

An Assessment of Union's Volunteer Self-Help Center

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Elizabeth Domingo
Trial Court Administrator
Union County Superior Court
Elizabeth, New Jersey

Acknowledgments

Union's Self-Help Center is in operation due to the considerable contributions of the court's operation, administrative and technical staff. I have always envisioned providing a location at the courthouse that would be able to assist citizens navigate through the court system. If it weren't for my staff, opening the Center would not have been possible.

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Abstract

Union County Superior Court located in Elizabeth, New Jersey opened a Self-Help Center staffed by an Ombudsman, volunteers, and interns. The center provides one-on-one service that was previously sought at the intake counters. Central to the services provided is the premise that individualized service is more meaningful to the court user. From the one-on-one service, to the distribution of self-help packets, to having computers available to the public, Union County's Self-Help Center was devised to take the pressure and volume of litigants away from the intake windows' staff who were dealing with specific staffing shortages and unable to keep up with the volume of litigants asking for help.

Union County Superior Court is committed to providing support to the self-represented litigants by enhancing their ability to locate, use, and most importantly understand court information, rules, and procedures. The goal of this research is to determine whether the center is meeting the needs of its users. To test these objectives, an identification of what court users expected of the Self-Help Center was evaluated. Users expect to be able to obtain information about how to proceed with their case. Helping the court users understand the process, which forms to complete, and understand what to do next in their court matters are measurable objectives of the Self-Help Center.

The research methodology used to evaluate the center's effectiveness took the form of survey questionnaires. Surveys were distributed to measure impressions of how the Self-Help Center was performing. Despite some limitations with the evaluations, the findings of the evaluation of the Self-Help Center in Union County were favorable. Surveys indicate that self-represented litigants who used the center were satisfied with their experience. The evaluations also show that the center's location is appropriate to serve its users. The Union County Self-

Help Center is meeting the needs of the court and community in many areas and has the potential to further enhance court access, public trust and confidence, and court efficiencies.

The concept of access to justice has long been considered by the justice community as synonymous with access to an attorney, largely out of recognition that the American justice system is a complex institution. A growing number of judicial policy makers adopted the view that a fundamental requirement of access to justice is access to the courts and that access to lawyers, as articulated in the Sixth Amendment, is not sufficient by itself to ensure access to justice. This outlook prompted a radical change in the willingness of courts to respond to the ever-increasing numbers of the self-represented.

I. Introduction

Increasing numbers of litigants choose to represent themselves in court proceedings rather than hire an attorney to represent them. These individuals are known as self-represented litigants and are creating challenges for the courts system as their numbers increase. Courts, bar associations, and national organizations look for ways to respond to the influx of self-represented litigants and the challenges they bring to the courts.

Litigants who are not represented by counsel forfeit important rights and which may translate to a denial of meaningful access to justice. This situation may be correlated to the governing law and facts of their case but due to the absence of counsel. The concept of access to justice has long been considered by the justice community as synonymous with access to an attorney, largely out of recognition that the American justice system is a complex institution. A growing number of judicial policy makers adopted the view that a fundamental requirement of access to justice is access to the courts and that access to lawyers, as articulated in the Sixth Amendment, is not sufficient by itself to ensure access to justice. This outlook prompted a radical change in the willingness of courts to respond to the ever-increasing numbers of the self-represented.

The American Bar Association conducted a legal needs study and the report recommended that “attention needs to be paid to how the legal system can help minimize the difficulties for these (self-represented) litigants and thereby increase their capability for appropriately representing themselves in court.”¹ This report goes on to recommend that the best efforts at providing quality services for these litigants may fail if efforts are not made to ensure

¹ ABA Consortium on Legal Services and the Public Legal Needs and Civil Justice: A Survey of Americans-Major Findings from the Comprehensive Legal Needs Study, Chicago: American Bar Association, 1994.

that the materials are written and presented in a way that litigants will be highly likely to understand them.²

Many discussions framing the challenges faced by the self-represented litigant recognize that the flood of un-represented litigants creates challenges for the courts, the judges and the Bar. Traditional methods of litigation are no longer the norm as the practice of law and providing justice has evolved. In order to assist the self-represented litigant, the area of “unbundled” legal services, limited scope representation or discrete task assistance has evolved as well. Attorneys who are unable to expand their practices to provide assistance to those who might otherwise never seek their aid are a win-win for the changing legal and court system. Attorneys with excellent communications skills and a good set of boundaries can assist the self-represented. Innovative legal practices such as unbundling of services can enhance access to justice. Legal service lawyers have also provided legal advice and assistance through hotlines, self-represented clinics, and the preparation of pleadings for years in keeping up with the needs of the self-represented litigant. Over time, through similar evolution inspired by conferences, and publications, a change in attitudes favoring unbundled services is evident across the country, reflected in part by changes in ethical and procedural rules in many jurisdictions.³

There are many reasons why litigants choose to represent themselves. A sizeable number of self-represented litigants proceed without an attorney simply because they cannot afford one. In 1994, for example, the American Bar Association conducted an in-depth study of the legal needs of low income Americans and found that 47% of low-income households experienced a new or existing legal need each year, but only 29% were addressed through the legal system and 38% of those legal needs were not addressed altogether. In a society where justice is grounded

² See Note 1 *supra*, page iii.

³ www.unbundledlaw.org. Accessed February 10, 2010.

in the rule of law, the theory is that justice is available for all but when access is easier for some than others, justice may be difficult to obtain at all when self-represented litigants face the challenges of navigating through court processes on their own from filling out and filing court forms to understanding and acting on court orders.³ The increase of self-represented litigants has generated a great deal of time and effort in a variety of conferences,⁴ websites,⁵ and publications.⁶ In an era that emphasizes customer service, the courts attempt to improve access and therefore public trust and confidence in the legal system during a time of great economic uncertainty. One such service is to develop self-help services, especially as litigants are increasingly seeking resources from the courts. Untrained in legal procedures, they raise their defenses and navigate through our labyrinth of procedural rules that make up the fabric of our judicial process.⁷

³ Charles L.Owen, Ronald W. Staudt, and Edward B. Pedwell, “Access to Justice: Meeting the Needs of Self-Represented Litigants”, Institute of Design and Chicago-Kent College of Law, Illinois Institute of Technology, 2002.

⁴ Conferences addressing the issue of unrepresented litigants included the Eastern Regional Conference on Access to Justice for the Self-Represented Litigant (White Plains, NY, 2006); the New York State Unified Court System Access to Justice Conference (Albany, NY, 2001); the Massachusetts Statewide Conference on Unrepresented Litigants (Worcester, MA, 2001); The Changing Face of Legal Practice: A National Conference on Unbundled Legal Services (Baltimore, MD, 2000); and the National Conference on Self Represented Litigants Appearing in Court (Scottsdale, AZ, 1999).

⁵ For information on the web, see the website funded by the State Justice Institute, serving as a network for practitioners of self –help programs, at <http://www.SelfHelpSupport.org> last visited July 28, 2009; the website of the Network of Self-Represented Litigation, at <http://www.srln.org> last visited July 28, 2009; and on the “Pro Se Resource” page of the American Judicature Society’s website at http://wwwajs.org/prose/pro_resources.asp last visited on July 31, 2009.

⁶ Publications include those such as Paula Hannaford-Agor and Nicole Mott, Research on Self-Represented Litigation: Preliminary Results and Methodological Considerations as published in *The Justice System Journal*, Volume 24, Number 2 (2003); Paper Six: Self-Represented Litigants and the Ethics of Lawyers, Judges and Court Staff by William Hornsby, Cynthia Gray, and John Greacen; and as cited in Russell Engler paper Ethics in Transition: Unrepresented Litigants and the Changing Judicial Role, 357, June 2008.

⁷ Jona Goldschmidt, ET AL., “Meeting the Challenge of Pro Se Litigation: A Report and Guidebook for Judges and Court Managers”, Chicago: American Judicature Society, 1998.

Court staff is faced with the challenge of helping citizens understand the increasingly complex laws and finding their way through the system.⁸ The difficulty is that courts were not designed to serve these citizens. As a result, individuals seeking service from the court system and those involved in providing service are equally frustrated. Confusing language, rules, and procedures frustrate litigants. Similarly, unprepared self-represented litigants frustrate attorneys by delaying proceedings, ultimately increasing expenses. Judges face additional challenges, as they must remain neutral on the bench, unable to provide much assistance to the self-represented litigant.

Court staff is faced with increasing numbers of self-represented litigants who ask for explanations of the legal processes pertaining to their cases. Providing assistance to the self-represented litigant takes time away from other administrative duties. In addition, prohibitions against the unauthorized practice of law serve to deter court staff and judges alike from rendering assistance to self-represented litigants. Court staff struggle to understand the distinction between legal information and legal advice while attempting to provide assistance specific enough to be of help to unrepresented litigants in handling their cases. In most jurisdictions, the result has been to turn away these litigants with the words, "We cannot assist you because we cannot give legal advice." Therefore, court staff must balance the training they have received on providing customer service, workload demands, and legal and ethical constraints. Court staff are often faced with a litigant who may require an explanation of a number of items, but due to concerns of crossing that line between legal information and advice, the court employee is not sure what information is appropriate to provide. The uncertainty of this situation typically results in the employee providing limited information to self-represented litigants.

