

## **Report to the Board of Trustees (February 2021-January 2022)**

### **Yolo County Law Library**

Janet Coles, Library Director

#### **Accomplishments**

In March 2021, the Board of Trustees approved the following initial task plan for the director and the Library for 2021-22:

- 1) Establish WiFi for patron and staff use
- 2) Establish a website
- 3) Conduct a user survey for legal professionals and the public
- 4) Establish an independent online public access catalog

The Board also requested that the Director investigate the possibility of separating the Library's finances from the county.

As of early February 2022, all but one of the tasks set in March 2021 had been accomplished, as follows:

- 1) WiFi was established fairly quickly (by April 2021) by working with the County.
- 2) The website was completed by September 2021.
- 3) The user surveys were begun in October 2021. The legal professionals survey wrapped up in January 2022, and the public survey ended on February 11, 2022.
- 4) The online public access catalog went live on January 30, 2022.
- 5) The director had a conversation in April 2021 with library cooperative Pacific Library Partnership (PLP) about the possibility of their handling the Library's finances, human resources functions, etc. PLP said they would definitely be interested in doing this should the Library decide to separate from the County. Given the totality of what this would require, however, and the feasibility of pursuing this action given that the Library is housed by the County by law and it would be difficult to establish separate IT and telecom services, this was put on hold for the present.

Development for both the website and the public access catalog are ongoing.

Additional activities conducted by the Library include:

*Clean-up and reorganization of the collection.* An assessment of the collection in February 2021 found it to be neglected and disorganized. None of the resources had call numbers, nor were they organized in a way that made them findable. Items were jumbled together throughout the facility, particularly in the compact shelving area and in the shelving toward the back of the library. There were many old series that had duplicate copies (sometimes three or four copies) and materials decades out of date. There was a lot of old equipment stacked around, both in the reading room and stack areas and in the staff office. We have been working steadily over the past year to weed, organize, clean up, and refresh the collection and the library facility (the Board included funds to refresh parts of the print collection in the FY2022 budget) and to surplus or donate old equipment. This task is ongoing and has required the majority of staff effort over the past year.

*LexisNexis Digital Library.* In October 2021 we became aware of a new resource, the LexisNexis Digital Library, that would allow the Library to offer important resources such as California Forms of Pleading and Practice freely online to County residents, at little additional cost. In October 2021, the Board approved moving forward with the Digital Library, and then in December 2021, approved the addition of

around 15 resources to the Digital Library (based on print titles in the collection that were due to be refreshed). The Library's Digital Library instance went live the last week of January 2022 and will be widely advertised once a few minor end user issues have been addressed.

*Revenue generating services.* The director identified a few possible services that could generate revenue for the Library, including passport acceptance services and notary services. Inquiries to the State Department on establishing passport services, beginning in August 2021, went unanswered until early February 2022, and the application process is now underway. Once the director is certified as a notary, the Library will also begin offering notary services.

*Public service.* Finally, and most importantly, the Library handled over 250 reference questions over the past year. Use of the Library, which was not robust before the 2020 pandemic, was further impeded over the past year by the pandemic and the recent holiday surge. Nonetheless the Library has handled a variety of inquiries covering many areas of the law. Some examples:

- A user needed to send a "certified copy" of her mother's will to an out-of-state financial firm, but the two notaries she took it to refused to notarize it.
- A user needed guidance on how to locate information on ownership of a joint account, where one of the owners has deceased.
- A lawyer needed the regulatory history related to Title IX.
- A lawyer needed the original Los Angeles city ordinance temporarily prohibiting residential and commercial evictions due to COVID-19.
- A lawyer needed the earliest version of Miller & Starr (1960s) for research into an historical real estate case.
- A legal assistant from out of state needed information on California legal procedures for settling small estates.
- A lawyer needed the original mid-1800s U.S. Northern District Court case files and decisions from two San Luis Obispo County ranchos: Cañada de los Osos y Pecho y Islai and San Miguelito.
- A lawyer asked for assistance finding treatises that discussed the Estate of Heggstad case.
- Someone from the Public Defender's Office needed the 1987 version of California Penal Code §12022.5.
- Someone from Oregon contacted us wanting to know how to file a motion to amend sentencing judgment in Josephine County, Oregon.
- A user wanted to know how to file a Marsden motion.
- A user wanted to know how to prove a will where there is no signed copy.
- A number of users wanted access to Nolo Press books or wanted specific documents from Westlaw or other sources e-mailed to them.

