

ACTION PLAN TO ASSIST SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS**May 14, 2002****Executive Summary**

The self-represented litigant in Butte County is fortunate in many ways. Once they are connected with assistance, they encounter staff and volunteers who are dedicated to providing accurate, effective, compassionate service. However, the litigant frequently encounters obstacles to linkage with that service. The Butte County Superior Court community focused Action Plan to Assist Self-Represented Litigants identifies the strengths of Butte County's system for serving self-represented litigants, explores the results of local needs assessments, and offers suggestions for removing barriers and solving problems identified by community members and service providers.

The fortunate event of the Self-Represented Litigants Regional Conference in Chico on April 1, 2001 was the vehicle by which the Butte County Superior Court (BCSC) focused on a review of its self-represented litigant services. A subsequent grant from the Judicial Council of California provided funding for a number of activities that not only led to the development of this Plan, but also provided practical support to those who serve self-represented litigants. The Court's accomplishments of the grant include:

- Formation of a Self-Represented Litigants Planning Committee and sub-committees of local professionals and specialists that met from June 2001-April 2002, including all stakeholders who provide legal services to the community.
- A Summit Conference served as a method to congregate, inform and inspire community service providers who are familiar with the needs of self-represented litigants in Butte County. Special guests Bonnie Hough from the Administrative Office of the Courts, and Mary Viviano of the California State Bar Association conducted a needs assessment session and provided statewide perspective to the local self-represented litigant emphasis.
- The development and distribution of an assessment tool to help determine community need. The tool was distributed to eight agencies for distribution to their service consumers.
- The collection of community legal service information and the publication of a Resource Directory.
- A training was conducted for local attorneys on unbundled or limited scope legal services. The training was offered free of charge and was attended by approximately 35 local attorneys.
- A consultant was retained to assist the Court in creating its Action Plan and completing other grant activities.

After review of strengths and weaknesses of its service system for self-represented litigants, the Planning Committee set priorities and objectives for improvement to the system. Even though at this time the funding to implement all plans is not available, the Committee determined that many of its ideas can be incrementally put into action through the creation of a Legal Self-Help Center. Three final conclusions will guide the on-going work toward this goal:

1. The Committee will continue to meet on a quarterly basis to guide progress toward the priorities in the Plan.
2. The Funding Sub-Committee will meet monthly to explore and review resources available to meet the goals of the Strategic Plan.

Court staff will be assigned to provide leadership to the committees.

1. Description of Need:

DESCRIPTION OF STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS USED

The eleven-month planning process brought together many agencies that had not before been involved in joint planning for legal services. One of the most rewarding results was the realization that services for self-represented litigants do exist in the community, even though there clearly must be a more organized, collaborative approach to enhance the effectiveness of those opportunities. Planning participants were particularly pleased to have the support and participation of the local bar and the Court.

Planning Committee

The Self-Represented Litigants Planning Committee met monthly from June 2001-April 2002 for the purpose of identifying community and organizational needs, and to suggest solutions to problems found in serving self-represented litigants. Committee members included a Supervising Judge (chair), the Family Law Facilitator, Small Claims Advisor, Mediation Center Director, Legal Services Director, a California State University professor, Law Library Director, staff of various non-profit agencies, the consultant, and Superior Court staff. (See Attachment A for list of names and agencies.)

Sub-Committees

In addition to the monthly Committee meetings, three sub-committees met to address key service issues. These committees were: Resource Directory, Summit Conference and Attorney Seminars, and Funding. Each sub-committee identified needs related to its topic and took action to begin addressing those needs. A Resource Directory was developed and a community Summit Conference was held. (See Attachments B, Resource Directory and C, Summit Agenda.)

Summit Conference

The Summit Conference held in Chico on October 12, 2001, served as a method to congregate, inform and inspire community service providers who are familiar with the needs of self-represented litigants in Butte County. The four-hour meeting was attended by approximately 50 people who heard messages from local and state bar representatives, the Supervising Judge, and special guests Bonnie Hough from the Administrative Office of the Courts, and Mary Viviano of the California State Bar Association.

At the Summit, the community needs assessment process was initiated through discussion and distribution of the "Unmet Legal Needs Assessment" survey (See Attachment D). Various agencies agreed to hand out the survey to their consumers for the purpose of informing BCSC as to the needs of self-represented litigants.

