



**PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION AND INFORMATION
(PLEI) in British Columbia**

Community Profile and Needs Assessment

Final Report

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Executive Summary

Purpose of the Study

The Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) Working Group was established in British Columbia in 2003 with the intent of co-ordinating PLEI efforts throughout the province. This PLEI Working Group currently consists of representatives from 10 organizations, including government and non-governmental bodies.¹ The PLEI Working Group contracted with an independent research firm to undertake a province-wide community profile and needs assessment of public legal education and information. The Working Group also enlisted an external reviewer to consult with them and the team on research methodology and related matters.

Methodology

This initiative was undertaken in a staged approach. Phase 1 focused on interviewing representatives from 20 core provincial PLEI services and resources, documenting their delivery processes, identifying gaps in services and resources, and preparing to refine and expand the research and analysis to a wider target audience in Phase 2. The purpose of Phase 2 was to selectively expand the coverage of needs assessment and gap analysis, building on the work completed in the Phase 1 core services review. The Phase 2 research was accomplished through focus groups in 10 communities selected across the province to represent different sizes and urban/rural features, and an online survey of community-based service providers, advocacy groups and, in some instances, clients who could speak to the needs in their own communities. For the 25 focus groups completed, 421 people were invited by phone, fax and/or email and 161 people attended. The online survey yielded only 26 responses, but proved to be useful as a preliminary testing of what could become a Needs Assessment Tool (NAT) for distribution across the province. In addition, a separate online survey was set up for educators and school counsellors from a list provided by the People's Law School, Law Courts Education and Simon Fraser University Centre for Education, Law and Society. Over 300 educators and school counsellors were invited to participate with 38 completing the survey.

¹ These are: Legal Services Society, People's Law School, Law Courts Education Society, British Columbia Courthouse Library Society, Canadian Bar Association (BC Branch), Simon Fraser University Centre for Education, Law and Society, UBC Law Students' Legal Advice Program, Law Centre (University of Victoria), Law Foundation of BC, Ministry of Attorney General of BC and the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General.

Phase 1 Findings

From the intensive interviews with the 20 core organizations, it was clear that they generally concur that a great deal of PLEI material exists, but it is not as widely accessible as it should be, particularly to those most in need. The challenges faced in this dissemination include a need for person-to-person contact, so that the “user” can have the materials explained. This situation is complicated for users whose first language is not English, who have low literacy levels, and who are under stress at the time of the need for information. Overall budgetary restraints experienced by agencies providing PLEI across the province have curtailed the availability of community-based PLEI and access to individuals who provide one-to-one support. The increasing transfer of PLEI to electronic/web-based resources, while valuable to service providers and many clients, is not readily accessible to some groups such as isolated seniors, Aboriginal communities and those with mental health issues.

The types of issues mentioned by all respondents included:

- Lack of co-ordination and integration of PLEI resources and service providers.
- Insufficient public awareness of PLEI.
- Lack of access to PLEI, and key barriers to ready access to PLEI such as geographic/locational (not near PLEI services) and cultural (e.g. language).
- The need for additional intermediaries to deliver PLEI.

Respondents repeatedly identified a number of target groups that require PLEI. These include: immigrants, unemployed and the working poor, low literacy, people with disabilities, seniors, Aboriginal communities, and youth.

Phase 2 Findings

The findings in Phase 2, with wider coverage of respondents across the province, were very similar to those of the core organizations review in Phase 1. This served to reinforce the validity of findings for each Phase. It is important to note that, outside of a separate survey of educators, much of the research focused on service providers and individuals who were in some way disadvantaged.

Most respondents cutting across all of the focus groups reported that a great deal of public legal information is available, especially in the form of printed materials. However, knowing where to obtain the information when needed remains a major challenge. Many respondents acknowledged that there was a growing amount of legal information available on the internet, but the view was widely held that not everyone has access to computers nor knows how to use them to obtain the information required. This is true for many organizations and for individuals.

Respondents identified numerous sources for accessing PLEI, including websites, libraries (public and courthouse), provincial organizations, government (Provincial and Municipal), and local service providers. The most common resource referred to was

POVNET². Many respondents, even those not directly associated with poverty issues, identified POVNET as essential for keeping up-to-date on PLEI issues. Native Court Workers were mentioned by many respondents as being a good resource for the Aboriginal communities.

Key issues identified by respondents in Phase 2 included:

- The importance of improving access to PLEI and to ensure that services providers and the public know what is available.
- The need for co-ordination, including one point of contact in communities for PLEI.
- One-to-one support to help clients access and understand PLEI.
- Training for key intermediaries and staff and volunteers of community agencies involved in PLEI.
- A focus on co-ordination of resources to improve the provision of PLEI throughout the province.

Mechanisms for Ongoing Needs Identification

Respondents in Phase 2 were also asked what mechanisms they believed would be most effective in ongoing identification of PLEI needs. The key findings are that the instrument itself must be easy to fill out and that there must be a “return” on the organization’s investment in time and resources in filling out the form. The respondents want the results to be communicated to them in a timely manner and they want to see that actions are taken to address the needs they would be identifying over time.

Recommendations for Further Action by The PLEI Working Group

There is a strong base of PLEI materials, but there are substantial challenges in moving this out into the communities and linking it to individuals most in need. The highest priorities for meeting PLEI across the province appear to be improving coordination and enhancing access to materials and related support services. This includes implementing critical coordination mechanisms such as the development of lead agencies at the community level, a PLEI Working Group Communication Strategy, the creation of a Web-based PLEI Clearinghouse, and the strengthening of partnerships between provincial PLEI organizations and community intermediaries. This also means enhancing access through increased use of the media, service-provider training, workshops and technology. There are also needs for an increased range of content for some target groups (e.g., seniors, youth and Aboriginal communities). There is a strong sense among respondents that effective delivery calls for personal, individual interaction between the PLEI provider and the user/client. This is seen as inherent to the nature of PLEI due to the complexity of the legal system, the very-changing nature of policy and case law and the intricacies of litigation.

² POVNET is an internet site for advocates, people on welfare, and community groups and individuals involved in anti-poverty work.

In sum, the following actions are recommended:

1. Formalize a sustained role of the PLEI Working Group.
2. Identify a lead PLEI organization(s) in each region of the province.
3. Develop a communication protocol.
4. Develop strategies for co-ordinating the development and distribution of PLEI information.
5. Identify strategies that will enhance access to PLEI.
6. Identify pilot initiatives to address priority gaps in PLEI.
7. Implement ongoing mechanisms for identifying PLEI needs.
8. Address options to facilitate funding stability and sustainability.

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I. Purpose of the Study

The Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) Working Group was formed in British Columbia with the intent of co-ordinating PLEI efforts throughout the province. This PLEI Working Group currently consists of representatives from:

Legal Services Society
People's Law School
Law Courts Education Society
British Columbia Courthouse Library Society
Canadian Bar Association, BC Branch
Simon Fraser University Centre for Education, Law and Society
UBC Law Students' Legal Advice Program
Law Centre (University of Victoria)
Law Foundation of BC
Representatives from the Ministry of Attorney General and the Ministry of
Public Safety and the Solicitor General

The PLEI Working Group requested that a community profile and needs assessment of public legal education and information in BC be undertaken. An independent research firm was selected on a competitive basis to carry out the project.

Public Legal Education and Information, as defined in this report, is comprehensive and includes any activity which allows individuals or groups of individuals to better understand and use the law. However, it does not include legal advice, legal aid or training intended specifically for lawyers.

The main objectives of this project are to:

- map what is currently being provided in BC in terms of PLEI
- identify issues and gaps in PLEI services and products
- develop a needs assessment measurement tool that can be used by funders, service providers, and other stakeholders to assess needs and identify gaps on an ongoing basis, to assist them with planning and appropriate resource allocation.

The data collection and analysis for this project have been separated into two distinct phases. As we will show below, the first phase, which was completed in March 2004, involved interviewing a wide range of provincial organizations which play a major role in the development and/or delivery of PLEI. The second

phase, completed in September 2004, involved visits to a number of communities throughout the province to conduct focus groups with PLEI service providers and clients, as well as discussion sessions with a number of target populations. Because the number of communities which could be visited was limited by the time frame and budget of the project, the consulting team also developed a short online questionnaire to provide other organizations and individuals with the opportunity to present their views on the PLEI needs in their community.

This project was conducted during a time where many community social service and justice community organizations were experiencing budget constraints that affected PLEI services to clients. Many community-based Legal Services Society offices were closed and many Women's Resource Centres were facing cutbacks and/or closures. However, we are confident that the research strategy is sound and that the findings are generalizable across the province as a whole.

II. Methodology

This initiative was undertaken in a staged approach. Phase 1 focused on interviewing core provincial PLEI services and resources, documenting their delivery processes, identifying gaps in services and resources, and refining and expanding the research and analysis to a wider target audience in Phase 2. The purpose of Phase 2 was to selectively expand the coverage of needs assessment and gap analysis building on the work completed in the Phase 1 core services review. This was accomplished through focus groups and an online survey of community-based service providers, advocacy groups and, in some instances, clients who could speak to the needs in their own communities.

In Phase 1, the consulting team concentrated on interviews with a core of 20 provincial organizations and a review of selected background documents. (See Appendix 1 for Provincial organizations interviewed.) Results of these 20 interviews were analyzed, using a content analysis approach³ which looks for common themes and identifies divergent views. While a set series of questions were used for interviews and focus group sessions, probes were used to obtain clarification. The results of Phase 1 are included in Section III below. (See Appendix 2 for Interview Schedule used with representatives from the 20 provincial PLEI organizations.)

In Phase 2, the consulting team and the PLEI Working Group identified communities where focus groups would be held with representatives from service providers and other interested parties.

³ "Content analysis enables researchers to sift through large volumes of data with relative ease in a systematic fashion. It can be a useful technique for allowing us to discover and describe the focus of individual, group, institutional, or social attention. It also allows inferences to be made which can then be corroborated using other methods of data collection." *An Overview of Content Analysis*, [Steve Stemler Yale University as posted on *Practical, Assessment, Research and Evaluation – A Peer-Reviewed Electronic Journal*](http://pareonline.net/getvn.asp?v=7&n=17). <http://pareonline.net/getvn.asp?v=7&n=17>

Figure 1: Location of Phase 2 Focus Groups



The eight focus groups held in the Lower Mainland were intended to solicit input from various target populations (including Aboriginal, Multicultural, Seniors, Youth, and Poverty Groups). As well, to ensure a geographic distribution, sessions were held in Richmond, Surrey, and the Tri-Cities. (See Appendix 4 for Sample Focus Group Questions)

The team invited 421 people by phone, fax and/or email to attend the focus groups. Of those, 161 people attended the total of 25 sessions. Separate focus groups were held with services providers and clients. Service providers were drawn from the health, social services, justice, training and education sectors, from all levels of government, and included representatives from community organizations such as: neighbourhood houses, advocacy groups, women's resource centres/transition houses, family and children's services, multicultural societies, refugee and immigrant associations, anti-poverty groups, youth services, public libraries, organizations working with people with disabilities, and a range of Aboriginal-serving agencies. Focus groups with clients (target populations with a potential need for PLEI) included sessions with seniors, youth-at-risk, and people with disabilities. (See Appendix 8 for lists of invitees to the focus group sessions.)

Overview of Those Invited:

Organizations/Individuals Contacted (or Attempted Contact)	421
Organizations/Individuals Agreeing to Participate	181
Organizations/Individuals Who Declined the Invitation But Agreed to Fill Out the Online Survey	61
Organizations/Individuals Who Did Not Respond to the Invitations or the Consulting Team was Unable to Make Contact	179

**20 did not attend the meetings*

Whenever possible, local representatives were asked to submit a list of names of potential attendees. This was supplemented by the Legal Services Society database and submissions from other PLEI Working Group members to ensure maximum coverage. All sessions were held during business hours to try to ensure maximum attendance.

