

## **Model Self-Help Centers Pilot Program Status Report as of Fall 2003**

### **Introduction and Background on the Project**

California courts are facing an ever-increasing number of litigants who go to court without legal counsel, largely because they cannot afford representation. These self-represented litigants' lack of familiarity with court procedures and forms, and with their rights, leaves them disadvantaged in court and consumes a significant amount of court resources. As part of an effort to meet its goal of improving access to the courts, the Judicial Council has provided funding for projects that address the needs of self-represented litigants.

The 2001 State Budget Act provided funding totaling \$832,000 to begin five pilot self-help centers that would provide various forms of assistance, such as basic legal and procedural information, help with filling out forms, and referrals to other community resources, to self-represented litigants. Courts could apply for funding under any one of five preestablished program categories, each of which explores a different model for assisting self-represented litigants. The pilot project is administered by the Administrative Office of the Courts, Center for Families, Children & the Courts.

The model self-help centers pilot project is aimed at determining the effectiveness of court-based self-help programs, identifying promising practices in the provision of services for self-represented litigants, and providing information to the Legislature on future funding needs. The five programs will provide models for replication in other counties in addition to translated materials and technological solutions. The project includes an evaluation of the five model self-help centers, which will disseminate information on the effectiveness and replicability of the models. The five pilot projects and their general goals are described below.

1. *Regional model, Superior Court of Butte County:* Smaller and/or rural courts often do not have the resources to offer a full range of services in each court or court location. This model explores how courts can share resources effectively with courts in other counties. The Superior Court of Butte County, in partnership with the superior courts of neighboring Glenn and Tehama Counties, developed the Self-Help Assistance and Referral Program (SHARP), which provides videoconferenced workshops and one-on-one assistance to customers in three program sites across three counties.
2. *Urban collaboration model, Superior Court of Los Angeles County:* In some jurisdictions a number of self-help centers operate in or near the court, often with limited communication or sharing of resources. This is likely to lead to duplication of efforts and confusion for litigants. The Los Angeles program, the Self-Help Management Center, seeks to coordinate resources, identify needs and gaps in services for self-represented litigants throughout the county, and provide a more seamless service delivery system for litigants.

3. *Technology model, Superior Court of Contra Costa County*: As the number of self-represented litigants increases, technological solutions are being explored for completion of forms, provision of information, meeting with litigants at a distance, and other needed services. Contra Costa's Virtual Self-Help Law Center has developed a Web site that provides general information, court forms, and instructional videos and uses videoconferencing to provide workshops in multiple sites in Contra Costa County.
4. *Spanish-speaking model, Superior Court of Fresno County*: The large number of Spanish-speaking litigants in California presents special challenges for self-help programs. Language as well as cultural differences may exacerbate problems normally faced by self-represented litigants. This model seeks to provide cost-effective and efficient services for a primarily Spanish-speaking population while exploring techniques for educating litigants about the legal issues and procedures in their cases. The Centro de Recursos Legales (Legal Resource Center) provides one-on-one assistance, workshops, translated forms and instructions, and interpreter assistance in the courtroom to Spanish-speaking self-represented litigants in Fresno County.
5. *Multilingual model, Superior Court of San Francisco County*: California has a diverse population with a large group of immigrants and litigants who speak many different languages and have significantly different cultural experiences. This model seeks to provide self-help services to litigants who speak a wide variety of languages and develop materials and techniques to address the needs of a multilingual, multicultural population. The Assisting Court Customers with Educational and Self-Help Services (ACCESS) center provides one-on-one assistance, workshops, a variety of materials translated into five different languages, and interpretation assistance to San Francisco's linguistically and culturally diverse population.

### **Evaluation Design**

The Judicial Council is required to submit an evaluation to the Legislature by March 1, 2005, on the efficiency and effectiveness of the Model Self-Help Pilot Programs in assisting self-represented litigants.

Berkeley Policy Associates (BPA) is evaluating the model self-help programs in a partnership with NPC Research. The evaluation, which is overseen by the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), began in fall 2002 and is scheduled to end by fall 2004. It is designed to assess the overall effectiveness of the five self-help programs in the following areas, as specified by the AOC in its development of the demonstration project:

- Litigants' understanding of and compliance with the terms of court orders;
- Access to justice by self-represented litigants;
- Likelihood of "just" outcomes in cases involving self-represented litigants;

- User satisfaction with the court process;
- Efficiency and effectiveness of the court systems; and
- Education for court users so that their expectations are reasonable in light of the law and facts.

In addition, the evaluation will document the implementation of the self-help programs and is expected to produce valuable lessons for other counties and jurisdictions that plan to develop similar interventions. Analysis of the implementation of these programs includes research on the startup of new centers and new initiatives, outreach to potential center users, and the extent to which potential users and court staff are aware of the center and its services. The evaluation also gathers data on the demographic and case profiles of center users, the specific services they receive at the self-help centers, and the experiences of self-represented litigants in courtrooms.

The resulting study design uses the following research methods to address these goals:

- *Site Visits*: Two rounds of site visits, which include in-depth interviews with center staff and other stakeholders, and observation of center operations to gather information on the process of planning and implementing the self-help centers;
- *Administrative Program Data*: Ongoing collection and analysis of program intake and service data to describe the population of self-represented litigants being served by the programs and to document the nature and intensity of services being provided;
- *Court File Review*: Court record review comparing self-represented litigants who received assistance from the self-help centers to those who did not, to capture effects of self-help center implementation on filings of court forms, continuances, and court orders;
- *Courtroom Observation and Post-Hearing Interviews*: Two rounds of courtroom observation to describe the experiences and preparation of self-represented litigants (and any changes over time); and two rounds of interviews with litigants whose cases are observed to capture their assessment of their courtroom experience as well as their understanding of the case and the process; and
- *Customer Satisfaction Surveys*: Surveys completed by a sample of customers receiving services at the self-help centers and through workshops to assess helpfulness of services and quality of service delivery.

