

## **ACTION PLAN TO ASSIST SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS**

### **BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION:**

Shasta County is one of the original 27 counties into which California was partitioned in 1850. Total land area is 3,785.2 square miles. The county seat was first Reading's Ranch (1850-51), then the town of Shasta (1851-88), and thereafter Redding. It is located in the northernmost part of the Sacramento Valley. Siskiyou County and westernmost Modoc County lie to the north, Lassen to the east, Tehama to the south, and Trinity County to the west.

The first whites to venture into the region were trappers like Jedediah Smith, the Hudson Bay Company members, and Pierson B. Reading. Reading obtained a large Spanish land grant (1844) and discovered gold (1848), precipitating a rush of miners. However, the gold did not last and lumber became important to the economy, as did cattle ranching and the growing of field crops.

Over half the county is covered by national forests; Shasta in the northwest and part of Lassen in the southeast. In Shasta is the Whiskeytown-Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area, including Shasta Lake which was created when the 602 foot high Shasta Dam was built to control the waters of the Sacramento, McCloud, and Pit Rivers as part of the Central Valley Project. Shasta Lake, a four-pronged body of water 14 miles north of Redding, was formed by Shasta Dam and serves as the major northern reservoir of the Central Valley Project and controls much of the state's water.

A tributary of the Pit is Burney Creek. Its 165 foot falls form a state park within Shasta National Forest entitled Burney Falls State Park. Nearby lies Lake Britton, another reservoir, and Hat Creek. In the southeast corner of the county is Lassen Volcanic Park, with the only active volcano in the continental United States. Castle Crags are granitic spires, the site of a battle between whites and Modoc Indians (1855).

There are few sizeable communities in Shasta County, the largest being Redding and the next largest is nearby Shasta Lake City.

In 1983, the county had a population of 123,000; with an area of 2,427,648 acres. It had 32 persons per square mile. Census 2000 put the county's population at 163,257, reflecting a 24.7% increase, with projections expecting a county population of 231,000 by year 2020 representing a 29.1% increase.

**SHASTA COUNTY POPULATION DISTRIBUTION:**

<i>Race and Hispanic Origin, 2000</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
White	145,896	89.3
Black/African American	1,225	0.8
American Indian/Alaskan Native	4,528	2.8
Asian	3,048	1.9
Pacific Islander	178	0.1
Other race	2,790	1.7
Two or more races	5,661	3.5
Hispanic origin	8,998	5.5
Mexican	6,582	4.0
Puerto Rican	277	0.2
Cuban	64	0.0
Other Hispanic	2,075	1.3
<i>Gender, 2000</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Male	79,572	48.7
Female	83,684	51.3
<i>Age, 2000</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Under 5 years	9,643	3.6
18 years and over	120,582	44.3
21 years and over	113,782	41.9
65 years and over	24,861	15.2
85 years and over	2,875	1.1
<b>Median Age</b>	<b>38.9 years</b>	

**EDUCATION:**

There are a total of 26 school districts providing services to a total of 30,440 enrolled students. Student performance on the standardized Stanford 9 Scores, an evaluation tool which attempts to represent that percent of students scoring at or above the 50<sup>th</sup> National Percentile Rank, reflects the following data:

<i>Area/Subject Matter</i>	<i>Percentile</i>
3 <sup>rd</sup> grade reading	54%
3 <sup>rd</sup> grade math	64%
7 <sup>th</sup> grade reading	58%
7 <sup>th</sup> grade math	57%
11 <sup>th</sup> grade reading	45%
11 <sup>th</sup> grade math	49%

The average 12<sup>th</sup> grade student SAT score in this county is 514 for verbal and 518 for math. This, however, only reflects the 22.5% of enrolled students going through the evaluation process. The Superintendent of Schools for Shasta County is Carol Whitmer.

**COUNTY GOVERNANCE:**

A general law form of governance prevails within Shasta County.

As of February 2002, the county had 82,235 registered voters equating to 68.04% of the population. Democrats claim 28,103 or 34.17% of registered voters, with Republicans accounting for 39,719 or 48.30%. The county's nine legislative districts are comprised of two Congressional, four State Senatorial and two State Assembly districts.

Public Safety personnel (policing staff) consist of a Sheriff in combination with 279 sworn officers, 158 of them within the Sheriff's Department as of 1999. Total reported crimes for year 2000 stands at 5,422 with 825 (15.4%) reported as violent crimes.

