

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF LASSEN

***Community Focused Action Plan to Serve Self Represented
Litigants***

Description of Need

Lassen County Superior Court has recognized that a large number of its citizens are appearing in court related matters without attorney representation. This has created a situation similar to those in most counties in California, where self-represented individuals are unable to understand and/or effectively participate in the legal process.

These individuals are faced with having to appear in court proceedings without the benefit of legal representation or the opportunity to obtain the most basic information needed to understand the legal process or where to obtain legal assistance. As a result, these self-represented individuals are frequently frustrated by their inability to effectively participate in the legal process.

Lassen County’s remote, northern location contributes to the problem of limited resources and a complete lack of legal assistance available to those unable to afford the services of an attorney. Litigants are referred to Legal Services of Northern California, located 2-1/2 hours from Susanville; however, they only provide advice related to housing and welfare issues.

The following Civil and Family Law statistics reflect a great need for legal services in Lassen.

Year	Family Filings	Pro Per	Pro Per %	Civil Filings	Pro Per	Pro Per %
99-00	236	133	56	181	37	20%
00-01	235	90	38%	175	22	12%
01-02	251	203	81%	179	90	50%

Description of Plan

Lassen County Superior Court is committed to assisting the growing number of self-represented litigants in our courts through a creative public outreach project accomplished through the collaborative efforts of the Superior Court, County Law Library and the Family Law Facilitator to improve access to justice for all members of the community.

The goal of the self-help center is to assist people representing themselves in court proceedings; to educate the public about the role and function of the court; and to network with other community and public social service agencies to enhance the provision of services with an eye toward increasing access to justice. Legal information will be available in the form of face-to-face personal consultations with the center's staff, seminars and educational forums, books, videos, computer research resources, form packets, and brochures.

The self-help center will provide legal information to self-represented individuals on a number of issues including Adoption, Child Custody/Visitation, Temporary Restraining Orders, Conservatorship, Guardianship, Probate, Landlord-Tenant, Civil Harassment, Appeals, Civil, Juvenile and Traffic.

A full-time operation providing the community with free legal assistance through the collaborative efforts of the Law Library Board, Small Claims Advisor, Family Law Facilitator, local attorneys, and court staff will improve public satisfaction with the court system, improve case management and effective use of judicial resources, and provide legal information through qualified legal staff and computer resources in an easily accessible location.

Desired Outcomes

Lassen County Superior Court's goal is to have the center open 8 hours each day, 5 days per week to senior citizens and low- and middle-income families and individuals needing legal assistance. Lassen intends that the center will be a creative public outreach effort involving the Law Library Board of Trustees, the Small Claims Advisor, the Family Law Facilitator, and local attorneys and court staff.

Community needs will also be addressed with regularly scheduled free public classes to explain court procedures as well as substantive areas of law commonly encountered by self represented individuals.