



Clicklaw and Beyond: ***Public Legal Education and Information*** ***Materials in BC***

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Gayla Reid with Drew Jackson and Carol McEown

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Executive Summary

This paper presents an overview of the public legal education and information (PLEI) resources currently available in British Columbia in order to identify and analyze gaps and overlaps. The research was commissioned to serve as a planning tool for PLEI providers in BC.

The Clicklaw project, which is funded by the Law Foundation of BC, is being led by Courthouse Libraries BC. All members of the Public Legal Education and Information Network (“the PLEI network”) are participating in the Clicklaw initiative. For a list of who is involved in the PLEI network, see Appendix A

The paper begins with a summary review of current research on how people seek to solve their legal problems. It then presents an overview of PLEI resources identified for inclusion on Clicklaw, a new website launched in April 2009 as a window into diverse sources of legal information, education and help in British Columbia. Following that, it compares the resources identified for Clicklaw with findings of relevant legal needs studies. The paper goes on to examine BC PLEI resources in terms of format and resource types as they appear on Clicklaw. The paper concludes by identifying where the gaps exist in BC PLEI, and makes suggestions about the way forward.

Overview of Clicklaw

Clicklaw content must relate to the legal rights of British Columbians, enhance public understanding of the laws and legal system, or provide law-related assistance, information, and/or education. Current content breaks down as follows: PLEI network 57%; other BC non profits 15%; other BC government 13%; other provinces and federal sources: 15%.

The three major Clicklaw sections are: Solve Problem; Learn and Teach; and Reform and Research. Solve Problems (79% of total) contains basic overview items and also more detailed guides & manuals. Learn and Teach (5%) houses the items designed for use by learners and teachers. Reform and Research (16%) houses items primarily designed for those who have a particular interest in or involvement with making the justice system more accessible.

Clicklaw uses a set of categories (a “taxonomy”) to organize resources. Clicklaw’s taxonomy includes categories for:

- *Topic*: what the resource is about or a community to whom the resource is of interest (Family law, Debt, Consumer, Seniors, etc.)
- *Resource type*: the nature of the information: Basics 58%; Self-help & forms: 15%; Reports & documents: 9%; Manuals & books: 7%; Gateways: 6%; Teaching materials: 3%; and Programs & courses: 2%.
- *Media format*: Web 45%; PDF 36%; Audio and podcasts: 16%; Video 2%; and Multimedia: 1%.
- *Language*: the language of the resource. Seventeen languages other than English are represented. The leading ones are Chinese 50%; Punjabi 28%; and Spanish, 8%.
- *Type of help*: for services only. This facet is part of phase 2 development, which is due to be completed by Fall 2009.

How does Clicklaw Compare?

The comparison of Clicklaw with other sites and with research outcomes should be read as broad-brush information and used as a base line or starting point for discussion and further analysis.

Comparisons with other sites

PLEI sites reflect individual cultures, mandates, funding and regional priorities, as well as different ways of categorizing information. Given these parameters, comparison with other sites reveals the following significant features:

- the strong emphasis on family law on Clicklaw
- the similar positioning with comparable sites of information on court procedures, criminal law, housing, and employment
- Clicklaw’s relatively weak emphasis on civil areas such as consumer law and health law

Comparisons with legal need surveys

The paper makes comparisons with the 2006 Department of Justice legal needs survey, which is one of three such surveys. The surveys looked at legal issues in terms of incidence, level of disruption to people’s lives, and the importance to people of resolving their legal issue. The comparison finds that while consumer and debt issues are among top three problems reported in the 2006 Department of Justice legal needs survey, there are relatively few entries for them on Clicklaw, where they are ranked 8th and 17th respectively.

Analysis of Resource Types

Resources on Clicklaw are categorized as being one of seven “resource types,” which get at the nature of the information.

Basics: The category of “Basics” dominates at 58%. This category covers a range of print and web items. Primary among them are what can be described as overviews. These are short, summary introductions to the issue, typically ending with referrals to additional information or in-person assistance. The brevity of overviews places major constraints on how much information can be provided.

Self-help & forms: At 15% of Clicklaw’s resources, self-help guides typically move step-by-step, are in plain language, and are organized from a lay person’s point of view. In terms of forms, much is yet to be accomplished so that legal forms become intelligible to lay people.

Reports & documents: At 9% of Clicklaw resources, this area could benefit from discussion about how to tailor items so that they are appropriate for users who are not legal professionals.

Manuals & books: At 7% of Clicklaw’s resources, this type provides two kinds of products: (a) advanced information such as chapters of the LSLAP manual, written for law students; and (b) what can be described as “middle-ground information.” Middle-ground information can be defined as follows: a resource item of sufficient length to (a) identify major user issues; (b) explain how those issues fit within a legal framework; (c) provide options; (d) answer basic questions; and (e) provide referrals. Middle-ground information can be web-based or print-based. In the areas where there are gaps in BC PLEI, there is typically a lack of middle-ground information. This area could benefit from discussion about ways to more clearly distinguish “middle-ground” information from “advanced” information.

Gateways: At 6% of Clicklaw’s resources, this type refers to websites and areas of websites that lead to relevant information.

Teaching materials: At 3% of Clicklaw’s resources, this type refers to materials prepared for teachers and facilitators.

Programs & courses: At 2% of Clicklaw’s resources, this type identifies the programs and courses that may be relevant to Clicklaw users. Parenting After Separation courses are a typical example.

Analysis of Formats

While BC PLEI resources contain outstanding examples of innovative resource development for online audiences, both in terms of specialized websites and in terms of individual video and multimedia items, more remains to be done.

PDFs

- On Clicklaw, over a third of the online content is in PDF format. PDF is basically a print format that has been posted online. Print and online experiences are different and require different methods of presenting information.

Audio, video, multimedia

- Despite general agreement about their value, there is not a strong body of research into the role of audio, video and multimedia PLEI online.
- Some of the BC PLEI network groups may be interested in expanding their PLEI in terms of format types but lack the resources to do so. The way forward may be for groups to develop a “circuit rider” model. In this model, expert help is available to groups to assist them with online issues.

Matrix of Gaps

The matrix is based on the 27 topics in the Clicklaw taxonomy. Gaps are identified as being large, medium, or small. The rationale for identifying a PLEI resource gap as “large” is based primarily on the amount of information items currently selected for Clicklaw. In some instances – Aboriginal, Courts & tribunals, and Legal help & lawyers – there is an additional research-based editorial assertion that given the nature of user need, more work needs to be done.

Some topic areas are identified as having a “small” or “medium” gap because the area has traditionally been well covered by BC PLEI. The matrix is not intended in any way to obscure the need for ongoing updating and new work in these vital areas. The following chart summarizes some of the larger gaps identified in the matrix.

Aboriginal	Aboriginal PLEI content needs to be developed and delivered by Aboriginal people informed by Aboriginal communities. There are content items on Clicklaw that meet this standard, but given the acute legal needs within Aboriginal communities, more work is needed.
Accidents & injuries	Clicklaw is relatively thin in this area and there is a lack of middle-ground information.

Business & non-profits	<p>There are gaps in this topic. All of the BC-based PLEI items about business within the Solve Problems section are Dial-a-Law scripts, which are by necessity brief.</p> <p>One initial strategy would be to investigate the nature of other resources available.</p>
Consumer	<p>The indicators from the research are unequivocal about the high incidence of consumer issues in the general population, but Clicklaw does not adequately reflect this. It may be timely to explore partnerships with community-based consumer groups that are currently outside the PLEI network.</p>
Courts & tribunals	<p>This is an area in which PLEI is strong, with state-of-the-art multimedia items and a significant amount of information for people dealing with adjudicative processes without legal representation. However, these efforts need to continue. Users need all the assistance they can get.</p>
Debt	<p>The research points to this as a priority area. Again, the middle ground is not covered.</p>
Health	<p>The health law resources on Clicklaw are slender. There are basic overview items on mental health and on access to records and consent.</p> <p>Despite (a) the prominence of holistic needs in the reform literature; (b) the identification of the importance of mental health issues within the research; and (c) some service/program efforts, PLEI in this area has remained static over the last decade.</p>
Housing, tenancy & neighbours	<p>The gap in tenancy is small; in housing it is medium; and in neighbours it is large.</p> <p>Residential tenancy issues are covered by PLEI network participants who are experts in the field, as well as by government. Housing issues such as mortgages and foreclosures are less well covered. Areas such as builders' liens, condo and co-op issues have only basic overviews. Although "neighbours" emerges as a prominent issue in the research, it is covered in a focused way by only one item, a Dial-a-Law overview.</p>
Seniors	<p>Within the topic of Seniors, BC PLEI has its greatest strengths in the areas of abuse and benefits. <i>Note:</i> The current holdings do not reflect items from BC CEAS as their website is still in redevelopment.</p>
Taxes & finances	<p>There are only 23 items on this topic on Clicklaw to date, which is less than 2% of total. PLEI users may benefit from information about income tax, property tax, understanding bank loan documents, trusts, making a complaint about a financial institution, etc.</p>

Overlaps

In terms of content, the paper finds only minor instances of overlap, and those have the potential to be addressed, given that Clicklaw will allow PLEI developers to look across sites and produce material within the entire context of what is available to users. It is worth noting that while the same area may be covered by both government and non-profit community groups (e.g. residential tenancy), the materials are written from different points of view. Users need both service provider and advocacy perspectives.

Recommendations

In the future members of the PLEI network will need to work more closely together in order to maximize scarce financial resources and present the best possible information to users.

Recommendations are offered in the following action areas:

1. Develop a coordinated response to user needs.
2. Promote skill-sharing among network members.
3. Focus on improving online formats.
4. Focus on resources tailored to current user needs.
5. Focus on broadening understanding of user response to formats.
6. Conduct usability testing into online experience.
7. Share evaluation outcomes.

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to present an overview of the public legal education and information (PLEI) materials currently available in British Columbia in order to identify and analyze gaps and overlaps. This overview and gap/overlap analysis is an initiative of the Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) Portal Project, which has developed Clicklaw, an online site launched in April 2009 in its beta version. The site aims to be a unified, trustworthy point of access on the internet to diverse sources of legal information, education and help in British Columbia.

The Clicklaw project, which is funded by the Law Foundation of BC, is being led by Courthouse Libraries BC. All members of the Public Legal Education and Information Network (“the PLEI network”) are participating in the Clicklaw initiative. The PLEI network is an informal body of organizations in British Columbia that provide or support public legal education and information. For a list of who is involved in the PLEI network, see Appendix A

Overall, Clicklaw aims to provide a single entry point to the PLEI domain for British Columbians, offering a route to the PLEI resources and providing current search technology so that users can find what they are looking for quickly and effectively. Users of the site can gain access to the diverse sources of legal information, education and help now available in British Columbia. Members of the public in BC, as well as legal service providers, information providers, educators, and students can search across and link into legal information, education and law-related services that reside on a range of websites.

While the primary focus of this paper is on PLEI content identified for inclusion on Clicklaw, this content is typically integrated with programs and services that exist to assist people to obtain the legal help they need in order to understand the legal system, participate effectively in the legal system, learn or teach, or participate in law reform. People who come to Clicklaw will be looking for those programs and services to help them. For this reason, Clicklaw will include a HelpMap section as one of its central features. Providing access to services and programs is in itself an important function of PLEI.

1.2 Structure

This paper will accomplish the following:

- Provide an overview of PLEI resources identified for inclusion on Clicklaw.
- Present an analysis of Clicklaw's content by comparing it with content on other relevant sites.
- Examine Clicklaw's content in the light of outcomes from key legal needs assessments.
- Examine Clicklaw in terms of formats and resource types.
- Identify by way of a matrix where gaps exist in BC PLEI, and what the nature of overlap appears to be.
- Make recommendations about the way forward.

1.3 Approach

This paper takes the approach that looking at legal issues from the point of view of the people who experience them is the starting point for providing effective PLEI content.

PLEI has a long history in BC with the broad goal of improving access to justice. For many groups, the goal of working towards equal access to justice is reflected in their principles and in their programs, which include:

- Programs and services to help people understand and use the law for their own benefit
- Focused programs to help people who are disadvantaged
- Law-related education programs supporting active citizenship and public engagement in discussions about and support for our justice system and the rule of law
- Community and institutional law reform programs fostering debate, change and ownership of the law

While this paper is not concerned with an assessment of individual PLEI efforts, some themes stand out. PLEI in BC has a history of focusing on the needs of people who are disadvantaged, and of providing information about rights and protections. It also has a history of developing first-class educational materials about the law. Today, the body of BC PLEI is informed by state-of-the-art knowledge and techniques, from user-focused plain language to multimedia. And to an increasing extent, PLEI is cognizant of the results of needs assessments, both formal and informal.

All of this has been accompanied by questions about the effectiveness of PLEI efforts. There is a desire for more rigorous evaluation, for a deeper understanding of how PLEI materials are actually used and what formats work best, and for some clear markers about the way forward.

Current issues for BC PLEI

In recent years, the work of BC PLEI has become more complex, due to factors that include: (a) the emergence of the internet as a common information source, with sophisticated technologies and software; (b) increased numbers of people trying to deal with their legal problem by themselves, including self-representing litigants; (c) the increasing complexity of laws and regulations; and (d) structural changes to in-person services so that they are now profoundly different from the traditional model of comprehensive representation.

In terms of education, PLEI clearly fits within the public school educational framework. However, the competition for dedicated space and time in the curriculum is fierce and many courses have more learning objectives and content than can be covered in the time allowed. Fostering support for legal literacy and law-related education in the school system is an ongoing challenge.¹ In the USA, the American Bar Association has taken a leadership role in promoting active citizenship programs in the schools. In Ontario, the Ontario Justice Education Network – modeled, to some extent, on the Law Courts Education Society – is building an integrated network to improve law-related education in Ontario.² Materials need to be developed that not only fit the learning outcomes and satisfy the teacher’s requirements (and attract their attention) but also engage the students.³

In terms of community need, BC is fast becoming a province of minorities, and this is creating new challenges and opportunities for PLEI providers. PLEI providers will want to work with new partners, stay aware of changing demographics, and use appropriate strategies and formats to reach the very diverse audiences that make up the province’s populations. The relatively new consortium to deliver the PLEI for Immigrants pilot project provides PLEI providers with an opportunity to reach new communities. As well, the PLEI providers may acquire fresh perspectives on strategies

¹ For current work in this area, see the BC Law and Citizenship Curriculum Assessment section of the website of the Law Courts Education Society: www.lces.ca/bc_law_and_citizensh

² See the Ontario Justice Education network at: www.ojen.ca.

³ A quick look at www.accesstomedia.org/ provides excellent examples of what youth are doing in this area.

that could be incorporated into mainstream justice services.

PLEI is a key component of many community development and law reform initiatives. Public discussion and debate are critical components of ownership of the law. The internet provides a wealth of opportunities to spread the word, create public interest, and build support and networks. For many small organizations, taking advantage of the internet will require them to acquire or find new sets of skills – especially in communication.

Adults engage in formal and informal learning opportunities for many reasons: to know more about the way things work, to “stay out of trouble,” to take advantage of opportunities, or to participate more effectively in their community. Classes both in-person and online, events, and reports and articles in community newspapers and on community radio have all been used to reach potential learners. PLEI providers need to ensure that their products and services can be found within the learners’ search paths.

PLEI is also seen as a critical component of legal services, assisting people to identify, avoid or resolve problems, and where necessary to obtain legal advice, assistance or representation from lawyers or community advocates. Basically, the classic model has been PLEI followed by legal advice, followed where appropriate by legal representation (an example of this path is Dial-a-Law/Lawyer Referral/ lawyer). For the numerous instances where this model does not apply (e.g. legal aid unavailable; private bar does not do poverty law), the BC model is often PLEI/community-based advocate. In the continuum of service model, PLEI has always been and remains an important pathway to in-person service.