Because the program design, goals, and activities of the Los Angeles County program, the Self-Help Management Center, differ markedly from those of the four other self-help pilot project sites, the research team has developed a unique evaluation design for Los Angeles County. This design consists of three primary activities: site visits, as described above; telephone surveys with providers of self-help and related services to assess the nature and extent of collaboration among agencies, as well as technical support and

training needs; and monthly logs to track the major activities of the Self-Help Management Center.

Following are preliminary results of the evaluation, based on data collected through June 2003. Not all components of the study were implemented at the time of this report. The final evaluation report will be released in early 2005.

### **Major Accomplishments of Self-Help Centers Providing Direct Services**

Less than one year after beginning operation of their centers, sites have accomplished much. They hired dedicated staff, provided services to customers, forged collaborations, and implemented changes in court docket scheduling.

Butte County's program accomplishments in the first year included hiring and training staff for three sites; buying teleconferencing and office equipment and setting up space for three sites; implementing teleconferenced workshops; and working with court staff and maintaining the support of the judicial officers in three counties.

Contra Costa County's program accomplishments for the first year included hiring a project coordinator and beginning the process of developing content for the Web site, including information on forms and court procedures.

Fresno County's program accomplishments in the first year included increasing the court's outreach to, and collaboration with, the community, other legal and social service providers, and the local educational system (colleges and vocational schools); setting up the facility; forming a volunteer interpreter bureau; developing instructions for 90 forms in easy-to-understand English and Spanish; working with court staff and maintaining the support of judicial officers; and recruiting volunteers.

San Francisco County's program accomplishments include forging strong relationships with twelve separate community-based agencies; setting up the facility; working with the court to calendar unlawful detainer court hearings on the same day as workshops; translating materials in the target languages the center is serving; and working with court staff and maintaining the support of judicial officers.

### **Descriptions of Self-Help Centers Providing Direct Services**

#### **Staffing**

The self-help pilot projects are staffed by a combination of legal and paralegal staff and volunteers. All self-help centers have at least one supervising attorney on staff as required by the AOC in the request for proposals. Other program operational staff, such as paralegals, interpreters, translators, and assistants who work with self-represented litigants, are integral to the functioning of the centers. These staff members perform duties such as:

- Helping customers fill out intake forms;

- Assessing why customers have come to the center and determining what kind of assistance they need (triage);
- Enrolling individuals in workshops;
- Providing forms and instructions to customers;
- Helping customers with fee waivers;
- Conducting workshops;
- Providing one-on-one assistance to workshop attendees;
- Translating forms and instructions; and
- Interpreting for customers at the Office of the Family Law Facilitator and in the courtroom.

The pilot programs have faced staffing challenges, including staff turnover, inadequate staff and volunteer training, and difficulty recruiting and retaining bilingual staff and volunteers.

### **Workshops**

All the programs offer workshops for self-represented litigants. The workshops tend to focus primarily on helping customers fill out court forms and giving them legal and procedural information.

In Butte County the topics for the workshops are primarily related to family law. Butte County's program determines its topic areas for workshops by level of demand from the self-represented litigants. As a result, there is not a predetermined workshop schedule.

Fresno County's program has revolving workshops/clinics for unlawful detainer, domestic violence, and divorce cases. These workshops are held at regularly scheduled times and days. Divorce workshops are held twice a month, domestic violence clinics are three days a week, and unlawful detainer workshops are twice a month.

San Francisco County's program offers bimonthly three-hour family law workshops at La Raza Resource and Referral Center (one of their community collaborators). The center also has unlawful detainer settlement conference workshops, which are run in collaboration with the Eviction Defense Collaborative, twice a week, prior to unlawful detainer settlement conferences.

Contra Costa County's program plans to hold workshops at the Contra Costa County Public Law Library in Martinez and to make them available through videoconference at other local branch courts (Richmond, Pittsburg, and Walnut Creek) and on the Contra Costa Community College public television station. There are also plans to record workshops on video and CD-ROM, and to provide access to these materials at the Law Library and on the Web.

Workshop duration ranges from an hour and a half in Butte County's program to up to four hours in the Fresno County program. Fresno County offers Spanish translation of the workshops when they are presenting materials. Butte and San Francisco Counties also offer Spanish interpreters when volunteers are available.

### **One-on-One Assistance**

Butte, Fresno, and San Francisco Counties offer one-on-one assistance. While the primary activity for Butte County's program is workshops, the program also provides one-on-one help with forms and with education about the court process. During business hours self-represented litigants are welcome to come in for information and help with forms, and staff are available to answer phone calls. The program's managing attorney and the paralegal each spend three days a week at the Oroville site and one day each at the satellite sites in Glenn and Tehama Counties. On the days that neither of these main staff members is at the satellite sites, the sites stay teleconferenced with Oroville so that staff or interns at other sites may ask questions as they arise.

In Fresno County one-on-one services include access to Spanish and English language self-help instructions; interpreter assistance through the volunteer interpreter bureau on an "as-needed" basis to help self-represented litigants with interpreting and translation at court hearings, in mediation and other venues; and review of documents by a court examiner.

One-on-one assistance at the San Francisco County program includes assistance with filling out forms, legal information, procedural information (how to file a case, how to serve the other party, and what are the next steps in the process), help preparing for a court hearing, and interpreting. Self-help assistance is provided in the areas of civil harassment, name changes, probate guardianships, and landlord tenant issues. In addition, the center provides limited assistance in family law, small estate affidavits, probate, and traffic. Most of the one-on-one assistance is with volunteer staff including volunteer paralegals or law students.

### **Interpreters**

While the superior courts of Butte, Fresno, and San Francisco Counties offer varying degrees of interpreter services, Fresno County's program provides the most extensive assistance. The volunteer interpreter bureau at the Fresno County program's location helps with interpreting. Court staff can call in advance (or as needed) to request a volunteer interpreter to provide interpreting for a Spanish-speaking litigant in court. Customers can also come into the center and request a volunteer interpreter. Interpreters are also available as needed for Spanish-speaking customers who access the Office of the Family Law Facilitator, which is located across from the self-help center.

Butte County's program has one Spanish-speaking staff member and also relies on volunteer interpreters, thereby providing limited Spanish interpretation to center visitors. In addition, the videoconferencing equipment is used to link Spanish-speaking staff and volunteers with Spanish-speaking customers in other locations.

