

Bringing Up Baby

By Barbara Engstrom, Executive Director

King County Bar Bulletin, July 2021

What felt like just yesterday, the King County Law Library announced the “arrival” of our new baby, the King County Law Library Foundation, in these very pages.

The Law Library is pleased to announce the birth of our new foundation. The King County Law Library Foundation made its debut this spring weighing in at a whopping 501(c)(3). We’d like to thank all the current and former King County Law Library trustees who supported the foundation start-up campaign to ensure a vibrant start for our fledgling entity.

That was in 2018 and as with real babies, time has flown and the KCLL Foundation has been marking the milestones. Like any proud parent, I’m excited to share our successes and update you on the Foundation’s progress.

First Steps

Law Library Trustee **Joe Bringman** facilitated wonderful pro bono assistance from Perkins Coie to get the Foundation up and running. We are especially grateful to **Lorri Dunsmore**, **Nisha Nariya**, and **Kelly Finn** from Perkins as well as **Andrea Templeton** of K & L Gates and **Emily Klick** of Holland and Hart in Boise.

We also have a stellar slate of founding officers including **Mary Jo Newhouse** (President), **Maureen Quigley** (Vice-President), **Dan Fiorito** (Secretary), and **Oliver Enquist** (Treasurer). The Foundation officers have been instrumental in shaping and guiding the Foundation’s mission and vision. On paper the mission of supporting Law Library services and programs seem simple enough, but the reality is anything but.

The Law Library’s funding model is based on a 100-year-old statute that is inadequate to support the operations of a law library in a technologically advanced, modern environment. RCW chapter 27.24 allocates a small portion of paid civil filing fees to support Library operations. When this statute was enacted in 1919, filing fees were sufficient to maintain a law library. As events and the practice of law evolved over the past century, the filing fee revenue no longer supports the full cost of running one law library let alone both the downtown Seattle and Kent branches. Filing fees began their decline about 10 years ago and have continued to drop steadily since then. As filing fees have declined, other costs, most notably legal publisher prices and subscriptions for electronic legal research databases, have surged. As a colleague lamented about a funding mechanism from a century old statute, it’s like being asked to navigate the autobahn with a horse and buggy.

A Steady Hand for Guidance

In fleshing out the mission and vision, the Foundation board placed co-equal emphasis on the goals of a) ensuring the long-term financial viability of the Law Library and b) financial support for innovative programs and services. As the complexity of the mission increased it became apparent that the

Foundation needed a steady hand to guide us. **Kristie Thompson** was tapped as the Executive Director in 2020. Kristie comes to the Foundation with a wide-ranging background working with nonprofits and has spent significant time working and travelling internationally. She's been invaluable in organizing administrative and fund-raising efforts as well as providing strategic planning for Foundation initiatives. Kristie recently spearheaded a successful Give Big campaign and website redesign.

Off to School

Starting in 2018, the Law Library has run a very popular series of workshops to introduce self-represented litigants to the basics of conducting a lawsuit. Pre-pandemic, the workshops were taught in-person at Seattle Public Library (SPL) and King County Library System (KCLS) branches. The workshops were very well attended and received national recognition from the American Association of Law Libraries(AALL) in 2019. The Law Library was awarded AALL's Excellence in Community Engagement prize. Through generous support from the King County Law Library Foundation, the Law Library was able to purchase laptops to allow staff to continue administering virtual SRL Workshop series from home during the pandemic shut down.

What's in Store

As the Law Library considers the "new normal" of how court and legal proceedings will function going forward, we are brainstorming new and innovative ways to engage with the community. Our SRL Workshop partnerships with SPL and KCLS have taught us that many of those with legal needs have an initial point of contact at public libraries and then are referred to the Law Library. The new Foundation-provided laptops will allow staff to do outreach more effectively in the public libraries and at various places in the community as things begin to reopen. We are hoping to create a program where KCLL librarians "ride the circuit" of public libraries in King County to offer legal research assistance at regularly scheduled times.

Another area of interest is spearheading a county-wide legal kiosk project similar to the Minnesota Legal Kiosk project. <https://www.legalkiosk.org/about> The Foundation envisions legal-help kiosks being placed around King County at community locations hosted by sponsor organizations. Currently, we are projecting two primary applications for the kiosks. The first application will facilitate retrieval of forms and self-help resources at community access points that are easily accessible. The second will create private, virtual connection points for contact with legal aid attorneys, courts, and other legal services providers to eliminate barriers for those without reliable access to transportation or technology.

It Takes a Village (We Need You!)

In order to make the Foundation's vision for the future a reality, we need you. The KCLLF Board of Directors is expanding and transitioning to a working board. **We are looking for new board members with knowledge and experience in fundraising, advocacy, equity and diversity issues, and building community engagement.** The Board of Directors currently meets quarterly over Zoom, though we anticipate returning to in-person meetings in the future. Prior board service is not required to apply. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis.

If you are interested, please forward a current resume and a brief statement of interest to KCLLF Executive Director Kristie Thompson thompsonk@kcllfoundation.org.

Other Ways to Support “the Baby”

If you don't have time to serve on the board, there are many other ways to support the foundation. Please consider making a one-time or on-going donation to the Foundation, choosing the King County Law Library Foundation as your charity of choice on Amazon Smile, buying law books from our book sale, or volunteering in other capacities. <https://kcllfoundation.org/ways-to-give/>

As the pandemic has proven countless times, when we work together for a common purpose, we all end up stronger for it. It does, indeed, take a village to raise a child. We hope we can count on your support.