

BC PLEI and Digital Delivery – a Cinderella Story for ILAG

Paper prepared by Mark Benton, QC for the meetings of the International Legal Aid Group

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Looking at the different initiatives that involve the digital delivery of legal services on Canada's Pacific coast, more than one commentator has referred to the area as the Silicon Valley of the north. The developments that contribute to this reputation originate from different bodies including the provincial government, the legal aid plan, and private not-for-profit services of varying sizes. The initiatives range from web-based delivery of services intended to increase the capacity of individuals to deal with legal problems and specialized websites for legal information, to guided pathways and a promised online dispute resolution tribunal. Some of the initiatives have been in place for a decade and some are not yet operational.

This paper explores why British Columbia (BC), a relatively small jurisdiction of 3.4 million people, has so many initiatives that are new or in development, which processes appear to be working and which are not, and what is most promising and most problematic in the current digital delivery environment in the province.

The appendices to this paper describe the vision for public legal education and information (PLEI) of individual agencies and are included to provide some detail of how different approaches to digital delivery have developed. They were prepared by the agencies themselves and have not been edited. This paper will illustrate how the differences among these organizations have actually contributed to a better integration of the delivery of legal aid and public legal education services. More importantly, these developments are supporting both a deeper appreciation of how legal information and advice can be delivered online to help individuals resolve their legal problems, and how these services can be used by lawyers to assist clients to obtain timely, lasting and just resolution of legal problems.

Provincial government involvement in the digital dissemination of PLEI is not touched on in this paper, in part because the government is still formulating its vision. That said, the BC Ministry of Justice has committed to implementing a guided pathways approach to helping the public with some legal problems. An appendix to this paper includes the provincial government's vision for PLEI.

Public Legal Education and Information Delivery Agencies in British Columbia, Canada

One of the reasons for the diversity in PLEI providers in BC is the fact that Canada is a federal state consisting of ten provinces and three territories. Federal government responsibilities include criminal law and divorce. However the administration of justice and civil and family law are within the jurisdictions of the provinces and territories. One consequence of this is that Canada has 13 legal aid plans and no single strategy to address access-to-justice issues.

From time to time Canada's federal government will fund the development of services that fall within provincial jurisdiction. In the early 1970s federal funding was a catalyst for both the development of civil legal aid and public legal education and information services across the country. When federal funding was discontinued several years later, only some provinces provided sustained funding for those programs; BC was one of those. At that time, the public legal information service model in BC, unlike other provinces, was based on local delivery models of small NGOs and only one larger organization, the People's Law School (PLS), had the benefit of ongoing federal funding. PLS was Canada's first PLEI provider and an early innovator in the delivery of public legal information. The early work of PLS explored using a variety of media and that work has shaped how many in the field think and talk about PLEI.

In 1979, the province's smaller PLEI providers merged with the public legal education arm of the provincial Legal Services Commission to become part of the Legal Services Society (LSS), a provincially-funded statutory organization with a mandate to provide public legal education and legal aid. This organization had a multi-million dollar PLEI budget and the potential to achieve vertical integration in the production and distribution of PLEI material, as well as add legal information into the delivery of legal representation services across the province. LSS was slow in realizing that potential and continues to explore opportunities to better integrate legal aid and public legal education and information services.

At the same time that public funding of PLEI was developing, a robust private sector publisher, Self-Counsel Press, emerged as a prominent provincial presence. Self-Counsel Press began publishing its self-help legal guides and legal forms kits in 1971 and remains in business today.

The presence of a significant number of community-based NGOs focused on the delivery of PLEI, provincial and some federal funding of PLEI, and the presence of a for-profit legal information market all contributed to a culture where PLEI was seen as an important public service.

Into this environment jumped several other agencies, each bringing a different perspective on the delivery of public legal information. Additional service delivery was possible as a result of funding from the BC Law Foundation. The Law Foundation was created in 1974 following the US Income from Lawyers Trust Accounts (IOLTA) model of pooling the interest payable on lawyer trust accounts and reallocating it to access-to-justice initiatives. It is a statutory organization whose mandate includes funding legal aid and public legal education and information.

The Law Foundation supported the start-up of the Law Courts Education Society (later renamed the Justice Education Society and referred to as JES here), an operation initially focused on public legal education relating to the courts and building a better understanding of court processes through guided tours of courthouses. The foundation also funded the BC Courthouse Libraries Society (BCCLS) whose

business is operating publicly accessible law libraries in courthouses across the province. Both organizations evolved into more substantial service delivery entities.

In the 1990s and 2000s demand for and cost of legal aid services increased and funding did not keep pace. One result was an increased demand for self-help legal materials to assist the many who received little or no direct help from legal aid. In this period PLEI providers remained committed to finding access-to-justice solutions while grappling with the emergence of the internet as a service delivery tool.

Throughout this entire period there was a substantial overlap in the population served by these groups and some overlap in the services provided. For example, both LSS and PLS produced self-help material; both BCCLS and LSS operated publicly accessible law libraries; and LSS, PLS and JES all had programs targeted to the education system. For the most part these were smaller scale endeavors that did not require substantial investments in infrastructure and the community was small enough that collegial collaboration was sufficient to ensure reasonable efficiency and avoid duplication of effort.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s three developments changed this landscape:

- The internet and web-based information distribution
- Government sources of revenue became increasingly difficult to secure
- Empirical research into legal problems helped providers understand the value of early information and advice

With the benefit of a significant grant from the Law Foundation in the late 1990s, LSS began working on a substantial website that consolidated family law information on a single site that was separate from LSS' own corporate site. At the same time, other PLEI providers were developing more modest sites for the distribution of their own material. Those early forays into creating websites began to build capacity and interest within the PLEI community for a web-based approach that gave users direct access to the organizations' legal information products without relying upon the distribution networks that had been the norm for distributing print publications. JES developed a reputation early on for being able to purpose-built websites. It has proven to be a remarkable innovator of online services that assist people with addressing legal problems in their social and emotional contexts.

One unique development in this period was the emergence of PovNet. An internet-based service targeted to supporting the legal work of a network of community advocates. A summary of this work can be found in the PovNet section of the appendices.

In the early 2000s the PLEI community established a formal network for discussing PLEI issues — the Public Legal Education and Information Working Group (PLEIWG). PLEIWG continues to meet regularly, providing a forum for sharing information, but involvement is voluntary and its only resources are in-kind donations from its participants.

One of PLEIWG's most significant contributions was serving as a foundation for Clicklaw (clicklaw.bc.ca), an aggregator site sponsored and now operated by the BCCLS. Clicklaw is a virtual library of PLEI material and its utility to the public is currently being evaluated. The development of Clicklaw involved the collaborative development of a PLEI taxonomy and the transfer to BCCLS of an existing aggregator site operated by LSS. It continues to be supported by PLEI producers who, along with justice system stakeholders, routinely refer people to it for help.

In 2002, austerity budgeting became a reality in BC. Government funding to legal aid was reduced by 40% and government funding to other PLEI providers dried up. One result was that PLEI providers were pursuing the same diminishing resources. Short-term project funding became a survival mechanism for the smaller organizations, a problem that was aggravated in the 2008 economic downturn. The competition for resources has had a number of consequences in the BC PLEI community. It has placed a premium on organizations to innovate in order to attract funders' dollars and has undermined both the willingness to collaborate and the trust necessary for collaboration. Because most project funders are interested in short-term outputs, very little strategy development is taking place for the sector.