Bonnie Hough and Mary Viviano conducted a session to gather input from stakeholders, in particular from staff of agencies serving people who are likely to represent themselves in court. Examples of such agencies were: Parent Education Network, Mediation Center of the North Valley, Catalyst (Domestic Violence), Legal Services, California State University Chico, Community Legal Information Center, and the Family Law Facilitator's Office. The group did a review of existing services and identified service needs. (Attachment E List of Needs and Existing Services)

Legal Needs Assessment Tool

A subcommittee designed an assessment tool to help determine community need. (Attachment D). The tool was given to eight agencies for distribution to their service consumers. 145 assessments were returned providing information useful to the planning process. (Attachment F, Survey Results) Key results include:

Almost forty percent of respondents would elect to represent themselves in court if affordable assistance were available.

Of those that responded, the total amount for one case that people would pay was:

- 15% would pay nothing
- 26% would pay \$100
- 24% would pay \$250
- 20% would pay \$500
- 15% would pay \$1,000

For one consultation with an attorney, people would be willing to spend:

- 15% would pay nothing
- 2% would pay \$25
- 48% would pay \$50
- 34% would pay \$100-\$150

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By far the most helpful type of assistance selected was face-to-face individual help, followed by staffed phone assistance and group assistance. The types of assistance selected as being the least helpful were phone recordings, and a library without staff. The Law Library with staff and written reference materials were selected as being fairly helpful. About 25% of respondents found the Internet to be very helpful, while an additional 50% found it to be somewhat helpful.

People need special assistance in these areas (listed by priority):

- Language (both Spanish and English)
- Cognitive (ability to understand)
- Transportation to services
- Reading

Major areas of the law in which people need the most assistance are: (listed by number of responses-highest to lowest)

- Child Support
- Child custody/visitation
- Divorce
- Small Claims
- SSI
- Enforcement of Judgments
- Fair Employment & Housing
- Spousal Support
- Unlawful Detainer

LOCAL NEEDS

Organizational Description

Butte County is located in northern California approximately 120 miles northeast of San Francisco, and established as one of the original twenty-seven California counties. The county covers approximately 1,676 square miles between the Sacramento River and the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and encompasses prime agricultural lands, forests, rivers, lakes, foothills, and rugged mountains and canyons.

The Superior Court of California, County of Butte is a unified superior court with courthouses in five locations: Chico, Paradise, Gridley, and two locations in Oroville. The bench is comprised of nine judges and two commissioners. The Court employs approximately 125 support staff.

The Hon. Thomas W. Kelly is the Court's Presiding Judge. The Court Executive Officer is Ms. Sharol H. Strickland.

Summary of Existing Superior Court System for Self-Represented Litigants

The Court estimates that at least 70% of its nearly 2,000 per year family law cases are self-represented. Judge William Patrick's Thursday morning calendar is devoted solely to self-represented family law cases. Assisting in the courtroom are staff and volunteers from Catalyst Domestic Violence agency, and Legal Services of Northern California. Their contracted role is to provide assistance in the correct completion of required forms, preparing Judge's formal orders, and giving information to clients as to the process they must follow to complete their case. Each week approximately 35-55 cases are heard in this Court.

The Court provides assistance to self-represented litigants through the Family Law Facilitator's Office, Court Mediation Services, and by the use of a retired attorney devoted to advising small claims litigants. In addition, cases are referred as appropriate to the Mediation Center of the North Valley.

Summary of Community Services Available

A group of existing service agencies provides important support to self-represented litigants. Before the formation of the Self-Represented Litigants Planning Committee, there was no comprehensive directory of these services. The Judicial Council grant allowed for the collection of service information and the publication of the Resource Directory. This has already made services more accessible and certainly more recognized.

The Resource Directory contains detailed information on the agencies, while the following list summarizes the services available.

1. Butte County Department of Child Support-Assists with obtaining and enforcing child support orders
2. Butte County Law Library-Legal research and references
3. Butte County Family Law Facilitator-Workshops for litigants on Family Law issues.
4. Catalyst-Filing restraining orders, accompaniment to court for victims of domestic violence.
5. Community Legal Information Center of California State University, Chico-Provides inmates with legal information; SSA hearings; consumer protection; family law issues.
6. Disability and Employment Rights Advocacy-advocate and support for persons with disabilities.
7. Lawyer Referral Service-Assistance in most areas of the law.

- 8. Legal Services of Northern California- Assistance in many areas of the law for low income or older adults.
- 9. Mediation Center of the North Valley-Mediation and dispute resolution.
- 10. Ombudsman Services of Northern California-Advocate for residents of long term care facilities and their families.
- 11. Parent Education Network-Individual and family counseling; court support program.
- 12. Senior Legal Hotline-Access to legal advice and information for 60 years and older.
- 13. Small Claims Advisory Service-information on small claims procedure in Butte County.

Strengths of system

The most significant strength in Butte County is the group of existing service agencies contained in the Resource Directory. A detailed description of their contribution to self-represented litigants follows.