⁸ Harold Hazzel, "Clerk's Perspective: The Changing Role of the Clerk" Public Trustee: A Publication of Florida's Clerks of the Circuit Court, 3rd Quarter 1998, 3.

In the event self-represented litigants are not deterred from the often-lukewarm reception of a busy clerk, they encounter additional barriers to justice in the courtroom. In the courtroom, the self-represented litigant appears before a judge who, like the court clerk, is faced with managing a heavy workload. Judges expect to play the traditional role of passive arbiter in the litigation process, and operate on the assumption that attorneys representing the parties will invoke the appropriate procedural rules and rules of evidence on behalf of their clients in the pretrial and trial stages of litigation.

As such, an individual judge is unable to devote the necessary time to provide a full explanation of the litigation process for the self-represented litigant, and feels constrained from advising—or lending any other form of assistance during the trial process—by virtue of the rule requiring that judicial impartiality is maintained. Judges, as the traditional role of an arbiter, expect that both parties will understand and use established rules for disposing the case. Self-represented litigants often cannot meet these expectations. Judges are placed in the position of explaining law and procedures to the self-represented litigant without becoming an advocate. Judges are concerned that there may be an appearance of impropriety if they intervene on behalf of one litigant too much or if they intervene too little. The level of intervention is especially challenging when one litigant is represented and the other is not. If an attorney appears on behalf of an adversary, the self-represented litigant is frequently at an even greater disadvantage. He or she often fails to prove their case or provide the relevant evidence. Even in forums such as small claims courts, where procedural rules are somewhat relaxed, self-represented litigants fortunate enough to obtain judgments are often denied instructions as to the available means for enforcement of the judgment. It is understandable that sometimes judges, court staff, and lawyers are uncomfortable becoming involved in their cases.

Sources

The Internet, written brochures, and handbooks designed by courts provide a plethora of knowledge for self-represented litigants who have some mastery of written English. However in our increasingly diverse world, there are self-represented litigants who do not have access to computers or who are not comfortable with computers. There are also self-represented litigants who are not literate or are not fluent in English. There is a need for minimizing the difficulties for the self-represented litigant.⁹ Materials need to be user-friendly and drafted with the community needs in mind.

As the courts face perhaps the greatest challenge in a generation or more, the courts will experience great pressure on budgets at the very time that demand for services will increase. Unless appropriately addressed, not only will this result in greater backlogs, more crowded calendars, and a potential loss of public trust and confidence, it will put court staff and judges under great stress, leading to a vicious downward spiral further reducing the effectiveness and efficiency of the courts.¹⁰

Research of user satisfaction in court self-help programs indicates that self-represented litigants “appreciate court and legal service programs and are highly satisfied with services rendered.”¹¹ In 1906, Roscoe Pound stated that “dissatisfaction with the administration of justice is as old as the law; the inevitable discontent with all law should not deceive us into overlooking or underrating the real and serious dissatisfaction with courts and lack of respect for

⁹ ABA Consortium on Legal Services and the Public Legal Needs and Civil Justice: A Survey of Americans-Major Findings from the Comprehensive Legal Needs Study. Chicago: American Bar Association, 1994.

¹⁰ Frank Bocalina and Richard Zorza, Ensuring Access to Justice in Tough Economic Times, *Judicature*, Volume 92, Number 3, November-December 2008.

¹¹ John Greacen, “Self Represented Litigants and Court and Legal Services Responses To Their Needs – What We Know”, 2002, page 2.

law in the United States today.”¹² One hundred years later, public confidence in the courts is critical for court leadership. Today, the public demands the immediate availability of information and services to accommodate their needs; courts must be prepared to respond. The greater challenge is to ensure that the self-represented litigant understand the risks and responsibilities of choosing not to have an attorney.

New Jersey Self-Help Initiative

The Supreme Court in New Jersey has been firmly committed to the delivery of justice and furthering public trust. Throughout the years, the Supreme Court has created subcommittees, which have achieved notable improvements designed to improve access to justice through various programs, policies, and services.

Of significance to the efforts predating the self-help initiative in Union County, New Jersey addressed the needs of the public by establishing the New Jersey Ombudsman Program. In June 1992, the New Jersey State Supreme Court Task Force on Minority Concerns recommended that the Ombudsman offices be established at the vicinage to provide information about the courts and to receive and investigate complaints about abuses in the judicial process.¹³

The New Jersey Court is a unified system, with trial level courts located in 15 vicinages¹⁴ consisting of the Superior Court of New Jersey, an Appellate Division, and a Supreme Court.¹⁵ The Superior Court is the court of general jurisdiction. It has original jurisdiction in all Criminal, Civil and Family matters and reviews decisions of the 537 municipal courts. There are 441

¹² Roscoe A. Pound, “The Causes of Popular Dissatisfaction with the Administration of Justice” Address to the ABA, 29 ABA Reports, 1906, page 395.

¹³ Recommendation 31, New Jersey Supreme Court Task Force on Minority Concerns Final Report 1992, pp. 248-253.

¹⁴ The 15 vicinages, i.e., judicial districts, include several multi-county vicinages that serve New Jersey’s 21 counties.

¹⁵ See, the Structure of the New Jersey Courts, Appendix A.

Superior Court judges in New Jersey. The Appellate Division, with eight appellate parts, reviews the decisions of the trial court, the Tax Court, the Municipal Courts and administrative agencies. New Jersey's Supreme Court reviews decisions of all of the other courts. Chief Justice Stuart Rabner is the eighth Chief Justice to be appointed since the Constitution of 1947.¹⁵ The Supreme Court also enjoys the service of six Associate Justices.¹⁶ The Supreme Court is the state court system's authoritative and rule making body.¹⁷ The current court structure evolved out of a process of review, streamlining, and centralization that culminated in the unification of a county-based court system into a state-based system.¹⁸

The courts' operations are managed centrally by the Administrative Office of the Courts, led by an Appellate Division judge who serves as the Acting Administrative Director (the "acting" designation preserves the judge's judicial status). Fifteen Assignment Judges and Trial Court Administrators who form its executive component lead the courts.¹⁹

The New Jersey Supreme Court approved the recommendation establishing the ombudsman office subject to the outcome of a pilot project. The eighteen-month pilot

¹⁵ Chief Justice Rabner was sworn in on June 29, 2007. See, www.njcourtsonline.com, Press Release, Chief Justice Stuart Rabner.

¹⁶ Justices Virginia Long; Jaynee LaVecchia; Barry T. Albin; John E. Wallace, Jr.; Roberto A. Rivera-Soto; and Helen E. Hoens.

¹⁷ New Jersey Constitution, Article VI, Section I, 1. "The judicial power shall be vested in a Supreme Court, a Superior Court, and other courts of limited jurisdiction. The other courts and their jurisdiction may from time to time be established, altered or abolished by law." The important role of the Supreme Court of New Jersey can be seen in significant decisions affecting fundamental rights in relationships, health, education and housing that impact the quality of life of New Jersey residents, e.g., among others: *In re Quinlan*, 70 N.J. 10, 355 A. 2nd 647, granting parents the right to remove daughter from a respirator, commonly known as "right to die" case; *In re Baby M*, 109 N.J. 396, 537 A. 2nd 1227, granting visitation rights to a surrogate mother and deeming surrogacy illegal in New Jersey; *Caballero v. Martinez*, 547 U.S. 1150, broadly interpreting resident to include an "illegal" immigrant; *Lewis v. Harris*, 908 A. 2nd 196, granting equal protection to same sex couples; *Abbott v. Burke*, 196 N.J. 544, 960 A. 2nd 360, supporting funding equality amongst school districts; *NAACP v. Mount Laurel Township*, 67 N.J. 151, requiring affordable housing and declaring exclusionary zoning illegal; *State v. Kelly*, 97 N.J. 178, permitting testimony about Battered Woman's Syndrome.

¹⁸ See, Hon. Glenn A. Grant, *Building on Success to Achieve Excellence* (December 2008) for a description of the evolution and development of the New Jersey court system including its history and current constitutional framework, structure and governance, and recent achievements.

¹⁹ See, New Jersey Rules of Court, R. 1:33, Administrative Responsibility.

Ombudsman Program was launched in Camden County, New Jersey in late June of 1996. After eighteen months, the pilot was evaluated. All the assignment judges from throughout the state reviewed the evaluation report and voted to approve the expansion of the program. This recommendation was communicated to the Supreme Court.²⁰ The Ombudsman Offices throughout the state of New Jersey serve all court users but is particularly sensitive to the needs of those who traditionally have had limited access to the courts, who lack confidence in the legal system, or who feel they have been discriminated against or mistreated by the courts. The ombudsman is uniquely situated to convey these concerns to the court community and to participate in front line efforts to improve access to the courts.

