

AUGUST 2017

LawMatters OVERVIEW + EVALUATION

LawMatters works with public libraries to enhance public access to legal information in all communities throughout British Columbia

INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the results of an evaluation of [LawMatters](#) - a program of [Courthouse Libraries of BC](#) (CLBC). CLBC's vision is that everyone in BC has the legal information they need and the ability to use it. CLBC's mission is to manage knowledge for justice in British Columbia in partnership with others. Through LawMatters, CLBC works with public libraries throughout BC to enhance public access to legal information in all communities in the province. The goal of the program is to support public libraries to provide their communities with up-to-date, reliable public legal information and to ensure that patrons' legal information needs are met.

LawMatters supports public libraries in BC with:



 Collection Development	 Grant Funding	 Librarian Training	 Community Discussions	Collection development expertise
				Grant funding for legal materials
				Training for librarians on legal resources
				Community discussions on legal resources

In the fall of 2016, CLBC embarked on an evaluation to assess the program and to identify the elements of the program that are working well, and elements that could be improved.

METHODOLOGY

CLBC hired an evaluation consultant to conduct the LawMatters evaluation. An online survey containing 24 questions was sent out in October 2016 to library staff in 71 public library systems in BC. The survey had 136 responses, including representation from 65% of the public library systems in BC - 40% of respondents were LawMatters Contacts (liaisons with the program). A majority of respondents did front desk reference work, but some also worked in collections and specialized services.

Survey Participation

- 46 library systems participated
- 17 systems had more than 1 response
- 25 library systems did not participate

Survey Respondents by Library Size

- 45% small
- 30% medium
- 20% large



Once the survey results came in, a brief was prepared outlining the results.

In November 2016, 12 phone interviews were conducted with LawMatters Contacts from libraries across the province to further explore themes identified through the online survey.

FINDINGS

LAWMATTERS SUPPORT TO PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Grants – Collections – Contacts

GRANTS

LawMatters has time limited project funding to support grants to public libraries. The vast majority of LawMatters Contacts said the current process of receiving grants and collection support from LawMatters is working well. Many feel the grants are needed and are important in ensuring they have an up-to-date legal collection in their library.

Funding for the grants is scheduled to run out by the end of 2019. When asked about a change in the grants program, most librarians expressed concern: they predicted there would be fewer titles, materials would be less up to date, books would be scaled back to the “bare bones” essential titles, and patrons would have to travel farther or wait longer to access important legal information. Many described already being squeezed by their overall budgets and it would be hard to find funding for legal materials without the grants. Some small libraries said they might not be able to purchase any legal information without the grant. The results indicate that the impact of reduced grants would be much greater on smaller libraries than on larger libraries.

COLLECTIONS

Beyond grant funding, survey and interview respondents said that they rely on the legal information curation expertise of LawMatters staff to determine what legal material to buy. Collection support in the form of an annual suggestion list was reviewed favourably.

Most respondents said the collection list, “Law Books for Libraries,” that LawMatters provides makes their collection management work easier. They also said that this list would still be

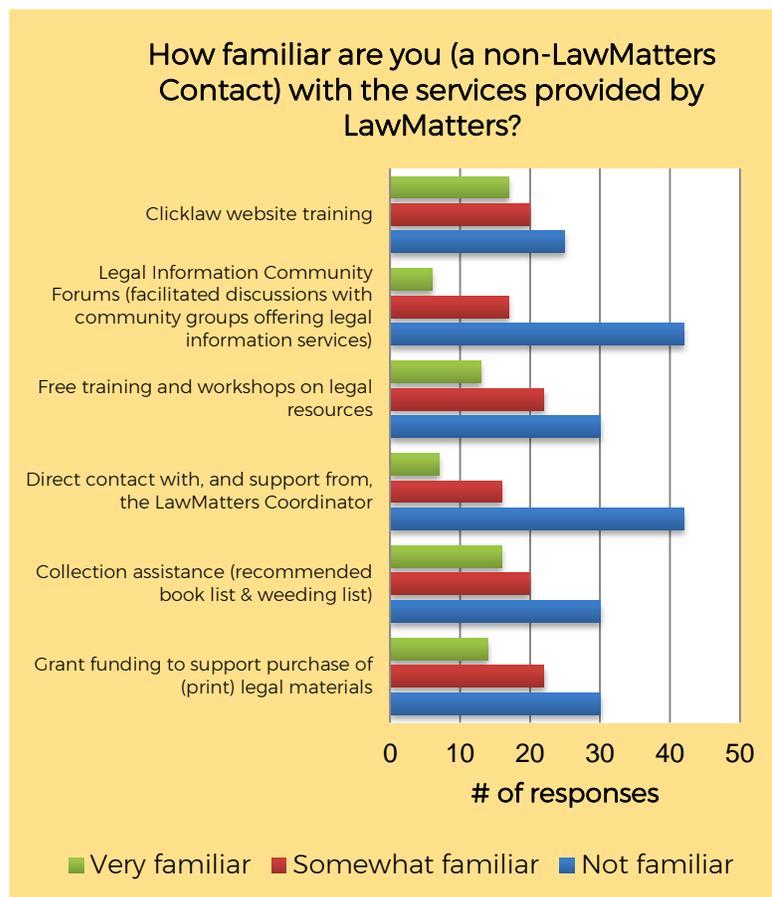
helpful if the grants were reduced or eliminated in the future. Some suggested that more prioritization and organization by subject would make the list more helpful. LawMatters Contacts discussed wanting more help with weeding, including more notification and support identifying and removing outdated materials.