Butte County Family Law Facilitator

In 2000 the Facilitator’s office provided services to at least 5,000 people. In 2001 the total rose to 6,662, a 33% increase. With an active monthly calendar of workshops, walk-in and phone assistance, this office provides a significant portion of the services to self-represented litigants in Butte County. Almost daily, workshops on Family Law issues help litigants establish or modify child support, petition for dissolution of marriage and paternity issues, modify child custody and/or timeshare, calculate child/spousal support and file Department of Child Support Services actions.

The top five types of legal cases in which people requested assistance in 2000 were:

Child Custody	(34.2% of requested assistance)
Child Support	(33% of requested assistance)
Divorce	(25.5% of requested assistance)
Child Visitation	(19.4% of requested assistance)
Response to Papers	(11.3% of requested assistance)

(Total equals over 100% as people frequently ask for assistance in more that one area.)
(See Attachment H, Facilitator’s Services 2001)

Butte County Law Library

Butte County Law Library is the only public law library in the northeastern part of California with a comprehensive collection and full-time staff. (Source: CCCLL Directory, 2001 ed.) Although other libraries exist in the region, their resources are limited. Colusa County Law Library, in Colusa, has a small collection. Glenn County Law Library, in Willows, is electronic-access only, from two computer workstations located in the Glenn County Recorder's Office. Sutter County Law Library consists solely of the California Codes and local city/county ordinances: 300 Volumes in all; Tehama County Law Library is not staffed. Yuba County Law Library is maintained solely in electronic form, but a qualified Reference Librarian whose desk and terminal is located at the Public Library augments public access to legal materials in Marysville.

The Butte County Law Library serves attorneys and the general public alike; providing a public place for legal research, and making the sources of the law available for legal research with the best law collection and supporting services possible, using 1.5 FTE staff, and 1.0 FTE volunteers. In terms of service numbers, the survey that the Law Library conducted for the Butte County Board of Supervisors in 2000 showed that the practicing bar makes up 33% of the "Gate" (those who enter the facility), that court staff and family law facilitator interns and volunteers make up another 33%, with the General Public comprising the remaining 34%. Half of this 34%, (17% of the total), utilizes the Law Library to fill-out forms, to type declarations, and/or to make photocopies for matters for which they are without legal counsel. The remaining 17%, or 50% of the overall Gate (when attorneys are added back in) utilizes Reference Resources.

Based on the individual uses by the public, the information need is for:

1. Family Law
2. Injunctive Relief Against Personal Conduct
3. Small claims
4. Name Changes
5. Grandparent and Stepparent Adoptions
6. Guardianships
7. Evictions
8. Juvenile Dependency Matters
9. Certificates of Rehabilitation and Criminal Records Expungement
10. Attorney Information and Referral
11. *Marsden* Public Defender Substitutions
12. Bankruptcies
13. Wills and Living Trusts
14. Wrongful Terminations
15. Easements
16. Criminal Appeals
17. Debt Collections
18. Probate Estates
19. Tax Matters
20. Civil Litigation
21. School Assignments

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Legal Services of Northern California-Butte Regional Office

Legal Services of Northern California (LSNC), is a federally, state and locally-funded legal services program providing civil representation to low-income clients in 23 counties in northern California, with offices located in Sacramento, Auburn, Chico, Eureka, Redding, Vallejo, Ukiah and Woodland. LSNC also has several special programs targeting particular needs of low-income clients. The local office in Chico provides services in a five-county service area. Specific programs include:

1. Unlawful Detainer Clinic
2. Tenant Housing Assistance
3. Public Benefits Legal Advice
4. Senior Law Project for assistance to seniors
5. Guardianship Clinics
6. Assistance with Guardianship Pleadings
7. Pro Per Orders Court Clinic
8. Homeless Mentally Ill Legal Advice
9. Workshops for Community-Based Organizations

Of particular significance is the Pro Per Orders Clinic held each Thursday to provide self-represented litigants with assistance in court with their family law/domestic violence cases. Specifically, cases involve child support, custody and visitation, domestic violence, harassment and spousal support. In 2001, Legal Services assisted 568 cases in this face-to-face assistance program.

Each Monday, Legal Services conducts "Pro Per" clinics to assist people with unlawful detainers. This program had approximately 300 attendees in 2001.

Catalyst

This local non-profit agency offers comprehensive services to victims of domestic violence and to their children including:

1. Filing restraining orders
2. Accompaniment to court
3. Shelter
4. Referrals
5. Crisis counseling
6. 24-hour hotline
7. Drop-in Centers
8. Domestic Violence response team
9. Legal Advocate Program to assist in the completion and filing of restraining orders.

