

Intermediary Training: A Review of LSS Regional Conferences, 2004

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**Legal
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Society**

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Preface

In 2002, the Legal Services Society (LSS or the society) asked community organizations providing legal information, referral, assistance, or advocacy to people with low incomes what it should do to support them given changes in the society's mandate and the loss of local offices. These organizations replied that they needed continued access to accurate public legal information and systems in place for staying current and connected and for sharing information. They also spoke of the need for ongoing training. As stated in the *Report on LSS Community Legal Information Needs Meeting, May 3, 2002*, "The LSS three-year plan needs to look at ways to support community advocates and their organizations such as FLAW and PovNet, and at ways to maintain and develop community advocacy skills." The society made a commitment to develop training programs for advocates and began to organize regional and provincial conferences.

In the spring of 2005, the LSS PLEI department asked Nancy Hannum to assess the previous year's regional conferences to determine if we were meeting the needs identified in 2002. Nancy has been actively involved in the delivery of public legal information since 1978 through her work as the manager of the Legal Resource Centre at LSS, a board member of the British Columbia Library Association, and a founding member of PovNet's steering committee. As a consultant, she worked with the BC Public Library Services Branch training librarians how to use QP LegalEze, an online legal research tool. Nancy is presently active with the Scow Institute.

I thank Nancy Hannum for her valuable work and the respondents for taking the time to participate in the interviews. Thanks also to Kathryn Spracklin and Candice Lee, who edited and produced the final document.

LSS regional conferences are made possible by the PLEI staff who oversee the conferences, community advocates and lawyers who help create materials and present workshops, and support from the Law Foundation.

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide the Legal Services Society with feedback from people who attended LSS regional advocacy conferences about the significance of the conferences for their work. In addition, the report will review participants' comments on their knowledge and use of the society's resources. The findings will help the society plan future training programs for intermediaries who help people with low incomes identify, avoid, or resolve their everyday legal problems.

In 2004, LSS held regional advocacy conferences in Campbell River, Williams Lake, Dawson Creek, and Penticton. Participants in these two-day conferences were community-based workers from organizations that provide advocacy, counselling, or referral services ranging from basic information services to paralegal-type representation at Ministry of Human Resources reconsideration hearings or helping people prepare for court.

The society's goals for the conferences participants were —

- to increase participants' knowledge of the law and available legal services so they can better assist their clients,
- to foster collaboration and networking among public legal education and information (PLEI) and advocacy services providers at the local and regional level, and
- to encourage participants to use the print and electronic PLEI resources of LSS and related agencies in their work.

This report is based on the results of telephone interviews with a selected group of conference participants conducted in March 2005. See Appendix A for a copy of the *aide-mémoire*.

2004 LSS Regional Conferences

This section of the report describes the conference participants by location and type of work, and then discusses the feedback from respondents to the telephone interview on the impact of the conferences on their work.

Conference registrants

A total of 154 people registered for the conferences in the following locations:

Conference location	Date	# of registrants
Campbell River	March, 2004	48
Williams Lake	May, 2004	38
Dawson Creek	June, 2004	20
Penticton	Sept. 2004	48
Total		154

The type of work conference registrants do can be categorized as follows:

Type of work	# of registrants	% of registrants
Information and referral	21	14
Basic advocacy	40	26
Intermediate advocacy	24	16
Advanced advocacy	16	10
Other related work	40	26
Unknown	13	8
Total	154	100

The 40 registrants identified as doing “Other related work” held positions in the following areas:

Type of work	# of registrants
Counselling	17
Aboriginal social development	9
Immigrant services	6
Victim assistance	5
Health	2
Research	1

In total, 52% of registrants identified themselves as doing some level of advocacy work. Of the others, a significant number provide information and referral or counselling services.

Interviews with participants

From the total of 154 registrants, 34 people were contacted about their work and the impact of the conference on what they do. These people were selected from registrants at each of the four conferences on the basis of their work and location (urban or rural). The objective was to keep a similar breakdown to conference participants between people doing advocacy (14 respondents), information and referral work (3 respondents), and other related work (12 respondents). The proportion of respondents who were from organizations serving primarily Aboriginal clients (38% or 11 respondents) also reflects the high number of Aboriginal people who attended the conferences. In addition, Aboriginal respondents were selected from First Nations, Métis, and general Aboriginal organizations.

Four of the 34 people selected were registered for a conference but did not attend, and 1 person is currently on leave. The summaries and conclusions that follow are therefore based on the responses of the remaining 29 people.