In the current environment, people are being asked or expected to resolve many more legal problems using PLEI materials. The research indicates that many people with legal issues do not follow the traditional models of using legal information as a pathway to legal assistance (see section 1.4 on context). If they do interact with the legal system, they may for a range of reasons “go it alone” with the help of the internet and the goodwill of family and friends. Some people “go it alone” through choice; for others, the decision is economic. Further, with the rise of self-representing litigants, adult PLEI users are being asked to complete complex legal procedures.

Many people who are dealing with a legal problem enter an environment they know little about, have never visited before, and don’t wish to be in. For these people, the phrase “accidental tourist in law land” (Giddings, 2008) is an apt one. One of the core challenges for PLEI is to understand whether and to what extent PLEI can “close the

gap.” There is a need for more evidence-based research into the question: To what extent are people using this legal information to deal with their legal problem?

BC PLEI has gathered and continues to gather evidence in the form of needs assessments, evaluations, and client service data. Members of the PLEI network include usability testing as part of their development of new materials, but there appears to be minimal sharing of skills around testing or of test outcomes.

The following discussion is offered in the knowledge that the PLEI groups make decisions in accordance with their own mandates, approaches and resources. But to be truly effective in the current environment, the PLEI community needs to build a more collaborative network, pooling skills in the effort to meet challenging PLEI needs.

1.4 Context

The Clicklaw project of the PLEI network is taking place in the context of a growing body of evidence-based PLEI research.⁴ This section provides a brief summary of major themes from the research that focuses on solving legal problems.

Note that the references are illustrative and in no way exhaustive; all of the research is cited in the section of this paper, References.

- People may not know that there is a legal solution to their everyday problem. This may lead to the problem escalating, thereby creating additional legal problems. Without timely access to help at the front end of the problem, people can be caught in a downward spiral. Unsolved legal problems have social costs and consequences (Currie, Pleasance, Stratton & Anderson).
- Once people have identified a legal need, they frequently use non-legal pathways to address the issue. Friends, family, and non-legal professionals are often the first ports of call (Currie, Clarke & Forell, Giddings & Pleasance).
- People who experience social disadvantage also experience the highest incidence of legal issues that have the most serious consequences, and face the greatest barriers in accessing the traditional pathways to legal information, assistance and advice (Pleasance, Schetzer & Henderson).
- Those most likely to experience social disadvantage include Aboriginal peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, youth, older people, people in

⁴ One of Clicklaw’s goals is to provide easier access to this research. As Mary Stratton (2007) comments: “PLEI across Canada is one area where quite extensive bodies of research do exist. Currently, however, there is considerable fragmentation of both PLEI research and development within the justice community.”

rural and remote areas, people living in institutions, people with below-average education, women, and people who are gay, lesbian, trans or bisexual. Economic disadvantage, which may be based on income dynamics, labour market dynamics, or family dynamics, also presents a significant barrier (CS Resors; Schetzer & Henderson).

- Tailoring legal information and education to address the unmet needs of disadvantaged groups and individuals is an essential PLEI strategy (McEown, Zalik, Coumarelos, Wei & Zhou).
- Both low and moderate income people have a range of unmet legal needs in the area of civil law (Currie, Pleasance).⁵ Numerous civil legal needs studies across many jurisdictions have come to consistent conclusions about priority areas to address (see section 3.2 of this report).
- In increasing numbers, individuals are embarking on self-help in order to deal with their legal issue. Self-helpers are diverse, but many have a relatively high level of education (Currie, Malcolmson & Reid, Stratton). This group includes individuals who would identify themselves as being middle class, but for whom costs have become a barrier. It also includes those who choose to be self-sufficient problem solvers. (The self-help research to date has tended to focus on litigants. PLEI information-seekers and problem-solvers, especially in online terms, are a much wider group.)
- Holistic responses are needed in order to address the root causes of legal problems (Currie, Moorhead & Robinson, Pleasance). The overlap between legal needs and other basic human needs associated with physical and social well-being also means that some individuals with complex problems require not only legal services but also non-legal support services, such as housing, financial counselling, social, welfare, family and health services (Coumarelos, Wei & Zhou).
- PLEI users may seek access to specific advice as well as general PLEI content. They may need to apply the information to their individual situation (Giddings). From this perspective, PLEI is often seen as being necessary but not sufficient to deal with the legal issue. In many instances, what makes the PLEI content effective is the ability to complement the information with access to in-person assistance and advice (Giddings, Scott).
- There are significant benefits to providing PLEI in multiple formats (Klinger).

⁵ The Ontario Civil Legal Needs Project is surveying households with up to \$75,000 in household income.

- Identifying a service or resource as Aboriginal is for many First Nations and Métis people an essential pre-requisite for its acceptance and use (Walkem).
- People who do not speak English are unlikely to be able to read or understand public legal information unless it has been translated. Multilingual public legal education and information materials are vital to those who need basic legal information in their own language and for the legal and non-legal organizations working with them (Zalik, Cohl & Thomson).
- Putting the information in the path of the user is a core PLEI strategy. Information is more likely to be used if it is timely and relevant, is provided at the point when a person is trying to solve a particular problem, is specific to the problem at hand, and is easy to find locally (McEown, Coumarelos, Wei & Zhou).

Use of internet for information

The integration into people's lives of internet use for information is ongoing and expanding. Internet use is not confined to Gen X and Gen Y. Pew Research's *Generations Online in 2009* found:

Older generations use the internet less for socializing and entertainment and more as a tool for information searches, emailing, and buying products.⁶

Use of the internet for information-seeking is increasingly prevalent in the health sector. In 2005, more than one-third of Canadian adults used the internet to search for health information.⁷ Recent research done by the Center for Studying Health System Change confirms that the internet is the most rapidly growing source of health information, with the number of online health searches doubling between 2001 and 2007, with the result that people's use of the internet for health information is now on par with their use of more traditional, longstanding sources of books, magazines and newspapers (33%) and friends or relatives (31%).⁸

⁶ Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2009, *Generations Online in 2009*. Online at: <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1093/generations-online>

⁷ Underhill & Mckeown, "Getting a Second Opinion: Health Information and the Internet," *Health Rep.*, vol 19(1), March 2008, p. 65-69.

⁸ Tu & Cohen, "Striking Jump in Consumers Seeking Health Care Information," Center for Studying Health System Change, Tracking Report No. 20, August 2008. Online at: <http://www.hschange.org/CONTENT/1006/>.

Internet and PLEI delivery

The trend to internet information seeking can be seen in the legal sphere as well. A survey commissioned by Thomson FindLaw of the legal needs of consumers in the United States revealed that 84% of consumers with a legal need who did research used the internet, far more than those who relied on friends and family, libraries, or local bar associations. Interestingly, about half of the consumers who used the internet to access information about their legal issue decided to contact a lawyer. That didn't mean, however, that the searchers were frustrated by what they found online. The vast majority (80%) of consumers who searched for legal information on the internet responded that they would be likely to use the internet as a legal resource in the future.⁹

In the PLEI community, applications of the internet were identified and embraced with enthusiasm. In a 2002 paper entitled *Applications of the Internet for Public Legal Education*, Lois Gander observed:

Public legal education organizations have . . . only begun to scratch the surface of what is possible even with the technology readily available today. . . the capacity of the PLE sector falls well short of what is needed to make the most of the vast potential of the Internet. . .¹⁰

Online resource-sharing amongst PLEI providers was established early, with Alberta's ACJNet and the United Kingdom's Public Legal Education Network (plenet.org.uk) being examples. Online networking among practitioners continues to grow in specific areas, such as SelfHelpSupport.org for those who develop resources for self-representing litigants. Recent initiatives are providing online in-person advice to individuals who have a legal problem, such as Pro Bono Net's LiveHelp chat lines in Montana and Iowa.¹¹ In addition, there is some PLEI research that explores promising

⁹ "How Consumers Meet Their Legal Needs Online," FindLaw. Online at: <http://www.lawyermarketing.com/cm/custom/how-consumers-meet-their-legal-needs-online.asp>.

¹⁰ Lois Gander (2000), *Applications of the Internet for Public Legal Education*, online at: www.acjnet.org/docs/int-ple.doc. Also see Lois Gander (2003) *The Changing Face of Public Legal Education in Canada* pages 4-9, where she comments: "The Internet. . . offer PLE news ways of creating, sharing, and managing knowledge." Online at: <http://cfcj-fcj.org/docs/2003/newsviews06-en.pdf>

¹¹ The *LiveHelp Pilot Project Final Evaluation Report* (2008) found that LiveHelp: (a) has high satisfaction levels and usage of the service is growing steadily; (b) significantly increases the extent to which users feel they had access to information needed to understand their legal rights, and (c) appears to increase users' confidence in their ability to follow through and resolve their problems. The report is online at: http://www.probono.net/nationalarearesearch/item.179623-LiveHelp_Pilot_Project_Final_Evaluation_Report?tab=pane_search-results-2

practices in the area of providing legal education and information to adults.¹²

In BC, PLEI providers are using the internet in various ways to serve their audiences. Two examples are PovNet, with its information sharing among advocates, and the upcoming VictimLINK website, which among other things will enable a victim to receive communications from the victim support worker and Crown counsel.

Creating general information/education online is different from providing individual problem-solving content online. To date, the relevant research about using online PLEI to address individual legal issues has tended to focus upon an iteration of barriers. Most often cited are complexity of legal information, challenges with searching, lack of online access, and preference for in-person help (Scott, Giddings). From this perspective, a primary role of the internet is one of providing the pathway to in-person assistance, through services such as the Clicklaw HelpMap.

To what extent can PLEI make use of new technologies and software to address the need for specific information about individual legal problems? Again, PLEI may look to the health sector for some answers. As early as 2000 at least one major health study suggested that the wide availability of general health information online resulted in positive individual solutions (Fox & Rainie 2000).¹³ The rise of social networking may be making it easier for people to find personalized health information and assistance online, and this may have applicability for PLEI.¹⁴

¹² See, for example, *Designing Websites Effectively: Promising Practices for Providing Legal Information to the Public*, Legal Resource Centre Alberta, March 2007. Online at: <http://www.legalresourcecentre.ca/research.html>

¹³ *The Online Health Care Revolution: How the Web Helps Americans Take Better Care of Themselves*, Pew Internet & American Life Project, Washington DC, Nov. 26, 2000. Online at http://www.pewinternet.org/report_display.asp?r=26

¹⁴ See, for example, the Wall Street Journal (2008) *The Informed Patient*: "The social-networking revolution is coming to health care, at the same time that new internet technologies and software programs are making it easier than ever for consumers to find timely, personalized health information online. Patients who once connected mainly through email discussion groups and chat rooms are building more sophisticated virtual communities that enable them to share information about treatment and coping and build a personal network of friends." <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB116717686202159961.html>

2. Overview

This overview focuses on what is contained on the PLEI resources identified for inclusion on the Clicklaw site, www.clicklaw.bc.ca. In order to understand what the site contains, it is necessary to identify what kinds of resources are being included, who might use Clicklaw, and how resources on Clicklaw are organized.

2.1 Clicklaw's organization

What is included?

PLEI network members developed criteria for what to include on Clicklaw. Clicklaw's content is based on the principle that everyone has the right to know the law. In fact, it is in everyone's interest to know the law, because that knowledge:

- empowers individuals and communities to make informed decisions;
- increases understanding of the justice system; and
- enables active participation in a democratic society.

Content must help British Columbians resolve or avoid legal problems, or provide law-related assistance, information, and/or education. Clicklaw may include resources produced by organizations in other provinces if they are relevant in this province – for example, items may provide information about federal laws.

Clicklaw gives priority to information that is accessible to the general public or specific communities or target groups, in plain language, and available at nominal cost or for free. The focus is on content that is produced by non-profit organizations, government, or the legal profession.

PLEI network members will have relevant documents which have not yet been included, and it is the goal of Clicklaw to have all of these materials identified. In some cases there may be opportunities for contributors to digitize materials; in other cases it will be a matter of ensuring that users have access to offline PLEI information.

Clicklaw's primary point of entry is topic-based. This reflects what the research tells us about how people most commonly search for information. However, Clicklaw also has the capacity to enable users or PLEI providers to approach information in a range of ways. For example, users who are representing themselves can access Clicklaw's resources through the category of "self-help and forms."

Figure 1: Criteria for inclusion of PLEI materials on Clicklaw

Clicklaw includes:
Content that helps British Columbians resolve their legal problems We give priority to practical resources designed to assist people to – <ul style="list-style-type: none">• understand their legal rights and responsibilities• obtain or enforce their rights or benefits• avoid or resolve specific legal problems• be effective consumers of legal services when needed
Content that enhances public understanding of the laws and the legal system We also include resources designed to – <ul style="list-style-type: none">• increase people’s knowledge and understanding of laws and the legal system• promote analysis and reform of laws and the legal system
Services that provide law-related assistance, information, and/or education We also include services that provide law-related assistance, information, and/or education to British Columbians.
Content that has a British Columbia focus or is relevant to a British Columbia audience We may include resources produced by organizations in other provinces if they have information about federal laws.
Content that is accessible to specific communities or target groups We also include resources that are – <ul style="list-style-type: none">• inclusive, or designed to meet the identified needs of the targeted audience• concise, complete and presented in clear language
Content that is free or low/nominal cost We give priority to resources and services that are free.
Content that is produced by non-profit organizations, government, and the legal profession We may give priority to content produced by non-profit organizations.
Excluded content We don’t include content if it – <ul style="list-style-type: none">• is primarily intended for the legal profession• is primarily intended to advance the agenda of a political party• is defamatory or discriminatory, or promotes illegal activities• is intended to solicit business for a commercial law firm or legal service• doesn’t have legal content, e.g. annual reports, marketing materials, order forms, general newsletters about an organization’s activities

Who will use Clicklaw?

One of the challenges faced by the Clicklaw team was to come to grips with how to develop a site that might address the needs of a diverse user base (all British Columbians). What would users want to access and how would they use the site? Audience research was conducted that included interviews with several organizations participating in the initiative, surveys on LawLINK and the Electronic Law Library, and analysis of website traffic on those sites and the sites of several participating organizations.

The Clicklaw team looked at patterns in users across several dimensions:

- age, gender, ethnicity, education, income, language, location
- technical experience/skills
- experience with legal system
- need for assistance
- frequency of and reason for use

Six personas were captured in brief descriptions that included a name, photo, goals, needs, and behaviour patterns. For each, a scenario was developed involving a legal circumstance, with the aim of understanding what approach they might take to using the Clicklaw site. The personas were: the help seeker, the independent problem-solver, the information seeker, the helper, the educator, and the learner.

Who are the contributors?

As Figures 2 & 3 on the following page illustrate, sources for Clicklaw come primarily from the PLEI network (see Appendix A for a list of participants). In addition, resources identified for Clicklaw come from non-profit community groups who are not part of the network at this time but who provide legal information and assistance. Examples include Battered Women's Support Services and Pivot Legal. Resource items are also drawn from quasi-governmental bodies (entities that act under the authority of government) such as the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee and the BC Business Practices and Consumer Protection Authority (BPCPA).

In addition, resources identified for inclusion on Clicklaw come from BC government ministries that are not part of the network. Examples are the information about residential tenancy from the Residential Tenancy Branch and the information about income assistance from the BC Ministry of Housing and Social Development. Federal government resources account for the majority of items categorized under "Other provinces and federal government." In addition, there are select items from PLEI groups outside of BC, such as ACJNet in Alberta.

