

was gathered in the initial registration on Zoom and provided to other participants as part of the guest list shared prior to the forum and stored in the shared Google Drive space.

Discussion (small or large group)

- It is recommended that the hosts provide facilitators for groups when doing discussion activities to keep the conversation moving and allow participants to focus on contributing. If sharing the small group discussion with the larger group, hosts can also provide a notetaker to record and share.
- If there are a smaller number of participants, dividing them into smaller groups may not be necessary. As a general guideline, we divided into smaller groups when the forums were larger than 25 participants. Smaller groups usually aimed for around 4-7 participants and never more than 10.
- Small groups can be determined ahead of time using the registrant list.
- Larger group discussions may benefit from an activity to focus the discussion. In the virtual forums, one activity resulted in solution building and a virtual referral tool in the form of a Google Slide deck. The slides were titled around certain themes that had emerged in previous forums or in the small group discussions, and each slide included a stack of stickies. During large group discussions, participants were given the link to the slide deck and had the opportunity to brainstorm solutions to the issues selected and provide their contact information if a service they provided would fill an identified gap.

Training and/or Updates

- Training is usually provided if time allows or if there are new resources available. The LawMatters Program representative has, in the past, provided overviews of Clicklaw and we are able to provide free training to library staff on the following:
 - The context and scope of what constitutes legal information and the kinds of questions that would be answered with legal sources of information.
 - Orientation to types of legal information (print and online resources) that help in finding answers or next steps for these questions.
 - More context of the entire legal system in BC, the role of information services in this system, and other agencies that can help further support the public with their legal need.
- In the virtual series, updates were usually provided at the beginning of the session as these forums were centered around discussion, not training. Hosts provided an introduction to their services and ways they can assist participants in their work.

Generally, a forum can be conducted first in rounds with each participant introducing themselves and their organization. The library representative who chairs the forum can then choose to open the floor to discussion among all participants during the Discussion portion (see potential topics below). The format can be altered depending on the agenda and the group.

Here is a general outline of how previous forums have been formatted:

- Open with a welcome, housekeeping (washroom locations, guidelines to participating virtually etc.), ask if all can stay until the end of the forum. Participants who have to leave early could do their introductions first.
- Introduce the concept and purpose of the forums.
- Before round-table introductions, ask if any participants attend current interagency meetings (if there are any locally).
- Roundtables can consist of introductions but also discussion questions on the agenda.
- Library could be the final presenter and describe library services and resources including responding to any issues that come up. For example: if a participant says her organization does victim support and a lot of grief counseling, the library can highlight related legal library resources but also point out that the library has resources for dealing with grief.
- Final discussion can be 'should we continue to meet and how often?'
- Evaluation forms handed out to participants at the end of forum.

Potential topics and discussion points

- How my organization provides legal information/services.
- What are the most pressing legal issues my clients are facing?
- What legal information/service needs are missing in our community?
- What is and isn't working when it comes to making referrals for legal help.
- Possible solutions to gaps in legal information/services and making referrals.
- How can the library help?

Day-of Forum Set-up/Checklist for In-person forums

- Library display of legal information titles and brochures
- Table for participants' brochures
- If doing demonstrations or showing slides - laptop, internet access, projector and screen.
- Light refreshments
- Tent cards for names (LawMatters can bring these)
- Evaluation surveys printed

Day-of Forum Set-up/Checklist for Virtual Forums

- Slideshow which can cycle through the waiting room for participants and be used during the introduction.
- Creation of any tools to use during the session (i.e., Google Slide Deck to create a virtual referral tool).
- Creation of evaluation survey – provide link to participants at end of session

Post-Forum Activities

- Collect evaluation forms. If partnering with LawMatters, send one copy to LawMatters Program, and keep one copy for hosting library.
- Compile meeting minutes: for in-person forums, LawMatters compiles the first draft of meeting notes and sends to library staff for review and any changes needed. Library staff or LawMatters sends draft notes to participants for review and any changes needed. For virtual forums, meeting minutes have been compiled by the hosts and their notetakers before being sent to participants.
- If desired: provide link to shared online space (i.e., Google Drive) which includes posters, flyers, contact information, meeting minutes, and any tools created for/during the forum.

