

Access to Justice in Your Community

Jean L. Willis

Assistant Director for Support Services

Sacramento County Public Law Library

Sacramento, California



Australian Law Librarians' Association 2018 Conference

2 – 4, May, 2018

Darwin, NT

Access to Justice via Connections



- The city of Sacramento is California's State Capital and is located in Sacramento County close to the center of the state.
- Sacramento County Public Law Library provides a variety of law library and legal reference services to the citizens of Sacramento County specifically, but also to those living in California and elsewhere.

Connections: Who?

- An informal collaborative initiated by our Library in our community
- We share our legal services resources, programs and workshops

Examples of our partners include:

- Sacramento Superior Court Family Law Facilitator
- Voluntary Legal Services Program of Northern California
- Sacramento Superior Court Small Claims & Traffic Advisors
- Legal Services of Northern California



- Sacramento Food Bank
- Sacramento Bar Legal Referral Service
- My Sister's House
- WEAVE
- Opening Doors, Inc.
- McGeorge School of Law
- 2-1-1 Sacramento

Connections: What?

- A loose network of legal service and referral providers in Sacramento County
- Examples of services offered include:
 - Sacramento County Public Law Library's Civil Self-Help Center
 - Sacramento County Public Law Library's Lawyers in the Library
 - McGeorge Law School Bankruptcy Clinic & Victims' Assistance
 - Sacramento Superior Court Small Claims & Unlawful Detainer Advisory Clinics
 - Loaves & Fishes Tommy Clinkenbeard Legal Clinics
 - WEAVE free monthly family law workshops and support with domestic violence restraining orders
 - Senior Legal Hotline free assistance on most legal matters for those 60+

Connections: Why?

- Court and public law library statistics highlight that almost 70% of all family law matters are handled by citizens representing themselves without an attorney.
- The number of citizens representing themselves *in pro per* on any number of legal matters is growing.
- Public law libraries serve a vital need, but we cannot provide all services that meet everyone's needs.
- Coordinating our efforts with community partners – most of whom offer a range of clinics and volunteer lawyer referral services – is critical.
- California courts rely on this network of service providers to ease entry and access to the court justice system.

Connections: Where?

- Sacramento County Public Law Library led the initiative to meet annually with other local, legal service providers in a central location
- We update each other with the different services and workshops we offer
- Throughout the year, we cross-refer citizens to the appropriate service provider
- Free clinics, workshops and private appointments are available at a variety of organizations throughout Sacramento County



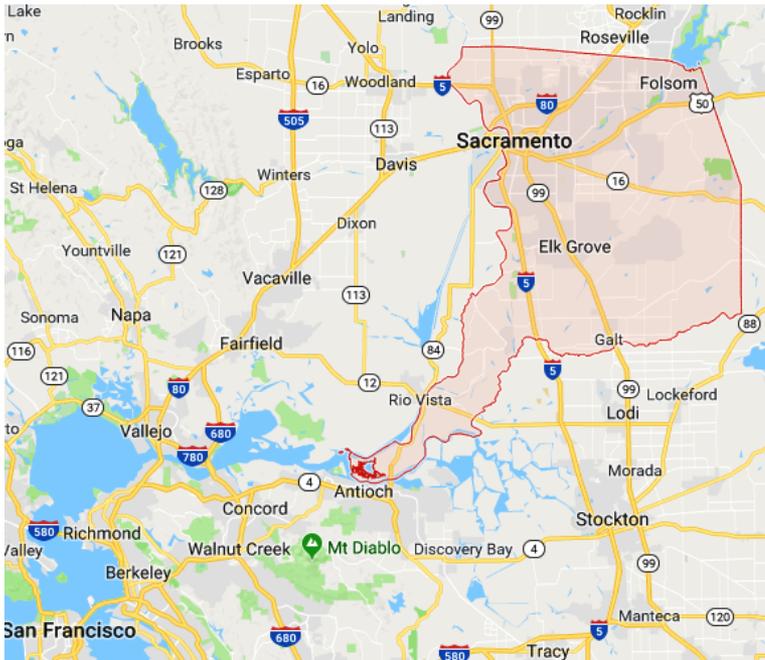
Connections: How?

- Referrals to other service providers are informal.
- Annual Connections meetings amongst service providers keep us informed about who is offering what services and when.
- Our Law Library maintains an ephemeral file of flyers from different organizations to hand out to our patrons.
- Many of us have cross-referral links on our websites



Connections: Some Statistics

- 39.54 million California residents
- 1.4 million Sacramento county residents
- Sacramento County = 994 square miles/26,000 hectares
- Sacramento County has 7 cities, including the city of Sacramento



Sacramento County Public Law Library:

- Approximately 26,000 patron visits p.a.
- Approximately 7500 reference questions p.a. answered in-house
- 80% of reference questions are non-attorney requests
- Public Services librarians also spend 6 hours per week handling virtual chat law library reference questions online in collaboration with other CA County Public Law Libraries

Access to Justice in Your Community

Points to Ponder:

- What do you need to get started?
- Who can lead the effort in your community to connect available legal service providers with each other?
- How can you communicate effectively with each to ensure that citizens in need are accessing those services that are available?
- Do you need to meet with other service providers regularly, and if so, how often?
- How do citizens learn about available, free or inexpensive legal services in your area?

Access to Justice in Your Community

"Access and fairness in the courts are not abstract philosophical principles - they are basic to preserving the rule of law." -
California Retired Chief Justice Ronald George

- California County Law Libraries provide free access to legal resources to all Californians. We all share the same goal: Making the law accessible to the public.
- The Council of California County Law Librarians exists to strengthen, improve, promote and advocate for the unique legal information services provided by county law libraries that support access to justice for all Californians.

Access to Justice in Your Community

Thank you!

Please feel free to contact me with questions and/or review our library's content-rich website.

Jean L. Willis

jwillis@saclaw.org

<https://saclaw.org>