Figure 2: Clicklaw sources, May 2009

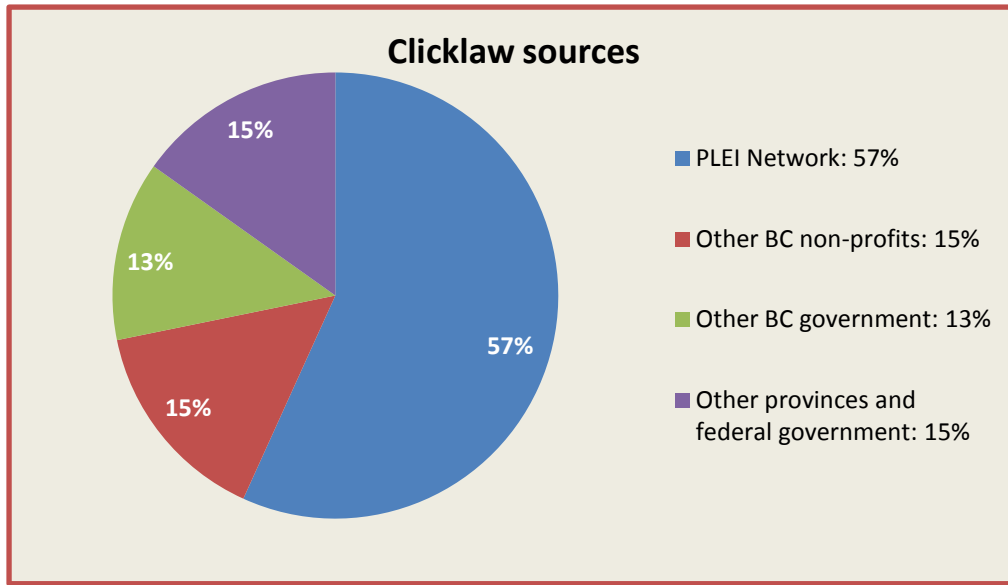


Figure 3: Sources for PLEI content

PLEI Network	Members of the BC PLEI Network who are participating in the Clicklaw project (see Appendix A for details). This includes three groups: members of the PLEI Working Group, the broader PLEI network, and other groups formally participating in the Clicklaw initiative.
BC non-profits	BC community groups and non-government authorities not part of the PLEI network
Other BC government	BC government ministries not part of the PLEI network
Other provinces and federal government	Federal government, PLEI providers in other provinces, individual private bar lawyers etc.

How are site sections organized?

Clicklaw is divided into four main sections that reflect what the users come to the site to do: Solve Problems, Learn and Teach, Reform and Research, and use the HelpMap.

Figure 4: Sections for PLEI content on Clicklaw

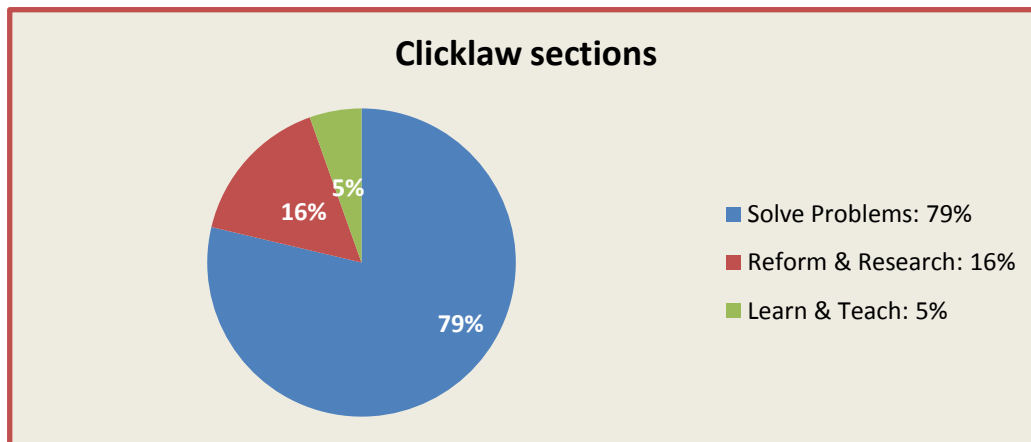
Solve Problems	<i>Understand your rights, solve legal problems</i>
	Resources that provide practical legal information designed to assist people in understanding their legal rights & responsibilities and/or avoid or resolve specific legal problems
Learn and Teach	<i>Build awareness of laws and the legal system</i>

	Resources that are primarily aimed at enhancing public awareness of and confidence in laws and how the legal system works
Reform and Research	<i>The public window to legal reform and innovations</i>
	Resources that primarily promote analysis or reform of laws and legal policy, or analysis of legal needs and innovative solutions
HelpMap	<i>Find those who can help with legal problems</i>
	An organization or service that provides law-related assistance, information or education to individuals with a legal problem on a one-on-one basis

With approximately 1175 PLEI resources currently identified for the Clicklaw site, Solve Problems is the largest section, containing approximately 79% of the content. (The HelpMap is in development as phase 2 of the Clicklaw project and will be completed by late 2009.)

The Solve Problems section contains basic overview items and also more detailed guides and manuals that aim to help users interact in some way with the legal system, or help others interact. The Learn and Teach section houses the items that are designed for use by learners and teachers. The items in Reform and Research are primarily designed for use by those who have a particular interest in or involvement with making the justice system more accessible.

Figure 5: Clicklaw sections, May 2009



What is the taxonomy?

A taxonomy is a set of categories used to organize resources. The PLEI taxonomy was sponsored by the PLEI network to enable a coordinated, structured approach to

describing public legal education and information resources from member organizations and others. The PLEI taxonomy is based on user testing, analysis of content, and feedback from organizations formally participating in Clicklaw.

The PLEI taxonomy includes categories for:

- Topic: what the resource is about or a community to whom the resource is of interest (Family law, Debt, Consumer, Seniors, etc.)
- Resource type: the nature of the information (basics, self-help & forms, etc.)
- Media format: the format the resource is in (web, video, PDF, etc.)
- Language: the language of the resource (Chinese, Punjabi, Spanish, etc.)
- Type of help: for services only, the type of help offered (advice, advocacy, information or self-help, etc.). This facet applies to HelpMap, part of phase 2 development.

2.2 Clicklaw components

Topics

Topics are grouped by user-centred categories: your family; your money; your safety; your daily life; your communities; and your legal system. Figure 6 presents the Clicklaw topics as they appear on the Clicklaw site, with the current numbers of resources listed within each topic.

Note that individual resources may contain multiple components. For example, a single Dial-a-Law resource may include scripts in English, Chinese and Punjabi, plus audio versions.

Also note that the resource base is dynamic and changes frequently.

Figure 6: Clicklaw resources organized by categories and topics, May 2009

Your safety	Your daily life	Your communities
Abuse & family violence: 77	Accidents & injuries: 27	Aboriginal: 27
Victims & crime: 146	Business & non-profits: 26	Disabilities: 38
	Consumer: 80	Gays, lesbians, trans, bisexuals: 16
Your money	Employment: 126	Immigrants: 61
Debt: 37	Environment: 31	Seniors: 24
Pensions, benefits & welfare: 142	Housing, tenancy & neighbours: 115	Women: 22
Taxes & finances: 23	Media & internet: 19	
	Privacy & access to information: 61	

Your family	Rights & citizenship: 92	Your legal system
Family law: 229		Legal help & lawyers: 51
Health: 33		Courts & tribunals: 219
Wills, estates & life planning: 65		Alternatives to court: 45
Children & teens: 56		Introduction to legal system: 28 ¹⁵ :
		Legal needs & innovative solutions: 18 ¹⁶

Resource types

Resources on Clicklaw are categorized as being one of seven “resource types,” which get at the nature of the information. The resource types are: Basics; Manuals & books; Gateways; Programs & courses; Reports & documents; Self-help & forms; and Teaching materials.

The placement of resource types follows predictable lines: “Basics” and “Self-help & forms” reside in the section, Solve Problems, while all of the “Teaching materials” are in the section, Learn and Teach. “Reports & documents” are clustered in the section, Reform and Research. “Programs & courses” are found in both Solve Problems and Learn and Teach, as are Gateways.

Figure 7 defines these types while Figure 8 on the following page shows their proportional representation on the Clicklaw site. Note that in considering resource types, a resource can only have one resource type (but can have up to four topics).

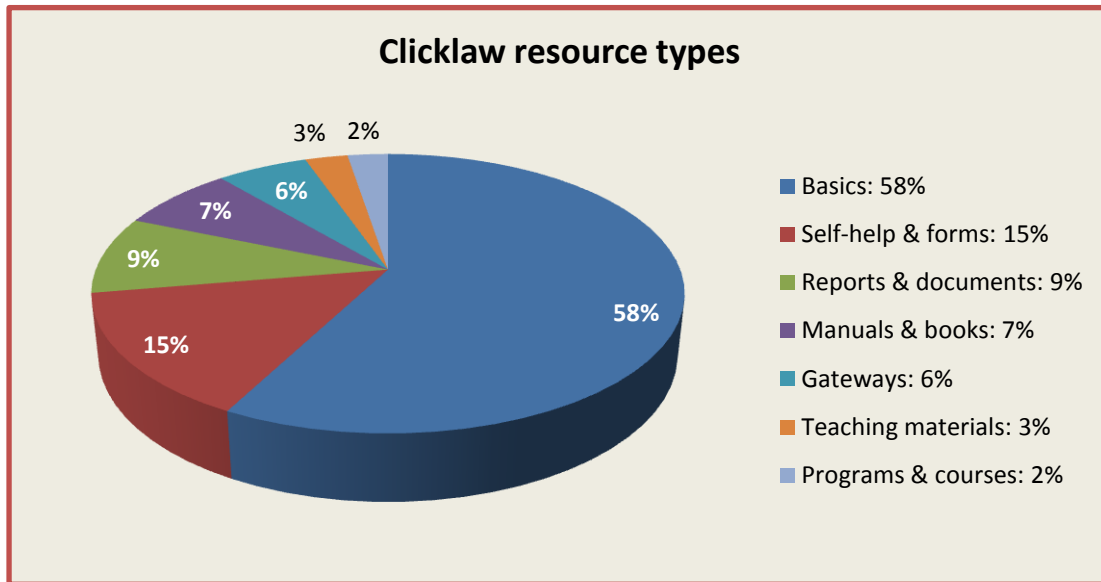
Figure 7: Clicklaw resource types

Basics	Basic practical legal information
Gateways	Websites or areas of websites that are entry points into a range of information
Manuals & books	Detailed or middle-ground information with a practical focus
Programs & courses	Programs, classes, animated or interactive websites & learning tools, either online or offline
Reports & documents	Detailed analysis, evaluation and policy
Self-help & forms	Tools to help people get things done (e.g., fillable forms, step-by-step how-to, sample wording)
Teaching materials	Guides, lesson plans, case studies aimed at those teaching or facilitating

¹⁵ In Learn and Teach only

¹⁶ In Reform and Research only

Figure 8: Distribution of resource types in Clicklaw, May 2009



Media formats

Figures 9 and 10 show the representation on Clicklaw of the following media formats: audio/podcast; multimedia; PDF; video; and web. The bulk of the audio/podcast entries (over 90%) are Dial-a-Law audio scripts. There are additional categories, print only, and not online (denotes in-person programs, workshops or classes) where the numbers are so low as to be statistically invisible.

Figure 9: Distribution of media formats in Clicklaw, May 2009

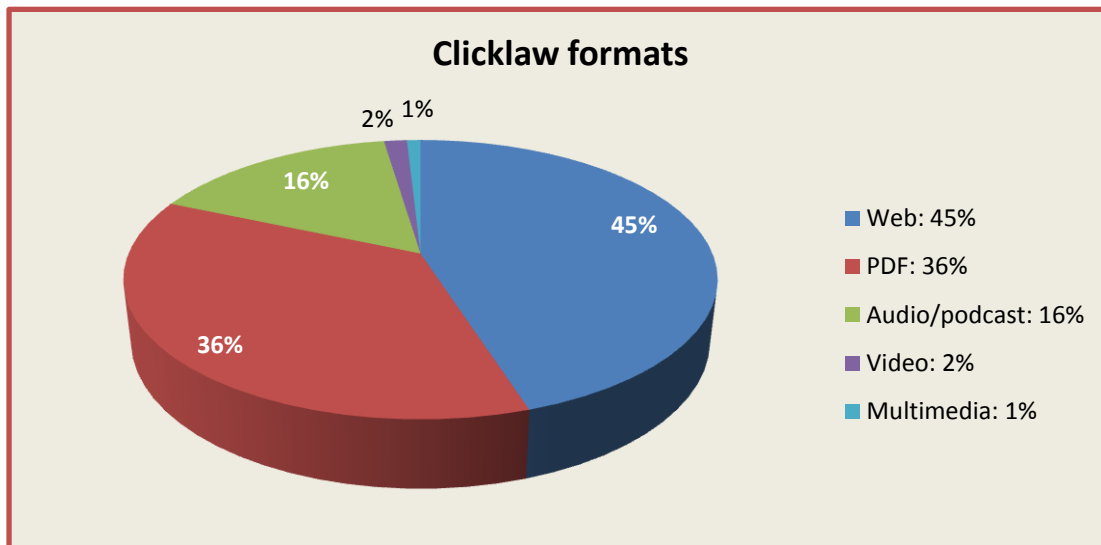


Figure 10: Clicklaw media formats

Audio/podcast	
Multimedia	Animated or interactive website
PDF	
Video	
Web	
Print only	A resource that is available only in print
Not online	e.g. in-person program or workshop

Languages

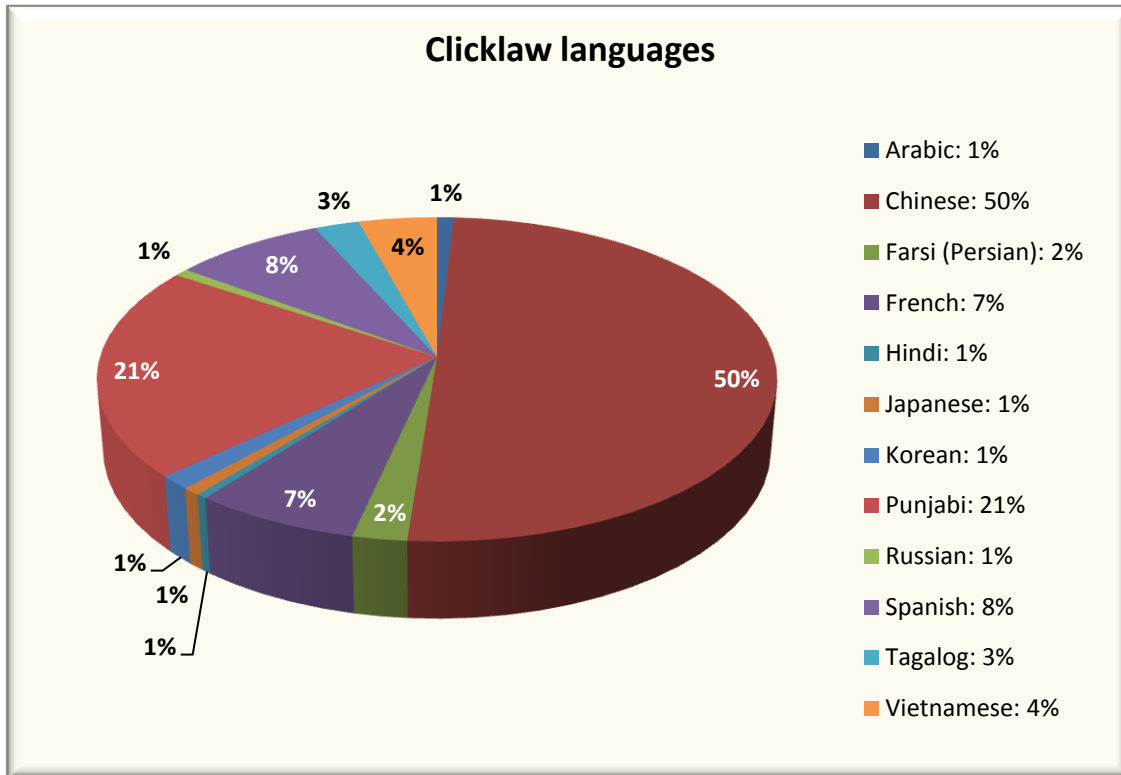
Approximately 27% of the content on Clicklaw is in languages other than English, with 17 languages being represented. Clicklaw is supporting MOSAIC, a PLEI network member, to ensure that MultiLingoLegal (the BC portal for PLEI materials in languages other than English) is resourced so that it can continue as a complementary website to Clicklaw. MultiLingoLegal describes resources in eight languages other than English, allowing users to navigate to resources in their preferred language. As well, MultiLingoLegal carries items in languages other than English not only from the PLEI network but also from across Canada.