Those who were unable to attend were asked if they would be willing to take the time to complete an online questionnaire. (See Appendix 5 for Electronic Survey) As well, a note was posted on POVNET inviting a broader audience, who did not participate in focus groups, to complete the online questionnaire. Representatives from 26 groups completed and returned the online form. This online process was intended to serve two purposes. It allows for input from a wider audience of participants. Most importantly, the online survey also allows the consulting team to test some of the questions that could be included in a Needs Assessment Tool (NAT) that could be used by the PLEI Working Group for on-going program monitoring and long-range planning.

A separate online survey was set up for educators and school counsellors from a list provided by the People's Law School, Law Courts Education and Simon Fraser University Centre for Education, Law and Society. A total of 38 people responded.

Challenges to the Methodology:

The approach used in this study posed two fundamental challenges:

- The logistics of arranging focus groups and contacting hundreds of potential participants throughout the province.
- The limited resources of many of these organizations, which sometimes resulted in their not being able to free up staff to attend, or not having the funds to support travel to other communities to participate.

We believe that it will be useful for planning future survey research projects such as this one for the reader to have a more detailed view of the challenges involved in conducting this kind of research. We hope the following account of these challenges will be of interest and of value for the future. For example:

- To contact the 421 organizations and individuals⁴ which ultimately resulted in a turnout of 161 participants, the invitation process required approximately 247 hours of staff time. This time included initial contact, finding/updating incorrect contact information, follow-up with those organizations that did not respond, sending or phoning reminders prior to the focus groups, and continuously updating the electronic database.
- For up to one-quarter of the organizations to be contacted, the phone numbers and email addresses of the organizations or individual respondents had changed, requiring additional research to find new contact information.⁵ Every person who confirmed attendance at the session required at least two contacts (an initial invitation and a reminder) while more than half of the 421 contacts required at least three contacts (initial invitation, one or two callbacks and one reminder). This level of contact is evidently essential to maximize attendance. Even with this level of effort, there were more than 20 individuals who said they would attend, but did not do so. Nor did they give advance notice of their inability to attend. Others who found they could not attend and who informed us of

⁴ As well, there were more than 40 organizations in our initial database that had either discontinued service, or closed entirely or for which up-to-date contact information was not available. These groups are not included in the 421.

⁵ This issue speaks to the importance of coordinating efforts needed to maintain regular contact with stakeholders across the province in order to ensure an accurate and up-date list to facilitate efficient communication.

this, greatly aided our planning for the sessions. (This included planning for nutritious snacks and beverages.)

During the course of setting up the focus groups, the consulting team contacted organizations throughout the province that indicated that they would be unable to attend sessions because of limited staff resources or the monetary cost of travel and/or staff. For example, of the 421 organizations and individuals we spoke with, 17 indicated that they did not have the resources (time or travel budget) to send a staff person. Of those, six were in urban centres (with populations of 50,000 or more), while 11 were in rural areas. While these 17 did inform us of their situation, there may well have been others in a similar situation that simply did not provide this information.

Organizing the PLEI focus groups provided unique challenges because of the broad cross-section of organizations involved in PLEI, the difficulty of securing participation of individuals because PLEI is often a small part of their duties (*“doing it off the side of their desk”*), and, the burden on staff time since many of the organizations were experiencing major cutbacks and found it difficult to commit staff to a focus group. Organizing focus groups with clients or service providers from specific target populations (such as youth-at-risk, seniors, multicultural, poverty, people with disabilities, and aboriginal) was much easier to organize where a lead organization assisted in identifying potential participants.

However, even faced with these challenges, many of those attending the focus groups indicated that preparing for it and attending the session provided them with a great opportunity to network and increase their knowledge of PLEI products and services available in their community.

For future projects it will be important to find ways to incorporate the views of those organizations who find themselves unable to send individuals to consultations. As indicated earlier, those individuals who said that they would be unable to attend a focus group were invited to complete the online survey. Other methods may need to be considered in the future, including phone interviews, identifying lead organizations in to assist with obtaining feedback from groups within their community or target populations, or taking advantage of gathering information at already scheduled meetings of the stakeholder groups.

III. Phase 1 Findings

The results outlined in this report of the Phase 1 research are based on review of PLEI Working Group member publications and documents, focus group sessions with the PLEI Working Group, and interviews with 20 key provincial organizations involved in PLEI.

A. PLEI Provincial Organization Service Overview

Respondents were asked to describe the current PLEI services and products they develop and/or provide. A wealth of information was collected on what is currently being provided by the 20 organizations interviewed. (See Appendix 3 - PLEI Provincial Organization Service Overview.) The content of the PLEI information covers a wide range of topics, including: Aboriginal, automobile/personal injury, income benefits, child protection, consumer, criminal, disability, education, employment, family, family violence, housing/tenancy, human rights, immigration, the legal system, medical/health, seniors, volunteers, welfare, wills/estates, and youth.

For the purposes of this study, the roles of the PLEI organizations interviewed can be characterized in two ways. First, there are groups who are identified as developers and providers of PLEI, in that they prepare information or develop educational materials and play a role in distribution of information or provision of workshops and training. Second, there are groups that are intermediaries. Intermediaries are defined as individuals or groups that do not develop their own PLEI, but play a role in distribution of information or in the organization of educational workshops/seminars. They may also receive PLEI training in order for their staff or volunteers to train others. Types of products and services are also identified in terms of print, video, online, phone, audio, workshops and/or training. Further description of current PLEI services and products is part of the Phase 2 findings in Section IV below.

B. Strengths of PLEI in the Province

When respondents were asked to identify strengths of the current PLEI system and its successes, many positive comments were provided. Respondents agreed that:

- There is a great deal of knowledge and experience in the province with regard to PLEI.
- There is a solid history of provision of PLEI in B.C. and a clear recognition of the value in PLEI.
- There are many diverse PLEI programs and services covering important areas of the law.
- Many respondents indicated that there is a great deal of information about poverty law⁶, and that POVNET is a key resource for the poverty law area.
- There are a wide range of different types of organizations involved in PLEI.

⁶ Poverty Law is the provision of legal assistance related to ensuring individuals have adequate access to social assistance, housing, health and mental health services, etc.

- PLEI services are provided by committed, professional, and compassionate people.
- PLEI is available in many different forms, publications, audio, video, phone, on-line, workshops and seminars.
- Respondents believe that modern technologies increase the opportunities for more effective and efficient delivery of PLEI. Respondents also see the potential for enhanced partnerships and innovative responses to the need for providing PLEI adequately. A specific example cited was the diversity of visitors to the POVNET site and the willingness of people to contribute their expertise whenever possible.

C. PLEI Gaps/Issues

In addressing gaps and issues, it is important to note that a number of respondents raised the concern that PLEI services are increasingly being called upon in the province as a way to solve a wider and more demanding range of legal problems. They are being accessed as a substitute for legal advocacy and legal advice, services which have been reduced or eliminated because of financial restraints. They perceive this as creating an additional burden on PLEI.

Further, all respondents reported that gaps in PLEI are increasing because of budget cuts to Legal Aid services and to a wide range of advocacy organizations across the province that have traditionally provided PLEI. Another phenomenon that may have an impact on the demand for PLEI is “unbundling”. Traditionally, lawyers representing a client have provided a whole range of legal services. Since some clients cannot afford legal representation they are left to find alternative means to address the range of legal issues they may face. This is seen as creating a further demand for PLEI, arising from the need of individuals for more information and education, in order to represent themselves, or at least be sufficiently well-informed to decide their next steps when facing legal issues.

The types of content gaps or service issues mentioned by all respondents included:

- lack of co-ordination and integration of PLEI
- insufficient public awareness of PLEI
- lack of access to PLEI
- the need for additional intermediaries to deliver PLEI.

We will describe these findings in more detail below.

Co-ordination of PLEI

Lack of co-ordination of PLEI was identified by all respondents as a major issue that requires attention. Coordination was used broadly by respondents to include

difficulties in co-ordination of planning, funding, service delivery, and the development of PLEI. They indicated that:

- There is lack of communication among funders, between funders and services providers, and among PLEI service providers.
- There is a lack of co-ordination in the development of PLEI, in its distribution and maintenance. This applies to the range of PLEI products and services including: publications, web-based information, workshops/seminars, training, and outreach activities.
- PLEI organizations, for the most part, have not co-ordinated their outreach initiatives. Most outreach activities to community groups are done on an ad hoc basis, if and when project funding is available.
- There is no systematic analysis of needs for PLEI. Much of the development of PLEI tends to be project-based, and as such is driven by criteria established by the funder. The Law Foundation is one of the few groups that continues to provide core funding to PLEI organizations to enable them to meet the needs of their communities.

Fairly typical responses from respondents on the lack of co-ordination of PLEI include the following:⁷

- *There is a lack of information sharing between organizations.*
- *Agencies don't work well together.*
- *There is no common agreement about what each organization is doing.*
- *There is no co-ordinated planning to use resources most efficiently.*
- *There are no agreed upon standards for PLEI service providers.*
- *Just putting information out there is not sufficient. It needs to be co-ordinated and accompanied by workshops and training.*
- *Better co-ordination is critical but there is a cost for co-operation among agencies. Be prepared to pay – it has value.*
- *Fresh look is needed in how to get the information out there.*

Insufficient public awareness of PLEI

There is a perception among respondents that a great deal of PLEI information is available in print, and on the Internet on a wide range of topics. However, they strongly believe that both the general public and staff in community agencies do not know what is available or how to access PLEI. Several comments were repeatedly mentioned:

- *People don't always know where to look.*
- *There is a definite gap in personal networks.*

⁷ Please note that while the research team took detailed notes throughout the group and individual interviews, the italicized statements above may not be verbatim. However, we are confident that they fully reflect the content and structure of the comments.

- *Staff in community organizations do not know where to go or who to ask for PLEI information.*
- *Finding someone who can help and who inspires trust is difficult.*
- *Very difficult in large communities to know where to start looking.*
- *People confuse groups providing PLEI with Legal Aid.*
- *Referral services seem to have been broken down.*
- *Our experience in the North is that people didn't even know the information was available.*

This lack of awareness is compounded by a number of factors. For example, there appear to be different perspectives on what is meant by PLEI and a confusion of what PLEI includes. Legal advocacy (and legal aid) are often identified as part of the PLEI services.⁸

Access to PLEI

Access to PLEI was identified as a major concern. In particular, the following issues were raised:

- Lack of access to PLEI outside the Lower Mainland.
 - *We have travelled all over the province. Once you get out of Vancouver, the existence of PLEI information is very limited⁹.*
- Reaching out to large and small communities outside of the Lower Mainland is seen as a critical challenge from a resource and training perspective. It is expensive to provide workshops or training throughout the province. It is also expensive to bring people into the Lower Mainland for training. This is compounded by the need to determine who should be trained and what type of training is required for effective delivery of PLEI.
- PLEI is often only available on certain topics, at certain times, and in specific locations. The subject, timing, and location for accessing the PLEI may not be right to meet the wide range of needs of diverse audiences throughout the province.
- There is a critical lack of access to PLEI for Aboriginal people, those living on or off reserves. This is compounded by the fact that many Aboriginal communities are remote. Telephone use is modest and the internet availability is limited. There are no libraries on many reserves.

⁸ It should be noted that legal advocacy and legal aid do not fall under the definition of PLEI and, in fact, during the focus groups they were specifically identified as not being part of PLEI by the consulting team.

⁹ Before the recent funding reductions to PLEI development and services (specifically to the Legal Services Society) there were 45 LSS offices across the province and currently there are only 7 Regional Centres, 2 Satellite offices and 21 Local Agents, with additional services offered through BC Government Agents. LSS added the LawLine telephone service and LawLink website to try and address client concerns regarding legal information and advice.