Appendices (I-V)

I. Further excerpts from the Community-Led Libraries Toolkit

The LawMatters Community Legal Information Forums could be one component of a potentially larger community planning process, as described in the report from the Working Together Project *Community-Led Libraries Toolkit* (2007), which may be downloaded from <http://www.librariesincommunities.ca/> [PDF 148 pp]

The focus of the *Community-Led Libraries Toolkit* is to present a service model in which socially excluded people actively participate as equals in library decision making and planning. However, much of the discussion can assist us in thinking about facilitating community legal information forums.

As well as the quotes included in section [2. Goals of the forum](#), the excerpts presented below are intended to provide some thoughts to guide our approach:

“Community Assessment & Needs Identification:

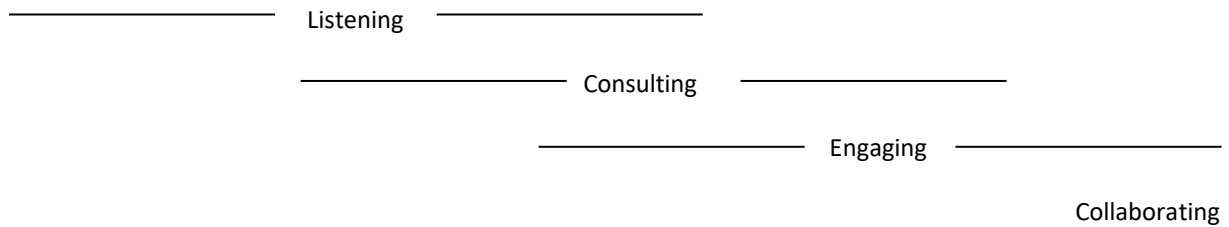
Staff spend time in community developing relationships with community members. Staff hear from community about what is important to them. Staff discuss with community members and hear from the community what their priorities are.”

- Community-Led Libraries Toolkit, Chart, p.30

The chart below is adapted from adapted from the Community-Led Libraries Toolkit (Chart p. 16) and illustrates a continuum of user engagement:

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT CONTINUUM*

Giving Information	Getting Information	Getting Information	Engaging	Partnering / collaborating
INFORM / EDUCATE	CONSULT	DISCUSS / DEBATE	ENGAGE / PARTICIPATE	PARTNER / COLLABORATE
Library plans services and informs the public of the services.	Library asks the community what it wants or finds important.	Library asks the community what it wants or finds important.	Library involves community in library activities.	Library works with community members to plan services.
Outreach	Surveys	Focus groups	Advisory committees	Collaborative service development
Library Booths	Polls	Public meetings	Expert advisors	Community-Led Service Planning
Marketing	Over-the-desk chats	Seminars	Community panels	
Programming	Feedback forms			
ICT training				
Literacy promotion				
Press & Pamphlets				
Open Houses				
Outreach				



*Community-Led Libraries Toolkit, Chart p. 16

II. Sample Invitations

Sample invitations: #1



INVITATION

Forum on public access to legal information resources in Chilliwack

Date: May 27, 2009, 1 – 4 pm

Location: Chilliwack Public Library

45860 First Avenue, Chilliwack

Co-sponsors: Chilliwack Public Library and LawMatters project of
Courthouse Libraries BC

Purpose; An opportunity for community organizations to identify local legal information services and gaps in access to information for their clientele.

Agenda: Round Table discussion: Legal information your organization provides and what is it not able to provide (gaps in resources and/or misperceptions about what your organization can do)

Group discussion: what would improve access to legal information in Chilliwack?

Display: Please bring brochures, sample information resources of your organization.

RSVP to:

Sample invitation #2:



>> Hello,

The Squamish Library will be hosting a community forum the morning of October 21st regarding legal information services in Squamish. The idea is to gather a number of community groups together to discuss what each group offers its clients in terms of legal information. Many groups often point people towards other organizations that offer legal information - the trick is knowing who offers what. We also want to identify gaps in legal information in Squamish and discuss how can we as a community, and we at the library, can help fill those gaps.

The LawMatters Project of the Courthouse Libraries is partnering with us on this event and has previously hosted a similar event in Chilliwack (<http://bclawmatters.blogspot.com/2009/06/first-lawmatters-community-forum-on.html>).