**INCOME AND POVERTY INFORMATION:**

The median household income per 1997 available data was estimated to be \$32,109.00.

**TYPES OF HOUSEHOLDS:**

<i>Type of Household</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
With person under 18	22,220	22.4%
With person over 65	17,345	27.3%
Family households	44,002	69.4%
Single person households	15,560	24.7%
Receiving Public Assistance	N/A	
Receiving Social Security	N/A	
Persons per Household	2.52	
Persons per Family	2.98	
Institutionalized Population	1,668	

**HOUSING AND CONSTRUCTION**

<i>Housing Units, 2000</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
TOTAL	68,810	100%
Occupied	63,426	92.2%
Seasonal/Recreational Use	1,580	2.3%
Single Family Units	n/a	
Owner occupied units	41,910	66.1%
Renter occupied units	21,516	33.9%
Median Value Single Family	120,800	
Median Rent	563	
<i>New Private Housing Units Authorized by Permit</i>		
1998	244	
1999	236	
2000	285	

**INTRODUCTION**

This Action Plan is the product of the Shasta County Superior Court. A committee made up of court staff, community service providers and a planning consultant assisted the court in the development of this action plan. (See Attachment 1 for the Committee Membership.) The court wishes to acknowledge the contribution of all who helped in the development of this Action Plan and looks forward to continuing its collaboration with the community in fully achieving the desired results: more informed court users who have ready access to justice system services.

- Description of Need:** Through their response to an internal court survey, court staff reported the following information related to self-represented litigants.

***Increase in Self-Represented Litigants:*** Court staff indicated a significant increase over the past five years in pro per customers as illustrated in Table 1 below.

***Table 1***

<i>Self-Represented Customers</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Increased greatly	16	29%
Increased moderately	22	40%
Stayed about the same	17	31%
Decreased	0	0%

***Available Court Resources:***

- A majority of court staff respondents (79.1%) feel they know what services the court currently has available to help self-represented litigants. It is also important to note that fully one-fifth of staff respondents feel they are not so well informed.
- Regarding staff knowledge concerning resources outside the court to which they can refer self-represented litigants, 83% expressed a desire for additional training.
- Also, the majority of staff respondents (40.8%) describe their training in preparation to respond to the needs of self-represented litigants as a “learn as you go” experience.
- This “learn as you go” approach may give rise to the 47.7% of staff respondents who feel they would benefit from additional training regarding exactly how much help they can give the self-represented litigants they deal with.

***Staff Described Needs of Self-Represented Litigants:***

Considering the above reflections from court staff about their preparedness to deal with self-represented litigants, it is not surprising that their suggestions for court provided services to pro per customers as described in Table 2 below strongly indicate the need for well prepared materials and instructions or dedicated staff to directly address these needs.

***Table 2***

<i>Type of Service Needed</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
More information on the website	22	13.7%
Staff dedicated to answer procedural questions	35	21.7%
Informational brochures	32	19.9%
Forms packets with instructions	41	25.5%
A walk-in self-service center	31	19.3%

2. ***Program Areas:*** The following program areas have been determined by the Planning Committee as warranting the application of concentrated efforts by the court as part of our ongoing effort to best address the needs of self-represented litigants in Shasta County. Extensive research activities in concert with numerous planning sessions characterized by high levels of extremely dynamic participation and valued contributions by all committee members provide the support for this plan.

1. **ADJUSTING COURT PROCEDURES**
2. **INCREASING AVAILABILITY OF LOW COST LEGAL ASSISTANCE**
3. **INCREASING COMMUNITY COLLABORATION**
4. **ESTABLISHING A SELF-HELP CENTER**
5. **INCREASING TECHNOLOGICAL ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND LEGAL SERVICES**

3. **Program Action Plans:**

**3.1.a. Program Description: ADJUSTMENTS TO COURT PROCEDURES**

A comprehensive assessment of court procedures will be initiated to (a) provide greater efficiency, (2) more effectively apply existing court resources, and (c) reduce the frequency of factual errors, actual and potential misunderstandings of procedures by self-represented litigants and other users of court services, and (d) attempt to reduce the number of unnecessary court visits by court users.