General comments about the respondents

People seemed so busy. Interviews were difficult to schedule, and even the scheduled interviews were often interrupted. People talked about not having enough time to learn and use the websites. Two respondents seemed near burnout and others were dealing with very difficult client problems — a woman living in her car in Courtney, the ongoing impossibility of finding affordable housing for people on welfare in Prince George. However, most were quite willing to talk. They were positive about the conferences and pleased with the

information support from LSS, if frustrated by the loss of legal aid offices. It was my sense that most people were speaking directly about their clients' real need for legal help rather than out of anger or a political agenda.

Essentially all of those interviewed are doing the same work they were doing at the time of the conferences. One person has changed organizations, another has moved to a nearby town to do the same work, and a third has been promoted to a position that involves less direct advocacy work.

Did the conferences meet LSS goals?

Respondents' answers to the interviewer's questions "What did you like best about the conference?" and "Tell me one thing you learned at the conference that has helped you in your work?" reflect the goals for the conferences quite precisely.

Goal 1. To increase participants' knowledge of the law and available legal services so they can better assist their clients

Knowledge of the law and legal services was identified by 11 respondents as the most valuable outcome of the conference. In addition, 13 respondents commented on the usefulness of specific workshops and 2 mentioned how the *Our Welfare, Our Laws* video helped them prepare their clients.

Specific comments:

- "I learned overall process, the process of [MHR] and how it all works, how I could step in/out to help clients, and when to work with other advocates."
- "Overviews of legislation I didn't know. Then I could go back and work with the details."
- "I felt confirmed in what I know."
- "A wealth of information well delivered."
- "Huge knowledge about the legal system."

Goal 2. To foster collaboration and networking among PLEI and advocacy services providers at the local and regional level

Networking was identified by 13 respondents as the most valuable outcome of the conference.

Specific comments:

- “I was new and it was so great to meet the people doing this work.”
- “I was impressed that there were lots of people from all over the community.”
- “Listening and letting everyone have a voice about their frustrations; people exchanged phone numbers, and now we phone each other more.”
- “I liked lunchtime because we could meet people doing the same work — this is such thankless and isolating work.”
- “It’s important to get together and learn from each other and support each other — otherwise people will burn out.”
- “The conference gave me the steam to do it for another year. We work so much in isolation in rural areas, no one understands how terrible (referring to what is happening to poor people) it is except those other people in the room at the conference.”

Goal 3. To encourage participants to use the electronic and print PLEI resources of LSS and related agencies in their work

The conference resource book was identified by 7 respondents as the most valuable outcome of the conference. In addition, 3 respondents identified Web training as very useful, and one respondent identified the *Aboriginal Poverty Law Manual* as the most valuable outcome.

General comments

In general, people were very positive about the conference. A few sometimes had trouble distinguishing this conference from other LSS conferences, and four people had trouble remembering specific workshops.

There was one dissenting voice who expressed dislike for the “propaganda” coming from the Ministry of Children and Family Development and said incorrect figures were given about children in care (particularly statistics on Aboriginal children).

Specific comments:

- “I wanted to attend every session.”
- “What stood out for me is that we have to be advocates. Because of the legal aid cutbacks and the small amount of hours that legal aid lawyers have, I need to help the clients prepare and help the lawyers with the legwork. When I call the lawyer, I am better prepared.”

- Two people also commented positively on the small groups, the question and answer sessions, and the interactive quality of the conference.

Future training, future conferences

Everyone responded thoughtfully to the interview question “How could LSS improve future conferences or training sessions?” Only one person suggested in a generally positive response that they wouldn’t go again: “I have what I need; my involvement is not that frequent.”

All the others expressed interest in attending future sessions. General comments included suggestions that because it was impossible for most people to attend every session, the same workshops could be repeated as refreshers. Respondents liked the opportunity to network with people from other services. Several spoke of the importance of keeping current. One person said, “More conferences will give us the fire to go on.”

Subject areas of interest for further training include:

- **Family law** — 6 respondents would like more family law training; specific subject areas requested include a repeat of the overview of family law custody and access, a focus on family court process (especially for issues of family violence), a beginner’s introduction to separation and divorce, and how to help people with do-your-own-divorce documents.
- **Aboriginal law** — 3 respondents requested Aboriginal law training; specific subject areas requested include updates on new Supreme Court of Canada decisions, the transfer of family and child services in the north, and wills and estates on-reserve.
- **Current law and legal process** — 3 respondents requested workshops about court process and how to apply the law to a set of facts in developing an argument.
- **Child and family services and child protection** — 2 respondents were interested in child protection procedures and how to develop arguments about cultural roots and heritage.
- **Legal aid updates** — 2 respondents were interested in changes in legal aid and how to help people who can’t get legal aid.
- **Welfare law** — 2 respondents wanted to be kept abreast of changes in the legislation and interpretations of welfare law. According to one respondent, “It would be good to have access to the people who do the reconsiderations to talk about how they are making decisions.”