Figures 11 and 12 show the numbers of resources in languages other than English that currently reside on Clicklaw. Figure 11 provides the total number of Clicklaw resources in languages other than English. Figure 12 portrays the presence by percentage of the top twelve languages (languages not listed do not individually amount to 1%). While Chinese is presented a single item for these purposes, items on the site distinguish between Simplified and Traditional versions.

Figure 11: Numbers of Clicklaw resources in languages other than English, May 2009

Arabic: 6	Japanese: 6	Russian: 5
Chinese: 332	Korean: 10	Spanish: 55
Farsi (Persian): 16	Polish: 1	Tagalog: 17
French: 47	Portuguese: 3	Tamil: 1
German: 1	Punjabi: 141	Vietnamese: 29
Hindi: 4	Romanian: 1	

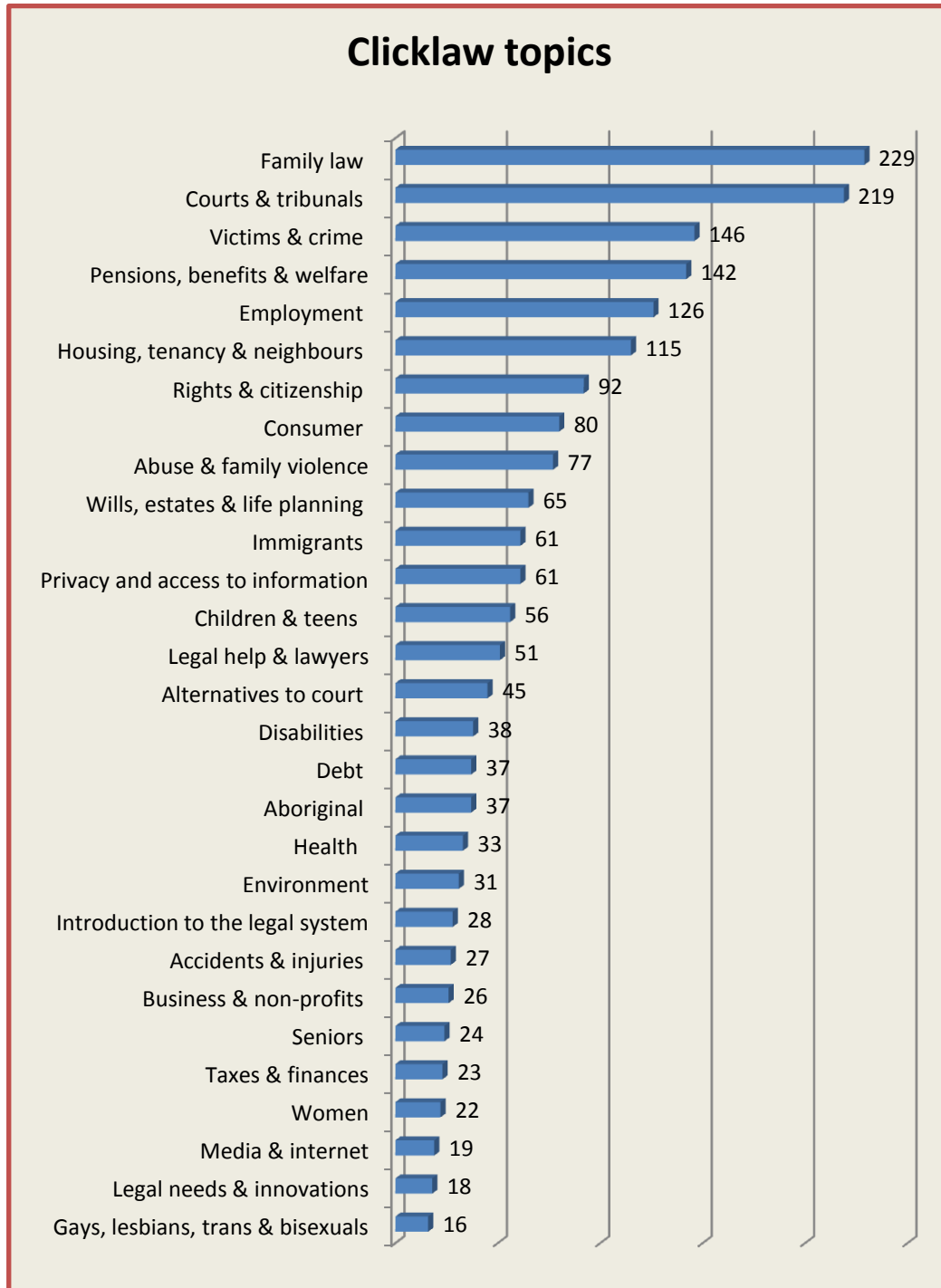
Figure 12: Presence of non-English languages on Clicklaw, May 2009



3. Analysis of PLEI content

This section takes a closer look at user access to BC PLEI online content by focusing on an analysis of topics on Clicklaw. (Note: a resource may appear under multiple topics.)

Figure 13: Clicklaw resource entries by topic, May 2009

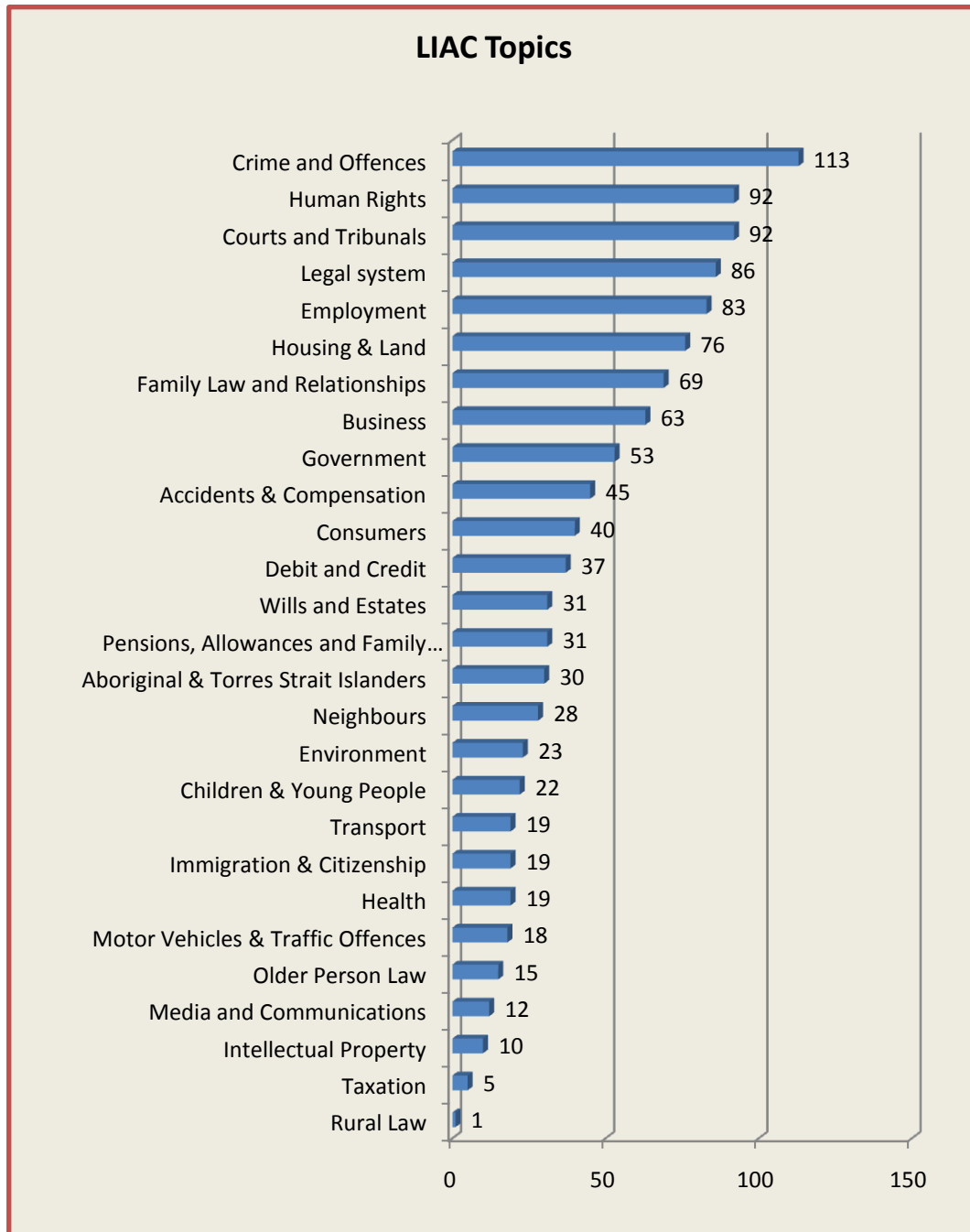


3.1 Comparison of Clicklaw with other websites

LIAC – Legal Information Access Centre, NSW Australia

LIAC is “a free legal information service for all members of the community” and LIAC’s Find Legal Answers¹⁷ is in many ways comparable with Clicklaw.

Figure 14: Legal Information Access Centre (New South Wales) topics



¹⁷ Find Legal Answers: <http://www.legalanswers.sl.nsw.gov.au>

LIAC & Clicklaw: Points of comparison

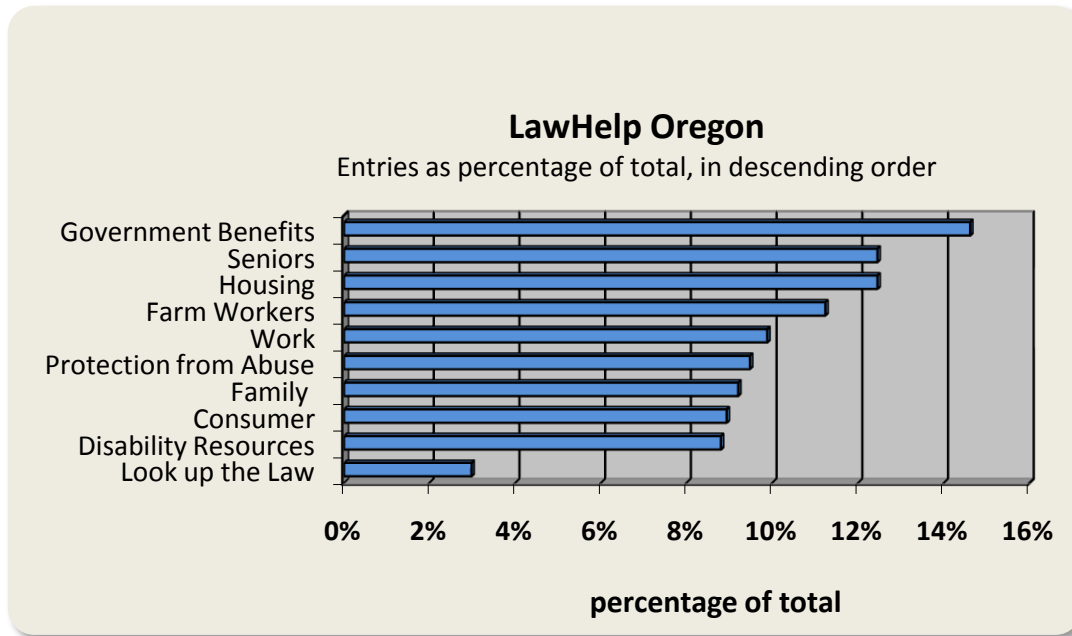
- PLEI in BC has traditionally had a strong family law focus. On Clicklaw (Figure 13) “Family law” ranks first with highest number of entries. On the LIAC site (Figure 14), however, “Family law and relationships” ranks seventh.
- The topic “Courts & tribunals” is ranked very high, with second place on both sites. (LIAC shares this second place with “Human rights.”) The priority placement reflects a shared view of the importance to users of this topic.
- On the LIAC site, “Crimes and offences” has the greatest number of resources. On Clicklaw, “Victims and crime” has the third highest number of resources (with more entries for offender issues than for victim issues). In this respect, again, the sites are similar.
- The topic of housing takes similar places on each site (sixth on both Clicklaw and LIAC). Clicklaw’s “Housing, tenancy and neighbours” provides a useful if extreme illustration of the fact that the truth lies in the details: the topic area is strong on tenancy, has some useful housing information, but provides only one item (Dial-a-Law script, Neighbour Law) entirely devoted to addressing neighbour issues. LIAC, by contrast, has 28 entries for “Neighbours.”
- The placements for “Employment” are similar, although the LIAC topic is somewhat more prominent, at fourth place on the LIAC site (given the two equal second placings), while it is ranked in fifth place on Clicklaw.
- LIAC recently added “Rural law,” which does not appear on Clicklaw. LIAC also created a new topic, “Debit and credit,” to replace their old “Banking and finances” and deleted “Culture and recreation.”

Note that these comparisons provide broad-brush information at best; the categories do not correspond exactly. On Clicklaw, human rights is covered under “Rights and Citizenship” while on LIAC it is treated as a separate topic. The LIAC topic, “Housing and Land” includes material about land that is not covered within Clicklaw’s “Housing, tenancy and neighbours.”

LawHelp Oregon

In the US, LawHelp.org, a national initiative sponsored by Pro Bono Net, helps low and moderate income people find free legal aid programs in their communities, and answers questions about their legal rights. LawHelp Oregon,¹⁸ whose topics are featured in Figure 15, provides a typical example of a LawHelp site.¹⁹

Figure 15: LawHelp Oregon topics, by percentage of entries



LawHelp Oregon & Clicklaw: Points of comparison

- Consistent with its focus on low/moderate income, the topic on LawHelp Oregon that lists the most resources is “Government benefits.” On Clicklaw, “Pensions, benefits and welfare” is in the top third of offerings by topic.
- “Seniors” is in second place on LawHelp Oregon. On the Clicklaw site, “Seniors” is currently placed within the bottom third of offerings by topics.²⁰ On LawHelp Oregon, “Housing” is in third position, which is somewhat more prominent than “Housing, tenancy and neighbours,” ranked sixth on the Clicklaw site.

¹⁸ [http:// www.oregonlawhelp.org](http://www.oregonlawhelp.org)

¹⁹ The content on state sites reflects the amount of funding the participating agencies receive as well as their specific mandates.

²⁰ This could be misleading, as network member BC Centre for Elder Support and Advocacy (BC CEAS) has a website in redevelopment.

