

I. Needs Assessment

Del Norte County is located along the northern-most coastal area of California. Aside from being geographically remote, the community also faces several barriers that prevent families and litigants in crisis from accessing needed assistance regarding legal matters. These barriers are present to self-representing litigants in all areas of the court process, especially in areas of family legal matters involving several issues such as domestic violence, dependency proceedings, paternity cases and drug court. Those processes are further mired by landlord/tenant disputes and civil matters.

Ideally, everyone who needs legal representation is able to afford and access help. However, we know the vast majority of family court litigants are without legal representation. This indicates most families attempting to navigate the legal system are doing so on their own, or with little outside assistance. Many of these families simply cannot afford an attorney, or if they initially retain one, quickly drop them due to their inability to continue paying for attorney services.

Del Norte County is an economically depressed area. The area's main industries have been on a steady decline, resulting in low income and high unemployment rates. Historically, fishing and logging sustained the town, and most households were made up of blue collar workers. Currently, the logging industry is almost nonexistent and the fishing industry is no longer a viable sole source of income for families. These trends are marked by the most recent statistics from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. The median household income in Del Norte County in 1999 was \$29,642, well below the State median income level of \$47,493. Within Crescent City, the only incorporated city in Del Norte County, the median income level was a dismal \$20,133 in 1999. The unemployment rate of 8.7% was also well above the State average.

It is interesting to note that by the year 2000, 30% of the County workforce was employed by the government, more than double the statistic for the State of California (U.S. Bureau of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis). As our State budget continues to be reduced, the community will be disproportionately affected by the funding cuts. The County will suffer cuts to important programs and jobs will be lost leaving residents few other opportunities for employment. Unfortunately, those most likely to require legal assistance are those most ill equipped to pay for it.

Poor communities with little economic development are often associated with low educational attainment. In the year 2000, 30% of the population (over age 18) was without a high school diploma according to the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. The percentage of the population able to achieve a bachelor's degree or higher was only 10%. A significant portion of the population is undereducated with literacy difficulties, exacerbating the problem of navigating the legal system without anyone explaining what legal documents mean in plain English or how to access them through the internet.

Clearly the community has problems with poverty, employment, and education. These problems underscore the importance of having a low cost/no cost option to address legal issues. Although some local resources exist, such as a part-time family law facilitator

and the A.O.C. sponsored self-help websites, access to these resources are not condensed to a single entry point. Additionally, these services are limited in scope and hours of availability if one does not have internet access at home.

Language barriers also exist between the court and the non-English speaking population. Although Del Norte County is over 80% Caucasian, there is a significant number of migrant farm workers who speak only Spanish and a smaller subset of Hmong population who require interpreters.

Due to our community's poverty, low education attainment, geographic isolation, limited services, and lack of a readily available bilingual materials, the Court has identified the need for a single entry self help center with online access to court related websites, written materials, visual aides, and electronic forms. All materials will be created and distributed bilingually, in Spanish and English. In addition, as funds are available, the court will also host with stakeholders workshops and training for self-representing litigants. The Court will work hard to attempt to provide limited staffing at the center for those who cannot navigate the center without assistance.

This center will be a collaborative effort with resources from the Family Law Facilitator, Unified Family Court Mentor Grant, and the Law Library Board.

II. Project Description

- 1) Create center of services for self representing litigants both English and non-English speaking.
- 2) Develop Community Outreach and Education.
- 3) Create a Self Representing Litigant Advisory Board
- 4) Implement ongoing data collection procedures

III. Program Action Plan: (See Attached Action Plan for detail and timelines)

IV) Existing Resources That Will Be Used

- 1) The part-time Family Law Facilitator has contracted with the Mentor Court Grant to provide consultation and supervision to the SHC on an ongoing basis for the next two years.
- 2) The Mentor Court Grant has significant salary savings this fiscal year from the delay in hiring the Case Manager. With this savings, the court will soon submit a budget revision requesting part-time funding for a paralegal to staff our SHC on a weekly basis for 10 hours a week for the next 2 years.

- 3) The Law Library is situated in the courthouse next to the Clerk's office. The Law Library Board has agreed to house the SHC in the front portion of the library, which is an ideal location to serve litigant needs. The Law Library is also providing Lexis-Nexis for the computers which will be housed in the Library. A kiosk just outside the Law Library will be available to handle overflow as needed if the computer terminals inside are all being used.
- 4) The partnership between the Mentor Court Grant, the Self Representing Litigant Grant and the Law Library is a unique opportunity to create a single entry point for self representing litigants. The Court will continue to look for opportunities to expand the hours at the center by recruiting volunteers and/or creating an internship with our local junior college.

V) Additional Resources Required

- 1) Funding for staffing and materials beyond the two year grant period will be a concern. We believe two years will be sufficient time for the program to prove its value and save both time and money for the court.