- **Teens and the law** — 2 respondents were interested in the legal issues facing young people; in particular, one person requested “a session on teenagers living alone — they are hard to place for housing. We need information about young people making contracts.”
- **Other interests** — There were also single requests for sessions on current refugee process, mental health law, and an orientation to the Canada Pension Plan and Employment Insurance programs. One person commented, “We need information to give the public so they know how to appeal, even that they have the right to appeal. The problem is that they (federal government) no longer provide print materials; everything is online.”

Comments on the form of training:

- “I would like to attend something like the Delta conference for experienced advocates — a semi-regular training and updating conference.”
- “What wasn’t good for me as a beginner was that the workshop on disability appeals seemed to be in bits and pieces — I need to have a case study and go all the way through from application to appeal; I needed to know the process.”

Networking

The fact that 13 respondents indicated networking as the most important conference benefit speaks to the isolation people identified in their work and their need for colleagues who understand what they do, their information requirements, and the pressures they face. This matches my sense of the respondents as committed busy people, some facing burnout and some struggling to add advocacy (a skill new to them) to their current range of services. The conference format seemed very successful in allowing time for local and provincial networking to take place among participants as well as with speakers and LSS program staff. Respondents said the conference was also important as a place where people listen. In several cases, the local networking has successfully continued since the conference. This reinforces the evidence that supporting informal networks with training and information is an effective means of strengthening advocacy services and those who provide them.

On reflection: Successful conferences, appropriate goals

The respondents' feedback suggests that the conferences did meet the society's goals. In addition, the conference goals were aligned with the needs identified by respondents.

- There is a high level of consistency between what respondents identified as the most important benefits of the conferences and the three goals for the conferences set by LSS.
- The respondents' general comments and the tone of their responses were very positive. This indicates not only that the conferences were successful, but more importantly that the goals of the conferences matched and met the needs of the participants.
- Perhaps a final indicator that the conferences are meeting real needs is the strong interest in future conferences and the detailed list of suggestions for conference topics.

Recommendations

1. Hold regular conferences with similar goals, with each conference building, in part, on the feedback from the last. Match workshop topics with local needs.
2. Share feedback from conference participants with other LSS departments. Front-line workers are a prime source of information about clients.
3. Shorten the time for seeking post-conference feedback to about six months to avoid some of the "blur factor."
4. Develop effective follow-up strategies to reinforce the information, knowledge, and skills taught at the workshops.
5. Identify further provincial training opportunities for victim assistance workers. Perhaps this has been done, but I was struck by the number of comments about the role victim services workers are taking related to family law legal aid services.

Use of LSS Resources

This section discusses the responses to the interview questions on the resources currently offered by LSS. Respondents were asked in particular about the use of the resource book prepared for the conferences. They were also asked about their awareness and use before and after the conference of specific LSS print and electronic resources and legal aid services. Respondents offered useful comments about the value of the services for their client groups.

Conference resource book

Conference participants received a resource book that provided information and listed key resources about each of the subject areas covered at the conference.

In addition to the comments from some respondents that the book was one of the conference highlights, more specific comments — some quite enthusiastic — indicated that 21 respondents (72 %) actively use the book.

Specific comments:

- “We really like it — there are no lawyers here. It can be intimidating, but it is full of useful websites; then we use the websites to download the forms.”
- “I use it mostly for training staff.”
- “I took a day off just to read it.”
- “It was sent by the goddess! I use it frequently and I photocopy pages for my clients (even though our photocopy budget is very tight) so they have it written down when they go to the ministry [MHR]. Sometimes with MHR, neither the worker nor the client knows the law. For example, a long-time disabled woman didn’t know about her right to a transportation subsidy. The four local workers didn’t know it either. She told them to look it up, and she had the photocopy I gave her, and ... she got it!”

- “Yes, it’s my reference book.”
- “I really love the big book.”

On the other hand, 5 respondents indicated minimal use and 1 respondent apparently did not pick up the book at the conference.

Shared use of the resource book

Of respondents, 17 indicate that they share the book widely with co-workers, staff of other organizations, and clients. Some photocopy relevant sections and make the book publicly accessible in their resource libraries. Two people said they got extra copies for staff of a related agency who also find it useful. Two others talked about using sections of the manual for training. One person said she made everyone review it and now they all use it. Six respondents indicated that they didn’t share the book or that they shared it with only one colleague or boss.

Preferred use of the resource book

Respondents were asked to identify what types of information were most useful for them (for example, legislation, checklists, forms, etc.). Most people were hesitant or unsure about identifying preferred sections or types of information. This suggests that how these respondents use the book is based more on the issues their clients are facing than on the subject or form of the information. One comment was quite specific: “We use it as an overall reference tool. I even use the sections I didn’t take at the conference; it’s good to have them, too.”

