

Chapter 2

Butte County: Regional Collaboration Model

PROGRAM SNAPSHOT MODEL TYPE: REGIONAL COLLABORATION MODEL

Hours:	Red Bluff: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. (21 hours per week) Willows: Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. (21 hours per week) Oroville: Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Friday 9 a.m. to noon (31 hours per week) Chico: Monday and Wednesday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Friday 9 a.m. to noon (17 hours per week)
Location:	Red Bluff, Tehama County: Court annex building (same block as courthouse) Willows, Glenn County: At the courthouse Oroville, Butte County: Court annex building (two miles from courthouse) Chico, Butte County: Court annex building (next to courthouse)
Number of Customers Served:	Monthly Average (June 2003 – September 2003): 1,220 (approximately 50% served in person and 50% by telephone)
Number of Staff: (As of May 2004)	Managing attorney (.5 FTE) Paralegal (1.0 FTE) Three Office Assistants (1.25 FTE)
Number of Volunteers:	Average 3 at any time
Case Types Served:	All areas of family law not covered by family law facilitator: dissolution, summary dissolution, motion for non child or spousal support. Guardianships including establishing, opposing, obtaining visitation in and alternatives to probate guardianship. Unlawful detainer (tenant and landlord), civil harassment, domestic violence restraining orders (petitions and responses), name changes, civil complaints and answers, change of venue motions, miscellaneous civil, small claims, collecting a judgment.
Types of services rendered:	Procedural information, assistance filling out forms, explanation of court orders, referrals to additional legal assistance, development of self-help materials, training and assistance for community organizations.
Methods of Service Delivery:	One-on-one assistance by staff over the telephone; service to walk-in customers including forms packets, forms completion, workshop scheduling and providing additional materials; one-on-one assistance by legal staff via teleconferencing equipment; language interpretation via teleconferencing equipment; teleconferenced workshops focused on forms completion.

Background

Butte, Glenn, and Tehama are three contiguous counties in the north-central part of California. Butte County's population of 203,000 ranks near the midpoint among the 58 California counties. Glenn County at 26,000 and Tehama County at 56,000 are much smaller. The majority of residents of Glenn and Tehama counties live in rural areas, as do about 40 percent of Butte County residents. Compared with larger urban areas of the state and with the central valley region, these counties have proportionately more white non-Hispanic residents (78 percent) and fewer Hispanic or Latino residents (13 percent), proportionately fewer people who speak a language other than English at home (14 percent), and proportionately more people older than 65 (15 percent). The three counties' combined poverty rate is 19 percent, putting them in the poorest quartile of California counties.¹⁰

The Office of the Family Law Facilitator is one of the few sources on the demographics of the self-represented litigants coming to court. Customers of the family law facilitator in the three-county region are generally similar to the U.S. census population in ethnicity and in the language spoken (94 percent spoke English). Compared with the region's overall population, many more customers of the family law facilitator appear to be living in poverty. About 54 percent of customers report an individual monthly income of less than \$1,000.

Rural and semi-rural northern California are characterized by high unemployment, limited social services, limited public transportation, long distances to population centers, and an aging population. In providing services to residents, rural courts and local governments face the problems of extremely small budgets, a limited pool of attorneys and other professionals, and limited or nonexistent university and community services available to the public.

As of July 2001, Butte County had 10 judges and 2 commissioners; Glenn county had 2 judges and 1 commissioner, and Tehama County had 4 judges and one commissioner. Butte County had 122 court employees, with about 20 in Glenn County and 42 in Tehama County. During the fiscal year 2002–2003, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) reports case filings for the three counties as detailed in figure 2.1.

¹⁰ U.S. Bureau of the Census. Census 2000.

Figure 2.1
FY 2002-03 Case Filings for Butte, Glenn and Tehama Counties
Judicial Branch Statistical Information System (JBSIS)

	Butte	Glenn	Tehama	Total
Family law	3,753	587	1,252	5,592
Probate	613	59	164	836
Small claims	1,498	103	589	2,190
Limited civil	2,868	167	638	3,673

Description of Model

Goals of Program

The Self-Help Assistance Regional Project (SHARP) shows how self-help services can be provided to self-represented litigants in rural areas through the innovative use of technology, program coordination, and staff resources. SHARP's initial goals were:

- To develop a regional program including self-help centers at several court sites in three rural counties, allowing the three superior courts to use the same program design, professional staff, administration, self-help curricula, and development of materials;
- To link the self-help centers through videoconferencing equipment so that workshops, one-on-one assistance, and staff supervision can be conducted by a single managing attorney; and
- To provide self-help services to the range of case types that are needed in areas where very few services are available to self-represented litigants, including family law, guardianship, unlawful detainer, domestic violence restraining orders (DVROs), and civil harassment.

Focus Areas of Law

In 2002, the Butte County Self-Represented Litigants Planning Committee conducted an assessment to determine the greatest needs of self-represented litigants. This needs assessment included an inventory of the few services that were then available to self-represented litigants in the county: the family law facilitator, Legal Services of Northern California, Community Legal Information of California State University, Chico, the local domestic violence advocacy program, the county law library, and the small claims advisor. Very few services were available to self-represented litigants in the other two counties. This limited number of services for self-represented litigants is common in rural areas.

Based on this needs assessment, SHARP anticipated focusing on these case types: family law not addressed by the family law facilitator (i.e., issues other than child support), small claims, unlawful detainers, eviction, fair housing, employment, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), enforcement of judgments, guardianships, name changes,

bankruptcy, criminal appeals, probate, general civil procedures, tax issues, tenant housing, and senior law issues.

When they opened in 2002, the centers focused primarily on all areas of family law not covered by the family law facilitator, including summary dissolution, orders to show cause, and notice of motion for non-child support issues such as custody and visitation of children, other financial matters, and finalization of judgment. The centers also addressed, but not as a primary legal service, guardianships, unlawful detainer, civil harassment, domestic violence restraining orders and responses to them, name changes, civil complaints and answers, change of venue motions, some limited civil matters, mediations, and drafting stipulations.

By the end of 2003, the centers had expanded the primary areas of law served beyond family law to unlawful detainer (landlord and tenant), guardianships, small claims, and limited civil matters. By mid-2004, SHARP added name changes, expungements, money judgment collection, stepparent adoptions, and emancipations. In 2004, of the 119 workshops given by SHARP during a sample reporting month, 52% were on an area of family law, 9% on civil harassment and domestic violence, 10% on unlawful detainer, and 29% on other topics including stepparent adoptions, guardianships, and other civil matters.

Project Planning and Start-up

Prior to receiving the grant for the SHARP project, Butte County received a planning grant from the AOC. A Self-Represented Litigants Planning Committee was formed, including a supervising judge, family law facilitator, small claims advisor, legal services director, and other staff from public and nonprofit agencies. Both the Butte and Glenn County courts and departments were involved in the planning. A summit conference in October 2001 launched a community needs assessment of more than 50 stakeholders, including a survey of those who used community agencies and a resource directory of existing legal services for self-represented litigants. The Planning Committee also formed subcommittees to address funding, training, resources, and data collection/needs assessment. This information-gathering process conducted by the advisory group fed into the planning for the SHARP centers. Members of the bench and the court executive officers from both Butte and Glenn counties were active in planning the project. Because Butte and Glenn counties had a tradition of using a regional model in many service areas (for example, a collaborative mentoring program operated through the family and children services departments), the regional model for the self-help pilot project grant seemed appropriate. The two counties decided to invite Tehama County to join in their collaboration, and the court executive and presiding judge in Tehama were both enthusiastic about participating.

After funding for the model regional self-help centers was received, the managing attorney was hired in August 2002 and located in an office at Butte County's main courthouse in Oroville. Between August and November, the managing attorney held

planning meetings with judges and court staff and asked court clerks to distribute a customer needs survey to self-represented litigants. In November, SHARP opened its first self-help center in the downtown courthouse in Oroville, about two miles from the main courthouse. In January 2003, SHARP opened the self-help center in Red Bluff, Tehama County, across the street from the main Tehama courthouse and began holding workshops in Chico, Butte County, in an annex building directly opposite the Chico courthouse. In April, SHARP opened the Glenn County self-help center in Willows in an office within the courthouse. By then, SHARP was providing teleconferenced workshops at all four sites.

All locations are accessible as required under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Public transportation to and from outlying areas in these counties is limited, but within the towns themselves, the SHARP locations are easily accessible. Although few signs direct customers to the centers, more than one-half of customers are referred to the centers by court clerks or other court staff, who provide directions.

The original SHARP staff consisted of the managing attorney, a paralegal, a paid assistant, a cadre of student volunteers (four to seven per semester), and two attorneys who conducted some workshops under contract. The roles and responsibilities of the staff members are described in more detail in the staffing section.