There are some promising signs that the sector will overcome some of these challenges. The major PLEI funder in BC, the Law Foundation, recently convened an exploratory meeting of PLEI providers to exchange ideas about strategy, and the PLEI WG group itself has begun exploring a longer term and more integrated strategy for PLEI in BC. That discussion is moving forward very slowly, however, as it defines common goals, explores shared measurement systems, and discusses the strategies needed to manage those changes.

Another promising development is the emergence of bilateral agreements that look at a more collaborative approach to outcomes based on the Collective Impact framework articulated by Kania and Kramer¹. A copy of such an agreement between PLS and LSS is included.

The most recent digital delivery initiative in BC is the development of the MyLawBC platform by LSS. This project is a web-based guided pathways approach to legal problem-solving based on the Rechtwijzer service developed by the Dutch Legal Aid Board.

Conclusion

The development of a variety of approaches to digital delivery in British Columbia is more a matter of circumstance than design. The category of public legal education and information is a broad one and encompasses both the production of information materials and its distribution to multiple audiences. In BC, this sector has a long history of innovation and multiple providers who compete for resources and sometimes collaborate.

As digital delivery has become a prominent mode for distributing legal information there has been a marked convergence in the service offerings of different providers. BCCLS, which is a library service, has begun to provide content of its own in the form of wikibooks; and JES, whose traditional focus has been on education and capacity building, now provides online assistance to users to complete their court forms. This convergence is driven in part by a desire to serve needs but is driven too by an effort to ensure organizational survival in a field where resources are scarce and where there are multiple providers. The convergence is also driving concerns by funders that the current environment may lead to inefficiencies as multiple providers deliver to the same needs, and that service gaps will result as content developers are driven by available project funding in areas like family law.

The digital distribution of legal information has been a disruptive force that is pushing BC's PLEI sector to develop new skills and more collaborative approaches to delivery than have existed previously. Particular initiatives, like MyLawBC, have helped underscore the importance of collaboration in moving

¹ Collective Impact, Kania and Kramer, Stanford Social Innovation Review, Winter 2011 (http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective_impact/)

larger digital delivery initiatives to scale. The fact that better integration is recognized in the sector and supported by the principal funder makes progress in this area almost certain.

MyLawBC is scheduled to launch in late 2015. In the interim, BC's PLEI providers have all been actively involved in the design phase. While it will be several years before a meaningful evaluation of the effectiveness of the MyLawBC service will be available, it is clear that the engagement of the PLEI community in the development of this delivery model is helping to reshape the interrelationships of BC's PLEI network, the relationship of PLEI providers with legal aid, and is assisting in shaping a vision for how digital delivery will unfold.

In Canada, PLEI is typically the poor sister to legal aid's bigger budgets. Even so, developments in the digital delivery of PLEI have outstripped digital delivery on the legal aid side of access to justice in the country. Within LSS there is real excitement about exploring guided pathways as a means of providing unbundled legal services digitally. Thus the innovations coming out of the PLEI community are now very influential in how LSS is conceiving the future of legal aid delivery and the role of PLEI in legal aid.

One of the things we are witnessing in BC is how PLEI providers are emerging as important technical and idea leaders in the delivery of digital legal services. There is a real prospect that this contribution, focusing as it does on an integrated approach to addressing legal needs, will reshape at least part of the landscape of publicly funded legal services. In the process, it will be interesting to see how the community-based values of the PLEI community will influence the legalistic inclinations of legal aid.

About the Author

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Called to the BC Bar in September, 1980

Mark has been a lawyer since 1980, has served as the CEO of the Legal Services Society (BC's legal aid provider and its largest public legal information provider) since 2002. He holds a B.A. from the University of British Columbia, a LL.B. from Osgoode Hall Law School, and a LL.M. from the Dalhousie University Faculty of Law. He was appointed Queen's Counsel in 2008.

His legal experience includes small office practice, legal aid work, appellate advocacy, and four years as an adjunct professor at the UBC Faculty of Law. He is past-chair of the Association of Legal Aid Plans of Canada, is a Canadian Forum for Civil Justice board member, and is an active participant on a number of prominent government and non-government collaborations addressing justice issues of importance to Canadians, including the steering committee of the Action Committee on Civil and Family Justice and the Reinventing Criminal Justice Forum. Mark has served as an advisor to governments and NGOs on the development of legal aid programs in the Caribbean, East Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia's Pacific region. He has an active interest in making justice systems more effective in responding to people's needs.

He is regularly invited to speak on topics related to legal aid, not for profit governance, and justice innovation. Mark has been recognized in the B.C. Legislature as "a passionate advocate for access to justice for the economically disadvantaged in British Columbia, and he brings along with that passion great creativity in the search for solutions for how to make a difference in people's lives."

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Public Legal Education and Information in the administrative, civil, and family justice systems

Toward A PLEI Vision for BC

*The right PLEI at the right time;
accessible in a way that works for the people who use it.*

Access to justice is the single most important problem facing BC's justice system. British Columbians need information, tools and education to access their justice system. PLEI enables justice system users to prevent, manage or resolve their justice related issues. To be effective, PLEI must be provided in a way that fits with users' lives and must be directly relevant to users' needs. To solve our access to justice problem, justice system actors must align our needs so, first and foremost, we meet user needs.

Background:

- PLEI performs different but overlapping functions for the people who use it and for the people who work in the justice system.
- Traditional justice processes were designed by and for legal and procedural experts. However, a growing proportion of litigants is self-represented and people can only participate in their justice system if they have the information, tools and education to enable them to participate.
- Users need to understand their potential or actual problem and what to do in order to prevent, manage or resolve it.
- The right information, tools and guidance, delivered at the right time and in the right way, empower users to participate effectively. Given the cost, complexity and delays in our justice system, users need guidance on questions like:
 - What are my options?
 - What can I or should I be doing first?
 - What comes next?
 - Where can I get help if I need it?

Transitions:

The BC Ministry of Justice is interested in exploring opportunities to collaborate with other PLEI providers in order to ensure that justice system users are receiving the right information at the right time in the most accessible ways. Our current PLEI focus is on optimizing online guided pathways for users. The highest number of interactions and

the biggest impacts are expected to come from web-based problem diagnosis, information, self-help, streaming and triage services. The guided pathways that support this type of service are designed specifically around the needs of users.

By implementing a new multi-channel service model for the Civil Resolution Tribunal, the ministry is continuing develop a new approach to PLEI. Technology is being embraced as a platform capable of supporting the creation of several new services and forms of justice interactions that provide much more accessible and much less costly services to users. Most importantly, we are learning to put users at the centre of our service design activities.

Key administrative, civil, and family justice PLEI programs:

- Civil Resolution Tribunal and Tribunal Transformation guided pathways
- Justice BC content (criminal, family (including family justice services and Parenting After Separation) and justice reform)
- Family Maintenance Enforcement provides a significant number of PLEI resources

PLEI priorities over the next 1-3 years:

For the next few years, supports for the Civil Resolution Tribunal and Tribunal Transformation initiative will be the focal point for Justice Services Branch PLEI funding. Specific activities may include:

- Civil Resolution Tribunal service channel development and maintenance
- Exploration of collaborative opportunities with CLBC/CLickLaw and others
- Continued information exchange with MyLawBC
- Introductory information supports in multiple formats and languages
 - Print, Video, Audio
- Guided pathway content supports
 - Clear language design and strategy
 - Clear language style guide
 - Clear language training for staff and members
- Development of process specific information supports in a variety of formats

CLBC History

“The establishment of the Law Library Foundation marks the first instance in North America in which a law library system has been incorporated independently and governed by representatives of the principal financial institutes which support it and the various user groups receiving law library services”.¹ Courthouse Libraries BC was incorporated under the Societies Act in 1975 (the official name became British Columbia Courthouse Library Society in 1984). According to Mr. Justice T.J. Melnick, the creation of the Society “catapulted BC’s law libraries into the modern world of library management”.² The library was unique in its mandate of service to the legal community and the public.