The Catalyst Legal Advocate assisted 265 clients in FY2000-2001. In cases assisted by Catalyst, over 30% were granted restraining orders, with an average of 10 clients per week receiving assistance in Court from the Legal Advocate.

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Mediation Center of the North Valley (MCNV)

MCNV offers people the opportunity to resolve their disputes with the help of two neutral mediators who are trained in conflict resolution and the facilitation of communication. Mediators are trained to assist parties in negotiating their own resolution. The MCNV is located in Chico, providing mediation services to the community at large, businesses, agencies and schools. One of the key goals of MCNV is to provide trained mediators to assist community members in resolving their disputes without having to go to court.

Community Legal Information Center of California State University, Chico (CLIC)

Established in 1970, CLIC is a collection of projects which serve the community by providing free legal information and referrals, presenting seminars, workshops, and information packets. CLIC is staffed by California State University, Chico (CSUC) student paralegal interns, who also provide free legal representation to clients in administrative law forums. CLIC provides legal information, not legal advice. It is funded primarily through CSUC, Associated Students and a grant from the City of Chico. One full time equivalent attorney is assigned to supervise CLIC, which provides 9,000 hours of voluntary community service per semester.

Among its many specialized programs, CLIC operates the County Jail Law Project whereby information is provided to inmates incarcerated in the Butte County Jail. Interns work directly with inmates through interviews, follow-up research, and responses to questions posed by defendants. CLIC helps clients complete and file all forms related to family law, and to domestic violence situations.

Small Claims Advisory Service

The Small Claims Advisor, funded largely by filing fees, provided phone consultation to 2,027 phone calls in 2000, and 1,497 calls in 2001. Without giving legal advice, he helped people fill out forms, gave information on procedures, and offered referral sources. Examples of state agencies to which people are directed are the Contractors' State License Board and the State Automotive Repair Agency.

Upon receiving small claims forms at the Court Clerk's Office, potential litigants receive a flyer describing how to contact the Small Claims Advisor. Services are offered on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 9 a.m. to noon. Daily numbers of callers range from five to twenty-one.

Other Resources

Although not focused singly on assisting self-represented litigants, other local agencies play an important role in providing information and assurance to help people solve their legal problems. These include:

- Butte County Department of Child Support
- Disability and Employment Rights Advocacy
- Lawyer Referral Service

- Ombudsman Services of Northern California
- Parent Education Network
- Senior Legal Hotline

Problems and BarriersButte County Family Law Facilitator

The Family Law Facilitator's Office is able to serve over 6,000 people per year, however, there are times when the demand exceeds the available workshops and people must wait two to three weeks for a workshop.

The Facilitator's staff consists of one .75 FTE Facilitator, 1 FTE Administrative Assistant, two part-time interns, and 1 FTE Office Assistant.

Another workshop is urgently needed in Chico, where at least twenty-six percent of the persons assisted by the Facilitator's Office reside. It is probable that more volunteers would be available for the Chico workshops, as this is the location of California State University Chico.

While the Facilitator's Office serves a significant number of self-represented family law litigants, there are many more people who have cases which are not family law related, or family law cases which fall outside the parameters of the required services. Frequently people needing assistance from the Facilitator cannot access the workshops and other information due to language and transportation issues.

Butte County Law Library

Butte County Law Library is catalogued, with 4,500 Library of Congress-classified catalog cards, which were prepared in 1998 and 1999 as access points to the 800-title collection. The catalog is not automated, however, and the Law Library is without a circulation system or a means to quickly monitor call number order in the stacks. Only one computer for public access to the Internet exists, as does one 75MHz Pentium I machine for public use in typing documents.

Using the San Diego County Public Law Library model, the Butte Law Library would like to offer a class once each week in Chico to teach the general public how to use the Law Library. However, teaching tools in the form of a laptop computer and a computer projector are needed to accomplish this goal.

Through these classes, it is predicted that more people would access the Library, creating a need for increased computer access and furniture. More specifically, the Library computer needs are: four fully equipped computer workstations, two printers, a router, a network hub, and library software. In addition, the library needs more tables and chairs to accommodate its current users.

Having more computers for library users would move people into the more user-friendly world of website learning, rather than the traditional setting of hundreds of large, daunting tomes of laws in a Law Library.

Resource Directory

Services to assist self-represented litigants do exist in Butte County; however, people are not aware of them. Rather than seeking help, they stumble discouragingly through the system causing frustration not only to themselves, but also to the Court. A community effort to publicize the availability of help is needed.