Populations Served

Volume

SHARP serves an overall regional population of 285,700 residents. In the last period reported, November 2003 to April 2004, SHARP served an average of 1,208 customers per month, apportioned as follows: Butte County, 723; Glenn County, 182; Tehama County, 298 (see figure 2.2 for details). About 60 percent of SHARP customers are served in Butte County, 25 percent in Tehama County, and 15 percent in Glenn County. The self-help centers experienced a 40 percent increase in customers during their first year of operation. Of SHARP customer contacts, about 51 percent are telephone, 31 percent walk in, and 17 percent workshop. An estimated 27 percent of customers have previously visited SHARP self-help centers. (Data on SHARP attendance are tracked by program staff and taken from the program's quarterly report to the AOC. Data on customer demographics and services received are taken from the intake forms, filled out by a subset of customers, and service tracking forms, filled out by staff on customers. See Appendix B for more information.)

**Figure 2.2
SHARP Volume Data**

Month	Quarterly Report	Intake Forms	Service Tracking Forms
June 2003	1169	161	245
July 2003	1102	162	301
August 2003	1369	187	501
September 2003	1240	163	623
October 2003	1093	193	913
November 2003	844	137	558
March 2004	1150	142	669
Monthly average	1138	164	544

Demographics

SHARP does not target its services to any particular demographic group.

Gender and number of children. About 65 percent of SHARP customers are female, and 64 percent of customers have at least one child (see figure 2.3 for an overview).

Race/ethnicity and language. The race/ethnicity of SHARP customers mirrors the overall race/ethnicity makeup of the region. About 78 percent of customers are white non-Hispanic, 14 percent are Hispanic, and 7 percent are Native American. Most customers (84 percent) do not speak a language other than English in the home; among those who do, Spanish is the most common. Furthermore, almost all customers (93 percent) prefer to receive services in English. Compared with the general population, slightly more SHARP customers speak a language other than English at home, as illustrated in figure 2.4.

**Figure 2.3
Population Served by SHARP: Summary Statistics
Customer Intake Forms**

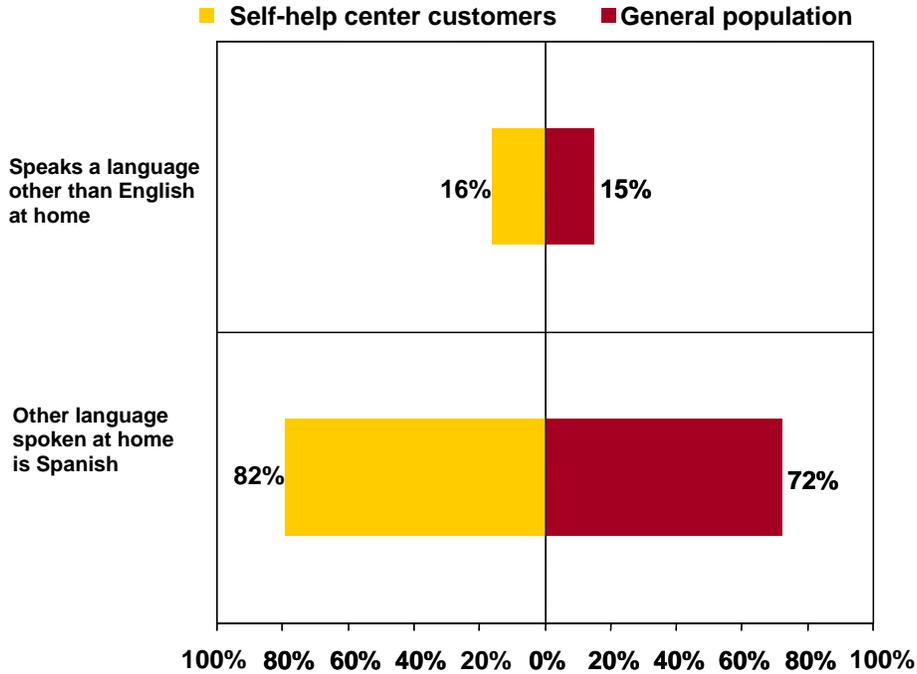
	%	N
Gender		
Female	65%	1,061
Male	35%	569
(missing)		32
Total		1,662
Age		
10-19 years	2%	25
20-29 years	24%	325
30-30 years	25%	332
40-49 years	26%	346
50 or older	24%	321
(missing)		313
Total		1,662

Figure 2.3 (continued)

	%	N
Race/Ethnicity¹		
African American	2%	30
Asian or Pacific Islander	2%	27
Hispanic	14%	218
Native American	7%	115
White non-Hispanic	78%	1,239
Speak a language other than English at home		
Yes	16%	258
No	84%	1,355
(missing)		49
Total		1,662
If yes, which language?		
Spanish	82%	166
Armenian	3%	5
Cantonese	2%	3
(missing)		55
Total		258
Monthly household income		
\$500 or less	16%	225
\$501-\$1000	27%	378
\$1001-\$1500	22%	314
\$1501-\$2000	14%	196
\$2001-\$2500	9%	124
\$2501 or more	13%	180
(missing)		245
Total		1,662
Education		
8th grade or less	5%	72
9th to 11th grade	17%	255
High school diploma or GED	32%	475
Some college	32%	462
Associates degree	6%	92
Bachelors degree	5%	66
Graduate degree	3%	42
(missing)		198
Total		1,662
Number of children		
None	36%	541
One	25%	369
Two	21%	320
Three or more	18%	275
(missing)		157
Total		1,662

¹ Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one race/ethnicity.

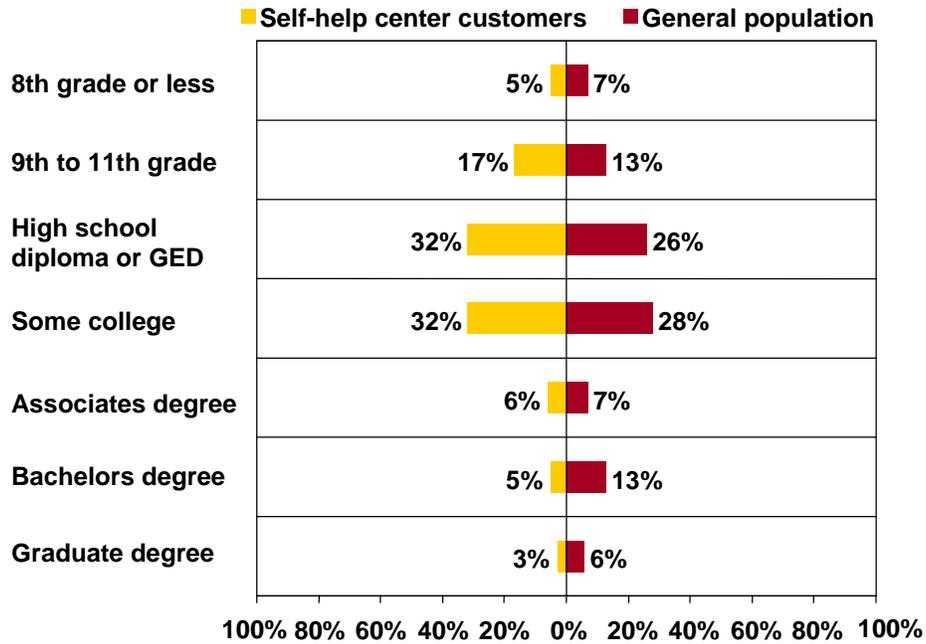
Figure 2.4
Comparing Center Customers With the General Population Averages in
Butte, Glenn, and Tehama Counties: Speaks a Language Other Than English at Home



U.S. Census Bureau; Butte County, Glenn County, and Tehama County, CA, DP-2 Profile of Selected Social Characteristics: 2000, American FactFinder. Retrieved July 22, 2004 from the U.S. Census Bureau Web site: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/060071k.html>

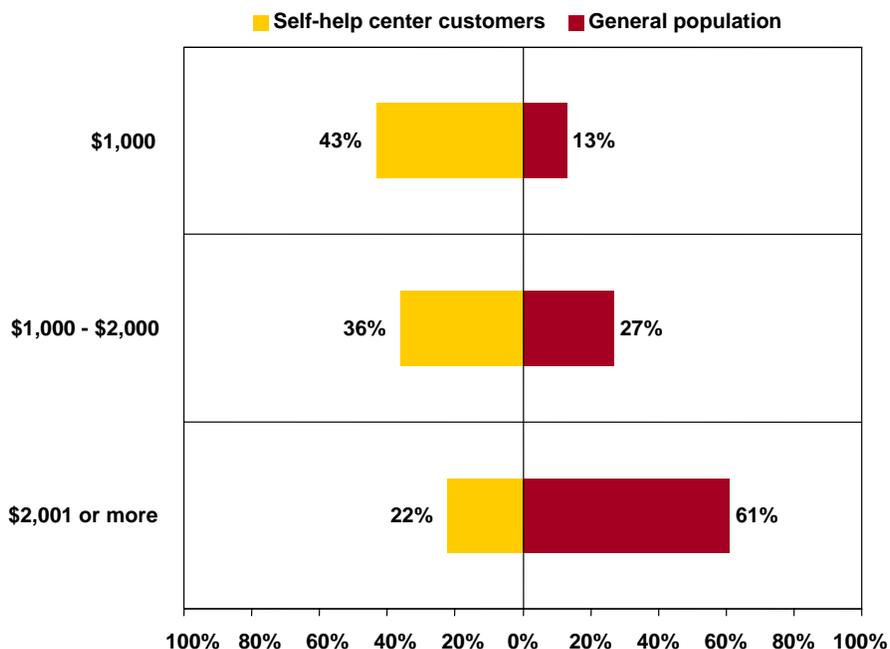
Education, income, and employment. The level of education of SHARP customers is somewhat lower than that of the general population in the region (see figure 2.5). About 55 percent of SHARP customers have a high school education or less, compared with 46 percent of the region’s population. The level of income of SHARP customers is lower than the general population (see figure 2.6). About 43 percent of SHARP customers have an income of \$1,000 per month or less, compared with only 13 percent of the population of the region. About 50 percent of customers are not employed, reflecting in part the high proportion of retired people in the area.