There were a number of researchers who were working on juvenile dependency cases, as well as a number working on unlawful detainer or family law cases.

## **Challenges**

The biggest issue for the Library is low usage. We estimate that the Library had fewer than 70 unique in-person visitors over the past year, though there were more who used the website and databases remotely or e-mailed or called for reference or document delivery services. Our surveys showed that nearly 50 percent of legal professional respondents had either not used the Library in the past five years or had used it less than once per year. 77 percent of public respondents indicated they had either never used the Library or had not used it in the past five years. We estimate that from February 2021 to

January 2022, the library had fewer than 150 total users, though there were a number with projects that required multiple library visits.

Several possible reasons for low usage, beyond the COVID-19 impact, as identified in user surveys and staff-user interactions, include:

*Lack of outreach.* A significant number of both professional and public responders indicated that they did not know that the Library existed, and if they did know it existed, they did not know what collections and services it offered.

Possible remedies:

- Marketing campaign (posters, Facebook ads, newspaper ads, etc.)
- Engagement with community groups (speaking, participation in community fairs, etc.)

*Location and aspect of facilities.* A number of respondents indicated that the Library is located too far away from them, or in a “bad part of town,” or that the Library’s aspect (with the high fence, etc.) is unwelcoming, reminiscent of a correctional or institutional facility.

Possible remedies:

- Consider if the library could and should be relocated, and where might be a better location
- Offer more remote services (databases) or kiosks at other sites
- Partner with other organizations to offer spot services in remote locations
- Investigate if something can be done about the fencing in front, while still avoiding the encampment problem

*Appropriate services.* Some responders indicated that the Library’s hours were inconvenient for them. Also, experience over the past year tells us there are essentially two categories of users: lawyers who need to use our legal databases, print resources, or interlibrary loan services, and people who are representing themselves, who often lack the necessary computer and literacy skills. At this point we struggle to assist patrons who must, or feel that they must, represent themselves but are simply unable to do so. Nolo Press books and online self-help resources are of little assistance to people who have limited reading and computing abilities.

Possible remedies:

- Provide some evening and weekend hours
- Reinstate after hours access for members of the bar
- Better local partnerships with other legal assistance providers
- Offer lawyers in the library and educational programming, not just in Woodland but in other places throughout the county. Work out any barriers that might exist for these (insurance, etc.)
- Would it help if we had a paralegal on staff, or a consulting lawyer?

*Proximity of larger law libraries with more robust collections and services.* Several users and survey respondents (especially legal professionals) have commented that with the proximity of the Sacramento County Law Library and the law libraries at McGeorge and at UC Davis, that they have more robust and more convenient access to the resources they need.

Possible remedies:

- Partnership with these larger institutions (Sacramento, UC Davis?)

- See remedies under “Location and aspect of facility” above
- Steer the Library, and dedicate more of its funding, more toward services for pro per users, such as lawyers in the library, educational classes
- Provide targeted opportunities for legal professionals, including continuing education fora, etc.

*Lack of funding.* To provide better services on an ongoing basis, the Library needs more funding for professional staffing and other resources. While the Library currently has a healthy reserve, mostly due to additional funding allocated by the state in 2017, 2020, 2021, and 2022, our only current stable funding stream is filing fee revenue, which is barely adequate to meet the Library’s basic operations.

Staff salaries are very low. A low, entry level wage for a qualified librarian or paralegal is around \$30 per hour; for a library assistant, around \$20 per hour (these figures are based on data from the annual California public library survey. These positions also usually include benefits.

Possible remedies for lack of funding:

- Smaller fundraising activities (such as passport acceptance and notary services)
- Establish a friends group that can conduct fundraising activities and assist with outreach
- Offer co-working space (charge rent) for solo/small practitioners or partner organizations (this would require reconfiguration of the current library space)
- Develop a leaner collection/library resources strategy, given that the collections and databases do not get much use
- Support the efforts of the California Council of County Law Librarians to establish ongoing state funding for county public law libraries

General directions for strategic planning

- Develop and implement outreach and marketing efforts
- Focus on effective services for pro per users
- Strengthen funding base and make more effective use of existing resources
- Relocate the Library?