**3.1.b. Program Partners:** Potential community partners and resources that may contribute efforts to assessing the effectiveness of current court procedures and services are:

- *S.M.A.R.T.*
- *Family Law Committee of Local Bar*
- *Women's Refuge Center*
- *Department of Child Support Services*
- *Legal Services of Northern California*
- *Senior Legal Services*

**3.1.c. Program Plan: Adjustments To Court Procedures**

<i>Task</i>	<i>Resources Needed</i>	<i>Person/Org. Respon- sible</i>	<i>#FTE Hrs./Time Span / Completed By</i>
3.1a Family Law Files: Assess scope of need	2.0 FTE Hrs.	Civil Division Manager	Completed
3.1b Expand ADR Assess what is available, what is needed and exposure to liability issues.	8.0 FTE Hrs.	John Zeis Susan Null	August 31, 2002 In progress
3.1c Expand ADR: Assess available training & Assess Training Needs	12.0 FTE Hrs.	Comm. Livezey  Cathy Peck John Zeis	August 31, 2002 In progress  In Progress
3.1d Generate more timely orders after hearing procedures Research existing alternative approaches in other counties.	8 FTE Hrs.	Nancy Putnam	August 31, 2002
3.1e Review and enhance training for pro tem judges in U.D.'s	12.0 FTE Hrs.	John Zeis Cathy Peck	August 31, 2002 In progress

**3.1.d. Existing Resources That Will Be Used:**

The court will continue to rely on staff to research, implement and administer adjustments to court procedures, as well as continue to collaborate with the program partners listed.

**3.1.e. Additional Resources Needed:**

The court will attempt to make adjustments to court procedures as noted with the level of resources currently in place; however, additional funding may be required in order to train staff, pro tem judges and for travel to other jurisdictions to observe existing procedures for implementation in Shasta County.

**3.1.f. Evaluation Methodologies to Be Applied:**

After implementation of the court procedures noted above, the court will conduct a survey of the local bar and court customers to determine the level of satisfaction with the adjustments that were made.

**3.2.a. Program Description: INCREASING ACCESS TO LOW COST LEGAL SERVICES**

Expanding accessibility to legal services in a chronically resource-lean environment demands adoption of creative and innovative approaches. A primary focus of this program will be to significantly expand the number of physical locations where low cost legal services may be accessed by self-represented litigants.

**3.2.b. Program Partners:**

- *Shasta County Women's Refuge*
- *Shasta County Library*
- *Northern Valley Catholic Social Services*
- *Local Bar*
- *Helpline, Inc.*
- *Department of Child Support Services*
- *Redding Rancheria*
- *Family Law Facilitator*
- *Volunteer Legal Services Program*

**3.2.c Program Plan: Increasing Access to Low Cost Legal Services**

<i>Task</i>	<i>Resources Needed</i>	<i>Person/Org. Responsible</i>	<i>#FTE Hrs./Time Span / Completed By</i>
3.2a Expansion of Family Law Facilitator Duties			
3.2a.1 Assess where the need to expand exists	4.0 FTE Hrs.	Family Law Facilitator	September 15, 2002
3.2a.2 Assess support throughout Court.	4.0 FTE Hrs.	Susan Null	Completed
3.2b Increase Volunteer Legal Services at Women's Refuge:			
Assess what is available	4.0 FTE Hrs.	Nancy Putnam	August 31, 2002
3.2c Increase availability of private attorney hours for unbundling cases:			
Assess support from within the court	2.0 FTE Hrs.	Susan Null	Completed

**3.2.d. Existing Resources That Will Be Used:**

The court will continue to rely on staff to research, implement and administer proposed increases to low cost legal services, as well as continue to collaborate with the program partners listed.

**3.2.e. Additional Resources Needed:**

The court will attempt to increase the availability of low cost legal services outlined with the level of resources currently in place; however, additional funding may be required in order to train court personnel and educate the public on services available in Shasta County.

**3.2.f. Evaluation Methodologies to Be Applied:**

After assessment of the proposed adjustments in the availability of legal services noted above, the court will conduct a survey of the local bar, program partners, court staff and customers to determine the level of satisfaction with the availability of legal services.



**3.3.a. Program Description: COMMUNITY COLLABORATION**

Community support is one of the foundations upon which the potential success of our self-represented action plan relies. Our court’s efforts to garner expanded community support will be launched with an aggressive outreach program to identify, establish and improve upon ongoing relationships with both existing and new resources.