Figure 2.5
Comparing SHARP Customers With the General Population Averages in
Butte, Glenn, and Tehama Counties: Education



U.S. Census bureau; Butte County, CA, CP-2 Profile of Selected Social Characteristics: 2000, American FactFinder. Retrieved July 22, 2004 from the U.S. Census Bureau Web site:
<http://quickfacts.census.gov/gfd/states/06/060071k.html>

Figure 2.6
Comparing SHARP Customers with the General Population Averages in
Butte, Glenn, and Tehama Counties: Monthly Household Income in Dollars



U.S. Census Bureau; Butte County, CA, DP-3 Profile of Selected Economic Characteristics: 200, American FactFinder. Retrieved July 22, 2004 from the U.S. Census Bureau Web site:
<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/060071k.html>

Notes: The self-help pilot project data and the census data do not perfectly match. The census data categories are as follows: \$833 or less; \$834 to \$2083; \$2084 and over. Numbers have been rounded and may not sum to exactly 100 percent.

Service Staffing

Paid Personnel

The managing attorney receives grant funding from the regional collaborative under a contract with the courts and is then responsible for employing staff and administering the program. At the time of the second site visit, SHARP staff consisted of the managing attorney (.5 FTE), a paralegal/administrative assistant (1.0 FTE), and three office assistants (1.25 FTE). The managing attorney and the paralegal divide their time among the four self-help centers.

Managing attorney. The managing attorney has been with the program since its inception. She has experience as a family law attorney and as a law professor, as well as previous experience as a high school teacher. She uses skills from these arenas in her current position. Her family law background provides her with the expertise necessary to supervise staff to ensure that customers are receiving quality and accurate assistance. Furthermore, her teaching experience has provided her with the skills necessary to train staff and assist customers. Her responsibilities include managing the program, training and supervising staff, conducting workshops, and helping customers one-on-one. The

managing attorney's SHARP position is half-time. The other half of her time is spent as the Butte County family law facilitator. She is also the Glenn County small claims advisor. (The Oroville SHARP and Butte County Family Law Facilitator offices are combined into one self-help center. The SHARP centers in Tehama and Glenn counties are not combined with the family law facilitator offices in those counties.)

Paralegal. The paralegal assists customers at the centers, particularly in completing forms and reviewing documents; schedules and conducts workshops; develops instructional materials; and trains other staff and volunteers.

Office assistants. The three office assistants perform intake and triage functions. Most callers or walk-in customers at SHARP are first served by an office assistant, who determines the customer's level of need. In some cases, the office assistants help customers directly by giving them the appropriate forms packet, providing information on court calendars and filing procedures, or scheduling a SHARP workshop. Other customers are referred to the SHARP managing attorney or paralegal. Office assistants also perform general office support tasks at the four SHARP locations.

Contract attorneys. SHARP also contracts with attorneys who give workshops for the program. Expenditures on contract attorneys ranged from .5 to 1.0 FTE during the period studied.

Volunteers

At any one time, an average of three interns or volunteers have worked at SHARP during the period studied. SHARP volunteers help with workshops and clerical tasks and also provide one-on-one assistance to customers when staff are busy with other customers or are at another SHARP office. Originally, student volunteers also answered the phones, but they are no longer assigned this task. People who were interviewed by the evaluation team during site visits (hereafter respondents; see Appendix B) explained that substantive knowledge is needed to answer callers' questions effectively, and paid staff now handle the phones. Currently, the project has one part-time bilingual volunteer who can assist customers in Spanish, but respondents noted that it would be beneficial for the centers to have more bilingual staff members and volunteers to ensure the centers will be able to assist Spanish-speaking customers.

Supervision and Training

Both new employees and volunteers receive extensive training from the managing attorney. New volunteers take part in an introductory training, are given written training materials, and take part in regularly scheduled in-service training sessions with the managing attorney. These training sessions cover a variety of topics, including substantive areas of the law, procedural issues, instructions on how to assist customers in filling out forms, and guidance on the difference between providing information and providing legal advice. SHARP has also created for its staff detailed instruction binders on case types and forms.

Supervision and training are important issues for this program for several reasons. Because the program now operates in four different locations, supervision and quality control present challenges. The program also uses paraprofessional staff and volunteers, all of whom need extensive supervision and training. The managing attorney and paralegal/assistant rotate among the four sites to provide on-site supervision and expertise. As a result, the managing attorney is constantly busy, but based on site visit observations, she is able to balance the multiple demands on her time and to assist her staff and volunteers when necessary.

The videoconferencing equipment is used extensively for staff supervision. On days when the managing attorney is not at the remote sites, they stay in touch via videoconferencing with Oroville, so that volunteers and staff can ask questions as they arise. Respondents say that the managing attorney tries to impress on her staff and volunteers that they should always feel free to ask her questions and should never give information to customers if they are unsure about its accuracy. Researchers observed this directly during both site visits: Staff and volunteers felt comfortable asking the attorney legal questions (either in person, on the phone, or via videoconferencing). This is a novel use of the equipment and a way for the managing attorney to have face-to-face contact with staff at multiple sites.

General Staffing Issues

According to respondents, hiring and retaining staff has been SHARP's greatest challenge. All the positions at SHARP except that of managing attorney have turned over more than once. Respondents attributed this to the fact that the grant funds allow for only low-paying positions without benefits and that staff trained at SHARP can find better paying positions elsewhere in the region. Turnover creates particular problems because SHARP invests a great deal of time in training its new employees and volunteers.

Another staffing challenge is the fact that the managing attorney is only half time in this position. While this one-stop model, combining the role of the SHARP managing attorney and the family law facilitator into one position, has coordinated key functions for self-represented litigants, some respondents said that the managing attorney's workload is that of two full-time positions condensed into one.

SHARP had originally planned to provide a number of workshops through attorney volunteers. However, the program has not had much success recruiting attorneys as volunteers.

Despite these challenges, respondents were universally positive about SHARP staff. Many commented on their high level of training, expertise, and knowledge. Respondents said that SHARP staff were better trained than staff at other legal assistance programs.

Analysis of Customers Served

Language of Service Provision

Almost all SHARP customers preferred to receive services in English. However, the project has provided some services in Spanish and Hmong, relying on bilingual volunteers. During one semester, the project had a Hmong-speaking volunteer, and the program has had several Spanish-speaking volunteers. Service tracking data indicate that the services provided in Spanish and Hmong took place mostly during one-on-one, in-person interactions, although some telephone assistance and one workshop were provided in Spanish. Respondents explain that the videoconferencing equipment also is useful for helping Spanish-speaking customers. Occasionally, a Spanish-speaking volunteer at one site has helped a Spanish-speaking customer at another site.

Case Types and Issues

SHARP serves the broadest array of case types of the five model self-help centers (see figure 2.7 for details). About one-half (55 percent) of customers require assistance with family law, 16 percent with civil, 14 percent with unlawful detainer, and 12 percent with probate cases.

Figure 2.7
SHARP: Case Types Served¹
Service Tracking Forms

	%	N
Family	55%	2,402
Dissolution	63%	1,251
Domestic violence prevention act	21%	415
Paternity	3%	66
Adoption	2%	41
Other family law	11%	217
Unlawful Detainer	14%	594
Civil	16%	689
Small claims	39%	272
Civil harassment	24%	168
Name change	9%	63
Other civil law*	28%	196
Probate	12%	525
Other	3%	150
(missing)		306
Total		4,666

¹ Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one case type.

* Other includes bankruptcy, breach of contract, debt collection, elder abuse and personal injury.

Most of the family law cases are dissolutions (63 percent), with an additional 21 percent of customers requiring assistance with domestic violence restraining orders. The most frequently raised issues in family law cases are child custody (40 percent) and visitation (43 percent), which are raised with equal frequency in marital dissolution and domestic

violence cases. (Customers with cases involving child support are assisted by the family law facilitator.) About 80 percent of customers with family law cases or issues were the moving party, and 17 percent were the responding party.

SHARP also assisted in civil cases involving small claims (39 percent), civil harassment (24 percent), and name change (9 percent). Most SHARP customers with civil cases were plaintiffs (78 percent).

Most of the unlawful detainer cases assisted by SHARP were evictions (88 percent). SHARP assisted both landlords (67 percent) and tenants (32 percent).