Digital Delivery of Resources and Services

Since its inception the goal of the library has been to provide the best possible access to useful legal information. Prior to the internet this was done by 1-800 phone lines and print finding tools. Today CLBC has a provincial network of libraries with access to a range of digital resources both in the library and via the internet. The philosophy of putting the user first and designing services around that need has been constant. How we do that has blurred the lines between traditional publishing, content creation and training.

Public Access

Following the closure of the Legal Services Society’s legal resource centre in 2002 CLBC increased its services to the public. In collaboration with other PLEI organizations and through user centred design we created Clicklaw, the public legal information website. A few years later, we worked with other organizations to convert their legal information content to the Clicklaw Wikibook platform to maximize access to the information and to facilitate collaborative content creation. This was a logical extension of CLBC’s public mandate and use of technology to deliver services and resources province wide in a cost-effective way. It responded to identified needs in a number of reports. In addition to the efficiency aspect, CLBC was an early adopter of technology to meet user needs in the legal community.

Partnerships

“We seek out opportunities to collaborate beyond the obvious and the easy.” (CLBC 2011-2013 Strategic Plan)

While all libraries now consider outreach and community partnerships key to providing the right mix of resources and services to meet users’ information needs, CLBC has been working within partnerships for its entire history. A few examples of both partnership and technology include Clicklaw, working with LSS and the CBA on training webinars, and working with the Law Society on its online learning centre.

¹ Tom Heitz, Library Administrator, 1974, quoted in British Columbia Courthouse Library Society: A Commemorative Look at Its First Quarter Century, p.4.

² British Columbia Courthouse Library Society: A Commemorative Look at Its First Quarter Century, p.4.

What We've Learned

We have learned first hand the importance of collaboration with other organizations, understanding user needs, and the necessity of a culture of innovation. User needs and expectations are changing rapidly and trying new methods, learning from those that don't work as well as those that do are essential in a time of rapid change. This can be challenging as it means designing services from the outside in and can create friction with other organizations especially in times of fiscal restraint. We have learned that change and collaboration can be messy and sometimes be painful. They are essential to provide relevant and effective services to the people we serve.

The Next Chapter

Our current planning process is more inclusive and transparent than previously and will build on our culture of innovation, challenging the status quo and focusing on end user needs. We started the planning process with an external review as well as an internal analysis. By continuing to engage external stakeholders, users and staff we are confident that our offerings will integrate with others in ways that benefit the end user.

CLBC Strategic Direction: Backgrounder for PLEI Planning Meeting May 20, 2015

CLBC is in the midst of setting a new strategic direction that brings collaboration and innovation into the core activities of the organization. The Board and senior staff met on April 2nd to discuss three possible futures that had been developed based on the external stakeholder review by Jane Morley and staff reviews of library trends. The Chair and CEO then met with funders for their comments. This meeting is an opportunity for us to share our thinking with others in the legal community, and to consider how it fits with the Law Foundation's PLEI vision.

The backdrop for this shift in direction is our recognition of the profound impact on libraries and the justice system of the ever-changing information technology environment. The rise of the new authoring economy, where legal experts create content online and share it outside traditional publication environments, is shifting the balance of power from the creator/seller to the client/buyer. It is no longer good enough to look at information technology as a tool for improving efficiency or saving costs. For libraries, the shift from print to digital materials is only part of the story. More important is that the Net or Web has changed the way people access and process information, their expectations as to its accessibility, and the way they communicate. Increasingly, people expect to have the real time information they need delivered directly to them on their mobile devices, in formats of their choice, to remix and reuse to meet their needs. With the public, and increasingly with lawyers, convenience trumps concern for accuracy. This reality has enormous implications for the access to justice discussions currently underway.

Some of the key questions for CLBC, with its mandate to provide legal information services to the public and the legal profession, are:

- How can we get accurate, relevant information to our users faster and in a form that they can use to fulfill their needs?
- What do we keep doing and what do we stop doing?
- How do we enable the continuous innovation required to adapt to the ever-changing information technology environment in a way that enhances access to justice?

In our planning process, we considered three possible futures for CLBC

1. A slow organizational decline due to lack of engagement of users and resulting reduced funding;
2. An online only organization with no "human " touch; and
3. An organization that engages with users both online and in physical space throughout the province. It was clear that to achieve the third, preferred, scenario requires collaboration with other organizations through such mechanisms as community JAC's, learning spaces, innovation labs. The Vancouver Public Library's new Inspiration Lab is an example of such a lab.

Recognizing that working collaboratively with other organizations requires a vision that will resonate beyond CLBC, we have developed the following draft vision (still a work in progress): *Everyone in BC has the legal information they need and the ability to use it.*

We have also clarified where CLBC fits into achieving that vision. In the long tradition of libraries, we are first and foremost knowledge managers and our draft mission (also a work in progress) is: *We manage knowledge for justice in BC in collaboration with others.* We added “in collaboration with others” because we recognize that we cannot do it alone.

We have looked at our core activities that we need to focus on to pursue our mission within the broader vision, and determined them to be:

1. *Identifying needs*
2. *Curating and developing accessible and useful legal information*
3. *Connecting people and organizations to the information and resources they need*
4. *Building individual and community capacity to use information*
5. *Operating an innovative stream in our organization*

The first activity is necessary to ensure the crucial link between what we do and our user’s needs. Activities 2, 3 and 4 are our core operational activities, and activity 5 is an acknowledgment of the key role innovative projects play in our ability to fulfill our mandate.

We are very clear that our vision and mission cannot be achieved unless we collaborate and innovate, but this does not mean that we are staking our ground as THE collaborative, innovative leader, among other BC organizations pursuing similar goals. What we are saying is that collaboration and innovation will be part of our core business, and we will work with other organizations that choose to work with us.

Which organizations choose to work with CLBC will impact the nature of the innovative initiatives we proceed with, but whatever they are, they will be directed to the goal that all British Columbians have the legal information they need and the ability to use it. Also, in seeking to fulfill that goal CLBC will focus on its core mission – managing knowledge for justice in BC by working with others and making a space for innovation.

On the innovation front, we are looking at a two-stream approach within the organization - one that focuses on doing the core operations well, and the other that has a separate “skunkworks” or innovation lab aspect that experiments, learns from the experiments, and feeds these learnings into the operations stream. With input from the innovation stream, the operational stream can continuously improve and adapt to the ever-changing information technology environment and meet the needs of those the justice system is designed to serve.

As a means of pursuing the collaborative aspect of the Board’s mission, we are examining the potential role of a collective impact “backbone” organization to support collaborative social innovation in the justice system as a whole. Collective impact requires one or more backbone organizations to provide the necessary support for collaborative relationship building and the coordination of mutually reinforcing initiatives. This includes ensuring information sharing and keeping others engaged. An example might be for CLBC to provide support for bringing organizations together to create and implement common outcome measures or metrics.