As stated previously, great progress was made in the creation of a resource directory for self-represented litigants, but the project is yet to attain completion. The Directory should be reformatted into a useable, succinct booklet. It must be reproduced in large numbers for distribution to service agencies, Court programs, and the general public. The Resource Directory could lead many self-represented litigants to services where they could get the help they need for their case.

Family Law Court

The cases in Family Law Court are not efficiently processed due to the lack of knowledge on the part of the self-represented litigants. A large majority of the litigants do not present the correct paperwork, they do not follow the required procedures and they simply do not understand what they must do to get through the complicated process to the resolution of their case. Even though form packets are available at low cost from the Court Clerk's Office, the packets offer a overwhelming array of forms, instructions, and mystifying language to people who may have never set foot in a courthouse or ventured into the legal system in any way. These packets need to be simplified, and made more useable.

Many cases presented at Family Law Court are not pursued to final judgment due to inadequate information. For example, Catalyst staff estimate that only thirty percent of their litigants follow through to completion of their case. There is no follow-up service available to investigate why the case is incomplete; it is probable that many lack the knowledge needed to navigate through each step of the process. Due to funding reductions at Catalyst, more comprehensive staff assistance is not available.

Language Needs

Butte County's rich diversity provides a wealth of cultural variety to the community. To understand the needs of all ethnicities in the County, demographic data was reviewed to determine if barriers related to culture, language, and race exist. It is illustrated in the following chart.

Table 1. BUTTE COUNTY POPULATION ESTIMATES – 2000 (Source: California Department of Finance)		
	Number of Persons	Percentage of Total
African American	2,816	1.4%
Native American	3,866	1.9%
Asian	6,752	3.3%
Nat. HI/Pacific Isl.	296	.15%
Other	9,790	4.8%
Two Races	7,923	3.9%
White	171,728	84.5%
TOTAL POPULATION	203,171	100%
Hispanic (included above)	21,339	10.5%

The following chart indicates the expenditures on interpretive services made in Butte County.

Table 2. Court Interpreter Expenditures in Butte County FY 1998-1999 (Source: www.courtinfo.ca.gov)	
Spanish	\$47,720
Hmong	\$23,830
Mien	\$4,740
Laotian	\$1,465
Punjabi	\$570
Ukrainian	\$360
Russian	\$292

Based on the population figures in Table 1, the expenditures offer no surprises. The Family Law Facilitator’s Office keeps the most consistent records of a significant number of self-represented litigants. Even though Butte County has a population of 6,752 persons of Asian ethnicity, only 35 accessed the services of the Facilitator in 2001. This could indicate the need for a Hmong, Mien or Lao-speaking staff available to help this population with Family Law issues.

A similar discrepancy in the representation of Hispanics appears to call for more services in Spanish. The overall population in Butte County is 10.9% Hispanic, the Facilitator’s Officer served 4.9% Hispanics in 2000-2001. Assistance in Spanish would be more helpful to serve this group better. Frequently, Spanish-speaking adults attend Facilitator’s Workshops with their children who attempt to help with translation. Even though this may be an honest attempt at gathering all resources, it is not appropriate for most children to be involved in their parents’ legal efforts.

According to the local needs assessment described previously, there are a number of areas in which respondents call for assistance. Listed by number of responses (highest to lowest), people need special assistance in the following areas.

- Language (both Spanish and English)
- Cognitive (ability to understand)
- Transportation to services
- Reading

Another access problem identified by staff and volunteers was the difficulty experienced by people who are incarcerated. This situation greatly deters litigants from getting help needed to represent themselves. Not only is there limited availability of materials, but it is cumbersome for them to speak with legal assistance volunteers and staff.

2. *Program Areas:*

STRATEGIES

The Butte County Superior Court has taken action since June 2001 to increase services for self-represented litigants. As stated previously, a Resource Directory was created, a community Summit Conference was held, training for local attorneys on unbundling – limited scope legal assistance services was conducted, and a Planning Committee of local professionals and specialists was convened.

In its effort to assess community needs, the Committee was assisted by input from local agencies that work with self-represented litigants, through the use of the Legal Needs Assessment Tool. The resulting Strategic Priorities and Solutions were based on these resources.

Self Represented Litigants Strategic Priorities and Solutions (Objectives)

Priority 1 Program Area. Understand the Integrated Role of the Community in Providing Assistance for the self-represented litigant.

Objectives:

1. Identify existing community resource centers/ providers, and inventory services being provided.
2. Contact those Community Resource Centers that do provide related services and inventory unmet needs in relation to access to the courts and the self-represented litigant.
3. Assess what unmet needs could be provided by existing community service/resource centers/providers and the resources necessary to provide the additional services, if any.