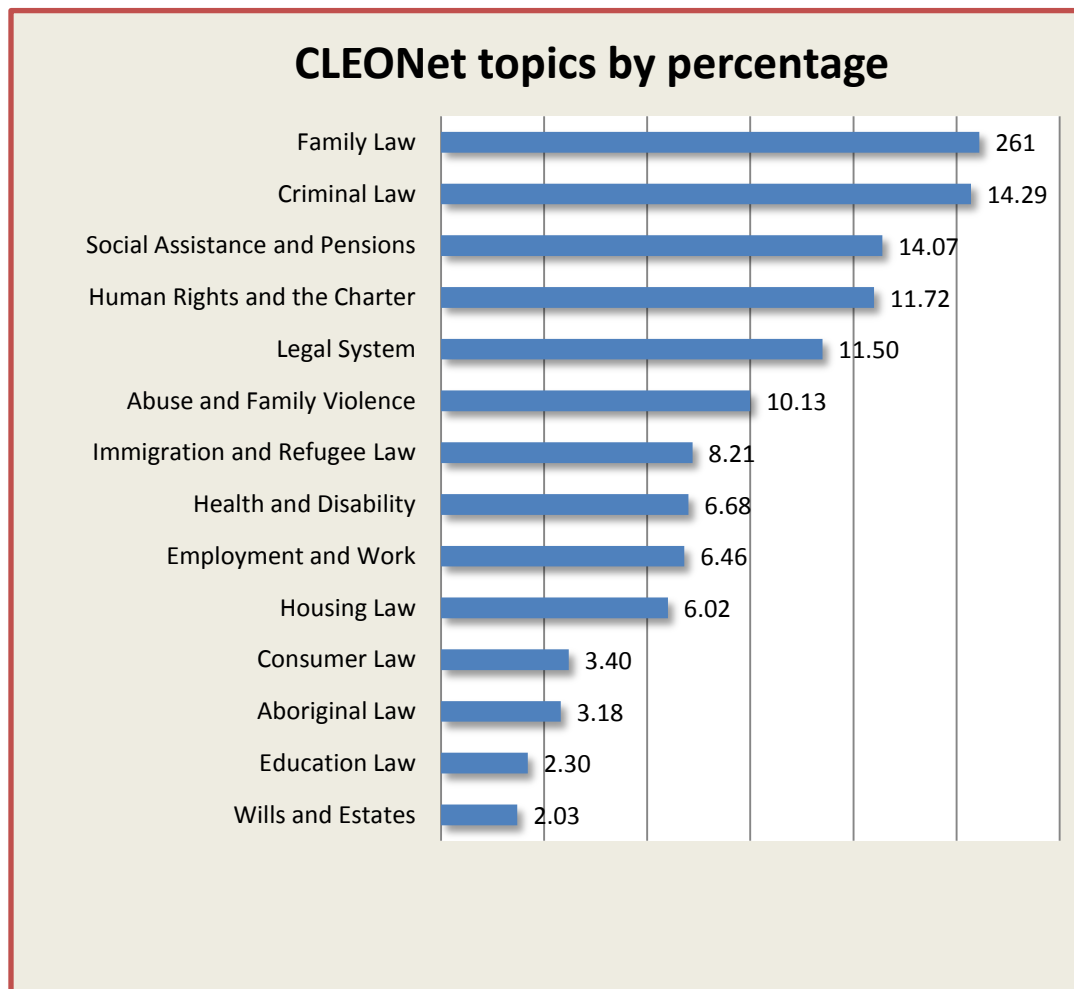
- While “Farm Workers” is fourth on the LawHelp Oregon site, this topic area has very few entries on Clicklaw, where it is situated under “Employment.”

Again, these comparisons provide broad-brush information only, and it is important to read them within the context of differences in categorization. While all items in LawHelp Oregon come under ten headings, Clicklaw’s taxonomy has 27 topics.

CLEONet

CLEONet²¹ is a portal site developed by Community Legal Education Ontario. Unlike the previous sites, CLEONet is designed for intermediaries: community workers and advocates who work with low-income and disadvantaged communities.

Figure 16: CleoNet topics by percentage of entries



²¹ <http://www.cleonet.ca>

CLEONet & Clicklaw: Points of comparison

- Like Clicklaw, CLEONet's highest number of entries is for family law.
- Criminal law has the second highest number of entries on CLEONet, which is comparable with Clicklaw, where "Victims and Crime" appears in third place.
- In contrast to Clicklaw, CLEONet places more emphasis on the topic of immigration and refugee law. On CLEONet, this topic contains 8.21% of total entries, while on Clicklaw, it constitutes 3.17% of total entries.
- CLEONet also places more emphasis on the topic of health, with 13 items on the subject of long-term care, and 31 items on the subject of patients' rights. (Percentage comparisons are difficult to make as CLEONet uses "Health and Disability" as a single topic, while Clicklaw separates the two.)
- CLEONet's items under "Social Assistance and Pensions" are 11.72% of their total entries while Clicklaw's items under "Pensions, benefits and welfare" are 7.37% of total entries.
- Unlike Clicklaw CLEONet includes "Education law" as a topic area. However, Clicklaw's Learn and Teach section addresses many similar issues.

Again, while making comparisons, it is important to note that CLEONet has 14 topics while Clicklaw's taxonomy has 27 topics.

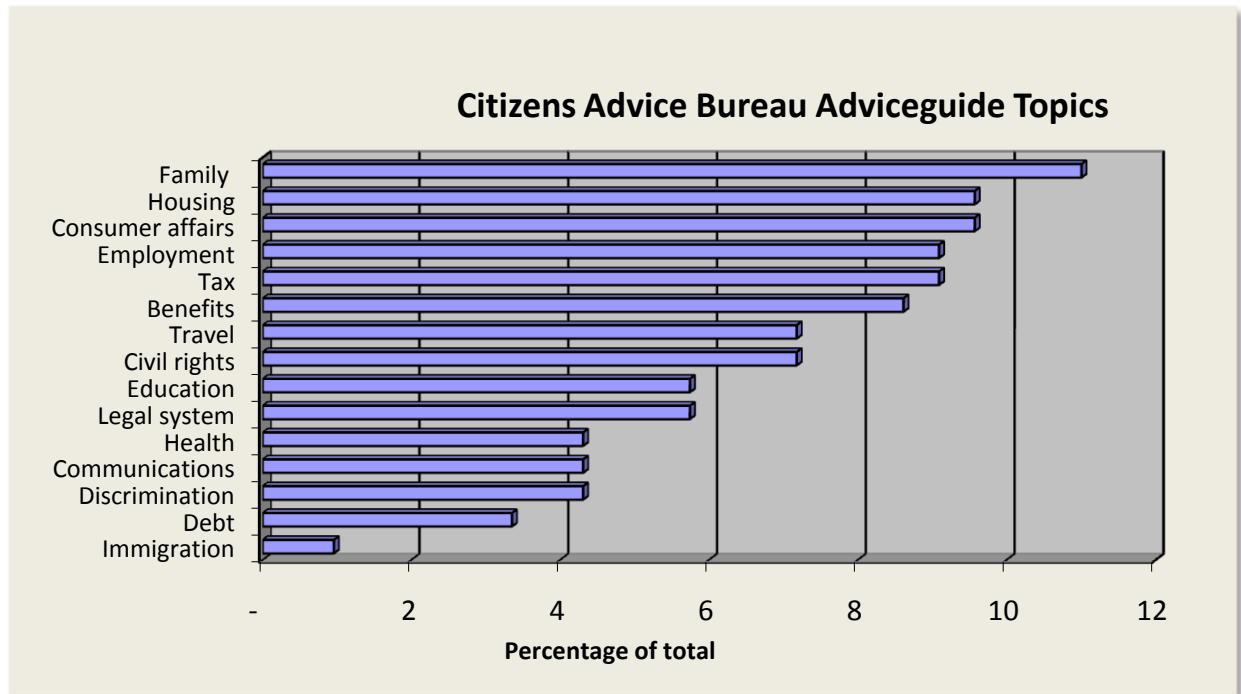
Citizens Advice Bureau Adviceguide

In the United Kingdom, the Citizens Advice Bureau provides extensive information services, including its Adviceguide.²² This is an online guide with a focus on "practical, up-to-date information on a wide range of topics, including benefits and housing, employment rights and discrimination, debt and tax issues."

Figure 17 on the following page lists the Adviceguide's topics, all of which contain multiple units of information within numerous subcategories, each with FAQs and fact sheets. While the Adviceguide is a site in its own right and not a portal, it is relevant here because it aims to cover the gamut of everyday situations in which legal issues may arise.

²² <http://www.adviceguide.org.uk>

Figure 17: Citizens Advice Bureau Adviceguide topics, with entries by percentage of total



Adviceguide & Clicklaw: Points of comparison

- On Adviceguide, as on Clicklaw, “Family law” tops the list.
- “Consumer affairs” is in third place on Adviceguide at 9.6% of total. This gives much more prominence than it receives on Clicklaw, where “Consumer” is in eighth place and 4.15% of total.
- The Adviceguide gives more space to the topic, “Tax” at 9.1% of total, compared with Clicklaw’s space of 1.19%.
- In general, Adviceguide information tends to be broader in scope than on other sites, including Clicklaw. It also deals with issues at a granular level.

Summary

In summary, the comparison with other sites reveals the following key features about Clicklaw’s collection of PLEI resources:

- There is a very strong emphasis on family law resources.
- Similar to other comparable sites, the collection provides numerous resources about court procedures, criminal law, housing, and employment.
- The collection is relatively weak in a range of “legal problems of everyday life,” including consumer law and health law.

3.2 Comparison with legal needs surveys and assessments

In recent years much research has been completed into how people experience legal problems.²³ This section focuses on the major Canadian and British Columbia surveys and studies.

In Canada, three major surveys were conducted by Dr. A Currie of the Department of Justice in 2004, 2006 and 2008. The surveys are useful for PLEI that focuses on solving problems because they provide insight into how people respond to legal issues (which includes taking no action, or taking action that does not bring them into contact with legal service providers). The Department of Justice surveys provide information about how often legal problems occur in people's lives, how disruptive these problems are, and how important it is to people to resolve their legal problems. Based on the survey results, it is possible to look across three dimensions of user experience: incidence, level of disruption, and importance to resolve.

Figure 18 on the following page presents select problem types from the 2006 Department of Justice legal needs survey.²⁴ In an effort to compare the survey findings with Clicklaw's holdings, matches were sought between the two sets of topics. In making this comparison, the research drew upon the inventory prepared for Clicklaw (February 2009). The inventory lists *all* items within an individual resource shown on the Clicklaw site. This "backend" information yields a higher level of detail and thus facilitates a more thorough exploration.

In the survey, "Relationship Breakdown" and "Other Family" were separate categories. For the purposes of comparison they have been combined to match Clicklaw's "Family law" category. Similarly, "Discrimination" and "Police Action" have been put together to match Clicklaw's "Rights and citizenship" category. "Hospital treatment and release" match most of the content in Clicklaw's "Health" section here they are treated as comparable topics. There were no comparable topics in the Clicklaw for the survey's topic of "Threat of Legal Action" so it was omitted. 17 topics used in Clicklaw were omitted for the same reason.²⁵

²³ Legal needs surveys have been conducted in jurisdictions within Canada, the US, UK, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, among others.

²⁴ Data from the 2006 *National Survey of The Civil Justice Problems Of Low And Moderate Income Canadians: Incidence and Patterns* survey has been adapted for the purposes of comparison with Clicklaw.

²⁵ Clicklaw topics omitted are: Aboriginal, Abuse & family violence, Alternatives to court, Business & non-profits, Children & teens, Courts & tribunals, Environment, GLTB, Introduction to the legal system, Legal help & lawyers, Legal needs & innovations, Media & internet, Privacy & access to information, Seniors, Taxes & finances, Victims & crime, and Women.

Figure 18: Select problem types by incidence, disruption, and importance to resolve: ranked in descending order by percentage

Problem Category	Incidence of problem types by percentage	Problem Category	Level of Disruption by percentage	Problem Category	Importance to resolve by percentage
Consumer	22.0	Disability pensions	60.4	Immigration	92.80
Debt	20.3	Hospital treatment or release	55.4	Family breakdown and other family problems	88.40
Employment	17.8	Personal injury	53.1	Hospital treatment or release	86
Wills & powers of attorney	5.2	Family – breakdown and other family problems	44.48	Personal injury	86.5
Family – breakdown and other family problems	5.0	Social assistance	37.5	Disability pensions	83.3
Discrimination and police action	4.0	Immigration	35.3	Wills & powers of attorney	81.9
Personal injury	2.9	Employment	33.8	Housing	65.8
Housing	1.7	Discrimination and police action	32.94	Employment	63.9
Hospital treatment or release	1.6	Housing	31.2	Debt	55.4
Social assistance	1.2	Wills & powers of attorney	28	Social assistance	62.5
Disability pensions	1.0	Debt	18.7	Consumer	47.5
Immigration	0.6	Consumer	12.6	Discrimination and police action	43.57

The three factors – incidence, level of disruption, and importance to resolve – provide insight into the contexts in which people experience legal problems. “Immigration” ranks last in the survey’s Incidence column but is first in terms of Importance to Resolve. Similarly, “Consumer” ranks first in the survey’s incidence column, but ranks last in terms of level of disruption.

Figure 19 takes the categories that the Clicklaw inventory shares with the legal needs study and ranks them by their prevalence (percentage of the content shared with the legal needs study topics). Note that the total inventory numbers are greater than those that are visible to site users (identified in Figure 13) because the inventory includes all items within each resource.

Figure 19: Clicklaw inventory: selected topics ranked by prevalence, February 2009

Clicklaw topics matching Department of Justice study	Number	Percentage
1. Family Law	310	19.00%
2. Rights & citizenship	197	12.07%
3. Housing, tenancy & neighbours	177	10.85%
4. Pensions, benefits & welfare	174	10.66%
5. Employment	162	9.93%
6. Wills, estates & life planning	140	8.58%
7. Consumer	114	6.99%
8. Immigrants	92	5.64%
9. Disabilities	90	5.51%
10. Health	66	4.04%
11. Accidents & injuries	56	3.43%
12. Debt	54	3.31%
Total	1632	100.00%

Department of Justice Survey & Clicklaw: Points of comparison

The national survey figures provide some points of broad comparison with the BC PLEI Clicklaw inventory.

Incidence

- As Figure 18 indicates, the survey's top three legal problems in terms of incidence were "Consumer," "Debt" and "Employment." While "Neighbours" was a topic included only in the third Department of Justice survey (2008), in that study it appeared within the top three categories, at a high 19.5%.
- The Clicklaw inventory on "Consumer" and "Debt" contrasts with the high level of incidence identified in the survey. In the survey (Figure 18), "Consumer" ranks number one in terms of incidence, but ranks seventh in the Clicklaw inventory, at 6.99% of total entries. "Debt" ranks second in terms of incidence in the survey results but is in last place (12th) in the Clicklaw inventory ranking by prevalence, at 3.31% of total entries.

Level of disruption

- The survey ranking of #1 for "Disability pensions" in terms of disruption points to the importance of the Clicklaw sections, "Pensions, benefits and welfare," and "Disabilities." In the Clicklaw inventory, if the resources from those two categories were considered together, the ranking for combined resources would put this topic in second position (16.17%) in terms of disruption.
- In the survey, "Personal injury" ranks second and "Family" ranks third in terms of disruption caused by the problem in people's lives.

Importance to resolve

- Within the survey "Family problems" ranks second highest in terms of importance to resolve, which can be compared with first place ranking in the Clicklaw inventory.
- "Personal injury" ranks fourth highest in terms of importance to resolve. "Accidents and injuries" (which includes personal injury) ranks quite low on the Clicklaw inventory - in 11th place, with only 3.43% of entries.

Figure 20 depicts the Clicklaw inventory collection by problem area corresponding to those areas identified in the Department of Justice Survey 2006 in relation to three key findings of the survey: Incidence (the frequency with which individuals experienced problems), Disruptive (how disruptive the problem was to them), and Importance (how important it was to them to resolve the problem) each ranked on a scale from 0 - 10.