However, 13 respondents indicated some preference for certain subject areas. When asked which sections of the book they use most, 5 respondents indicated the referral section, legal aid guidelines, and LSS catalogue; 3 indicated family law; 3 indicated the Residential Tenancy Act; 2 indicated welfare and disability law; and 1 indicated refugee law. Another 2 commented they couldn’t remember which sections they use.

Most respondents could not answer the question “What type of information is most useful to you?” Specific comments do show a preference for the checklists (mentioned by 3 respondents), and 2 respondents commented that they tend to use the Web for current legislation and forms. One person used the BC Coalition of People with Disabilities (BCCPD) forms, but she couldn’t remember where she got them.

Several people either picked up the book when we were talking or said they would go get it to remind themselves. It also seemed from people’s responses that they simply didn’t remember where they looked for a particular item in the past. Busy people grab what they know, use it, and move on to the next client. People knew, for example, that they used BCCPD forms or family

law forms, but they weren't always clear where they got the forms. In addition, 2 respondents had received other reference books (which they also use) at later LSS conferences, and got the books confused when responding to my questions.

Preference for print or electronic version

All respondents had Internet access and only 2 talked about sharing computers — the others all had one at their desk. However, 1 person indicated she didn't have access to personal e-mail.

Still, 16 respondents prefer to use the resource book in print for various reasons:

- “Nice tabs and it's quick to find things.”
- “Working with an illiterate population who like hard copy.” (She gives people copies of pages they need for their specific situations, often to show the MHR workers.)
- “Having it at my fingertips takes less time than searching the Net.”
- “We have to share printers and it's easier to access in print.”
- “Don't use electronic sources much.”
- “Mostly use the LSS catalogue in print.”
- “Find it difficult to read the screen for long periods.”
- “I get lost on the Net.”

An electronic version was preferred by 4 respondents:

- “It would be awesome — more user friendly; it would make it easier to amend for local training purposes.”
- “I would use it more if electronic.”

Another 6 respondents thought having access to both a print and an electronic version would be good:

- “More people could use it.”
- “I like the Net, but my clients like hard copy.”
- “Different levels of staff computer skills here.”

Print resources

When asked about their pre- and post-conference awareness of LSS print resources, most people responded that they know and use the materials. Only 3 respondents said they didn't know about them before the conference.

Comments were positive and suggest that LSS publications, along with photocopies from the resource book, are the materials respondents prefer to give to clients. Heavy use of these publications by bulk order or frequent re-ordering was indicated by 14 respondents.

Specific comments:

- “I use them any time I can. I also print out specific pages of LSS publications (from the LSS website) for a low-literacy person. Sometimes it’s better just to print out the specific information they need.”
- “Awesome. I use them all the time.”
- “Still on back-order for the *Aboriginal Poverty Law Manual*. I really need it.”
- “I started a legal library when I came back from the conference with all the LSS pamphlets; people come and use it. It’s great.
- “Mostly welfare rights and the *Tenant Survival Guide*.”
- “I give out tons of brochures, but only after I have talked with a client. I highlight the page. Sometimes they are so stressed they don’t hear it when we talk. I can tell when someone has low literacy and we see quite a few.”
- “Requested publications in Vietnamese or Chinese.”
- “I use the booklets that cover on-/off-reserve issues and also print things like *Speaking to Sentence* off the LSS website for clients.”
- “I also give the publications to the local MLA’s office and the ministry — both of them send people to us.”
- “I use for kids in trouble.”
- “I use for criminal court work.”

Here again, there was some blurring of LSS resources. For the most part, people seemed to be talking about print materials, but when talking about printing, some mentioned printing pages from the LSS website.

Electronic resources

Respondents were asked about their pre- and post-conference awareness and use of LSS electronic resources.

PovNet website

PovNet had the highest name recognition of all the websites, with 17 respondents aware of and using it before the conference and 4 remaining unaware of it after the conference. Ten respondents were active users, while 9

respondents said they don't use PovNet so much (3 of these were limited users because they don't do much poverty law).

PovNet e-mail

Twelve respondents indicated they are active on PovNet e-mail lists, with 2 of these mentioning the Aboriginal list specifically, and the rest indicating that they are on more than one list. For those not on the lists, 3 asked to be added.

Specific comments:

- “I use it less now because there is lots of venting on the lists.”
- “I use the lists to work out alliances with other advocates in the province.”
- “PovNet fits into my time limits — I can read the short postings, and it's often exactly the information that I need.”
- “I would like more information about on-reserve issues, wills/estates for example.”
- “I put a notice about PovNet in my Band (First Nation) newsletter.”

