

Interactive Community Assistance Network (I-CAN!)

Simple On-Screen Help in Three Languages

In Orange County, the [Legal Aid Society](#) and [the superior court](#) collaborated to help self-represented litigants by producing a user-friendly set of 13 interactive modules on the legal matters these clients most often encounter (all are available in English and Spanish; five are available in Vietnamese):

1. License denials
2. Wage assignments
3. Divorce (dissolution of marriage) cases
4. Paternity petitions
5. Answers to paternity petitions
6. Domestic violence restraining orders
7. New cases with the county Department of Child Support Services
8. Small claims sheets
9. Small claims pleadings
10. Orders to show cause
11. Unlawful detainer cases
12. Fee waiver requests
13. Income and expense reimbursement requests

Reducing Risks of Domestic Violence

The I-CAN! domestic violence module helps victims file applications for temporary restraining orders electronically from sites such as women's shelters. No longer does the victim have to travel long distances to the courtroom or risk an encounter with the perpetrator that might lead to retaliatory violence. Electronic filing also reduces the risk of misplaced or lost documents.

The creators worked hard to produce a simple on-screen guide, accessed on a Web site or at kiosks with touch-screen computers. It asks users easy-to-understand questions at a fifth-grade reading level and explains legal terms and court practices, while guiding users through tutorials.

As the user responds to each question, the module initiates the relevant court pleadings. By the end of the tutorial, properly formatted court forms are completed, printed, and ready for filing. Forms completed in Spanish and Vietnamese are printed in English to satisfy court filing requirements.

If users run into problems, they can use a telephone at the kiosk or click on an icon on the Web site to reach a legal aid help center for immediate personal assistance.

I-CAN! also includes educational videos telling, for example, how to

- File forms
- Serve papers
- Prepare for court appearances
- Locate court facilities
- Find parking
- Present a case

I-CAN! is being linked with the [California Courts Online Self-Help Center](#) to provide consistent information statewide and to help parties create and file forms and pleadings electronically.

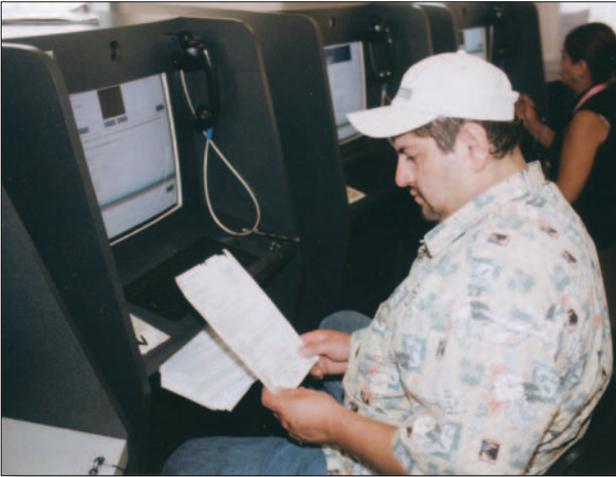
Impacts

- By midyear 2003, I-CAN! had helped nearly 16,000 self-represented litigants prepare legal forms properly at no cost to them. It significantly reduced disparities of access to the court. (Software in the system collects data on how much and for what issues the program is being used.)
- Litigants in rural locations gained access to legal aid attorneys for help with their cases.
- Judges reported that users were better prepared and more familiar with court procedures—two important factors for successful self-representation. The judges found that they could help six I-CAN! users in the time they previously spent with one self-represented litigant.
- Collaboration on I-CAN! created a closer working relationship among the courts, legal services programs, women’s shelters, the State Bar, child support agencies, the Judicial Council, and pro bono attorneys.
- Courts in nine California counties have adopted I-CAN!, and seven more counties are considering it. Other states are also using or studying the program.

Easy and Popular

An evaluation conducted by the University of California, Irvine, reported that 97 percent of I-CAN! users found it “easy or very easy to use” and approximately 95 percent found it to be “helpful or very helpful.”

A court staff member noted, “Every time I go past the kiosks there are people lined up waiting to use the modules. This program has helped *a lot of people*.”



A self-represented litigant fills out order to show cause forms at an I-CAN! kiosk.

Superior Court of Orange County, 700 Civic Center Drive West, Santa Ana, CA 92702

**Project contact: Jeannette McSkane, Division Director, Management Services,
949-476-4776, jmcskane@occourts.org**