- Respondents indicated that while more and more information is available on websites, many clients still do not have their own computers or access to the internet. There are insufficient internet access points in communities for public/client use. Technology is not uniform throughout the province and there are many areas that do not have high speed internet. A lack of knowledge about the use of computers, modest English language levels, and literacy limitations all create barriers. In addition, many clients will not go to libraries or other centres to use computers, due to privacy concerns. If the public is expected to fill out complicated forms on the internet, this creates an added burden. Further, for those who are able to access the internet, they still need to know how and where to access PLEI.
- PLEI is not well-organized for an unsophisticated user of the web, and is not user-friendly in many cases. In addition, printing out information from the computer may be too costly for certain target groups.
- Respondents also expressed the concern that even with access to PLEI, without training or proper assistance, clients may not know how to use the information effectively.
 - *It is not just what you learn but how you learn it that is important.*

For community service providers' views on technology see Phase 2 findings.

Intermediaries

- By intermediaries, we mean those individuals or groups that do not develop PLEI but play a key role in distributing public legal education information, facilitating provision of workshops/seminars, and/or who may receive training so they can provide information or training to others. While they do not develop their own public legal information, they may adapt information for their clients. Respondents have indicated that many groups who have traditionally carried out these roles, such as community advocacy groups (e.g., Women's Centres, groups working with people with disabilities), courthouse libraries in small communities, and other non-profit agencies are no longer being funded or have experienced budget cuts resulting in the need to streamline their operations, and may no longer be providing PLEI or do not have up-to-date information.
- Another significant phenomenon is the shift in demographics among PLEI providers. Staff experienced in PLEI are ageing and retiring and this is leaving a void of people with expertise.
- There is a need to strengthen existing intermediaries and to find new intermediaries with wide networks and contacts in communities to enhance the delivery of PLEI.
 - *There are few intermediaries in the community to help people use and understand the law.*
 - *Some of the networks we knew are no longer there.*
 - *Hard to find advocates who can assist you.*

Gaps and Issues Relating to Content and Target Populations

Respondents were specifically asked to identify gaps in the content of PLEI and to identify any target groups that are not being adequately served.

The major issue emphasized by respondents was the constant change in legislation and legal decisions. The challenge is how to most effectively ensure that these changes are communicated to the public and to PLEI providers. Many respondents said that the government has a role and obligation to ensure that the public is informed and educated on changes in the law. They felt that posting information on the government website is not sufficient for informing people adequately about many issues of great importance to them. For example, there have recently been significant changes in the *Residential Tenancy Act* and new Federal privacy legislation has come into effect (the *Personal Information Protection and Privacy Act* – Canada 2000 C5). Respondents said that community organizations need assistance in accessing PLEI in these areas and in communicating this information to the relevant target audiences.

The Public Legal Education and Information Resource Catalogue (BC) 2003/4 includes titles of workshops, courses, or print, online, and audio-visual materials published, offered and/or distributed by eight PLEI organizations. Even though there is all this detail, a number of respondents felt that the catalogue is not complete and should include information on a broader range of PLEI organizations.

While a number of respondents believe there is a great deal of information on different aspects of the law, they pointed out that there is no formal course for the public that provides a general overview of the law. These respondents stated that there is a need for more “proactive information” to build legal competency on an ongoing basis, rather than relying on the current tendency to respond when there is an emergent issue with clients.

From a content perspective, respondents indicated that information is lacking in the following areas: (Note: This is in alphabetical order, not in an order of priority.)

- Aboriginal law – laws that specifically relate to the Aboriginal community (such as community justice training)
- Administrative tribunals (such as appeal boards for various kinds of benefit programs)
- Contract law
- Elder/senior law
- Family law. While respondents indicated there is information available about family law matters, this is an area where there is no, or extremely

limited, free legal advice¹⁰. This creates a high demand for effective information and the need for guidance on how to use existing information appropriately

- Hunting and fishing (particularly in smaller communities)
- Immigration law, including human rights and immigration issues, refugee claimant issues
- Labour law
- Motor vehicle (including personal injury claims)
- Self-representation information – more information is required for self-representing litigants
- Youth sexual exploitation/abuse
- Small claims (e.g., Changes in legislation being considered may result in the thresholds changing from a maximum of \$10,000 to \$50,000. This may lead to more people requiring information regarding self-representation in matters involving more money – and possibility more complexity.)
- Suits - information for people who sue or are being sued
- Community volunteering (security, liability, role as board member, etc.)

In many instances, as we have learned throughout this project, the fact that a group identifies a gap does not necessarily mean there is one. Instead it may be more reflective of a lack of knowledge of what is actually available and how and where this information can be accessed. However, it is important that the PLEI Working Group be aware that these perceptions exist and thus, people may well shape their own actions (or lack thereof) around these beliefs.

Target groups

Respondents repeatedly identified a number of target groups that require PLEI. These include: immigrants, unemployed and the working poor, low literacy, people with disabilities, seniors, Aboriginal communities, and youth.

- There is a perception that PLEI is not effectively reaching with low literacy levels.
- PLEI specifically related to Aboriginal people is lacking or not appropriate to address differences in culture and values in the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Communities. It was suggested that Aboriginal communities need to build their capacity to enable them to provide PLEI in their own communities. This requires dedicated resources.
 - *We need people on the ground to work in these programs.*
 - *We need to design PLEI programs that are tied into the Aboriginal culture.*

¹⁰ Legal aid coverage for Family law has been drastically reduced and the Law Student's Legal Advice Program no longer provides Family Law services.

- *We need to involve Elders and build traditional values into program design.*
- Many respondents identified a need to reach youth in high schools and to provide them with basic legal information about daily life activities that they will encounter. This includes laws relating to rental accommodation, motor vehicle ownership and use, and financial matters. Further, there is a perception that high school students are receiving information about human rights issues, but not on other issues such as freedom of speech, due process of law, and privacy.
- People with low literacy levels cannot use the system effectively.

D. Barriers to Access to PLEI

The key barriers to ready access to PLEI that respondents identified are geographic/locational and cultural (e.g. language).

Geographic/Locational Barriers

As indicated, providing PLEI outside of the Lower Mainland through “passive” (dissemination of print or electronic information) and active (workshops, training) means can be expensive in itself. There are insufficient funds dedicated to outreach into communities throughout the province. While there is an increasing reliance on use of technology to distribute PLEI, this has significant challenges, as has been noted above.

Workshops and training sessions in communities outside the Lower Mainland are infrequent and they tend to be delivered on an ad hoc basis. Provincial organizations have to seek specific funding for this type of PLEI and often this is on a one-time project basis. The organizations try to ensure that they visit as many diverse communities (both geographical and demographic) as possible. In addition, respondents noted that there is a lack of co-ordination among the key PLEI organizations in terms of their outreach strategies.

Comments made about geographic access include:

- *It is too costly to travel outside the Lower Mainland to provide PLEI.*
- *There is a lack of funds to distribute material outside the Lower Mainland.*
- *There is generally a lack of PLEI outside the Lower Mainland and Victoria.*
- *Geographic barriers for people with disabilities are a big issue – even short distances.*
- *Distance poses problems for seniors since many lack transportation.*
- *Only 2% of the population is not in a library region, but it is still a great distance for some people to travel.*

- *You can be in a place where there is not phone service, let alone internet access.*
- *We only manage to deal with northern Aboriginal communities every 1.5 years.*
- *In a perfect world, we would need a string of offices all over the province, but this is not practical.*

Culture/Language

Providing PLEI in different languages and ensuring information is culturally sensitive were identified by Provincial PLEI organizations as a continuing challenge. While a number of these organizations have translated specific PLEI materials into other languages (specifically French, Punjabi, Chinese, Farsi, Spanish), they indicated that there was still a demand for more materials to be translated into the languages mentioned above as well as broadening the range of languages into which PLEI materials are translated, e.g., Eastern European languages, African languages.

In addition, provincial PLEI organizations have limited funding, and this creates difficulty in making choices about the languages into which materials can be translated. Even if information is translated, respondents raised the concern of how best to ensure that the information is culturally sensitive. Providing workshops and training in different languages or using interpreters requires additional resources specifically dedicated to this function. Resources to respond to this demand have been limited and are most often project-based rather than available on an on-going basis.

Other Barriers

Other barriers mentioned less frequently by respondents include:

- Literacy issues, e.g. people who cannot read or do not understand what they read.
- Lack of information for the blind or visually impaired – although there are a number of telephone services (participants also indicated a lack of resources in large print format).
- Lack of transportation to locations where people can access PLEI.

E. Mechanisms for Ongoing Needs Assessment

A key objective of this study is to identify mechanisms to enable ongoing assessment of needs and gaps to assist the PLEI Working Group in future strategic planning.

Suggestions centre around two core strategies:

- Development and implementation of a survey tool
- Development and implementation of a co-ordinating mechanism

1. Development and Implementation of a Survey Tool

The organizations interviewed in Phase 1 would all be willing to complete a simple survey either once or twice a year. In addition, this survey could be distributed to a wide range of community organizations involved in PLEI. The respondents indicated that the following should be considered in such a process:

- The value of completing a short survey should be clearly communicated to all organizations. Some groups may be reluctant to participate because they believe they will lose some of their autonomy or not be able to secure the funding they require.
- The survey must be very simple so that it does not create a burden for groups to complete.
- It is suggested that the information on the survey be limited to a select number of questions. The first time an organization completes the form, it would give a very brief description of what PLEI it currently provides.

Subsequent to that, each organization would provide an update that could include answers to the following types of questions:

- What changes have occurred in terms of PLEI in the organization over the last reporting period – what has been deleted or what new has been added?
- What key changes in legislation are impacting PLEI?
- What are the key PLEI gaps or issues that the organization and their clients/community are currently facing?
- What type of support would help address these issues; including such considerations as:
 - Potential partnerships with other PLEI providers?
 - Enhanced training of PLEI deliverers?
 - Access to specified materials or resources?
- The database of survey distribution and results must be easy to maintain with limited resources.
- Some mechanism is required to ensure that survey information is shared.
- An infrastructure should be established that includes: phone-based, paper-based and computer-based mechanisms to transmit and share information.
- It is critical to develop an appropriate list of organizations that will be involved in this process. Most of the 20 organizations interviewed have their own distribution lists. A co-ordinated and shared data base of organizations and key stakeholders should be considered.

- To enhance information on PLEI needs and content gaps, it is suggested that a periodic survey also be conducted with such stakeholder groups as lawyers, provincial court judges, and probation officers.
- Further, to enhance information on the general public's need for PLEI, a periodic telephone survey could be conducted with a random sample of the public.

2. Development of a Co-ordinating Mechanism

All respondents recognized the need for co-ordination of development and delivery of PLEI. They stated that decisions on how this is accomplished must be made through an open and transparent process so that all relevant organizations will see the benefits to them of increased co-ordination. A number of approaches were suggested:

- Build on the current PLEI Working Group and establish a PLEI network which would be a provincial body that has representation from co-ordinating groups in regions and communities throughout the province. (Based on a similar network in Alberta - the Public Legal Education Network of Alberta)
- Identify a lead agency (an existing organization) either on a geographical basis in smaller communities or by subject area in larger communities that could assist with:
 - Organizing other PLEI groups or intermediaries into communities of interest. Facilitating representation to a provincial PLEI network body.
 - Identifying gaps and needs on an ongoing basis for strategic planning.

This lead agency could reach out to specific target groups in the community and to the general public to identify PLEI needs.

- Maximize the use of technology to connect “communities of interest” through interactive technology. While recognizing that smaller organizations may not have access to the internet, they can be linked with other organizations which have this technology. Intermediaries can have real-time access to PLEI information and training that could benefit a wider public audience. As an example, Legal Services Society is working toward enhancing their existing Law LINK services. These currently provide public access computers and legal information. Enhancements would include touch screens, video cameras (to increase the personal contact with clients, assuming confidentiality is not a concern), printers and phone lines to provide clients and intermediaries with full service access to legal advice and training
- Identify a lead organization that could monitor legislative changes that may affect PLEI and co-ordinate appropriate strategies with relevant groups to update PLEI, as required.