SHARP is the only model self-help center to assist a high proportion of probate and guardianship cases (12 percent). About 90 percent of the probate cases involved guardianships, and a high proportion (87 percent) of the customers were petitioners.

Types of Services

Most SHARP customers received assistance with information about legal procedures (68 percent). More than one-third of all customers (36 percent) received direct assistance in completing forms, and another 10 percent received assistance reviewing forms they had completed. Ten percent of customers received forms with written instructions. Within case types, civil and unlawful detainer cases were somewhat more likely than family and probate cases to receive procedural assistance and not direct assistance in completing forms.

Description of Service Delivery

As illustrated in figure 2.8 below, SHARP provided extensive telephone, one-on-one, and workshop assistance for its customers. Volume data from the SHARP self-help centers indicate that nearly half of the services were provided over the phone, another one-third through one-on-one, in-person assistance, and 17 percent through workshops.

Figure 2.8
SHARP: Contact Type¹
Service Tracking Forms

	%	N
Telephone	47%	2,114
One-on-one	41%	1,854
Workshops	14%	623
Other*	1%	62
Total		4,653

¹ Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one contact type.

* Other includes staff attempting to return telephone calls and customers who came to the center to use books and resources without speaking to staff.

Workshops

Workshops were the principal component of SHARP's planned regional videoconferencing model (for an overview, see figure 2.9). The primary goal of SHARP workshops is the accurate and informed completion of necessary forms.

Videoconferenced workshops allow the managing attorney or an attorney on contract to SHARP to "conduct the workshop/clinic, provide an orientation, assist in completion of the forms relevant to that particular workshop subject or area of the law, answer questions and communicate with participants or assistants in the other locations" (SHARP Project Proposal).

Figure 2.9
SHARP Workshop Profile
Workshop Tracking Forms

Number of workshops (March 2004)	47
Workshop length	
30 minutes	2%
One hour	46%
One and one half hours	20%
Two hours	13%
Two and one half hours	13%
Three hours	7%
Attendance	
One person	24%
Two people	47%
Three people	16%
Four or more people	12%

Workshops offer other advantages for a regional self-help model. At any one center, professional legal staff are available for drop-in or telephone assistance only a small proportion of the time. With a range of workshops available throughout the month, the SHARP office staff can triage customers' legal concerns and assign them to workshops where they will receive expert assistance with forms and other issues. Finally, the number of drop-in and telephone customers has increased steadily at SHARP since the beginning of the program. Workshops, with their ability to serve many customers at one time, maximize attorney resources and allow SHARP to manage its growth in users without corresponding increases in staff.

SHARP holds multiple workshops during the month at all four of its sites. Workshops are scheduled in advance. Monthly workshop schedules are printed for each SHARP location and are given to the court clerks and faxed to community agencies and other frequent referral sources for the centers. Office staff have a set of intake questions to ask customers who telephone or visit the self-help centers, and they can provide a workshop appointment when appropriate. About 22 percent of all customers at SHARP were given a workshop appointment during the study period.

In the most recent reporting period, August 2004, SHARP held 120 workshops in the areas of family law (52 percent), unlawful detainer (10 percent), civil harassment (9 percent), and other matters, including stepparent adoptions, guardianships, obtaining judgments, and other civil topics (29 percent). Although 52 percent of workshops were in the area of family law, intake data show that the family law workshops served 64 percent of all workshop participants, perhaps indicating higher enrollment for the family law workshops. Although SHARP offers a small number of guardianship workshops, they serve a high proportion of workshop participants (10 percent).

About 14 percent of all SHARP customers were served through workshops, including 16 percent of family law customers, 12 percent of probate customers, 13 percent of unlawful detainer customers, and 13 percent of civil harassment customers (see figure 2.10).

Figure 2.10
SHARP Workshop Topics¹
Workshop Tracking Forms

	%	N
Dissolution	36%	17
Custody	17%	8
Other family law	17%	8
Unlawful detainer	13%	6
Other case type	34%	16
Total		47

¹ Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one topic.

The program uses videoconferencing equipment to broadcast workshops to multiple sites. In August 2004, one-third of the workshops (42) were videoconferenced to another site. SHARP has encountered some difficulties in consistently videoconferencing workshops. The centers are not all open on the same days and times, and there may be no one available at the remote sites to operate the videoconferencing equipment and assist workshop attendees.

Respondents explained that over the course of this past year, SHARP has refined the workshops they provide. For example, the project now offers separate dissolution workshops for customers with children and those without children. This way, customers without children do not have to sit through instructions about and explanations of the forms that customers with children must complete. The program also covers separate steps of the process in separate workshops rather than trying to cover all steps of the process at once. Thus, SHARP now offers an order-to-show-cause workshop separate from a motion workshop reflecting the difference in service of process requirements. Respondents explained that SHARP is now focusing on helping customers get through the entire process of their cases rather than just helping them to start their cases.

In March 2004, 47 workshops were examined in detail. As detailed in figure 2.9, the workshops ranged in length from 30 minutes to three hours, with slightly less than half (21) of the workshops lasting one hour. Attendance for the workshops (across all sites) varied from one to seven people, with one or two people participating in 71 percent (32) of the workshops. Data from workshop forms indicate that in March 2004, center staff led all of the workshops, and 16 workshops included the use of assistants.

Customers received a variety of services during the workshops, including information on legal procedures, help preparing forms, help preparing for hearings, and assistance with motions. Figure 2.11 illustrates the services received during the March 2004 workshops.

Figure 2.11
SHARP: Type of Service in Workshops¹
Workshop Tracking Forms

	%	N
Legal/procedural assistance	97%	46
Forms preparation	87%	41
Hearing preparation	19%	9
Motion assistance	10%	5
Referrals	10%	5
Video or other visual presentation	4%	2
Other	4%	2
Total		47

¹ Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one type of service.

Workshops used a combination of lectures, question and answer sessions, one-on-one assistance, and small group activities, as illustrated in figure 2.12. The workshops SHARP offers are constantly changing in response to the needs of customers. Brief descriptions of a sample of workshops follow.

Figure 2.12
SHARP Workshop Format¹
Workshop Tracking Forms

	%	N
Small group	49%	23
One-on-one	36%	17
Lecture	26%	12
Question and answer	25%	12
Other	4%	2
Total		47

¹ Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one format.

Dissolution Set I (with Children) . This one-hour workshop is offered every other week at each location. It is part of a three-part workshop series designed to assist customers through each stage of the dissolution. This workshop gives an orientation regarding the dissolution process, then provides step-by-step instructions on filling out the following forms: summons, petition, declaration under Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act (UCCJEA), and proof of service. After forms are completed, customers are instructed on how to make copies, file, serve documents, and file completed proof of service. In all workshops, attendees are encouraged to make their copies at the SHARP centers so that everything is prepared and in order upon leaving the center.

Dissolution Set II. This two-hour workshop is offered every other week at each location. It is a follow-up to the first dissolution workshop, and begins with an orientation to the judgment process. Step-by-step instructions are given on filling out the following forms: declaration of disclosure, schedule of assets and debts, income and expense declaration, declaration regarding service of declaration of disclosure, petitioner’s/respondent’s property declaration.

Dissolution Set III: Default judgment workshop. This is a one- to two-hour workshop offered every other week at each location. Step-by-step instructions are given on filling out the following forms: declaration for default, notice of entry of default, judgment, related attachments, notice of entry of judgment, request for default hearing/request for hearing to establish child support (Butte County only). Default judgments in paternity actions are also covered.

Additional family law workshops. The Notice of Motion workshop, which is given every week, includes instruction on the forms: notice of motion, application for order and supporting declaration, income and expense declaration, and other attachments as required. The Order to Show Cause workshop is given every week and includes instruction on the forms: order to show cause and declarations and attachments as needed. The Paternity—Petition for Custody and Support workshop is given every week and

covers summons, petition, UCCJEA, and proof of service. The Response workshop is given every week and includes responses and the income and expense declaration forms.

Probate guardianship. The guardianship workshop lasts three hours and is offered every other week at each location. The workshop begins with an orientation to the paternity process. The first half of the workshop gives step-by-step instructions on filling out the following forms: petition for appointment of guardian, order appointing guardian, letters of guardianship, petition for appointment of temporary guardian, letters of temporary guardianship, order appointing temporary guardian, notice of hearing, confidential guardian screening form, duties of guardian, order appointing court investigator, consent nomination and waiver of notice, UCCJEA, all attachments as needed, order dispensing with notice as needed, and proof of personal service as needed. After the midway point in the workshop, the following forms are covered: oppositions, terminations, petition to appoint successor guardian, petition for visitation, and related requests. People who need instruction only on the latter forms can join the workshop at the halfway point. Finally, information is given on making copies, filing, serving documents, filing completed proof of service, and the next step in the process.

Civil harassment and domestic violence. This workshop lasts from one to three hours and is given every week at every location. Customers are given step-by-step instructions on filling out either the civil harassment or domestic violence packets, as needed.

Evictions. This workshop lasts one hour and is given every week at every location. Customers are given step-by-step instructions on filling out the unlawful detainer forms packet.