In carrying forward its mandate to ensure that all individuals are afforded fair and impartial access to judiciary services throughout the court system, the New Jersey Supreme Court's Subcommittee on Minority Access to Justice recognizes that assuring fair, equal, and meaningful access to justice involves weighing and considering several factors that have an impact on an individual's ability to optimally utilize court services and programs. These factors include the location and physical conditions of court facilities to court programs and services; the ability to participate equally in court proceedings; receive fair and equal services regardless of income level; and timely access.²¹

Union County's Self-Help Center

Union County Superior Court in acknowledging the importance of the message captured in the 2007-2009 Biennial Report of the New Jersey Supreme Court Committee on Minority Concerns recognized the need to go beyond providing self-represented litigants with written procedural packets, kits, and referrals to the Internet, and Law Library. In response to that trend,

²⁰ Camden County Ombudsman Program Review, Evaluation and Recommendations, Nov. 25, 1997.

²¹ The New Jersey Supreme Court Committee on Minority Concerns Biennial Report, 2007-2009, page 60.

Union County Superior Court opened a Self-Help Center to provide the one-on-one service that was being sought at the intake counters. Central to the services provided is the premise that individualized service is more meaningful to the court user. From the one-on-one service, to the distribution of self-help packets, to having computers available to the public, the Self-Help Center was devised to take the pressure and volume of litigants away from the intake window staff who were dealing with specific staffing shortages and unable to keep up with the volume of litigants asking for help.

The Center is open three days a week from 10AM through 2PM. The Center assisted over 1,015 self-represented litigants (674 walk-ins and addressed 341 telephone calls).²² An Ombudsman and a group of volunteers and interns staff the Center. Intake forms used at the Center track its users to better respond to their needs. Of the 674 walk-ins, 267 filed for divorce and 215 filed family motions. As of May 2009, the Center tracked the ethnicity of the users to show that 68% are minorities (40% Hispanic, 28% Black). Over 45% make less than \$25,000 a year.²³

In keeping with the concept of meaningful access, which is central to the administration of justice and the role and purpose of the courts, Union County Superior Court is committed to providing support to the self-represented court users and enhance their ability to locate, use and most importantly *understand* court information, rules, and procedures. Central to the services provided by Union County Superior Self-Help Center is the premise that individualized service is more meaningful to the court user. The center provides a structure for supplementing existing resources to give self-represented parties the information and assistance needed to participate effectively in court proceedings. However, there is a need for an assessment of its services. Is

²² The Center's Intake Form was used to capture a sampling of the center's users for Union County Superior Court's data collection purposes.

²³ Income information gathered from the Center's Intake forms.

the Union County Self-Help Center providing adequate and accessible services? Who is using the Center? Are their needs being met? Evaluating the program will determine whether services should be expanded full time and whether other options may be available for consideration.

Aligning these goals, this research will measure whether the self-help center is providing services needed by the self-represented litigant.

II. Literature Review

There is a wide array of documentation concerning self-help programs nationwide and a comprehensive discussion of the principles and services provided to the self-represented litigant throughout the United States. This section provides a brief summary of where courts been; the benefits of facilitating meaningful access by looking at the needs of the self-represented litigant and evaluation efforts in taking steps to address access to justice through models of self-help centers using one-on-one assistance, Internet technologies, and collaborative programs.

Background

The National Center for State Courts has discussed national trends in the courts and found that:

“In the last few years, a growing number of court professionals have come to realize that self-represented litigants are not just a minor, peripheral source of irritation for court administrators and judges. Rather, they see that self-represented litigants provide a large and important percentage of the courts’ customer base, and innovations in access for the self-represented will significantly improve the functioning and reputation of courts. Attention to self-represented litigation issues serves the interests of all court users and staff, not just the self-represented litigants. Expanding assistance to self-represented litigants is an integral part of providing all Americans with equal access to justice.”²⁴

Furthermore, self-represented litigants are on the rise and their needs have created challenges for the courts in that:

“The numbers of self-represented litigants have been increasing over the last ten years. This increase has placed a burden on judges, court staff, and court processes and is expected to continue. Self-represented litigants are most likely to appear without counsel in domestic-relations matters such as divorce custody and child support, small claims, landlord/tenant, probate, protective orders, and other civil matters. The self-represented includes a broad range of income and educational levels. In many courts they may represent 50 to 80 percent of the caseload.”²⁵

²⁴ National Center for State Courts, Access to Justice: The Self-Represented Litigant, Article from Future Trends in State Courts 2006: Ten Trends Impacting State Courts, page 18.

²⁵ See Note 25 *supra*, page 18.

As a result of this influx, many states have set up task forces, commissions, or committees to study the number of self-represented litigants in their states, and ways to address their needs.

Current assistance for self-represented litigants includes: self-help centers, one-on-one assistance, court-sponsored legal information assistance, Internet technologies, and various collaborative approaches (workshops, clinics, videos, telephone assistance, mobile service centers, lawyer-for-a-day programs and access to unbundled services). Courts have developed Web sites geared toward self-represented litigants that provide information such as online forms, instructions, and guides. Some courts have case coordinators to assist self-represented parties. In Washington State, facilitators refer parties to legal, social service, and ADR resources; assist in the selection, completion, and distribution of forms; explain legal terms; provide information on basic court procedures; and preview pleadings to ensure procedural requirements have been met. Several courts are adopting protocols for judges to use during hearings involving self-represented litigants, as well as changing court rules to allow court staff to provide assistance to self-represented litigants.²⁶

Courts are becoming more and more customer service-oriented. As captured in 2001 by Madelynn Herman in the National Center for State Courts Annual Report on Trends in the State Courts, courts are doing this in a variety of ways, which include but are not limited to children and elder waiting rooms at the courthouse (California); day care assistance at the courthouse (Colorado, Massachusetts, and North Carolina); increased signage; name tags; expanded hours (Tampa, Florida); suggestion boxes (Virginia); user surveys (Overland Park, Kansas and Virginia); ombudsman programs (New Jersey and New York); photocopying services (Albuquerque, New Mexico); electronic calendar monitors (Scottsdale, Arizona and Prince

²⁶ **Ibid.**

George's County, Maryland); courthouse maps; dining areas or lounges; magazine racks (Kent, Ohio); statements of public service (Ann Arbor, Michigan); decorations such as children's art in the family court rooms (California); and re-designing court houses from the customers perspective (Nevada). Other examples of the courts becoming more customer-focused include a traveling night court in Ohio and on-site mental health screenings in Berkeley, California.²⁷

In addition to the courts becoming more customer-focused, the courts have experienced an increase in the number of litigants that are representing themselves. The courts are responding in a variety of ways to meet the needs of this growing population. Current ways of addressing the needs of self-represented include one-on one assistance, court sponsored legal advice, Internet access, collaborative approaches, and self-help centers.

Self-Help Centers provides self-represented litigants with reference materials such as forms and detailed instructions in order to assist them with routine types of cases, such as uncontested divorce, modification of child support, guardianship, or landlord/tenant matters. Other reference materials that might also be provided include, law information, videos or instructional media, lists of attorneys or other resources in the community. The most well known example of a self-help center is in Maricopa County, Arizona. Many states have modeled their self-help centers after Maricopa County's self-help center. The self-help centers in Maricopa County were designed to inform and instruct self-represented litigants on *how to complete* frequently utilized documents and to ensure they are filing the appropriate forms for the relief they are seeking. This effort would facilitate efficient and expeditious access to their court system.

²⁷ Madelyn Herman, "Access and Fairness: Pro Se/Customer Service Trends in the Courts," Annual Report on Trends in the State Courts 2001, page 29.

Another forerunner in the self-represented litigant movement is California, which alone has over 80 self-help centers operating in their state courts. California has also translated many of their forms into various languages to further assist self-represented litigants. Most self-help centers are located in the courthouse but few communities have “mobile self-help centers” such as Ventura County (California) Superior Court or temporary centers that can be set up and taken down quickly, such as the 11th District Court of New Mexico.

While obtaining forms and instructions from self-help centers can be a tremendous assistance to court customers, litigants often require additional assistance. As more courts become comfortable with providing legal information to self-represented litigants, one-on-one assistance offered by court staff or trained volunteers often supplements the initial library model of self-help centers. One-on-one assistance may include referring self-represented litigants to appropriate resources, assisting them in the completion of forms, or explaining court procedures. Some courts limit this type of assistance to certain case types such as domestic violence or family law.

The 20th District Court of Colorado (Boulder) takes giving one-on-one advice to self-represented litigants very seriously. Their most senior and experienced court clerks staff the filing windows and the public telephone lines. Since the clerk’s office was generally the first place self-represented litigants went for help, they reasoned that it was more efficient and customer-friendly to provide litigants with access to court personnel who were the most knowledgeable about the court’s policies and procedures.²⁸

California took the one-on-one assistance model a step further with the statutory creation of a “family law facilitator” position in all of the state superior courts. In 1996, the California

²⁸ See Note 28 *supra*, page 29.

legislature passed the Family Law Facilitator Act in an attempt to alleviate California's growing pro se problem.²⁹

As the courts post more and more information on their web sites, they are increasingly tailoring assistance to self-represented litigants through Internet technologies. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, litigants being able to download forms and instructions, computer programs to help litigants fill in forms; access to court records online; links to online resources including lawyer referral services; computer programs to help clerks prepare orders so that litigants can get them before they leave the courthouse; e-filing systems that are designed for self-represented litigants; and videos to orient self-represented litigants to the court process or how to complete commonly used forms.