We'd like to invite you to attend and to share your resources. The event will be from 9am-12pm on October 21st at the Squamish Public Library - please let me know if you can make it.

Thanks!

Marie <<

Sample invitation #3:

Hi,

I hope this message finds you well! I'm reaching out to you today to let you know about an upcoming virtual Community Meeting taking place in your region.

LawMatters has been partnering with PovNet and Legal Aid BC this year to deliver a series of virtual Community Meetings, which bring together community library staff, Courthouse Library staff, community advocates, and other front-line workers who assist with legal matters into one virtual space. We've been delivering these regionally throughout BC and are now coming to the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley!

The purpose of these sessions is to increase connections among service providers so everyone has a better idea of the services available locally in their regions and communities and can provide their patrons with better referrals for legal help. We've heard positive feedback from participants who attended previous sessions that the event gave them a better understanding of free legal services and helpers in their communities.

We're holding two sessions for the Lower Mainland, Fraser Valley, and surrounding region. We know this is a large region to cover so we wanted to give people a choice of sessions to make sure as many as possible had a chance to attend. The dates we've selected are **Tuesday, September 28th**, and **Wednesday, September 29th**, from **9:30 AM to 12:30 PM** on each day. Participants can choose to attend whichever session is more convenient for their schedule.

Session 1: Tuesday, September 28th - 9:30 AM to 12:30 PM

https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZwkd--qrDIsGNO_HdYLsXXnRf7UoYKu_oQb

Session 2: Wednesday, September 29th - 9:30 AM to 12:30 PM

https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYrcOmvqzsjGNzshOUcg_xsWQYNY-2NNk5o

I'm happy to answer any questions you might have about the session. You can reach me here at lawmatters@courthouselibrary.ca.

Looking forward to hearing from you,

III. Sample Agendas

Sample Agenda #1



Forum on public access to legal information resources in Chilliwack

May 27, 2009, 1 – 4 pm

Chilliwack Public Library

Agenda

- (1) Welcome and introductions
- (2) LawMatters Community Forums description
- (3) Go-round: each representative to describe briefly [3 or 5 min] the legal information your organization provides and perhaps is not able to provide (gaps in resources and/or misperceptions about what your organization does)

Break

- (4) Group discussion: what legal information service is missing in the Chilliwack area; what would improve the public's access to legal information in your area?
- (5) Brief demonstration of new website Clicklaw and future Help Map
- (6) Wrap up and evaluation forms, follow up

Sample agenda #2/reminder email:

>> Hi all,

Thank you so much to those of you who have already rsvp'd this event. For those who haven't and are planning on attending, please let me know as we'd like to have a good idea about the numbers to expect that day

So far, we are expecting approximately 15 attendees from a variety of community groups in Squamish. These include Helping Hands, Community Futures, Seniors Connections, Povnet, RCMP, Squamish Council, BC Government Agent, Howe Sounds Women's Centre, Quest University, Child & Youth Mental Health, Sea-to-Sky Community Services...

The forum will start with a round-table, with each participant briefly describing what their organization does, what types of legal information and referrals it provides, and whether they find there are gaps in legal services in Squamish.

The hope is that by sharing this information, we will all learn more about what already exists in our community and where we as a community perhaps need to work in order to fill gaps in knowledge.

Following the round table, we expect there will be a group discussion about how Squamish can improve access to legal services and how we can follow up on that.

Finally, there will be two quick presentations: one from Courthouse Libraries BC about the LawMatters project and website ClickLaw (<http://clicklaw.bc.ca>); and one from the Legal Services Society and services they provide for Squamish residents.

We will have a resource table available and encourage you to bring materials about your organization to display and/or hand out.

Looking forward to seeing you all next week.

Thanks again,

Marie <<

Sample agenda #3 (virtual forums):

Lower Mainland Community Meeting

Location: Zoom

Date: Sept 28, 2021

Time: 9:30 am – 12:30 pm

Meeting Agenda

1. The Zoom doors are open (9:15-9:30)

Arrive a bit early if you like and give yourself the opportunity to test your audio and video and get settled.