IV. Phase 2 Findings

Phase 2 was designed to broaden the scope of the inquiry into the needs for PLEI across the province, and to further assess the content and utility of administering a Needs Assessment Tool (NAT) periodically. The results of Phase 2 research are based on the focus groups held across the province with 161 participants. In analyzing and synthesizing this qualitative data, we have identified the major themes and issues that have cut across all the focus groups. Where an issue has been identified frequently by most of the participants we use the term “most”; where quite a few participants have provided the same or similar feedback, we use the term “many”; and where an issue is raised less frequently by participants, we use the term “some” respondents.

A. What is Working Well

Most respondents indicated that a great deal of public legal information is available, especially in the form of printed materials. However, knowing *where* to obtain the information when needed remains a major challenge. Many respondents acknowledged that there was a growing amount of legal information available on the internet.

In terms of content, most respondents generally agreed that there was information available (in print, online and/or through community service providers) in the following areas:

- Welfare rights – e.g., the recently revised Welfare Rights Handbook
- Tenants’ rights
- Criminal Law
- Family Law – e.g., Family Law Handbook
- Victim Services
- Poverty Law

As well, respondents identified numerous sources for accessing PLEI, including websites, libraries (public and courthouse), provincial organizations, government (Provincial and Municipal), and local service providers. The most common resource referred to was POVNET. Many respondents, even those not directly associated with poverty issues, identified POVNET as essential for keeping up-to-date on PLEI issues. Native Court Workers were mentioned by many respondents as being a good resource for the Aboriginal communities.

Other PLEI resources and activities that work well and that were identified by the majority of respondents across all focus groups include:

Information and Referral:

- POVNET resources such as the plain language fact sheets, POVNET free online courses for advocates, and issue-specific information.
- Lawline and LawLINK – service providers noted that this is a valuable service for clients, but there are also complaints about the “hold-time” for clients and the difficulty in having calls returned by lawyers.
- Seniors’ groups, multicultural organizations, and organizations dealing with people with disabilities play an important role in getting public legal information out to their members. The better informed they are, the more able they are to provide accurate and up-to-date information.

Outreach:

- Media-related activities – some service providers use radio and community television to provide information to clients. Community television stations have provided assistance in creating educational videos.

Advocacy:

- The work of local advocacy groups fills some of the gaps left when Legal Services Offices closed.
- Advocacy groups where they exist, work well, although participants felt this resource was dwindling, e.g., cutbacks to Women’s Resources Centres, closure of Residential Tenancy Offices and many Legal Services Society Offices.

Education:

- Education/courses provided by local schools and colleges. The only problem is that inconsistent funding has led to an ad hoc provision of this activity.
- A number of community groups across the province hold workshops and have speakers on various legal issues and respondents indicated that this type of service is very useful. However, these workshops are also not consistently available when required.

Pro-Bono and Legal Aid

- *Pro bono* legal information clinics have been found to be extremely useful.

Government Services:

- Family Justice Centres work well, where they exist.

Respondents identified a number of coordinating mechanisms that worked well and that could be applied PLEI.

- Certain coordinating Local “Interagency Committees” are essential to the sharing of public legal information among service providers. These committees meet regularly and draw from a cross-section of community agencies. In larger communities there may be a number of these committees that focus on particular community issues (e.g., Drug and Alcohol, Poverty, Mental Health, and so on).
- Target groups already have coordinating agencies that take the lead on certain issues (e.g., disability organizations) – the same could be done in PLEI.
- POVNET is a very good example of a tool that is being used to coordinate information and resources.

B. Key Themes Regarding PLEI Issues and Gaps

This section addresses the issues and gaps identified by respondents. Respondents did not specifically identify overlaps. It is possible that this may have resulted from the fact that many organizations have been affected by funding cuts and may have felt reluctant to identify anything that could be perceived as an overlap¹¹.

Common themes regarding gaps and issues, repeatedly mentioned in most of the focus groups, are identified below. The quotes selected reflect typical comments made by respondents. Where a finding reflects the view of a particular target group or region of the province, these are identified. A number of priority issues have been identified and these are discussed below. Respondents noted that it is important to improve access and to ensure that service providers and the public know what is available. There should be co-ordination so that there is one point of contact in communities for PLEI, which includes personal contact with clients. Training of intermediaries and a focus on co-ordination of funding were also identified as critical needs for improving the provision of PLEI.

Access

- Most respondents across the focus groups generally agreed there is a great deal of information available, but both service providers and clients indicated that they do not know where and how to access it. Typical comments are as follows:
 - *There is a wealth of information, but how do you find what is relevant to you?*
 - *Knowing where to go to get the information is the big issue.*
 - *How do we find out where to get the information we need?*

¹¹ We observed that while organizations did not specifically identify overlaps, many communities tend to develop their own strategies to address PLEI issues. This may result in a duplication of effort that enhanced coordination province-wide could help address.

- Most service providers across the focus groups were concerned about how current the printed and internet legal information is. They indicated that there are numerous and frequent changes in legislation and policies which are hard to track and as a result it is difficult to ensure the legal information is up-to-date. It also becomes very expensive to keep the material updated.
- Many respondents indicated that the phone systems used by governments and large agencies are intimidating, especially when clients are under stress and need legal information.
- Technology was raised as an important factor to enhanced access. But services providers and clients also raised a number of limitations to what they perceived as an increased utilization of technology to access PLEI. (See Technology section below.)
- Most respondents in rural and urban areas and across all the target groups identified language as a huge barrier to accessing PLEI. A number of different concerns were raised regarding language:
 - Legal terminology is complex and many people have difficulty in understanding the legal information.
 - There are varying degrees and levels of literacy, and there is a need to accommodate people who are functionally illiterate. With a greater emphasis placed on printed and computer-based information, many of the most disadvantaged clients are being excluded from accessing PLEI.
 - Further, where English is a second language, e.g., immigrants and refugees, PLEI is difficult to access. While some public legal information has been translated, it is most often translated only into a number of key languages (Chinese, Punjabi) and there is little or no translation occurring into Eastern European languages.
- Respondents indicated that reaching out to residents of isolated communities remains a major challenge. People in isolated communities do not have the same capacity to access PLEI. Transportation was a key barrier identified in small communities and in the North. In certain regions of the province one community houses most of the PLEI services for surrounding areas. (e.g., Nelson in the West Kootenays).
- Respondents in larger urban centres (Kelowna and Surrey) suggested the need for a storefront service to enhance accessibility to PLEI.

Individual Client Assistance

- One of the most frequently mentioned issues is the need for one-to-one support to help people navigate through PLEI products and services; that is, to assist with explaining and accessing required information. This was repeatedly mentioned by many target groups (seniors, Aboriginal, immigrants, women at-risk, low income and service providers) in both urban and rural areas. This gap was expressed in different ways:

- *We still need a person to talk to, if possible.*
- *No matter what the information, there must be a human being they will eventually go to.*
- *We need someone to help us through the maze.*
- *Clients need someone to help them navigate the system; someone to help them walk through the system.*
- *We need advocates. Too many people are falling between the cracks or they are self-advocating and they do not have sufficient information.*
- *We need trusted individuals to assist in explaining legal information.*

Lack of co-ordination

- A lack of co-ordination of PLEI services was identified by many respondents across all target groups throughout the province as a key issue to be addressed. The following are typical comments:
 - *There is a need for a central referral network.*
 - *There is a need for a co-ordinator.*
 - *There is a need for a case management process.*
 - *There is a need for one clearing house in each community.*
 - *We need a provincial data base of legal information. It would need to include what is available provincially as well as a list of resources in each community.*
 - *We need a directory of information and legal services that is kept up-to-date.*

Training

- Most service providers across the province who participated in the focus groups indicated that there is a substantial need for more training/professional development of staff in community organizations and government departments providing PLEI. It is difficult to remain current in the midst of constantly changing information.
- In a number of focus groups, respondents suggested train-the-trainer sessions as a means to reach a greater number of people in communities¹².
- Many service providers in rural and urban areas indicated that their organization or group rely on volunteers to provide services. They emphasized the need for training and co-ordination of volunteers. In small communities, respondents were concerned about a lack of volunteers.

¹² Train-the-trainer programming is directed at providing individuals and organizations with the capacity to delivery training programs to their own community without the expenses associated with bringing in professional trainers.

- A service gap mentioned by respondents largely in rural areas and among the Aboriginal community is the need for front line staff and clients to become more familiar with the court system. They indicated that it would be useful to offer orientation sessions with judges, lawyers, and court staff to increase the comfort and knowledge level of service staff.
- Some respondents in both urban and rural areas and across the various target groups indicated that the public should have more training on how to access PLEI on their own. Typical comments include:
 - *We have had to give up teaching people the skills to deal with their problems and take shortcuts. We just make the calls for them.*
 - *We need to train people on how to use the computer to access PLEI.*

Funding

- The issue of funding cuts was raised in all focus groups. Respondents indicated that many organizations are working within tight budgets and there is constant competition for funds. This is seen by many to erode an organization's ability to provide quality access to PLEI for their clients. Typical concerns raised by most respondents in urban and rural areas and across target groups include:
 - There is a lack of continuous funding. Funding is often project-based and ad-hoc and PLEI activities are funded for short periods of time. This results in fragmented service delivery.
 - There is little funding for small projects. Funding is either earmarked for operational needs or for larger projects.
 - Given that a considerable amount of PLEI material (forms, brochures, etc.) is being distributed exclusively on the Internet, the cost of printing these items from the Internet for clients is pinching tight service provider budgets even further.
 - There is limited, if any, funding for technological upgrades to equipment (computers, etc.). Many respondents indicated that this is a huge cost for small service providers running on tight budgets.
- Budget cuts have forced many agencies to lay off staff involved in PLEI. A greater number of volunteers are being used to provide PLEI. While this is seen as a cost-cutting measure, it is also recognized that use of volunteers takes time and resources to ensure adequate co-ordination and training. Many respondents felt that use of volunteers may lead to greater inconsistency in services and could contribute to government funders concluding that there is less need to provide funding for paid staff.

Uses of Technology

Focus groups with community service providers and clients also confirmed the growing importance of technology as a tool for accessing PLEI products and services. Service providers and clients indicated that they are using technology

more and more to access PLEI. A number of challenges regarding technology were repeatedly mentioned, some of which apply to both service providers and clients while others are specific to each group. These include:

- Computers are not as accessible to certain client groups such as seniors, the Aboriginal community, immigrants, and low income groups.
 - *Not everyone has access to a computer or knows how to use one.*
- Even if computers are available, not everyone has access to the internet, especially high speed internet. This applies to both clients and some smaller organizations that find it costly to have access to computers or the internet.
- Accessing legal information on-line requires knowledge of how to search for relevant information. Computer literacy was identified in most of the focus groups as a very real problem. A typical comment made was:
 - *Computers are only as good as the ability of the person accessing it.*
- Training is required for many service providers and clients to help find the right information on the internet. There should be a *pathfinder* to PLEI websites – a clearing house for information. Also, there is the issue of how best to interpret this information. Note, for example, the following typical service provider comment that reflects the complexity of accessing certain legal information on the internet:
 - *Accessing online legislation/statutes is a nightmare - even a librarian with a master's degree has a difficult time. It is unimaginable that a novice would be able to do it. And then there is the problem of understanding the statutes. There is a need for workshops to review retrieval techniques of legal documents - a 1 day session for librarian and key service providers.*
- Respondents in small towns expressed concern about client confidentiality with regard to the LawLINK Kiosks, as they are often situated in public places and lack privacy (e.g., LawLINK Kiosk is in city hall in Dawson Creek and in the Library in Terrace). *[Note: While the participants commented positively about the accessibility of PLEI resources through the Kiosk, one of the first things a participant noted was that the Kiosk would not be used because it was in an open area and lacked privacy.]*

C. Gaps in PLEI Content

Respondents were asked to identify gaps in content. Many of them were not clear on what was actually available in their communities and therefore identified many gaps in content when in fact the information may be available (in many respects this may be a further reflection of gaps in access to information – even among service providers). A number of content areas were repeatedly mentioned in most of the focus groups and appear to reflect gaps province-wide:

- Mental Health
- Human Rights, particularly as they apply to youth
- Aboriginal Law issues
- Civil law
- Information that provides an overall understanding of the Justice system
- Different aspects of family law were mentioned, but the ones most frequently identified are child custody and property issues.