The most comprehensive web site to assist self-represented litigants was unveiled by the California Administrative Office of the Courts.³⁰ Other examples of how Internet technologies are being used to assist self-represented litigants includes software provided by the Delaware Family Court so that litigants can calculate the amount of child support that will be ordered.³¹ The Utah Administrative Office of the Courts also developed an interactive web application that uses information provided by self-represented litigants to prepare pleadings in uncontested divorce and landlord/tenant cases.³²

The most recent trend in self-represented assistance programs is the development of collaborative programs by state and local courts, legal services/aid agencies, local bar associations, and community organizations.³³ Pooling resources and distributing costs

²⁹ Frances L Harrison, Deborah J. Chase, and L. Thomas Surth, "California's Family Law Facilitator Program-A New Paradigm for the Courts", Journal for the Center for Families, Children and the Courts, vol.2, 2000, at 61.

³⁰ See Note 29 *supra*, page 32.

³¹ **Ibid.**

³² See Note 28 *supra*, page 32.

³³ **Ibid.**

associated with self-represented assistance programs allows more communities to address the needs of self-represented litigants. Maryland and Massachusetts are examples where this model is used. Since more states now have self-represented litigant programs in place, the questions in recent years lean toward fine tuning those programs, evaluating those programs, and reporting on those programs.³⁴

Many of the innovations developed to address the needs of the self-represented litigant have significantly altered the culture of the courts. But given the various self-help “experiments,” unresolved barriers to access may still exist.³⁵ It is possible that many of our processes and assumptions are out of date and possibly contributing to the barriers for reasons that go beyond the unrealistically assumed presence of a well-paid advocate.³⁶

The Needs of the Self-Represented Litigant

According to Goldschmidt and colleagues, “in the mid-1990s, at least one party was self-represented in more than two-thirds of domestic relations cases in California and in nearly 90 percent of divorce cases in Phoenix, Arizona, and Washington, D.C.”³⁷ Yet, the scarcity of self-represented and civil legal services is well documented. In Florida, self-represented litigant service organizations reported a 30% decline in self-represented litigant services³⁸ and in 2007 a national study found that 80% of the civil legal needs of low-income Americans are not being met and for every person helped by a Legal Services Corporation-funded program, another was turned away.³⁹

³⁴ William Downs, “Where We’ve Been” Pro Se Information Trends, 2004.

³⁵ Richard Zorza, “The Self-Help Friendly Court: Designed from the Ground Up to Work for People Without Lawyers”, 2002.

³⁶ See Note 36 *supra*, page at 13.

³⁷ See Note 7 *supra*, page 8.

³⁸ The Florida Bar News, “Pro Bono Goes Stagnant,” January 2009 at <http://www.floridabar.org>

³⁹ Legal Services Corporation, Documenting the Justice Gap in America: The Current Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-Income Americans, 2007, Overview.

Typically there are numerous additional factors at play inhibiting self-represented litigants to gaining access to the legal system. Factors restricting access may include:

- **Economic barriers.** Access to lawyers is stratified according to economic means;
- **Lack of Knowledge.** Litigants may avoid costly legal representation by representing themselves, but if they do so, they must confront bewilderingly complex requirements, processes and events for which they are ill prepared by normal experience;
- **Complexity.** Obtaining justice is complicated process made unreasonably difficult by the sheer complexity of the legal system;
- **Language⁴⁰ and Understanding.⁴¹** Self-represented litigants often face institutional barriers to communication and understanding; specialized legal jargon, procedures required to be completed in English when the litigants primary language is not English, and inadequate access for those with sight or hearing disabilities;
- **Distrust.** Among self-represented litigants, as among the general public, there is widespread low and waning confidence in the courts. When potential litigants are disenchanted and cynical, they are less likely to avail themselves of information, advice, and help they consider suspect – and are more likely to try to make their own way through the legal system;
- **Commitments.** Family commitments and work responsibilities often place an unmanageable burden on the amount of time self-represented litigants can dedicate to

⁴⁰ The average native English speaker reads comfortably at the 5th grade level. Plain language documents use succinct phrasings, are written in the second person with active shorter sentences. Maria Midlin and Katherine McCormick, Plain Language works for Pro Per Litigants, found at <http://www.selfhelpsupport.org/library/item.55548-PlainLanguageWorks>

⁴¹ Ibid.

working on their cases or understanding what is required of them. The effect may well be an unfair outcome if the self-represented litigant is pitted against a represented litigant;

- **Inconsistent Information.** Multiple sources of information and the variety of media forms used for dissemination frequently lead to inconsistencies that are difficult for the self-represented litigant to resolve;
- **Costs of reform.** Funds available to courts and legal service systems vary among the states. Courts seldom have large discretionary funds for reforming dated systems and cost effectiveness must be a key consideration for any change.
- **Location.** The location of a self-represented litigant's residence in relation to the courthouse and his or her ability to travel can pose problems in keeping appointments, meeting court dates, and simply gaining access to needed information. Costs of travel also are not insignificant when they include loss of pay for an entire day's work; and
- **Lack of Uniformity.** Laws governing self-represented litigation are different from state to state. Further, individual court systems even in New Jersey differ in size, volume, and types of cases heard, demographics of residents, age of the court system, adaptability to change, and resources for making changes. These incompatibilities hamper the dissemination of improvements among court systems.⁴² There is wide spread consensus that in addressing these barriers as recommended by the American Judicature Society, "development of programs to assist self-represented litigants should be a collaborative effort of the courts, the bar, legal aid providers, the public and relevant government agencies."⁴³ In fact, we have much to learn from the experience of other countries, such as Canada, where judges already have an obligation to provide reasonable assistance to

⁴² Charles L. Owen, Ronald W, Staudt, and Edward B. Pedwell , Access to Justice: Meeting the Needs of Self-Represented Litigants ,2002 at 15-16.

⁴³ American Judicature Society, Revised Pro Se Policy Recommendations, 2002, page 2.

self-represented litigants in civil and criminal cases. The duty is considered a corollary of the judicial duty to ensure fairness.⁴⁴

Self-represented litigants represent themselves for a variety of reasons. John Greacen found that most self-represented litigants feel that the matter was relatively simple and can handle it themselves (45%), some can not afford an attorney (31%), or they do not want to pay for a lawyer even though they can afford one (22%).⁴⁵ From the National Center for State Courts study, surveys were distributed at the courthouses. Three specific questions were asked. Why did litigants choose to represent themselves? What resources did litigants use to prepare for their cases? And, what, if any, previous experience did they have in self-representation?

The survey responses revealed that the majority of litigants thought lawyers were simply too expensive; the litigant felt the case was too simple to warrant assistance from a lawyer or that legal aid was unavailable to assist in their cases; responses ranged from 40% and 75% of the litigants from each of the four sites surveyed.⁴⁶ The main finding was the striking differences between sites. Cross-jurisdictional comparisons were not feasible considering the differences in self-represented litigant populations and the types of programs and resources they consulted. Yet one consistent finding was that self-represented litigants were predominantly new to the justice system. Approximately two-thirds from each site had never represented themselves before. Only 7.3 percent of the litigants had filed a self-represented claim on more than one occasion. Therefore, repeat self-represented litigants were rare. It was important to ask these questions since court data does not document personal choices for self-representation.

⁴⁴ Jona Goldschmidt, "Judicial Ethics and Assistance to Self-Represented Litigants" *The Justice System Journal*, Volume 28, Number 3, 2007, page 326.

⁴⁵ John Greacen, "Self-Represented Litigants and Court and Legal Services Responses to Their Needs – What We Know", 2002, page 3.

⁴⁶ Paula L. Hannaford and Nicole L. Mott, "Research on Self-Represented Litigation: Preliminary Results and Methodological Considerations" *24 Justice System Journal* 163 (2003), pages 172-173.

Some litigants may represent themselves initially, but later hire an attorney. Some litigants begin their cases with an attorney, but then the attorney files a motion to withdraw for various reasons, such as if the litigant could no longer afford the attorney's services or the litigant and attorney developed serious disagreements about how to conduct the case. Longer cases may involve several cycles of attorney representation and self-representation.