A Spanish-speaking volunteer in San Francisco County's program offers interpretation as needed for Spanish speakers at the self-help center, for the small claims legal advisor, and in court for civil harassment cases. At the San Francisco County program, Language Line interpreting service is available to communicate with customers when there is a language need they are unable to meet. However, it has had limited use because the interpretation needs of customers can usually be met through the use of volunteers or other court staff. The program uses Language Line as a last resort when no staff or volunteer is available at the self-help center or court to help with language interpretation. The San Francisco program's primary method of providing services to its multilingual population is through forms, instructions, and other educational materials that are translated into its target languages.

### **Technology-Based Services**

Butte County's program offers workshops in its three locations using teleconferencing equipment. The workshop leader is able to present the material to customers in one location and the workshop is broadcast to customers in one or both of the other project locations. Customers at all locations are able to ask questions of the workshop leader. In addition, center staff uses the teleconferencing equipment even when workshops are not in session; for example, if a volunteer at one location is unable to answer a customer's question, he or she may dial up the main center location in Oroville to consult with the managing attorney.

The Contra Costa County Virtual Self-Help Center is billed explicitly as a technology-based model. This model relies on a Web-based service delivery system to provide self-help services to self-represented litigants with unmet and under-served legal needs, including individuals whose work schedules preclude attending workshops during normal business hours, for whom transportation is difficult, and who are not able to access needed services.

The center plans to complement and dovetail existing services. The center staff will assemble existing content from the Contra Costa County Law Library and the Office of the Family Law Facilitator, and will create new content in order to deliver a complete self-help package via a variety of media: workshops that involve teleconferencing, Web delivery of materials, and videos.

The San Francisco County program plans to record English language traffic workshops and dub them in Spanish. In addition, the program has televisions, three with a VCR and one with a DVD player, so that customers can watch videos on restraining orders, guardianships, and small claims.

### **Printed Materials**

Printed informational materials have been produced for self-represented litigants by all of the sites (with the exception of the Contra Costa County program, which will have materials available online). Generally the materials cover family law topics and reflect the areas of law covered at the sites. Printed materials provided include forms, form

instructions, and handouts on court processes. Fresno County's program developed printed and on-line materials in both English and Spanish on how to fill out the eight most commonly filed forms in family law, guardianship, civil harassment, and unlawful detainer matters.

Printed materials are available in the San Francisco County program in six languages: English, Spanish, Russian, Tagalog, Cantonese, and Vietnamese. Printed materials include a guide to the Superior Court of San Francisco County (where to go to get court forms and file papers and which departments handle various case types and court-based self-help services); information on self-representation (services provided at the self-help center, tips for self-represented litigants, and tips on finding a lawyer); tips on how to use a translator in court; and information on particular case types the center provides assistance with, including information on evictions for both landlords and tenants.

The San Francisco County program pays an outside service provider for translation of its materials into plain English or accessible text and translation to four of the five non-English languages the program serves. Program staff has the capacity to translate materials into Spanish, but must use a translator for the other languages.

### **Radio Show**

San Francisco County's center director conducts bimonthly 30-minute radio interviews on a local Chinese cable radio station that are translated into Cantonese by a representative from Cameron House, a social service agency serving Asian and Asian-American San Francisco residents. The director is interviewed on the air on a particular topic (the first on-air interview covered the services provided by the self-help center and getting legal name changes). The estimated audience of the radio show is more than 2,000 people. Following the radio show, the director conducts a workshop on the same topic at Cameron House. The workshop script is translated into Cantonese and Vietnamese.

### **Community Collaboration**

Collaboration with community agencies outside the court is important for all of the self-help centers. Butte County's program is based on a three-county collaboration of Butte, Tehama, and Glenn Counties. The program does not actively collaborate with other community-based agencies, except that it gives customers referrals to needed services. The project does collaborate with colleges and universities, however, to recruit student interns to serve as volunteers at the project's three centers. The program is successful in securing six interns each semester who provide crucial help at the centers.

Contra Costa County's project has established collaborative relationships with the pro bono committee of the Contra Costa County Bar Association (which is reviewing the content of Web site material and will assist in delivery of workshops), the County Law Library, and Contra Costa Community College (San Pablo Campus).



Fresno County's self-help center works closely with local community-based legal and social service providers and local colleges and vocational schools (Fresno City College and Duncan Polytech School) to recruit volunteers and assist with outreach. During the early planning and implementation phase, the community resource manager<sup>1</sup> was actively involved in reaching out to these organizations and made presentations to a number of community-based social and legal service providers. During the early development stages of the project, legal providers and organizations in the community were asked to participate on an advisory committee, along with court personnel. Agencies represented on the advisory committee were Central California Legal Services, Fresno County Bar Association Pro Bono Section, Fresno Madera Area Agency on Aging (FMAAA), United Health Center, Centro La Familia, Economic Opportunities Commission, Cesar Chavez Adult School, and the Southern School of Interpretation.

In San Francisco County, early meetings with legal providers and organizations in the community, as well as with court personnel, laid the framework and established an initial cooperative relationship between the center and other organizations. The San Francisco County program has done significant community outreach and has leveraged resources to expand both the types of services the center is able to provide in the courthouse (for example, by having members from the Eviction Defense Collaborative do workshops at the center) and the types of services the self-help center can provide outside the court (for example, by holding workshops at La Raza's offices and at Cameron House).

### **Demographic Characteristics of Self-Help Center Customers**

Upon arrival at the self-help center, customers are asked to fill out an intake form for each unrelated case they seek help with, and to provide information on their demographic, social, and economic background; how they heard about the self-help center; whether they sought help prior to visiting the self-help center; and why they have decided to represent themselves. The forms are filled out on a voluntary basis, so the data captured are representative only of those individuals who complete an intake form. The data presented in this section come from intake forms collected by the self-help centers between mid-March and early June 2003. During that period, a total of 310 intake forms were collected in Butte County's program, 273 in Fresno County's program, and 229 in San Francisco County's program.

