

HANDOUT

ABA/ NLADA 2008 Equal Justice Conference

Serving the Un-served: Your Law Library as Your Partner and Your Bridge

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Brief Description:

As the chair of the Self Represented Litigation Network's Law Librarian's Working Group, Mr. Dyer will report on best practices in law libraries across the country for serving self represented litigants, including cooperative efforts with other agencies and organizations. He will also quickly discuss the role of law librarians within the SRLN and the role of the American Association of Law Libraries as one of its participating organizations. (Mr. Dyer is also currently serving as the official representative of the AALL to the SRLN.)

Topical Outline:

- I. Short Introduction on Information Needs of Self-Represented Litigants
 - a. Five of the seven barriers listed in Richard Zorza's *The Self Help Friendly Court* have information components for SRLs: The Analysis Barrier, The Situations and Options Evaluation Barrier, The Preparation and Presentation Barrier, The Remedy Barrier, The Enforcement Barrier. (The Ethics and Neutrality Barrier and Bar Uncertainty are our problems.)
- II. Directory of Library Based Self-Help Programs
 - a. Just completed by the SRLN Law Librarians Working Group, it currently 24 entries, with some entries including more than one program. Adding more as we find them.
 - b. These are specific programs for self represented litigants, which go beyond offering library access and good reference services.
 - c. The Directory includes a full description of each program and contact information.
 - d. Example: Kern County Slide showing SRL workshops done jointly by the Kern County Law Library and Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance.

- e. Example: Washoe County Slide showing that, in addition to the brief advice clinic and workshops, their website acts as a portal to other agencies offering free services.
 - f. Freely available at http://www.aallnet.org/sis/sccll/docs/library_self_help_directory.pdf .
Also on www.selfhelpsupport.org .
- III. A Best Practice: Classes for Self Represented Litigants
- a. Some with librarians as teachers; some with other partners.
 - b. Classes held at law libraries, public libraries, and other venues.
 - c. Variety of topics: research computer use, even procedures and forms.
- IV. A Best Practice: Websites Oriented to Self Represented Litigants
- a. Statewide, developed through cooperative effort.
 - b. Better usability and easy navigation.
 - c. Simple explanation.
 - d. Referrals to local law libraries.
 - e. Email and live chat-room style reference.
 - f. Examples: California, [Http://www.publiclawlibrary.org](http://www.publiclawlibrary.org)
 - g. Example: Maryland, <http://www.peoples-law.info/Home/PublicWeb>
- V. A Best Practice: Online Reference for Self Represented Litigants.
- a. Librarian and user communicate through a chat room window.
 - b. The librarian takes control of the user's PC and points the user to specific websites in another window in response to reference questions.
 - c. Librarians can use previously written scripts in order to send large amounts of information quickly.
 - d. Example: California Council of County Law Librarians, Using 24-7 (now called Ask Now)
http://www.247ref.org/portal/access_law3.cfm?virt=CCCLL
- VI. A Best Practice: Partnering
- a. Increased partnering between public law libraries and the courts or other legal services agencies.
 - b. More than just referrals, these other agencies will place staff in the law libraries themselves.
 - c. Sometimes they share funding with the library, too.
 - d. Example: San Diego County Public Law Library
 - i. They had a clinic run by the San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program (a pro bono organization), 2001-2005.
 - ii. Replaced by a Law School SRL clinic, run by the University of San Diego School of Law.
 - iii. Also, specialty clinics are run by local bar associations.
- VII. Law Librarians are Active in the Self Represented Litigation Network
- a. The Information, Marketing and Outreach Working Group has a sub-group specifically to include a larger number of law librarians.

- b. The Law Librarians Group has completed several projects and sponsored several presentations at various national conferences on behalf of the SRLN.
- c. Law librarians also participate in other working groups. Judy Meadows, the State Law Librarian of Montana, chairs the Distance Services Working Group.
- d. The American Association of Law Libraries became a participating organization in the SRLN in 2007, including an annual contribution and an official representative, who participates on the Management Team.

VIII. Consulting Services

- a. Charles R. Dyer Consulting, <http://www.charlesrdyer.com> and charlesrdyer@clearwire.net , offers limited free mentoring and consultations, in addition to full consultations.
- b. Judy Meadows, State Law Librarian for Montana, jmeadows@mt.gov , is also listed with the National Center for State Courts as a consultant and can do one-day site visits at cost when her court allows.

Notes:

Bibliography & Website Links:

1. Directory of Library Based Self-Help Programs (Self Represented Litigation Network, Law Librarians Working Group, 2008). Freely available at http://www.aallnet.org/sis/sccll/docs/library_self_help_directory.pdf . Also on www.selfhelpsupport.org .
2. Best Practices in Court-Based Programs for the Self Represented: Concepts, Attributes, and Issues for Exploration (Self Represented Litigation Network, 2006 edition). Available on www.selfhelpsupport.org, but requires registration. http://www.ncsconline.org/WC/Publications/KIS_ProSeBestPracticesSRLN.pdf A second edition is forthcoming, with expansion, descriptions of particular programs and contact information. Best Practices 2, 4, 8, 9, and 13 are represented in the work discussed in this presentation.
3. Serving Self Represented Litigants: Planning for Action, A Workshop for the New York State Unified Court System, October 24, 2006, presented by Charles R. Dyer.

<http://www.charlesrdyer.com/NYSUCS.asp>. This website contains all the power point materials, handouts, and explanations for their use from a half-day workshop on best practices and triage patterns for public law libraries.