LawLINK website and public access computers

Eight respondents reported using a LawLINK public access computer or referring clients to one. One respondent offered this very enthusiastic comment: “Yes, we use it. In fact, at the conference we made a connection with someone who gave us a computer that we now use for our public access site. People use LawLINK a lot.”

The comment that clients are not able to use the computer and website by themselves was made by 7 respondents.

- “I haven't used it much with clients; they like talking to me or calling the LawLINE.”
- “The LawLINK public access computer is across the hall and I check in about every half-hour when some is using it. But they sit there for hours sometimes with no contact.”
- “People don't have a lot of access to the Net — half hour at the public library isn't enough for a client. People are stressed — in crisis, sometimes they have literacy problems, and they don't have computers at home. People in stress can't handle the research.”
- “I don't think our clients would use this — they would have language problems. But I'm not sure because they would use it at home.”
- “Many of my clients don't speak much English and these would be too complicated for them to use. Their children help with English but I don't think they could use these websites.”

- “My clients don’t have good search skills.”
- “For the most part, people are not using LawLINK. I think it’s because they don’t yet have the skills and they get overwhelmed. It is easier to get help from a person. I may use it to give them a printout.”

In addition, people commented about lack of public access sites:

- “We would love to have a public access site here; we heard you had some computers for people. We have front-line volunteers who could show people how to use it. We get so many legal questions.”

My sense here is that *where* there is personal interest and support from advocates, LawLINK gets used more. But there is still a mixed level of comfort and use of the Internet by 9 conference respondents and therefore some hesitation to refer people to the site or to use it. There were 3 respondents who could remember that they used LawLINK via the LSS website, and 2 of these said they use the Family Law website more often.

Electronic Law Library

Fewer respondents indicated using the Electronic Law Library (ELL) than said they used LawLINK. One person commented about statutes (a link to the Queen’s Printer site) being out of date. My sense here is that the comments for LawLINK apply equally to ELL, and non-users were feeling sheepish about their Internet use.

Family Law website

Respondents were vague about what they knew about this website before or after the conference. On reflection, I suspect that some people might start with the LSS site and then click on a link to the Family Law site. If this is the case, they don’t relate to it as separate from the LSS site. Twelve respondents (including the 9 who indicated they don’t use the Web much) either didn’t know about or don’t use the site. Several of these people also commented that they don’t do family law.

Feedback offered by the 14 respondents who use the site included comments on browsing, referral, and forms.

Specific comments:

- “It’s very useful for mailing forms to people who have no other sources.”
- “It’s well organized. I use forms and documents lots.”
- “I take young women through the site, but it’s hard for them to take this in when they are crisis. The site is as good as can be, but people in these circumstances so often need a person to talk to.”
- “It takes time, but it’s good.”

- “I use the AG family law site.”
- “The clients need a person when they’re so involved in the mess they’re in. They can’t do research, they need help.”
- “I find it more user-friendly now that I’m used to it.”
- “I use it, but I’m not sure my clients could if they didn’t have a clue about the law.”
- “It works well for me, and I work through it with people, but people have to know what they need before than can use it. The availability of forms etc. is great.”
- “I just go to the Family Law site and click on what I need.”

Family law child protection online discussion group

Only one respondent, who is a subscriber to the discussion group, was aware of the group before and after the conference. However, 7 respondents said it could be useful to their work and all but one person requested to be added to the list. Other respondents said they rarely or never got involved with child protection issues.

Legal aid services

It became clear after interviewing several respondents that most people related to legal aid via their closest representative. If there was a local agent, they didn’t much use or refer to the call centre, for example. Often people responded to the question about their awareness of call centre or regional centre services by talking about a local agent. People in several communities said that victim assistance workers handle legal aid applications for them.

Regional centres/Local agents

Prince George and Kelowna were the only regional centres mentioned by respondents (2). One person commented about Kelowna: “We work directly with legal aid and the outreach workers at the courthouse. They are fantastic with clients. Sometimes I take clients over there; it saves time doing intake. I have also taken clients to the LawLINK site at [the Kelowna] office to help them with family forms; it works well if someone is there to help them.”

For 10 respondents, their main contact with legal aid is through their LSS local agent. Respondents from Williams Lake said they missed their local agent and are awaiting the new agent. In Dawson Creek, 2 respondents work with the local agent or the native courtworkers to get to legal aid. One person talked about sending a client to the local pro-bono program, but the client didn’t get an appointment with a lawyer for three months. A respondent from

Duncan reported good support from the local agent but frustration that the agent's role is so limited compared to before the cuts.