### **Gender, Age, and Number of Children Living in the Household**

In all three of the programs a higher proportion of women than men are accessing self-help center services (see Table 1). In Butte and Fresno Counties this difference is due to a higher proportion of women than men accessing family law services, particularly in the area of dissolution and domestic violence. In San Francisco County's program, this difference is due to a higher proportion of women than men seeking assistance in obtaining a civil harassment restraining order.

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<sup>1</sup> The community resource manager is the formal title of the director of Fresno's program.

In Butte and San Francisco Counties, around three-quarters of the individuals seeking services are between the ages of 20 and 49. In Fresno County’s program 91 percent of the individuals seeking services are between the ages of 20 and 49. The median age of self-help customers is 37 in Butte County’s program, 34 in Fresno County’s program, and 39 in San Francisco County’s program.

In all three programs, the majority of customers—ranging from 60 percent in San Francisco to 83 percent in Fresno—have at least one child under the age of 19 living in their household. In Fresno, almost one-third of customers have three or more children living in their household, compared to 19 percent of customers in Butte County’s program and 13 percent of customers in San Francisco’s program.

**Table 1. Gender, Age, and Number of Children of Self-Help Center Customers**

	Butte		Fresno		San Francisco	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	97	32%	108	40%	87	38%
Female	211	68%	161	60%	141	62%
Total	308	100%	269	100%	228	100%
<b>Age</b>						
10–19	9	3%	3	1%	2	1%
20–29	69	24%	85	33%	30	21%
30–39	86	30%	86	33%	46	32%
40–49	65	22%	65	25%	33	23%
50–59	40	14%	11	4%	19	13%
60+	22	8%	10	4%	16	11%
Total	291	100%	260	100%	146	100%
<b>Number of Children</b>						
None	92	33%	35	17%	64	40%
One	63	22%	40	20%	31	19%
Two	74	26%	62	31%	44	28%
Three	28	10%	37	18%	13	8%
Four	18	6%	19	9%	3	2%
Five or more	6	2%	9	5%	5	3%
Total	281	100%	202	100%	160	100%

*Notes: Percentages are based only on the number of valid responses. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.*

### **Race/Ethnicity**

In Butte County’s program, three-quarters of the individuals seeking services identify themselves as non-Hispanic white (see Table 2). According to the 2000 Census, the county’s general population is predominantly non-Hispanic white (80 percent) with a smaller proportion of Hispanic/Latino and Hmong residents. Since Fresno County’s program primarily targets Spanish-speaking individuals, it is not surprising to see a much higher proportion of Hispanic/Latino individuals among self-help center customers than among the general population. The majority of the Fresno program’s customers (95

percent) identify themselves as Hispanic/Latino. In Fresno County, Hispanics/Latinos are 44 percent of the county’s resident population.

In San Francisco County’s program, the majority of individuals seeking services identify themselves as Hispanic/Latino (41 percent) or African-American (26 percent). In San Francisco County, the two largest ethnic or racial groups in the general population are non-Hispanic white (44 percent) and Asian (33 percent), yet a significantly smaller proportion of individuals seeking services in San Francisco County’s program identified themselves as non-Hispanic white (22 percent) or Asian (13 percent). The difference between the racial/ethnic breakdown of self-help center customers and that of the general population may be due to the fact that the San Francisco program targets non-English-speaking individuals.

**Table 2. Race/Ethnicity of Self-Help Center Customers**

	<b>Butte</b>		<b>Fresno</b>		<b>San Francisco</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
African American	6	2%	1	<1%	57	26%
Asian or Pacific Islander	4	1%	2	1%	28	13%
Hispanic or Latino	56	19%	251	95%	92	41%
Native American, Eskimo, or Aleut	20	7%	1	<1%	7	3%
White, non-Hispanic	226	75%	9	3%	48	22%

*Notes: Customers were asked to check all race/ethnicity categories that applied to them. Percentages are calculated based on the total number of respondents who provided valid responses to race/ethnicity. Therefore, percentages may sum to more than 100.*

### **Language**

In Butte County’s program, 12 percent of customers speak a language other than English at home, which is close to the estimates for the general population in that county. In Fresno and San Francisco Counties, the majority (71 percent and 57 percent respectively) of customers speak a language other than English at home.

In Fresno County’s program, the overwhelming majority (99 percent) of customers who speak a language other than English at home speak Spanish. In San Francisco County’s program, two-thirds of the customers who speak a language other than English at home speak Spanish. San Francisco customers also speak a wide variety of other languages, including Russian, Cantonese, Mandarin, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

## **Socioeconomic Characteristics of Self-Help Center Customers**

Other studies have found that individuals with low levels of education and income are more likely to access court-based legal assistance programs, which is similar to what the present findings suggest. The data in this section describe the basic socioeconomic characteristics of individuals accessing self-help services at the pilot programs.

### **Employment**

In all three programs, close to half of the individuals seeking services are employed either full- or part-time. Among those who indicated that they are not employed, the majority identified themselves as either unemployed or disabled. Of the three self-help centers, Fresno has the highest proportion of customers who are unemployed (60 percent).

### **Educational Attainment**

In Butte and San Francisco Counties, the majority of individuals seeking services (76 percent and 79 percent, respectively—see Table 3), have at least completed high school or obtained a GED, which reflects the educational attainment levels of the general population in those counties. In Fresno County’s program, education levels of individuals seeking services are significantly lower than those of the general population. Only 32 percent of customers reported completing high school or obtaining a GED, compared to 68 percent of the general population. Furthermore, 44 percent of individuals seeking services reported completing less than a ninth grade education, compared to 18 percent of the general population. During interviews with self-help center staff in Fresno County’s program, respondents indicated that low education levels of customers has been affecting the program’s provision of services. For instance, workshops often go beyond scheduled hours because customers need more one-on-one assistance than anticipated.

### **Income**

All three of the pilot programs are primarily serving low-income customers. For example, in Butte and San Francisco Counties, over 40 percent of customers reported monthly household incomes of \$1,000 or less. In Fresno County’s program the majority of customers (69 percent) reported monthly household incomes of \$1,000 or less.

The proportion of customers with monthly incomes below \$1,000 is significantly higher than that of the general population in all three of the pilot programs. Furthermore, the majority of these low-income households reported having at least one child under 19 living in the household.