JES and Digital Technologies

The Justice Education Society has been publishing legal education and information resources online for almost 15 years. Like many others, we started out small – with a website and links to PDF documents that could be downloaded. Over the years, based on interest and demand, we moved more and more content online. Today, JES is recognized worldwide for applying digital technologies to improve access to justice. In 2014, websites produced by JES were visited by about 800,000 British Columbians.

JES has innovated most in providing self-representing litigants with online resources to help them advance their case. We publish SmallClaimsBC.ca, SupremeCourtBC.ca, CourtofAppealBC.ca and AdminLawBC.ca. These websites map legal processes, provide helpful text, link to court rules and forms as well as provide online guides and instructional videos.

JES has introduced the first legal Virtual Assistant to help website users navigate to the information they need. The video-based avatar provides automated support through a guided pathway, expert system (triage level 1). We also provide legal help through live chat and email (triage level 2). For matters that are complicated, a contracted lawyer responds to questions by email (triage level 3). We call this suite of triage support “Virtual Legal Help Services”. It is available on two websites now and we are working to integrate the services into 4 other websites.

JES has also introduced Canada’s first court-approved Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) platform. The custom developed application lets disputants with Small Claims Court matters try to settle their matter online, without going to trial. This pilot project was funded by the Canadian Bar Association’s Law for the Future Fund. It was developed with support from the BC Provincial Court, MediateBC and the Ministry of Justice. To date, the Settle Online option is not particularly popular – approximately 80% of defendants do not reply to agree to negotiate online. However, for the 20% of cases where both parties use the ODR platform, the settlement rate is about 50%.

Looking ahead, there seems to be no end to how digital technologies will be utilized to improve access to justice. Since 2000, there has been a rush to publish a broad range of legal content online. Now, the trend is towards content paired with services.

For example, here are two commercial examples of how digital technologies are being applied to deliver services to people with legal issues.

1. Have a legal question? Pay as little as \$10 and ask it at Law.JustAnswer.com. A Canadian lawyer will respond – typically the same day. The site provides an expert rating system and some Law Society members have hundreds of satisfied customers.
2. DivorceOptions.ca helps British Columbians get fully prepared divorce forms – with a review and 100% money back guarantee – for just \$99. For only \$249 they file the documents with the court and manage your divorce through the system.

Within the PLEI sector, economic realities are driving government agencies and non-profit organizations to collaborate as never before. As Roger Smith, the UK advocate explains, laws apply to specific jurisdictions, but the technology used to deliver this content is global. Later this year, several US organizations are gathering in Vermont to examine how CANADIAN legal resources can be localized and redeployed for US states.

At JES, we are already participating in this trend. Clients have come to us and said: “We like that website, can you make one for us?” This year, JES will host and maintain 25 legal education websites, plus we are producing web resources for every Canadian province and working with 5 US states. JES is localizing our current digital technologies to produce PLEI websites, online videos, virtual legal help services, and interactive games at a fraction of the price, compared to developing new web resources. Looking ahead, we see more opportunities to extend web services developed here in BC, to regions across the globe.

JES Strategic Planning 2015-2020

The Justice Education Society is in the process of updating the strategic plan to cover its work for the next five years.

The strategic plan will have two components. The first will cover objectives for JES work in BC and also include the sharing of these resources with other jurisdictions in Canada and elsewhere in North America. The second component will address our work in other areas of the world.

Both strategic plans are organized around four themes:

- building organizational excellence,
- building program excellence,
- building credibility and leadership
- building business development capacity

The Board will meet on June 16th and discuss a new vision for JES. The Board will examine our motto “Justice through Knowledge” and discuss the following draft mission statement.

JES Mission Statement:

*To help individuals identify and manage everyday legal needs
and understand the law and justice system*

To help the justice system serve the everyday legal needs of individuals

The Board will be discussing the components of a restructured JES BC program and agreeing on a 5 year plan to maintain and further develop each of these areas.

- 1) **Legal Help:** Providing in-person and on-line legal help services and informational resources including triage, guided pathways, virtual assistance and expert support connected to guidebooks, videos and other web resources

Virtual Help Services	SmallClaimsBC.ca	SupremeCourtBC.ca
Court Information Program	CourtOfAppealBC.ca	AdminLawBC.ca
LegalRightsForYouth.ca	FamiliesChange.ca: Guides	Changeville.ca
Legal Help Resources	VictimsInfo.ca	Supreme Court Guidebooks
Legal Dictionary	Your Human Rights in BC	Court Tips for Parents
ImmigrantLegal.ca	CourtInformation.ca	Immigrant Fact Sheets

Formerly the Law Courts Education Society of BC

- 2) **JES Academy:** providing on-line learning and training to individuals, parents, youth, intermediaries

Parenting After Separation	PAS Finances	CybersafeBC
YCJA	Renting it Right	SRL Family Law Course
BCCAT – Admin Justice	Legal Webinars	

- 3) **B.C. Schools and Community Education:** providing in person experiential learning, professional development training and legal education resources using websites, regional offices and local volunteers to meet the needs of individuals, community organizations and intermediaries. The foci will be on legal capability skills building, legal rights and our justice system.

JSEP	Northern Native PLE	CourtsofBC.ca
LawLessons.ca	YCJA.ca	Youth and Criminal Law
Youth and Gangs	Being an Active Citizen	Legal Independence
Law Connection	Though the Heavens Fall	Court Watcher's Manual
Wall Charts: BC's Justice System	Legal Dictionary	Youth Against Violence
Legal Pix	Legal Quest	Mock Trials

- 4) **Expertise Sharing and Collaboration:** providing leadership in applying digital technologies to improve access to justice and creating and pursuing opportunities for working collaboratively with other agencies (in British Columbia and elsewhere) committed to enhancing the value and usage of PLEI resources. The JES Resources team will produce PLEI resources for 9 provinces and 5 US states this year.

Virtual Legal Help	Families Change	Online Dispute Resolution
Virtual Legal Services	Guided Pathways	Court resources

Next steps

1. JSEP review and 5 year program goals to be completed by the end of the summer.
2. Governance Structure review (Board structure and membership) to be completed by the fall.
3. Five year strategic plan for B.C. and our other areas of work and a revised organization plan will be approved by the Board in the fall of 2015.

The Law Foundation of British Columbia and Public Legal Education

The Law Foundation of British Columbia was formed in 1969 by an amendment to the Legal Profession Act. The legislation, which has remained largely unchanged over the years, provides:

- that the Law Foundation is to receive all interest earned on lawyers pooled trust accounts, and
- that the Law Foundation is to spend this money in five mandate areas, legal aid, legal education, law reform, legal research, and law libraries.

The legal education mandate of the Law Foundation includes both public legal education and professional legal education. The objective of Law Foundation funding in the public legal education area is: “to promote legal education programs and services in British Columbia to make the law more accessible through: increasing public awareness of the law and the justice system, and providing education to groups with particular legal needs”.

The Law Foundation has provided significant funding support for public legal education programs and projects, as follows:

- Since its inception in 1969, over \$40 million of public legal education funding has been provided by the foundation,
- In the last 10 years alone, from 2005 to 2014, the Law Foundation has provided over \$17 million of public legal education funding. Of this amount, \$8 million was for continuing programs, and \$9 million was for a variety of different projects. Note that these totals do not include the portion of the Legal Services Society annual grants of approximately \$3 million per year that is devoted to public legal education activities (in 2015, this will amount to approximately \$900,000). Annual funding for other public legal education programs and projects currently amounts to between \$750,000 and \$1 million.

