

Justice Innovation Event Report: Libraries & Justice Forum October 29, 2015

The positive energy at this special justice innovation event was palpable and the synergies remarkable. More than 75 people from public, courthouse and government libraries, community and student legal clinics, the Law Society of Upper Canada, Ontario Justice Education Network, the Law Foundation of Ontario, and Legal Aid Ontario converged in Toronto on October 29th for a unique and invigorating one-day “justice innovation” event. We left changed by the people we met and by what we learned. We were surprised to hear that librarians from the U.S. and U.K. were interested in what we were doing. Participants said the event inspired them to get involved with community-oriented library and justice projects. Furthermore, 96% stated that their awareness was raised about the prevalence of common legal problems and the importance of early intervention. The event received positive coverage across blogs, newsletters and social media ([Southern Ontario Library Service Blog](#); [PLE Learning Exchange](#); [BC Law Matters Blog](#); [TAG newsletter](#) and [website](#)).

A graphic artist captured our ideas and inspirations throughout the day. This picture (below) says a thousand words and was displayed at the Law Society of Upper Canada.



As everyone began to arrive, a [Community Snapshot presentation](#) ran in the background, highlighting past library initiatives and resources available from CLEO to assist librarians. The day then began with a rousing call to action by former Attorney General Chris Bentley. He stressed the tremendous trust communities put in their librarians and the important role they can and do play in connecting people to legal resources, providing a path to justice.



The main highlight of the day was an informative [presentation by B.C. Courthouse librarian extraordinaire Janet Freeman](#), who has dedicated most of her professional life to access to justice initiatives.

She has also written about some of this important work in “[Law Matters at your Local Public library: A History of BC’s Program for Public Legal Information and Education in Public Libraries.](#)”

We also heard an inspiring presentation from the librarians and community legal clinic staff involved in a local Libraries & Justice project in Eastern Ontario. We learned more about the crisis in access to justice in Canada and the particular challenges facing people living in rural and remote areas: it was clear that librarians could and do play a critical role in linking people to the legal information they need (see the [Powerpoint presentation](#)).



Highly interactive “Collaborative Conversations” helped participants and future partners get to know one another and to brainstorm and to formulate plans for next steps.

An informal follow-up with some participants indicated that some initiatives were already underway.

Find details about this work below.



- CLEO is beginning to work on an online course for librarians and offering a legal information webinar in collaboration with SOLS on March 2.
- TAG has partnered with the Southern Ontario Library Service to survey librarians about the access to justice needs of their patrons. Preparations are underway to also collect this data from librarians that fall under Ontario Library Service – North.
- A recent Simcoe County Library Co-op Chief Librarians’ meeting discussed access to justice joined by CLEO staff and a lawyer from the Community Legal Clinic of Simcoe, Haliburton, Kawartha Lakes.
- The Queen’s Law Faculty Chief Librarian has contacted the Kingston Public Library to offer assistance.
- The Ontario Courthouse Librarians have created a focus group to explore how to partner with their local community clinics and public libraries.

We will distribute a survey electronically in March 2016 to find out what other new initiatives have begun, and how we can best support more access to justice work in rural and remote areas with our new partners in the year to come. But a lot is already happening! Thank you!



Summary notes of the discussions and all the ideas generated by the Collaborative Conversations were kept and have been provided to the event’s participants. A [video recording](#) also captured highlights. A [report with helpful resources](#) was created for use by libraries that are interested in starting their own local initiative, based on the experience of the first pilot in Hastings County. A simple “[Ten Lessons Learned](#)” handout is also available.

The event was organized and sponsored by the Rural and Remote Access to Justice Boldness Project, the Community Advocacy & Legal Centre, Community Legal Education Ontario, and TAG (The Action Group). Funding was provided by Legal Aid Ontario and the Law Foundation of Ontario. The organizing committee met for about six months to develop the day and also to create a new virtual site to share information between the new justice and library partners. Information about PLE for Librarians can be found on the [PLE Learning Exchange](#), which also has information about [Libraries and Justice Partnerships](#) and [Training for Library Staff](#).