The definition of a "self-represented litigant" is, thus, significant in any comparison of self-represented and attorney-represented litigants. As noted in the Hannaford and Mott article, the court needs to be aware that there are many degrees of representation status; and court records may not distinguish among these variations. For example, four ideal representation categories would be both sides self-represented; petitioner (plaintiff) self-represented and respondent (defendant) attorney-represented; petitioner (plaintiff) attorney-represented and respondent (defendant) self-represented; or both parties attorney-represented.⁴⁷

However, the integration of court-based programs and the legal services community is part of every major paper on self-represented litigants. Extending the continuum of legal assistance and better integration of lawyers into self-represented litigant assistance is preferred. The strategy according to the National Center for State Courts can be achieved through better coordination of self-help programs with legal referral services, pro bono programs, development of program models, and promotion of unbundled legal services by the private bar, broad reviews of ethics and regulations to encourage private attorney involvement, use of marketplace reforms to institutionalization of the role of private lawyers in pro se assistance programs, sufficient financial support for legal services and pro bono programs, and the use of paralegals and law

⁴⁷ See Note 47 *supra*, pages 172-174.

students.⁴⁸ Most state court systems have accepted the responsibility for responding to the needs of the litigants and have worked to provide self-represented litigants as demonstrated by a Conference of Chief Justice and Conference of State Court Administrators resolutions for self-represented litigators and with the information they need to bring their cases before court.⁴⁹

Reaching out to the Self-Represented Litigant and Evaluating Efforts

Court Administrators have unique obligations when providing services to the self-represented litigants. They must provide a level of service that matches both the degree of difficulty of the case and the ability of the individual litigant to meet that difficulty.⁵⁰

Court Administrators must also come to terms with the dichotomy between legal information and legal advice.⁵¹ At least a dozen states have drafted and adopted definitions for judges, staff, and the public, setting forth in plain English the activities in which staff may engage and those that they are prohibited from performing.⁵² Where individuals must face the court system on their own, often unprepared, the results could be disastrous. Without the availability of a self-help center to learn some of the ins and outs of the process, self-represented litigants seem lost, may lose a hearing they should have won, and even if they do win, they don't know how to get their judgment implemented.

Many courts and access to justice groups have conducted early evaluations of the initial self-help efforts. These include work conducted on the Maricopa Superior Court, and evaluation

⁴⁸ State Justice Institute and National Center for State Courts, The Future of Self-Represented Litigation: Report from the March 2005 Summit, page ix.

⁴⁹ See Conference of Chief Justices, Resolution 31, In Support of a Leadership Role for CCJ and COSCA in the Development and Implementation and Coordination of Assistance Programs for Self-Represented Litigants, August 2002. The resolution specifically recognized that courts have an affirmative obligation to ensure that all litigants have meaningful access to the courts, regardless of representation status, and supports the establishments of assistance programs for self-represented litigants

⁵⁰ The Future of Self-Represented Litigation, Report From the March 2005 Summit, National Center for State Courts, 2005.

⁵¹ John Greacen, "Legal Information vs. Legal Advice: Development During the Last Five Years", American Judicature Society, Vol. 84, at 198 (Jan./Feb. 2001), posted online at http://www.ajs.org/prose/pro_greacen.asp

⁵² See Note 52 supra, page 9.

of rural self-help projects conducted by the American Judicature Society, various self-help programs in California and work by the National Center for State Courts on five innovative courts.⁵³ Lessons learned so far are that the self-help centers are heavily used. One example is in Los Angeles where family law judges interviewed prior to the establishment of the family law facilitator program indicated that they didn't think that there was a problem with self-represented litigants⁵⁴ After all, information on how to file documents was provided to the self-represented in Los Angeles. However it was soon learned that there are individuals whose age, temperament, mental health, or cognitive ability may impede their ability to represent themselves effectively, even in simple matters. It was determined that one-on-one assistance in the form of a family law facilitator might better address the needs of the self-represented litigant. Within three months of operation, the facilitator program was serving over 3,000 people per month – litigants were lining up at 5AM to get help. This experience has been borne out throughout the country – particularly in family law cases.⁵⁵

The issue remains that no matter how many programs increase access to justice, the programs are far from filling the gap. It appears clear that self- help centers are serving a large number of persons who are unable to afford an attorney and would, in many situations, simply be unable to solve their problem through the court system. For example, over 90% of the litigants served by the three direct self-help programs in California make less than \$2,000 per month. This is a state where the average rental cost for a two-bedroom unit is \$1,104.⁵⁶ This would

⁵³ Bonnie Rose Hough, “Evaluation of Innovations Designed to Increase Access to Justice for Self-Represented Litigants” Paper Nine: Summit on the Future of Self-Represented Litigation, page 1

⁵⁴ “A Report to the California Legislature – Family Law Information Centers: An Evaluation of Three Pilot Programs” for the statutory definition of success for this pilot project.

<http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/resources/publications/FLICrpt.htm>.

⁵⁵ **Loc. Cit.**

⁵⁶See Note 54, *supra*, page 4.

suggest that many self-represented litigants may not be obtaining services and that most programs might not be providing assistance in a wide variety of manners.

It is worth mentioning that a segment of the population does not know enough about the courts and the adversarial system of justice especially when they default or do not file a claim due lack of knowledge, fear, finances, or other reasons.

In addition, self-represented litigants are not the same and do not have the same needs. Sophisticated litigants and litigants with simple, uncontested cases can generally function effectively if they are given forms and information. Litigants with complex and contested matters need more information and assistance. Litigants who do not know what they want from the court need legal advice. Persons with mentally illness, retardation, those who are illiterate, non-English speaking (especially those from a different culture) and other persons with other handicaps need additional assistance, in the form of someone (not necessarily a lawyer) to help them through the court process.

Customer satisfaction and the self-help programs can make the court more effective. When the self-represented litigant is better prepared for court, court employees and judges are less likely to continue a case or make a decision based on incomplete information. Therefore, self-help programs help the courts save courtroom time, manage cases efficiently, and avoid continuances, all-important considerations during tight financial times.

III. METHODOLOGY

The focus of this research is to determine if the Union County's Self-Help Center is meeting the needs of the self-represented litigant. The Self-Help Center provides a structure for supplementing existing resources to give self-represented parties the information and assistance needed to participate effectively in court proceedings. However, there is a need for an assessment of its services. Is the Union County Self Help Center providing adequate and accessible services? Who is using the Center? Are their needs being met? Two surveys and an intake form were used to collect data in evaluating the center.

The objective of the surveys used was to study the perspectives of the Self-Help Center's users. By studying the participants' perspectives the court can make informed decisions as to what is the best avenue for increasing self-represented litigants' access to the courts.

Population Identification

In order to better serve its community, Union County Superior Court, located in Elizabeth, New Jersey had a need to identify its users. Demographic data are of particular importance in order for the court to develop services that will meet the needs of those who seek the assistance of the self-help center. Data from the US Census was compared to the data gathered from the intake form. According to the Census of 2008, Union County had an overall population of 523,249. In Elizabeth, the population was 126,179. Elizabeth, New Jersey is an urban town with a high minority-based population. From the Elizabeth population, 49.5% were Hispanic as compared to 25.8% overall in Union County. The Black population comprised 20% in Elizabeth as compared to the County's overall population of 22.6%. The White population in Elizabeth was 55.8% as compared to the overall county's figure at 71.1%. The median income in

Elizabeth, New Jersey is \$35,175 as compared to the entire county's median household income of \$61,587.

The research methodology varied based on the specific aspect of the self-help center that was being evaluated. For example, National Center for State Court's (NCSC's) CourTools Measure One was used to measure access and fairness, while a customer satisfaction survey captured information related to the service of the courts and whether the center was able to accommodate the needs of the self-represented litigant. The Self-Help Center staff developed an intake form to capture the user's demographics.

Access and Fairness

The National Center for State Courts promulgated ten trial court performance measures, referred to as CourTools.⁵⁷ The NCSC highlighted five reasons why managers should utilize CourTools in evaluating the courts' performance. First, the empirical data offered by the measurement allows the court to develop policies and procedures based on outcomes that are consistent with reality, rather than perceptions or anecdotal information, which may not be accurate. Second, the measurements focus on aspects of the operation that have the greatest impact on court users thereby ensuring that resources are gauged toward these areas. Third, given that methods focus on outcomes, it fosters creativity among court staff in developing innovative means to achieve desired ends. Fourth, it allows the court to articulate its budgetary needs while maintaining accountability through evidenced-based data. Lastly, since the courts operate from a budget funded by taxpayers, the public is entitled to objective data by which they can evaluate performance. Furthermore, when the court assesses its own performance and acknowledges its accomplishments and areas of needed improvements, its ability to

⁵⁷ National Center for State Courts. CourTools: Trial Court Performance Measures. Williamsburg, VA. 2005.

autonomously govern the role and responsibilities of the third branch is strengthened. CourTools can be used to assess the court's effectiveness in achieving fundamental objectives.⁵⁸

Ratings of court users on the court's accessibility and its treatment of customers in terms of fairness, equality, and respect is extremely important if the court is to boost the public trust and confidence in the courts and the perception of access. Specifically, this research sought to determine whether Union County's Self-Help Center users' experience was "productive." To measure access, fairness, and productivity, CourTools measure 1 was used.

All of the users who came into contact with the center were asked to complete the one-page survey at the end of their visit to the center or at the courthouse when they concluded their business. The Ombudsman administered the survey at the center from the months between August 2009 and November 2009. The completion and receipt of the survey was completed on a voluntary basis.