Respondents did not discuss specific details in each of these areas. A number of specific gaps in content relevant to specific target populations are identified below.

D. Issues and Gaps Identified by Target Populations

The following outlines key issues and gaps identified by target populations such as the multicultural community, Aboriginal community, seniors, and youth.

Multicultural Community Service Provider Focus Group in the Lower Mainland

Respondents indicated that:

- Newcomers are bombarded with a great deal of information and they do not know how to sift through what is important or not.
- There is a lack of availability of key brochures; many are no longer being reprinted or the supply is limited, and some brochures are out-of-date.
- While respondents indicated that some PLEI products and services have been translated into such languages as French, Punjabi, Chinese, Farsi, and Spanish there are a growing number of immigrants whose languages are not represented (e.g., Eastern European, African, and Southeast Asian). In particular, multicultural workers indicated an increased need for the availability of PLEI products and services related to immigration, family and employment law in a greater variety of languages. Respondents also indicated that even when translated, it is often difficult to understand the legal terminology. It is being translated in technical terms that are not familiar to them. For example, immigration information could be translated into many more languages, using simple terminology, so that it is more readily understood.
- Cultural factors are important to consider. The term “legal” has negative connotations for some groups. It is critically important to have someone to explain the legal issues to immigrants. They need an advocate and one-to-one support.

- *If individuals are confronted with legal issues they believe they are having a bad day. They have difficulty understanding and can become paralyzed. They need help on a one-to-one basis.*

Aboriginal Community Service Provider Focus Group (held in the Lower Mainland)

Respondents indicated that:

- PLEI services in general to the Aboriginal community are inadequate. Because Aboriginal people are over-represented in the justice system, in the courts and in the prisons, extraordinary measures should be taken to remedy this situation and special attention to the Aboriginal community is required.
- It is not sufficient to have brochures available. In many cases printed material is not read because of a high level of illiteracy. Legal issues are tied to high emotions, and this makes it difficult to understand these issues when people are under stress. What is required is one-to-one service to assist people and to act as advocates, or just to be supportive companions.
- Those in the prison system need information to prepare them for when they are released.
- Parents need information on their legal rights when their children are apprehended. Parents are intimidated by the courts and therefore they need simple information on the court process. Most significantly, they need an advocate or companion who can support them.
- There is a need to clarify criminal and civil law as it pertains to residential school survivors.
- There is a need to clarify which federal and provincial laws apply to the Aboriginal community.

Seniors' Focus Group (held in the Lower Mainland)

This focus group involved seniors who are providing information and referral services to other seniors. Respondents indicated that:

- Many seniors find PLEI information very confusing. Many of the seniors who call the information and referral service for seniors do not have ready access to or knowledge of how to use computers and are often confused by the phone system.
- Given the above, it is critical for seniors to have someone available to help *“walk them through the maze of information.”*
- Increasingly, volunteers are expected to provide information and support to seniors. There are great expectations put on volunteers and they require more training and support for their own efforts. Also, it should be

recognized that there is a limit on what volunteers can be expected to do when it comes to PLEI.

- A major gap in PLEI for seniors relates to patients' rights in care facilities and more information on the rights of seniors with mental health problems.

Youth – Focus group of At-Risk Youth (held in the Lower Mainland)

Respondents indicated that:

- They feel “*the law is used against us instead of for us.*” Youth who participated in the focus group indicated that youth need to know how to protect themselves through the law and how the law can help them. Overall they want to know what their rights are as youth. More specifically, they identified the following key gaps in PLEI relating to youth:
 - What rights do police have to search youth?
 - What sexual activities are allowed and what is a crime?
 - What is the law regarding crossing the border if you have committed an offence?
 - What are the employment laws relating to youth?
 - Simple information on the Young offenders Act is required.
 - Legal information relating to financial matters is required such as: accumulated debt and obligations to pay back; if you commit fraud, how does that affect your ability to obtain credit?
 - Information on hate crimes is important for youth.
 - Information on the rights of Youth in Care should be more widely distributed.
- Youth can play an important role in reaching out and educating other youth on legal issues.
- The youth identified, through their experience, a number of effective ways to reach youth:
 - Distributing information through youth shelters and youth organizations.
 - Providing education in the schools but starting at an early age in elementary schools and adding new information each year.
 - Making greater use of posters
 - *Pamphlets don't really work for us – posters are effective – if they are good, we look at them and remember them.*
 - Advertising on transit shelters, in washrooms of various facilities where youth gather, and on the radio. Youth listen to certain radio stations e.g., Z95; 101.1 Classic Rock.
 - Developing videos for youth by the youth themselves.

Poverty Service Providers – Focus group (held in the Lower Mainland)

Respondents suggested that with regard to poverty issues (as well as other PLEI), it would be beneficial to have two sets of information – one for clients that is very simple and directs them to where they can obtain assistance, and one for service providers.

Outlined below are some of the PLEI needs of service providers:

- Service providers need access to an up-to-date clearing house of information so that they are aware of what information is available and where to find it.
- Front-line workers are being asked to absorb more and more information, and thus find they are spreading themselves too thin. The client-base is increasing exponentially. They require sufficient knowledge of PLEI to be able to make informed referrals.
- Service providers are dealing with the most at-risk clients, who face health problems, addiction, mental health issues, and homelessness and there is a need for PLEI knowledge specifically relevant to these groups.
- There is an expectation that service providers are aware of and keep up on changing legislation and how this affects their clients. There is a real problem of "quality control" with organizations of various capabilities interpreting legislative changes.
- Lack of resources is a very real concern for service providers. Providers used to produce more materials and focus on specific issues. They would create/customize their own documents that describe where to get help, access to justice clinics, self-advocacy, courthouse access, etc. However, this has been drastically reduced because of a lack of funding.
- Individual advocacy activities have also been downsized.
- Less and less time is available to build client capacity and knowledge of PLEI.
- There is a need for more information in plain language, not only for service providers but for clients as more and more clients have to advocate for themselves.
- Service providers are filling the gaps with brochures or referring clients to the internet instead of providing one-to-one support. People who used to be there to help are not there anymore. Clients often have to go out to five or six agencies before they find someone who can help.

E. Mechanisms for Ongoing Needs Identification

Respondents in Phase 2 were also asked what mechanisms they felt would be most effective in ongoing identification of PLEI needs. The following summarizes the key feedback:

- It would be important to work through a lead group/organization in the community that could obtain input from others. *Many respondents indicated that unless an ongoing mechanism involves some consultation with key groups once a year and is co-ordinated at local levels, it will not provide effective results.* Organizations are bombarded with emails and an email survey alone will not be effective.
- Organizations will need to clearly understand why they are being asked to provide information, how the information will be used, and how it might benefit their organizations and clients. A process of understanding and buy-in takes time and should be co-ordinated.
- Many respondents indicated that they would complete a survey, but they emphasized that it must be very simple, with a clear explanation as to the purpose of the survey. It should be administered only once a year. In addition, it should not be assumed that all service providers/organizations have email capability and a mixed format should be used including email, mail and fax.
- The questions should not only be distributed on a geographical basis, but should address target group populations including: youth, seniors, multicultural community, Aboriginal community and poverty groups.
- Bring together PLEI funders on a regular basis to identify what has been funded and what requests have not been supported.
- Some respondents expressed reluctance in identifying priorities because they fear funding may get shifted from other areas and cause additional gaps. They do not want to be put in a position where they would be asked to choose one priority over another.
- A number of respondents suggested that a survey tool could be supplemented by a process of selected consultation sessions that address particular issues identified through the survey process.
- Most respondents emphasized the importance of being able to see the results of the survey and they want to be informed about the actions which have occurred based on their input. Typical comments include:
 - *I'd want to know something is coming of it. If nothing ever changes, why would I do it over and over?*
 - *But who will benefit from this? Will benefits come back to the community?*
 - *We need to see the results on a regional or local basis, so we can collaborate more with each other.*
 - *We need to collaborate and come together to address issues.*

F. Electronic Survey Findings

The electronic survey, designed as a pilot version of the proposed NAT, was distributed to individuals who were unable to attend focus groups sessions in the communities we visited between July and October, 2004. As well, it was advertised to visitors to the POVNET site. The survey was to serve two purposes. First, it would allow the team to expand the scope of the study to include those who could not participate through the focus groups. Second, it would allow the consultant team to test the viability of using this medium to survey service providers throughout the province. Outlined below are the survey results as well as the respondents' opinions on the instrument itself. Based on the latter, we have revised the NAT and believe it is now ready for large-scale distribution. (See Appendix 6 for Revised NAT.)

Note: During the course of the study it was determined, after significant consultation with the Working Group, that there needed to be more focus placed on school-based legal education. To address this a second survey was conducted with school based educators, principals and counsellors (between November 26 and December 10, 2004) in order to add an additional dimension to the results. Due to the modified survey tool (tailored to educators) we have decided to keep the results separate. These results are documented beginning on page 42 of this report.

Results from the Survey (Conducted July-October, 2004)

There were 61 email invitations sent out to those unable to participate in the focus groups and who indicated they would be interested in completing a survey online¹³. Twenty-six of these surveys were completed. An overview of the geographic distribution of the survey respondents indicates that:

- 12 respondents were from the Lower Mainland
- 7 respondents from Vancouver Island
- 2 respondents from the Thompson-Okanagan
- 4 respondents from the Kootenays
- 1 respondent from the North

With this relatively low number of respondents, the survey cannot be assumed to represent the “big picture” of the PLEI gaps and services in the province. However, in that these findings echo those from the intensive qualitative survey conducted through the individual interviews and focus groups, we believe the electronic survey results are quite sound. (Results are outlined below.)

This survey form also adds value to our findings on the types of data that could be collected and analyzed once the full NAT is implemented. Some examples of these data include:

¹³ An invitation was also sent out to POVNET list subscribers asking them to fill out the survey.

- Type of PLEI assistance required, cross-referenced by community
- Type of PLEI services offered, cross-referenced by community
- Number of organizations that develop their own material, cross-referenced by type of PLEI offered

Below is a basic descriptive table drawn from the survey data collected for this study. It identifies the number of organizations that indicated they provide some level of service in a particular area of law as well as the number of organizations that specifically indicated what those services entailed. As well, the table indicates how a number of organizations develop their own materials in various areas of PLEI. Again, this type of information could be used quite effectively in the future with a much greater sample size and a number of different cross-tabulations and correlations could be provided: e.g., community comparisons, target group comparisons, etc.

Table 1: Number of Organizations Providing Services in Each Type of Law

Sample size = 26 organizations responded to the survey

Type of Law	Respondents That Provide Service in this Area	Handouts	Workshops	Training	Website	Referrals	Advocacy	1 to 1 Assistance	Support Group	Develop Own Materials
Aboriginal	5	3	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0
Compensation/Benefits	18	11	4	1	4	1	1	2	0	2
Consumer/Debt	8	7	0	2	2	2	1	0	0	0
Contract	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Criminal	7	5	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1
Disability	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Employment	9	6	5	3	3	1	0	1	0	3
Family	12	10	4	1	2	2	1	1	1	6
Lesbian/Gay/Transgendered*	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Housing	11	9	5	3	4	1	2	1	0	6
Human Rights*	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Immigration	4	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Poverty*	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Seniors	2	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Welfare	12	11	5	2	3	1	2	4	0	7
Wills/Estates	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Youth	3	3	3	2	0	1	0	2	0	1

*These types of law were added by survey participants in the “other” column. They have been added into the final NAT to supplement the initial list developed by the PLEI Working Group and the team.