Activities supported by Law Foundation funding have included:

- People's Law School: People's Law School is a community-based agency that has provided written information and workshops about the law for decades.
- Justice Education Society: The Justice Education Society has for many years had an active schools program where high school students are given an opportunity to observe courts in action. They also support a variety of law based websites.
- Clicklaw: Courthouse Libraries maintains a web-based portal, which provides the public access to most of the public legal education material that is available in B.C.

- CBA: The Canadian Bar Association, BC Branch, maintains Dial-A-Law scripts on a variety of legal topics and in several languages.
- Law Matters: Courthouse Libraries has a program it operates in conjunction with the public library system in British Columbia, where it maintains a basic collection of legal information in every public library in the province.
- Legal Services Society: The LSS family law website is the main source of information on family law for the people of British Columbia. LSS also has a variety of other Public legal education publications.
- a variety of other legal projects, on topics such as landlord tenant law, wills and estates etc.

The Law Foundation has recently approved a new vision for public legal education and British Columbia. It is as follows:

PLEI Vision

The Foundation wishes to support a public legal education and information program that will provide legal education and information services to the diverse public of British Columbia in all areas of law except criminal law.

The Law Foundation envisions PLEI as addressing five main components:

- a) Substantive content creation and development in subject areas of greatest need – making use of existing content and avoiding duplication.*
- b) Mechanisms for individuals to quickly locate the best content for their situation (will involve triage and guidance to content).*
- c) Mechanisms to help individuals apply the content to their particular situation (will involve individualized guidance, help with forms, etc.).*
- d) Stewardship – someone to regularly assess, anticipate and plan for what is needed in the above areas.*
- e) Legal Capability – curriculum and delivery of a school program that builds students' knowledge, skills, confidence and attitude to deal with law-related issues.*

This vision will be the foundation of the public legal education strategy for the Law Foundation as a funder going forward. A key element of the strategy will relate to the digital delivery of legal information and legal services. The National Action Committee report and virtually every study of public legal education and legal aid service delivery initiatives that has been conducted in recent years has acknowledged the importance of the Internet as a means for people to receive information and assistance. In the future, guided pathways, online dispute resolution, wiki books and other online tools will likely

become more and more common. Just as in the world of commerce, citizens will be able to perform more and more law related functions themselves online, through their computers or their smartphones. A key aspect for the Law Foundation, in fulfilling its legal aid mandate, will be to ensure that citizens receive the assistance they need in order to find information and solve their problems online.



Since 1979, LSS has had a dual statutory mandate to provide legal advice and representation (LAR) and public legal education and information (PLEI) to the people of BC. This model contrasts with other provinces, where “legal aid” has generally meant advice and representation, and PLEI is delivered by other organizations. This close integration gave LSS the unique ability to help people with low incomes at all points along their continuum of need – from prevention to resolution of legal problems.

Historically, LSS has always been committed to a broad vision that sees PLEI as central to ensuring that people had access to justice. Programs developed in the first decade included innovative Schools, Legal Resource Centre with a law library, a librarian-staffed Law Line, Native and Public Legal Education Programs. In addition to developing and distributing PLEI resources in print and video formats, LSS supported field offices, community-based services, and local initiatives through a small grants program.

This period could be described as the “pre-digital” age of legal aid in BC. It is hard to imagine now: there was a time when most staff at LSS worked without computers. Some early electronic services such as the Legal Beagle, an email-based program that provided answers to questions from students, found their origins here. For the most part, we focused on one-on-one, in person service delivery.

During the late 1980’s and into the 1990’s, LSS experienced increasing financial pressure, as well as growing demand for services of all kinds. PLEI was identified as a core service and closely integrated within a range of services delivered through field offices and community intermediaries. The basic model for service delivery remained largely the same, however, with an emphasis on in-person, individualized services.

With the growth of the Internet in the late 1990’s, we saw opportunities to support the development of new online services, including PovNet, a communications and information network for anti-poverty advocates, and the Electronic Law Library, a virtual reference desk maintained by LSS’ law librarians in collaboration with the public library system.

In 2002, LSS experienced drastic reductions in funding and changes to mandate. A long-established service model had to change. Most offices closed, staff was laid off and representation services were limited severely. In response, LSS re-designed its programs and service delivery models from the ground up.

In retrospect, one of the most significant changes was the decision to situate PLEI within a new Legal Information, Technology, and Communication Division. For the first time, PLEI providers worked very closely with technology experts as part of the same team. This led to a cross-pollination of ideas and opened a door to new ways of doing things. In the digital world, the availability of the Internet,

PCs and cell phones among ordinary British Columbians was growing at an increasing pace. And so disruption on several fronts forced LSS to abandon longstanding assumptions about how PLEI services should be delivered, and ushered in an age of digital experimentation and innovation.

After 2002, LSS quickly expanded the LawLINE program into a province-wide Call Centre that included access to legal aid applications as well as staffing to respond to callers seeking PLEI. A year later, LSS launched an expanded LawLINE that employed call centre technology and case management systems to deliver sophisticated brief advice services from lawyers and paralegals. The Law Foundation (LF) provided generous funding to LSS to develop the Family Law Website. The site featured self-help guides to respond to anticipated increases of the impact of an acknowledged but little understood phenomenon – the self-represented litigant. The site came to be known as the “Grand Central Station” for family law resources in BC. We built internal expertise in web design and content development. LSS also experimented with legal information services delivered through public access computers - long before the advent of the laptop or the “smart” mobile device.

A key lesson from this expansion of online service delivery: our audience was expanding along a continuum of digital literacy. Many users had an ongoing need for one-on-one assistance navigating web-based resources. At the same time, an increasing number of British Columbians owned computers and cell phones. This reflected a worldwide trend documented in statistical research on the reach of Internet and cellular services. Even at lower income levels, access to technology was increasing. LSS created an Electronic Services Manager position to encourage the use of new technologies to reach clients. Our integration of mobile websites and social media also came out of the growing awareness of the online audience

With encouragement from the Law Foundation, the PLEI Working Group (PLEIWG) was formed in 2002 to foster cooperation among the major producers of PLEI. A major success emerging from PLEIWG collaboration was the aggregator site Clicklaw, a portal to reliable online legal information. It succeeded the Electronic Law Library, which LSS could no longer support with its limited resources.

In 2009, LSS experienced another round of funding cuts that resulted in further changes to our service delivery model. The Electronic Services Manager was lost. Traditional roles which had supported PLEI services were re-examined and skillsets were revised based on current needs. A decision was made to specialize functions among community training, engagement, publications development - and perhaps most significant for the adoption of technology - online outreach.

Our online outreach co-ordinator (OOC) supports our online presence in various ways, including data and traffic analysis. Our social media presence includes a blog, a Facebook page and a Twitter feed. More significantly, the OOC assesses the usability of online legal information and explores emerging approaches to improving access and audience engagement. This helps us stay aware of emerging trends in online legal services such the gamification of information and texting, both more

common in the health sector but presenting significant potential for development in a legal aid context.