4. Identify Alternative Dispute Resolution resources, and the particular service provided, and the services that are needed but not provided.
5. Determine the educational resources available and the extent to which such resources can be utilized to provide assistance to the self-represented litigant.
 - a. Outreach to churches and other places where people feel comfortable
 - b. Be more sensitive to ways that communities resolve conflicts
 - c. Find ways to encourage mediation for appropriate cases
 - d. Create better communication with children's services in northern counties; seek solutions to confidentiality challenges
 - e. Consider the Oregon and New Zealand "Family Unity" system whereby all people connected with the child, including school, family, youth organizations, etc. support the family while professionals back out, leaving the family to make decisions.
 - f. Coordinate with "service learning" concept in education

Priority 2 Program Area. Provide Access to the Court as a Whole System, including the Physical Environment, Services Provided and Culture of Consumer Friendly Access.

Objectives:

1. Assess the existing access to the Court, examining physical access through public transportation and access electronically, by phone, web and e-mail. Access should be convenient and meet the needs of the public needing to utilize the services of the court, avoiding when possible, time consuming, expensive and often marginally productive physical trips to the court facilities.
2. Assess the "signage" at the Court, with attention to language, culture and physical barriers, in assisting people trying to find your way as a first time user of the court facilities. This would include signs appropriate for disabled persons and signs that were either universal or in multiple languages to meet the need of the consumer.
3. Assess the extent to which the facilities are appropriate for the consumers of the court facility, including waiting rooms, conference rooms, child friendly and safe, sufficient phones, computer terminals.
4. Assess the extent to which the consumer is satisfied with the level and scope of the services provided.
 - a. Easier access to providing services in jail
 - b. Put posters in clerk's offices
 - c. Designate a judge on assignment for orders
 - d. Provide free consultations for clients
 - e. Rule allowing handwritten forms statewide

- f. Recognize importance of human contact
- g. Provide social work training to court personnel
- h. Universal forms, particularly for local forms
- i. Uniform rules regarding ways to file forms, etc.

Priority 3 Program Area. Provide Successful Models of Service DeliveryObjectives:

1. Evaluate what has been successful in other communities and determine the extent to which such services would be appropriate for Butte County, especially given the rural and diverse composition of Butte County.
2. Develop working network with other counties, especially other rural counties, and statewide legal service providers to continue to share and exchange ideas on providing services to the self-represented litigant.
 - a. Access to a kiosk system
 - b. Collaboration between service providers including workshops, etc.
 - c. Provide incentives for attorneys to participate in LRS-MCLE, calendar preference, etc.
 - d. Explore domestic violence “support person” model for other types of cases
 - e. Provide services for respondents (domestic violence, dissolutions)
 - f. Van or some other way to get to outlying communities. [“Passages” (senior agency) has been granted a van to get information out to people.]
 - g. Develop a Plan and seek funding for a Self-Help Center
 - h. Forms available on the Court website

Priority 4 Program Area. Provide the Technology and Information at a level Sufficient to Accommodate the Needs of the Community, Including Socio/Economic, Cultural and Language Factors.Objectives:

1. Assess the library resources for the self-represented litigant currently available and the extent to which the needs of the self-represented litigants are being met.
2. Determine the extent to which reference materials needed by the self-represented litigant are available but not accessible to the self-represented litigant. Are there technological solutions to the availability of the needed reference materials?
3. Determine for those reference materials available but not accessible what means are available to provide reasonable access.

4. For the reference material needed by the self-represented litigant but not available, how can such reference material be acquired and the feasibility of providing such reference material to the self-represented litigant.
 - a. Education and publicizing
 - b. Outreach to other parts of the county
 - c. High school requirement of basic knowledge about the court structure
 - d. Explore computer programs that do translations
 - e. Encourage delivery of Law Library services at Chico State University since there are better hours and it is more accessible for many more people than the Oroville location
 - f. Have CLIC students work at the Law Library on information needs of the users
 - g. Work with Political Science Department students who have completed the legal research class for assistance in Law Library
 - h. Central 24-hour call-in service telling where to go and what to do

Priority 5 Program Area. Provide a System or Means of Access to the Courts that will Recognize the Significant Diversity of Butte County, including Rural and Urban, Young and Old, Rich and Poor, Able and Disabled, Culturally and Ethnically Diverse.

Objectives:

1. Identify the language diversity of Butte County and the extent to which language is a barrier in accessing the Court. If language barriers are identified, the extent to which such barriers are being eliminated or addressed.
2. Assess the cultural and/or ethnic barriers that exist for the self-represented litigant in accessing the court.
3. Identify the extent to which age affects self-represented litigants' access to the court, with particular attention the under eighteen and older/senior population and their particular needs or limitations in access to the court.
 - a. More information in other languages
 - b. Posters or other information about where to get help in other languages
 - c. Outreach in other languages, especially non-English language communities
 - d. Evening court, Saturday court, satellite courts
 - e. Create a language line and other multi-lingual information
 - f. Work with other systems trying to work with language needs. I.E.-Medi-Cal, Public Health, education, etc.