Findings from the Survey (Conducted July-October, 2004)

In the following section we look at the other topics covered in the draft needs assessment survey. These topics include: status of services, partnerships, training, technology, materials, other assistance, and respondents' views on the survey itself.

Service Status:

Only three agencies indicated that they had to discontinue services during the past year. One agency had to discontinue all in-person client support (including: client representation, drop-in services, free workshops, etc), one dropped its CPP services because of lack of demand, and another stopped providing pamphlets on Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender rights because they did not have the funding to reprint.

On the other hand, eleven agencies indicated that they had added services. These services include:

- Immigration sponsorship debt (mentioned twice) –“*Government is now collecting debt for sponsored immigrants who collected welfare while their sponsorship period was still active.*”
- New website links
- Student Loan issues
- Youth housing.
- Aboriginal Poverty Workshop
- Homelessness Protection Workers
- Translation of a Tenant Survival Guide
- Residential Tenancy Act workshops throughout BC
- Email-based program called “Ask an advocate”
- Province-wide employment workshops (for employers and service providers)

The service or content gaps identified by survey participants do not differ greatly from the themes mentioned by other participants in Phase 1 and Phase 2 of this project. Some major themes include:

- Lack of information for clients and service providers about what PLEI is available.
- Structural barriers (including not enough service providers, lack of translated material, lack of access to computers).
- Clients having personal multiple barriers to service use (mental health issues, addiction, unstable housing, etc.).

- Lack of resources (fewer advocates, lack of time, fewer services, fewer service providers expanding their services to meet a need, increasing caseload).
- Situational barriers to service provision (including affordable office space, poor equipment).

When asked about specific assistance that their organization may require, participants had a number of interesting responses. We have included the direct quotes, in italics, under a number of headings relating to assistance with partnership development, training, technology usage, materials and other. These responses reflect similar views participants had during the focus groups, but the consulting team felt it was important to include all replies in order to indicate the level of detail that can be derived from the NAT.

Developing Partnerships with Other PLEI Organizations:

- *Many of the workshops I delivered were brokered by the People's Law School. This has saved me a lot of time and energy because all I had to do was show up at the appointed time and place and deliver the workshop. I understand the People's Law School has lost some funding and no longer has a co-ordinator who can do this valuable work.*
- *Networking of groups/agencies around PLEI.*
- *A database of material that could be shared. Partnerships to plan and hold larger workshops and share costs.*
- *Additional funding for travel cost etc. to partner with organizations in different areas to provide PLEI for tenants.*
- *Cost and resource sharing of workshops and promotional efforts. Structured sessions with client groups, e.g., regular booking.*

Training:

- *Training for staff (advocate) to understand how to communicate with learning disabled and mentally challenged individuals; and trained to navigate the law, in particular Administrative Law and Family Law.*
- *Training for Family Justice Counsellors/Police/outreach and frontline workers/social workers on the service needs of men and how to relate to them.*
- *Training in legal advocacy for volunteers who provide peer support in the transgender community would be very helpful. Clients have, in the past, attended workshops hosted by other organizations and have reported that they are too general to address the specific issues of concern to the transgender community. Staff would benefit from training on Aboriginal law especially relating to health benefits and welfare.*
- *Train staff in public legal research.*

- *Workshops for staff and clients to attend so that we are well-informed or I can be more helpful to clients about what is out there and how to access it.*
- *Paralegal training.*
- *Training opportunities that are local and affordable to non-profits.*
- *Training in facilitation and workshop planning.*
- *Training for existing and new staff related to Family Law, Benefits and Housing rights. Workshops about rights and options for those individuals seeking benefits from MHR.*
- *Training of staff speaking other languages is important. However, it is very difficult to find volunteers or settlement workers for certain languages.*
- *Annual training of intake, referral staff so as to ensure they are aware of different programs, services, etc. offered on province wide basis. Or centralized listings of programs and services provided by region or community.*

Computer and Internet Usage:

- *Computers and internet access are required for staff; networking and keeping updated with changes in legislation.*
- *We have CAP (community access program) computers but the funding is uncertain and equipment and programs gets outdated fast-- perhaps some ways to support what we have (i.e., enhancement funds to assist in staffing or upgrades, good web sites etc.)*
- *Any funding support for internet access or technology would be appreciated.*
- *We definitely require new computers and we need high speed internet. Right now we are running equivalent computers that are about 10 years old or so and are on a dial up internet hook-up.*
- *Technology is great, but many of my clients are not computer capable or have literacy or learning disability issues that prevent them from benefiting from technology.*
- *New computers, audio video equipment (i.e. power point projector).*
- *New computers (including a laptop).*

Materials:

- *People need material translated in the language they speak, read or write.*
- *Perhaps some materials in the main languages spoken by newcomers: Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Punjabi.*
- *Family Law, Administrative Law updates, and easy access to case law.*
- *We do have Legal Services Society and anti-poverty manuals, but with all the changes that have taken place many of these are out of date. An online*

PLEI site with easily updated pages (rather than a new edition of a printed manual) would be very helpful.

- *Like to have information to give out or read or interpret for clients.*
- *We have accessed some material from other provinces on youth justice (CLEO¹⁴ materials from Ontario are awesome) but it would be good to have BC-specific resources.*
- *Shared handouts etc.*

Other Assistance To Enhance PLEI Provision:

- *Financial assistance so that we can continue to develop and distribute up-to-date informational materials for LGTB communities, and offer legal seminars on topical legal issues.*
- *Support network, and stress management for staff.*
- *Regular person to come and make sure our info is up to date provide routine support not always as a special project- find ways to enhance the local services so may need a case-by-case response not a cookie cutter approach.*
- *Funds for collections of materials.*
- *Funding for our services.*
- *It is also important that Boards of Societies take a more accountable role and ensure that executive directors take into consideration not only the multi-ethnic face of the Lower Mainland, but also seniors, people with disabilities and so on when planning delivering and implementing programs. I believe assessments of programs together with community consultation are important because programs need to change accordingly. Otherwise there is no way for an organization to know whether or not their services are meeting their goals.*
- *Money to hire advocates/support workers and supervisor.*
- *Access to distribution channels for pamphlets, informational materials.*
- *On-site interpreters.*

Respondents' Opinions of the Survey

Respondents were also asked at the conclusion of the survey to assess three things about the NAT:

1. The perceived usefulness of the questionnaire,
2. If they found it simple to fill out, and
3. Whether it is something they would complete on a regular basis.

¹⁴ Community Legal Education Ontario

The intent was to determine the feasibility of using this format for ongoing needs assessment. As well, these assessment questions (or ones similar to them) could be used to provide ongoing evaluation of the NAT.

Of the 26 respondents, 18 felt that a survey of this type would be useful, five believed it would not be useful, and three did not respond. Of those who did not feel it would be useful, two believed that it may be useful if it was done every two or three years, and one respondent indicated that the major gaps are known and there really does not seem to be any reason to research them further. Of those 18 who felt a tool of this nature would be useful, the associated comments indicated that:

- The research should be used to assist groups most in need.
- It would help identify trends and needs from across different types of law and throughout the province.
- It may raise awareness of what is available and what is not, causing funders to re-assess their plans.
- It would help identify community-specific resources.
- It will be valuable if the needs are responded to and changes made.

Of the 26 respondents, 22 felt that the survey was easy to complete, three felt it was not, and one did not respond. Those respondents who indicated that the survey was easy to fill out did, however, have useful elaborations on their assessment of it. These included:

- Including some “types of law” into the “other” category disturbed some respondents.
- Many believed it was easy to fill out, with clear questions which were simple to read on the computer; however, one respondent indicated that it did not fit on her screen.
- Some clarification of specific terminology may be required (it may be useful to include a glossary of terms – such as the definitions of the areas of law).

Of those who did not think it was easy to complete, one did not understand that they could indicate more than one type of law in Question 1 (our revised NAT addresses this issue); one indicated that their organization did not provide legal education; and the other indicated that it was not clear who should fill out the survey.

Of the 26 respondents, 17 felt that they would be likely to fill out a survey of this nature annually, four did not, and three did not respond. Of those who did not feel an annual survey was appropriate, one believed that yearly was too often, one did not see the benefit in the survey, one did not think they could comment and the other did not provide any input.

The groups that did respond positively to an annual survey emphasized the importance of having the results published and that funders should follow through on the input they receive. Finally, these respondents said that they find a lot of value in seeing what other groups are doing throughout the Province.

Results from Supplementary Survey (conducted Nov. 26 – Dec. 10, 2004)

In order to gain more information about PLEI work in the school system, a supplementary survey was conducted by the consulting team between November 26 and December 10, 2004. Over 300 email invitations sent out to public school educators asking if they would complete an online survey. Thirty-eight of these surveys were completed. The responses came in from the following regions:

- 23 Lower Mainland
- 2 Vancouver Island
- 5 Thompson-Okanagan
- 1 Kootenays
- 7 Northern BC

The following table sets out the responses received from the schools that filled out the online survey. It shows the areas of law they teach as well as the format used to convey the information.

**Table 2: Number of Schools Providing Education in Each Type of Law
Supplementary Survey of PLEI in Public Schools (Conducted November 26 – December 10, 2004)**

Sample size = 38 educators (teachers, principals, or counsellors) responded to the survey

Type of Law	Respondents That Provide Service in this Area	Print	Classroom	Guest Lecturers	Theatre	Court Visits	Web	Videos	Dial-a-Law	Develop Own Materials
Aboriginal	9	7	8	7	1	1	0	0	0	0
Consumer/Debt	5	4	3	2	0	1	0	0	0	1
Contract	13	12	12	2	4	2	1	0	0	3
Criminal	19	13	12	12	12	12	1	1	1	13
Disability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Employment	5	5	5	2	0	0	0	0	0	3
Ethics*	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Family	11	9	9	4	5	2	1	0	0	3
Housing	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Human Rights*	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Immigration	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
International Law	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Legal System	29	25	23	14	20	12	1	2	1	13
Welfare	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Wills/Estates	3	3	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Youth	22	14	17	10	11	7	1	0	1	5

*These types of law were added by survey participants in the “other” column. They have been added into the final NAT to supplement the initial list developed by the PLEI Working Group and the team.

Findings from the Supplementary Survey (Conducted November 26 – December 10, 2004)

In the following section we look at the other topics covered in the draft needs assessment survey. These topics include: status of services, partnerships, training, technology, materials, other assistance, and respondents' views on the survey itself.

Service Status:

Only two respondents indicated that their schools were discontinuing law education in particular areas: one in family law and the other in court visits.

On the other hand, eight respondents noted that their schools were adding to their law curriculum. These include:

- *Judicial Independence Lessons -- Judge visits to the classroom.*
- *Shoplifting Prevention Program for women & youth.*
- *Aboriginal Material, Treaties, Supreme Court of Canada Decisions.*
- *Students use print-based materials to complete LAW 12 and receive credits toward their graduation.*
- *Additional Justice Theatre events to support Social Responsibility Goals.*
- *Posters; guest speakers addressing issues such as aboriginal law, and Judicial Independence.*
- *Justice Theatre mock trial presentations.*
- *School focus on social responsibility means increased education around bullying, responsible actions, proactive teaching of coping strategies. Have DARE program, Friends program, Roots of Empathy program.*

The service or content gaps identified by survey participants do not differ greatly from the themes mentioned by other participants in Phase 1 and Phase 2 of this project. Some major themes include:

- Ability to continue to be updated on legal changes.
- Pay, lunch, transportation costs, photocopying, etc.
- Services to remote communities. *We have limited access to guest speakers - lawyers, legal aid workers, even RCMP officers. The students need to hear the experts in the field - it allows them an opportunity to have their questions heard.*
- Budgets have been severely cut. *I have NO budget to purchase any new material.*
- Language barriers.
- Convenient access to courts.
- General knowledge of the law.....plain language material.