In fact, several people responded to the question on their awareness of legal aid services by talking about what is missing from these services:

- “There are no legal aid lawyers here and legal aid is mostly criminal (i.e., not family). Sometimes I use the [legal information outreach worker] in Prince George, but I have to be careful with conflicts.”
- “LSS should help us get the federal money for Aboriginal justice in the communities. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal People recommended money be allocated to the provinces for legal issues, and LSS should look into this.”
- “We need to work on getting legal aid back in place. The women are staying in bad environments because there is no place for them to turn. We have the highest crime rate in Port Alberni. There is a mediator through probation, and she comes once a week; she is over-burdened.”
- “We only get about three people who can use legal aid per year; mostly, they don't cover my issues.” (Friendship Centre advocate)
- “We use everything we can — 1-800 number, local agent — but it's so painful to have lost the office here. The women don't have cars and often can't afford the bus to go to Nanaimo, so they hitchhike, which puts them even more at risk.”
- “Clients need to see a person — we really want to keep the local agent here.”

LawLINE

LawLINE was well known and used by 22 respondents, mostly for clients. Respondents were glad it's available, but feedback about improvements was minimal because many of them have not used it themselves and the people they refer to LawLINE are the ones they can't help, so they don't hear back.

Specific comments:

- “It's the best source for my clients who do not have computer skills.”
- “People want to hear a voice on the other end; they don't like those tapes.”
- “Sometimes people call if they can't get local help — if there is a conflict, for example.”
- “When we are working with a woman, sometimes our staff will make the call; it's a good service.” (transition house worker)
- “We send people all the time, but I don't know how it works because the people I send are the ones I can't help.”

- “People use it and say it’s really helpful — it’s just they have to wait.”

There was criticism primarily about waiting time and the frustration of getting through, especially for people with certain disabilities.

Specific comments:

- “The main complaint is waiting and access.”
- “I once waited 25 minutes, but I warn people about this.”
- “Clients are aware of it. One woman tried to use it but got frustrated and came back to me.”
- “Some find it frustrating to wait when stressed. And some people have trouble remembering which button to push — dyslexic, disabled, people in a mental health fog. I’d say about 50% have trouble with it.”
- “Mostly, people need interpreters and go through us.” (immigrant service worker)
- “One person called, but they told her some information and said she would still need a lawyer. That was frustrating.”
- “Better access to LawLINE — it’s so hard in rural areas. We need a reliable and more accessible service.”
- “When I phone, the information is too cursory, and the local agent is good, but her hands are tied.”

Finally, 2 respondents commented that they don’t often refer clients to LawLINE because they try to use local resources or resolve (MHR) issues with the local staff. One person commented that she can still get help from local lawyers (former LSS staff members).

Call centre

The call centre was actively used by 10 respondents. Of these, 4 spoke of frustrations.

- “The complaint here is that people can’t get through, so they leave their name and never know when the return call will come. There is no one to call on the weekends.”
- “Once I figured out which button was for family, it worked well.”
- “People find it difficult, yet another phone call and waiting on hold ...”
- “We use it but usually go through victims assistance for booking legal aid.”

Family duty counsel

Family duty counsel was mentioned by 17 respondents, and of these, 15 were positive comments. One respondent commented that the duty counsel lawyers are too busy and only see a client once or twice with no continuity if the person goes back. Once again, there were comments that victim assistance staff work more closely with duty counsel.

Specific comments:

- “We try to squeeze people in through them.”
- “Any time a single parent can get legal help is useful.”
- “Very helpful, a good asset.”
- “We use it lots. We have received mixed reviews — quality seems to vary depending on how busy they are.”
- “They seem to be good about seeking out people who are standing around and might need them.”

Supreme Court advice lawyers

Only 3 respondents were aware of this service and only 1 of those reported sending people there for help with divorce matters. Several people were glad to hear about it and asked for more information (I referred them to the LSS website).

Future communications from LSS

When asked if they wanted to be more connected to LSS resources, respondents’ comments varied from satisfaction with the current level of communication from LSS (5 respondents) to a range of requests for new information

Specific comments:

- “LSS is great for keeping us updated and informed about conferences, etc.”
- “Whoever answers the phone is helpful. LSS is one of our most important resources, quality resources, and quality services.”
- “LSS does pretty well with what they can do. They let us know on the Web pages and tell us about workshops.”
- “LSS is wonderful. We have no complaints.”
- “We’re already in the loop; we get lots of information from LSS.”