**Table 3. Educational Attainment and Income of Self-Help Center Customers**

	Butte		Fresno		San Francisco	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Highest Level of Education Completed</b>						
8th grade or less	12	5%	92	44%	21	13%
9th to 11th grade	68	19%	60	24%	22	8%
High school graduate/GED	99	31%	45	19%	63	29%
Some college	86	31%	23	9%	37	22%
Associates degree	23	8%	5	2%	14	7%
Bachelor's degree	9	4%	1	1%	11	13%
Graduate degree	4	2%	2	1%	12	8%
Total	301	100%	228	100%	191	100%
<b>Monthly Household Income Before Taxes</b>						
\$500 or less	42	15%	69	34%	33	19%
\$501–1,000	85	30%	73	36%	42	24%
\$1,001–1,500	57	20%	43	21%	34	20%
\$1,501–2,000	42	15%	11	5%	27	16%
\$2,001–2,500	28	10%	4	2%	10	6%
\$2,501 or more	32	11%	5	2%	27	16%
Total	286	100%	205	100%	173	100%

*Notes: Percentages are based only on the number of valid responses. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Educational attainment is presented only for customers ages 25 and over.*

### **Self-Help Center Customers' Access to Other Legal Assistance Services**

The majority of individuals accessing services at the pilot programs—ranging from 61 percent in San Francisco County to 81 percent in Fresno County—did not consider hiring an attorney to help with their case. Most customers (75 percent in Butte, 86 percent in Fresno, and 73 percent in San Francisco) were representing themselves because they could not afford an attorney. Others indicated that they were representing themselves because they were either unsure if their case required a lawyer or because they chose to represent themselves.

In all three of the programs, the majority of customers did not seek help prior to coming to the centers. Among those individuals who did seek help, help was sought from a wide variety of service providers, including legal aid, friends or relatives, and private attorneys. In Butte County's program, the top three sources of assistance customers consulted before coming to the self-help center included legal aid services, private attorneys, and friends or relatives. In Fresno County's program, customers consulted with legal aid services, friends or relatives, and paralegals. In San Francisco County's program, customers consulted with legal aid services, friends or relatives, private attorneys, and self-help books before coming to the self-help center.

**Table 4. Help Sought Prior to Self-Help Center Visit**

	Butte		Fresno		San Francisco	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Tried to Get Help With Case Before Coming to Self-Help Center</b>						
No	190	64%	165	71%	116	59%
Yes	106	36%	66	29%	81	41%
Total	296	100%	231	100%	197	100%
<b>Where Customers Tried to Get Help</b>						
Legal aid	38	33%	33	45%	46	42%
Private attorney	28	24%	9	12%	26	24%
Friend or relative	24	21%	15	21%	30	28%
Paralegal	21	18%	10	14%	3	3%
Library	8	7%	0	0%	15	14%
Self-help books	4	3%	5	7%	21	19%
Internet	4	3%	3	4%	16	15%
Other	18	15%	10	14%	20	18%

*Notes: Percentages are based only on the number of valid responses. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Customers were asked to check all categories of assistance that applied to them. Therefore, percentages may sum to more than 100.*

Customers in Butte and San Francisco Counties most often learn of the self-help center from the clerk’s office and court-based and community legal service providers. In Fresno, center customers most often hear of the self-help center from friends or family, followed by the clerk’s office and family court services. Since most of the centers have done limited formal advertising, only a small percentage of customers learn of the centers from newspapers, television, or radio advertisements or pamphlets, other printed materials, and posters.

### **Services Provided at the Self-Help Centers**

The data presented in this section are gathered from the service tracking form designed for the evaluation. The service tracking forms captured information on the case types and issues customers requested assistance with, the types of services provided to customers, and any referrals made. Center staff completed service tracking forms for each unique customer visit to the center. The data presented in this section come from service tracking forms collected by the self-help centers between mid-March and early June 2003. During that period, a total of 559 service tracking forms were collected in Butte County’s program, 360 in Fresno County’s program, and 819 in San Francisco County’s program.

### **Case Types**

The direct service pilot programs provide self-help information and assistance to self-represented litigants in a variety of legal areas, including family law, other civil, and probate matters. These services are provided as a complement to both court-based and community-based legal services programs. For example, in San Francisco County, the court has a fully developed family law self-help center; therefore the San Francisco

County program chose to focus its efforts primarily on other civil matters. In Fresno County, the program provides services primarily for family law cases, particularly divorce. The program had planned to provide services for victims of domestic violence/civil harassment, but they are seeing a relatively low volume of customers seeking assistance for these issues. This may in part be due to the already well-established assistance program for victims of violence in the community, through the Marjaree Mason Center, which has the capacity to assist Spanish-speaking individuals.

In Butte County's program 64 percent of cases served at the center are family law cases. Other major case types with which the program provides assistance are other civil (14 percent), probate (12 percent), and unlawful detainer (10 percent). More than three-quarters (77 percent) of the family law cases are dissolution cases, and another 18 percent are Domestic Violence Prevention Act (DVPA) cases. Within the family law cases, the most common issues with which the Butte program provides assistance are custody (33 percent), child support (21 percent), and visitation (17 percent).

In Fresno County's program, the overwhelming majority (88 percent) of cases for which staff provide assistance are family law cases. As in Butte County, most family law cases are either dissolution (78 percent) or DVPA cases (13 percent). The most common issues involved in family law cases are custody (57 percent), visitation (54 percent), and child support (25 percent). Due to the high volume for demand of Spanish language services in family law matters, Fresno is serving only a limited percentage of other civil law matters.

San Francisco County's program offers assistance primarily in other civil (71 percent) and unlawful detainer (18 percent) matters. Most (66 percent) of the other civil cases are civil harassment, and a smaller percentage (12 percent) are name change cases. In San Francisco County's program, family law assistance is provided as a complement to existing court-based services in family law; as a result, only 5 percent of cases served at the center are family law cases.