Customer Satisfaction

A customer satisfaction survey was used to capture data for this research to determine whether the Union County Self-Help Center is meeting the needs of its users. It was necessary to capture the extent to which the customers were satisfied with the center. The Ombudsman administered the survey between the months of August 2009 through mid-November 2009. The survey captured information as to what brought the user to the center and whether the user was satisfied with the services that were rendered at the center. The survey also sought information as to whether there were any language problems and whether it was the user's first visit to the center.

⁵⁸B. J. Ostrom and N. Kauder, "Measuring Court Performance, Ten Trends Impacting State Courts." NCSC, 20-21, Williamsburg, VA. 2007.

The surveys were not distributed to the Self-Help Center users in a systematic way. There was no tracking as to the actual numbers of surveys that were distributed. The total number of responses was small, but offers a sense of the users' perspective of the Self-Help Center. Participation in the study was voluntary whereby individuals were provided the opportunity to refuse to take part. An estimated ten minutes was required to complete the survey. The intake form data was collected on all of the users that visited the Self-Help Center to identify who was using the Self-Help Center. Due to the short duration of this study, the scope of this assessment is narrow insofar that conclusions were extrapolated from the findings of the measured time period.

IV. Findings

To make a determination if the Union County Self-Help Center, which offers a variety of services, is meeting the needs of the community, a variety of methods were used to collect the data measuring the success of the center and in identifying its users. From the one-on-one service, to the distribution of self-help packets, to having computers available to the public, the Self-Help Center was devised to take the pressure and volume of litigants away from the intake windows staff who were dealing with specific staffing shortages and unable to keep up with the volume of litigants asking for help. To establish a way that self-help services can be provided to self-represented litigants, basic information was collected. With this information as well as information regarding customer satisfaction with the services rendered, and perceptions of access, the Self-Help Center can be enhanced to better meet the needs of its users. This section will address the data collected from the intake forms, then the access and fairness survey, and finally the customer satisfaction survey.

Intake Form Data

Soon after the opening of the Self-Help Center, it became important to capture who was using the center. Since the goal of the Self-Help Center is to meet the needs of the user, identifying the users and reasons for visiting the center was critical. The intake form was designed to capture whether the user had an attorney for the matter that brought them to the center; whether it was their first visit to the center; reasons for the visit; ethnicity; age; income; and who referred them to the center. Despite the limited scope of this study, the use of the intake form is ongoing.

The Union County Self-Help Center logged in 2,398 contacts between March 2009 and November 2009. The data used in this study were retrieved during this 8-month period;

telephone inquiries totaled 852. Total number of filings (those who came directly to the center) equaled 1,546. All of the responders reported that they did not have an attorney representing them in the matter that brought them to the Self-Help Center. However, not all of the users answered all questions on the intake form.

Of the 1,546 who visited the center, only 1,352 (87%) responded to the question of age. Eight of the users were under the age of 21; 36% of the responders were between the ages of 22-39; 26% of the responders were between the ages of 40 –48; 13% of the responders were between the ages of 50-59; and 3% of the responders were over the age of 60.

With respect to ethnicity, the data demonstrated that the vast majority (71%) of the center's users are members of a minority group, which is representative of the overall population in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Out of the 1,112 who responded to the question of ethnicity, 29% responded that they identified themselves as White; 31% responded that they were Black; 37% responded as Hispanics, and 3% responded to "other."

With respect to income, 1,013 responded to the income portion of the intake form-- 12% were receiving government assistance, 44% of the 1,013 of the responders were earning less than \$25,000, 32% of the 1,013 responders indicated they were earning between \$25,000 and \$50,000, while 11% of the 1,013 responders indicated that they were earning more that \$50,000. Of the total number responders, 88% of the responders earned less than \$50,000.

The Self-Help Center's intake form captured a total of 1,546 users who needed assistance during the months of March 2009 through and including November 2009, 319 of those same users (21%) were repeat visitors. In assessing reasons for visiting the center, the majority (61%) of the 1,013 users who responded needed help with a family court matters followed by 31% of the users who needed help with civil type matters.

CourTools Measure 1 Data

Preparation for court hearings and providing information to self-represented litigants is at the heart of the Self-Help Center. If litigants know how to present their cases and what to reasonably expect, their use of the center and experience at the courthouse will be more meaningful.

The Self-Help Center is located on the first floor of the location known as the Albender Building in Elizabeth, New Jersey. The location is two blocks away from the main courthouse. It is also down the hall from the vicinage's matrimonial intake customer service window and next door to the Bank Building, which houses the Finance Division.

At the Self-Help Center, computers are set up for users to download forms, hard copies of a myriad of forms from all of the case management divisions are available to the public, information of how to file (the NJ Judiciary website provides an extensive self-service database to the public), and access to a person to assist them. The one service that the center does not provide is that of legal services. Staff however provides as much assistance as possible without violating any judicial or legal protocols.

Surveys were distributed to the Self-Help Center's users and a total of 116 surveys were collected. For purposes of reporting the results, "agree" and "strongly agree" responses were combined and hereinafter referred to as "agree." In assessing the information gathered from the Access and Fairness Survey, the majority (91%) of the responders agreed that they felt safe at the courthouse. In addition, 91% of the responders also agreed that they were treated with courtesy and respect. With respect to whether the litigant was able to get their court business done in a reasonable amount of time, 88% agreed that they were in fact able to complete their court business done in a reasonable amount of time (See Table 1).

**Table 1: Access to the Court
Percentage of Survey Responses**

I felt safe in the courthouse	91%
I was treated with courtesy and respect	91%
I was able to get my court business done in a reasonable amount of time	88%
Court Staff paid attention to my needs	88%
Finding the Courthouse was easy	86%
The forms I needed were clear and easy to understand	85%
I easily found the courtroom or office I needed	85%
The court makes reasonable efforts to remove physical and language barriers to service	75%
The court's hours of operation made it easy for me to do my business	75%
The court's Website was useful	39%

With respect to whether court staff paid attention to the needs of the court user, 88% agreed that court staff did pay attention to their needs. The survey asked whether finding the courthouse was easy, 86% agreed that the courthouse was easy to find in Elizabeth, New Jersey and that it was also easy for 85% of the responders to find the courtroom or office that was needed.

Language and physical barriers did not appear to be a concern for respondents, since 75% agreed that the court did make reasonable efforts to remove such barriers to service. It should be noted that according to the 2000 US Census Bureau, 35% of Union County residents speak a language other than English, while 65% of all Union County residents speak only English. However, 67.5% of the residents in Elizabeth speak a language other than English at home.

With respect to hours of operation, 75% agreed that the court hours made it easy for the user to conduct business at the courthouse. It was noted that 39% of the 116 responders agreed that the court's website was useful. It is worth noting that respondents were less likely to rate Internet service at the center (41% indicated "not applicable"); this is likely since one-on-one service is provided to the litigant at the center.

Inevitably when discussing access to the courts, the issue of fairness or the perception thereof arises. Section two of the *CourTools* survey addressed perceptions of fairness. Interestingly, most of the responders found that this section was not applicable to their situation; many were only at the center to gather information on how to proceed with matter. However, 41% of the responders agreed that their matter was handled fairly (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Fairness
Percentage of Survey Responses**

The way my case was handled was fair	41%
As I leave the court, I know what to do next about my case	32%
I was treated the same as everyone else	31%
The judge had the information necessary to make good decisions about my case	24%
The judge listened to my side of the story before he or she made a decision	23%

As the data demonstrates, 32% of the 116 responders agreed that they knew what they needed to do once they left the courthouse. When asked whether they were treated the same as everyone else, 31% of the 116 responders agreed. When asked whether the judge had the information necessary to make good decisions about their case, 24% of the 116 responders agreed. While the center has been able to assist to some extent, it appears that the fairness perception must be worked into any enhancements made toward improving how the center might be better able to assist the courts and case management staff. With respect to outcomes, 23% of the 116 responders agreed that the judge listened to their side of the story before a decision was made.

Customer Satisfaction and Expectations Survey

The survey provided to the self-represented litigants who used the center measured a variety of areas to help determine whether the center was effective and thereby met the needs of

the users. The concept of self-help was new to Union despite having an Ombudsman. If anything, it has expanded the breadth and scope of the Ombudsman's duties. In planning the Union Self-Help Center, materials and type of service provided were fashioned after other existing self-help centers outside the state of New Jersey. The Customer Service Survey, borrowed from another project, provided some insight of what was happening at the center. In assessing overall satisfaction with the center, 81% of the total 66 responders were very satisfied with the services received. A very small minority (3%) was unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with the service provided at the center.

The survey asked what type of legal issue brought the user to the center. The majority (83%) of the responders reported that they needed assistance with divorce and family type matters. The balance of the responders needed help with civil matters. These data are consistent with that which was found in the intake form data previously noted. When asked about whether the user of the center was an initiator of a legal action or if the matter they needed help with was filed against them, 53% (of the 45 who responded) reported that they were the initiator of a matter while only 15% responded that matters had been filed against them.