2. Welcome & Overview (9:30 – 9:45)

During this time or at any point in the session, feel free to share and recognize the traditional territory you are joining from. This may be done verbally or even posted in the chat. If you are interested in more information about the lands under you, you may find these helpful: www.whose.land & <https://native-land.ca/>

3. Break Out Session (9:45 – 10:45 am)

4. Round of introductions (what services do you provide and what area do you serve)
- What is working with regards to referral in your area (both out and in)?
 - What isn't working?
 - How could you improve referrals in your area of service?

We will be providing a Facilitator for the breakout sessions, who will guide the conversation, record what is said and report back to the main group on your behalf, so you can focus on the conversation.

Bio Break (10:45-11:00)

Do whatever you need to take care of yourself during this time.

5. Back to main group (11:00-11:30 am)

6. Final discussion, wrap up, and next steps (11:30– 12:00 pm)

IV. Sample Library Brochure: Squamish Public Library October 2009

Clicklaw

Clicklaw is a website aimed at enhancing access to justice in British Columbia.

It features legal information and education, but it is not a site of laws. Instead, Clicklaw features legal information and education designed for the public from 24 contributor organizations, as well as selected others.

www.clicklaw.bc.ca
Operated by:



www.courthouselibrary.ca

Other Online Legal Resources at the Library

We also have subscriptions to thousands of online magazines, newspapers that may have relevant legal information for you.

- MasterFILE Premier
- Business Source Premier
- BC Stats
- BC Codes

All you need is a library card number to access these resources.
Go to www.squamish.bclibrary.ca and click on "Find Articles".

Legal Information at the Squamish Public Library




askaway..

Real people. Real help. 

Chat live online with our expert staff and find answers to your questions.

www.askaway.org

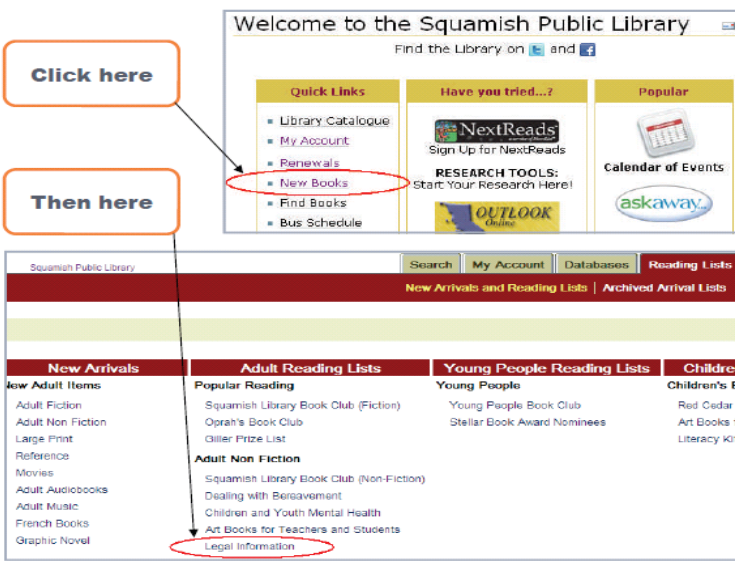
Squamish Public Library
37907 2nd Avenue
PO Box 1039
Squamish, BC V8B 0A7

Phone: 604-892-3110
E-mail: libcirc@squamish.ca
<http://squamish.bclibrary.ca>

View an online list of legal materials at the Library:
www.squamish.bclibrary.ca

Click here

Then here



Some of the titles we have include:

- Tenant Survival Guide
- Grandparents raising grandchildren: a legal guide
- Aboriginal people and the law in BC
- Introduction to contracts
- How to appeal your conviction
- Surviving your divorce: a guide to Canadian family law
- Your guide to Canadian law
- Sexual harassment: a guide for understanding and prevention
- Your welfare rights: a user's guide to BC benefits
- Canadian legal guide for small business
- Print & Online Statutes & Regulations
- BC Codes
- Legal Info & Advice Toll Free Phone Numbers in BC
- Parents' rights, kids' rights
- Sexual abuse information series

V. Sample Forum Notes

Example #1:

Chilliwack Forum on public access to legal information resources held May 27, 2009

Attendance:

- Anouk Crawford, Ann Davis Transition Society
- Al Ricard, Chilliwack Family Justice Centre
- Debbie Denault, Chilliwack Learning Communities Society
- Darlene Wahlstrom, Chilliwack RCMP Victim Services
- Christine Newhook, Community Response Network
- Julie Pariseau, Immigrant Services Program of Chilliwack Community Services
- Baljinder Gill, Legal Services Society
- Michelle Lavergne, Native Courtworkers & Counselling Association of BC
- Michaela Gasparini, Xolhemet Transition House Society
- Jody Burrell, Chilliwack Specialized Victim Assistance
- Natalie Fouquette, Chilliwack Branch of Fraser Valley Regional Library
- Jennifer Douglas, Chilliwack Branch of Fraser Valley Regional Library
- Drew Jackson, Courthouse Libraries BC Outreach and Clicklaw
- Nancy Hannum, LawMatters Project
- Janet Freeman, LawMatters Project

Regrets:

- Kim McLandress, Chilliwack Restorative Action And Youth Advocacy Assoc.
- Maria Gray, Elizabeth Fry Society
- Connie Vince, John Howard Society
- Irene D Adams, Sto:lo Nation Social Development
- Ellen Boyes, Legal Advocacy Program of Chilliwack Community Services
- Marian Moore, Chilliwack Law Courts

Handouts [available from Janet jfreeman@courthouselibrary.ca]:

- Forum Invited Attendee list of contact information
- BC Toll-Free Numbers for Legal Advice and Information
- Reading List of Legal Information, and Multilingual Legal Information Titles
- Legal Advocacy Program of Chilliwack Community Services poster
- Services from John Howard Society of the Fraser Valley
- New legal information website: Clicklaw

Other handouts available from attending organizations

Notes from participant presentations:

Chilliwack Public Library

- People are often desperate when they come to the library, and they want advice, even from library staff
- Have print and electronic resources and help people as much as we can.
- Libraries are the only information resource that is open to the public evening and weekend hours
- No longer keep print statutes, but have subscription to QP LegalEze database of BC statutes and regulations

- BC Laws site [www.bclaws.ca] is more user friendly than QP LegalEze, but does not have as much search capability
- Have a new brochure on social services: “What do you Need in Chilliwack?”
- No longer can give computer classes – these were based on grant funds

Limitations on public computer access

- Can’t save to flash drive or CD
- Can’t do both web and word on same computer
- Can’t do email attachments
- Computers do not have audio capability
- Users need a library card, although guest passes are available for limited times

Chilliwack Family Justice Centre

- Provide information for people about family court, particularly getting orders for child custody, guardianship, access or support.
- Free mediation available, as well as parenting after separation classes

RCMP Victim Assistance

- Mostly provide emotional support
- Give a package of information to victims to read
- Noted that there are 22 new officers in this region, and they often need help to become familiar with community group services

Chilliwack Specialized Victim Assistance

- Provide services to victims of crime; including men, women and children
- Most common crimes are family violence and sexual assault
- Do provide court orientation and accompaniment
- Don’t specialize in family law – refer people to Ann Davis Transition House or others

Ann Davis Transition House

- Legal advocate helps with legal information and advocacy, not legal advice
- Advocate available on Wednesday only
- Works with women and men (generally women)
- Do have counselors for men, services are not just for battered women
- Also help with disability claims and child tax benefits
- Much busier since legal aid cuts

Native Courtworkers & Counselling Association

- Many clients have cognitive issues and fear of officials
- Work with Aboriginal people (and others) in criminal court, and help them understand the process. Do a quick assessment of cognitive abilities and determine eligibility for Legal Aid
- Stress the importance of making court appearances
- Help people in jail apply for Legal Aid and determine potential for diversion.
- Informally, also helps with residential tenancy issues, residential school settlements, Aboriginal social services and other poverty law issues
- Office hours on Fridays for homeless people

- In Chilliwack Tuesdays, Wed and Friday, Abbotsford Monday and Thursday.

Chilliwack Learning Community Society

- Use a community development approach to promote literacy for groups and individuals
- Train literacy workers to be tutors with learners
- People attend to learn about community resources and learn essential work skills
- People have legal challenges
- A literacy task group helps people and organizations learn how to use plain language and to do a plain language audit of their materials, and offers training in plain language skills.