VI) Evaluation

The successes of our self help center will be measured in surveys. Each survey will be developed to measure the level of perceived assistance the self help center has offered to each client and the perceived influence said center has had on court function. Surveys will be completed prior to the opening of the self-help center, at the six-month review of the opening of the center and again at twelve months.

Clients of the self-help center will initially complete an assessment of the litigants needs. Once the litigant has completed the tasks, an exit survey will be completed to measure the efficiency of the help received and the need for further assistance.

Information pulled from litigant surveys will be entered into our Family Court Services Database by Mentor Court Grant staff. This data will be analyzed in a quarterly report submitted to the Self Representing Litigant Advisory Board. These surveys will create a constant measure of the areas of deficiencies of the center and enable the Advisory Board to delineate clear lines for improvement.

VII) Other Factors

We will rely on the AOC for continuing guidance in the type of materials available in our SHC. We will also require ongoing assistance with training of staff, and opportunities to connect with other SHC staff.

Future sustainability will depend on the proven viability of the service provided by the SHC. We believe it is important to solicit community and agency input when planning our SHC to ensure our center will meet our community's unique needs. In the next few

months, we plan to hire a consultant who can facilitate several visioning sessions to give our SHC the best possible chance at success. Our goal is to create a vision and mission statement that can carry us through our planning process into implementation. We have a wonderful opportunity over the next two years to pull funding and resources from our Mentor Court Grant to create a place that will serve the needs of all our County's residents. We have already created partnerships with the Law Library Board which will be a potential source of support and revenue. We hope to expand our staffing through volunteerism or community based organizations.

Attachment SELF HELP CENTER (SHC) ACTION PLAN

Objective:	Activity:	Milestone/Timeline:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a center of services for self representing litigants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research potential locations of SHC • Contact necessary collaborative partners • Create agreements for use of space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree on location/May 04 • Create MOU with collaborative partners as needed/Court Staff/Fall 04
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Furnishings/Equipment in SHC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase 2 computers • Purchase Furniture (workstations and conference table(s) and chairs) • Basic office supplies • Copier • Printed Material/books/brochures • Advertising • TV/DVD/VCR • Typewriter • 1 kiosk for overflow access in courthouse lobby • lighting/security needs in room • High-speed internet connection • Lexis/Nexis • Purchase of glass door and/or help window 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor Court Grant/June 04 • Mentor Court Grant/June 04 • Mentor Court Grant/June 04 • Mentor Court Grant (Budget Revision Request)/June 04 • SRL Grant/August 04 • SRL Grant/August 04 • SRL Grant/June 04 • SRL Grant/June 04 • SRL Grant/June 04 • SRL Grant/August 04 • Court's existing connection • Law Library Board/June 04 • Collaborative effort/June 04

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information Technology Assistance with set up of computers/programs • Copier maintenance • Set up/access to EZLegal web-based fillable form programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court in-kind/Ongoing • Court in-kind/Ongoing • Court in-kind/Purchase and Implement/August 04
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staffing/Supervision of SHC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contract Paralegal 10 hrs/week for 2 years • Contract Attorney: consultation/supervision for at least 2 years on a limited basis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor Court Grant-(Budget Revision Request)-June 04 • Expand Family Law Facilitator's Scope of Work-ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create written material library 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase published self help legal guides in English and Spanish • Collaborate with consulting attorney to identify gaps/need for other materials. • Review of all written materials by Spanish fluent staff for accuracy/development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SRL Grant/August 04 • Court Staff/ongoing • Court Staff/ ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Outreach/Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify all local resources for self representing litigants--develop action plan to fill gaps • Run print ads in local publications, including Spanish publications • Create flyers in Spanish for distribution at local lily bulb farms • Develop radio spots for broadcasting • Develop brief presentations for local agencies, partners, and community based organizations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative effort in progress/June 04 • During kick-off of SHC in August 04
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create Self Representing Litigant Advisory Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate several visioning workshops with stakeholders and community members to create a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SRL grant to fund visioning workshop facilitator/Fall 04

	<p>vision and mission statement for the SHC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit stakeholders and community members for participation on advisory board to identify and track needs of self representing litigants • Meet on a quarterly basis with judicial officers and court administration. • Create policy/procedures for SHC and analyze ongoing data collected to address gaps and improve service delivery. • Determine type of workshops based on litigants areas of need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court/Community Collaborators/June 04 and ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Del Norte Superior Court Website Development coordinated with SHC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight SHC in new Superior Court website with links to AOC sites • Explore ways to offer specific case management information on website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor Court Staff/August 04 and ongoing • Court Staff/ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement Data Collection Procedure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create assessment and exit survey for litigants using the SHC • Create survey tool to measure impact of SHC on court function • Creation of queried report from MCG database specifically designed for SHC survey results • Ongoing data entry • Quarterly report generated from database presented to Advisory Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court Staff/July 04 • Court Staff/pre-testing before center is open, post-testing six months later, and post-testing 12 months after SHC opened. • Mentor Court Grant staff/August 04 • Mentor Court Grant Staff/ongoing