The survey asked whether the information received at the center helped them to understand their situation better, 80% (out of the 68) agreed. The survey also asked whether staff knew what needed to be done next, 84% agreed that staff knew what they were doing. Along the same lines, 83% reported that staff was knowledgeable. When asked whether staff listened to them, 84% agreed. The survey asked whether staff explained things clearly, 84% agreed, and when it came to respect, 86% agreed.

Center users quickly notice a lack of staffing if they are not provided with timely assistance. As such, the survey inquired about timeliness. A measure of satisfaction is whether

the users had to wait long for assistance, 83% agreed that they did not have to wait a long time to be served. When asked if the user would recommend the service provided at the center to another who had a legal problem, 83% would recommend the center to a friend.

Staff at the center provides assistance with the completion of forms. The survey asked whether this service was helpful, but only 24 responded to this portion of the survey. The majority, 20 of 24, responded that the service was helpful.

Staff also provides written instructions for filling out forms. When asked whether this service was helpful, 19 out of the 22 responded that the service was very helpful with only two responding that it was “somewhat helpful.” Only one person out of the 22 responded that the service was not received.

Staff is at the center to answer questions. When the user was asked whether staff responds to questions, 21 out of 23 responded that the staff was very helpful while 2 of the 23 reported that staff was somewhat helpful.

The center can better respond to type of service if it ascertains why the user was planning to represent him or her in the matter, which brought them to the center. Out of the 22, respondents 8 responded that they did not feel the case was not complicated enough to need an attorney. Twelve individuals responded that they could not afford an attorney while two did not want to spend the money for an attorney. When asked where the users would have gone should the center not be there, half (8 out of 16) didn't know where they would have gone, 6 would have gone to an attorney, and 2 would have sought assistance from a friend.

Not one of the 68 surveys returned responded to the query made on what other services would have been found helpful. The responders to the surveys did not provide any suggestions

for alternative services. However, a larger sample and continued monitoring will be helpful to the center in providing customer satisfaction.

Limitations

During the time of the data collection, Union County Superior Court experienced serious budgetary and staffing challenges, which limited and restricted the scope and availability of the judges and intake staff in the case management offices to assist with this project. In addition, several of the volunteers at the center left the court to seek gainful employment. The Ombudsman primarily staffs the center. Compounding the budgetary and staffing challenges, popularity of the program has grown, while Union County Superior Court has been unable to expand its hours. Union County has submitted a special initiative request for additional full-time staffing, as the assumption is these data will be able to demonstrate that the concept of personal service is a viable area for the court's continued investment.

V. Conclusions

These research findings provide some insight to determine whether Union's Self Help Center operated by an Ombudsman and volunteers is meeting the needs of the community. A demographic examination of the parties using the self-help center resulted in a clear identification of who the users are and will assist the court to tailor future services of the Self-Help Center aimed at meeting the needs of the community.

Despite the Spanish-speaking population in Union, none of the respondents indicated that there were any language barriers; Union should to continue to monitor this. On a positive note, the center has had access to the interpreters unit to meet linguistic needs that arise from the users.

Concerning overall satisfaction, the majority of customers were satisfied with the services that the center offered. Most specifically, the one-on-one service was found to be very helpful. Users found staff to be both helpful and knowledgeable.

A consequence of meeting the needs of the customer of the center is increasing public trust and confidence in the courts. It warrants mention here that The National Center for State Courts found that one of the major barriers to pro se litigants was the court's own administrative and procedural complexities.⁵⁹ Individuals who used the center found that the information and services received were helpful. It is interesting to note that when the users were asked whether the website was useful, 39% indicated that the use was not applicable. This would suggest that the users preferred the one-one services that were available.

The location of the center and the contents affect whether public can access justice. As expected, the center's users were more satisfied with the court system when their needs were

⁵⁹ Dent College of Law, Institute of Design and National Center for State Courts, "Access to Justices: Meeting the Needs of Self-Represented Litigants," 1999-2003, www.ncsonline.org/WC/Publications, 8.

met. Physical accessibility and proximity to conduct business increases overall customer satisfaction. Our court benefits from the center more when users efficiently utilize court time and staff. The evaluations show that the center's location is appropriate to serve its users. The Union County Self-Help Center is meeting the needs of the court and community in many areas and has the potential to further enhance court access, public trust and confidence, and improve court efficiencies.

Perception of fairness is always critical in addressing the needs of the litigant. Only 41% of the litigants felt that their case was handled fairly. This low percentage of satisfaction could be attributable to the self-represented litigants' lack of understanding of court processes and outcomes or perhaps when we captured their perceptions, the court had not handled or processed their case. Overall, the litigants appreciate the Self-help Center.

VI. Recommendations

Union County Superior Court is dedicated to providing quality services to the community. The development of the Self-Help Center is an example of that commitment in assisting all who conduct business at the courthouse. The following recommendations are offered to enhance the Self-Help Center:

1. As with other core court functions, the Self-Help Center's location should meet two critical objectives: a) ease of use for the public, and b) efficient use of staff.

The Self-Help Center should be accessible to the public for ease and convenience when litigants are referred to the center by court staff for immediate assistance. In addition, the self-help center should also be able to provide a safe place for the public to come and receive services. The majority of the respondents found the center. However, a confound of this conclusion is that the survey only included those who found and used the center. While this was not an issue for those who found the center, it is recommended that the location of the center be reexamined throughout the year as divisions are consolidated or moved and the court should consider sampling the public in other locations.

2. The center should review the types of services it offers to self-represented litigants.

As with previous recommendations to improve communications of the needs of self-represented litigants, it would be beneficial for the center and the court to review the services provided to continue meeting satisfactory customer service based on ongoing meetings with the case management teams to ensure that services are in alignment with current best practices and rule changes. A yearly customer services survey is therefore recommended to keep current with the needs of the public.

Furthermore, it would be beneficial to evaluate the website service. From the findings of the survey, a majority indicated the website service was not applicable to their visit. Was it not useful or applicable when presented with the option for personal service (one-on-one service)? Are the self-help center users different than those who use the website? A web-based survey of web-users would provide further insight on this issue and whether a redesign is a necessary remedy.

3. Conduct surveys of self-represented litigants leaving courtrooms after court appearances.

It would be beneficial to learn whether the self-represented litigants achieved their desired outcomes after using the services of the Self-Help Center. The perception of the litigant after leaving the courtroom will be needed as services are tailored to meet the needs of the self-represented litigant. If the findings suggest that users are not satisfied with the outcome of their cases, but generally tend to be satisfied with the Self-Help Center, a survey of the users as they leave the courtroom and interviews with judges and lawyers would provide insight into this apparent disconnect.

4. Survey the Judges and Staff with respect to their perceptions of the Self-Help Center and provide a yearly report to all capturing data collected from the Intake Form.

In order for the Self-Help Center to enhance the services it already provides, it would be beneficial to ask the judges and court staff, “How would you rate your overall satisfaction with the contributions of the program in terms of making your job easier?” “How can the Self-Help Center enhance services to the self-represented litigant?” The Self-Help Center is not run in isolation from judges and other court staff and thus their perceptions are valuable in shaping services offered. In an effort to document the services the Self-Help Center provides and to

whom, data, which are collected through the intake form, should be shared with all court personnel and judges. This report can provide the framework in collaborating with judges, administrators and court staff in enhancing and tailoring services to the users that use the center.

5. Redraft the Self-Help Center's Intake Form to Capture Perceptions of Customer Satisfaction.

The purpose of the intake form was to capture the user's demographic data but as time passed by it was important to capture overall perceptions of customer satisfaction. During this study, it was obvious that the users did not answer all of the questions posed in the intake form or surveys used. In order for the Self-Help Center to optimize services rendered, the form needs to be retooled. The current form is too narrow in its focus; it may need to be redrafted to focus on the effectiveness of the court as a whole in dealing with self-represented litigants. As witnessed in this study, the use of various tools was most likely burdensome to the center's users thereby resulting in the small numbers of surveys that were collected for this assessment.

6. It would be beneficial for the Self-Help Center to seek input from non-center users.

The Self-Help Center has the potential to grow. In order to optimize its resources and collaboration with the judges, lawyers, court staff, managers, and administrators it would be worthwhile to seek their input. Everyone's perspectives should be addressed and aligned in order to provide the best service possible to meet the needs of the self-represented litigant.

This paper measured customer satisfaction, public trust and confidence, access to justice, and customer expectations. The Self-Help Center is meeting the needs of the court in providing services to the self-represented litigant. With continued partnerships with the divisions, full

realization of the benefits will continue to develop. If this evaluation were to be conducted again, a more extensive timeframe would be beneficial. Feedback from staff and the judges would also enhance services.

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Appendix A: New Jersey Court Structure



Appendix B: Customer Service Survey

Customer Satisfaction Survey

Case number _____
 Interviewer _____

The court is gathering information on this program. Your feedback about your experience today will help us to better understand our customers and improve our services to the public. I hope you will take a few minutes to answer some questions. The information you provide is confidential; it will be reported in summary form only and you will never be personally identified. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may refuse to answer any questions. Are you willing to participate?