**3.3.b. Program Partners:**

- *Shasta College*
- *National University*
- *Chico State University*
- *Simpson College*
- *Women’s Refuge*
- *Student Day Care Assistance*
- *Shasta County Law Library*
- *Northern Valley Catholic Social Service*
- *Kids Turn*
- *Cooperating as Separating Parents Program*
- *Local Bar*

**3.3.c. Program Plan: Community Collaboration**

<i>Task</i>	<i>Resources Needed</i>	<i>Person/Org. Responsible</i>	<i>#FTE Hrs./Time Span / Completed By</i>
3.3a Inquire and compile contact information.	12.0 FTE Hrs.	SRL Committee	Completed
3.3a.1 Initiate contact with providers	28 FTE Hrs.	SRL Committee	Completed
3.3b Assess transportation needs and resources	16 FTE Hrs.	Susan Null John Zeis	Completed

**3.3.d. Existing Resources That Will Be Used:**

The court will continue to develop working relationships with our program partners and continue to facilitate the sharing of information and resources.

**3.3.e. Additional Resources Needed:**

No additional resources needed.

**3.3.f. Evaluation Methodologies to Be Applied:**

Conduct survey to determine transportation needs.

**3.4.a Program Description: ESTABLISH A FULL SERVICE SELF-HELP CENTER**

As they search for information about legal remedies, processes and procedures available to them to address their legal issues, self-represented litigants seek out this information from a multiplicity of sources. A Self-Help Center will be established in an effort to provide a one-stop location for them to access comprehensive, timely, accurate and precise information needed to respond effectively and efficiently access and secure due process for their legal affairs.

**3.4.b. Program Partners:**

- *Local Bar*
- *Technical vendors*
- *Far Northern Regional Center*
- *Parenting Center*
- *Family Law Facilitator*
- *Shasta County Drug and Alcohol Program*
- *Senior Advocacy Center of Northern California*
- *Northern Valley Catholic Social Services*
- *Department of Child Support Services*
- *Women’s Refuge*
- *Small Claims Advisor*
- *Helpline, Inc.*
- *Shasta County Veterans Service Office*

**3.4.c Program Plan: Establish a Full Service Self-Help Center**

<i>Task</i>	<i>Resources Needed</i>	<i>Person/Org. Responsible</i>	<i>#FTE Hrs./Time Span / Completed By</i>
3.4a Create comprehensive legal information availability:  Assess need via surveys; Develop easy to use customer survey	16 FTE Hrs.	Nikki DeArmond Lisa Leecing Nancy Putnam	Completed
3.4b Provide easy to use forms, instructions and guidelines with a checklist guide.  Assess existing stocks	24.0 FTE Hrs.	Division Supervisors	Completed

3.4c Assess space connected with Family Law Facilitator functions. Long-term plan: locate in courthouse.	4.0 FTE Hrs.	Susan Null John Zeis	Completed
3.4d Assess availability of video information in all areas.	8.0 FTE Hrs.	Dan Ostrowski	September 15, 2002 In progress
3.4e Locate site for information desk in courthouse lobby	2.0 FTE Hrs.	Susan Null	Completed

**3.4.d. Existing Resources That Will Be Used:**

The court will continue to develop working relationships with our program partners and continue to facilitate the sharing of information and resources.

**3.4.e. Additional Resources Needed:**

Staff, equipment, space, other.

**3.4.f. Evaluation Methodologies to Be Applied:**

The court will establish a regular feedback process for users of the Self Help Center to identify ways in which to continually improve the provision of services.

**3.5.a. Program Description: INCREASE TECHNOLOGICAL ACCESS TO LEGAL INFORMATION AND SERVICES.**

The court will expand its use of the Internet and other available technologies to enhance the scope and level of detail of legal information and services available to the general public.

**3.5.b. Program Partners:**

- *Technology vendors*
- *Shasta County Library*
- *Shasta County Law Library*
- *Shasta County Family Law Facilitator*
- *AOC and other websites*

**3.5.c. Program Plan: Increase Access to Legal Information and Services Through Technology**

<i>Task</i>	<i>Resources Needed</i>	<i>Person/Org. Responsible</i>	<i>#FTE Hrs./Time Span / Completed By</i>
3.5a Provide kiosks and computer availability at clerks' windows and Law Library.  Assess number needed – structure and location	12 FTE Hrs.	Dan Ostrowski	Completed
3.5b Enhance court website features; review current information and features	4 FTE Hrs. (per month)	Managers and Supervisors	Ongoing
3.5c Establish Dissomaster, projectors and printer display of real-time court information. Assess placement of equipment.	12 FTE Hrs.	Dan Ostrowski Comm. Beatty	Completed
3.5d Establish video conferencing capability	8 FTE Hrs.	Dan Ostrowski	September 30, 2002 In progress
3.5e Assess wiring needs of courthouse facilities	12 FTE Hrs.	Dan Ostrowski	Completed
3.5f Recruit volunteers to provide more timely orders-after-hearing processing.  Assess feasibility to provide more time from volunteers.	8.0 FTE Hrs.	Cathy Peck Paul Ammon Nancy Putnam	August 31, 2002
3.5g Explore current availability of computer terminals	4.0 FTE Hrs.	Dan Ostrowski	Completed

**3.5.d. Existing Resources That Will Be Used:**

The court will continue to rely on staff to research, implement and administer proposed increases to allow access to low cost legal services by way of technology, as well as continue to collaborate with the program partners listed to facilitate the sharing of information and resources.