3. *Program Action Plans:***a. Program Description:**

At this time, the Committee believes that the initial efforts of its members should go toward the creation of a **Legal Self-Help Center**. A Center would be the best way to maximize existing resources, avoid duplication, and create new assistance techniques that have been identified as the most useful to the community. Many of the Program Priorities can be achieved in a Self-Help Center.

Locally identified community needs can be addressed in a Self-Help Center. The survey indicated a preference for face-to-face assistance, more Internet access, and reference materials with staff assistance to understand them. Increasing volunteer assistance, and making equipment available for electronic research can reduce identified barriers. The Center can be a source of referral information to other agencies in the community, and a place to access attorneys who provide limited scope and/or pro bono services.

As a result of attendance at the Self-Represented Litigants Regional Conference, local Planning Committee members learned of the many resources available regarding Self-Help Center programs. Specifically, the preliminary draft of a paper entitled “Designing, from the Ground Up, a Self-Help Centered Court, One in Which the Litigant Without a Lawyer is the Norm” by Richard Zorza, Esq., is of particular interest as a tool for creating a Butte County or regional Self-Help Center. The Ventura County Self-Help Legal Access Centers also provide well-informed information based on existing services. These resources will be used as guides in up-coming planning meetings, as will possible visits to existing Self-Help Centers.

Through discussion, the Committee has already fashioned ideas that can be included in the design of a Self-Help Center. These include:

- More neutral legal advice accessible to the community
- More Internet access
- Local website improvement
- Out-station the self-help resources periodically to address transportation, cultural and language barriers
- Help filling out forms
- Provide an “I-CAN” kiosk
- More library resources
- Work with nearby counties in a regional approach
- More volunteers to provide face-to-face help
- Free copying
- Referral to appropriate resources
- Pro bono and affordable legal assistance

b. Program Partners:

At this time a regional approach to a Self-Help Center is planned. Specifically, a project, known as Self-Help Assistance Regional Project (SHARP) will provide pro per legal assistance to three rural Northern California counties (Butte, Glenn and Tehama.) Based on the results of the baseline evaluation for this region, SHARP will provide improved access to the Court and improve the quality of justice, services and needs of its self-represented litigants by effectively utilizing the services of an attorney coordinator and video teleconferencing technology.

c. Program Plan:

Butte County anticipates a long, careful effort toward the creation of a fully operational Self help Center which is accessible to a three-county area. Rather than over-extending existing resources, the focus will be to keep local programs such as CLIC, Catalyst, Law Facilitator and the Law Library optimally functional. Using an incremental approach, program pieces will be integrated into the system as resources (staff and funding) become available. As each program aspect is successful, the next program priority will be approached.

Toward an overall approach of regionalization, Butte County’s current Self-Represented Litigants Planning Committee will be expanded to include similar stakeholders in two nearby counties (Glenn and Tehama). The new Regional Advisory Committee will meet on a regular basis via video teleconferencing. Many achievements accomplished by Butte County Superior Court will be implemented in the region. An attorney coordinator and grant consultant will develop and distribute survey and needs assessment questionnaires to the region and analyze the results.

The attorney coordinator will plan and implement regional attorney seminar training on issues such as “unbundling” or limited scope legal representation. The attorney coordinator, with the assistance of the Regional Advisory Committee, will develop a regional resource directory guide, pamphlets, brochures and other community-based legal assistance guides. The attorney coordinator, with the assistance of the Regional Advisory Committee will convene at least one regional stakeholders summit each year to solicit in-put from consumers, providers and court on effectiveness of SHARP and provide surveys and recommendations for improvement of services. The attorney coordinator will be responsible for quarterly reports and the final project report.

<i>Task</i>	<i>Deadline</i>	<i>Person/Org Responsible</i>
Turn in Grant Application	March 1, 2002	Vahan Hovsepian
Establish Regional Advisory Group	June 30, 2002	Attorney Coordinator
Complete Surveys	July 31, 2002	Attorney Coordinator & Consultant
Purchase Teleconferencing Equipment	June 30, 2002	Attorney Coordinator
Recruit and Train Volunteers	August 30, 2002	Attorney Coordinator

<i>Task</i>	<i>Deadline</i>	<i>Person/Org Responsible</i>
Solicit Attorney Assistance	One Seminar per year	Attorney Coordinator
Develop Regional Resource Guide, and other info	January 1, 2003	Attorney Coordinator & Advisory Committee
Convene Stakeholders' Summit	One each year	Advisory Committee & Attorney Coordinator
Complete Reports	Quarterly and Annually	Attorney Coordinator

d. Existing Resources That Will Be Used:

Even without new financial resources, there is the possibility that combining the existing efforts of many partners would lead to more efficiency and therefore more assistance for self-represented litigants, especially by using a regional approach.