- Up-to-date information on specific areas of the law: Civil & Tort law, Contract / Consumer Debt, Employment law - Employment Standards Act specifics, re: youth BC and Workers Compensation - related to youth BC.
- Workshops on issues such as vandalism, driving under the influence, possession of drugs, stealing cars, and gangs.

Asked about specific assistance that their organization may require, participants had a number of interesting responses. We have included the direct quotes, in italics, under a number of headings relating to assistance with partnership development, training, technology usage, materials and other.

Developing Partnerships with Other PLEI Organizations:

- *We already partner with Law courts Education and Legal Services but would like to expand.*
- *Require additional funding from Ministry of Education or other sources so Law teachers can purchase badly needed resources.*
- *More community education on family law, custody, access etc.*
- *Workshops for Law 12 teachers offering current topics.*
- *Some sort of a bulletin board service / consulting group on-line would be useful.*
- *Bulletin or fact sheet - easily read by students or a short video.*
- *More interactive sessions like the Justice Theatre. Students learn by being involved so any programs in which they can be involved in using and understanding the law making process in our country.*
- *Lawyers establishing a presence within our community - as buddies.*
- *Continuing liaisons with law enforcement officers.*
- *More information required regarding PLEI (i.e., what are the possibilities?)*

Training:

- *Training to staff and volunteers on the Justice system Process.*
- *Professional Development for Law 12 teachers.*
- *A summer institute on law-related issues for teachers would be very helpful. The training we received from the Law Courts Education Society on the new Youth Justice Act was very helpful.*
- *The Justice Theatre presentations have been fantastic...exactly what is needed...great support material.*
- *Work shops / conferences for myself on the current issues in most legal areas. Things seem to be changing so quickly, it is hard to keep up.*
- *Administration training to understand the Youth Offenders Act and Canadian Constitution.*

Computer and Internet Usage:

- *Access to broadband with lab.*
- *Use computer and internet to research.*
- *New DVDs or videos on legal matters. Many of ours are dated.*
- *The computers in my school often don't work. We have limited lab space so it is difficult to have a whole class access the internet at the same time.*
- *Continue with internet access...web pages etc ...*
- *New, updated videos on law topics, many videos are outdated.*
- *Availability of on-line access is limited. There is a central lab in our school, but it is often booked and individual computers are often vandalized."*
- *An interactive program that models the court system and encourages students to make decisions in the context of creating public well-being.*
- *Our lab has only 15 computers, so students have to share one for two students. This inhibits ability to research anything.*
- *Website with info for schools...Staff and students!*

Materials:

- *Criminal Code of Canada Cases on DVD.*
- *Continue developing resources that teachers can use in the classroom. But keep in mind we are under severe budget restraints that have been imposed on us by the present Liberal regime in Victoria.*
- *More video topics.*
- *Specific & up-to-date video resources are in short supply.*
- *Student-friendly readings and activity sheets.*
- *Ideas for field trips.*
- *These need to be connected to the learning outcomes as outlined by the Ministry of Education and then they need to be accessible to educators.*

Other Assistance To Enhance PLEI Provision:

- *Visits to local schools on Professional Development Days. In-service for teachers.*
- *Lobby the provincial government to increase funding so Law teachers can purchase/ get access to required resources.*
- *Up to date texts?*
- *A British Columbia version of "Law Now" including some sort of on-line reference for looking up precedent setting cases.*

- *We occasionally provide legal information to our Parent Advisory Committee, could be youth law, family law.*

Respondents' Opinions of the Survey

Respondents were also asked at the conclusion of the survey to assess three things about the NAT:

- The perceived usefulness of the questionnaire.
- If they found it simple to fill out.
- Whether it is something they would complete on a regular basis.

Of the 38 respondents, 23 felt that a survey of this type would be useful, seven believed it would not be useful, and eight did not respond. Of those who did not feel it would be useful, one indicated that they prefer giving feedback directly to Law Courts Education staff, one indicated that a survey every 3 to 5 years would be more appropriate, and two indicated that the survey was not appropriate for elementary schools. Three respondents did not provide specific comments. Of those 23 who felt a tool of this nature would be useful, the associated comments indicated that:

- The information needs to have a purpose.
- The survey would allow information to be shared throughout the Province.
- The survey results are important to keep the government aware of the impacts of funding cuts.
- It is important to keep educators aware of what is “out there”.
- It may assist with curriculum decisions.
- It could be useful if incorporated into year end reviews.

Of the 38 respondents, 22 felt that the survey was easy to complete, ten felt it was not, and six did not respond. Those respondents who indicated that the survey was not easy to fill indicated that:

- They did not feel that the questions were necessarily appropriate to their school setting.
- Wording may need to be clarified.
- Survey too long.
- Not sure about what is being evaluated. Need to further explain purpose.
- May not be geared towards “in-classroom” educators – maybe counsellors or principals.

Of the 38 respondents, 22 stated that they would be prepared to fill out a survey of this nature annually, 12 would not, and four did not respond. Of those who did not feel an annual survey was appropriate, the most common response was that they did not believe that curriculum would change annually.

The inference here was that, different from the service providers, educators believe that their input relates primarily to the delivery of Law-Related Education (specifically school curriculum) and that there would not be a need for annual input.

Conclusion:

Between the two surveys the consulting team received 64 responses. These surveys provide two, quite different, perspectives on the issue of the provision of PLEI:

- The views from front-line workers dealing with the public on a daily basis reflect that fact that they are often forced to react immediately to the legal concerns their clientele.
- The views of school educators whose efforts are generally more “pro-active” in nature.

But, interestingly, there were many common themes such as:

- Many respondents to both surveys recognize that the cuts to LSS have had an impact on communities – especially rural communities.
- Many respondents acknowledged the assistance of PLEI resources such as LSS, People’s Law School, Law Courts Education and Dial-a-Law.
- The issue of funding was mentioned by some respondents in both surveys – ensuring there are adequate and up-to-date resources (including computers, print resources, etc.) for those.
- Many respondents (including teachers and agency staff members) mentioned the need for professional development and training as something that is necessary to stay current.
- Some respondents mentioned difficulty in accessing current information. While many of those respondents acknowledged that up-to-date information is out there, both teachers and service provider staff noted that their time is very limited and that they have difficulty staying current. As well, they say it is sometimes difficult to find the information they need quickly.
- Maintaining up-to-date technology is something that a number of respondents to both surveys noted was very important.

It is noteworthy that these themes are also very congruent with the responses heard in the interviews for Phase 1 and the focus groups from Phase 2, even though the opportunity to respond in a survey format tends to be much more restricted due to the lack of interactivity with the interviewer or other respondents.

The Revised Needs Assessment Tool (NAT)

The online survey served two purposes for this project. First, it allowed the team to collect information from people who were unable to attend focus groups. Second, it allowed the team to test a ‘pilot’ of the NAT. After analyzing the results of the focus groups (where we asked participants about what a tool could look like and how it could be implemented) and the direct input of online survey participants, the team made some fairly significant structural changes to the Tool.

1. **User profile information:** To make the Tool as valuable as possible, some participants felt it would be useful to collect additional information from users. They saw it as an opportunity to ensure that agencies had full access to PLEI services available to them. As well, some believed that it was important to see if the information collected could be used to enhance a PLEI database of services. Most important, however, many people believed that it was essential to know that the input they provided was being used and one of the best ways to do this would be to release a PLEI Working Group planning document, perhaps as part of annual reporting.
2. Some participants felt that Question 1 (which asked participants to describe the PLEI products and services they provided - broken into sub-parts for each type of law) was confusing. As well, the previous format of Question 1 meant that important areas of the law could be missed (or relegated to the “other” column). The new format for Question 1 is much clearer and incorporates a more representative number of ‘types of law’. As well, new categories can be added without significantly increasing the size of the document.
3. The Evaluation section of the document has been modified slightly to better reflect the ongoing assessment of the Tool. In the initial version of the questionnaire, the consulting team wanted to evaluate the simplicity of the format as well as the perceived effectiveness. In the final version the question related to “ease of use” has been removed.

Appendix 7 provides a brief strategy for the PLEI Working Group to implement the NAT on an annual basis including:

- Communication with agencies and schools to complete the survey
- Data collection process
- Analyzing data
- Reporting results
- Costs

V. Conclusions and Lessons Learned

A number of important conclusions and lessons learned from this project help to lay the foundation for the priority recommendations identified in the next section of this report.

Co-ordinated Approach

There is strong agreement on the need for a co-ordinated approach to the planning, funding and delivery of PLEI. Respondents did not always provide clear direction on how this could be achieved, but a number of essential ingredients were identified in the consultation process. For example:

- Co-ordination is required at the provincial level and clear linkages to co-ordinating mechanisms at the regional and local levels need to be established.
- Service providers want to be informed and consulted and a number of different methods will need to be employed to ensure that this is achieved effectively. We have learned from this study that it is a complex and time-consuming task to access stakeholders across the province and ensuring their participation is a further challenge.

Awareness of Current Resources

While there are a number of gaps in PLEI content, and these should be addressed as resources are available, one of the greatest challenges is ensuring that service providers and the public are aware of what already exists and how to access it. A number of different methods of achieving this are outlined in the report and in the recommended actions.

Greater Use of Media To Disseminate PLEI

A major strategy to improve access to PLEI is greater use of the media. Respondents from a wide range of sectors, including youth, seniors, the immigrant community, Aboriginal community, and the general public across the province indicated that media is an effective vehicle to reach many diverse groups and isolated individuals. As mentioned earlier, some groups did use local media and highly recommend it to their peers. As well, one agency used the 'Val-Pak' coupon program (delivered to every home in the community) to get information out to women in violent relationships.

Computers and the Internet

Computers and the Internet have an important role to play in making PLEI accessible so service providers throughout the province. It will become increasingly important for clients but its limitations must be recognized for at-risk clients who during a crisis may require more one-to-one support.

One common theme that arose throughout the discussions is that it is essential for service providers to have the tools, training, and time to assist clients.

Funding

Funding of PLEI remains a critical issue and concerted efforts should be made to facilitate joint planning, and the identification of new sources of funding to enhance content and effectively address service delivery.

Development and Distribution of PLEI

Many respondents were uneasy about the status of PLEI organizations and are unclear how the development and distribution of PLEI will continue to be coordinated. As a result, processes like a NAT can be met with scepticism and, in some cases, resistance to participating.¹⁵ While we as consultants met with consistent co-operation, open communication and strategies for stakeholder involvement in the longer term must address this potential resistance in a constructive manner to ensure effective and efficient PLEI.

Accessing Service Providers

Accessing service providers is an important issue. Setting up focus groups and ensuring attendance is a time-consuming and resource-intensive endeavour. The NAT is likely to be a more cost-effective method of measuring input. The tool, however, will need to be supplemented with a process that utilizes *lead organizations* in communities to reach out and ensure input from a wider group of stakeholders. This would help ensure that trends revealed by the survey are fully understood and that emerging PLEI content and service needs are identified early.

Providing Results to Communities

Service providers were adamant that if they were going to provide information on a regular basis they would need to see results. These results could take the form of a PLEI Working Group “update” document made available on an annual basis. More importantly, for respondents, they want to see the implementation of some of the suggestions/needs identified by participants when they fill out the NAT.