SHARP has evaluated and changed its workshops over time. SHARP identified the importance of helping customers finish their dissolutions and reconfigured the dissolution workshops so that they formed a series covering each part of the process. In guardianship, SHARP has identified that many people return to the centers after taking the guardianship workshop and need help putting forms in proper order and determining which attachments go with which forms. SHARP may offer a second workshop on this topic.

One-on-One Assistance

Many of SHARP's customers come directly to the self-help centers without an appointment. Volume data indicate that 31 percent of all customers are walk-ins. According to interviewees, the type and extent of one-on-one assistance varies depending on the needs and abilities of the customers. The most common form of assistance walk-in customers receive is information on legal procedure, including where to file legal papers, which forms to use, and what the next steps in their case will be. About 39 percent of all walk-in customers receive procedural information from SHARP staff. About 12 percent receive direct assistance in filling out forms and reviewing documents. Each of the SHARP centers has tables at which customers can work, and staff members can help them with questions about what forms they need and how to fill them out. About 6 percent receive forms and written instructions without direct assistance in completing the

forms. About 18 percent are given an appointment to a SHARP workshop, and 6 percent are given a referral to another provider.

The use of the videoconferencing equipment for one-on-one assistance is an unexpected benefit of SHARP's regional model. Individuals interviewed explain that the managing attorney uses the videoconferencing equipment to provide one-on-one assistance both to customers and to office staff and volunteers assisting customers. For example, if a volunteer working at the Red Bluff location cannot answer a customer's question, she can reach the managing attorney, who may be at one of the other center locations. The managing attorney can then use the videoconferencing equipment to help the customer face-to-face.

Phone Assistance

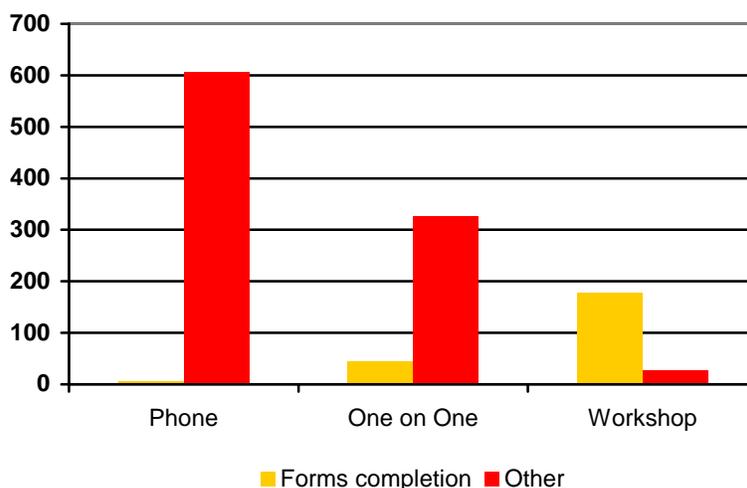
Volume data indicate that 51 percent of SHARP contacts are made over the telephone. Explaining that services provided over the phone are very important, interview respondents noted that self-represented litigants may not take the time to go to a center; they thought many questions could be answered effectively over the phone. Customers phoning SHARP received a variety of different services, including instructions on how to complete forms, explanation of court orders, and general legal and procedural information. SHARP has developed a series of scripts for the staff answering the telephone; the script helps them identify the litigant's problem and direct that person to an appropriate workshop or referral if service cannot be provided by telephone. Customers using the telephone receive information on legal procedures (42 percent), workshop appointments (31 percent), referrals to other providers (11 percent), and occasionally assistance in filling out forms (1 percent).

The SHARP centers are serving customers who live in rural communities with nonexistent public transportation, and these communities are often many miles from the centers. A telephone call is the first and perhaps only contact with SHARP. For this reason, project staff recognized the importance of having knowledgeable individuals answering the phones. During the course of the program, SHARP also found that the volume of phone calls was overwhelming the program and made the decision to stop returning messages left after office hours.

Forms Completion by Service Type

Figure 2.13 estimates the number of customers receiving assistance in filling out forms by type of service. Forms completion is the most time-consuming type of assistance for staff and the one that generally requires an attorney or paralegal. At SHARP, more customers are served by one-on-one, in-person assistance or by telephone; however, the bulk of forms completion assistance takes place in workshops.

Figure 2.13
SHARP: Forms Completion by Contact Type
Service Tracking Forms



Written Materials

SHARP has created a variety of written materials for customers. These include form packets with instructions, pamphlets that explain court processes, and brochures highlighting services available at other agencies. People interviewed for the evaluation explained that many customers use the workspaces provided by the centers along with the written materials to complete their forms while they are at the centers and then have center staff check their work. Thus, the written materials allow those customers who do not need intensive one-on-one assistance to complete their forms with minimal time and involvement from center staff. SHARP also allows litigants to use computers at the centers to complete forms, using programs such as HotDocs, EZLegal File, and fillable PDF forms developed by the AOC.

SHARP staff expressed a need for additional materials for self-represented litigants, including forms packets such as the Judicial Council Domestic Violence forms packets, links at the self-help centers to the Judicial Council Self-Help Web site, forms that can be filled out online, and instructional videos for litigants. The use of standardized Judicial Council forms packets makes it easier to handle forms completion in a workshop setting.

Chronological Description of Service Flow

Referrals to the Centers

According to intake data, almost half of SHARP customers are referred to the program by court clerks, and another quarter are referred by family and friends (see figure 2.14). (SHARP’s proportion of referrals from court clerks, 48 percent, compares with 19 percent from this source in Fresno County and 36 percent in San Francisco).

Figure 2.14
How SHARP Customers Heard of the Self-Help Center¹
Customer Intake Forms

Source	%	N
Clerk’s office	48%	655
Friend or family	22%	305
Family law facilitator	8%	113
Family court services	7%	96
Community service agencies	5%	73
Legal aid	5%	70
Attorney	4%	50
District attorney	3%	45
Pamphlets	3%	40
Judge or Commissioner	1%	17
Newspaper or other advertisement	1%	12
Police	1%	11
Other court personnel	1%	7
Walk-in	0%	3
Bar association	0%	2
Other	4%	55
Total		1,554

¹ Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one source.

SHARP posters are posted in the courthouses, and program brochures are provided to court clerks, other court staff, and community-based organizations. The managing attorney has met with numerous groups to inform them of SHARP’s activities, including Legal Services, the domestic violence shelter and advocacy program in the area, senior citizens groups, substance abuse rehabilitation centers, the Head Start annual network meeting, Rotary Clubs, retired public employees, and the community resource fair.

SHARP also sent a letter and book on limited scope representation¹¹, also known as “unbundling,” to family law attorneys in all three counties to encourage them to provide these services, including representation for a discrete task such as a court hearing. Finally, SHARP staff report that social services agencies in Glenn and Tehama counties are beginning to make calls to the centers on behalf of their clients, as well as referring them to the centers.

The ways that customers learned about SHARP were generally consistent across the demographic categories of gender, race/ethnicity, education, and income. Hispanic customers were more likely to report that they heard of the centers through family and friends (24 percent) than white non-Hispanic customers (19 percent). Very low-income customers (\$500 or less per month of individual income) were also more likely to have heard of SHARP through family and friends (25 percent) than customers with an income of more than \$2,000 per month (16 percent).

Previous Attempts to Get Help

Most customers (69 percent) did not seek help for their cases prior to coming to SHARP. For the minority of customers who had sought help elsewhere, about one-quarter sought help from Legal Aid, one-quarter sought help from a private attorney, and another quarter sought help from families and friends. Only 30 percent of SHARP customers had considered hiring an attorney. Most customers stated they were representing themselves because they could not afford an attorney (69 percent), while 23 percent stated they were unsure if they needed an attorney, and 17 percent stated that they chose to represent themselves. Customers with unlawful detainer issues (about 15 percent) had a strikingly different profile of self-representation, with 54 percent saying that they could not afford a lawyer and 38 percent saying they chose to represent themselves.

Intake Procedure

SHARP has a formal intake and triage procedure. Office staff are trained in a scripted set of questions that help them determine whether a customer, either in person or on the telephone, can be helped through immediate information and provision of materials or requires a workshop appointment, one-on-one assistance with forms completion and review, or a referral to another agency. Customers who come to workshops are also quickly assessed to make sure they are receiving the right assistance. During the course of program operation, the intake procedure has changed so that volunteers and interns are no longer asked to answer phones and provide intake and triage.

Referrals From the Centers

SHARP makes referrals to a variety of legal and community service providers. According to service tracking data, SHARP referred 14 percent of its customers to another agency

¹¹ Limited scope representation is a relationship between an attorney and a person seeking legal services in which it is agreed that the scope of the legal services will be limited to the defined tasks that the person asks the attorney to perform.

(see figure 2.15). Referrals made by SHARP vary by case type. Customers with family law issues were most likely to be referred to the family law facilitator (37 percent), to other legal providers (22 percent), or to legal services (8 percent). About 32 percent of family law customers were referred to a nonlegal service, such as a domestic violence service and shelter. Customers with unlawful detainer issues were far more likely to be referred to legal services (52 percent of those referred). Customers with civil, probate, and other issues were most likely to be referred to other legal providers.