It is somewhat surprising that child support issues are such a high proportion of those issues raised in cases served by self-help center staff in Butte and Fresno since the family law facilitator typically handles child support matters. This suggests that an overflow of customers from the Office of the Family Law Facilitator may be receiving services at self-help centers. This may be due to the fact that the Office of the Family Law facilitator does not have the capacity to provide assistance to non-English-speaking customers, especially in Fresno County; and/or that customers have difficulty separating child support issues from other issues involved in their family law cases and therefore seek a single place to get assistance with all of their legal issues.

### **Party Types**

Because the pilot programs are court based, services must be available to both individuals starting an action and individuals responding to an action. In all three programs the majority of individuals seeking services in the majority of case types served are those who initiate a legal action.

In unlawful detainer/eviction cases, self-help centers are accessible to both landlords and tenants. In Butte County's program a higher proportion of landlords than tenants receive services. In San Francisco County's program, a higher proportion of tenants than landlords receive services.

### **Service Delivery Method**

In all of the centers, the most common form of service provision is through individual, one-on-one contact, followed by workshops. In Butte County's program, where transportation is a major challenge for self-represented litigants, a substantial proportion of contact with customers (40 percent) takes place by telephone. In Fresno and San Francisco Counties, customers receive services primarily through individual, face-to-face contact, and to a more limited extent, in workshops.

In Butte County's program, services are provided in English (96 percent) and to a limited extent in Spanish (3 percent). In Fresno County's program, the majority of services are provided in Spanish. In Fresno County's program, 71 percent of customers say they speak a language other than English at home, and the center provides help in Spanish to 72 percent of customers.

In San Francisco County's program, services are primarily provided in English (72 percent) and to a lesser extent in Spanish (21 percent). In San Francisco County's program, 57 percent of customers say they speak a language other than English at home, and the center provides help in other languages to 28 percent of customers. Less than 7 percent of customers are receiving services in the other target languages of the center, namely Russian, Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), Vietnamese, and Tagalog. However, a variety of written materials is available to customers who speak these languages.

### **Service Types**

In all of the centers the most common types of assistance provided are sharing procedural information and helping with forms. Approximately one-third of individuals who received assistance at the self-help centers were those who returned for additional assistance. In all three pilot programs customers returned for help with additional questions, subsequent steps in the process, and document review.

In Butte County's program, customers are typically assisted with completing forms (63 percent), procedural information (54 percent), forms with instructions (12 percent), and explanation of court orders (10 percent). Approximately one-quarter of individuals who sought services from the center were those who returned for additional assistance; of these customers, 48 percent returned for help with subsequent steps in the process, 24 percent because they had additional questions, and 21 percent for document review.

In Fresno County's program, the types of services customers receive typically include forms with instructions (46 percent), assistance completing forms (25 percent), and procedural information (25 percent). Over one-quarter of individuals who sought services



from the program were those who returned for additional assistance; 40 percent of them returned for document review, 27 percent for assistance with subsequent steps in the process, and 23 percent because they had additional questions.

The types of services customers in San Francisco County's program receive typically include procedural information (84 percent), assistance completing forms (51 percent), and referrals to other providers (34 percent). Approximately one-third of individuals who sought services from the center were those who returned for additional assistance; 60 percent of those customers returned for help with subsequent steps in the process and 28 percent because they had additional questions.

## **Los Angeles Self-Help Management Center**

### **Purpose of a Coordinating Center in Los Angeles County**

Los Angeles County is home to a large and complex web of public and private service providers. There are dozens of agencies providing some degree of service for self-represented litigants, including several court-based self-help centers. These centers vary in the type and extent of services they offer, from those that offer only referrals to those that provide consultations with attorneys, workshops, or other hands-on assistance. Many of these providers focus on family law and domestic violence, but some focus on other areas of the law, including unlawful detainer. Two large non-profits run many of the self-help centers located in the courts and in the community: Neighborhood Legal Services (NLS) and the Los Angeles Foundation for Legal Aid (LAFLA). In addition to the programs run by these agencies, there is a variety of independent nonprofit service providers. The county also has the family law facilitators program and Family Law Information Centers (FLIC) located in many of the courts.

While many agencies provide some services for self-represented litigants, judges and court staff expressed concern that there was little or no coordination among the agencies and that the agencies provided inconsistent information to litigants, so customers often are not referred to appropriate services. There are 58 court locations in the county and literally tens of thousands of self-represented litigants. Furthermore, many self-represented litigants speak limited English, are unfamiliar with the legal system and/or have low incomes, making access to appropriate services and the court system more difficult.

According to planners and staff, the Self-Help Management Center has several goals. First, the Self-Help Management Center is to serve as a vehicle for gathering information on all the providers in the county in order to document what agencies exist, what services are being provided, where there is duplication in services, and where there are discrepancies in the content and quality of services provided. In addition, the Self-Help Management Center will focus on identifying best practices for dissemination among providers; these best practices may include such things as ensuring the consistency and quality of services and referrals; suggested workshop content areas and formats; and

models of program operations and service delivery systems. Another key component to the Self-Help Management Center's plans is to foster communication and collaboration among providers and to facilitate service provision both within individual agencies and across agencies.

### **Staffing**

The Self-Help Management Center has two staff members: a full time managing attorney and a part-time assistant attorney. The managing attorney is responsible for grant management, supervising the assistant attorney, creating a presence for the Self-Help Management Center among the local providers, setting goals for the center, and conducting all center activities (as described below) with the help of the assistant attorney. The assistant attorney works half-time for the Self-Help Management Center, and her duties have included conducting dissolution workshops (described below) and visiting self-help centers to gather information about the services they provide and to raise the profile of the Self-Help Management Center.

### **Collaborative Activities and Providers' Identified Needs**

As part of the evaluation, the research team interviewed self-help providers in the Los Angeles County area. Telephone interview respondents provided information on the types of agencies with which they currently collaborate, as well as on the type of collaborative activities in which they take part. In addition, interview respondents provided information about the types of collaborative activities in which they would like to participate in the future, as well as the areas in which they could benefit from technical assistance.

All interview respondents indicated that their agencies have had at least minimal contact and communication with other legal service agencies within the past year. Additionally, 16 of the 19 respondents had at least minimal contact and communication with social service agencies as well as with law schools during the past year. Half of the respondents indicated that their agencies had contact with bar associations in the past twelve months. Several respondents described contacts they had with other types of agencies and groups, including corporations, churches, elected officials, private law firms, and city or county departments.