Legal Services Society

- A LSS legal information outreach worker is based in Surrey, and covers Langley to Chilliwack.
- Provides legal information, gives presentations to community groups, and assists with Family Duty Counsel in Surrey
- 65% of clientele in Surrey is Punjabi
- Helps people access legal services and find information through the web and publications
- Specifically, helps people file in small claims court and family court
- Changes in legal aid coverage recently, see LSS website for updates eg dispute resolution is no longer covered
- People can call the central legal aid number, or visit the LSS intake office in Chilliwack

Xolhemet Transition House

- Services for women and children in abusive situations
- Also work with homeless people
- Work with victim assistance and special victim assistance people
- Accompany clients to court
- Connect clients with legal aid; will drive clients to legal aid in Surrey and Abbotsford
- Find pro bono a bit difficult
- don't give legal advice

Courthouse Library BC

- Services include toll-free and email reference from the Vancouver library, and on-line research help materials in different legal topics as well as case law and legislative research
- New Westminster branch includes in-person reference service, but small branches such as Chilliwack do not have reference help, and hours are limited.

Discussion notes

Discussion on Chilliwack Courthouse Library Access

- Suggested that there be a sign in the window showing hours open, 1-800 number, and services available when open, and possibly post a list of referral sources such as pro bono
- Interest in workshop on Law Source training sessions, and access to litigator data base
- Courthouse Library is very busy, since the courthouse itself is busy
- Advocates would like access to the library after hours
- People doing more on their own now and CLBC is 'it' for legal research

- CLBC website should show what services are available in the small branches

Other Discussion:

- Courthouses themselves could be more user friendly: signage is very poor, and sometimes court staff [eg sheriffs] don't know about services in the building, particularly community group services.
- This forum is a good opportunity to increase our community information; we want to be able to give good referrals
- Reminder that public library has many resources to help people with legal information as well as other topics such as grief and loss, employment, parenting, citizenship and housing
- Literacy issues are a common thread to all our issues; the concept of doing a quick literacy assessment is essential for library staff, but also for other groups
- Useful to have police officers aware of community diversion programs.
- Government, police and legal aid services need to be more aware of mental health issues of clients, as well as cognitive abilities
- Chilliwack does not have enough family lawyers
- Legal version of Enquiry BC is needed
- Confusion regarding differences between pro bono services and lawyer referral service.

Presentation of new website of legal information from Courthouse Libraries BC: www.clicklaw.bc.ca This site includes plain language legal information on problem solving as well as sections on learn and teach, and reform and research the law. A new feature to be added in a few months is a Help map which will list all legal advice and information services in the province.

Follow up

- Suggested to hold a second session of this forum group in a few months, focused on how to use the Clicklaw site (including proto-type map of Chilliwack services)
- CLBC will investigate how to include advocates in legal data bases training sessions
- Community groups will continue to share information, for example, concerning diversion options
- LawMatters will produce a fact sheet explaining the differences in legal advice services. [Dial a Law has a script online called *Low Cost and Free Legal Services* at http://www.cba.org/BC/public_media/lawyers/430.aspx which is lengthy but thorough]

Example #2:

Squamish Forum on Public Access to Legal Information Resources

held October 21, 2009 at Squamish Public Library

Attendance:

- Melinda Peters , Squamish Helping Hands
- Kevin Bracewell, RCMP NCO
- Kathryn Hennigar, RCMP Community Policing
- Victoria Rigdon and Carolyn Green, Squamish Chamber of Commerce
- Candace Dunkley, Service BC
- Wendy Faris, Howe Sound Women's Centre
- Karen Clarke, The Squamish Creative Connections Group for Seniors
- Jan Oberson, Sea-to-Sky Services
- Doug Race, Squamish Council and retired lawyer
- Theresa Nystrom, Quest University Student Services
- Penny Goldsmith, PovNet
- Sylvia Tobler, Legal Services Society
- Janet Freeman and Nancy Hannum, Courthouse Libraries BC, LawMatters and Clicklaw projects
- Marie Palmer, Squamish Public Library

Regrets:

- Paul Lalli, Squamish Council
- Kathy Daniels, Sea to Sky Community Services
- Rob Smith, Child & Youth Mental Health
- Melanie Koenderman, Quest University
- Stephanie Nand, Community Futures
- Squamish Nation representative
- Sea to Sky Restorative Justice Society
- Native Courtworkers & Counselling Association of BC

Handouts [available from Janet jfreeman@courthouselibrary.ca]:

- BC Toll-Free Numbers for Legal Advice and Information
- Legal Information Reading Guides, and Multilingual Legal Information Titles
- New legal information website: Clicklaw

Other handouts available from attending organizations:

- Legal Information at the Squamish Public Library

Notes from participant presentations:

Squamish Helping Hands

Is a new service; a shelter with two caseworkers, currently open 24 hours/day, 7 days/week. Clients are facing housing, criminal and homelessness issues.