Figure 2.15
SHARP: Referrals Made to Legal and Community Service Providers¹
Service Tracking Forms

Referral	%	N
<i>Legal Service Providers</i>		
Lawyer referral service	27%	135
Family law facilitator	27%	133
Legal services	15%	75
Law library	11%	56
Small claims advisor	6%	28
Local child support agency	5%	23
Public defender	2%	10
Other legal service ²	17%	81
Total		541
<i>Community Service Providers</i>		
Domestic violence	21%	36
Government services	11%	18
Counseling service	5%	9
Mediation service	4%	6
Substance abuse services	2%	4
Housing service	2%	3
Other community service ²	70%	120
Total		196

¹ Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one provider.

² Other Legal services include Web sites, clerks and the child abduction unit. Other community services include Department of Motor Vehicles, mental health, parent education, adult services, Salvation Army, churches and Web sites.

Returning for Service

Service tracking data indicate that customers returned to SHARP for services 27 percent of the time. This is the highest proportion of returns to service across the model self-help centers and is probably due to SHARP’s model of providing some assistance to telephone or walk-in customers and then having them return for a workshop. Many customers who returned to SHARP for help were looking for assistance with the next step in the process of their cases (49 percent), as shown in figure 2.16. The second most common reason for

returning was to have additional questions answered (40 percent), to get help with forms (13 percent), and to seek document review (10 percent). Customers with unlawful detainer issues were the most likely to return to a SHARP center (33 percent).

Figure 2.16
SHARP: Reason for Customers' Return Visits¹
Service Tracking Forms

	%	N
Next step in the process	49%	587
Has additional questions	40%	476
Needs help with forms	13%	160
Document review	10%	123
Responding to new papers	5%	55
Needs help understanding a court order	3%	35
Court appearance preparation workshop	0%	4
Needs access to an interpreter to help translate in court	0%	3
Other	7%	85
Total		1,528

¹ Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one reason.
Note: About 27 percent of visits to a SHARP center were from customers who returned for additional help.

Budget and Expenditures

All SHARP staff are contract staff. SHARP centers are housed in court facilities and not required to pay rent. The SHARP videoconferencing equipment is maintained by court staff for the SHARP program.

SHARP's regional videoconferencing model required that a major portion of the first year's operating budget be spent on the installation of the videoconferencing equipment. Equipment costs in 2001–2002, largely for videoconferencing equipment and services, were \$42,000, about 52 percent of all operating expenditures. (The cost and time of installing and bringing the videoconferencing equipment online did not exceed the amount estimated in SHARP's original proposal.) Funds spent on personnel accounted for 45 percent of operating expenditures.

In 2002–2003, the first year that SHARP staffed and operated all the self-help centers, the cost for video conferencing and other equipment dropped to 5 percent of total operating expenditures, while personnel accounted for 86 percent. In 2003–2004, personnel costs accounted for 84 percent of total operating expenditures.

Collaboration and Outreach

Collaboration Within the Courts

SHARP is a collaboration among three counties. Respondents said that while an advisory committee was established to write the grant, it did not continue after the program was implemented. As described above, Butte and Glenn counties have a history of participation in regional collaboratives, and the court executive officers from Butte, Glenn, and Tehama counties had an existing relationship prior to this grant. The program continues to work closely with the court executive officers and judges in each of the three counties; the managing attorney is accessible to court staff and has established open lines of communication. Respondents said that court clerks, family law facilitators, and other court staff in all three counties have good relationships with SHARP and are eager to provide referrals to the program. Indeed, according to individuals interviewed for the evaluation, some court staff members are champions of the project and regularly tell self-represented litigants about SHARP. For example, at the Oroville courthouse, the family law court attendant gives an introductory speech about SHARP at the beginning of the family law calendar. Respondents report that SHARP also has a collaborative relationship with the Butte County law librarian. The law librarian was involved with the original planning phase of the grant and has worked with the managing attorney on making form and instruction packets.

Because SHARP's managing attorney is also the managing attorney for the Butte County Office of the Family Law Facilitator, there is a close relationship between the two agencies. The distinction between the two is administrative and budgetary, but from an Oroville customer's standpoint, there is just one integrated self-help center that assists with family law and other areas of law. The SHARP centers in Tehama and Glenn counties are not combined with the Office of the Family Law Facilitator in those counties, but those offices do provide referrals to the SHARP centers. The SHARP managing attorney recently became the small claims advisor in Glenn County.

Collaboration and Public Relations Outside the Courts

Individuals interviewed for the evaluation explained that SHARP has not done extensive collaborative work with community agencies. Given the rural nature of the tri-county region, there are not many community-based organizations with which to collaborate. Recently, however, the managing attorney has established a relationship with Catholic social services. SHARP did a presentation at Catholic social services and has entered into a collaboration to provide workshops and services in Catholic social services' teen program. The managing attorney also has engaged in discussions with the Unified Courts for Families Mentor Court Program, which coordinates juvenile and criminal law cases involving the same families. Because customers often have needs and issues in multiple areas, the two programs are exploring the possibility of sharing facilities. Currently, they are exploring the possibility of opening joint centers in Orland and Chico.

In addition, respondents discussed the possibility of building regional collaborations to expand the videoconferencing network. For example, the three-site network could be linked into other videoconferencing networks (run by public or private agencies providing a wide variety of services) to allow SHARP workshops to be broadcast in a wider variety of locations (and other workshops, classes, and trainings—law related or not—could be broadcast at the SHARP centers). Respondents were excited about this idea as a low-cost method for providing self-help services to a wider audience and as a method for providing SHARP customers with services that may address their other needs.

Impact on Litigants

Views of Court Personnel and Other Stakeholders

The SHARP centers serve thousands of customers each month who previously had no court-based self-help assistance available for cases other than those involving child support. SHARP has made the completion of dissolution cases a focus of its efforts, and respondents commented that self-represented litigants are now more likely to finish their cases, rather than starting but never finishing their cases, which was common before SHARP's implementation. Respondents also commented that forms are filled out correctly the first time, and litigants are better prepared for court.

Vignette: Assistance With Visitation Orders in a Guardianship Case

A grandmother came to the SHARP project asking for help with a visitation order in a guardianship case. She had become the legal guardian of her 8-year-old grandson two years ago because his parents were addicted to drugs and unable to care for him. The grandmother was retired and working part-time to help support her grandson, in addition to receiving some public assistance for him. At the time of the guardianship, she did not have legal representation. The mother of the child, however, had an attorney. About six months ago, the mother's attorney crafted a stipulation for visitation by the mother who was supposed to be in drug rehabilitation. Since that time, the mother has not exercised her visitation. Recently, the mother decided she wanted to visit her child. Without notice, she went to the grandmother's house at 8 p.m., accompanied by the police, to take the boy for visitation. The stipulation said she was to pick him up at school. The boy was extremely fearful and upset and did not want to go with his mother. The police said they didn't want to take the child, but felt they had no choice. SHARP was able to help the grandmother prepare a declaration to the court informing the judge of current events and requesting that the visitation order be immediately modified to reduce the distress to the child as much as possible.

Views of Customers

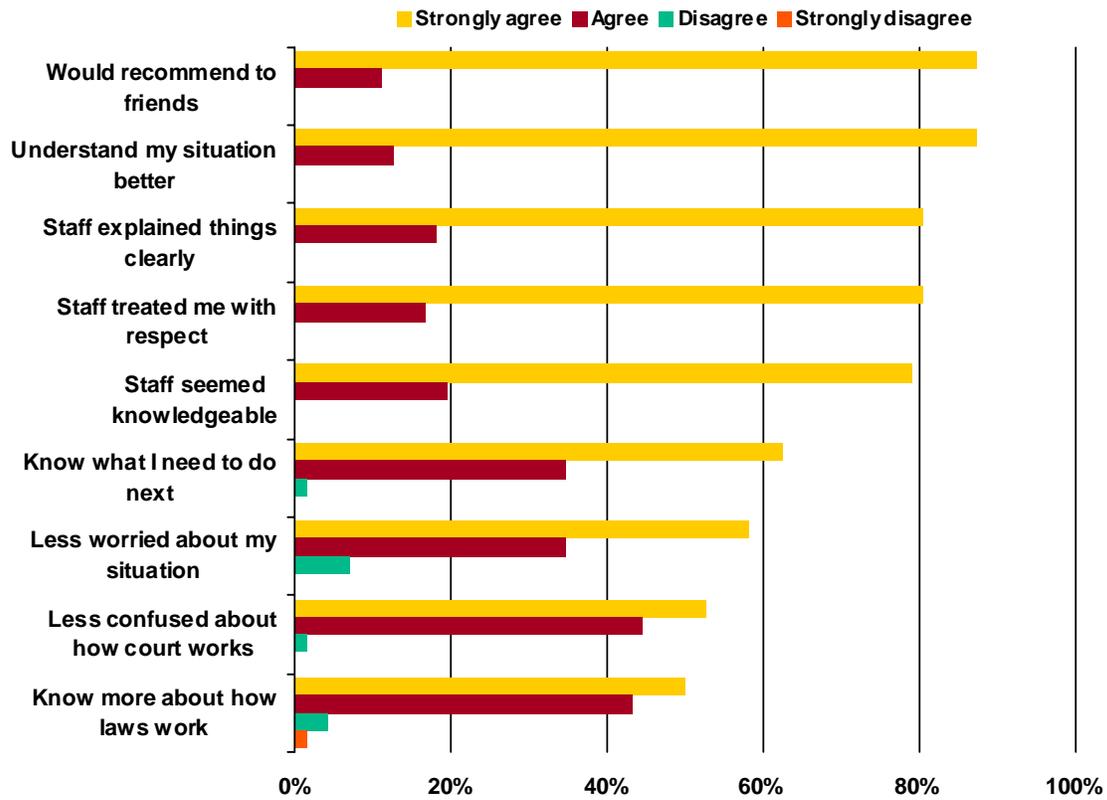
Customer satisfaction surveys were distributed to SHARP drop-in and workshop customers during a two-week period in May 2004. Surveys were received from an estimated 26 percent of those visiting the centers during this period. Although the