In addition to describing the types of agencies with which they had contact during the past year, interview respondents described the types of activities in which they had participated with these agencies. Over three-quarters of the respondents described networking activities, including regularly scheduled or ad hoc meetings with other legal service providers to share ideas and learn about each other's services. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents indicated that they took part in policy groups or boards, and just over half of the respondents indicated that their agencies participated in jointly funded projects. Only four indicated that their agencies participated in jointly administered projects with other agencies. Two respondents indicated that they had not participated in any collaborative activities during the past year.

Most respondents expressed strong interest in a wide variety of training and technical assistance. Over half of the respondents stated that their organizations were planning on expanding their services in the coming year, either by expanding their geographical reach (often by opening additional offices), expanding the type of law they specialize in, or expanding their target populations. Perhaps partly as a result of these expansion goals, respondents provided a long list of topic areas for which they would appreciate technical assistance.

Several respondents indicated that they would like assistance with forging relationships with judges and other court personnel, including the Family Law Information Centers and the Offices of the Family Law Facilitators. Respondents also expressed interest in having assistance with navigating the different procedures used across courts, as well as assistance with attempts to standardize procedures across courts.

Respondents also indicated that they would appreciate more opportunities to meet with other self-help providers to learn what others are doing, as well as more communication with other community groups; and that they would be interested in external staff training, both in the provision of services and in substantive areas of the law, so that training would not need to be provided in house. Respondents expressed the need for assistance in several other areas, including information technology, staff and volunteer recruitment, and updates on new developments in government regulations and benefits.

### **Self-Help Management Center Activities**

Self-Help Management Center staff members initiated a variety of activities during the first year of operation, many of which address the needs described by the interview respondents. Staff members take part in numerous collaborative meetings and have also worked directly and intensively with several self-help providers and courts on a range of issues and projects.

The managing attorney attends multiple collaborative meetings, including the central court's monthly meeting on services for self-represented litigants. She also has been invited to attend staff meetings for NLS and LAFLA that have given her an opportunity to learn about the challenges the self-help centers face. In addition, she has attended meetings for court managers and quarterly group meetings of entities that provide assistance in family law. The managing attorney is in close and constant communication with court administrators and family law facilitators. Furthermore, Self-Help Management Center staff members have visited self-help centers to meet with their staff and observe their operations.

The Self-Help Management Center staff members have worked directly with several different centers and courts on self-help issues, including facilitating coordination and sharing of information and materials designed to assist self-represented litigants; arranging for paralegal students from a local community college to volunteer their services for a self-help center in one of the Los Angeles court locations; assisting with setting up and securing resources for a new self-help center; staffing a local legal aid

program's dissolution workshops in that were in danger of being discontinued due to budget cuts; and planning a statewide training conference for self-help providers.

The Self-Help Management Center's activities to date, along with future plans, address providers' desire for help with networking, improving relations with the courts, information technology, and volunteer recruitment. Perhaps most importantly, the Self-Help Management Center is providing opportunities for self-help centers to learn from each other, and has provided self-help center staff with someone to turn to for help on a variety of issues. The managing attorney and assistant attorney will continue to work collaboratively with Los Angeles County's self-help providers in the coming year to identify priorities for the Self-Help Management Center.

### **Successes and Challenges of the Five Pilot Self-Help Centers**

The pilot programs have reached many milestones, including hiring dedicated staff, providing important services to the public, and forging collaborations within the court and with the community at large. These early accomplishments have enabled the programs to progress toward some of their common goals of improving access to justice, increasing satisfaction with court processes, strengthening the efficiency and effectiveness of the court system, and forging strong collaborations within the court and with the outside community. The pilot programs have also faced implementation challenges involving staffing, implementing and integrating technology, and service delivery/implementation at a time of budgetary cutbacks.

Below is a summary of the successes and challenges experienced by each of the five pilot self-help centers during early implementation.

#### **Regional Collaboration Model: Butte County Self-Help Assistance and Referral Project (SHARP)**

##### **Successes**

- *Implementing three self-help centers:* The SHARP program was successful in securing space and staff for three self-help centers during its first year of operation.
- *Fostering positive relations with judges and court staff in three counties:* A related success of the SHARP program is the relationships that the managing attorney has forged with judges and court staff (including executive officers and clerks) in the three counties. The support of these individuals has contributed significantly to the managing attorney's ability to create the three centers in such a short period of time.
- *Making innovative use of videoconferencing equipment:* Videoconferencing equipment has been used not only to broadcast workshops to multiple locations, but also to allow the managing attorney to supervise staff in other locations and to provide language assistance to customers who are not in the same office location as a bilingual staff person.

### **Challenges**

- *Recruiting and retaining qualified staff:* One of the biggest implementation challenges has been recruiting and retaining qualified staff. Recruitment and retention of bilingual staff is also an issue. In addition to Spanish-speaking customers, the counties have growing Hmong and Laotian populations.
- *Recruiting and retaining sufficient volunteer attorneys:* The program would like to utilize volunteer attorneys to conduct workshops, and these attorneys also could assist the managing attorney with supervision of center staff and activities.

### **Technology Model: Contra Costa County Virtual Self-Help Law Center**

#### **Successes**

- *Developing relationships with other court agencies:* Center staff have begun to build partnerships with individuals from other court-based self-help services, such as the Contra Costa County Public Law Library and the Office of the Family Law Facilitator, in order to create content for delivery in different media: workshops by teleconference, Web materials, and videos. The center staff has also sought volunteer assistance from outside providers, such as the local bar association's pro bono section, to lead workshops, create videos, and review content.
- *Developing content for the Web site:* Center staff have begun to develop content for the Web site, with an eye towards making the information accessible to self-represented litigants.

#### **Challenges**

- *Implementing the program:* Implementation of the program was delayed by the need to hire a replacement project coordinator, as the first project coordinator left the program shortly after being hired. The program has also experienced delays in implementing technologies and obtaining equipment.