NAT as a Mapping and Planning Tool

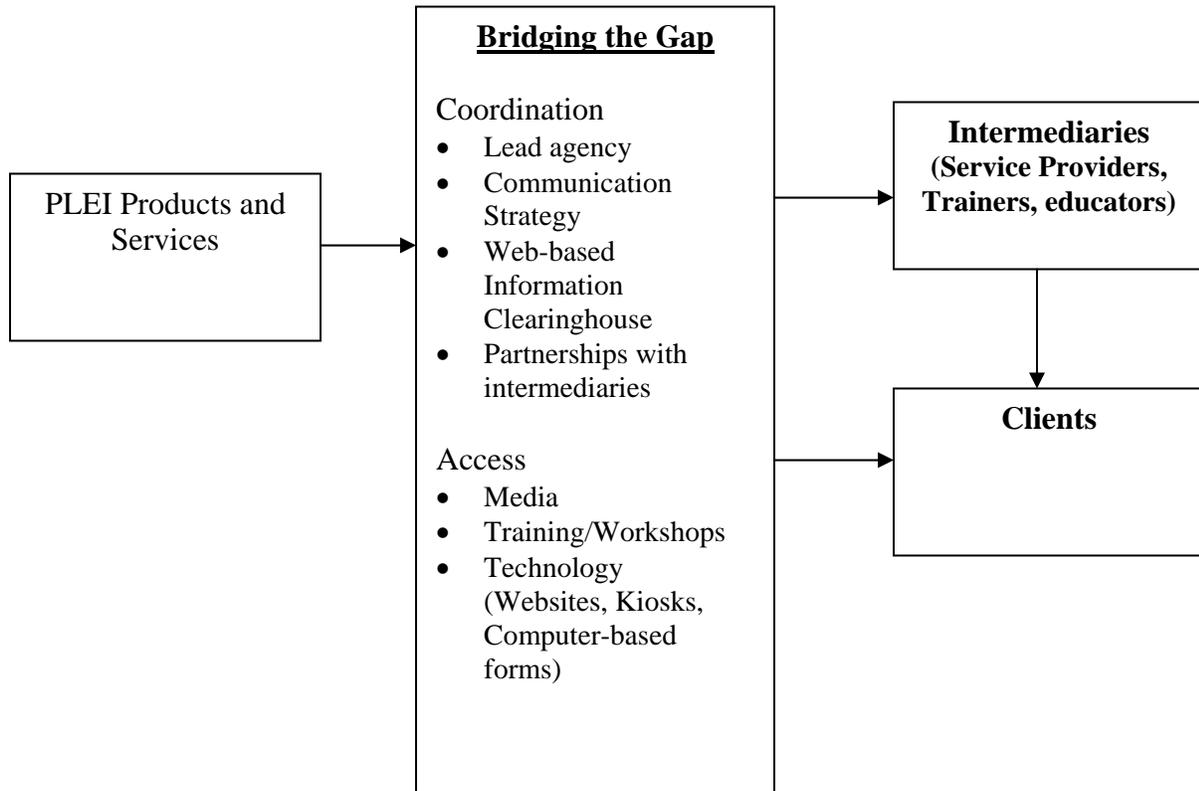
The NAT also serves an effective mechanism for collecting up-to-date contact information and a more accurate overview of PLEI products and services currently provided. This would facilitate more accurate mapping of PLEI services and would be critical for future planning and evaluation.

In sum, there were varying degree of awareness among service provides and clients of what PLEI products and services were actually available and how to easily access the information in a timely fashion. The first priority for the PLEI Working Group is to ensure that there is an increased awareness and coordination of existing PLEI services and products and enhancing access to these. This would then enable a more effective

¹⁵ Some focus group and survey participants felt that these types of exercises had been carried out in the past with little or no useful results.

response to the identified PLEI gaps and future planning. A number of co-ordination and access strategies addressed in this report are illustrated in the diagram below and are further identified in the recommendation.

Figure 2: Co-ordination and Access Strategies



VI. Recommendations

Priority Recommendations

The following recommended actions have been identified in order of priority and sequence. It is believed that a number of actions need to take place before a system of ongoing needs assessment can be implemented and be effective.

1. Formalize role of the PLEI Working Group

The PLEI Working Group, to be effective, should clarify its mandate and authority and formalize its role as a co-ordinating body for planning, development and delivery of PLEI in the province. This could involve creating a formal partnership among the organizations or even creating a separate entity of which all Working Group participants are contributing members.

Possible Action Items:

- Develop a strategic action plan - include funders and community stakeholders in the planning process.
- Develop a budget and identify potential funding sources.

2. Identify a lead PLEI organization(s) throughout the province

Identify a lead PLEI organization(s) in each region of the province that will link with the “formalized” PLEI Working Group and that can connect with key PLEI contacts in their region. This would, most likely, be an existing agency with extensive contacts throughout the region; an organization that has developed a level of trust with other agencies and clients.

Possible Action Items:

- Identify lead organizations throughout the Province. These lead organizations could be a geographically-based group or a particular group/organization within a specified target population, e.g., seniors, youth, to co-ordinate PLEI for their designated audiences.
- Identify roles and responsibilities of lead organizations – (e.g., lead organization will be able to play a key role in ongoing needs identification. See recommendation section on On-going Mechanism for Need Identification.)
- Determine budget requirements to compensate lead organizations for time, travel, and administration.

3. Develop a communication protocol

Ensure that the mandate and work of the PLEI Working group are clearly communicated on an ongoing basis to all relevant groups throughout the province.

Possible Action Steps:

- Develop and maintain a comprehensive and up-to-date contact list, making use of the PLEI Working Group and lead organizations to assist. As detailed earlier, the contact information for service providers can change quite often. The information collected on the NAT will help maintain this contact list.
- Develop a PLEI Working Group communication strategy. For the Working Group to be successful it is essential that the message gets out to service providers and clients in a co-ordinated manner. This communication strategy could include an annual update on results and feedback on input provided by stakeholders in the Needs Assessment Survey.

4. Develop strategies for co-ordinating the development and distribution of PLEI information

Priority should be given to implementing a number of strategies to enhance co-ordination of development and distribution of PLEI information:

Possible Action Steps:

- Develop a web-based clearing house to identify what PLEI is available and where to access it. This could entail building on an existing site or create a stand alone entity. This could link to the proposed NAT and link to order forms for print-based PLEI publications.¹⁶
- Through lead organizations, work with communities that identify the need for one-stop access for PLEI. Suggestions made include housing these in the Public Library or the office of the local Government Agent.
- Formalize partnership arrangements with key intermediaries to strengthen their role in supporting PLEI. Such groups could include: schools, libraries (Public and BC Courthouse), community centres, neighbourhood houses, multi-cultural organizations, Aboriginal community groups, seniors' organizations, youth groups, and disability organizations. These groups would be provided with up-to-date

¹⁶ One-stop access on the web requires a certain level of co-ordination and co-operation by all participants. There would likely be the need to appoint a lead agency that would host and update the website as well as identify and address the short and long term costs of the operation in conjunction with the other partner agencies.

information, training (train-the-trainer), workshops, and support to carry out PLEI activities in their communities and/or with their target audiences.

5. Identify strategies to enhance access to PLEI

Focus on a number of key strategies that will enhance access to PLEI province-wide.

Priority should be given to the following possible action items:

- **Enhance use of the Media**
Make greater use of radio, television, community newspapers, videos and ethnic media to disseminate and educate the public on legal issues.
- **Increase Capacity of Intermediaries**
Strengthen the capacity of community-based intermediaries to provide direct, in-person, assistance to at-risk groups. This could include providing additional training to staff and/or volunteers so that they can carry out these functions effectively.
- **Continue to use Computers and the Internet Where Appropriate**
Assess the effectiveness of electronic access to PLEI by clients and service providers (web sites, kiosks, computer-based forms, etc.) in order to develop strategies that maximize their use. The PLEI Working Group should also consider increasing, where appropriate, online training available to service providers so as to provide continual professional development at the local level.

6. Identify pilot initiatives to address priority gaps in PLEI

A number of priority gaps and issues have been identified in this needs assessment. In determining the priorities, consideration should be given to available funding and the readiness of partners in the community to address these issues. Consideration should be given to developing pilot initiatives in a number of the following areas:

- **Aboriginal Community** - Engage the Aboriginal community in the design and delivery of PLEI to meet their needs. This may include establishing an Aboriginal Working Group (connected to the PLEI Working Group), holding a high-profile provincial conference, engaging Aboriginal leaders, partnering with key Aboriginal organizations, and reaching out to Aboriginal service providers.
- **Multicultural Community** - Partner with multicultural organizations in the design and delivery of PLEI to meet the needs of multicultural

communities for basic, plain-language information on immigration and refugee claims.

- **Youth** - Engage youth groups and organizations to train and support other youth to address key PLEI issues impacting youth such as human rights, and employment laws.
- **Seniors** - Support seniors' organizations to meet PLEI needs of seniors, in particular as it relates to seniors' rights.
- **Poverty** - Work with anti-poverty agencies to develop PLEI programming suitable for the most at-risk clients without access to computers, addictions and low literacy levels.
- **Mental Health** – Work with service providers to address issues facing at-risk individuals regarding mental health legal issues as they may apply to members of any of the following groups: seniors, low income, youth, Aboriginal and the multicultural community.
- **Work with intermediaries** to enhance the existing library of plain-language PLEI fact sheets offered by organizations (e.g., POVNET, LSS, People's Law School). These fact sheets could be used to interpret new legislation, clarify complex legal topics (e.g., the court process), and address any other issues identified by intermediaries. Focus group participants also identified the need for information tailored to their community.

7. Implement ongoing mechanisms for identifying PLEI needs

Once the newly formed PLEI Working Group has established greater community awareness of its role, and publicized some successes, it will be much easier to secure the support of key stakeholders to provide ongoing information on their PLEI needs.

- Use the proposed revised NAT (Appendix 6) as one means of gathering ongoing data. The following is recommended for the NAT:
 - Ensure that a clear and concise explanation is provided with the survey.
 - Distribute the survey by the most appropriate methods - emailed, mailed or faxed. Email would be the most cost-effective method as all completed surveys would be saved in a database that could be readily analyzed. However, some service providers acknowledged that fax/mail versions should be available. In this case, the PLEI Working Group would need to dedicate some resources to entering this information into the electronic database.

- Ensure the survey process is supported by lead organizations throughout the province and can be supplemented with selected group sessions to collect feedback, as required on specific issues.
- Consider hosting the survey on a website (like POVNET) that is regularly accessed by service providers.
- Ensure that results of the survey are communicated and any decisions made based on the survey results are clearly identified to stakeholders.
- Ensure that stakeholders are kept informed of the impact of their input.
- Include an evaluation component in the survey to evaluate respondents' views on the needs assessment process and other key elements, as required.
- Use the data from the survey to create a comprehensive contact list. Clients and service providers would be able to access this information to find an agency in a particular community. This contact list could be accessed online.

8. Address options to facilitate funding stability and sustainability

The following funding strategies should be considered to enhance stability and sustainability of PLEI:

- Pool and reallocate resources from existing PLEI Working Group member budgets.
- Bring the major PLEI funders together to undertake joint planning.
- Identify new potential sources of funding using the combined influence of a formalized PLEI Working Group.

In sum, there is a strong base of PLEI materials, but there are substantial challenges in moving this out into the communities and linking it to individuals most in need. The highest priorities for meeting PLEI across the province appear to be improving coordination and enhancing access. This includes implementing critical coordination mechanisms such as the development of lead agencies at the community level, a PLEI Working Group Communication Strategy, the creation of a Web-based PLEI Clearinghouse, increased face-to-face resources to aid clients with specific concerns, and the strengthening of partnerships between provincial PLEI organizations and community intermediaries. This also means enhancing access through increased use of the media, training, workshops and technology.

There are also needs for increased range of content for some target groups (e.g., seniors, youth and Aboriginal communities). There is a strong sense among respondents that effective delivery calls for personal, individual interaction between the PLEI provider and

the user/client. This is seen as inherent to the nature of PLEI itself and often to the nature of those most in need.

It is our hope that this study will be of use to the PLEI Working Group in its further consideration of these important issues.

Appendices

<Separate Document>