CONTACTS

The program involves maintaining relationships with individual LawMatters Contacts (who are the liaisons with the program) in libraries across BC. These contacts find the program particularly important - without it there would be fewer resources available to the public and less confidence among librarians to support patrons with legal questions. What also emerged is that smaller, rural libraries have unique challenges with space, funding, and capacity that could be better addressed by LawMatters. In particular, some smaller communities are seeking support around the unique and specialized legal needs of local Indigenous communities.

Most respondents who were not directly involved with the LawMatters program said that they were not very familiar with the services offered by the program. Additionally, about half of those respondents did not know who their local LawMatters Contact was.

More communication with library staff who are not directly involved with LawMatters could improve the awareness of the program and relevant legal resources. Through the survey and interviews, LawMatters Contacts suggested that LawMatters create pre-packaged communication materials that they could easily forward to library staff or post on their library intranet.



LEGAL QUESTIONS AT THE LIBRARY

Confidence Levels - Available Resources – Library Size

CONFIDENCE



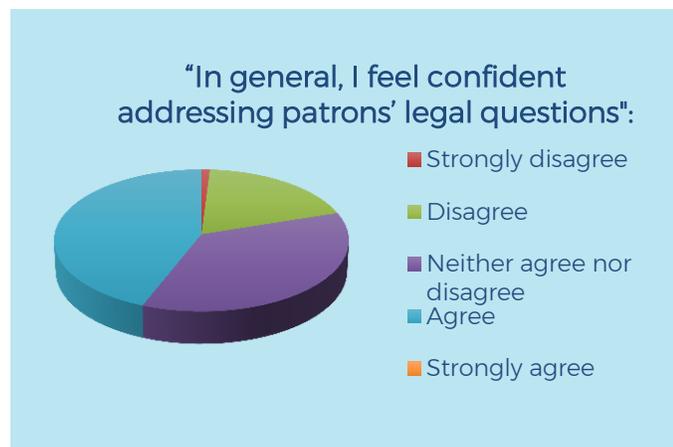
Most respondents felt reasonably confident in answering people's legal information questions. Respondents were provided with a series of legal topics and asked to rate their confidence level with each. They reported their highest level of confidence was answering questions related to 'Housing and Tenancy' as well as 'Wills and Estates'. They were least confident answering questions regarding 'Crimes and Offences', and 'Accidents and Injuries'.

Results indicate that when a librarian does not feel confident, it usually depends on the context. Sometimes a question is beyond their scope, such as when patrons ask personal legal questions that require legal advice. Many respondents reported challenges in clearly understanding and communicating boundaries between legal advice and legal information.

Very few related their lack of confidence with a lack of resources. Some attributed a lack of confidence to having less practice and experience answering legal information questions.

Respondents said that, rather than more written material, more training, experience, and knowledge about online and local resources would help them feel more confident in answering patrons' legal questions.

It is common for librarians to refer patrons to other legal services and organizations - 75% said they often or sometimes refer. The most common referrals were to the Courthouse Library, Legal Aid (LSS), [Clicklaw](#), and local community-based organizations.



RESOURCES

Respondents observed that people look for legal information when they need it, not just for exploration.

Librarians found online resources such as [Clicklaw](#) the most useful resource for them, but they reported that patrons found brochures and printed materials the most useful format.

Some respondents cautioned against relying solely on online resources, noting many of their

patrons looking for legal resources were not comfortable using online resources. Patrons who found it challenging to use the internet (or had limited access or experience online) wanted print materials.

LIBRARY SIZE

Larger libraries in urban centres are surrounded by more services and high need. Some have a Courthouse Library in their community and they work to complement each other in their services and resources. Some library systems span a very large geographic area, and the legal needs vary from place to place. In small towns, respondents reported that they either received many inquiries because people had nowhere else to go, or that they saw very few legal inquiries despite few (if any) local legal services. It was unclear from the data why small libraries experienced one or the other.