Our 2012 Accessibility Initiatives Report was the next significant milestone. This report was prepared to address three key issues: how to improve the content, look and feel of online resources; address barriers for people with low literacy; and make online resources more accessible for an Aboriginal audience. The report recommended presenting online legal information in a more engaging and effective way using more white space, less text and incorporating images and other media. It provided advice on how to make PLEI more useable by people with varying levels of literacy, through changes to style, formatting and presentation, and the use of a readability scale. And finally, it gave some guidance on how to improve Aboriginal access, particularly in rural and remote areas. Since then, we have worked hard to implement key recommendations in the report through incremental and sometimes dramatic changes in our online resources.

Guided pathways to legal information were already in use in legal aid in the United States, through A2J Author and LawHelp Interactive, and in the Netherlands, through the Rechtwijzer website. These expert systems used question and answer formats to help refine a user's search for answers to their legal questions. The Rechtwijzer site added an online dispute resolution platform to this service.

This brings us up to today. LSS sees a need for a similar resource in BC so that critical legal information was easily accessible and could meet the increasing desire of the public to be empowered to address their legal needs. Dr. MacFarlane's work shows how disillusioned the public is with expensive legal fees presenting a too often insurmountable barrier to their ability to access justice. And the public feels they have a right to access justice. We are now developing the MyLawBC site with funding from the Law and Notaries Foundations. MyLawBC will provide users with an interactive experience as they navigate the ordinary problems of everyday life.

As demonstrated by the Rechtwijzer in the Netherlands, and as planned by the BC Government's CRT, the future for digital delivery of service is expanding rapidly. We are in the early phase of making information interactive, but it is clear that service delivery beyond information, self-help guides and self-populating forms is coming. Access to mediators, parenting coordinators and other professionals delivering services and even adjudicators through online hubs is underway. Ever improving attention to user design and experience will lead to increased success for those who to access justice online.

What lies in the future? There is enormous potential for low-cost online services to further expand access to a wide range of moderate income people who cannot afford lawyers. But much more is about to change. An enterprising young lawyer in the US has developed a living will app that can be completed - including the selection of alternative clauses and electronic signatures – entirely on a smartphone. Currently he is working on an app that will scan residential tenancy agreements,

identify gaps and illegal terms, and provide a preliminary opinion on the document for a lawyer to review. And in Toronto, ROSS, built in the IBM Watson super-computer, is being developed to provide lawyers with answers to legal research questions, in response to free-form written or oral questions.

In “The Future of Law: Tomorrow’s Lawyers,” legal futurist Richard Susskind invoked hockey legend Wayne Gretzky to make a point about change in the legal profession. Gretzky said: “skate where the puck’s going, not where it’s been.” The same is true of legal aid and PLEI. The world is a dynamic environment. We are changing with it.

LSS PLEI Vision

The LSS vision for PLEI is rooted in our mandate, mission, vision and values. It is supported by the pillars of community engagement and best PLEI practices. Our vision is:

1. Client centred and needs based

A client-centred approach is at the heart of our business and evidence based client needs drive our PLEI service provision.

2. Collaborative and coordinated

LSS has a history of collaboration with other PLEI providers, intermediaries and government. We regularly seek out new collaborations.

3. Comprehensive and accessible

PLEI content covers a broad range of topics of public interest centred on the problems of everyday life, experienced by low income people, including those who cannot afford a lawyer to help them or are ineligible for legal aid counsel. PLEI is tailored to meet needs ranging from low literacy to intermediaries and the general public.

4. Cost effective

We leverage our expertise, distribution systems and strong community networks to expand PLEI services in a cost efficient way.

5. Part of a continuum of service

PLEI is integrated into the LSS service delivery and is a core part of our public service delivery, from 40,000 clients triaged annually at intake to support provided by Duty Counsel, the Family LawLine and Community Partners. Lawyers, advocates and intermediaries use PLEI to help British Columbians resolve their legal issues through self-help and appropriate, affordable legal assistance.

6. Innovative

We continually strive to find new and better ways to provide resources that meet the highest standards for usability, accuracy and effectiveness so that British Columbians can find and access the tools they need to access justice.

LSS PLEI Programs

Our program goals:

1. Identify PLEI needs to help people recognize and resolve legal problems.
2. PLEI in formats and places where it will reach a wide range of British Columbians
3. Strengthen staff, contractor and intermediary capacity to deliver PLEI
4. Work with others in the justice community and beyond to build the legal capability of all British Columbians.
5. Help people resolve legal problems in a timely way.

Our programs:

Publishing program

We assess user needs and gaps in PLEI, develop content and select delivery methods. We update existing research about legal needs and rely on expert advice. We engage in continuous improvement through user feedback through consultations, website surveys and usability testing. We ensure all print and web resources are up to date. Our Family Law Website received more than one million visits last year; the Aboriginal Legal Aid website was launched in 2014 and the LSS site provides corporate and service information. We optimize print distribution networks, and provide print and online PLEI that is widely accessible: easy to use and easy to understand.

Community education and engagement

We help intermediaries serve clients better. Opportunities are created to break down silos, share knowledge through in-person and web based training and the provision of PLEI materials. Our legal education conferences, workshops and other outreach activities build legal capability. We engage with public libraries, educators, mental and other health professionals, faith based organizations, Aboriginal serving agencies and groups supporting women's issues, the disabled, refugees and more, including Law Foundation advocates. This networking complements our community partners in 35 BC communities, local agents and offices in 34 centres and regular outreach to 25 bands in rural and remote locations.

Public services

We triage issues, provide information and community based referrals through a wide array of services. These range from law student volunteers providing LiveHelp chat, to lawyer answered email queries, to our Call Centre, intake, legal information outreach and Aboriginal community legal workers, our Community Partners and Local Agents. Services may be one to one, or in small workshops and range from brief online exchanges to sitting together at a computer and working through a family law self help guide.

LSS PLEI Priorities

2015 – 16 Fiscal year

1. MyLawBC

LSS is preparing for the launch of MyLawBC in 2015. This includes establishment of an advisory committee and planned continuous testing and improvements.

2. Aboriginal Community needs assessment

LSS will be assessing justice needs in Aboriginal communities to better serve Aboriginal people. This will include:

- regional workshops featuring dialogues on local needs and solutions
- stakeholder consultations on perceived needs
- develop a justice access strategy for very small, isolated communities
- develop strategies to enhance Aboriginal services

3. Collective impact practices

- work with PLS pursuant to agreement and others as opportunity arises

4. Aboriginal PLEI improvements

- Aboriginal Legal Aid Website - content review, user testing, promotion
- develop new processes for feedback on PLEI needs and products
- new materials for Aboriginal audiences, including Gladue self-help materials, matrimonial property on reserve, and the launch and evaluation of a youth-oriented graphic novel and YouTube animation

5. Responsive design

- Plan and implement responsive design to adapt the way website content is displayed on different screen sizes, subject to available resources and balancing above priorities.

The People's Law School was formed in 1972 by a group of UBC law students who wanted to educate people about the law. From inception to date, we have been developing and distributing PLEI, in multiple formats, to individuals and intermediaries, schools and communities throughout BC.

Vision and Mission

Our vision contributes to a province where people have the knowledge, skills and attitudes to resolve everyday legal problems. To achieve this vision we facilitate, promote, develop and distribute plain language legal education and information to British Columbians.