Figure 20: Comparison of topics in the Clicklaw inventory with the rankings of Incidence, Disruption, and Importance to Resolve, Department of Justice legal needs survey 2006

Legend for rankings:

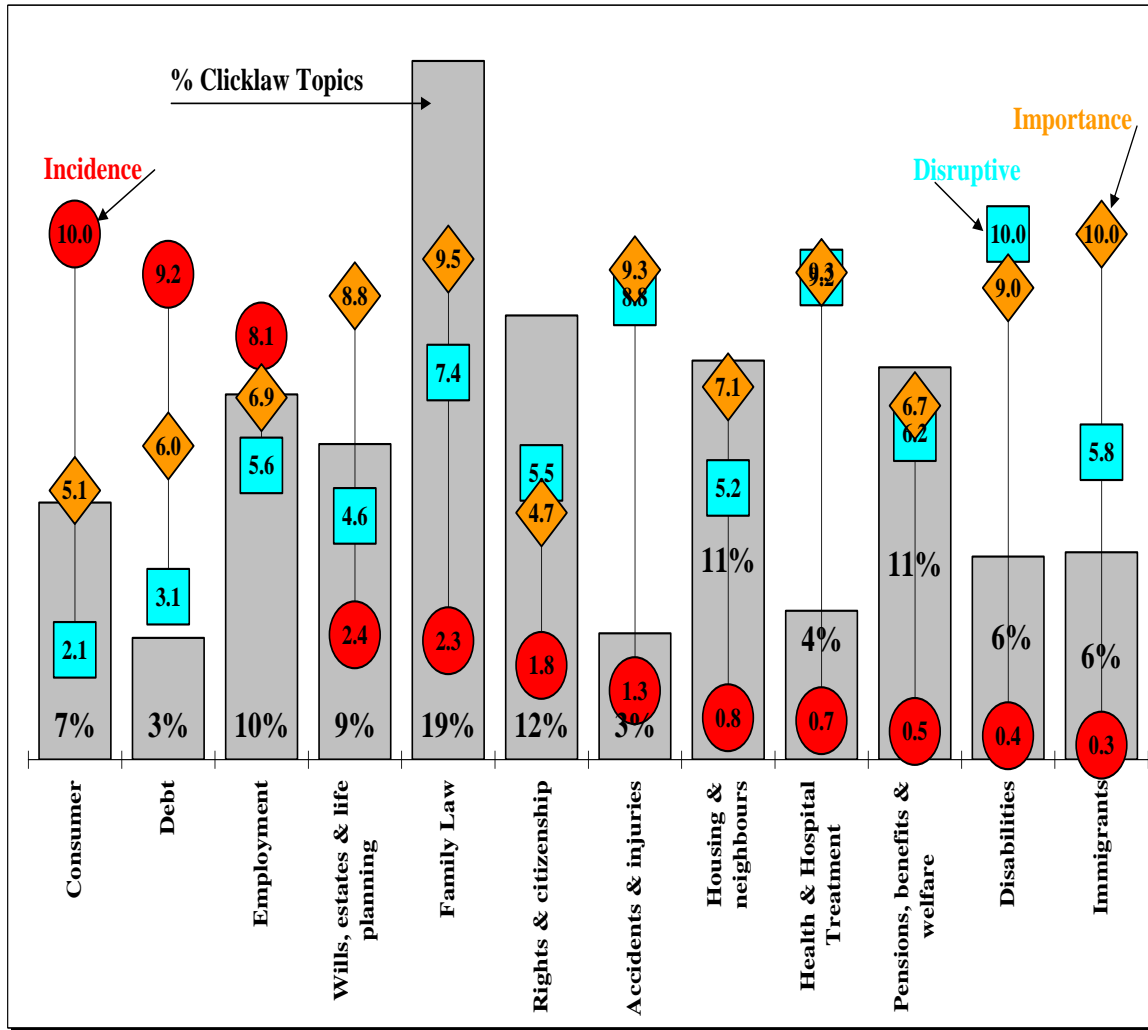


Figure 20 shows the relationship (or lack thereof) between the holdings of the Clicklaw inventory and the legal needs survey findings. For example, the consumer problems column makes up 7% of the Clicklaw inventory, which rank the lowest (at 2.1) in terms of being disruptive to respondents who experienced a consumer problem, and second lowest at 5.1 in terms of being important to resolve, but which rank highest at 10 in terms of incidence. Employment problems, which make up 10% of the Clicklaw inventory, and rank fifth in the collection, rank third in incidence at 8.1, seventh in disruptiveness at 5.6, and

eighth in importance at 6.9. Some issues which are both highly disruptive and very important to resolve (Disabilities, Health and Hospital Treatment and Accidents & Injuries) are ranked relatively low in terms of the Clicklaw inventory.

Relevant British Columbia survey and studies

As Figure 21 illustrates, the results of the 2008 Ipsos Reid survey conducted for the Legal Services Society, *Legal Problems Faced in the Everyday Lives of British Columbians*²⁶ are remarkably consistent with those in Department of Justice survey. The LSS online survey focused on low and moderate income British Columbians, with incomes of less than \$50,000 a year. In this study 1,189 British Columbians drawn from the internet survey pool responded to a survey about problems they had experienced in the last three years. The importance of consumer, money/debt, and personal injury among the survey population has relevance for future directions of BC PLEI, given the relative lack of emphasis on these issues on Clicklaw. In contrast, other issues also of importance to the survey population, such as housing, employment and family law issues are currently quite well covered.

Figure 21: Incidence of problem types in descending order, Legal Problems Faced in the Everyday Lives of British Columbians

Legal Problems Faced in Everyday Lives of British Columbians In descending order	Percentage of respondents identifying they had experienced a problem in this area
Consumer problems	51%
Money/debt problems	46%
Housing/land problems	36%
Employment problems	35%
Family relationship problems	32%
Personal injury problems	29%
Welfare/social assistance problems	24%
Wills & power of attorney problems	19%
Discrimination problems	16%
Police incidents	15%

²⁶ Online at www.lss.bc.ca

Legal action problems	15%
Hospital/treatment release problems	15%
Immigration problems	8%

In the area of poverty law research²⁷ in BC, the topics of welfare, disability, housing, employment insurance, and debt were the top five priorities in the 2004 SPARC report, *Delivering Poverty Law Services: Lessons from BC and Abroad*.²⁸ Welfare, housing and debt were the top five priority areas in the 2005 Law Foundation report, *Poverty Law Needs Assessment and Gap/Overlap Analysis*.²⁹

Figure 22: Pressing problems of poverty law, ranked in order of importance

Delivering Poverty Law Services	Poverty Law Needs Assessment and Gap/Overlap Analysis
Welfare	Welfare
Disability Benefits	Housing
Residential Tenancy	Debt
Employment Insurance	Workers' Compensation
Debt/Credit Issues	CPP/OAP
Canada Pension Plan matters	
Workers Compensation	

A comparison of these priorities with items in the PLEI resources available on Clicklaw reveals that BC PLEI has well developed information for low-income users (both individuals and intermediaries) in some poverty law areas, specifically within the topics of “Disabilities,” “Pensions, benefits & welfare” and “Housing, tenancy and neighbours.” However, given the importance of debt problems within these BC studies, it appears that PLEI resources in the topic area of “Debt” warrant review.

²⁷ Poverty law does not include family law.

²⁸ Andrea Long and Ann Beveridge, SPARC, *Delivering Poverty Law Services: Lessons from BC and Abroad*, 2004, p.11. Online at www.sparc.bc.ca

²⁹ Denice Barrie, *Poverty Law Needs Assessment and Gap/Overlap Analysis*, p.1. Online at www.lawfoundationbc.org/plna-nov05.pdf

3.3 Comparison with relevant data about client usage of services

Clicklaw’s resources can also be reviewed in comparison with data about matters for which clients have sought legal assistance. The following are three representative examples of client data for the purposes of brief comparison.

Supreme Court Self-Help Information Centre (SHIC): Evaluation data (2005) for full-service users of the SHIC shows that requests for help were 60% for family law matters and 40% for civil law matters. Within the area of non-family civil law, the top three problem types were personal injury, consumer contract, and wills litigation.

The Law Students Legal Advice Program saw over 4,052 in 2007/2008. The highest areas of demand were for criminal, family, contract dispute, landlord tenant, employer/employee, debt, and tort law. Figure 23 provides the figures for these problem types.

Figure 23: LSLAP topics

LSLAP topics, top areas in descending order
Family law: 562+ Divorce 244
Criminal: 598
Contract dispute: 459
Landlord/tenant: 268
Employer/Employee: 222
Debt: 193
Tort (negligence etc) 182

LawLINE: Between March 31, 2007 and February 9, 2009, LawLINE handled 26,204 issues. The top priorities in descending order are illustrated in Figure 24.

Figure 24: LawLINE topics

LawLINE topics, top areas in descending order
Family law: 29% (n=9373)
Criminal law: 13% (n=3728)
Consumer rights: 8% (n=2378)
Housing: 7% (n=2092)
Debt: 7% (n=1943)

Health & estates: 6% (n=1681)

Employment law: 5% (n=1374)

In addition, short service and civil procedure was 8% of the total issues.

A review of data for clients who seek legal assistance suggests that BC PLEI is on track with Clicklaw's strong emphasis on the topics of "Family law" and "Victims and crime." However, the comparisons suggest that PLEI's response to topics within civil law (e.g. contract dispute, consumer rights, and personal injury) may not match the level of demand for legal information and help in the BC population.

3.4 Comparison with data about online use

The comparison with relevant data about online use will be a central strategy in assessing future PLEI online needs.

PLEI providers can learn about user response to online PLEI by taking into account variables such as what pages drive the most page views on their sites, how long users stay on the site, and how they reach the site. While some PLEI providers analyze their collections on this basis, there has been little shared discussion about results and online use data has not formed the basis for joint planning.

Clicklaw, with the use of Google Analytics among numerous network members, will enhance this body of information and facilitate responses based on the evidence provided by internet traffic. Most importantly, it will facilitate shared planning. For example, if online material developed on a specific topic or for a specific community has very few users, this could prompt an investigation as to whether or not the material and/or format may be appropriate, and what changes could be made.

An initial step in the development of Clicklaw was to conduct online surveys on the LawLINK and Electronic Law Library (ELL) websites, the two BC portal-like PLEI sites that have now been "folded into" Clicklaw. Over 200 responses to the surveys provided learning that applies to Clicklaw and also has ramifications for the network of PLEI sites.

- Over half of the respondents were members of the public (53%). Some 40% were advocates and intermediaries, and 4% were educators. Interestingly, of the two sites, Electronic Law Library had a greater percentage of respondents who were members of the public (56%,

compared to 45% on LawLINK). Even though ELL was originally developed as a tool for public librarians, it obviously evolved into a site that was used extensively by the public.

- Respondents were accessing the two sites from home (50%), work (33%), public libraries (10%), and other public-access computers (5%).
- Over half the respondents were visiting the sites for the first time (54%). This was even more pronounced for the Electronic Law Library (where 60% were first-time users).
- Respondents arrived on the sites in a variety of ways:
 - 28% from Google searches
 - 28% by following a link from another site
 - 17% from bookmarks/favourites
 - 5% typed in the address directly
- The high percentage of users arriving on the Electronic Law Library and LawLINK by following links from other sites reinforces the value of having strong linkages among the PLEI provider sites, as well as between those sites and Clicklaw. And clearly all sites including Clicklaw aim to achieve high results in Google and other search engines.³⁰
- The introduction of Clicklaw widgets will enable PLEI providers (and others) to display portions of the Clicklaw content on their own sites. These widgets will:
 - offer the public more entry points into PLEI
 - strengthen linkages between PLEI providers
 - create a visible network of linked content, conveying a sense of cohesiveness across the community of PLEI providers

³⁰ The network of links (network sites > Clicklaw > network sites) will assist people to find what they are looking for, and has the added bonus of helping the content of PLEI sites climb in Google results (links count as votes in Google's PageRank algorithm, a key ingredient that determines search results sets).

4. Analysis of PLEI resource types and formats

This section makes some suggestions about Clicklaw's major resource types and formats, with a view to prompting discussion about possible future directions.

4.1 Resource types

Basics: Within Clicklaw resource types, the category of "Basics" dominates at 58%. This category covers a wide range of print and web items. Primary among them are what can be described as overviews. These are short, summary introductions to the issue, typically ending with some referrals to additional information. A typical example of an overview would be a Dial-a-Law script, in its variant print and audio versions. The brevity of overviews places major constraints on how much information can be provided.

Self-help & forms: Constituting 15% of Clicklaw, this resource type covers a wide range of user needs. In some instances users are now expected to be able to go online and perform a number of tasks that are technologically quite advanced. An example is using Court Services online to search court records. In others instances users are required to download and prepare forms, such as Supreme Court forms, which are written in legalese.

Clicklaw contains online self-help guides to assist users with court and tribunal procedures. The guides move step-by-step, are in plain language, and are organized from a lay person's point of view. While some are PDFs of print formats, others are written with online users in mind. Technological advances in online forms completion will make the user's task somewhat easier. However, document assembly programs are complex to implement and raise privacy concerns.

Reports & documents: At 9% of Clicklaw's holdings, this area could benefit from discussion about how to tailor items so that they are appropriate for users who are not legal professionals. Some materials, such as those from the Scow Institute, are clearly organized for different users. The Scow Institute has a series of fact sheets for entry-level users and the full reports for sophisticated researchers.

Manuals & books: Within the less populated resource types, "Manuals and books" makes up 7% of Clicklaw's holdings. In this resource type users find two kinds of products: (a) advanced information such as chapters of the LSLAP manual, written for law students; and (b) what can be described as "middle-ground information."

“Middle-ground information” can be defined as follows: a resource item of sufficient length to (a) identify major user issues; (b) explain how those issues fit within a legal framework; (c) provide options; (d) answer basic questions; and (e) provide referrals. Middle-ground information can be web-based or print-based. A typical example of middle-ground information would be the People’s Law School booklets of recent years.

A striking feature of BC PLEI online where there are gaps (see section 5.2 of this paper) is that the “middle-ground information” is missing. Typically, a gap area provides overview information and in some but not all instances moves on to advanced information, such as the LSLAP manual. This area could benefit from discussion about ways to more clearly distinguish “middle-ground” information from “advanced” information.

Gateways: At 6% of Clicklaw’s resources, this type refers to websites and areas of websites that lead to relevant information.

Teaching materials: At 3% of Clicklaw’s resources, this type refers to materials prepared for teachers and facilitators.

Programs & courses: At 2% of Clicklaw’s resources, this type identifies the programs and courses that may be relevant to Clicklaw users.

4.2 Print & web formats

On the Clicklaw site³¹ over a third of the online content is in PDF. PDF is basically a print format that has been posted online.

Demand for print *and* online information is ongoing. PLEI users want and need information in print. As the 2006 *PLE Review* comments,

While we recommend that all information be on the Web, core information for clients and some self-help must be in print. Many in our client group don’t use the Web to find information and many intermediaries, even if they have access to a computer, lack the time and financial resources to download and print PDF files for their clients.³²

From an online user’s point of view, however, PDF may not be the best format. People who are familiar with documents can search a PDF, and a table of contents may be offered – but negotiating the content successfully requires

³¹ May 2009

³² *PLE Review: Reflections and Recommendations on Public Legal Education Delivery in BC*, vi.

familiarity with research skills. If you don't have these skills, information that is hidden is likely to remain hidden. For example, the *Aboriginal Law Manual* contains much useful information about a range of topics, such as bankruptcy, housing, and residential schools. This information is tucked away within the PDF and a user would have to pick up the scent before they would go looking. The LSS family law website fact sheets, on the other hand, are examples of materials that are written for online users, with links, and a heading on every page.

Accessing PDFs through search engines can be a hit-and-miss affair. From the PLEI site provider's point of view, it is a challenge to get them ranked well.³³

The print and online experiences are different and it is not the case that one process fits both.³⁴ The current approach of developing a print product, then making it do double duty by saving it as a PDF has serious flaws.

PLEI practitioners are well aware of the body of research that details how writing for the web is different from writing for print. For example:

- Reading from screens is slower than reading from paper – up to 25% slower.
- Online content should aim for 50% of the word count of its print equivalent.
- Up to 79% of users scan the page instead of reading word for word (this varies on what is being read, but the general point is that users scan online much more than they do in print).
- Online users are looking for that one piece of information, and they want it as quickly as possible. They are searching for their “needle in the haystack.”³⁵
- While print and TV are narrative and linear, the web experience is non-narrative and non-linear: the user dips in and out of the vast stream of information.
- Web learning (reading text online) has been described as “just-in-time” learning, while “big picture learning” is said to be better accomplished in other media.³⁶

³³ For example, PDFs tend to be static and are updated infrequently. Few PDFs are optimized for searches; they tend not to have header tags or metatags. Often they do not have links, and as such, do not benefit from search algorithms which include links in/out.

³⁴ There is interesting debate in the medical field about comprehension of online media vs. print (most studies have focused on reading speed). See for example, *Heading Frequency and Comprehension: Studies of Print vs. Online Media*: <http://www.stc.org/ConfProceed/2005/PDFs/0032.pdf>

³⁵ The web developers for Clicklaw, whose framework is the online environment, suggested “haystack” as a possible name for the portal.