What type of legal issue brought you to the self-help center today? *Check all that apply.*

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce
<input type="checkbox"/> Child custody
<input type="checkbox"/> Child support
<input type="checkbox"/> Visitation
<input type="checkbox"/> Paternity
<input type="checkbox"/> Domestic violence/restraining order
<input type="checkbox"/> Civil harassment/restraining order not related to domestic violence
<input type="checkbox"/> Drivers license reinstatement
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please describe) _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Landlord/tenant (eviction)
<input type="checkbox"/> Small claims
<input type="checkbox"/> Traffic ticket
<input type="checkbox"/> Name change
<input type="checkbox"/> Guardianship/conservatorship
<input type="checkbox"/> Criminal expungement |
|---|---|

Are you the initiator of (or are you considering initiating) a legal action, or has a case already been filed against you?

Overall, I am very satisfied, satisfied, unsatisfied, or very unsatisfied with the service I received today.

After each statement, please check the box that comes closest to how you feel about your visit to the self-help center today.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The information I received today helped me to understand my situation better.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know what I need to do next.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff seemed knowledgeable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff listened to what I had to say.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff explained things to me clearly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff treated me with respect.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I did not have to wait a long time to be served.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would recommend the self-help center to a friend with a legal problem.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

In using the program today, I did, did not have a language problem.

For this legal matter, this is my first, second, or third or more visit to the program.

Please indicate how helpful you found the services. If you did not receive a service, check "Not Received."

Service	Not Received	Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Not Helpful
Staff help with forms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Written instructions for filling out forms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff to answer my questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interpretation or translation assistance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Workshop	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help to prepare for a court hearing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help following up with court orders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Educational materials (pamphlets, books, videos)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information on where to get more help	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Met with an attorney (not court staff)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Referred to an attorney outside the court for legal help	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help using computer to obtain information or prepare documents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Made an appointment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please describe)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Why are you planning to represent yourself in this matter? **Interviewer: Do not read the options. Let the person answer in his or her own words. Check the most appropriate response(s).**

- My case is not complicated enough to need an attorney
- I cannot afford an attorney
- I don't want to spend the money for an attorney
- An attorney would slow down the case too much
- I don't trust attorneys
- Other _____

If this program were not here, where would you have gone for help? **Interviewer: Do not read the options. Let the person answer in his or her own words. Check the most appropriate response(s).**

- An attorney
- A friend
- Not sure/don't know
- Other _____

What other services would you have found helpful today?

Please share any other comments or suggestions about the services you received at the program today.

Please provide the following demographic information.

<p>Sex</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female	<p>Age</p> <input type="checkbox"/> under 18 <input type="checkbox"/> 18-24 <input type="checkbox"/> 25-34 <input type="checkbox"/> 35-44 <input type="checkbox"/> 45-54 <input type="checkbox"/> 55-64 <input type="checkbox"/> 65 and over	<p>Race. Check all that apply to you</p> <input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/> Black/African American <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Alaska Native <input type="checkbox"/> Asian Indian <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese <input type="checkbox"/> Filipino <input type="checkbox"/> Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> Korean <input type="checkbox"/> Vietnamese <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian <input type="checkbox"/> Guamanian or Chamorro <input type="checkbox"/> Samoan <input type="checkbox"/> Other Pacific Islands _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Other Asian _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Other African _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Some other race
<p>Primary language other than English</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Highest level of schooling completed</p> <input type="checkbox"/> 4 th grade or less <input type="checkbox"/> 5 th to 8 th grade <input type="checkbox"/> 9 th to 11 th grade <input type="checkbox"/> High school graduate/GED <input type="checkbox"/> Some college <input type="checkbox"/> Associates degree <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelors degree <input type="checkbox"/> Graduate degree	
<p>How many children under 19 live in your household?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 or more		
<p>Total monthly <u>household</u> income (this includes all income sources) <u>before</u> taxes:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> \$500 or less <input type="checkbox"/> \$501 to \$1,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,001 to \$1,500 <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,501 to \$2,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$2,001 to \$2,500 <input type="checkbox"/> \$2,501 to \$3,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$3,001 to \$3,500 <input type="checkbox"/> \$3,501 to \$4,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$4,001 to \$5,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$5,001 to \$6,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$6,001 to \$7,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$7,001 to \$8,000 <input type="checkbox"/> above \$8,001	<p>You heard about the program from (check all that apply)</p> <input type="checkbox"/> attorney <input type="checkbox"/> bar association <input type="checkbox"/> clerk's office <input type="checkbox"/> community service agency <input type="checkbox"/> child support agency <input type="checkbox"/> friend or family <input type="checkbox"/> judge/commissioner <input type="checkbox"/> legal aid/legal services <input type="checkbox"/> newspaper/television/radio <input type="checkbox"/> pamphlets/written materials/posters <input type="checkbox"/> other _____	<p>Are you Spanish/Hispanic/Latino?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano <input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Puerto Rican <input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Cuban <input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino _____

Appendix C: Self-Help Intake

UNION COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT SELF-HELP CENTER

VII. INTAKE FORM

1. Date: _____ Docket No: _____
2. Name: _____
3. Have you or the opposing party ever been represented by an attorney in this matter? Yes
No
4. Is this your first visit to the center? Yes No
5. Reason(s) for today's visit?
 - Appeal (Municipal, Appellate)
 - Civil – Contract Dispute
 - Criminal – Expungement
 - Divorce
 - Family Motion (Child Custody, Support)
 - Landlord/ Tenant
 - Name Change
 - Probate
 - Real Estate Dispute
 - Small Claims Case
 - Traffic
 - Other _____

Completion of questions (6-9) is voluntary and used for statistical purposes:

6. Ethnicity: Please check one or more of the appropriate box(es), if multiracial, check all that apply.
 White Black Hispanic or Latino Asian/Pacific Islander/American Indian
Other
7. Age: under 21 22-39 40-49 50-59 60
8. Your monthly income: \$ _____
9. Are you receiving or have you recently received:
 TANF* SSI or SSP Food Stamps General Assistance

*(Temporary Assistance for Needy Families)

10. I _____ was referred to the Self-Help Center by:

11. Other information which will help us to help you:

—

DISCLOSURE

I am requesting that the Self-Help Center (SHC) assist me with information and documents concerning my case. I understand that neither the SHC, nor anyone associated with the SHC can provide me with legal advice, nor represent me or any of my interests in this or any other matter. I understand that the SHC may assist both sides in cases. I do not have any expectation of confidentiality concerning any matter discussed and understand that if I wish to have a confidential consultation, I should consult with or retain a private attorney.

I have read and understand the disclosure statement written above.

Signature

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Helped _____ in _____ Center _____ How _____ Helped:
Referred Elsewhere? Yes No
Where: _____

Appendix D: Access and Fairness Survey

Access and Fairness Survey

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Section I: Access to the Court						
<i>Circle the Number:</i>						
1. Finding the courthouse was easy.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
2. The forms I needed were clear and easy to understand.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
3. I felt safe in the courthouse.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
4. The court makes reasonable efforts to remove physical and language barriers to service.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
5. I was able to get my court business done in a reasonable amount of time.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
6. Court staff paid attention to my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
7. I was treated with courtesy and respect.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
8. I easily found the courtroom or office I needed.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
9. The court's Web site was useful.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
10. The court's hours of operation made it easy for me to do my business.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
<i>If you are a party to a legal matter and appeared before a judicial officer today, please complete the following additional questions:</i>						
Section II: Fairness						
11. The way my case was handled was fair.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
12. The judge listened to my side of the story before he or she made a decision.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
13. The judge had the information necessary to make good decisions about my case.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
14. I was treated the same as everyone else.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
15. As I leave the court, I know what to do next about my case.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Section III: Background Information						
What did you do at the court today? <i>(Check all that apply)</i>	What type of case brought you to the courthouse today?			How do you identify yourself?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Search court records/obtain documents <input type="checkbox"/> File papers <input type="checkbox"/> Make a payment <input type="checkbox"/> Get information <input type="checkbox"/> Appear as a witness <input type="checkbox"/> Attorney representing a client <input type="checkbox"/> Jury duty <input type="checkbox"/> Attend a hearing or trial <input type="checkbox"/> Law enforcement/probation/social services staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Traffic <input type="checkbox"/> Criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Civil matter <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce, child custody or support <input type="checkbox"/> Juvenile matter <input type="checkbox"/> Probate <input type="checkbox"/> Small Claims <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____			<input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Alaska Native <input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic or Latino <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander <input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed Race <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____		
How often are you typically in this courthouse? <i>(Choose the closest estimate)</i>	What is your gender?					
<input type="checkbox"/> First time in this courthouse <input type="checkbox"/> Once a year or less <input type="checkbox"/> Several times a year <input type="checkbox"/> Regularly	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female					