

REBUILDING LAW LIBRARY PROGRAMS

I am soon approaching my first year of service as a public law librarian. While I have worked in both law and library settings, the last year provided an opportunity to do both—a merging of my worlds. My position in outreach and training has been exhilarating—a word uncommonly associated with librarianship.

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a literal shut down of many of our library's programs and almost all in-person outreach services. As a result, I have focused on reimagining, refining, and reoffering those programs. That included launching a new series *Ask a Lawyer*. With the Housing and Economic Rights Advocates of California, a legal group that focuses on supporting low-income communities, free lunch hour workshops were offered to the public. The 12 workshop topics included probate, landlord/tenant, debt collection, student loan management, consumer protection, and more.



Lawyers in the Library, which paired volunteer attorneys with members of the public for 20-minute consultations, became unworkable during the shutdown. Over the year, I focused on adapting our former program into a remote service, accommodating changed preferences in the legal community and the increased digital literacy of our patrons. Offering remote pro bono hours is predicted to increase attorney participation, resulting in more library users having their legal questions answered, and the return of our most popular program.

Additionally, our library moved forward with a Community Connections group to offer more coordination and better referrals across service providers working with the public. In Sacramento, the number of unhoused library users increased, while available services have not met demand. Launching *Serving Unhoused Sacramentans*, a free minimum continuing legal education (MCLE) series, helped fill this gap. The series provides legal information to attorneys who are looking to help meet the need for support but are unsure where to begin. Topics in this series have included avoiding eviction, citation defense, and accessing public benefits.

Through outreach efforts, our library coordinated an expungement clinic with the Sacramento Public Library and Sacramento Public Defenders office, a debt collection and bankruptcy clinic with the Sacramento Superior Court, and provide our library users with access to legal clinics in town across a variety of subject areas. The need remains high, and we are exploring additional ways to help meet it.

When not launching programs, my year included bringing our library services to the public. Presenting to middle schoolers on a *Day in the Life of a Law Librarian*; participation in elementary school mock trial lessons as part of the Sacramento Bar Association's Kids Law Day; sharing legal history on community panels; and providing information to those recently released from prison through the Sacramento Public Library's reentry resource fair are some of the ways we have been active in civic education.

Meanwhile, I serve on committees that advocate for both stronger library and justice programs, including the California Library Association's legislative committee, the Ursula Meyer Advocacy Fund Board, and the California Council of Law Librarians. I also participate in a variety of American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) activities. Receiving two AALL scholarships has supported my library science program at San Jose State University; I am paying it forward in volunteering for 2024's selection committees.

Of course, I also staff our library's reference desk—the main feature of our library—where there is never a dull day. I have learned from the smartest and most empathetic librarians in the profession, who have served for multiple decades. Tears after work were not uncommon in my first month. Our librarians help those who have been turned away again and again, and they do so with remarkable grace. It is beautiful to witness. There is no substitution for a librarian who will listen and respond with a helpful resource. I have seen legal reference books act as medicinal for those who have hit a dead end.

Admittedly, public law librarianship is certainly not for everyone. It requires knowledge of a broad range of legal subject areas, an openness to an equally broad range of library users, and strong personal and emotional boundaries. However, providing access to information regardless of income levels and without eligibility requirements is critical access to justice work. Put simply: it is precisely the work I attended both law and library school to do. I am very pleased to contribute my education, training, and experience to facilitate public understanding of legal systems and resources in the spirit of justice for all.

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