RCMP Community Policing

- Operates with volunteers and is open Monday – Friday, 8:30 – 4:30.
- Provides information on pardons, peace bonds, restraining-orders, home security, business crime prevention, auto crime prevention, personal safety, fraud information, and bicycle safety.
- They do not provide legal advice.

RCMP

Police cannot give legal advice; their role is to investigate criminal matters. Their knowledge of civil and family law is limited and they make referrals for legal help. They make use of the victim services database to refer victims.

Squamish Chamber of Commerce

Receive questions mostly from Chamber members and other service agencies regarding business law, as well as debt and mortgages. They refer the questions back to their lawyer members, and a new service to members will offer discounted legal advice in business law.

Service BC [local BC government agent]

- Provide information on all BC government services, including court services.
- Can provide court contact information, and access to the courts websites and applications from the public access terminals. Staff can also help a person get in the right direction when dealing with an issue related to government.
- The office acts as a contact for agencies such as Legal Services Society [legal aid] and Residential Tenancy Office, and can forward applications and filings. Residential Tenancy hearings are done by long distance, but they do not have space for phone hearings at the Squamish office.
- They provide provincial government phone and fax service as well as community access computer terminals. The office cannot take court fine payments.
- Service BC is a Ministry of Housing and Social Development [income assistance/welfare] conduit office; therefore the application process is done through SBC although clients are dealing with the North Vancouver office of MHSD by telephone and fax.
- A Service Canada office for federal information will be opening in Squamish soon, and will forward passport applications.

Howe Sound Women's Centre

- The Centre is staffed with advocates who can meet with and listen to women's concerns, including abuse, custody and access, welfare, disability and human rights issues.
- They offer publications and information, assistance with forms as well as transition house services, a children's program and First Nations and multicultural outreach.
- They do not have adequate staff to provide court accompaniment.
- An Access Justice pro bono legal clinic is available for women each week (Thursdays for 2 hours). The clinic provides free legal advice, but not free representation in court. Women can decide to hire one of the clinic lawyers to represent them in court if they want. Note that although the clinic is free, women must book appointments.
- There is a Criminal Lawyer available for clients who fit the criteria (client must call HSWC to see if they fit the criteria).

Squamish Community Health

- Squamish Seniors Creative Connections Group hosts workshops occasionally on legal issues for seniors: a talk on Adult Guardianship is scheduled for January, and a talk on Wills and Estates is scheduled for March.

- The Squamish Community Health Unit provides a Seniors One Stop Information Line and brochure rack. There is a range of resources for seniors here including some legal information. The Seniors One Stop phone number is 604-892-2293.

Sea-to-Sky Community Services

- Runs family-based programs, including counseling for women who have experienced violence, a homelessness outreach worker, alcohol and drug programs, employment programs, disability services and a sexual abuse intervention program for children. Their homeless outreach program generally works with people not using the Helping Hands Shelter
- Accepts all income levels, provides help with forms and occasional court accompaniment for child protection cases.

Squamish Council member and former practicing lawyer

The Squamish District does not give legal advice to individuals.

- Worked for a firm that offered pro bono service including clinics re wills/estates planning, buying a house, and pro bono services mostly to non-profit societies, and specialized in business and estate issues.
- Mentioned that Lawyer Referral Service [see LawMatters list of toll-free phone numbers] offers 30 minute consultations with a local lawyer for \$25 – sometimes legal questions can be cleared up in the consultation.

Quest University Student Services

New position; helps international students connect to local resources, and understanding how Canadian law is different.