Current Programs

Our **Legal Education and Referral** program provides education, information and referral services to individuals, intermediaries, schools and communities. We develop content, workshops and curriculum to meet the needs of the public and unique audience by collaborating with community partners, utilizing current technology, and delivering education and referral services through multiple channels. Key activities include:

- **Legal @ Lunch:** Providing 1 hour information sessions on everyday legal topics. Delivered by a legal professional or PLEI facilitator to target audiences who include: youth, seniors, intermediaries, newcomers, immigrants, and the general public including self-represented litigants.
- **Speakers' Bureau:** Coordinating 2 hour sessions on everyday legal topics. Delivered by a legal professional or PLEI facilitator in community centres, schools, seniors' centres, immigrant-serving agencies, and libraries.
- **PLEI in the Community:** Participating in small- and large-scale community events such as Law Week, Multicultural Community celebrations, community events, and conferences to increase outreach.
- **Form Clinics:** Collaborating with BC Paralegal Association to host monthly form clinics focused on affidavits (sworn offsite), small claims, family court and indigent status forms.
- **Justice Theatre:** Touring BC and presenting dramatized trials in schools and communities that provide opportunity for students and community members to serve as jurors. Teachers integrate message into curriculum emphasizing lesson and legal impact on topical issues such as: gangs and drugs, cyberbullying, shoplifting and hate crimes.
- **PLSask Referral Services:** Listening and making referrals online, over the phone or in person. Our friendly and informed staff refer people to appropriate legal services, our resource and reading room, education events and web site, and to our community partner sites and services.

Our **Multimedia, Publishing and Distribution** program develops and distributes PLEI in multiple formats, through multiple channels to meet the diverse and dispersed needs of people throughout BC. Through the use of technology tools, we produce and distribute content that is accessible online via portals, websites, and social networks and offline through print media and direct marketing. Our focus has been on civil law problems and family law as relates to child support, caring for children, and family violence and abuse. Key activities include:

- **Content:** Developing, revitalizing and distributing content in multiple formats to increase access and use of PLEI, including bundling and distributing content in resource sets or curriculum kits to meet the unique needs of individuals, notaries, teachers, facilitators, advocates, government agencies, and other community intermediaries.
- **Website:** Providing access to a mobile friendly site, publishing content in multiple formats and linking to other community and service sites.
- **Booklets:** Producing and distributing plain language publications written by legal experts on everyday legal problems. Available in multiple formats, including print, wikibook, and EPUB (a format designed for use on tablets and ereaders).
- **Factsheets:** Publishing two-page snapshots that highlight important aspects of a legal topic.
- **Videos:** Creating videos and animations that feature everyday scenarios and help answer FAQs.
- **Social media:** Engaging with public and intermediaries on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to share information and educate and inform on everyday legal problems.

1 – 3 Years Priorities include:

- **Communications:** Improve public engagement through collaboration and communication campaigns.
- **Respond to need:** Deepen our understanding of end-user needs, identify areas of greatest need, and develop PLEI, programs and people to respond to those needs.
- **Evaluate impact:** Expand evaluation and collective impact tools to assess the outcomes and impact of PLEI.
- **Pursue digital PLEI:** Extend publishing in digital-friendly and print on demand formats, provide online seminars and repurpose content in smaller bites.
- **Develop legal capability in youth:** Develop curriculum to strengthen the legal capability of students in BC to address everyday legal problems.
- **Partner:** Collaborate with others to minimize program and content overlap and maximize access to legal information, education and services.
- **Secure support:** Secure justice community support and program and project funding to support the PLEI needs of people in BC.



Prepared by Teresa Augustine, Executive Director, People's Law School in response to Mark Benson, Executive Director, Legal Services Society: Legal Aid BC ask for a 500 word history of PLS and 500 words on why we've gone digital and where we think digital PLEI in BC is headed.

A historical summary of People's Law School and a glimpse into its digital pursuits

The People's Law School: Public Legal Education Society was formed in 1972 by a group of UBC law students who saw the need to develop and distribute public legal education and information (PLEI) to people in BC. From inception to date, the Society has focused on putting PLEI into the hands of individuals and resourcing schools and communities, so that whoever and wherever people are, they can access legal information that informs, and helps them address everyday legal problems.

As the first PLEI provider in Canada, People's Law School has long been recognized as an innovative leader. Our first products included a booklet titled *Women and the Law*, and a video, *Canadian Court System*. Both products were well-received and as awareness grew so did demand. Responding to demand, People's Law School took public legal education to Cable TV via a weekly show entitled *Law Talk*, featuring interviews with members of the legal, business and political community. Our Newcomer to Canada services expanded to include low literacy material, classes and ethnic media in community newspapers, TV and radio. Multi-language media initially focused on Chinese, Punjabi, Spanish and Vietnamese, and when our provincial diversity shifted, we added Tagalog, Russian, Korean, Swahili and Arabic to name a few.

In 1986, Justice Theatre put the courtroom under the big tent at the Pacific National Exhibition. Sixty-eight performances attracted 10,000 people over a two week period. In the 90's we started offering *Learning about the Law*, a multi-series curriculum to English-language teachers and learners. We continued publishing PLEI in print and video formats including the award winning video *Where's Winston* that was supported by a teachers' guide and video narrative in multiple languages. We also began to see and envision the impact and potential of the World Wide Web.

A lot has happened since 1972. Provincial demographics have changed, a result of globalization, aging population, migration and immigration, the advancements and affordability of technology have influenced the way people access opportunities, education, information and PLEI. Alongside these changes has been increasing concerns from the public, special interest groups, funders and governments over a congested justice system, increased costs, duplication of services, and the array of service providers all making navigation of PLEI and the justice system more of a maze rather than a door.

Responding to end-users, system needs, funders and technological changes, we have in the past four years made a strategic shift from what was, to what is, in preparation for what could be. We began with an environmental scan and business analysis followed by strategic planning and a training, marketing and development strategy. Paramount to our success has been our ability to lead change, listen to and provide the consumer with accessible and accurate information, utilize technology to advance goals and collaborate with partners and funders to collectively improve access and impact of PLEI in BC.

From past to present, all avenues lead to digital PLEI.

Over the past 5 years our core programming distributed more than 500,000 print resources, delivered 3,044 education events and triaged 12,000 referral requests. We engaged directly with children, youth, diverse groups of adults, seniors, aboriginal people, immigrants, service providers, professionals, and self-

represented litigants. In the same period, fiscal constraints tightened access to funds and a public frustrated by high service costs and a congested justice system increasingly self-represented. Where those realities posed challenges they also presented opportunities to evidence the value and benefit of PLEI.

With visionary leadership, People's Law School saw technology and alliances as a way to reduce the growing gap between public need and operational capacity. The environmental scan and business analysis spurred changes to a traditional approach and set the foundation to strategically and collaboratively get digital. We shifted from a mindset of ownership to one of stewardship. We stopped bemoaning the absence of resources and developed talent. We moved from thinking the development process is fixed to knowing it's in motion, and focused on the purpose.

Strategically, we upskilled our team, opened communications and changed our operational structure. We deployed a mobile-friendly website with commonly understood gateways and legal categories. We shifted the focus from booklets and inventory to social media, video messaging, wikibooks and e-books so end-users could search, tag, flag, tweet, post, print on demand, and build their own e-library. And we declared content, the Ruler!

