

## **SLA Ignite Talk: The Saskatchewan Access to Legal Information Project (SALI)**

**By Alan Kilpatrick, BA, MLIS**

### **What is SALI?**

Good morning. I am here to share a remarkable library collaboration that is going to revolutionize access to justice and legal information in this province. The Saskatchewan Access to Legal Information Project (SALI) is a new partnership among urban, rural, and remote libraries, justice industry stakeholders, and community organizations, working to advance access to justice for Saskatchewan residents.

### **Why was it created?**

The project arose in 2016 out of a discussion at the Dean's Forum on Access to Justice and Dispute Resolution. This is an initiative from the University of Saskatchewan that brings together justice stakeholders to discuss access to justice and to find solutions to the justice system's inaccessibility. During this discussion, the forum realized that serious gaps exist in the public's access to legal information. It is generally accepted that legal information is widely accessible through the internet. However, many people are not aware of the wealth of resources available online. It can be difficult to determine if online legal information is credible or reliable if you do not have a background in the law.

Recognising that libraries are suited to act as intermediaries to help the public locate and identify authoritative legal information, the forum made it a priority to partner with Saskatchewan's public libraries as a way of improving access to legal information.

### **What has it done?**

Under the coordination of Brea Lowenberger, Saskatchewan's Access to Justice Coordinator, and Beth Bilson from the University of Saskatchewan's College of Law, a working group was formed with representatives from the Public Legal Education Association of Saskatchewan (PLEA), the Saskatoon Public Library, the Law Society Library, and the University of Saskatchewan College of Law to investigate turning this idea into reality. PLEA, Saskatchewan's official public legal education provider, has developed a variety of accessible legal resources and has experience partnering with public libraries to distribute legal materials. The Saskatoon Public Library, the Law Society Library, and the College of Law Library all possess legal collections and expertise that enhance PLEA's materials.

This working group realized it would be valuable to bring together a broader group of library and community partners. A one day meeting was hosted in Saskatoon last September to exchange information and to discuss the role libraries might play in improving access to legal information. Those invited included representatives from every library region in the province, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice, Pro Bono Law Saskatchewan, Community Legal Assistance Services for Saskatoon Inner City, and Saskatchewan 211.

The morning featured discussion on the access to justice crisis and potential opportunities for libraries to help improve access to legal information. The afternoon featured break-out sessions. Several themes emerged during the day. They included how to collect statistics on public library patron's legal questions, identifying opportunities for legal reference question training for library staff, and utilizing public library space to increase access to legal information.

Based on the momentum of the meeting, the attendees formally established the SALI project and embraced several next steps.

### **What's next?**

What's next for SALI? Key updates include a two-day conference to be held during Saskatchewan's second annual access to justice week in October 2017. This will continue the discussion started at the first meeting. SALI is also beginning a pilot project to collect statistics regarding public library patron's legal questions at six public library locations.

### **Conclusion**

Does your library participate in improving access to legal information initiatives? Post a link or picture on Twitter using our hashtag #SKA2J. Want to get involved with SALI? Contact us at [sali\\_project@usask.ca](mailto:sali_project@usask.ca)! You can learn more and sign up for the SALI newsletter at [law.usask.ca/createjustice](http://law.usask.ca/createjustice).

Thank you! Does anyone have any questions?