Specific requests for information included:

- Finding out how to get on PovNet e-mail lists
- Successes
- Updates in refugee law
- Changes in legislation
- Publication on youth/parents re leaving home under 19, parental responsibilities

Feedback about the delivery of information included:

- 2 respondents suggested fax announcements
- 1 respondent preferred regular mail updates on coverage and services
- 11 respondents said e-mail updates would be very useful, particularly for information about legal aid coverage, services, announcements of what's new, and workshop announcements (3 respondents said they now get information about updates in the law from other sources, such as victim services, local people, and PovNet)
- 7 respondents liked the idea of online courses, some of these knew about the PovNet courses, and others were interested. One person suggested periodic live online forums on related topics
- 1 respondent requested workshops for front-line community workers and stakeholders; their concern was that lawyers, judges, and the police need to know more about Foetal Alcohol Syndrome

Suggestions for improving services

The interviewer asked respondents to provide one example of when they could have used better information or support from LSS.

Three respondents provided specific case examples:

- “Tenant eviction of a woman in the hospital, [the] landlord wanted to sell her stuff — [the] advocate didn’t know how to answer this and the residential tenancy booklets were out. She commented that they have a good local network and someone did find the information for her.”
- “Disabled client with three children who were apprehended because someone reported that she couldn’t manage. But I know she was a good mother. She really needed a lawyer.”
- “My first EI appeal — I wish I had known more.”

Other comments included:

- A plea for more support for women in family law coverage, particularly in the north where the men are making large salaries in the oil patch.

Part 2: Use of LSS Resources

- A suggestion that LSS track tribunal decisions and have a place to post decisions.
- A suggestion to support the native justice workers in Lower Post, Horn Lake, Atlin, and Fort Nelson who need training about legal issues and don't have much access to information and materials.
- A suggestion that people can make larger bulk orders for heavily used print materials, such as the *Tenant Survival Guide*.
- Two respondents offered very grateful comments on the opportunity to learn at LSS workshops and acknowledgement for what LSS has been able to do creatively since the cuts.

Note: There appeared to be two general kinds of responses to the questions about how LSS can improve its support services. For those who had experience with the former legal aid services, there was regret and yearning for better legal aid coverage and more local offices, staff, and support.

For people less directly connected and less aware of legal aid services, there was often a kind of thoughtful silence when presented with these questions. My sense was that this response had several components. First, people were very busy working “heads down” to provide immediate service to their clients with whatever resources they knew about, and they often found LSS very helpful with information resources. Second, their busyness meant they were often “multitasking” when they talked to me, and often couldn't think of either a specific instance where more support would have been helpful or what kinds of help they might request.

Finally, I was impressed with the number of times throughout the interviews that people referred to the local network from which they got support and information. One respondent said, “I'm lucky — I've been here a long time, and I know who to ask locally.”

Conclusion: Use of LSS print and electronic resources

There seem to be several factors affecting feedback on LSS resources.

First, I sensed a general blurring of memory regarding specific websites. Although there was name recognition for most of the sites, people were vague about what they had used. This may be related to good linking between websites. Several people alluded to this in their attempt to recall which site they used. Once in an LSS site, a person can link to them all, and this is a good thing. However, it might make specific site recall more difficult.

Another factor is that busy people grab the information at hand. The popularity of the resource book may be a good example of making important information easily available. People's comfort with print/electronic sources seemed to determine which place they looked to first for information. At the same time, there was again a blur factor — this time, the pace and demand of their work. Until we asked, respondents may not have thought about which resources they used; they just used them and moved on. Some libraries do periodic surveys of reference resources used, but most other agencies do not collect this kind of statistics.

Finally, this survey instrument may have been flawed somewhat in this aspect of its inquiry. People often got a bit defensive when asked about their recall and use of electronic resources after the conference. The question seemed to imply a criticism of their skills that I was not always able to overcome. And again, there was some of the blur factor — the survey was not effective in identifying pre- and post-conference recognition and use of the websites. People often gave general responses about Web use to these questions. It may be that a survey focused just on website recognition and use (i.e., not tied to conference feedback) would produce different results.

On reflection: New resources and new advocates

Although information about new electronic resources was ranked as the most valuable conference outcome by just 3 respondents, these services were certainly seen by respondents as part of the full package of training and information resources provided by LSS. My own sense is that recognition and use of these resources will increase with familiarity and with need.

Note that 12 respondents identified their work as other than advocacy or information and referral. Some seemed very focused on the daily and practical aspects of helping their clients; for anything law-related, they have been referring out or contacting other agencies for help. But this group of people is slowly becoming more aware of the law and more accustomed to using the Internet. It takes time, they're busy, and legal information is complex. Many

of these people provide traditional counselling services or services focused on particular issues (i.e., family support, victim assistance, and settlement services.) One social worker commented that her need to learn more about the law came from the needs of her clients. Counsellors are more likely to use a one-to-one problem-solving technique and less likely to use legal information than advocates.

Others are actively using these print and Web resources because their clients and their work demand it, and their confidence with the resources is growing. So they may use the Family Law site but not PovNet or vice versa, depending on the specific needs of their clients.