Collaboratively, we aligned with shared-value partners to improve access to PLEI through gateways such as PLEI for Non-Profits, Clicklaw, and the soon to be released Solution Provider and MyLawBC. We worked with a network of PLEI organizations to develop shared metrics so we could report out and analyze impact in the same language. We adopted common publishing standards and centralized our distribution services so end-users could access a comprehensive selection of civil, family and criminal law products in one place. We championed Clicklaw Wikibooks encouraging and supporting other PLEI providers to get digital. Through that alliance we moved our *Learning about the Law* curriculum and supporting resources online so teachers and learners throughout BC would have access to PLEI that is supported by comprehensive and easily updated instructional resources. We entered into a collective impact agreement with Legal Services Society: Legal Aid BC that has us working together on common initiatives and assessing individual and collective impact. We optimized our web content, used social media to engage end-users and pushed traffic through digital networks using Q&A with inbound and outbound links and loops to our programs and services and those of other PLEI providers. Increasingly we focus on distributing information in consumable amounts and have become a go-to center for digital media.

Examples are many, so also are the lessons learned. Our key take away - change waits for no one!

Where is digital PLEI in BC headed? I suspect we will see more gateways to centralized services, attention will be given to media campaigns so we can serve the public with reformatted and new content, guided pathways will be well resourced through the collaborative efforts of PLEI producers and, independently or with the help of another, individuals and families can help themselves.

In a climate of increased demand and limited resources, it's critical that we, individually and collectively, pursue digital so that the people we serve can find and open doors, so all, rather than some have access to justice.

March 30, 2015

How PovNet got started

PovNet is an online resource for anti-poverty and community workers and anyone who is looking for information about issues affecting marginalized communities locally, nationally or internationally. PovNet is not any one person's idea -- it is the creation of the organizations and individuals using it. PovNet's role is not to be a direct protagonist in the world of systemic advocacy or activism – the organization provides some of the tools for anti-poverty activists and advocates to do that work.

PovNet began with a meeting in Vancouver in 1997. Advocates and community workers from around the province were invited (and funded) by Legal Services Society of BC to attend. They talked about poverty issues. They struggled with new technological language. They wrote lists on flip charts. They had to figure out how to use this new internet. They hadn't yet heard of the "digital divide" but they certainly knew intuitively what it was. They didn't talk tech talk –there was not a computer in sight.

After that meeting, the ground work started with grants from the Legal Service Society, The Law Foundation and the Vancouver Foundation. The first couple of years at PovNet, the co-ordinator travelled around British Columbia showing people how to turn computers on. PovNet's role was to facilitate the network so that advocates, some of whom had been working in the field for years, would now have access to the technology that would put them in daily contact with others around the province.

One of PovNet's founding member groups, the federated anti-poverty groups of bc (fapg) were people who often were helping others in their own communities. They were sometimes advocates who were on welfare themselves, and they had much more expertise in dealing with the system than a lot of other community workers. They met every year at Naramata, a United Church retreat near Penticton, for their annual general meeting, training and networking. It was the only in-person communication they had, and the only time they talked to each other (long distance phone calls were too expensive, as were faxes).

Initially they were quite hostile to the idea of PovNet -- how could people on welfare afford computers? But because they were directly involved and had a voice from the beginning – their president was a founding member on PovNet's steering committee – they began to see that there were public access sites in libraries and other ways to find computers. PovNet could also be a resource for advocates who were not part of the more established (and funded) advocacy network.

The first time PovNet's co-ordinator went to Naramata to an fapg meeting to talk to the group about PovNet she had to think about how to tell them about this new tool so they could see the point of being involved. Because if they weren't involved, PovNet would not be truly an online commons of equal partners in social justice work. There were no computers at Naramata. No options for power point presentations. There was a display table – that was it.

So she took a large piece of bristol board and put an enlarged copy of the front page of the PovNet web site on it. Then she photocopied multiple copies of a number of the pieces and news stories that were on the front page of the web site. She took pieces of string and attached them from the picture of the web site to the relevant article on the table. A web in action. People got it. Then it was just a question of finding which public access sites had computers that fapg advocates could use back home.

When the provincial Liberal government instituted cuts to legal aid in 2002, every single community law office and native community law office was wiped out within six months. What this meant for the community advocates was that suddenly they weren't doing their work along with their allies at legal aid - they were on their own.

If PovNet hadn't been available, it would have been impossible for the advocates to communicate with each other – they had been used to going into local legal aid offices and using their fax machine, photocopier, picking the poverty lawyer's brain. The local transition house worker was suddenly helping a battered women get income assistance because there was no-one else in her community to do it. PovNet let her connect with over 200 other advocates across the province to get help.

PovNet had become a lifeline.

What PovNet has learned from digital delivery of poverty law services

1. Most importantly, PovNet has learned that digital delivery of services, be it facilitating online courses, networking via email lists, or perusing web sites, only works when there are warm bodies attached to the online options. Advocates and PovNetU learners meet at in-person training conferences. PovNet staff talk to community groups and are invited to attend organizations' staff meetings. PovNet provides a human face to the technological tools that we offer the anti-poverty community.
2. Accessibility is a key issue when providing online tools to the PovNet community. There is no use in us offering a high end webinar with video segments embedded when someone in a northern rural community in BC doesn't have the broadband capacity to see it. Low tech options are a crucial part of digital delivery.

PovNet has always worked to make sure that no-one is left out because of the technology. That has always been part of PovNet's goals – checking in with people before they get to the point of feeling like idiots because they don't know how to do use the computer or the software. PovNet's only two rules are that there are no stupid questions, and that it is *always* the computer's fault.

PovNet finds the technological resources for its users to meet their needs. Advocates don't care about what new program PovNet is using to run the email lists; they only care that they can use it. PovNet's job is to make the technology seamless.

3. The digital divide continues to be an important component of talking about poverty and access to technology. The digital divide is not going away. PovNet is one of the social justice organizations in Canada that fights for continued affordable access to the internet so that marginalized communities are not left behind in the new world of online services and public legal education.

Statistics Canada released its bi-annual internet use survey in November 2013, and while much of the immediate reaction focused on the continuing growth of internet use (due largely to increased usage by those aged 65 and older), the bigger story is the ongoing Canadian digital divide that confirms the strong link between household income and

internet use. Internet use among the richer half of the country is actually over 90 per cent. Internet use among poorer Canadians stands at only 62.5 per cent.

Statscan reports that 47.5 per cent of Canadians aged 65 and over use the Internet (up from 40.2 in 2010), the biggest jump of any age group. However, there is a major divide in internet use based on household income. While 66.7 per cent of households over the age of 65 in the top half of income use the internet, that number drops to only 28.5 per cent for the poorest quartile of households. (from a *Globe and Mail* article by Michael Geist published in November, 2013)

Where PovNet is going next

PovNet is constantly exploring and evaluating new accessible technologies to make the online experience more user friendly for advocates and the general public. The most recent addition to the web sites is a wiki for advocates called advocapedia which will allow them to share resources on poverty law topics.

PovNet is expanding and changing to meet the needs of learners from different communities of interest. For example, a new project in the downtown eastside of Vancouver is working with single room occupancy tenants – the co-ordinator asked if PovNetU could provide an online course that was self-paced for these tenants with particular legal issues when dealing with a landlord who is a hotel owner.

It is the online anti-poverty community which dictates where PovNet is going next and the tools that they need to do their work. PovNet is the pencil; its users are the ones who keep it sharp.

*Penny Goldsmith, Executive Co-ordinator
PovNet*