response rate is too low to draw many conclusions, SHARP customers consistently rated their satisfaction high (figures 2.17 and 2.18).

While customer feedback was extremely positive overall, the proportion of customers who strongly agreed with the satisfaction statements had some notable variations. Customers were least likely to strongly agree that they knew more about how the laws work (50 percent), that they were less confused about how the court works (53 percent), that they were less worried about their situation (58 percent), and that they knew what they needed to do next (63 percent). On all other items, about 80 percent or more of customers strongly agreed.

“I am extremely grateful for the help I received to get me through this difficult time and situation.”
SHARP customer

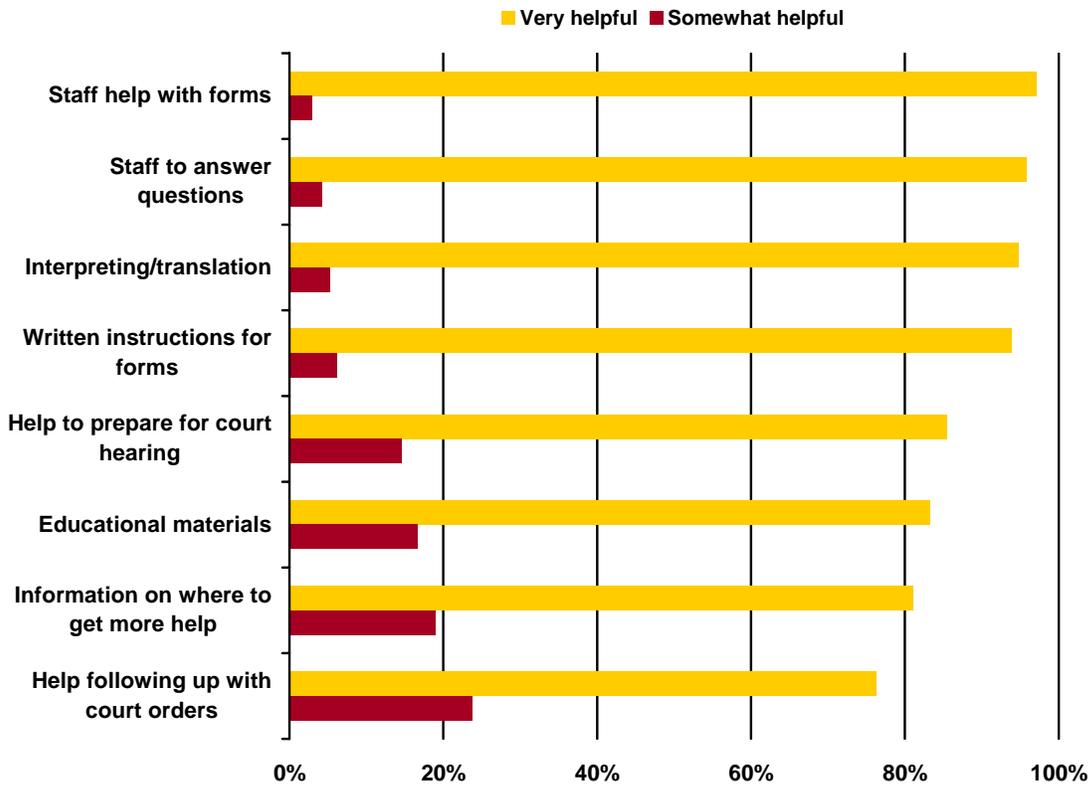
Figure 2.17
Overall Satisfaction
SHARP Customer Survey



SHARP customers overall also provided extremely positive feedback on the service assessment questions: 100 percent rated all of the services as very helpful or somewhat helpful. Customers were least likely to rate the following services as very helpful: help following up with court orders (76 percent), information on where to get more help (81 percent), educational materials (83 percent), and help to prepare for a court hearing (85 percent). For all other services, at least 94 percent of customers provided *very helpful* ratings.

“I feel that the people at SHARP helped me considerably. Otherwise I would need an attorney I can't afford!”
SHARP customer

Figure 2.18
Satisfaction With Specific Services
SHARP Customer Survey



Vignette: Unlawful Detainer Assistance Through a Videoconferenced Workshop

An elderly woman, a landlord, attended the unlawful detainer workshop. She attended the workshop in Oroville, Butte County while the legal assistant providing the workshop was in Red Bluff, Tehama County. Four other litigants with similar unlawful detainer issues were present at the workshop. The elderly woman informed staff that she was hard of hearing and could not understand what the legal assistant was saying to the group. The video conferencing monitor was positioned closer to the group of litigants and the volume was turned up so that the woman could hear. The group was very understanding of the woman's hearing disadvantage and everyone enjoyed the presentation of the new technology. As staff monitored how the workshop progressed, using the videoconferencing equipment, the same personal assistance was able to be offered as if the legal assistant was providing the services in person.

Impact on Court Process

Respondents explained that court staff members have gotten fewer complaints from self-represented litigants since the centers opened. Litigants' paperwork is now more accurate, which leads to fewer upset litigants. Respondents also said that clerks are far less frustrated now that they are able to refer litigants to SHARP. Because clerks can refer litigants to SHARP, clerks spend less time with self-represented litigants, and the lines at the clerks' counters do not get as backed up as they did before. Respondents also commented that they have heard judges compliment the program. In general, respondents asserted that cases now are completed faster and in a more organized fashion. One respondent said that SHARP is "doing something that makes the practice of law look good."

Court File Review

Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC) staff abstracted and analyzed family law dissolution and unlawful detainer files in Butte, Glenn and Tehama counties. The purpose of the file review was to identify areas in which the impact of the self-help centers could be quantified through the broad case indicators found in the court file and, more generally, to identify the problems self-represented litigants face in the course of their dissolution cases. (See Appendix E for the complete file review tables.) Cases were taken from the period of January 2003 to March 2004. Cases were chosen at random from (a) a list of litigants who received help from the SHARP centers and (b) a list of all self-represented litigants who were not on record as having received help from SHARP.

Dissolution. After excluding certain cases because the litigants had received help from an attorney, the final dissolution sample included 71 cases in which the petitioner had received help from one of the SHARP centers and 113 cases with no record of the petitioner receiving help from the SHARP centers.

Several caveats to the findings presented below should be noted. One of SHARP's objectives has been to assist customers in proceeding to judgment when their dissolution cases have been unresolved for periods of more than a year. By taking cases filed since January 2003, the sample does not capture those cases. In addition, it is possible that even though there was no record of some litigants' receiving help from the SHARP centers, they actually did receive assistance but did not fill out an intake form. It also appears from the file review data that cases receiving assistance from SHARP in the period sampled were less likely to involve children or property, and as a result, they might be less complex than cases in the comparison group. Finally, a court case file does not by any means capture the full extent of SHARP's assistance to its customers.

Background of cases. SHARP customers were more likely to file dissolution cases one year or more after their date of separation (41 percent of SHARP customers compared to 28 percent of the comparison group). Cases in the comparison group were more likely to involve children (60 percent of the comparison group, and 41 percent of SHARP customers). This may be due to the fact that in Butte County, customers with child support issues are seen at the SHARP center but by the family law facilitator. Cases in the comparison group were also more likely to involve property (56 percent of comparison group, and 46 percent of SHARP customers).

SHARP customers successful at filing paperwork. Customers of the SHARP centers were more successful than the comparison group at including key elements in their filings. SHARP customers were more likely to file UCCJEA declarations when the case involved children (97 percent to 86 percent) and to provide income information with the petition (69% to 53%). SHARP customers were also somewhat less likely to have missing or inconsistent information in their petitions (52 percent of SHARP customers compared to 60 percent of comparison group).