The Planning Committee will continue in its advisory and planning role. Community-based organizations will be included to support efforts in the development of a self-represented litigants clearinghouse, including a Self-Help Center.

e. Additional Resources Needed:

To implement the regional shared services, the following budget will be required. Planning for a comprehensive, multi-program Self Help Center with a regional emphasis will continue, addressing the changing needs of community and new laws and legal requirements. Resources will be sought to achieve program goals as community capacity is created.

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA

COUNTY OF BUTTE

Date Submitted: June 1, 2002

Contact Name and Phone: Vahan Hovsepian 530-538-7612

Budget Category	Cost Year 1	Cost Years 2 & 3
1. Personnel	10,000	60,000
2. Fringe Benefits	400	23,380
3. Rent (N/A)	00	00
4. Travel	2,820	00
5. Equipment	40,949	4,800
6. Supplies	3,000	00
7. Telephone	4,356	13,464
8. Postage	00	00
9. Printing/photocopying	900	756
10. Consultants/Contractual Agreements	15,600	64,000
11. Evaluation (must be one-half of grant amount for 2001–2002)	\$83,200	
12. Other (Training)	5,175	
TOTAL:	83,200	
Total Needed for Project:		\$166,400
Matching funds (if any):		

f. Evaluation:

The projects selected for implementation by the Self-Represented Litigants Planning Committee will include a plan for determining the success of the activities. Methods will include simple sign-in forms, user surveys, periodic questionnaires and focus groups for service recipients. The most meaningful information will be the results of the specific assistance that users receive through the Center. This can be collected through voluntary phone surveys. Evaluation of the specific types of assistance and their relationship to positive results for both the Court and for consumers will be conducted. Methods for compilation and distribution of the information will be built into program plans.

The SHARP Program will incorporate evaluation using a consultant with experience in program assessment, to study the results of the program activities.

4. *State Support:*

Support that would be helpful in local efforts includes:

- a. State provision of demographic court-related data on a regional basis. Rather than aggregate statewide information, having it broken into counties and/or regions would be more useful. It would be useful to have court usage data for our region that we could define interactively (select our specific region). Develop a database for commonly used court-related statistics. (Include JBSIS.)
- b. Continue to support the statewide website. Provide technical assistance for our own Court's website, and/or include our website with the statewide website. Produce court-related information in other languages besides Spanish (do a survey to identify language needs of counties.)
- c. Continue to develop more materials to make the court process easier for self-represented litigants.
- d. Develop resources for self-represented litigants who have difficulty reading. Provide materials for different cognitive abilities.
- e. Provide equipment for people with hearing impairments for local Courts.
- f. Continue to make trainers available such as Carmen Ramirez and Sue Talia.
- g. Provide consultants for local Courts to use in their self-represented litigants program efforts.

5. *Unique Approaches:*

Due to the geographic, financial and transportation limitations for the rural residents of this region, it would not be practical to create only one Self-Help Center within the region. One location would continue to pose a hardship for those who needed services the most, because affordability and availability to come to one center 45-100 miles away would be problematic if not impossible. Therefore, the proposal design of using video teleconferencing located in three different population centers or county seats would reduce transportation hardships and make access to the workshops/clinics possible. Local in-county transportation would most easily accommodate the self-represented access to their local courts. The regional nature of this project will combine resources of three small counties to avoid duplication and extend the reach of available resources to self-represented litigants in the three-county area.

6. *Sustaining the Action Plan:*

The Advisory Committee will continue to meet on a quarterly basis to guide progress toward the priorities in the Plan.

The Funding Sub-Committee will meet monthly to explore and review resources available to meet the goals of the Strategic Plan. Funding sources will be identified and applications will be submitted.

Court staff will be assigned to provide leadership to the committees.

7. *Other Comments:*

Attachments:

- A. A List of Self-Represented Litigants Planning Committee members
- B. Resource Directory
- C. Summit Agenda
- D. Unmet Legal Needs Assessment Tool
- E. List of Needs and Existing Services
- F. Summary of Survey Results

*Attach Additional Pages as Needed to Provide Complete Description of All Programs that
Comprise the Court's Self-Represented Litigant Action Plan*