Some serve Indigenous communities that can make up to 80% of the surrounding population. Library staff reiterated the importance of ensuring that the legal needs of Indigenous community members are met through the LawMatters program. These information needs were described in the evaluation's interviews as: poverty, unemployment, housing supply on reserve and alternative Indigenous justice approaches.

TRAINING

Almost all LawMatters Contacts reported the training they receive from LawMatters was useful. Some respondents were not aware of LawMatters training and/or had not taken advantage of it. They reported that this was because they didn't get a lot of legal questions and it was challenging to set aside the time for staff training.

Through the interviews, library staff indicated that LawMatters is their only source of legal resources training.

Most respondents identified webinars as the best format for training. Having webinars archived was noted as essential to improve access. Librarians want them brief, non-scholarly, and relevant to their work supporting patrons. Most want them to cover how to answer basic legal questions.

Respondents indicated that conferences were a preferred venue for LawMatters to provide in-person training.

Most respondents expressed support for the idea of LawMatters helping libraries put on legal workshops for the public. Some identified the importance of LawMatters not duplicating work



by other organizations and also ensuring that workshops are relevant to the local community.

TESTING NEW IDEAS

Sending Materials - Clicklaw Wikibooks – Connecting LawMatters Contacts

SENDING MATERIALS

Part of this evaluation involved testing out new ideas to get feedback. One idea that is being explored by CLBC is sending legal resources directly to libraries. When asked about this proposal, most respondents said that they would take what books and materials LawMatters sends them. Larger libraries responded more enthusiastically since they generally have the capacity to manage a high volume of materials. Smaller libraries wanted more information about this approach and input over what materials would be available from LawMatters.

Small libraries reported having less space and less time to work on selection of legal materials, making them highly reliant on the recommendations and curation expertise of the LawMatters program. The results highlighted the importance of considering the needs of small libraries when testing new ideas.

CLICKLAW WIKIBOOKS

LawMatters is increasing the use of [Clicklaw Wikibooks](#) to make legal information accessible to the public. While many respondents expressed familiarity with [Clicklaw](#), most were not familiar with Clicklaw Wikibooks. In fact, many respondents and interviewees were confused about the difference between the two. Some respondents also expressed the need for clarification between Clicklaw Wikibooks and other Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) pamphlets from other providers.



Generally, however, librarians were interested – they wanted to know more about Clicklaw Wikibooks and to promote them more once they understand them better.

Several respondents mentioned that they do not or would not print or catalogue Clicklaw Wikibooks into their collection. They would only be printed by front line staff when in demand because they are free and downloadable. It was unclear whether these respondents were referring only to pamphlets (on Clicklaw Wikibooks) or if their comments also included larger Clicklaw Wikibooks volumes.

CONNECTING LAWMATTERS CONTACTS

Respondents had a lukewarm response to the proposal of spending time and energy on having LawMatters Contacts connect with each other. This could be because legal resources were identified as a small part of what most LawMatters Contacts do at their libraries. Respondents from smaller libraries indicated that making connections between smaller libraries could be useful for sharing information about legal materials and resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



The evaluation identified four key recommendations:

- Don't change the program too substantially because libraries rely on it.
- Develop specialized support and services for small libraries.
- Clicklaw Wikibooks need more library awareness, input, and collaborative planning if they are going to play a larger role in library legal collections.
- If there are changes to the grant funding for libraries, there need to be alternate supports implemented.

SMALLER RECOMMENDATIONS THAT CAN BE IMPLEMENTED NOW

Keep the collection list going with minor suggested improvements on how the information is organized. Libraries need more support on what to get rid of and when to update.

Create pre-packaged communications and promotional materials that LawMatters Contacts can send along to staff in their system on an ongoing basis to let them know about LawMatters, legal training opportunities, updated legal resources, and more.

Stick to webinars for training. Ensure that they are relevant, brief, and focus on resources. Webinars should be archived to improve access.

Take advantage of the time in which people are in “legal mode” with their collections work (i.e. after the list comes out and/or before the spending deadlines). Provide increased support at this time.

Always keep in mind the needs of library patrons who are not comfortable with digital resources.

Be clear and consistent with terminology about resources and programs. Help is needed to clarify some of the differences between what LawMatters does, what CLBC does, and what People's Law School and other agencies do.

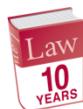
If you have any questions, please contact **LawMatters Program Coordinator** Shannon McLeod smcleod@courthouselibrary.ca



LawMatters is a program of Courthouse Libraries BC

www.courthouselibrary.ca

Supported by the Law Foundation of British Columbia



LawMatters

At your local public library

www.bclawmatters.ca

bclawmatters.blogspot.ca

Contact:

Courthouse Libraries BC

librarian@courthouselibrary.ca

This report is based off of an evaluation conducted by

Alison Brewin Consulting

www.alisonbrewin.com