**3.4.e. Additional Resources Needed:**

Increased funding for purchasing kiosks, computer terminals and for training staff on the new equipment, as well as training costs for training volunteers to assist in the preparation of orders after hearings.

**3.4.f. Evaluation Methodologies to Be Applied:**

Survey court customers after kiosks and additional computer terminals have been put in place to determine the level of satisfaction and increased customer services.

<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Adjusting Court Procedures</i>	<i>Increasing Availability of Low Cost Legal Assistance</i>	<i>Increasing Community Collaboration</i>	<i>Establishing a Self-Help Center</i>	<i>Increasing Technological Access to Information and Legal Services</i>
<b>2002</b>					
Aug	<p><b>3.1a Family Law Files</b> Assess scope of adjustments needed.</p> <p><b>3.1b Expand ADR</b></p> <p>3.1c Assess training needs and available training.</p> <p>3.1d Generate more timely after hearing orders.</p> <p>3.1e Review &amp; enhance UD training for pro tem judges.</p>	<p><b>3.2a Expand FLF duties.</b></p> <p>3.2a.2 Assess support throughout court system.</p> <p>3.2.b Increase volunteer services at Women’s Refuge</p> <p>3.2c Assess court support for increased availability of private attorney hours for unbundling cases.</p>	<p><b>3.3a Inquire and compile contact information.</b></p> <p>3.3a1 Initiate contact with providers.</p> <p>3.3b Assess transportation needs and resources.</p>	<p><b>3.4a Assess need for availability of comprehensive legal information through survey research.</b></p> <p>3.4b Assess existing stocks of easy to use forms, instructions and guidelines with a check list guide.</p> <p>3.4c Assess self-help center space connected to FLF functions.</p> <p>3.4e Locate site for information desk in courthouse lobby.</p>	<p>3.5a Assess number of Kiosks needed – their structure and locations.</p> <p>3.5b Enhance court website features.</p> <p>3.5c Assess placement of courtroom Disomaster, projects and printer display of real-time court information.</p> <p>3.5e Assess wiring needs of courthouse facilities.</p> <p>3.5f Assess feasibility to provide more time from volunteers.</p> <p>3.5g Assess current availability of computer terminals.</p>
Sep		3.2a.1 Assess areas where expansion of services is most needed		3.4d Assess availability of video information in all areas	3.5d Establish video conferencing capability.

**APPLIED TO THE ENTIRE ACTION PLAN:**

4. **State Support:** Request permanent funding through the state budget process.
5. **Unique Approaches:** Collaboration with community partners to provide increased access to justice system services.
6. **Sustaining the Action Plan:** Continue to assess the needs of self-represented litigants by conducting surveys of court customers on a yearly basis. The court will also continue to garner community support of the court's action plan by having an outreach program wherein we can identify, establish and improve upon ongoing relationships with both existing and new resources.

## ATTACHMENT “A”

### SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANT PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

**Commissioner Cara Beatty**, Chair

**Susan Null**, Court Executive Officer

**Hon. Gregory M. Caskey**

**John Zeis**, Court Administrative Analyst

**Jeanette Palla**, Esq.; Family Law Facilitator

**Michael J. Hamilton**, Esq.

**Heather Cibula**, Esq.

**Dret McHatton**, Esq.

**John Berglund**, Esq.; Shasta County Department of Child Support Services

**Marcella Thompson**, LCSW

**Catherine Peck**, Manager, Shasta County Superior Court Civil Division

**Paul Ammon**, Supervisor, Shasta County Superior Court Civil Division

**Nancy Putnam**, Supervisor, Shasta County Superior Court Civil Division, Family Law Unit

**Nikki DeArmond**, Manager, Shasta County Superior Court Courtroom Support Division

**Lisa Leecing**, Supervisor, Shasta County Superior Court Criminal Division

ATTACHMENT “A”