Getting intermediaries to use Web resources may be more complex than simply providing technical training or publicity. It may also be that many of these 12 are new to working with legal information and resources in a field traditionally based on a more personal approach to problem solving.

Best practices

It might be useful to look at the growth rate in people's use of new resources and approaches to see how best to promote the use of LSS Web resources. In my own experience with public libraries, when legal information was added to their range of information services, it took time for staff to learn and integrate this new skill and service. Practices similar to these conferences were effective in the medium- and long-term. Ongoing training builds the network and provides repeated opportunities for people to learn about new resources. These new websites provide information that people may not have previously identified as necessary to know or use.

Recommendations

1. Continue with training and publicity for the LSS websites. Note that the high level of awareness of PovNet among community workers and ELL among librarians is in part because they have had extensive community training.
2. Initiate an e-mail listserve for community advocates based on the 11 respondents (38 %) indicating interest in updates on legal aid services, news of workshops, and other announcements.
3. Develop new instrument(s) to gather feedback on recognition and use of LSS electronic resources. This could include surveys taken at future conferences or conducted independently of the conferences.

Aide-mémoire

Preface: I am calling on behalf of LSS. LSS is looking at ways to improve its advocacy training program, and they have contracted with me to talk to people who attended training sessions in the last year to ask about the usefulness of the session they attended. I understand that you attended xxxx. Would you be willing to be interviewed about that training session and how it has/has not been useful in your work?

Name/Number

1. Background — from LSS

Attended LSS advocacy training session in (city) _____ on (date)

At that time the person was employed by _____ as _____

2. Are you still doing the same work? Yes ___ No ___

If no, can you comment on why not?

Area (s) of law you work with?

Brief description of the type of work you do:

___ Does not deal with “clients” per se (e.g., school, college) but through personal interest works with law as background information resource

___ Information and referral: organization tells clients about LSS services, but does not provide direct assistance (i.e., neighbourhood houses, libraries, I & R centres)

___ Basic advocacy: helping people find specific information related to their problem, helping to navigate the system, etc.)

___ Intermediate advocacy: speaks to government representatives with/on behalf of clients

___ Advanced advocacy: organization provides direct advocacy services for clients. Includes active use of LSS resources and services (full representation at tribunal, residential tenancy arbitrations, helping prepare family court forms/affidavits, etc.)

Appendix 1: Aide-mémoire

3. I have a few questions about the conference itself:

Generally, what did you like best about the conference/remember most about the conference?

4. Please talk about one thing you learned at the conference that has helped you in your job (i.e., improved skills or knowledge in an area of law, new contacts within the community, better understanding of LSS services and PLEI resources)

5. Resource materials:

At the conference, you received a binder of resource materials.

Do you still use it? (If not, why not?)

Do other staff members use it?

What sections do you use?

Do you use sections on subjects not covered at the conference?

What type of information is most useful? (i.e., forms, checklists, legislation, articles)

Would you use this information if it were in electronic form (i.e., CD/online)

I have several questions about LSS sponsored services and your awareness and use of them before and after the conference:

6. Before the conference were you aware of the PovNet website?

Yes ___ No___

If yes: Did you learn more about it or do you have any suggestions for improvement? _____

If no: Do you use it now? If not, why not?

7. Before the conference were you aware of the PovNet e-mail lists?

Yes ___ No___

If yes: Did you learn more about it or do you have any suggestions for improvement? _____

If no: Do you use it now? If not, why not?

8. Before the conference were you aware of the Family Law website?

Yes ___ No___

If yes: Did you learn more about it or do you have any suggestions for improvement? _____

If no: Do you use it now? If not, why not?

9. Before the conference were you aware of the Family Law Web child protection discussion group? Yes ___ No___

If yes: Did you learn more about it or do you have any suggestions for improvement? _____

If no: Do you use it now? If not, why not?

10.	Before	After	Comments
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LSS publications

LSS websites

LawLINK website

ELL

Call centre (phone intake)

LawLINE telephone service

Regional Centres where they exist (Vancouver, Surrey, Victoria, Kelowna, Kamloops, Prince George, Terrace, Prince Rupert)

LIOWs (Legal information Outreach workers)

LawLINK public access computers (where they exist)

Family Duty Counsel (every provincial court)

Supreme Court advice lawyers

Contact with LSS staff who organize or presented at conference?

11. Would you want to be more connected to LSS resources? If so: how?

Mail

Fax

E-mail

If so, what?

Updates about changes in the law

Updates about resources (online/print)

Updates about LSS services

In-person courses or workshops

Online courses

13. Thinking back over this year, think of one example when you could have used better information or support from LSS? (aside from money)

14. How could LSS improve future conferences or training sessions?

15. Other comments?