PovNet

- PovNet is an online community of anti-poverty advocacy organizations that maintains a website of legal issues and resources of interest to people living in poverty.
- The website contains a “Find an Advocate” feature which lists local advocacy organizations.
- PovNet also offers a series of email lists for advocates and community workers on issues such as welfare, housing/ homeless, debt, mental health, First Nations/Aboriginal and workers’ rights.

Squamish Public Library

- Similar to other community resources, library staff cannot give legal advice, but try to help a patron formulate a legal question in order to point to useful resources.
- Patrons often use the library as a first stop or testing ground for working out their questions; lots of homeless people use the library.
- Important to have community brochures and information so that staff can pass the information on to library patrons; our biggest challenge is where to send people for help.
- Library has both reference [use at the library] and circulating legal titles in plain language
- Reference titles include online databases of BC statutes and regulations and BC Codes.
- Eight public access terminals available for online searching, including audio capability, and can be used for up to one hour a day.
- Library is also part of provincial library AskAway on-line information services virtual reference..
- Library website: from home page, go to Recommended websites – hot topics – legal information – legal reference checklist, which includes top six websites and family law / divorce resources

Courthouse Libraries BC

- Services include toll-free and email reference from the Vancouver library, and on-line research help materials in different legal topics as well as case law and legislative research. New website coming in November.
- Vancouver library includes in-person reference service for the public, but small branches such as North Vancouver do not have reference help, and hours are limited, although a computer access terminal is available.
- Operates both the LawMatters and the Clicklaw website projects.

Lawmatters at your local public library project

Provides grants to public libraries to enhance their legal information collections, as well as training and legal reference support to library staff. Reading guides of legal information by subject heading, as well as multilingual titles, are available for the public.

Clicklaw website project

Clicklaw provides online legal information in three categories: Solve Problems [law in daily life], Learn & Teach, and Reform & Research. Resources from BC publishers are highlighted currently, but more resources will be added soon, along with a Help Map feature using Google maps.

Legal Services Society [please note: LSS recently announced that they will be cutting some programs, such as LawLine as of April 1, 2010. For a recent update, see their newsletter at http://www.lss.bc.ca/elan/Oct_Nov_09/ELAN.htm]

- Provides legal aid [legal advice and legal information] services.
- Website details different services such as legal representation, criminal and family duty counsel, LawLine, Legal Information Outreach Workers, and publications.
- Family Law in BC website contains step-by-step guides to court procedures, including forms and definitions of legal terms..
- LawLink website organizes plain language legal information resources, primarily for low income people [this site will be replaced by Clicklaw eventually].

Discussion of legal information resources gaps

- There is a need for a local referral list of legal resources. Marie offered the library as a central resource for collecting this information and including it on their website.
- There used to be regular meetings of Squamish community groups, and it would be useful to have them again
- Lack of police victim assistance service, but a coordinator has been hired, and the service should be available in January 2010..
- More services for seniors needed, such as tax forms help, elder abuse awareness [Public Guardian and Trustee office helps adults who require assistance with decision-making - toll free number is 1-800-663-7867] and legal advice.
- Lack of services for South Asian population [estimated to be 10%]
- Need to identify services for First Nations (More services needed for First Nations populations.)
- Lack of local court impacts ability of people to file their claims and represent themselves.

- Difficult eligibility requirements for legal aid, as well as lack of local legal aid lawyers also make it difficult for people to appear in court.
- Growing need for services for homeless people, as this population grows. Sylvia mentioned that TRAC {Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre} has a page with many links to resources on homelessness, see www.tenants.bc.ca – Housing Issues.

Action Items

- Marie will coordinate development of a centralized list of local resources, and canvass participants regarding future meetings of community groups.

VI. Evaluation Form

Evaluation Form

Forum on public access to legal information resources in [Location/Community]

[Date], [Location]

1. What aspect(s) of the forum did you find most useful?

2. How confident did you feel referring to legal information providers *before* this forum? (Circle response)

Not confident ←————→ *Very confident*
1 2 3 4 5

3. How confident do you feel referring to legal information providers now (at the end of the forum)?

Not confident ←————→ *Very confident*
1 2 3 4 5

4. How could this forum format be improved or strengthened?

5. Any suggestions on specific actions community groups could do in [location/community] to improve public access to legal resources?

6. Any other comments you'd like to make?

Thank you for your participation!