The PLEI network may wish to consider these issues in more detail, as they are central to the delivery of the majority of PLEI materials.

When it comes to materials developed exclusively for web users, BC PLEI has some state-of-the art resources. For example, the Legal Services Society's family law website shows what can currently be accomplished in terms of providing extensive online information on a legal topic in a range of formats.

4.3 Audiovisual & multimedia formats

BC PLEI providers, especially those with the strongest array of resources, are producing innovative audio, video and multimedia in response to identified needs and tailored for specific audiences. As Figure 9 in section 2.1 illustrates, on the Clicklaw site,³⁷ 1% of items are listed as multimedia, 2% as videos, and 16% as audio/podcasts (with over 90% of these being Dial-a-Law audio scripts).

It is often said that we now live in a visual culture and six times as many people prefer to watch a video than read printed information. When it comes to PLEI materials, this raises a number of questions. A preference for visual entertainment does not necessarily mean that visual information is easier for users to comprehend or to work with. It depends on the users, and on what they need to do or what they are seeking to find out.³⁸

These formats have advantages when people are most comfortable within an oral tradition, and/or may have difficulties with prose, either online or in print. For example, the report, *Building Bridges*, comments that Aboriginal people are highly literate in the oral tradition, pointing to a need for greater emphasis on audiovisual materials in PLEI for Aboriginal peoples.³⁹

Audio, video and multimedia formats also have the potential to break down barriers for members of multicultural communities who cannot access PLEI resources in English. They may be particularly relevant for users who have low literacy skills in their first language or whose cultural preferences for

³⁶ See, for example, Jakob Neilson, "Writing Style for Web versus Print." Online at: <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/print-vs-online-content.html>

³⁷ May 2009

³⁸ A video vignette would be tedious in the extreme for users who could scan print information and get the same information in a matter of seconds.

³⁹ *Building Bridges*, p. 21

communication are audio or visual. The Ontario study, *Connecting Across Language and Distance* comments:

There has been good headway in producing multilingual text materials, but progress has been slower with audio and other formats.⁴⁰

In terms of video and multimedia formats, BC PLEI contains state-of-the art resources. Examples include sites developed by the Law Courts Education Society such as *legalrights4U*⁴¹ and *Courts of BC*.⁴² While video and multimedia educational PLEI destined for a student learning environment work within clearly understood parameters, the use of these formats for adult PLEI users is exploratory and innovative. For example, online video has great potential in assisting self-helpers who interact with the legal system. No matter how sophisticated laypeople are, the justice system is an unfamiliar environment. PLEI such as the Law Courts Education's *Courttips*⁴³ enables the user to look into that environment and to some extent "experience" it ahead of time. This kind of "front-end" experiential orientation can yield valuable learning because the format has the capacity to convey a feel and a tone, and to provide clues about what to expect.

Despite general agreement about their value, there is not a strong body of research into the role of audio, video and multimedia PLEI online. Evidence certainly exists that online use of educational videos is increasing. A major US study on the use of online video has found that 57% of online adults have used the internet to watch or download video, and 19% do so on a typical day. Of those surveyed, 22% reported they watched or downloaded educational videos online.⁴⁴ To date, much of the research information about online formats comes from marketing.⁴⁵ More investigation is needed about how this applies to PLEI.

⁴⁰ *Connecting Across Language and Distance*, p.20

⁴¹ <http://www.legalrights4u.ca/>

⁴² <http://www.courtsofbc.ca/>

⁴³ <http://www.courttips.ca>

⁴⁴ Mary Madden (2007) Online Video, Pew Internet & American Life Project http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Online_Video_2007.pdf. Also see other topics under Pew Internet & American Life Project, *Online Activities and Pursuits*. Online at: <http://www.pewinternet.org/topics.asp?page=2&c=1>

⁴⁵ The Wharton School of Business showed that video boosts comprehension and retention by 50% over a live presentation. Other industry studies have shown that video expedites buying decisions by 72% versus print. Quoted from <http://www.onlinevideonews.com>

One interesting approach being used at the Legal Services Society is to conduct testing of the same information conveyed in different formats online (e.g. print only, audio+print, video), to gain a better understanding of user preferences.

4.4 Expanding opportunities for enhanced formats

Many of the groups in the PLEI network are primarily service providers. PLEI is an adjunct activity. It is likely that a majority of these groups would be interested in expanding their PLEI in terms of format types (e.g. possibly offering audio, video and multimedia online) but lack the resources to do so.

The way forward may be for groups to develop something like the “circuit rider” or “e-rider” model used by PovNet, in the UK,⁴⁶ and by Pro Bono Net in the US.⁴⁷ In the circuit rider model, expert help is available to groups to assist them to develop their online communications. BC PLEI groups may benefit from extending this kind of collaborative effort; it would mean that not every group has to develop its own coordination and/or production expertise, but could call upon expert technical assistance as needed.

The larger BC PLEI groups (in particular, the Law Courts Education Society and Legal Services Society) have dedicated resource expertise to developing online materials. In the area of enhanced formats, BC PLEI is making contributions that rank with any comparable online efforts across Canada and internationally. Part of Clicklaw’s mandate will be to assist in making these resources more widely accessible. It would also be worthwhile for PLEI network members to regularly share their “best practice approaches,” possibly in an online format such as a PLEI WG wiki.

⁴⁶ For UK circuit rider information, see:
<http://www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/lasacircuitridercasestudy>

⁴⁷ For an interesting example of how the Pro Bono Net LawHelp circuit rider model is being built upon, see the following comments on a Court Collaboration Circuit Rider:
<http://groups.nten.org/vb/showthread.php?t=259>

5. Identification of gaps and overlaps

5.1 Approach to gaps

There are many ways to think about gaps. This paper takes a content approach, which provides broad-brush information. In the PLEI community, front-line service providers and PLEI producers identify gaps in a range of informal ways. For example, the service providers at the Supreme Court Self-Help Information Centre found that centre users were struggling with what to do about costs – and an information booklet was prepared with their expert, practical input. A more formal approach to identifying gaps is the path taken by the Legal Services Society, where *The Struggle for Justice* research with Aboriginal communities was followed by the *Building Bridges* recommendations, with PLEI gaps being identified through the process.

Another example is the way in which mapping carried out as part of the Justice Access Center initiative identified PLEI gaps in underserved communities. For example, *Voices from the Field* found a lack of information tailored to people in rural and remote communities. Clicklaw has one item, *Legal Help for Rural British Columbians*, developed from a focused rural point of view.⁴⁸ In addition, Clicklaw includes resources that focus on Aboriginal populations in rural areas. For the most part, however, rural populations are under-served. For example, the Gay/Lesbian/Trans/Bisexual (GLTB) information on Clicklaw is almost all developed by The Centre, an urban group serving an urban population.

To effectively identify gaps and overlaps, a content approach needs to be grounded on evidence that has identified PLEI use *in context*: who needs the PLEI, how they use it, when and where they use it. The context includes the fact that the traditional paradigm of PLEI information >legal advice > legal representation often does not apply. Today's PLEI users are typically being asked to do more. This context also includes the fact that people who experience social and economic disadvantage face barriers to access. PLEI providers may tailor resource materials to reach disadvantaged people, but the appropriateness of the product does not by itself transcend these barriers. Complementary in-person services may be necessary to deliver the PLEI and to deal with the legal problem.

⁴⁸ Cliff Thorstensen (2008) *Legal Help for Rural British Columbians*. Available online from Access Justice at: <http://www.accessjustice.ca/downloads/LegalGuideforRuralBC.pdf>

5.2 Matrix identifying gaps by content

A review of Clicklaw and a comparison with similar websites and with findings from the research and client service data reveals the gaps outlined in the following matrix.⁴⁹

The matrix is topic-based. The matrix focuses on gaps in content areas where the research suggests there are client needs and therefore opportunities for online resource development to meet those needs. Gaps are identified as being large, medium, or small. This is inelegant and imprecise, but it provides a starting point.

The rationale for identifying a gap as “large” is based primarily on the amount of information items currently available on the Clicklaw site. From some topics – “Aboriginal,” “Courts & tribunals,” and “Legal help & lawyers” – there is an additional editorial assertion that given the nature of user need, every effort is needed. This assertion is based on research that finds (a) barriers to service are acute within Aboriginal communities, and (b) the need for access to legal help is intense, in particular among self-representing litigants who are dealing with tribunal/court processes.

Some topic areas are identified as having a “small” or “medium” gap because these areas have traditionally been well covered by BC PLEI. In many instances addressing the topic has been part of the mandate of a particular group or set of groups. Examples of such topics are: abuse and family violence, disabilities, family law, immigration, pensions and benefits, rights and citizenship, and tenancy. This matrix is not intended in any way to obscure the need for ongoing updating and new work in these vital areas.

The matrix takes a quantitative approach to content, which should be approached with caution. Neither the matrix nor the paper as a whole examines topic areas with an eye to passing editorial judgment (e.g. “this topic area has X pieces of clear, user-focused information and Y pieces of information that could be improved”). This would, however, be an appropriate task for network members as they plan collaboratively for the future.

⁴⁹ The categories are the topics on Clicklaw, and they aim to frame issues as users would approach them, rather than as the legal system approaches them. For example, administrative law, tort law, and contract law are not categories by themselves.

Figure 25: Matrix of gaps

TOPIC	OVERVIEW	GAP	COMMENTS, QUESTIONS & SUGGESTIONS
Aboriginal	<p>Aboriginal PLEI content needs to be developed and delivered by Aboriginal people informed by Aboriginal communities.</p> <p>There are resources within the current BC PLEI collection that meet this standard. Examples include items from the Scow Institute, the Law Courts Education Society, and Legal Services Society.</p> <p>Given the acute legal needs within Aboriginal communities, efforts need to be maintained across a range of areas.</p>	Gap: Large	<p>To what extent are print resources used? Is their main audience intermediaries?</p> <p>To what extent are online video/multimedia formats appropriate?</p> <p>What is the most effective way to deliver PLEI content, given the preference for service delivery to be in person, Aboriginal, and local?</p>
Abuse & family violence	<p>PLEI providers have long-established connections with front-line services, and Clicklaw reflects this relationship</p> <p>Current networks are well situated to determine the need for new information, and community-driven content has been developed by BC PLEI.</p>	Gap: Small	<p>Is content allegedly for end-users in fact being used more by intermediaries (e.g. <i>Speaking of Abuse</i>)? And does that matter?</p> <p>Do we have sufficient outreach information for non-legal professionals who may be the pathways to legal help?</p> <p>What are the new areas of understanding in this area that need to be conveyed more broadly to users or reflected in reform and research items?</p>
Alternatives to court	<p>Clicklaw has relatively few items. They include information from the Dispute Resolution Office, a self-help item from the BCSCSHIC, and information about mediation services. To some extent this topic is covered within others topics.</p> <p>The “Courts and tribunals” topic, for example, encompasses alternatives to trial.</p>	Gap: Medium	<p>Is further content warranted? It seems counter-intuitive to have few items in this topic area, given the attention it receives in the research.</p> <p>A review of the resources on this topic may be in order.</p>
Accidents & injuries	<p>The research indicates that this is a priority area for PLEI users, but its importance is not reflected in BC</p>	Gap: Large	<p>This area may lend itself to being a section of a website dedicated to</p>

	<p>PLEI resources. There are overviews and then there is information prepared for law students. There is a lack of middle-ground information (see 4.1 for a definition).</p>		<p>everyday civil law questions. It could begin by answering basic questions, e.g. Are different types of accidents treated differently?</p>
<p>Business & non-profits</p>	<p>There are gaps in this topic. All of the BC-based PLEI items about business within the Solve Problems section are Dial-a-Law scripts, which are by necessity brief.</p> <p>The current basic information focuses on starting a small business/forming a partnership or private company.</p> <p>Items for non-profits focus on start-up and maintaining non-profit status.</p> <p>In both areas there is a lack of middle-ground information.</p> <p>The treatment of business as a topic area reflects the following approach: (a) Self-Counsel Press has business topics covered; and (b) business people can afford lawyers.</p>	<p>Gap: Large</p>	<p>Would it be consistent with PLEI priorities to develop PLEI for those who run/work in small businesses? Are there community-specific needs? (In the past BC has had PLEI in Spanish about franchises, for example.)</p> <p>This area may lend itself to being a section of a website dedicated to everyday civil law questions.</p> <p>In the area of non-profits, there may be a demand for information about “enterprising non-profits” (non-profits that conduct a small business).</p> <p>One initial strategy would be to investigate the nature of resources available from financial institutions.</p>
<p>Children & teens</p>	<p>The PLEI content has a significant number of items under this topic. In the Learn and Teach section of Clicklaw it has the highest number of entries.</p> <p>Across the inventory there is little information that is youth driven (i.e. developed by youth for youth).</p>	<p>Gap: Medium</p>	<p>Would an updated Legal Beagle or equivalent be a benefit, or is this need being met in other ways?</p> <p>Is it worth exploring the possibilities for youth peer-to-peer legal information online?</p> <p>One strategy would be to explore the range of options used in other jurisdictions.</p>
<p>Consumer</p>	<p>The indicators from the research are unequivocal about the high incidence of consumer issues in the general population.</p> <p>Given the paucity of consumer</p>	<p>Gap: Large</p>	<p>There are compelling arguments for a major effort in this area: (a) there is evidence of demand; and (b)</p>

	<p>information available within the PLEI network, the Clicklaw project team sought usable consumer items on non-network sites.</p> <p>Most of the items are in the Solve Problems section (Dial-a-Law overviews on consumer contract, BBB consumer alerts, and some web-based information from BPCPA).</p> <p>Beyond the basics there is the LSLAP information and the LSS manual, Consumer Law and Credit and Debt Law, intended for advocates. There is very little middle-ground information.</p>		<p>information/self-help may be sufficient and would be preferred for resolution in some cases.</p> <p>One possibility is a dedicated consumer website that expands PLEI consumer law content from a user-focused point of view.</p> <p>It may be timely to explore partnerships with community-based consumer groups that are currently outside the PLEI network, such as the Better Business Bureau.</p>
Courts & tribunals	<p>This is an area in which BC PLEI is strong, with state-of-the-art multimedia items and a significant amount of information about procedure for self-representing litigants. To name one example, materials have been developed by the Law Courts Education Society for the Supreme Court Self-Help Information Centre.</p> <p>These efforts need to continue. The research is clear about the challenges of interacting with the system. Users need all the assistance they can get.</p>	Gap: Large	<p>PLEI may provide the legal system user's only front-end preparation.</p> <p>All indicators suggest this topic area needs to remain a very high priority. The designation of "large" gap is based on this rationale, not on the lack of current items.</p>
Debt	<p>The research points to this as a priority area. Again, this is an area in which BC PLEI has overview information (mainly Dial-a-Law scripts), then advanced information, such as LSLAP manual and LSS guide for paralegals, plus a few reports. The middle ground is not covered.</p>	Gap: Large	<p>This area may lend itself to being a section of a website dedicated to everyday civil law questions.</p> <p>It may be timely to explore partnerships with community-based debt assistance groups that are currently outside the PLEI network.</p>
Disabilities	<p>This topic is generally well covered, given the strong involvement of front-line community-based service provider groups.</p>	Gap: Medium	<p>While the topic area is well covered by community experts, this is a user group with a high level of need in terms of access to PLEI.</p>

			Some groups, such as the Deaf community, have very few resources.
Employment	This topic is covered from several key angles: unemployment by the CLEO booklet, WCB by workers advisors, and provincial employment standards by government, with additional information for entry-level workers from the People's Law School.	Gap: Small to medium	Provincial and federal government information is well represented within the topic items. In terms of unemployment, the network may wish to liaise with the poverty law sector to identify next steps for PLEI content. There may be a need to promote the CLEO Employment Insurance booklet in regions where unemployment is high. There may be a gap in EI information in languages other than English (the CLEO booklet is currently in English, French, Chinese, and Vietnamese only).
Environment	Environmental issues are emerging as part of mainstream PLEI. Clicklaw's resources represent a fine beginning, with West Coast Environmental Law Association taking the lead. Reform and Research is the area of greatest strength for this topic.	Gap: Medium	There is room for growth. More information would likely be well used members of the public and by learners/teachers as they see these topics being framed as PLEI issues.
Family Law	This area has the highest number of PLEI items, and BC PLEI providers are well organized.	Gap: Small	This is a prime example of a high level need being relatively well met. More research is needed into how users actually use self-help guides, what their response to formats is, and how they browse across the current family law sites.
GLTB	With resources identified for Clicklaw from community-based groups such as The Centre, this area is partly covered. There is a lack of rural based information.	Gap: Medium	This is an area in which the PLEI network needs to foster and maintain outreach to and communication with frontline community groups.