### **Spanish-Speaking Model: Fresno County Centro de Recursos Legales**

#### **Successes**

- *Coordinating the volunteer interpreter bureau:* The volunteer interpreter bureau is providing much-needed assistance to Spanish-speaking litigants who need interpretation in family law and other civil law proceedings and is providing training opportunities for individuals interested in becoming court-certified interpreters.
- *Creating the advisory board with community involvement:* The center was able to form a strong and active advisory board, which includes members of the court, community based social and legal service providers, and representatives of the local educational system, to assist with program development, implementation, recruitment of volunteers and outreach.
- *Developing instructions:* Center staff developed, with the assistance of volunteer interpreters and the cooperation of department heads and other court staff,

instructions in English and Spanish for 90 forms pertaining to family law, civil harassment, unlawful detainer, and guardianship matters.

### **Challenges**

- *Managing budgetary cutbacks:* With the courts facing a financial crisis, the center has been forced to mitigate the negative effects of court budget cuts. The program has not been able to hire required program staff due to financial limitations and court staff hiring freezes. The program has taken on the responsibility of providing services to both English- and Spanish-speaking self-represented litigants in the areas of family law that the court no longer has resources to cover.
- *Losing key staff:* The loss of key staff members and the program's inability to hire sufficient qualified staff has limited the ability of the center to implement its model. The center has an English- rather than Spanish-speaking court examiner to assist Spanish-speaking litigants with their paperwork, with volunteer staff members providing interpreting assistance.
- *Location:* The center is located away from the courthouse and signage is limited, making it inconvenient for self-represented litigants to access services immediately before or after their proceedings.

### **Urban Collaboration Model: Los Angeles County Self-Help Management Center**

#### **Successes**

- *Securing highly qualified staff:* The managing attorney was recruited for the position because she not only is an experienced family law attorney who founded a non-profit legal aid center, but also has other experience and skills that are important for this position. Site visit interview respondents commented that the managing attorney has the right mix of skills for the position, including the ability to network, communicate, and forge relationships.
- *Advantages to contract staff:* Center staff are employed by an external grant and therefore are not court staff. Site visit interview respondents said they appreciated having a link and an advocate within the court system. However, the fact that the managing attorney is *not* a court employee has been beneficial to her as she forges relationships with court staff. Due to state and local budget crises, court staff can be very sensitive to funds being spent on new programs.
- *Focusing on the center's intangible and informal activities:* As the Self-Help Management Center has developed, staff members have realized that much of what they do consists of intangible and informal activities, such as acting as a liaison between providers and court personnel. The center plays an important mediator role: listening to multiple perspectives, gathering information from a variety of individuals, and then trying to arrange agreements and forge relationships aimed at improving the quantity, quality, and efficiency of the work done by self-help providers.

## Challenges

- *Defining the role of the Self-Help Management Center:* While Self-Help Management Center staff wants to help providers improve their services, they do not want the center to be seen as a regulator. The Self-Help Management Center plans to suggest best practices and standardized procedures for self-help centers. However, the center does not have any official authority over the providers, and therefore it may be difficult to convince providers that they should change their policies or procedures.
- *Soliciting the support of attorneys and bar associations:* Self-Help Management Center staff members hope to strengthen collaborations with bar associations and attorneys in order to increase the number of attorney volunteers working with self-help centers. To strengthen these collaborations, Self-Help Management Center staff will have to overcome some resistance to self-help centers among attorneys in private practice.
- *Working in a tight fiscal environment:* Los Angeles County, like the rest of California, is currently faced with substantial budget shortfalls. This economic situation could lead to competition among self-help providers over diminishing resources. It may be particularly difficult to get providers to look beyond their organizations' immediate needs in order to form collaborative relationships and projects. However, the economic crisis also could serve as an impetus for collaborative work; the Self-Help Management Center may wish to stress that this is a particularly appropriate time for agencies to pool limited resources in order to keep programs afloat.

## **Multilingual Model: San Francisco County Assisting Court Customers with Educational and Self-Help Services (ACCESS) Program**

### Successes

- *Securing qualified staff:* The center's ability to hire well-trained and dedicated staff has been key to the successful implementation of the program. Site visit interview respondents cited the center director's performance, including her ability to work with and bring together court staff and her ability to forge relationships with the community and other legal and social service providers, as key to the success of the center.
- *Collaborating within the court and outside community:* Collaborations within the court have helped improve referrals between various court-based self-help service providers and helped increase court staff's understanding of the self-help services available within the court. The San Francisco County program has also done significant community outreach and has been able to extend the reach of the court to the outside community by providing services through workshops held at community based organizations and on the radio. It has also been successful in leveraging community resources to expand the types of services that are available to self-represented litigants within the court.

- *Coordinating court-based self-help resources:* The center has improved referrals from court staff to various court-based self-help programs. It has also successfully leveraged existing court-based resources to enhance the services self-represented litigants are receiving. For example, the center was able to work with other court staff to rearrange the court's calendar so that unlawful detainer settlement conferences would be scheduled on the same day that the center provides unlawful detainer workshops.
- *Translating materials:* The program has made printed materials available to self-represented litigants in six languages: English, Spanish, Russian, Tagalog, Cantonese, and Vietnamese. Printed materials contain information for self-represented litigants on where to go to get court forms and file papers, general information about the departments that handle various case types, and procedural information for a range of case types.

### **Challenges**

- *Securing bilingual staff and volunteers:* The center has limited paid or volunteer staff members who speak the center's target languages (Spanish, Russian, Tagalog, Cantonese, and Vietnamese). Center staff speak English and Spanish only, limiting the amount of one-on-one assistance the center is able to provide to speakers of the other target languages.
- *Recruiting adequate numbers of staff:* The program's inability to hire a sufficient number of qualified staff, due to budgetary limitations, is placing a great burden on existing staff members. Heavy workloads, limited time for staff and volunteer training, and limited number of bilingual staff members have hindered the ability of the center to meet the increasing demand for services. The lack of another full-time, paid, and highly qualified staff member also has limited the ability of the center director to do community outreach.
- *Providing services in a variety of languages:* Providing services in all five target languages has proven to be a challenge for the self-help center, particularly in the context of the limited financial resources of the center.