Few differences in service or filing orders to show cause, motions, or response. Litigants in both groups were equally likely to successfully serve the responding party (82 percent of SHARP customers and 81 percent in the comparison group) and provide proof of service for declaration of disclosure (66 percent to 62 percent). Litigants in both groups were equally likely to file orders to show cause or motions (14 percent to 16 percent) or to have a response filed in the case (18 percent to 22 percent).

Proceeding to judgment. A higher proportion of cases from the sample of SHARP customers requested a default judgment (61 percent of SHARP customers to 53 percent in the comparison group). A nearly equivalent proportion of cases in both groups proceeded to judgment (63 percent to 66 percent). A higher proportion of cases from the sample of SHARP customers proceeded to default judgment (87 percent to 70 percent). For the cases that proceeded to default or uncontested judgment, more cases in the comparison sample had a marital settlement agreement or stipulation (31 percent) than in the SHARP sample (12 percent). The mean days between the date the petition was filed and the date that status was terminated were almost identical for the two samples (216 days to 218 days).

Comparison group subsamples. Files in the comparison group were examined for indications that the petitioner had received some assistance with paperwork, even if not from the SHARP centers. Roughly one-half of the cases in the comparison group (54 percent) appeared to have received no assistance with paperwork. When this subgroup is compared to the cases from the SHARP centers, some interesting differences are revealed. A high proportion of the cases that apparently received no assistance had children (63 percent). These cases were substantially more likely to have missing or inconsistent information on the petition (71 percent).

The subgroup of cases apparently receiving no assistance with paperwork also differs from the subgroup of cases that did receive some assistance. A higher proportion of cases in the no-assistance subgroup had children, filed orders to show cause or motions, did not have a response filed, and had missing or inconsistent information on the petition. This seems to indicate a population with family law cases that are unrepresented, complex, more likely to involve children, and not being reached by any form of self-help assistance.

Unlawful detainer. The samples of unlawful detainer files were also drawn from cases taken from the period of January 2003 and March 2004. After excluding certain cases selected because the litigants had received help from an attorney, the final sample included 42 plaintiffs and 41 defendants who had received help from the SHARP centers, and 131 plaintiffs and 75 defendants who had apparently not received any help from the SHARP centers.

Comparison of plaintiffs who received help from SHARP with those who did not revealed few differences. Plaintiffs who received help from the SHARP centers were more likely to reach judgment by default (52 percent of SHARP customers compared to 36 percent of the comparison group). Plaintiffs who did not receive help from SHARP were somewhat more likely to receive a conditional judgment (8 percent of plaintiffs from the comparison group and no plaintiffs from SHARP). Finally, plaintiffs who received help from SHARP appeared somewhat less likely to have long cases (more than two months from filing to judgment).

The comparison of defendants showed more differences. Defendants who received help from the SHARP centers were far more likely to submit handwritten rather than typed or computer-generated forms. Almost all the defendants who received help from the SHARP centers raised an affirmative defense (98 percent), compared with 83 percent of defendants who did not receive help from SHARP. Of those defendants who raised affirmative defenses, 83 percent of those who received help from SHARP provided supporting facts, compared with 68 percent of the comparison group.

Defendants from both groups were equally likely to reach a judgment (85 percent of SHARP customers and 80 percent of the comparison group). Of those that reached judgment, immediate possession to plaintiff was equally likely in both groups (71 percent of SHARP customers and 68 percent of comparison group), but a money judgment for

the plaintiff was less likely among the SHARP customers (60 percent of SHARP customers and 72 percent of the comparison group). SHARP customers were more likely to reach judgment by stipulation (26 percent of SHARP customers and 13 percent of the comparison group). SHARP customers were also more likely to receive a conditional judgment (conditional judgments often require some action from the plaintiff).

Key Findings and Lessons Learned

Accomplishment of Goals

Regional collaboration. SHARP has successfully implemented its regional collaboration model. The program built on a history of collaboration between Butte and Glenn counties, bringing Tehama County into the regional model. Under the regional model, centers operated in three counties, providing services to customers in a wide geographic area who otherwise might not have been served. The regional model allowed for the pooling of resources, with one managing attorney to serve centers in three counties. This results in cost-efficient service delivery. Without the regional collaboration, the cost of implementing a self-help project in the smaller courts would have been prohibitive. Furthermore, given the distances between the courts and the lack of public transportation, self-represented litigants would have been unlikely to travel to another county for services and instead would have remained unserved.

Use of technology. SHARP has succeeded in operating four self-help centers in three counties with very limited resources by making efficient and effective use of technology and professional staff. By creative use of teleconferencing equipment, which links all four centers, the part-time managing attorney is able to supervise all the centers and, with a full-time paralegal, provide self-help assistance to more than 1,000 customers per month. SHARP has successfully addressed many of the barriers that face rural courts attempting to establish centers for self-represented litigants, including court budgets that are too small to pay all the costs of starting up a self-help center and the lack of qualified attorneys to recruit for jobs at a self-help center.

By videoconferencing workshops and one-on-one assistance across the four self-help centers, SHARP has addressed the problems that many residents of rural areas have in gaining access to legal services. SHARP is able to provide the same workshops and assistance in four locations throughout Butte, Tehama and Glenn counties. SHARP's model has also reduced the time that staff need to travel from location to location. Although videoconferencing technology reduces the need to have an attorney at each site, the SHARP workshop model still requires a person to open the site to customers and operate the videoconferencing equipment.

The time and cost of installing and using new technology is often a stumbling block to programs. In part due to its strong collaborative relationships with the three courts involved, SHARP was able to implement the video technology within the time frame and

the budget specified in its program plan and then to reduce technology costs sharply in subsequent years of operation.

Provision of assistance to self-represented litigants in the community. SHARP has brought help to self-represented litigants in a region where very few resources for self-represented litigants were available. Since the beginning of the project, SHARP has served many thousands of county residents who would otherwise have received no assistance at all. About 69 percent of all customers of the self-help centers had received no previous help on their case. Also, 69 percent of all customers and 75 percent of customers with family law issues said that they were representing themselves because they could not afford an attorney

SHARP has also served a region with very few resources for self-represented litigants by offering help with a range of case types through workshops and individual assistance. About one-half of SHARP customers have family law issues, while the remainder have cases in unlawful detainer (14 percent), probate and guardianship (12 percent), and a range of other case types.

Service Issues

Skills of managing attorney. Respondents explained that a key feature of the managing attorney's role is the ability to work collaboratively with court personnel from the three counties that are involved with the pilot project. Gaining the trust and support of judges and court executive officers in all three counties was crucial to the success of the project, and achieving this goal was facilitated by the managing attorney's effective verbal and written communication skills, flexibility, openness to new ideas and competing viewpoints, and ability to forge relationships and alliances.

Respondents also attribute much of SHARP's success to the skills and experience of the managing attorney. The managing attorney is an experienced litigator and law professor, who is able to draw on her wealth of experience to design services for a range of legal issues to be delivered in a variety of media.

Collaboration with the court. SHARP has strong collaborative relationships with judges and court executive officers in all three counties, and court clerks make numerous referrals to the project. SHARP had a higher proportion of customer referrals from court clerks (48 percent) than any of the other model self-help centers evaluated. The courts in the three SHARP counties have been willing to provide space to the self-help centers and technical support with the videoconferencing equipment. When possible, they have unified the family law facilitator or small claims advisor functions with the SHARP centers.

Intake and triage. SHARP's use of a formalized intake and triage process allows the program to target more extensive assistance, including workshops and one-on-one consultation with the paralegal or managing attorney, to those customers who need it.

(The triage materials developed by SHARP are now available on the AOC's Web site at www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/equalaccess.)

Focus on workshops. SHARP uses workshops to provide in-depth case assistance to customers, particularly in the area of forms completion. More than four times as many customers receive assistance in forms completion through workshops, rather than through drop-in assistance, even though more customers overall are served through drop-in assistance. SHARP has continuously evaluated and modified its workshop offerings, their format, and the curricula to better meet the needs of its customers. SHARP customers rate their satisfaction with workshops as highly or higher than their satisfaction with the one-on-one services they receive.

Staff supervision. The SHARP model consists of a half-time managing attorney supervising staff at four self-help centers. The managing attorney has used several strategies to address this challenge. First, the managing attorney insists on high standards for her staff, and to this end, staff and volunteers receive extensive training, and underperforming team members are replaced. Second, the managing attorney is accessible and available to her staff and volunteers and emphasizes that they should contact her any time they have a question. Third, the project uses the videoconferencing equipment for supervisory purposes; the managing attorney can interact face-to-face with staff at remote locations to answer their questions and to observe activities at the remote center.

Staff retention. Recruiting and retaining staff and volunteers has been a significant problem for SHARP. The program has struggled with a limited pool of qualified applicants and with its inability to pay competitive wages and benefits. The extensive training required by SHARP's intake and triage process has also limited its ability to use interns and volunteers as telephone and counter staff. SHARP was also disappointed by its lack of success in recruiting attorney volunteers to conduct workshops.

Hours at the centers. The varying hours that courts in the three SHARP counties are open has limited SHARP's ability to videoconference workshops across all sites. At present, about one-third of the workshops are being videoconferenced to all sites.