<p>Health</p>	<p>BC PLEI resources in this area are slender. There are overview items on mental health and overview items on access to records and consent.</p> <p>Despite (a) the prominence of holistic needs in the reform literature; (b) the identification of the importance of mental health issues within the research; and (c) some service/program efforts, PLEI in this area has remained static over the past decade.</p>	<p>Gap: Large</p>	<p>There is room for middle ground PLEI in this area. Some of the immediately obvious topic areas are access to medical records, consent to care, and making complaints. In terms of mental health, hospitalization and adult consent would likely be among the priorities.</p> <p>The civil legal needs of people dealing with mental illness is an area that may be worth exploring further.</p>
<p>Housing, tenancy & neighbours</p>	<p>Residential tenancy issues are covered by PLEI network participants who are experts in the field, as well as by government.</p> <p>Housing issues such as mortgages and foreclosures are less well covered. Areas such as builders' liens, condo and co-op issues have only basic overviews.</p> <p>Homelessness issues are very briefly covered, mostly in Reform and Research.</p> <p>Although "neighbours" emerges as a prominent issue in the research, it is covered in a focused way by only one item, a Dial-a-Law overview.</p>	<p>Tenancy: Small Housing: Medium Neighbours: Large</p>	<p>Residential tenancy is well covered by TRAC and by the provincial government.</p> <p>There are gaps in all other areas of this topic. "Neighbours" stands out as a neglected area. "Land" is an area encompassed in other PLEI collections (such as LIAC) but not explicitly addressed within Clicklaw.</p>
<p>Immigrants</p>	<p>Immigrant issues are covered by PLEI network participants who are experts in the field.</p> <p>The Public Legal Education and Information for Immigrants pilot project will serve to identify PLEI resource needs.</p>	<p>Gap: Medium</p>	<p>Service cutbacks may be creating greater PLEI needs in this area.</p> <p>Language issues are a major concern, with the need for currency in languages other than English being paramount.</p>

<p>Introduction to the law</p>	<p>This is a category for learners/teachers only. PLEI network members such as the Law Courts Education Society and Simon Fraser University Centre for Education, Law and Society, have extensive expertise in the area.</p>	<p>Gap: Medium</p>	<p>Teachers and librarians have always been a priority audience for BC PLEI.</p> <p>Given that people report seeking help from “non-legal professionals,” there is room for directing information to health and other professionals, as well as to community workers, broadly defined.</p>
<p>Legal help & lawyers</p>	<p>Given the nature of demand, there is a need for this information to be made available in as many different dimensions as possible.</p>	<p>Gap: Large</p>	<p>This is a topic area in which the gap is identified as “large” not because of the lack of items, but owing to the acute nature of the need.</p> <p>The network is striving to address this issue with the development of the HelpMap section of Clicklaw.</p>
<p>Legal needs & innovations</p>	<p>This is a topic area in the Reform and Research section only.</p> <p>The extent of BC PLEI innovations and partnerships could be more fully reflected by further research into best practices.</p>	<p>Gap: Medium</p>	<p>Innovations at the community level are an important piece.</p> <p>Innovations in document assembly and forms completion are also of importance.</p>
<p>Media & internet</p>	<p>Clicklaw provides few resources in this area, with under twenty items.</p>	<p>Gap: Medium-</p>	<p>Given the way these topics are integrated into people’s everyday lives, the lack of items is somewhat surprising.</p> <p>PLEI users may benefit from information about the application in these areas of contract law, copyright law, libel law, privacy law, trademark law etc.</p>
<p>Pensions, benefits, welfare</p>	<p>This is an area currently well covered by BC PLEI.</p> <p>Community-based groups within the network ensure that information is current and targeted to users.</p>	<p>Gap: Medium</p>	<p>BC PLEI has a history of addressing these needs as a priority. These effort needs to be maintained, given (a) the impact on people’s lives</p>

			of decisions in this area; (b) the fact there are fewer poverty law services in BC than in the past; and (c) the constantly changing nature of regulations etc.
Privacy & access to information	BC PLEI has a healthy number of items. Community-based groups within the network are experts in these areas, in particular BC FIPA.	Gap: Low	The room for growth here may be in resourcing the relevant groups to enhance their online formats.
Rights and citizenship	BC PLEI has a very strong tradition in this area, with a particular focus on rights and protections. Groups within the network are experts, in particular the BC Civil Liberties Association. BC PLEI resources in this area include current themes such as terrorism, surveillance, and dealing with security guards etc.	Gap: Medium	Many of the items focus on rights and protections. There may be room for growth in the citizenship area. Much of the information has its roots in PLEI's print-only era. Community-based groups could be further resourced to develop their web components.
Seniors	Within this topic BC PLEI has its greatest strengths in the areas of abuse and benefits. Note: The current inventory does not reflect items from BC CEAS as their website is in redevelopment.	Gap: Large	There is potential for greater coverage of everyday issues (from finances to healthcare, to retirement housing, "snowbird" issues, and issues around residential care, in-home care etc.). Distinctions could be made between the two major cohorts of seniors (roughly 60-80; 80+) as they tend to have distinct sets of legal needs. The notion that "older people don't use the internet" is obsolete.
Taxes & finances	There are only 25 items on this topic on Clicklaw to date, which is less than 2% of total.	Gap: Large	PLEI users may benefit from information about income tax, property tax, understanding bank loan documents, trusts, making a complaint about a financial institution, etc. It would be worthwhile exploring what is available on non-PLEI

			<p>sites.</p> <p>This area may lend itself to being a section of a website dedicated to everyday civil law questions.</p>
<p>Victims & crime</p>	<p>This topic has the third highest numbers of items on Clicklaw, with crime having more emphasis than victims. The topic entries are rich in the range of resource types and format types.</p> <p>Crime is addressed in various dimensions – from legal aid to civil liberties.</p> <p>Many of the items are about procedure.</p> <p>Crime prevention and victim entries reflect expanding understandings in these two areas.</p>	<p>Gap: Medium</p>	<p>This always will be a very high priority for PLEI and the topic area needs to be well resourced.</p> <p>BC PLEI does not address the civil legal needs of prisoners and their families.</p> <p>There is scant information about victims in natural disasters.</p>
<p>Wills, estates & life planning</p>	<p>BC PLEI has a healthy collection of resources but there are unmet needs.</p>	<p>Gap: Medium</p>	<p>BC PLEI has traditionally addressed this topic with a useful focus on low-income needs; the needs of users who have modest income could also be accommodated.</p> <p>Changes to wills and adult guardianship create a significant need for new resources.</p> <p>Most resources are print-based and there are huge opportunities here for different format approaches.</p>

5.3 Overlaps

The content overlaps are far fewer than the gaps. Given the diverse ways people come to PLEI information, it could be argued that some degree of overlap is a potential advantage. (This would definitely be the case if the financial resources for PLEI were extensive.)

Overlap and point of view

At first glance some content areas appear to have a significant degree of overlap. Topic areas such as child protection, tenancy, and welfare are covered by information from both the community and government. However, there are vital differences in point of view.

As a generalization, those who are responsible for administering a service develop information that describes procedures for interacting with the service and promotes its efficient use *from the system's point of view*. Those who are responsible for advocating for people who encounter problems in interacting with the service are far more likely to develop information that contains strategies for solving problems *from the user's point of view*. For example, *Your Welfare Rights: A User's Guide to BC Employment and Assistance*, contains many of the same facts as the information available in the fact sheets from the Ministry of Housing and Social Development, but the points of view are different. On this basis there is little evidence of overlap.

Overview information

The current review finds a small amount of overlap in the area of overviews, i.e. general introductory information, situated within the Clicklaw category of "Basics" and typically located in the Solve Problems section.

PLEI producers make some attempt to be conscious of other resources available. For example, the fact sheet about adoption on the LSS family law website refers to a government site that has more detailed information. However, when it comes to searching for a general description of custody and access, the online user could find this information on the LSS family law site, the Family Justice site, the Dial-a-Law site, and the website of JP Boyd, a lawyer who has written for the public on this topic, as well as within numerous print publications posted as PDFs. While it is difficult to see how this kind of repetition is the best possible use of resources, it is relatively rare across the Clicklaw resource collection.

A decade ago, the People's Law School and Dial-a-Law were providing overview information about life planning and at times it was hard to see the difference between them, apart from the more narrative approach of the People's Law School items. In more recent years, however, the People's Law School has moved to longer, "middle-ground information" and the degree of overlap has evaporated.

Situating the information for the user

From a user's point of view, there are issues about how one PLEI material fits with another. This is particularly problematic when users need the information in order to complete a procedural task. By way of illustration, on the Supreme Court Self-Help Centre site there is a publication, *A Guide to Preparing Your Own Affidavit*. On the CLAS site there is a publication, *Drafting Your Own Affidavit*. (Both are written the same expert.) A self-helper browsing online for information about preparing affidavits in the context of a judicial review might well be puzzled. Are these publications different? Is one of them more detailed? In terms of learning, does one come first?

With the advent of Clicklaw, users will have a single place where they can view PLEI resources from multiple sites. In turn, PLEI presenters will be able to situate their resource for the user within the entire context of information available, not just what is available on their own sites.

Recommendations

The advent of Clicklaw is a milestone that reflects and promotes a greater degree of coordination among PLEI network members. In the future the PLEI network partners will need to work closely together in order to maximize scarce financial resources and present the best possible information to users. The following recommendations are made within this context.

1. Develop a coordinated response to user needs

A coordinated response includes discussion among PLEI network members of an individual group's plans for meeting the needs of their user groups.

PLEI network members could take the following actions:

- 1.A** Develop a coordinated plan to review the gaps. This could consist of the following: (a) high level review to assess size of gap and range of products/services needed to address it; (b) identification of potential partners (including those outside the PLEI network); and (c) identification of which PLEI groups wish to address the gaps and a review of capacity/production needs. The review could also focus on identifying other ways to identify gaps, in addition to content analysis. For example, another perspective would be to look across the site to see if there are sufficient self-help tools to facilitate users' interaction with the legal system.
- 1.B** Adopt the approach of looking across network sites in order to align current initiatives and future plans in relation to all available BC PLEI. This would include looking at content available across sites and also reviewing site visit data (a process that will be enhanced through the use of Google Analytics). A first step could be to incorporate "cross-site reviews" in shared discussion about proposed initiatives.

2. Promote skill-sharing among network members

BC PLEI contains innovative products. However, developing online resources demands expertise that is not available to all PLEI network members (and building such expertise may not be a service priority). The PLEI network could benefit from developing ways to share specialized expertise as and when member groups wish to do so.

There are four aspects to this: (a) sharing technological expertise; (b) sharing how to measure outcomes on a low budget; (c) sharing expertise around translations; and (d) sharing lessons learned and best practices.

PLEI network members could take the following actions:

- 2.A** Explore ways in which the “circuit rider” model might be adapted to enhance network member capacities. A circuit rider model would involve one or two specialists who could provide consistent technological service throughout the network. Groups including PovNet and the Courthouse Library (Clicklaw) who already use a “circuit rider” approach could participate in this exploration.
- 2.B** Explore ways to share low-budget approaches to assessing outcomes. Examples include Clicklaw’s online usability testing, and LSS’ readability testing. An occasional workshop/seminar or a Wiki may provide a way to share these skills.
- 2.C** Explore ways to share expertise about translating resource materials. Groups that have experience in this area could identify relevant considerations, steps in the process, and trusted resources.
- 2.D** Explore ways to share lessons learned and best practices. PLEI resource projects often involve complex partnerships and face numerous production challenges. A Wiki or workshop on what was learned from each project could share practical lessons and best practices while also building the BC PLEI community.

3. Focus on improving online formats

Over one third of the items on Clicklaw are in PDF format, which research shows is not best suited to online use. While print remains vital, online information is the first stop for many PLEI users. It is time to provide these users with information formatted specifically for the online experience.

PLEI network members could take the following action:

- 3.A** Explore what a development process looks like for a resource that (a) is destined for online use only; and (b) is destined for both print *and* online. Information and skill sharing could focus on the process of identifying core content, followed where appropriate by parallel production paths. A workshop/seminar or network Wiki could be useful.

4. Focus on resources tailored to current user needs

The paradigm for legal problem-solving of information > advice > representation is in many ways becoming outdated. Today’s PLEI users are typically being asked to do more.

PLEI network members could take the following action:

- 4.A** Within their mandates and resources, take into account the need to provide users with the following:
 - (a) “middle-ground information” that allows users to take next steps

- (b) dedicated sites (or parts of sites) on specific legal issues that feature materials written specifically for online users about how to avoid or resolve problems
- (c) videos/multimedia that provide the tone and feel of court/tribunal experience as well as the procedural requirements
- (d) reform and research that distinguishes between entry-level users and research-level users (e.g. fact sheets + research papers)

5. Focus on broadening understanding of user response to formats

Further evidence-based information is needed about preferred resources, both online and offline, in order to enhance understanding of what users want.

PLEI network members could take the following action:

- 5.A** Conduct research into preferred formats for resources, both online and offline, in order to attempt to answer questions that include the following: When is print the most appropriate product, and for whom? When is an online resource most appropriate, and for whom? Are there instances when both approaches are needed? Do different groups have different preferences? Are some formats more successful when mediated by intermediaries? How do we know?

6. Conduct usability testing into online experience

There is a need for more evidence-based information about user experience online.

PLEI network members could take the following actions:

- 6.A** Conduct regular testing of users' online experience. What is working well for users? What are the main difficulties that users face? How do they attempt to overcome them?
- 6.B** Assess the possibilities of sharing resources (e.g. survey instruments) to obtain consistent feedback usability testing across sites.

7. Share evaluation outcomes

Network members carry out project evaluations, but results may or may not be shared and discussed within the PLEI network.

PLEI network members could take the following actions:

- 7.A** Make a commitment to share outcomes of evaluations within the PLEI network.
- 7.B** Consider identifying and using core evaluation questions across projects that would yield results that could be compared.

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Appendix A:

Public Legal Education and Information Network (the PLEI Network)

The Public Legal Education and Information Network (the PLEI Network) is an informal body of organizations in British Columbia that provide or support public legal education and information. All members of the PLEI Network are participating in the Clicklaw initiative.

The following organizations make up the **core PLEI Working Group**:

- Courthouse Libraries BC
- Law Courts Education Society of BC (LCES)
- The Law Foundation of British Columbia
- Legal Services Society
- Ministry of Attorney General of British Columbia
- People's Law School
- PovNet

The **broader PLEI Network** also includes:

- Canadian Bar Association (BC Branch)
- The Law Centre (University of Victoria Clinical Law Program)
- Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General of British Columbia
- Simon Fraser University Centre for Education, Law and Society
- University of British Columbia Law Students' Legal Advice Program

Also **formally participating in the Clicklaw initiative** are:

- BC Centre for Elder Advocacy Support
- BC Civil Liberties Association
- BC Coalition of People with Disabilities
- BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association
- BC Law Institute
- BC Public Interest Advocacy Centre
- Community Legal Assistance Society
- MOSAIC
- Pro Bono Law of BC

- TRAC Tenant Resource & Advisory Centre
- West Coast Environmental Law
- West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF)