

BC Supreme Court
Self-Help Information Centre
Final Evaluation Report

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A. Executive Summary

This document summarizes contents of the final evaluation report of the BC Supreme Court Self-Help Information Centre (SHC) project in the Vancouver location of the Supreme Court of British Columbia. The project evaluation ran from April 2005 to March 2006. The project has received funding to continue for one more year, to March 2007.

The purpose of this evaluation was to analyze SHC service model experiences, challenges, and degrees of success in meeting stated goals. The attached report presents a statistical profile of clients served, legal issues addressed, services offered, and patterns of referrals made and received over the pilot period. The report also provides qualitative data on service model characteristics, efficiency issues and measures, and collaboration experiences. Finally, it identifies core features of the service model in order to identify key issues for consideration if the model is to either be expanded or replicated in other venues.

Context

The purpose of the project pilot was to design a self-help centre for unrepresented litigants that would facilitate access to justice by offering advice, information, and education about procedures in the Supreme Court of British Columbia. SHC services comprise a range of resources developed by partnering organizations as well as the in-person service delivered by the two staff who work at the physical location. The office is open for walk-in service and there is no financial eligibility test for accessing services and resources. Although the Centre's purpose is to provide services to unrepresented litigants in its Vancouver location, services are offered to all walk-ins, regardless of where their Supreme Court case originates.

Statistical profile

Full service and brief service: Records kept within the SHC database distinguish between "full service" and "brief service" users. Full service users are those requiring more than 15 minutes of staff time. Brief service users are those who require 15 or fewer minutes of staff time.

In total, the SHC recorded 766 visits by 604 full-service users, along with 3,470 brief service visits over the period from the April, 2005 opening to March of 2006. Over time and for reasons elaborated in the report, the volume and proportion of brief service users increased significantly.

User characteristics of full service users

- Five of every six users came to the Centre a single-time.
- The largest block of users fell between the ages of 40 and 49.

- Male users predominated by a small margin.
- Female users were younger on average.
- A significant majority of users reported income at or below \$2,000 per month.
- Over a third of users reported having a college or university degree, with close to two-thirds reporting at least some level of post-secondary education.
- Slightly less than half of Centre users lived in Vancouver, but 96 per cent resided in the lower mainland.
- Over fifty per cent of Centre users report speaking a language other than English at home, with Asian languages dominating. However, less than one in ten users report having a problem with English-only service provision.
- Close to three-quarters of users reported having both access to and an ability to use a computer.
- Almost six out of ten Centre users reported receiving assistance with their legal matters prior to accessing services at the SHC. Of these, the majority reported having had prior legal advice in some form, using online resources or receiving assistance through the family justice system or from outside community-level services.
- An overwhelming majority of users reported they are not currently retaining the services of a lawyer with more than three-quarters saying they could not afford a lawyer.
- Less than 10 per cent of users reported barriers to service delivery. Those reporting barriers cite areas such as travel, location, and language.

Service characteristics

- User referrals into the Centre from the court registry predominate, followed by referrals from services within the family justice system. Along with the Internet, these sources accounted for almost three-quarters of all full service users.
- More than three-quarters of SHC services provided to full-service users fall into the family law area, with civil matters or judicial review-related services together accounting for the remainder. Family law preponderance with this category of user can be attributed to the document-intensive quality of family law matters which renders brief service contact less practical.

- For brief service users, the breakdown between family and civil law services saw civil law users accounting for over 40 per cent of the total. This statistic, while based on a short six-week period of data gathering, tends to underline the importance of the SHC continuing to maintain a service delivery focus in the civil as well as family law area.
- Female users of the Centre were more likely to be recipients of family law-related services than are males, and less likely to receive services in other legal areas.
- In family law services, divorce, child support, and custody made up close to three-quarters of service instances.

Types of services provided

- The most common type of service was the provision of information followed by assistance with the completion of court forms.
- Referrals more than doubled in frequency over the life of the pilot and occurred in a quarter of full-service visits.
- The top four referral destinations were pro bono services, duty counsel, suggestions that users seek the services of private bar lawyers, and the registry.

Overview of SHC features

Qualitative information was gathered in 116 interviews carried out during the project, including 35 interviews with SHC users. The following summarizes major themes to emerge from the interviews.

Interview data shows that the Centre was providing a unique set of self-help services and was forming part of a larger context of emerging services for unrepresented litigants.

Users reported the Centre as largely effective in satisfying their needs and in helping them prepare for court. In addition, the Centre was seen as effective in connecting users to appropriate services through referrals. Through these actions, the Centre was also seen to yield efficiencies at the level of court proceedings and the operation of the registry.

Qualitative information gathered in the course of the evaluation also identified the following essential characteristics of SHC services:

User focused: The Centre provided a range of user-focused services to unrepresented litigants, played a vital role in directing litigants to legal advice, and helped people to understand and use information to access legal services. Users reported that the Centre answered their information questions, helped them prepare to take their matter forward, provided a space for research, and directed them to legal advice as well as other resources. Users who reported

going back and forth between the Centre and legal advice services indicated a willingness to do so even though they said legal advice on-site would be a better arrangement.

In-person, hands-on assistance: The overwhelming majority of service providers and users identified the in-person, hands-on assistance as being a crucial feature of the service.

Multi-layered and collaborative: Centre services included the office and staff *plus* the available products, whether they were at the Centre or online. The Centre was therefore a front door point of access not only to in-person assistance but also to the partners' array of resources.

Assist unrepresented litigants to commence their matter: Litigants used SHC services in order to become better prepared to commence their action. The outcome was that users reported they felt more comfortable with the process, had a better understanding of what to expect, knew the steps they have to take, and knew about the legal advice and legal resources they could use.

Facilitates user access to services: The SHC is part of a continuum of services for unrepresented litigants and as such made and received referrals as a core part of the service model. The SHC facilitated referrals within a network of service providers, primarily within the legal arena. In many cases, this involved establishing "back-and-forth" relationships as users move among appropriate services. Examples from the project included streamlining of referrals to pro bono services, and streamlining of the user's interactions with the LSS Supreme Court Duty Counsel program. In addition, SHC worked with service providers to initiate and present workshops on topics of relevance to users.

Skilled service provision: Staff positions demand a high skill level as SHC service provision is much more than "directing" people to resources. The service provision demands a sophisticated range of skill sets — from familiarity with all aspects of registry service, an understanding of family and other civil law procedure, to high-level inter-personal skills and, as one staff noted, an ability "to think outside the box."

Crosses traditional boundaries and mandates: SHC services are part of a "cultural shift" to client-focused integrated service delivery. User needs crossed categories that had traditionally been used to organize and deliver justice system services. In response, staff provided personal assistance that included a mix of resource identification / introduction; detailed procedural information; service referral; printing out and checking of documents, and a steady measure of reassurance, confidence-building and encouragement. In doing this, they drew upon the resources and services of all partners.

Facilitates user access to legal advice: The Centre placed high priority on proximate and immediate access to legal advice. Users indicated they wanted

legal advice, and they came to the Centre expecting to find it. While the provision of on-site legal advice was part of the original SHC vision, evolution of the service model has relied on referrals out to pro bono service providers and other legal resources.

SHC also facilitated user access to legal advice by informing users, when and where appropriate, that their matter would best be dealt with by a private bar lawyer.

Website as portal for unrepresented litigants: The SHC website has over the course of the project period grown into a major portal for unrepresented litigants, with approximately 2,500 visitors per month. The project year saw a surge of resource development, particularly in the area of civil law materials for unrepresented litigants. The website included 17 new booklets and several multimedia presentations.

In addition to using the materials that are being developed according to the partners' mandates, SHC staff actively identified user needs for additional resource materials, which in turn may be produced by partners, posted online, and offered to SHC users. This kind of synergy was a significant feature of the evolution of SHC services.

Collaborative at all levels: The Centre has emerged a unique and groundbreaking collaborative initiative between government and the community. The partners interviewed were in agreement that the success of the collaboration has been one of the project's most important achievements, and an essential component of the Centre's future. Further, the operational collaboration between divisions of government was also viewed as being successful, as well as innovative.

Participants interviewed over the course of the evaluation pointed to goodwill and joint efforts to meet ongoing challenges as essential to the ongoing success of the collaborative venture.

Innovative service delivery: The Centre is the first of its kind in this country and its services have attracted national and international attention. Madam Justice Beverley McLachlin comments, "I was most impressed with the Centre and their work. I have mentioned it in a number of speeches and interviews, citing it as an example of the many efforts being made to improve access to justice and assist 'in-person' litigants."

The interviews identified priorities for future service delivery. Interview participants emphasized that the Project was "off to a good start" but that more needed to be done to accomplish the vision. To accomplish Centre goals with limited funds, partners saw the need to "be imaginative and creative," to seek

new sources of funding and to maximize user access. The following ideas emerged as the most important themes for the future.

Commitment to ongoing collaboration and innovation: The collaboration between government and community has been highly innovative and successful. There is a need for an ongoing commitment from government and community partners to continue the collaboration in order to meet the needs of users in both civil and family law areas, and to explore new ways of meeting those needs.

Legal advice: The availability of legal advice is the area of greatest unmet need identified by the evaluation. Developments in law reform may open up the path to changes and in the long term the SHC may be able to fulfill its vision of having onsite legal advice available to users. In the meantime, the SHC continues to work in close cooperation with legal advice providers.

Virtual expansion: Exploring the potential for “virtual expansion” through the website was cited as a top priority for future directions. The capacity of the Internet to answer users’ questions and provide support may help address the unmet needs of unrepresented litigants, in particular those who do not have physical access to the downtown Vancouver location.

Other priorities: These include ongoing outreach to the judiciary and to the private bar. The support of the judiciary has been an outstanding feature of the project and efforts to further acquaint the judiciary with the range and nature of services available would be beneficial.

Recommendations for the future also include the development of a discrete identity for the centre, and the development of a full governance model. In addition, further research might be able to yield a fuller analysis of user outcomes – both in terms of resource use and in terms of court efficiencies.

Model template: A service model template has been developed and attached as an appendix to this report. The purpose of the template is to guide future efforts to either expand the scope of the current model, or to replicate the model in other geographic venues around the province.

B. Introduction

This document is the final evaluation report with respect to the BC Supreme Court Self-Help Information Centre (SHC) pilot project in the Vancouver location of the Supreme Court of British Columbia. The period of the evaluation ran from April 2005 to March 2006.

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide a summary of the BC Supreme Court Self-Help Centre (SHC) service model experiences, challenges, and degrees of success in meeting stated goals. It presents a statistical profile drawn from evaluation data that looks at types of clients served, legal issues addressed, services offered, and patterns of referrals made and received by the Centre over the pilot period. This report also offers an analysis of qualitative data relating to service model characteristics, efficiency issues and measures, collaboration experiences and potential, and replication questions. Finally, the report identifies core features of the service and outlines key issues for future consideration as to expansion and replication.

Two interim reports were produced during the project. The *Initial Evaluation Report* was presented in October 2005 and the *Second Interim Evaluation Report* was presented in February 2006.

C. Project conception

The purpose of the SHC project was to design a self-help centre for unrepresented litigants that would facilitate access to justice by offering advice, information, and education about procedures in the Supreme Court of British Columbia.

Over the past five to ten years, unrepresented litigants have emerged as an identifiable target group for services. In response to the increasing number of unrepresented litigants, justice system partners began the *Developing Models for Coordinated Services for Self-Representing Litigants* project in the spring of 2004.¹ Government and non-government agencies collaborated in designing the Centre and determining the services that would help unrepresented litigants.

As a result of the initiative, the Supreme Court Self-Help Information Centre (SHC) opened on April 18, 2005 as a one-year pilot project at the Vancouver location of the Supreme Court of British Columbia.

¹ The reports of the *Developing Models for Coordinated Services for Self-Representing Litigants* project are available on the website of the Law Courts Education Society in its Research section. Go to: http://www.lawcourtsed.ca/Self_Help_Information_Research/

The pilot project received funding from the Law Foundation of BC, the Vancouver Foundation, and the Ministry of Attorney General. It also received extensive contributions of technical expertise, staff resources, and products from all the participating agencies, both government and non-government.

D. Goals and objectives

The Project Charter defines the objectives, scope, contributors and major deliverables. The overall goal of the Supreme Court Self-Help Information Centre (SHC) Project is to improve access to justice for unrepresented litigants involved in civil actions (including family) in the Vancouver location of the Supreme Court of British Columbia. Through improved knowledge of the civil justice system, its options and processes, the Project also aimed to improve efficiencies in the way unrepresented litigants become involved with the justice system.

Specific project objectives are identified as follows:

- To provide legal information, education, and referral services to unrepresented litigants who are involved in civil actions (including family).
- To deliver services using a model that is client-centred, complements existing services, and identifies where the core components of the design can be replicated in other locations.
- To develop a collaborative and consultative structure in which government and non-government contributions work towards the success of the project.
- Through an evaluation of the project service delivery model, to pinpoint effective strategies and/or barriers in project implementation so as to inform future options and determine net efficiency benefits as compared to the status quo.

Evaluation objectives flowing from project objectives can be itemized as follows:

- To determine the degree to which the Centre assists users to access information, education and referrals services.
- To determine the effectiveness of the Centre service delivery model including the collaborative and consultative structure to which government and community partners contribute.
- To identify effective practices and/or any barriers in the implementation of the project that can inform future program implementation.
- To determine the degree to which the Centre, by increasing unrepresented litigant's access to justice, also facilitates efficiencies in the court system.

E. Operational overview

The BC Supreme Court Self-Help Information Centre offers a range of services to unrepresented litigants in Supreme Court through the assistance of staff at its office and the provision of resources developed by participating organizations.

The office is located in downtown Vancouver, across from the BC Supreme Court, at 274 – 800 Hornby Street, Vancouver, BC. It is open for walk-in service on Monday to Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 and 1:30 to 4:00 p.m. There is no financial eligibility test for accessing the Centre's services and resources.

Although the Centre's purpose is to provide services to unrepresented litigants in the Vancouver location of the Supreme Court of BC, services are offered to everyone who seeks assistance at the Centre, regardless of where their Supreme Court case originates.

Management: The Centre Services Committee collaborates on the development and delivery of services at the SHC. The Committee is composed of representatives from the participating organizations in this project:

- Court of Appeal of BC – Law Officer
- Supreme Court of BC – Law Officer Trial Division
- Ministry of Attorney General - Court Services Branch
- Ministry of Attorney General - Justice Services Branch
- Law Courts Education Society of BC
- Legal Services Society of BC
- BC Courthouse Library Society
- Pro Bono Law of BC
- Law Society of BC (observer)
- Community Legal Assistance Society of BC
- People's Law School
- Department of Justice Canada – Research Section
- Canadian Forum on Civil Justice

The chair of the Centre Services Committee is shared by Court Services Branch, Justice Services Branch (Family Justice Services Division), and a representative chosen by the non-government members of the Centre Services Committee. The Centre Services Committee is responsible for establishing and maintaining the Centre sub-committees (Education, Legal Advice, Operations, and Evaluation). Membership on the sub-committees is determined by invitation of the Committee. An Executive Committee is comprised of the chairs of the other subcommittee and others as requested by the committee.

The Executive Committee is responsible for decisions and issue resolution where the full Centre Services Committee is not required or is unable to meet.

Scope: The scope of centre services are decided by the Centre Services Committee on the basis of what services the Committee members agree are necessary or desirable, and are based on what they can support, offer, or sustain through their respective organizations and on what government can support with the administrative capacity of the Centre office and staff.

Policy: A Policy and Procedure Manual provides details on the Centre's facilities, staff, and operating procedures. It also provides information on legal service providers, including translation services, legal aid, family duty counsel, pro bono services, community advocacy groups, and alternate dispute resolution services.

Staff: Staff members are provincial government employees and staffing is co-managed by Court Services Branch and Justice Services Branch (Family Justice Services Division).

Two Centre staff members are present in the Centre whenever it is open. One staff position requires expertise in civil law matters in Supreme Court and the other requires expertise in family law matters in Supreme Court.

Physical space: The Centre is comprised of one large main room and a side office. The main room (19x26 feet) contains computers set up against the walls, tables and chairs in the centre of the room, and some seating by the door. One staff desk is located in this room; another staff desk is located in the smaller office (9x13 feet), which also houses a fax machine and printer. When users enter, they may be greeted immediately by staff or may need to wait to be served (typically on the seating by the door). The small office is used for private meetings with users. For security, staff have a "panic button" to contact court sheriffs should the need arise. Sheriffs visit the Centre on a regular basis throughout the day. The room has internal windows that open on to a major hallway of the courthouse.

Services: In general, the Centre provides information about the court system and procedure to enable users to make informed decisions about various dispute resolution options, including litigation. If users decide to proceed with litigation or are faced with litigation instigated elsewhere, the Centre provides basic information about how to obtain pro bono legal advice and how to proceed without legal representation. The services to which Centre users may be referred are administered by both governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Specifically, Centre staff helps users:

- find legal information and other educational resources;
- get referrals to other legal services;
- locate and provide tools and resources to complete Supreme Court forms;
- find pro bono legal advice; and,

- find alternate dispute resolution resources and services.

Resources: Centre staff utilize an array of resources to help users access legal information, including the following:

- staff who can provide legal information;
- a dedicated telephone linked to the Legal Services Society's LSS LawLINE;
- computers and printers;
- Internet access;
- a photocopier; and,
- a resource library.

Staff also provide a number of informal services. For example, they provide users of limited means with three-ring binders and tabs for their chambers' documents. (The binders are recycled from the registry.) Staff also allow users to avail themselves of the Centre's phone to make appointments related to their legal matter and, in cases of emergency, to connect with a government office.

Website & online materials: In addition to resources located at the Centre, the Centre's website (www.supremecourtselfhelp.bc.ca) provides extensive self-help materials and links to sources of:

- legal information;
- legal advice;
- alternate dispute resolution; and
- other online materials.

During the project period the Centre has developed and published 17 self-help booklets to help unrepresented litigants understand various court procedures (e.g., starting a civil proceeding). These booklets are available at the Centre in print form, and are posted on the Centre's website. The Centre has also produced a one-hour video, *Family Law and You: Representing Yourself in Supreme Court*, now available online at the Law Courts Education Society's website.² The presentation gives an overview of court proceedings in the Supreme Court of BC and outlines the issues that an unrepresented litigant should consider before getting involved in litigation.

The website currently has approximately 2,500 visitors per month. With limited resources for service provision, combined with rapidly expanding online capacities, the website is establishing itself as a core asset within the array of available SHC services.

² www.lawcourtsed.ca/Parents_Families/

Publicity & profile: The implementation of the Centre included the development of publicity materials (a leaflet and press releases). Word on the opening of the Centre was spread by the project partners through email and through member websites. Leaflets were developed and signs posted throughout the Supreme Court registry. The Society received considerable publicity through the media at the time that it was officially launched in June of 2005, as it was the first public event attended by the new BC Attorney General, Wally Oppal. Articles introducing the Centre appeared in several law and daily newspapers and newsletters. The Centre was also profiled as a model of government-community collaboration at the annual training conference of the Association of Canadian Court Administrators in Toronto

National and international recognition: SHC services are attracting attention because they aim to address the needs of the growing group of justice system users who seek to proceed in court without representation. The Centre is the first of its kind in this country and as such is a Canadian innovator in the context of an agenda well underway in other jurisdictions.³

Visitors to the Centre have included the Chief Justice of Canada and a delegation from Court Services Alberta, with the latter looking to institute a similar program in that province. An Assistant Deputy Minister from the province of Nova Scotia has also visited the Centre to acquaint herself with the program and its experiences.

Internationally, the Centre has made links with the Self-Help Support (a national U.S. network for practitioners of self-help programs), and has taken part in telephone conferences. Self-Help Support's website (www.selfhelpsupport.org) carries information about the self-help information provided by one of the partners, the Law Courts Education Society.

³ Insight into the dimensions of the self-represented litigation agenda in the U.S. can be had from the 2005 *Summit on the Future of Self-Represented Litigation*, a national conference that developed a three to five year agenda and agreed on a general approach to creating a self-represented litigant networking and advocacy consortium in support of this agenda.

F. Focus and scope of the evaluation

To facilitate evaluation of the Centre, a series of data-gathering activities were designed to determine how well the pilot project was achieving its goals.

1. Providing assistance to users

Statistical information was gathered on Centre access and use, services provided and referrals made. Efforts were also made to assess barriers clients face in accessing self-help services. This facet of the evaluation plan was geared to assessing the degree to which the Centre was relevant to user needs and was having success in meeting those needs.

2. Developing a collaborative structure involving government and community organizations

Project evaluators looked at the unique nature of the collaborative structure that has been designed to organize the SHC model. Given that this model combines the participation of government ministries with non-governmental service providers and community-level resources, it presents unique and ongoing challenges.

From an evaluation standpoint, the need is to learn from the experience of the Centre's operation and governance, and to analyze it with a view to providing insights pertinent to the ongoing efforts as well as possible future efforts aimed at providing similar services.

3. Looking at effective practices and future program implementation

This evaluation goal was linked to the project goal of pinpointing effective strategies and/or barriers in project implementation so as to inform future options. The evaluation aimed to provide relevant information and insight into what pilot experiences would mean for the service in the future as well as for possible efforts to replicate the service elsewhere, particularly in other provincial locations where the array of existing local resources – both government and community – differs from that found in a downtown Vancouver location.

4. Assisting with justice system efficiency

Government in particular was interested in looking at how operation of the Centre might provide efficiencies in the operation of the courts and the registry. Consequently, evaluation data gathering was also focused on tracking how users move in and through the Centre and how services provided may ease pressures experienced elsewhere within the justice system.

G. Major phases of the evaluation

The evaluation process was divided into two phases covering project preparation (January - March 2005) and project implementation (April 2005 - March 2006). During Phase 1, the evaluators worked with the project evaluation subcommittee to determine ongoing evaluation requirements, develop an evaluation framework and workplan, and create appropriate data collection tools. Phase 2 involved implementation of the evaluation workplan. It began with training of Centre staff in the use of the database and included ongoing refinements to data gathering tools in response to feedback from implementation. Throughout Phase 2, the evaluators responded to the issues raised by staff.

H. Evaluation methods

To meet goals and objectives identified for the pilot, the evaluation has relied upon quantitative and qualitative data collection methods.

1. Collecting statistical information

The Project's database system enabled the Centre to track patterns of usage, services delivered, and referrals made to outside organizations. To complement this data, Centre staff recorded information regarding areas of service delivery, types of services delivered, and resources at the Centre drawn upon by users. They also recorded information regarding barriers they perceived users faced in trying to access services, as well as referrals made to other services, within the justice system and beyond.

2. Interviews of SHC users, staff, service providers and partners

The other major focus of the evaluation data gathering concerned the conduct of interviews.

Throughout the project, evaluators conducted 116 interviews with people who had some form of substantial contact or connection to the Centre and therefore were in a position to offer comments and perspectives on the Centre's operation.

Approximately a third of the interviews were undertaken on the Centre's premises with users in efforts to gain their perspectives on who they are and why they were there. Centre staff members were interviewed as part of the same process.

In addition, members of the Central Services Committee, service providers connected to the Centre in some capacity, government officials and registry staff, and others including those within the pro bono sector and the private bar were all canvassed for their opinions on the nature of the pilot, its direction, and future potential.

Approximately 40 per cent of partners and service providers interviewed were contacted on two occasions, for each of the interim reports. In addition, eight key partner/service providers were interviewed for a third time during the preparation of this final report.

I. Who uses the SHC?

Records kept within the SHC database distinguish three categories of users. “Full-service” users are those requiring more than 15 minutes of staff time. Brief service” users are those who require 15 or fewer minutes of staff time. A third category of “frequent” users are those whose use of the Centre is continued and ongoing. This last category reflects a small number of users whose reliance upon Centre services is disproportionate. As such, the actual volume of data recorded for each visit of quite minimal, consisting of data, user ID and general purpose of visit.⁴

Overall, the Project recorded a total of 766 visits involving 604 full-service users, and 3,470 brief service visits over the period from the April, 2005 opening to March/ April of 2006. These figures do not include “frequent users.”

1. Brief service and frequent users

SHC staff record basic statistics tracking the type and frequency of brief service users. The following table provides a monthly summary of this data.

Figure 1: Brief service user service delivery

Month	Out of mandate	Providing directions	Brief referrals	Self-directed computer use	Blank forms without help	Total	Average per day	Average (net of brief referrals)
April	13	17	20	2	12	64	7.1	4.9
May	13	15	64	35	55	182	8.3	5.4
June	17	22	59	19	46	163	8.2	5.2
July	22	33	91	26	29	201	9.6	5.2
Aug.	28	52	177	47	29	333	15.9	7.4
Sept.	23	73	123	56	74	349	16.6	10.8
Oct.	17	70	130	47	80	344	17.2	10.7
Nov.	35	101	177	80	144	537	25.6	17.1
Dec.	25	40	133	47	96	341	21.3	13.0
Jan.	42	76	176	54	111	471	22.4	15.5
Feb.	35	55	253	42	72	472	23.6	11.0
Mar	21	29	175	24	34	283	28.3	10.8
Total	291	583	1,578	479	782	3,740	16.9	9.8

⁴ Services drawn on by this category centred primarily on computer use, access to the Internet for research, and photocopying. Some of these users settled into near-daily patterns of Centre use and their presence required significant staff input and supervision.

Centre staff provide a range of brief services — from quick referrals and directions to guiding people to Centre computers and distributing blank court forms. Although a user’s issue may be “out of mandate” staff report they can spend significant time with such users before that determination is made. In these situations, staff will often provide additional information as to where users might find help appropriate to their needs.

The column titled “Providing directions” reflects the number of people who cannot find an office or service within the building or in the court or government system, and are therefore given assistance locating where they want to go. “Brief referrals” occur when users are given quick information and directions to another service provider. The “Self-directed computer use” and “Blank forms without help” columns both constitute significant and largely self-explanatory sub-categories of users.

The columns on the right of the above table confirm major overall growth in the incidence of “Brief service” delivery. In the period running from September, 2005 to March, 2006 the average daily incidence of brief service users is three to four times greater than it was in the initial months of the Centre’s functioning.

2. Pilot project data sources: issues and considerations

From the outset, the database system created for use at the Self-Help Centre had a dual function. First of all, it was intended to gather information relevant to the delivery of services to users. Information was recorded relating to each client, dates they made visits to the centre, services used, and referrals made to outside resources. By gathering information in these areas, staff were intended to have the ability to track individual client access to the Centre and its services over time. It was believed at the time that having ready access to this information would be essential to the provision of quality service, particularly to repeat users. Secondly, the database was intended to gather information pertinent to the conduct of the evaluation. Information recorded on clients, services and referrals could be analyzed for purposes of assessing the evolution of the service model, user needs, the distribution of services and resources used, and the model’s overall success in reaching intended targets.

For the initial evaluation period, staff entered data into the database on a relatively consistent basis. With the growth in service volumes over the first few months of Centre operation, time and workload pressures increased. Staff were increasingly required to choose between spending time with users and entering information into the database. To deal with this situation, staff in consultation with the evaluators created the category of “brief service user.” These were people who, while accessing the Centre and its services, were not using more than fifteen or possibly twenty minutes of staff time. Instead of gathering full data on these individuals and thereby increasing the time required to maintain the database, staff would record basic brief service information in a spreadsheet

to maintain an ongoing record of user volumes. Brief service information was therefore, by its very nature, highly limited in its scope and content.

Given the pilot nature of the SHC project, changes of this type were to be expected. The data system had to be adjusted as time went on so as to maintain its connection and relevance to the way services were being delivered. That the SHC staff were able to effect this change in the hectic early months of the Centre's operation is to their overall credit. Nonetheless, the above changes brought a sizeable shift in the reported pattern of Centre use. In the period leading up to the initial evaluation report, staff recorded approximately two and a quarter visits by brief service users for every one by a full service user. Subsequently and owing to growing pressures on staff time, the ratio of brief to full service users increased significantly. In the late months of 2005 and early months of 2006, there were about ten brief service user visits for every one by a full service user entered into the database system. This shift occurred despite the fact that, when asked, staff reported a generally similar mix of users across these periods.

This change suggests that for the first four to five months of the pilot's operation the full-service data system was not fully in line with the period following as some brief services users would initially have been entered into the larger full-service system. In addition, creation of "brief service users" meant that little would be known about service delivery to this growing category of user.

As the data in Figure 1 confirms, the pattern and incidence of brief service use established after September of 2005 remained highly consistent for the duration of the pilot period. This suggests that the data system in this period was settling into a pattern more closely reflective of the on-ground pattern of SHC service delivery. In addition, data regarding users' demographic characteristics (gender, age, income, education, etc.) detailed in the preliminary evaluation report covering the initial period of Centre operation is broadly consistent with similar data reported for later stages. This suggests that the underlying integrity of these areas of the data system was not compromised by decisions made to alter the way information on different categories of users was recorded.

Notwithstanding these observations, the changes did introduce a level of ambiguity regarding certain aspects of Centre service delivery. The main area affected was the area of law where user needs were to be situated. This issue arose in the wake of evaluation statistics showing a strong inclination of full-service use in the direction of family law issues, coupled with perceptions on the part of SHC staff that a similar pattern could not be presumed to exist for brief service users. This issue later became a controversial one, largely because the tracking of service delivery by areas of law held major implications not only for the evolution of the service model during the pilot, but also for service template development and considerations of future project replication.

Evaluators canvassed these issues with staff at different points while preparing this and earlier reports. Much of this discussion centred on the idea that while the database was essential to the conduct of the evaluation, it was not as important for the actual delivery of services to users. If the Centre were to become an ongoing service, staff saw less of a need to track patterns of repeat user access to the Centre and voiced a greater interest in being able to pinpoint and analyze patterns of Centre access, resource use and areas of law for services provided. With this in mind, the evaluators are recommending that updating of the SHC database system along these lines be signaled as an issue requiring consideration in development of the service model beyond the pilot phase.

3. Full-service users

Figure 2 show that the overwhelming majority of Centre users were from the lower mainland area of the province. Smaller percentages came from Vancouver Island and other parts of BC. A small number of users came from other parts of Canada and from international locations.

Figure 2: Geographic location of SHC users

Area	% of Total
Lower Mainland	96.0%
<i>of which Vancouver has:</i>	<i>46.3%</i>
Gulf Islands or Vancouver Island	1.6%
Other parts of BC	2.0%
Outside BC	0.4%

The table also confirms that Vancouver residents account for less than half of total users. As indicated in earlier reports, this pattern confirms the Centre effectively establishing its “catchment area” as the broad surrounding lower mainland region and not just the city of Vancouver.⁵ At the same time, it shows that many area residents are willing to travel significant distances within the lower mainland to avail themselves of services the Centre has to offer.

Most full-service users are first-time visitors to the Centre. The following table presents the overall pattern for the first eleven months of the Centre’s pilot operation (April, 2005 to March, 2006).

⁵ This observation has been confirmed in discussions with Centre staff, who report hearing from clients that they were making day trips into downtown Vancouver from areas in the Fraser Valley for the express purpose of visiting the Centre, once they came to learn of its existence.

Figure 3: Frequency of SHC user visits

Visit frequency	% of Total Users	% of Total Visits
More than four times	1.0 %	4.6 %
Four times	1.8 %	5.7 %
Three times	2.6 %	6.3 %
Twice	11.3 %	17.8 %
Once	83.3 %	65.7 %

Whereas five out of six Centre users report visiting the Centre only once, the other sixth of users who have used the Centre more than once account for more than a third of total visits. In earlier reports, it was suggested that more return litigants might access the Centre with the passage of time. However, data from subsequent periods indicate this not to have been the case. The predominant pattern of Centre usage has remained that of the single-time user.⁶

Figure 4 shows the age profile of SHC users. The largest block of users falls between the ages of 40 and 49.

Figure 4: Age profile of users

Age group	% Total
60+	5.1%
50-59	23.6%
40-49	36.6%
30-39	26.5%
20-29	8.2%

A comparison of data for the entire pilot indicates that the overall age breakdown of Centre users has remained fairly constant through this period.

The next table summarizes the gender profile of Centre users.

Figure 5: Gender profile of users

Gender	% Total
Female	46.7%
Male	53.3%

⁶ It may be the case that increased reliance on the brief service category of user services under-records the actual volume of repeat users. However, there is no way to confirm this.

Similarly, the gender profile of Centre users has remained fairly stable with male users predominating. Overall, male users outnumber females by close to six percentage points.

Figure 6 cross-tabulates age and gender data for Centre users

Figure 6: Age and gender profile combined.

Age group	% Total Females	% Total Males
60+	2.2%	7.8%
50-59	18.6%	27.9%
40-49	38.1%	35.3%
30-39	30.1%	23.6%
20-29	11.1%	5.4%

Data from the initial April to August period showed female users to be younger on average than their male counterparts. This pattern carried over into subsequent time periods. Overall, more than a third of male users are over the age of 50, while for female users the corresponding figure is less than 21 per cent. Female users are more highly concentrated in the “20-29”, “30-39” and “40-49” categories while males are more likely to be found in the older categories.

The next table looks at reported levels of monthly income.

Figure 7: Monthly income levels of users

Monthly Income	% Total
\$0-1,000	31.7%
\$1,000-2,000	28.1%
\$2,000-3,000	22.3%
Over \$3,000	17.9%

As can be seen, close to 60 per cent of Centre users report gross monthly income of \$2,000 or less.

The next figure cross-tabulates full-service user income and gender data.

Figure 8: Monthly income broken down by gender

Monthly Income	% Total Females	% Total Males
\$0-1,000	33.8%	29.5%
\$1,000-2,000	30.7%	26.1%
\$2,000-3,000	20.3%	24.2%
Over \$3,000	15.2%	20.1%

While overall income levels are comparatively low, the data confirm that female users are significantly more likely to earn \$2,000 or less than their male counterparts – roughly 64 per cent of females and 56 per cent of males fall below this level.

The next table looks at reported education levels of Centre users.

Figure 9: Users’ education levels

Education	% Total
Grade 8 or less	2.4%
Grades 9 to 11	12.2%
High school graduate	21.0%
Some college or university	25.3%
College-university degree	39.0%

Earlier reports showed Centre users reporting comparatively high levels of education. This pattern persisted through the entire period of the pilot.

The following table cross-tabulates education and gender data.

Figure 10: Gender breakdown of users’ education levels

Highest Level of Education	% Total Females	% Total Males
Grade 8 or less	0.8%	3.9%
Grades 9 to 11	9.8%	14.4%
High school graduate	21.2%	21.1%
Some college or university	27.3%	23.6%
College or university degree	40.8%	37.0%

As with the initial period, female users report generally higher educational qualifications as compared with male users, particularly at the level of college and university degrees.

The following table offers a more detailed comparison of gender patterns in relation to both income and educational level.

Figure 11: Age, gender and income profile combined

Monthly Income Level	Highest Educational Level	Female users	% of all Females	Male users	% of all Males
\$0-1,000	Grade 8 or less	2	0.9%	5	2.0%
	Grades 9 to 11	9	4.0%	11	4.3%
	High school graduate	18	8.0%	12	4.7%
	Some college or university	20	8.9%	22	8.6%
	College or university graduate	26	11.6%	25	9.8%
\$1,000-2,000	Grade 8 or less	-	0.0%	3	1.2%
	Grades 9 to 11	11	4.9%	10	3.9%
	High school graduate	18	8.0%	19	7.5%
	Some college or university	21	9.3%	17	6.7%
	College or university graduate	20	8.9%	16	6.3%
\$2,000-3,000	Grade 8 or less	-	0.0%	2	0.8%
	Grades 9 to 11	1	0.4%	9	3.5%
	High school graduate	5	2.2%	13	5.1%
	Some college or university	13	5.8%	16	6.3%
	College or university graduate	27	12.0%	22	8.6%
Over \$3,000	Grade 8 or less	-	0.0%	-	0.0%
	Grades 9 to 11	2	0.9%	7	2.7%
	High school graduate	6	2.7%	13	5.1%
	Some college or university	7	3.1%	5	2.0%
	College or university graduate	19	8.4%	28	11.0%

The data show concentrations of both male and female users who have higher education levels (“Some college or university” plus “College or university graduate”) and yet who have very low levels of income (below \$2,000). In the case of female users, this accounts for almost 39 per cent of users, while for men it represented about 31 per cent of users. For those earning over \$2,000 and with higher education levels, the percentages are somewhat skewed in the direction of male users. Overall, those with Grade 11 or less make up relatively small percentages of users – 11.4 per cent of males and 9.8 per cent of females.

If anything, the figures re-confirm gender bias in the direction of males as regards income and in the direction of females in regards to levels of education.

Centre users were asked at the point of intake what language they speak at home. This approach offered the best insight into the language make-up of users and possibly into the area of language barriers. Figure 12 shows the overall patterns of responses.

Figure 12: Do you speak a language other than English at home?

Another language?	% Total
No	53.2%
Yes	46.8%

Major languages reported by the group answering “yes” to the previous question were as follows.

Figure 13: Other languages spoken at home

Which other language?	% Total
Other	39.7%
Cantonese	10.7%
Spanish	10.7%
Mandarin	7.9%
Russian	7.5%
Punjabi	6.3%
French	5.6%
Farsi	4.0%
Hindi	2.8%
Empty	2.0%
Korean	1.6%
German	1.2%

The major Asian languages predominate although almost 40 per cent of users report another unspecified language.

Using a language other than English does not by itself necessarily indicate a problem with the ability to function in English. Figure 14 shows responses to the intake question designed to gauge the impact of user language barriers.

Figure 14: Users reporting a problem with English-only services

Problem with services in English?	% Total
No	91.7%
Yes	8.3%

Less than one in ten Centre users report a problem with English-only services. In most cases, those whose first or home language is not English were able to draw on the assistance of others – friends or family – to assist with surmounting language barriers. In this context it is also worth noting a service-provider response from the original mapping exercise about the target group for Centre services:

“[T]here are three levels. There are “professionals” and their investment is in going it alone. In the middle, there are people who have sufficient confidence in the legal system and sufficient comfort with bureaucratic institutions that with some instruction they can fumble along. Most of these expect to be doing some or all of the work themselves. The third group is people who cannot do it – for various reasons it’s too difficult. It is the middle layer that is our primary target.”⁷

The question remains of what is happening to those whom the model is not reaching, for whom the self-help process is “too difficult.” In the broader context of assessing the service needs of unrepresented litigants, this population must remain “on the radar”.

Intake data also measures the degree to which Centre users have access to a computer they can use. The next table reports the pattern of responses of both periods of data collection.

Figure 15: Access to a computer

Computer Access	% Total
No	32.1%
Yes	67.9%

Access to and use of a computer is relevant in assessing the ability of Centre users to make use of the ever-increasing volume of self-help resources available on the Internet. It also has clear relevance to assessing how the SHC service model should evolve. As the above table indicates, about two-thirds of Centre users report having this access.

Users report various ways and methods of coming into contact with the Centre. Figure 15 shows the distribution of answers.

⁷ *Developing Models for Coordinated Services for Self-Representing Litigants: Mapping Services, Gaps, Issues and Needs* (2004), p. 12. Online at: www.lawcourtsed.ca/documents/research/srl_mapping_repo.pdf

Figure 16: How users discover the Centre

How do users discover the SHC?	% Total
Court registry	45.3%
FJC	12.4%
Internet	8.5%
Family Maintenance Enforcement	7.0%
Lawyer/LSS duty counsel at court	4.3%
Legal aid	3.8%
Community agency	3.1%
LSS LawLINE	2.3%
Judge / Master	1.4%
Workshop	0.5%
Library	0.4%
Schools	0.4%
Family and Friends	0.4%
Drop-in / chance	0.4%
Other (user does not elaborate)	9.9%

User referrals into the Centre from the court registry predominate, followed by referrals from areas within the family justice system, and the Internet. Together, these sources account for almost three-quarters of all full service users.

The Initial Evaluation Report speculated that the Internet might increase in importance as a source of user knowledge of the existence of the Centre. However, this did not happen.

Almost six out of ten Centre users reported receiving assistance with their legal matters prior to accessing services at the SHC. Figure 17 shows the precise breakdown.

Figure 17: Have you been helped before?

Have you been helped before?	% Total
No	43.0%
Yes	57.0%

As the following figures show, users report getting help in various ways and from a range of sources.

Figure 18: Where did users receive prior help?

Helped before: what or where?	% Total
Legal Advice (incl. Legal Aid, Pro Bono and LSS Duty Counsel)	49.4%
Online information	13.0%
Family Justice system (FJC / FMEP)	12.3%
Community services	6.1%
Court staff (inc. masters & judges)	4.6%
Other	4.2%
Court registry	3.8%
Friends & family	3.4%
BC Supreme Court Library	1.9%
LSS LawLINE	1.1%

As can be seen, the largest groups report having had prior legal advice in some form, using online resources or receiving assistance through the family justice system or from outside community-level services.

Users are also asked at intake whether they are currently retaining the services of a lawyer. The overwhelming majority report “No.”

Figure 19: Do you currently have a lawyer?

Do you currently have a lawyer?	% Total
No	96.1%
Yes	3.9%

For those reporting not having a lawyer, reasons offered are as follows.

Figure 20: Reasons for not having a current lawyer

Reasons for not having a current lawyer	% Total
I cannot afford to hire a lawyer	75.9%
I need more information before I decide	17.2%
I don't want a lawyer	10.9%
Other	8.3%
I do not know how to find a lawyer	4.3%
Legal aid said they could not help me	2.4%
(multiple selections possible)	

As with before, most users report not being able to afford a lawyer. Smaller percentages reported needing more information before making a choice, or not wanting to hire a lawyer to assist them with their legal matters.

J. What services are provided at the SHC?

As noted before, full service users had a total of 766 visits to the Centre recorded over the course of the eleven month period running from April, 2005 to March, 2006. This section of the report offers statistical breakdowns of and commentary on the nature of services provided during these visits.

SHC users were asked at intake what their status is in regard to their legal matter. The following summary is for full service users of the Centre.

Figure 21: User status

User status	% of total full-service visits
Applicant / plaintiff	69.2%
Respondent / defendant	19.5%
Other	11.4%

As can be seen, almost 70 per cent of users identified themselves as either applicants or plaintiffs in their legal matters. Just under a fifth identified as respondents or defendants and a smaller group selected the “Other” category.⁸

Users were also asked about the type of action they were pursuing or responding to. A breakdown of responses is provided in the following table.

Figure 22: Type of legal action

Type of legal action	% of total full-service visits
Initial application	45.6%
Application to vary	28.0%
No application filed	15.7%
Ongoing matter	9.3%
Emergency application	1.4%

Initial applications or applications to vary accounted for almost three-quarters of all actions, with smaller percentages applying in the other categories.

⁸ One SHC staff noted the following:

”I use the ‘Other’ category quite frequently when parties are doing a joint divorce because they are neither plaintiffs, petitioners, defendants or respondents’ but actually Party 1 and Party 2... this is one of the few situations that I could think that it would be used, the only other one being if the parties were defendant/petitioners or plaintiff/respondents.”

The following table summarizes the primary area of law users identify themselves as involved with.

Figure 23: Areas of law

Area of law	% of total full-service visits
Family	78.2%
Civil	15.8%
Judicial Review	6.0%

As can be seen, more than three-quarters of SHC services provided to full-service users fall into the family law area, with civil matters or judicial review-related services together accounting for the remaining 22 per cent.

As noted earlier, the relative distribution of Centre users into family and civil law areas arose as an issue within the pilot evaluation, largely because of a perception that the nature of the SHC database and its reliance on full-service data gave inordinate prominence to family as opposed to civil law issues. To Centre staff in particular, this concern raised the need to re-evaluate “area of law” statistics gathered within the Centre’s database and reflected in Figure 23. In the words of one staff member,

“I do not feel that the ratio of family vs. non-family matters is accurately represented by only basing this conclusion on the Family forms (i.e. the full service database) and that an erroneous conclusion is drawn by extrapolating the traffic at the Centre from these. Family by its very nature and in particular Divorce engages individuals in a structured forms completion stage that permits Intake forms to be completed with ease and more regularity. The non-family users tend to be more diverse and unstructured in their needs and interventions by us which are more likely to take place without the completion of an Intake form.”⁹

If this observation is correct, the proportion of family to non-family users reflected in Figure 23 would clearly lean disproportionately in the direction of the family law area.

To test the latter possibility, Centre staff in consultation with evaluators undertook a revision of the brief service form used to record information on this category of user, in early March of 2006. For the final month and a half of brief service data gathering, the revised form was able to differentiate the family or non-family status of brief service users. The results of this exercise – presented in Figure 24 below – cast a new and different light on the types and relative frequency of Centres service delivery by major areas of law.

⁹ Email to evaluators, March 7, 2006.

Figure 24: Brief service areas of law: March – April, 2006

Week of Data Gathering	% Family Law	% Civil Law	% Other Areas
Week of March 6 (4 days only)	47.9%	52.1%	0.0%
Week of March 13	54.0%	43.4%	2.7%
Week of March 20	62.0%	32.9%	5.1%
Week of March 27	50.7%	47.9%	1.4%
Week of April 3	59.4%	36.2%	4.3%
Week of April 10 (2 days only)	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%
Summary of Six Week Period	56.3%	41.3%	2.5%

For the six-week period reflected above, the distribution of services between family and non-family areas comes out much as more evenly balanced. Family still predominates but by a much smaller margin than that suggested in the full-service data. In the minds of a number of Centre staff, this latter breakdown is a more accurate reflection of the relative proportion of family to non-family law users of Centre services. Despite the short period of time for which the Figure 24 data was recorded, this alternate perspective should be borne in mind when examining and considering other statistical measures relating to areas of law covered by SHC services. Clearly “area of law” information is an issue where existing SHC data points in divergent directions. In any future SHC data gathering there would be a need to examine whether the alternate pattern discussed in this section was one that persisted over a longer period of time.

Female users of the Centre remain more likely to be recipients of family law-related services than are males, and less likely to receive services in other legal areas, particularly those related to judicial review. The following table provides this comparison.

Figure 25: Gender breakdown of Centre service areas

Area	Female % of total full-service visits	Male % of total full-service visits
Family law	83.6%	74.7%
Civil law	12.6%	18.7%
Judicial review	3.8%	6.6%

The following table offers a breakdown of family law sub-areas.

Figure 26: Family law sub-areas: service distribution

Family law sub-areas	% of total full-service visits
Divorce	52.0%
Child support	41.7%
Other	23.6%
Custody	18.7%
Access	12.6%
Property division	10.7%
Spousal support	9.0%
Guardianship	7.6%
Restraining	3.2%
ISO REMO	1.3%
Adoption	0.8%
Assistance	0.2%
Multiple selections possible	

Services are most concentrated in the divorce, child support, and custody sub-areas. Other sub-areas occurred with less frequency.

Civil areas of law are the second largest area of SHC service delivery to full service users. The following table provides an overall breakdown of civil sub-areas.

Figure 27: Civil law sub-areas: service distribution

Civil law sub-areas	% of total full-service visits
Personal injury	16.0%
Consumer contract	16.0%
Wills litigation	13.2%
Consumer foreclosure	3.8%
Consumer other	2.8%
Consumer bankruptcy	2.8%
Wills procedure	0.9%
Adult guardianship	0.9%
Multiple selections possible	

As can be seen, the incidence of civil law service delivery at the SHC for full-service users is significantly less than that found in the family arena. Previously, the most common sub-areas found were “wills litigation” and “consumer contract.”

The following figure offers a sub-area breakdown for services provided to full-service users in the judicial review area and other civil sub-areas.

Figure 28: Judicial review/other civil sub-areas: service distribution*

Judicial review /other sub-areas	% of total visits
Human rights	100.0%
Landlord tenant	40.0%
Other	35.0%
Small claims	17.5%
Motor vehicle license	12.5%
Multiple selections possible	

*The Human Rights category shows a higher incidence in this table compared with the table in figure 23 because many human rights cases were recorded annotatively within the “Other” category.

As can be seen, the incidence of services in this sub-area has fallen in all categories with the exception of those relating to motor vehicle licensing.

What kinds of services are provided by SHC staff to full-service users? In general, these services fall into one of three categories: information, assistance with forms, and referrals. The table in Figure 27 offers a summary of services provided.

Figure 29: Summary of SHC services, by type

Service types	% of Total Visits
Information	84.2%
Forms Assistance	68.0%
Referral	24.7%
	1.9%
Multiple selections possible	

As Figure 28 shows, the most common type of service was the provision of information, followed by assistance with the completion of court forms. Referral services occur in a quarter of full-service visits.

The next figure offers a breakdown of resources offered to full-service users.

Figure 30: Summary SHC resource categories

Types of resources provided to users break down as follows.

Service categories	% of Total Visits
Resource room	56.4%
Internet	42.8%
Computer	41.9%
Printer	41.5%
Photocopier	31.7%
Publications	25.0%
Interview room	23.4%
Centre phone	8.1%
LSS LawLINE phone	3.3%
Disks	3.1%
Other	0.4%
Multiple selections possible	

As can be seen, use of the resource room¹⁰ and the Internet predominate.

The Centre's intake process also recorded additional data for users' return visits to the SHC. Overall, about one in six Centre users were recorded as repeat users. The data in Figure 31 summarizes reasons why repeat users return to the Centre.

¹⁰ Resource room use means that users make use of the work stations to prepare documents, read materials, view videos etc.

Figure 31: Reasons for user return visits

Return visit reasons	% total return visits
Using Centre resources again	59.4%
To ask additional questions	48.1%
To get further help with forms	47.5%
To take the next step	9.4%
Other	6.2%
Prepare for court appearance	4.4%
Responding to developments	1.9%
Multiple selections possible	

As is evident, the major reasons why users elect to return are to use Centre resources again, to ask more questions, and to get further help with their forms.

The intake database system also tracked user referrals. The intention here was twofold: to provide quality services and to provide information regarding the resources users routinely are directed to. The table in Figure 32 shows a monthly tally of SHC referrals.

Figure 32: Monthly SHC referral tally

Month	Total referrals recorded	No. of days when services recorded	Average referrals per service day
April	37	11	3.4
May	58	20	2.9
June	38	18	2.1
July	48	14	3.4
August	53	21	2.5
September	33	15	2.2
October	24	13	1.8
November	13	9	1.4
December	8	6	1.3
January	14	9	1.6
February	20	12	1.7
March	15	8	1.9
Total	361	156	2.3

The data in the table show that on average and through month-to-month fluctuations, the SHC makes approximately two referrals per day of operation.

The data also show that the incidence of referrals has tended to drop over time. In light of the previous discussion involving the recording of information in the SHC database system, this statistical change could well be a by-product of inconsistency in the way referral data is being entered.

Figure 33 provides a breakdown of reported referrals by legal area.

Figure 33: Legal area of SHC referrals

Legal area	% total referrals
Family	52.2%
Civil	10.6%
Judicial Review	3.9%
Unknown	33.3%

Slightly over half of Centre referrals fell within the family law area. The other two areas – civil law and judicial review – account for close to 15 per cent while the “unknown” category totaled a third of all referrals

Figure 34 shows where users are being referred.

Figure 34: Referral destinations

Referral to	% total referrals
Pro Bono	23.6%
LSS Duty Counsel	14.8%
Suggestion that user seek a private bar lawyer*	12.6%
LSS LawLINE	11.8%
Registry	9.6%
FJC	5.5%
Legal Aid	2.7%
Mediation / DR	2.5%
FMEP	2.2%
Interpreter	1.1%
Courthouse Library	0.8%
CLAS	0.8%
Counselling	0.3%
Workshop	0.3%
Unknown	11.5%

* The SHC does not refer users to particular private bar lawyers. Rather, these referrals are logged when users are encouraged to seek outside legal advice owing to the nature and complexity of the legal issues they are pursuing.

The top five referral destinations accounted for about three-quarters of all referrals. Referrals to non-legal destinations were sparse for full-service users.

Centre intake also recorded information related to barriers users experience in accessing and using legal resources. As was the situation with referral information, less data was entered into the database in the September, 2005 to March, 2006 period, as compared with the earlier April to August, 2005 period. The following figure provides a summary of types of barriers reported for the entire period of SHC operation.

Figure 35: User barriers to service

Barrier type	Total	% Total	Explanation
Other	44	61.1%	Users generally cite travel/distance, language, finances, computer access & mental health issues
Transportation	12	16.7%	
Location	8	11.1%	
Disability health	5	6.9%	
Literacy	2	2.8%	
Childcare	1	1.4%	
Total	72		

As is evident, relatively few Centre users reported barriers to service delivery. Those that did cited areas such as transportation, location, and language along with a range of other issues.

K. Efficiency measures: registry data gathering

Early in the pilot period, a registry data form called a “Tracking Sheet” was developed and registry staff at the civil and family desks was asked to complete forms using data gathered in the course of interactions with registry users. The exercise was initially conducted through a multi-week period in the summer of 2005 for the purpose of gauging the impact of the SHC on work at the registry. Data gathering was repeated in the fall of that year and information from an additional 35 users was added to the initial group of 57. The following points summarize major conclusions drawn from an analysis of data yielded by this exercise.

- Most registry users surveyed reported visiting the registry for the purpose of filing originating documents or applications to the court.
- SHC users displayed a greater degree of orientation and knowledge of what to do at the registry as compared with non-users.
- Whether SHC users asked more informed questions compared with non-users varied substantially over the course of the data gathering and consequently results were inconclusive on this measure.

- SHC users had better prepared documents that were more ready for filing.
- In general terms, registry staff perceived the SHC as having a beneficial overall efficiency impact on their work.

L. Interview data

Interviews were conducted with a broad range of individuals having some substantive connection to the SHC. The number of interviews conducted and the “status” of the interviewee can be broken down as follows.

Figure 36: Interviews by status of interviewee

Status	Interviews Conducted
Judges & masters	9
Service providers & partners	63
SHC staff	9
SHC users	35
Total	116

Service providers and partners are a large category of interviewees and encompass all individuals connected to organizations that have had a role either in helping develop the SHC service model and plan, or in the delivery of services and supports to those using the Centre. While there are differences between these two groups, many participating organizations – like Law Courts Education Society, Legal Services Society, Court Services and the Family Justice Services Division – clearly fulfill both functions. Any effort to segregate the two for purposes of analysis would therefore lead to artificial and arbitrary distinctions.

Judges and masters are selected for special consideration because their views are relevant to assessing efficiency benefits within the courtroom.

The perspectives of users are examined first and are followed by those of non-users. In connection with the latter, distinctions will be drawn in the accompanying commentary when and where appropriate in order that the varied perspectives of staff, service providers, partners, registry personnel or judges and masters are properly reflected in the discussion. On occasions, when it would be cumbersome to identify each category and where the point being made crosses categories, this report uses a generic term, “interview participants.”

The discussion to follow analyzes interview data with a view to capturing the following variables:

- SHC in the broader legal context
- User perspectives on SHC services
- Service provider perspectives on SHC services

- Impact of SHC services
- Need for legal advice
- SHC structure
- Perspectives on potential for expansion of SHC services

M.SHC in the broader legal context

The Centre provides a range of user-focused services. It not only provides assistance to self-represented litigants, it also plays a vital role in directing litigants to legal advice (both pro bono and private bar lawyers) and in helping people to understand information and use it to access legal services.

In their assessment of Centre services, partners frequently situated their comments within the wider justice system context. Partners interviewed clearly indicated their belief that numbers of self-representing litigants will continue to increase and that the need for self-help services will continue to grow. Having litigants enter the adjudication process unrepresented poses an additional burden for adjudication and, without supports, has the potential to undermine fairness as well as efficiency.

Many interview participants also located the work of the SHC within the context of the reforms that are taking place throughout the justice system in response to those emerging needs. Some saw the Centre not only as part of the landscape of reform, but as giving an increased profile to larger systemic needs and issues in this area. At the same time, service providers were inclined to comment on ways in which unrepresented litigants in general are undertaking increasingly complex matters.

Figure 37: Select comments on wider context of Self-Help Centre services

We are finding that questions from the public are becoming more complex than they used to be. They are trying to take on bigger cases than they did before. - Partner

To do this kind of work you have to put yourself in the shoes of the litigant. I think people [service providers] are surprised by how much work people can do on their own. - Partner

We need to build a system that does not assume you have to have a lawyer to get your day in court. . . The Centre highlights the need to do this. It's a step in a broader process. - Partner

In a wider way, I think the Centre gives profile to the issues. The issues are systemic and are ones that every court has to tackle. One of the advantages of the Centre is that it has challenged assumptions and forced service providers to think outside the box. - Partner

N. User perspectives on SHC services

Throughout the evaluation period, 35 users were interviewed, in two separate groups. The first set of interviews (24 users) was conducted after the Centre had been in operation for four months, while the second set of interviews (11) was conducted after the Centre had been in operation for six months.

As a summary overview, users interviewed in both groupings reported that the Centre answered their information questions, helped them prepare to take their matter forward, provided a space for research, and directed them to legal advice as well as other services. Users who reported going back and forth between the Centre and legal advice services indicated a willingness to do so in order to obtain the assistance they needed.

SHC experience: views of users

User interviews confirm the overall pattern of Centre access reflected in Centre database statistics. Users generally report using the Self-Help Centre because they have legal needs in the family, civil and other arenas which they would otherwise be unable to address. Seen from another vantage point, the Centre provides a range of services and supports to unrepresented litigant and, for that very reason, is attracting a diverse range of users to its premises.

Users who were surveyed reported accessing a range of specific Centre services:

- Over half reported using the Centre to gain assistance with the completion of court documents.
- Some 47 per cent stated came to use physical resources in the Centre, including computer equipment, phones, the fax machine and the copier. (Users who mentioned these resources were overwhelmingly of the opinion that access to such resources was of major significance to them and to others on low income.)
- About 42 per cent said they came to the SHC to get help in understanding court and legal procedural issues.
- The fourth most common reason was to get explanations for technical issues related to their legal matters.
- A quarter of users interviewed also reported getting various print materials for use in understanding their legal issues.
- Smaller percentages reported accessing available templates and other Centre print resources.

Figure 38: Select user perspectives on their experience of SHC services

<p>I have found it very helpful for research and for information and documents.</p>
<p>I came for information, to use the computer for the family law site. I got some documents printed out and I watched a video on Chambers... This service has helped me a lot. I think I will be much better prepared for Chambers now.</p>
<p>This is my second time in the Centre. I came back to use the resources to get the work done properly. Here I have the quiet I need. It is a really good work environment. I am going to pro bono – staff here arranged it. I am <i>so</i> glad this place is here.</p>
<p>The first time I was sent by the registry. Here they introduced me to a Salvation Army pro bono lawyer. I got the application and the forms here. I asked them questions about how to fill them out. Then I got legal advice to fill them out. Now I'm back with some more questions about the process.</p>

Quality of service – views of users

When asked about the general quality of their experiences at the SHC, the overwhelming pattern of user responses was positive. The vast majority of users said that they were treated by staff with dignity and respect, and that they obtained necessary help. The following comments convey both a clear sense of appreciation and satisfaction, tempered by a realization that the SHC cannot meet all of their legal needs.

Figure 39: Select user comments regarding overall SHC service quality

<p>This place is a really excellent source of help for people who are involved in self-litigating. If people come here expecting to get legal advice they need to know that it's not provided.</p>
<p>I can only praise this program. I very much welcome it. This is the first time I'm able to do a document the proper way.</p>
<p>Overall the services have been very good. When I first came I did not know what to expect and I was unsure of what to ask for.</p>
<p>I've found the service to be very helpful and overall excellent. There needs to be a place where people can go. Lots of people cannot afford a lawyer. Even when you go via Legal Aid, it can be very intimidating.</p>
<p>I think the service is extremely good. The average person has no idea about litigation. Certainly having a place like this helps a lot.</p>
<p>Overall the service is OK. But I wouldn't say I feel 100 per cent prepared.</p>
<p>The staff here can direct the person but there's a limit to what they can do because they are not lawyers.</p>

Use of SHC with other services – views of users

Repeat users of the Centre were able to provide insights into their experiences of “shuttling back and forth” between services as they “struggle to proceed without representation.” The following are typical remarks that describe their experiences and also identify their view of some SHC limitations.

Figure 40: Select user comments regarding use of SHC with other services

<p>The Centre works well if you're also going to a clinic. You can go to the pro bono clinic and get some advice. Then you come back here for the forms. Then you go back to the clinic and they can tell you what to modify, then you come back here and modify them. This works for me because I'm not working. But if you had a job there's no way you'd be able to do it.</p>
<p>I was referred from the registry office. . . Here they made a referral and I have an appointment at a pro bono clinic. I'm going to go to the registry now and then I want to come in again. I have to fill out an affidavit. I will need more information about the process.</p>
<p>I think you could take the service up a level and have a full-time lawyer available. Maybe half-hour clinic sessions helping people with documents. That way you don't have go to a duty counsel to get the advice then come here, and so on.</p>

Barriers to service – user views

Centre users were asked to comment on the barriers they saw themselves facing, both in trying to access services as well as in trying to get their legal matters resolved.

The most common circumstance cited was lack of the funds to hire a lawyer, a factor mentioned by four different users who were surveyed. Two users referenced being ineligible to access Legal Aid services and another two made mention of difficulties they had encountered in getting timely access to pro bono lawyers. One user talked of the fear he felt, knowing his former partner’s family was arranging for counsel in court when he would be appearing unrepresented.

Two users also made mention of “scope-related” concerns they had with provision of SHC services. One made specific mention of trying to get help with an appeal matter which fell outside SHC scope.

Figure 41: Select user comments relating to barriers

The intent of the court is to provide redress when there is a conflict. This should be accessible to citizens in general. People use counsel because they don’t know what to do. However, at \$300 to \$400 per hour, it is too expensive.
I don’t qualify for pro bono assistance because I make too much money. However I have a lot of debt and I cannot hire a lawyer.
I’m doing an appeal. The court sent me here but they have said they can’t help me.
I’ve been here several times and the service is good. It’s a family matter. The first time I came was six months ago. What I’ve found with them is that I gave them the situation I was in and wanted help with the forms, how to fill them out. They said, “We want you to figure it out.” But you’re there to get help. ¹¹
I need a lawyer but I haven’t been able to get a lawyer. Here they listened well and made some suggestions. Then they told me I could try the LSS LawLINE [kiosk in Centre]. Again the fellow listened and made some general statements. I’m going round in circles.

User suggestions for service improvement

In one round of interviewing, 24 users were asked to identify how Centre services might be changed or improved.

1. **Need for legal advice** – seven of 24 users cited this when asked for specifics on how the service model might be improved. In a related vein, one user suggested involving law students and another suggested having paralegals work at the Centre. Overall, however, a sizeable block of

¹¹ Centre staff cannot advise users as to what information they should put in the forms.

- Centre users felt that having on-site access to legal advice would both enhance the quality of their experience using the Centre while providing further support with efforts to have their legal matters dealt with.
2. **Need for phone-in service** – two users said that having an ability to phone in and connect with staff would assist them in getting the assistance they needed. One user noted that phone-in service could save people unnecessary legwork in coming to the physical location, especially in situations where the legal need falls outside of Centre scope.
 3. **Expansion of Centre hours** – three users said the service could be improved if hours were adjusted. For two users, this meant opening the Centre in the evening while for the third it meant making lunch-time service available.
 4. **Scope of legal areas** – two users referenced a personal interest in having the scope of the service model extended to cover Court of Appeal cases.

O. Service provider perspectives on SHC services

Partners, service providers, and members of the judiciary were interviewed at several points during the evaluation period. Overall, they perceived the Centre to be welcoming to users, to offer services that helped lessen user confusion, and to be pointing people in the right direction to assist them in moving their legal matters forward. A selection of relevant comments is provided in the following table.

Figure 42: Overview impressions of SHC services

<p>We know that by the time people walk out of the Centre and go to the registry that they feel more comfortable with the process. They have a better understanding of what is expected and how things will unfold, and a more realistic idea of what they are trying to achieve.</p> <p>We also know we are able to connect people to legal resources and legal advice that they didn't know was available to them. - Staff</p>
<p>It is warm and welcoming, not a counter situation, not an office with a sheet glass in front of it... I think being less formal is a huge plus for users. – Service provider</p>
<p>I have dropped in a couple of times and have formed the impression that it gives people help with something that is so foreign to any other experience in their life. People don't know what an appearance is, what an affidavit is. Just to be able to get a hold of the forms and be told what follows what – it gives them a real leg up. - Judge.</p>
<p>By all accounts the staff are friendly and helpful and it seems to be the case that people are being routed to it in an organized fashion. I've been there twice and I've seen how things are going – staff are very helpful. – Service provider</p>

I think the potential is enormous. . . My impression of the Centre is very positive and I'm very bullish on its work. - Judge

SHC offers in-person, hands-on assistance

The overwhelming majority of service providers and users identified the in-person, hands-on assistance as being a crucial feature of the service. Some staff members with registry experience reflected on the difference in user responses when the service can be more personal and staff have more time to assist.

Figure 43: Personal, hands-on nature of SHC services

In terms of the public, they can get a far more personalized information service to help them. They aren't looking at a civil servant across a counter. They are meeting with someone who has the time to listen to their problem. This is particularly important to those who are new to the justice system. - Service provider

Our great asset is personal service. They [users] need someone to talk things through. Quite a few don't want to go to the computer - what they want is for you to talk to them. Over at the registry I might give someone a list of pro bono clinics and they go away frustrated. Over here I phone the pro bono clinic for them and they aren't frustrated. I get the same person on the phone as they would if they had dialed the number. But someone has done it for them. Also, if the matter is urgent I can explain that [to pro bono intake]. Users feel they have a direct link to the person. - Staff.

I think it's important that we actually help people find the other resources they need. We can help them prepare for Lawyer Referral. They want to know what kind of service it is and what information questions to ask. A lot of people are intimidated and we can make them feel a bit more confident going in. - Staff

At the counter we can say: "You will need an affidavit." Here we can say: "An affidavit tells the story. It explains to the judge what you want them to do. Think about what you need to tell the judge to get them to do this, and use your own words. Write it out. I can't tell you what to say but I can check what you say to see if I can understand it and I can help with your grammar if you want." We can also say: "This is what the legal language means; this is where you can find out about your entitlements under the law." We are giving information and education. - Staff

SHC offers multi-layered and collaborative services

Some partners pointed out that it is important to conceptualize Centre services as the office and staff *plus* the available products, whether they are at the Centre or online. Unrepresented litigants have a continuum of needs and the Centre is a

front door not only to in-person assistance but also to the partners' array of resources.

In an interesting way, the Centre's service provision is giving profile to the broader issues facing unrepresented litigants. While unrepresented litigants have for some time struggled to prepare their own documents and to navigate their way through the system, the presence of the Centre means that barriers in the system are being highlighted, both by Centre staff and by legal advice providers. The "back-and-forth" nature of referrals, especially to and from the pro bono clinics and duty counsel, is bringing to light ways in which self-representing litigants could better be served. For example, the Centre's work has served to highlight the need for plain language precedents and documents, based on more accessible rules. The refinement of a capacity to identify user needs and to respond to them is viewed as an essential feature of the Centre's evolution.

Figure 44: Multi-layered services that highlight user needs and system barriers

A collaborative approach helps to identify the gaps and the resources that can be brought together to meet the needs. - Partner

Clearly there has been some work in putting resources online and I think that this needs to be ramped up, as well as the development of print and video publications that can be made available throughout the province via legal aid offices, family justice centres, and other public access points. - Partner

Sometimes people come to the [pro bono] clinic and we send them to the Centre to get help with forms. They have all kinds of forms at the Centre. But the staff there are not in a position to give legal advice. This means the clients are just referred back to our program in order to get legal instruction on the preparation of the documents. The clients don't complain particularly but they are going back and forth. If the Centre had precedents it would eliminate one trip to the lawyer. . . . If they had precedents and not only forms, the clients could follow the precedent. - Pro bono clinic service provider

The templates are very poor. You need to be a high-end user to make sense of them. They are not for the novice user. The documents are complex and you need prompts, messages etc - there are some U.S. programs that simplify documents and we need to be looking at that. - Staff

Think about lay litigants when you are writing the rules. You have to find out whether to use a petition instead of a writ of summons and at the end of the day they are doing the same thing. It's like choosing between a spoon and a fork. Really what you want is to get the food to your mouth. - Staff

SHC services assist unrepresented litigants to commence their matter

Service providers identified ways in which litigants were able to use Centre services in order to become better prepared to commence their action. One outcome of the assistance provided is that litigants feel more confident about the process and less stressed in taking the next step.

Figure 45: SHC provides assistance to users starting their court action

<p>I think what we do best [at the SHC] is give people information about procedure and walk them through a Chambers application. People doing it on their own don't know basic things, like how you can come in through different doors – you might need a half-hour in Chambers or if it's over two hours you want to go to trial. There is a lot of information about document preparation that we can provide. - Staff</p>
<p>It's not all that easy to be given a blank form and have to figure it out by yourself. Most people don't want to review the legislation and if they did, they may not know what prompts to look for. And there are consequences of doing it the wrong way. - Staff</p>
<p>We can give them legal information on how to commence an action and we have an information sheet that provides an overview of the process. We can then steer them to legal advice on how to commence the action. - Staff</p>
<p>People who come back here from the SHC are generally more confident and aware of the steps they have to follow. This makes for less stress at the counter. - Registry DDR (Civil)</p>
<p>I think we can also make people less stressed either in the registry or in court. They have a better idea of what to expect. They are more prepared. There is less stress for them when they finally do get into court. - SHC staff</p>
<p>I'd say they seem more confident because their papers are in better shape. People who are initiating a process are more confident and the documents are more correct than they would be had they not gone. - Supreme Court master</p>
<p>People will have better understanding of everything from etiquette to the process of the court. - Partner</p>

SHC is part of the service continuum for unrepresented litigants, and is facilitating user access to services

The Centre is facilitating referrals within the network of service providers including pro bono clinics, LSS Supreme Court family duty counsel, LSS LawLINE, and the Community Legal Assistance Society (CLAS).

Making and receiving referrals is a core part of the SHC service model. The most common referral experience cited by partners and service providers concerns the movement of people back and forth between the Centre and the registry. At the same time, the Centre is involved in an active referral arrangement with the family justice system. Sending people to the SHC to get specialized information or assistance with forms is now seen by family justice counsellors as a common part of their interactions with clients whose matters involve BC Supreme Court.

Further, making referrals to SHC online resources has become part of the practice of service providers who regularly field information from unrepresented litigants.

Throughout the pilot, staff have actively networked with the other services to streamline steps involved in making referrals to facilitate the user's ability to move through the system. The Centre and other services have established a "back and forth" relationship to better serve the needs of clients as the latter present themselves. The development of a direct online booking system with Access Justice is one example. Another example has been the introduction in the Centre of the LSS LawLINE, with the addition of physical arrangements to ensure privacy for users when they are using it.¹²

Staff interaction with other agencies for purposes of streamlining referrals was seen to have additional positive outcomes, including a greater understanding of the nature of other services and increased liaison with them.

The figure below offers a sample of referral-related comments offered by service providers.

Figure 46: Select comments regarding SHC referrals to and from other services

I refer people to it [SHC] all the time – I tend to direct to the website as well as the physical centre. For people who phone, this is exactly the kind of place they can get the help and information they might need. We list it in the handbook we prepare of referrals judges can make to litigants. – Law officer
Yes I refer people, in court. I refer them when they need help with pleadings. I refer when they don't know what they're doing. - Supreme Court master
I do refer them to the Centre, if it's a person who needs assistance with matters in Supreme Court, if they want to do a divorce or they have issues regarding property division. Generally I send them down there to get the documents to do as much as they can on their own, and if they need further help then I tell them to make another appointment to see duty counsel. - Supreme Court family duty counsel

¹² The LSS LawLINE kiosk in the Centre has a cone around it to prevent conversation from being overhead.

I think the Centre is complementary to pro bono. We get a lot of people who call us. In my job I like to give people all the resources that are available out there. They may have to wait a week or two to get into a clinic. Meantime they can be downloading from the family law website and they can visit the Centre while waiting to see the lawyer. It makes them less anxious. - Pro bono office staff

I see the Centre and CLAS as being complementary. It's good for referrals.
- Service provider

We refer to each other. They send people up and we send people down to do their paperwork. Before the Centre, there was that gap and people didn't know where to turn. The way it's set up is exactly corresponding to the need from what we hear from our clients. The services are complementary. They can get answers to their procedural questions and do their paperwork and computer work there and up here they can get legal advice. It's a good match. - Duty counsel

It's going really well. We received so many referrals from the Centre that we gave them a password so they can book directly into our system. This has led to more efficient referrals. . . The volume of referrals is also definitely greater since we did this. - Access Justice pro bono clinic

From an FJC point of view, having the Centre has been a huge bonus. It's great to have somewhere to refer for the paperwork. Same with FMEP - if you need to vary, you need to fill out the documents. - Service provider

We quite often refer people to lawyers who are just starting or, if it is something out the norm, like enforcement in another jurisdiction, we refer to Justice Access and Salvation Army. . . We also refer to David Mossop [CLAS]. They can work back and forth with us - see us, get legal advice, see us again, then go back to legal advice. We use LawLINE quite often but there are some problems - a user might say, "They gave me good legal advice - but I write slowly." - Staff

We really have nothing but praise about our links with the other service providers - including LawLINE, Access Justice, CLAS, and the law library. It has been a pleasure dealing with all of these organizations - we've shared secrets of the trade and resources. - Staff

SHC service provision is highly skilled

There was agreement among the majority of service providers and all staff that the service provision demands a sophisticated range of skill sets — from familiarity with all aspects of registry service and an understanding of family and other civil law procedure, to high-level inter-personal skills and an ability “to think outside the box” in ways that are innovative within the justice system. Overall, a collective acknowledgement that these positions demand a high skill level has clear staffing and resource consequences for the future of the model as well as for any decisions about possible replication in other venues.

From a variety of vantage points, service providers and staff were able to describe in some detail the difference between the provision of SHC services and simply “directing” people to resources.

Figure 47: SHC services demand highly skilled staff

<p>You have different levels of providing information. You can have someone who knows what resources are available. Or you can have someone with a lot of experience who can focus on the components of the problem and deal with information in that context. You need substantial experience to know how to see the person’s needs and use the information as a tool. – Service provider</p>
<p>To do this job you need to have had a lot of people skills and you need to have what I call road experience. You also need to know the nuts and bolts, and you need to be able to describe it blow by blow... You need to know how to communicate the how -to; you need to understand users and how much ability they have to absorb information. You have to provide information in chunks. Knowing how to do this only comes from experience. - Staff</p>
<p>In terms of staff, I think you have to have a DDR [Deputy District Registrar] level staff over there. A Clerk 3 wouldn’t know how to answer the questions. To be helpful, you have to know procedure from top to bottom. – Service provider</p>
<p>You have the DDRs with their vast experience of procedure and you have family side with their “soft” skills of listening and interviewing. They come from two very different cultures and work well together. – Service provider</p>
<p>Some people have civil and family issues at the same time. And there are grey areas – issues are not just black and white. Depending on the case you may have to go further. It goes beyond filling in forms to questions of where to look to for things. You really have to know the area. We really are technicians because the area of knowledge is very specialized. – Staff</p>
<p>If our goal is access to justice we have immense potential as a clearinghouse. Think of the Centre as being like Google. You ask the question, we summon up the resources. You might need some help with <i>how</i> to ask the question to get the resources you need for you issue, and we can help you ask the right question. – Staff</p>

SHC services address user needs that cross traditional boundaries and mandates

The needs that bring users to the Centre are wide-ranging. They cross the categories that have traditionally been used to organize and deliver justice system services. In the space of a few hours, staff might be providing services to a user who is preparing documents for Chambers, another with a complex inter-provincial family dispute, another who has an urgent civil matter that requires filing before registry closing time, another who requires assistance with ongoing

research, another with a straightforward question about an uncontested divorce, and another with a query about an out-of-scope service (such as a Court of Appeal matter.)

In response, staff are providing personal assistance that includes a mix of resource identification/introduction; detailed procedural information; service referral; printing out and checking of documents, and a steady measure of reassurance, confidence-building and encouragement. In doing this, they are drawing upon the resources and services of all partners to the SHC service model.

Centre services were viewed as being part of a “cultural shift” to client-focused integrated service delivery that seems likely to continue.¹³ A significant component of that shift is the blurring of mandates that comes with the increasing use of technology. In addition, Centre services were viewed as having the potential to address gaps in the traditional provision of service, where some needs of unrepresented litigants – for example, in the area of poverty law – do not even make it into the system.

Figure 48: SHC services cross the traditional boundaries

The Centre provides integrated services that cross jurisdictions. - Partner
What we are talking about is a cultural shift. We need to get beyond the silos. - Staff
There are. . . I suspect, huge demands in other areas of law that are not getting referred because we are not in contact with them. You don't get many poverty law issues at the registry counter because they are not the focus of Court Services work. Those needs are not being addressed. This is not because they don't exist; it's because they don't even make it into the system. The SHC concept could begin to address those needs – it is an area that needs to be thought through. Bottom line is, it can't just be a court-based program. You have to find some other ways to do outreach to get services available to these other people. - Partner
... there has been a shift in government. Their view of the whole thing has changed to one where we have to provide resources to people who are self-representing. – Service provider
With technological advances, no one has the rigid mandates they used to have; technology has blurred the mandates. The Self-Help Centre is one set of networking in all of this. - Partner

¹³ Integrated service delivery “means services working together to minimize gaps and overlaps in what they provide to their clients, and it means that clients can easily find the services they need, and can move easily from one service to another.” *A New Justice System for Families and Children*, Report of the Family Justice Working Group to the BC Justice Review Task Force, May 2005, p.37.

The rationale is based on what the user needs. Think of it as a pie where all the collaborators throw in what their mandate is... They all bring in their own resources according to their mandate. - Partner

SHC offers resources developed by partners

While the front-line service is provided by staff in the physical location, Centre staff draw upon the resources developed by the Centre's partners.

The SHC website, launched in April 2005, has over the course of the project period grown into a major portal for unrepresented litigants. The project year has seen a surge of development, particularly in the area of civil law materials for unrepresented litigants. The "Online Self-Help Resources" section of the website (www.supremecourtselfhelp.bc.ca) gives a sense of the scope and depth of the resources, which include 17 new booklets, online information and multimedia presentations.

The materials used by SHC staff are developed according to the partners' mandates. Examples include the multimedia on-line orientation course for unrepresented litigants developed by LCES, the print/online materials developed on evidence by the Legal Services Society, and the information on judicial review developed by CLAS.

A characteristic of the resource development process has been the way in which staff have been able to identify user resource needs, which then can be met by the partners. For instance, staff identified that users need plain language information about the awarding of costs in civil cases, and a booklet/online information was produced, "Costs in Supreme Court." Staff also identified user needs around the LCES court orientation materials. This kind of synergy is an important part of the ongoing evolution of SHC services.

Partners and service providers agree that the role of the Centre in developing resource information for unrepresented litigants is a priority area of ongoing work, and that the website should continue to develop its profile as the "first stop" for unrepresented litigants.

When assessing the Centre's role in the provision of resources, service providers referenced the need to learn more about user outcomes. It was suggested that a study of resource use could be implemented, which involved contacting users who had received resource information from the Centre in order to find out what use they had made of the information.

Figure 49: SHC partners' focus on resource development for unrepresented litigants

We need to set priorities for the continuous improvement of the service – and that includes the publications and videos on the website.

A lot more work needs to be done on resource development, both on the civil side and the family side. Some of the materials now being used were developed before the Centre entered the dynamic and before new technologies became as widely available.

On limited dollars we can highlight the website, make it more interactive. We also need to look at the website from the user's point of view. This means drawing attention to the resources as well as having them available. For regular users, it's very important to see that the website is being updated regularly.

Opportunities for “virtual expansion”

At the time of preparing this report, the SHC had received funding from the government for a one-period year. With the prospect of being able to maintain but not expand services on the basis of this funding, SHC partners were focusing the potential of using the website as a vehicle to reach users whom the service does not currently reach, and to enhance the capacity of the site to provide online services that are not currently available.

These discussions about website enhancement come at a time when the site has already developed a profile of being a primary resource for unrepresented litigants, and the potential for expansion is very positive.

Figure 50: SHC partners' focus on resource development for unrepresented litigants

We need to continue to think creatively about ways to address unmet user needs. For example, there are some models, such as the help line in Montana, where users at the website can get live phone access to have their questions answered.

There are new challenges. One of them is working to see that the products get used. We may have content, but that content has to be made accessible. It involves new mental energy that focuses on packaging, on making the links with the user. We need a commitment, a strategy, and a way of working back and forth among the partners and the SHC to bring the best we can to the website.

There is a need for all of the partner resources to reflect the fact that unrepresented litigants are now part of the picture. That fact affects how online materials are used – which in turn affects how they must be developed and presented. It involves a new effort in packaging and framing. We need to be re-developing the SHC website. There has been a lot of development in the past year on the civil side of things. We need to look at that as a continuing process and keep it going. Also, the family resources need to be updated.

SHC works with partners to offer workshops to SHC users

The vision for SHC included the provision of workshops for unrepresented litigants, drawing upon the resources of the partners. A highly successful and well-attended workshop was offered to SHC users by the People’s Law School, on the topic of evidence. The workshop will be offered again at several points during the coming year. The People’s Law School location, opposite the SHC centre, makes it an ideal location for such activities, and has the advantage of being able to open in night-time hours.

SHC is also working with the Courthouse Library to develop and deliver a workshop for litigants in civil cases on the principles that apply in key areas, such as breach of contract. While unrepresented litigants would typically not focus on the latest legal developments, they would benefit from information about what test the judge is likely to apply in certain areas, and what terms are likely to be used.

P. Impact of SHC services: court efficiencies

Impact of SHC services: registry perspectives

Service providers most familiar with the functioning of the registry reported that the positive impact of the Centre is that “it gives clients a place to go.”

Staff who are dealing with registry line-ups are able to refer clients, in particular those who owing to language difficulties or other barriers need more personalized assistance. In addition, the Centre is identified as providing a space where users can work on their documents. It is also perceived as facilitating user access to pro bono legal advice. These observations confirm the data-gathering with registry staff (described on page 40 of this report).

Figure 51: Select comments regarding user referrals from the registry

Before [at the registry counter] you’d tell them, and then five minutes later they’d be back again and you’d tell them again. Now you can say, there is a self-help centre across the road, go over there. We have the luxury we never had before. – Registry staff also works at SHC

If clients are taking a lot of time at the family counter we send them to the Centre. It is such a confusing and daunting process. - Registry DDR (family)

I can think of one example where a woman came back with the petition for judicial review. She had been over there [at the SHC] and they’d helped her, and that helped us. It means you don’t get that standoff — them saying, I can’t fill this out, and us saying, we can’t fill it out for you. - Registry DDR (civil)

[M]y staff are actively referring people to the Centre. This allows them to carry on with providing service to the clients we get at the registry.
- Registry administrator

[I]t gives clients a place to go. And the Centre does things outside of the registry realm in the area of computer services and referrals. But overall I don't think the Centre has a large impact on the registry... There are some efficiencies in having the ability to go somewhere to sit down and read the forms and have a place to work. And I think it does improve court efficiencies in that it is getting people to go to pro bono services. They are more likely to end up with pro bono if they go across the street and have more discussion. So it helps them get to lawyers. - Registry administrator

Impact of SHC: judiciary perceptions

Members of the judiciary interviewed were very supportive of the Centre's work, while making the point that individual unrepresented litigants do not identify themselves as having used Centre services. Some members drew a positive inference about the impact of SHC services from the fact that the unrepresented litigants they are now seeing are on average better prepared than they were before. Members of the judiciary also emphasized that SHC services assist litigants by reducing the stress of dealing with an unfamiliar environment.

Figure 52: Judiciary perceptions of court efficiencies

Some of the line-ups are reduced but more important is it gives clients a place to go. And the Centre does things outside of the registry realm in the area of computer services and referrals. But overall I don't think the Centre has a large impact on the registry. . . There are some efficiencies in having the ability to go somewhere to sit down and read the forms and have a place to work. And I think it does improve court efficiencies in that it is getting people to go to pro bono services. They are more likely to end up with pro bono if they go across the street and have more discussion. So it helps them get to lawyers. - Service provider

We are seeing a lot of in-person litigants in Chambers. Despite the fact we abhor that - quite frankly it makes handling of the situation much more difficult - we are seeing quite a few situations where the affidavits are reasonably well prepared, the in-person litigant seems to know where they are going and what points to make - often they have them written out on a piece of paper. It is quite clear to me that there has been an intervention. Some look like a lawyer has been assisting and some do not. I assume that some of them are from the Centre. Certainly this is something new - it wasn't happening before. It's difficult to know, but as a generalization litigants are better prepared than they used to be. - Judge

I would say that the people who have been to the Centre are better prepared from a pleadings point of view. It is difficult to know if they understand the concepts any better. The paper work is more in keeping with what is required by the Rules. - Master

I'd say they seem more confident because their papers are in better shape. People who are initiating a process are more confident and the documents are more correct than they would be had they not gone... - Master

Certainly when people are better prepared it helps me because I don't have to explain how to do it... Is that my role? If this person gets that kind of help from me, then what about the next guy?" - Master

It's difficult to say. . .but my sense in general is that people representing themselves are much better prepared (in some cases better prepared than the lawyers). I attribute that to the Centre. Certainly they are better prepared than they were before. Their documents are better prepared. They understand the issues. Their affidavits and materials address the issues. You don't have the same kind of "dump it all down in front of the judge and see what happens" as we used to. . . They're addressing the issues, so I can address the issues instead of trying to ferret them out. I can get to the issues quicker and give them a judgment quicker. - Judge

The efficiencies are that the more people understand about the process, the less time they are going to need from the court, and the more cases can be done in any given span of time. It helps everyone get heard. - Judge

Impact of SHC: perspectives legal advice lawyers who make or receive referrals

The capacity of the SHC to prepare users for their interactions with legal aid lawyers emerged as a key issue amongst staff, partners, and service providers. In this connection with this point, it is useful to cite some direct references made by legal advice lawyers and intake workers. It is worth noting that efficiencies were identified by both pro bono clinic service providers and duty counsel.

Figure 53: Select comments regarding SHC impact on lawyer time

Sometimes they come in, we tell them what forms they need, they can go there [the SHC] and get them and start doing the work. This leads to efficiencies in my job in fact.- Supreme Court family duty counsel lawyer

In many cases the documents and affidavits are well done. They [clients] are better prepared for the lawyer, ask better questions, and are more on target. In most cases they go back down again [to the SHC] after the appointment with the lawyer. - Supreme Court family duty counsel intake worker

If you have to do it yourself, the combination of self-help and having a lawyer's confirmation — especially for someone who cannot qualify for legal aid — makes it easier and is more beneficial. If you are an SRL [unrepresented litigant] you are able to have the resources the Centre can provide and the lawyer's brain we provide. If the appointments can be booked online, the lawyers can check for their appointments online and that is another advantage – lawyers can check their conflict list two weeks before if they want. So it benefits everyone involved in the process. – Pro bono intake worker

Service model limitations

A significant line of thinking relates to the idea that the SHC effectively caters to only a certain class of unrepresented litigants: those with sufficient focus, clarity and other resources to see their way through what is often a complicated and demanding process.

There is also evidence from the interviews that organizations make decisions regarding who to refer to the SHC based on informal assessments of client capacity and the absence of barriers that would prevent them from using Centre resources.

Figure 54: Service model limitations

Really, the Centre is like giving a 10-year-old a Ferrari. Or maybe a Volkswagen. They still have to learn how to operate it. – Duty counsel lawyer

I think the Centre is serving the kind of clients who are able to use it. We know there are a whole bunch of low -income clients who cannot use that kind of help.” – Service provider

We know who the Centre is reaching. We need to be looking at who the Centre is not reaching. We should be looking at the impediments – the language issues, the complexity of the process, the location of the Centre – and trying to figure out, how do we reach that other group that is the most disenfranchised? - Partner

Q. The need for legal advice

SHC users need to access legal advice at strategic points. They may need advice at the start of the legal process, and advice and procedural assistance at other points in the process.

The theme of “closer ties with pro bono” was an important one for many partners and service providers. This is accompanied by a general perception that successful liaison with legal advice providers has been one of the project’s significant successes. Referrals to duty counsel for advice are working well for appropriate family matters, and referrals to the pro bono clinics are likewise functioning smoothly. In addition, users indicate that they are willing to shuttle back and forth between the Centre and the legal advice services available to them. However, despite these successful legal advice arrangements, user need for legal advice/assistance on procedural matters continues. Users come into the Centre hoping to receive this kind of assistance and there are circumstances when, as one staff member puts it, “time is of the essence.”

In this context it is worth noting that the initial *Proposed Service Vision and Program Design* recommended that, “given the dimension of the need identified by service providers and SRLs [unrepresented litigants] in the mapping phase for hands-on assistance with the completion of forms, exploring the possibility of expanding the Centre’s work to include this service be identified as a priority task once start-up has been completed.”¹⁴

Reasons why the Centre had not included legal advice services at the project’s outset were clear to all partners interviewed. The provision of legal advice at the Centre is not possible under the current Law Society Rules concerning professional liability. In addition, it would be necessary to do a conflict check for each client.

In their discussions around legal advice, interview participants referenced both the reasons why advice is not currently being provided and the importance of keeping legal advice within the vision for SHC services in the future. In addition, staff commented on user perceptions of what is available at the Centre, while users commented on their own needs and expectations in this area.

One possible future initiative could be to arrange for retired lawyers volunteer their time in the Centre. One interviewer referenced a CBA seniors’ section and suggested that the *Unbundling of Legal Services Report*, due out in the coming months, is likely to address the issue of offering pro bono services in settings

¹⁴ *Developing Models for Coordinated Services for Self-Representing Litigants: Proposed Service Vision and Program Design* (2004), p.14. Online at: www.lawcourtsed.ca/documents/research/srl_services_vis.pdf

such as the SHC. While there will be various steps to negotiate, including the issues of insurance and conflict checks, this could be a promising path to pursue. The need for timely procedural advice was identified during the original feasibility study and has been reiterated throughout this evaluation process by both users and service providers. The in-house part-time presence of a lawyer at the Centre – or possibly in an office immediately adjacent – would be a tremendous addition to SHC services.

Figure 55: Select comments on legal advice

<p>I think one thing is crystal clear: they need to have legal advice as a component of this – information is not enough. Quite often they need legal advice to fill out the forms. Legal advice is the missing part of it. There are issues here but the current direction needs to be closer ties with pro bono. - Partner</p>
<p>In the original vision we were going to have a fully integrated service. It did not come to pass. We can't do it right now. The difficulty is because of conflict and the Law Society rules. - Partner</p>
<p>We need to change the conflict guidelines. . . . If the Law Society can move [on the conflict rules], that will open the doors to a different model. The Unbundled Task Force of the Law Society is looking at it. – Service provider</p>
<p>My vision is that it would be a fuller service model, an integrated model with a legal advice component, one way or another. That's what it ought to be. It's far from ideal just yet. It is critical to keep reiterating this vision of the model. The compromises we made were important at the time in order to get the Centre up and running. But we can't lose sight of the initial vision - Partner</p>
<p>I think we need to keep sight of the fact that legal advice is at arm's length and that from the user's point of view, we need to be looking at how to make it more integrated. The vision was for an information/advice model and just because of the information model is working that doesn't mean we put it in a box and stop there. - Partner</p>
<p>Having legal advice onsite would still be the ideal for clients. With LSS LawLINE and pro bono you are afraid you are going to lose a few. It may be too much work for people to follow up on a secondary referral. – Staff</p>
<p>Some people lose momentum if they have to go to another location – and they may have mobility issues. It can be hard to get an appointment to the Access Justice or Salvation Army clinics, and it can take some days before you get in. So it would be good to have the advice on hand. – Service provider</p>
<p>People don't think about the difference between information and legal advice. They think we've got lawyers in here anyway. But when you explain it, most people are grateful for the service. – Staff</p>

There is a logical flow from information to legal advice. The reality is that the forms are complex. And users are not familiar with how to fill them out. I've had users in here completely at a loss because they have to type up the order and deal with costs. - Staff

If you could have pro bono available on-site at certain times, they would help because in some matters, time is of the essence. – Staff

I would see it [the Centre] ideally as a tool to be used in conjunction with readily available summary advice, and in some cases, further advice and assistance from duty counsel, and following that, some representation on discrete tasks. That's what we can work towards. To do this would require a high degree of collaboration among partners. So you begin to get a line-up of services: self help, summary advice, duty counsel (family is in place; maybe there will be civil duty counsel), pro bono representation on discrete matters. Between all of them you can get quite a lot of ground covered. - Partner

I've been preaching the need for coordination for some time, especially on the pro bono front... I think this is happening. I think there is a pretty good integration between the Centre and pro bono services. I understand the Centre has access to pro bono and can make appointments online, so that type of integration is there. They are different services and it's not to say that the integration couldn't be better, but it is happening. – Judge

Adjustments to service delivery

Throughout the project period, staff and partners – in particular, staff managers – have worked together to identify and resolve issues involved in the operations of the Centre. While the project is guided by a Procedures Manual, there was no way of knowing, at the project's inception, which unforeseen issues would arise and what form they would take.

Issues that came up included:

- how to respond to users who wish to use the computers to prepare documents but who lack even basic word-processing skills,
- how to deal with users who take up virtual residence in the Centre;
- how to streamline the flow of clients in the limited space;
- how to deal with cell phone use in the Centre,
- how to de-escalate anger in clients disappointed with court outcomes, and
- how to enhance security at the Centre.

In the vast majority of these kinds of situations, managers and staff have devoted skill and energy to coming up with creative responses. For example, concerns about security have been addressed by creating large glass windows that open

into a high-traffic corridor. Blinds have been added to ensure staff privacy during periods when the Centre is closed.

In some instances, it has not been possible to make changes, given the provisions of the collective agreement within which staff operate and the nature of the physical location. For example, the hours of the Centre cannot be extended into times when the courthouse building is closed.

Human resources issues emerged as staff settled into the work, and for the most part it was possible to address them as they arose. One example was the provision of cross-training in the registry for family justice staff. Other issues present challenges that will require ongoing discussion. For example, the Centre is a unique working environment for government employees and in particular, “working between two departments” raises issues with respect to governance.

Other ongoing issues identified by staff include the following:

Phone service: The need was identified for a phone service at some point in the future in order to reach unrepresented litigants who do not make it to the office, for a range of reasons. Staff also identified the time and resource issues involved in providing the service by phone.

Language issues: At times language barriers do pose a challenge. However, in the majority of cases, users are able to obtain assistance by bringing a friend. In urgent cases, staff have been able to find the necessary supports within Court Services to help users overcome language barriers. In addition, the Centre is translating materials into other languages, with the goal of being able to offer basic orientation in multi-languages.

Hours of service: Issues remain around closing times. For some users, closing the Centre during lunch is problematic because they are taking time off work. Staff continue to express a desire to keep the Centre open, if at all possible, during that period. While operational constraints make expansion of hours a real challenge, overcoming this barrier would be of significant value to users.

Outreach to the private bar

Partners, service providers, and staff all saw liaison with the private bar as an important part of the Centre’s outreach efforts. Support of the private bar would help ensure that litigants who cannot afford lawyer services are told that they can seek help from the Centre. The liaison would also serve to build understanding of the Centre’s potential in an unbundled services environment.

An important step in this outreach would be development of a communications strategy and the identification of some potential “champions” from the private bar. Suggestions for reaching the private bar included attending CBA subsection meetings, having an electronic Centre newsletter, and developing articles for the

profession's communications' vehicles. Additional suggestions included inviting private bar participation on a partnering level.

Another theme that emerged out of these discussions was the need to situate the work of the Centre within the wider context of justice system reform. From this point of view, the SHC was seen to have a specific role to play in the arena of the unbundling of legal services.

Figure 56: Select comments on SHC relationship to the private bar

<p>My sense is that this project has not been well advertised among lawyers. I'm not hearing anything and I don't recall seeing much. They need to know about it because everyone in the private bar runs into clients not able to afford a lawyer. It's an excellent resource – you can say, “You can go down there and get some information.” – Private bar lawyer</p>
<p>I can't imagine why the private bar would not support or be neutral. The Centre is not taking business away. Quite the reverse. Staff at the Centre are often able to say to someone, you need to hire a lawyer. In some cases people who can afford one have come to the Centre to do it themselves, have realized how complex it is, and have been given a referral to Lawyer Referral. – Partner</p>
<p>Information is just not relevant to the private bar. It would not affect private bar clients. The only way it would have any relevance to the private bar is if someone phoned a lawyer and could not pay and the lawyer might, if prepared to give the person time, refer them to some other resource. That's the only relevance it would have for a lawyer – if someone was on the phone looking for resources. – Private bar lawyer</p>
<p>We do need to bring the private bar around—we have been pretty successful with the lawyers who initially expressed concern and we can build on that in various ways. Talking to the CBA subsections would help the Centre. So would distributing information – an electronic newsletter for lawyers who have an interest in self help. Those kinds of things would help raise the profile of the Centre and develop an appreciation of the services. – Partner</p>
<p>We need to situate it in the work of unbundled services. – Partner</p>
<p>I think we have a role to play in the unbundling of services. If lawyers provide discrete representation – maybe they draft the pleadings, for example – they could benefit from having us see clients to provide information. Many people cannot afford lawyers for A to Z but they could afford a discrete service, say to get the pleadings started properly. – Staff</p>

Outreach to the judiciary

Support for the Centre's work by members of the judiciary has been an outstanding feature of the pilot. Nonetheless, more needs to be done in the future to familiarize the judiciary as a whole with SHC services. Some members

of the judiciary interviewed reported they would appreciate having more information. One partner respondent suggested holding a series of “open houses” for members of the judiciary during the lunch hour.

Figure 57: Select comments on SHC relationship to the judiciary

<p>I did a presentation to the judges and had all of ten minutes. Really, for them to remember anything you need a half-day workshop. They could then see how we can link people to legal advice, how we can assist with tools and resources, how we interact with the other resources such as the library. But in ten minutes you're lucky if they even remember where you were from. Maybe champions is a way to go. - Staff</p>
<p>Based on what I'm seeing over there, and I've been over there a number of times ... they are doing a very good job helping people prepare and to understand the process. - Judge</p>
<p>Judges don't go over and look at the Centre... They don't know where the Centre is or what it does. My idea for this is to stay open during the noon hour and organize tours for judges through the centre. Staff could explain things to them for about a half-hour. Do it once a week every month or something like that and rotate the judges through. - Partner</p>
<p>I would appreciate a bit more information. I'm mainly talking about Chambers. Could a Chambers judge actually have something on the bench beside him or her with the name of the organization, where it is located, and information about whether there is someone on duty? It would also be useful to have something the clerk of the court could hand out to the self litigant. - Judge</p>

R. SHC structure

SHC commitment to collaboration

The Centre is a unique and groundbreaking collaborative initiative between government and the community. The partners interviewed were in agreement that the success of the collaboration has been one of the project's most important achievements, one that is essential to the Centre's future, and one that lays the foundation for new ways of working in the future.

Further, the model of government and community partners working together in a genuinely collaborative relationship to deliver a range of services that is user-focused, was seen to be a major innovation. The operational collaboration between divisions of government was also viewed as being successful, as well as a significant innovation.

Pressure points have arisen in the collaboration where the service vision runs up against operational realities. However, interview participants pointed to

goodwill and joint efforts to meet the challenges associated with developing the collaborative relationship and working through its problems over time.

The elements for success identified by the collaborators are as follows:

- Good communication linking all those participating in developing the service model and a willingness to work through differences in pursuit of a shared goal.
- A recognition that all participating interests needed each other because the scope of the undertaking exceeded the reach and capacity of any single organization, whether government or community-based.
- Respect for the contributions made by all participating organizations and for the fact that different organizations had different skills and assets to add into the service mix.
- Compromise and movement away from fixed positions to embrace a broader interest in developing a functional service model that met the needs of users.
- Involvement, from the earliest possible time, of local service providers so that local needs are clearly reflected in goal and agenda -setting.

Figure 58: Select comments on SHC collaboration and its future

<p>The greatest success has been the collaboration between government and non-government to get the model off the ground. - Partner</p>
<p>Things have worked here because we haven't approached it with ownership – not one group <i>owns</i> it. - Partner</p>
<p>There are pressure points between the vision and operations and we continue to work them through... There has to be an understanding by the NGOs of government operations and vice versa. We are restricted by our collective agreement and the work has to be undertaken with an understanding of what the parameters are. This has happened and we are working things out. – Partner</p>
<p>It works. You want to do something? Get a bunch of people together in a room and start talking. It's a very Canadian approach. – Partner</p>
<p>I don't know of any other government situation with this type of set up. - Partner</p>
<p>We have started with collaboration. I think we have to find a process to formalize the collaboration... How do we get to legitimize the collaborative effort? We need to deal with this ahead of problems. We have to be preemptive. – Staff</p>

The vision is for a partnership with government. Because government provided the location and the staffing does not mean that the Centre works on the same kind of model as any other program or service that is provided via the courts. It is probably easier to lose sight of this now because the centre is up and running and is physically housed with Court Services. But it remains a collaborative project under the control of a group of disparate cooperating entities. There is a need to reiterate this in the collaboration. - Partner

Why were we created? What are we trying to do? What needs have we identified since we started? Basically we need to keep going with the collaborative effort that led to the Centre being started. We are trying to provide access to justice through a collaborative process with the justice system, the registry, all of the agencies involved and pro bono services. We need to be able to talk, to debate. - Staff

Development of a discrete identity for SHC services

Some interview participants focused on the Centre as a new and distinct entity, providing its own unique set of services. These responses echo the original service vision elaborated in the *Proposed Service Vision and Program Design*:

The service model will have its own identity based on a collaborative arrangement linking different service providers. . . The Centre will operate as a discrete service, with its own identity, its own principles and protocols, its own communications image and outreach strategy.¹⁵

A separate identity was seen to involve the development of a decision-making process around the range and scope of services, as well as around governance roles and responsibilities.

Some interview participants described the ways in which providing a discrete “self-help” service area addresses emerging needs and also gives greater profile to the presence of unrepresented litigants within the justice system as a whole.

Developing a discrete identity for the Centre was also seen to support the role it could play within the broader context of law reform. For example, as a discrete service, the Self-Help Centre could participate to the fullest extent possible in law reform initiatives and in national and international self-help agendas.

¹⁵ *Developing Models for Coordinated Services for Self-Representing Litigants: Proposed Service Vision and Program Design* (2004), p. 3. Online at: www.lawcourtsed.ca/documents/research/srl_services_vis.pdf

Another asset to the SHC of having a discrete identity may be its ability to seek out other sources for funding, in particular from foundations.

Figure 59: Select comments on SHC identity

I think what is needed is a cultural shift. I think all of this has to be placed within the big picture. If we go with this model without challenging it to evolve, it will be an annex to the registry and to the FJCs. It needs to be its own stream. The self-help world has to develop its own identity and not just be an add-on. - Partner

Given the emphasis of the Justice Review and of the AG, where there really is a push to civil justice reform, and given that this is an important part of it, it makes sense to link the Centre with the other reform initiatives and to have the broader discussion about access. We are not just reforming the court programs. . . I think some kind of ongoing forum would be really useful. I think that the Centre should be at that table as a participant in its own right. - Partner

Development of a governance model

During the project, in some instances it was unclear whether specific decisions should be made by the Executive Committee or by the managers within Court Services and Family Justice.

Governance is also related to staff reporting and dispute resolution issues. Staff currently report to different divisions within the Ministry. As the model evolves, a management structure developed specifically for the Self-Help Centre may be needed.

Figure 60: Select comments on SHC governance

For this to work the partners have to truly be partners. They have to have decision-making authority. I think it would be important to have the current steering committee stick with it for the next year or so. No governance model should be adopted without the full participation of that group. - Partner

We are working between two different departments. It would be helpful to have clearer lines at the outset about who to report to for particular incidents. Even small things like office supplies, [and procedures for] calling sheriffs. - Staff

Governance is key. Both macro and micro. Sometimes there are issues I *should* be raising with all the partners... We are a success because of the partnership and collaboration. If we are siloed then this success will diminish. We also need to look at governance in the micro. We need clarity about expectations and deliverables, and ways to resolve issues. I answer to my supervisor, [other staff person] answers to their supervisor. There is nothing in between. - Staff

S. Perspectives on potential for expansion of SHC services

Service providers, partners, and staff were asked to express opinions about areas of services provided by the Centre and the possibility of expanding SHC services to other levels of court and to other locations.

Expansion in the wider context

The question of expansion was addressed by some interview participants with reference to the practical barrier of finding a suitable space in which to provide self-help services. This barrier is a result of courthouse design, a factor which in turn indicates how the court system until very recently has viewed its role and function.

Partners and some service providers also related expansion issues to the other reform initiatives taking place that will affect services to unrepresented litigants. In particular, reference was made to the findings of the Family Justice Reform Working Group, which envisions a “hub” of family services. Clearly, one of the Centre’s tasks will be to define how it relates to the other new services as they emerge.

Figure 61: Select comments on context for expansion of SHC services

<p>One of the huge issues is suitable space in courthouses. Courthouses are not constructed with a self-help centre in mind. Even new courthouses have no suitable space. . . Spaces for unrepresented litigants are simply not on the radar. – Partner</p>
<p>In a sense this is a bit of a test, almost a pre hub – essentially the precursor of the family hub. In terms of how to improve, the way might be to think about expanding the Centre with the addition of FJCs and so on – whether you call it a self-help centre or not, you need a place with a lot of family services attached to it. And there should be civil [services] as well – Judge</p>
<p>I think the Centre is different from the vision for a family hub. A hub would focus on consensual dispute resolution and would start with an assessment and referral, looking at what should be the next step. I think the Centre has its own role, which is to provide assistance with filling out the documents etc. The Centre is the first step; the hub has an array of services that go deeper. – Partner</p>

Priorities around expansion to other levels of court

Some interview participants supported expansion to other levels of court but not at this time because “we are still so green.” Some were in favour of considering expanding to Provincial Court, while some thought that the Centre should focus on expanded work at the Supreme Court level.

There was also discussion about the possibilities of expanding to the civil area of Court of Appeals, and even to Federal Court. It was noted that the staff at the Centre respond to queries from users about Court of Appeal as there are no other self-help service available to users.

The most divergent responses came in the area of possibly providing SHC services for civil non-family matters in Provincial Court.

Figure 62: Select comments on SHC expansion to other levels of court

<p>The Court of Appeal is seeing 20% - 25% of cases going without representation, and it is a very complex landscape. Some Court of Appeal materials have been developed but the needs are acute. - Partner</p>
<p>In Provincial Court. . .there should be civil [self-help] as well. Much of civil is guiding people to the Provincial Court, especially now with the \$25,000. If it's a lot more than that then in most cases people should go hire a lawyer. - Judge</p>
<p>From my years in Small Claims I'd say it's a fairly simply set up and the judges play an active role in making it accessible to the average lay litigant. I don't know there is a practical need to throw funds or resources in that direction. - Partner</p>
<p>I think the plan should be to have centre services in the larger courthouses and to expand to Small Claims. This would balance the ratio of services on the civil side. At the moment the service is weighted to the family side because duty counsel is referring, the FJCs are referring. - Partner</p>
<p>In Supreme Court the process is an issue because it's difficult. For Small Claims the process isn't the issue so much as getting legal advice. - Partner</p>
<p>I think that in Small Claims they already have the LSLAP clinic in place so they have resources. . . They already have LSLAP as a collaborator, and they are providing a very viable, very effective service and doing a wonderful job. - Staff</p>
<p>I think if you were going to expand to Small Claims you would need to have a Small Claims project in and of itself. . . We don't know for sure what the need is, or what the registry thinks. All we know is people don't have lawyers - Partner</p>
<p>We get a lot of Court of Appeals coming down to see us. If we did Court of Appeals we would need training - mostly they want help with forms. I have some concerns about expanding to the Court of Appeal - not because of the Rules but because of what it involves - the Court of Appeal is paper driven. I am afraid we might become a printing office. - Staff.</p>

I'd be in favour of expanding to Small Claims and Court of Appeal. We have users come and ask for help in those areas. In the Small Claims you'd get the numbers of bodies because there is more demand. But in Court of Appeal there is nothing to really help people and it is much more difficult... So it's numbers needing help versus the dimension of the need. – Service provider

If funding were available, I think the ideal would be to expand to Provincial Court in Vancouver and also to another Supreme Court location outside the lower mainland. - Partner

Priorities around expansion to other locations

The majority view of both partners and service providers was that the model should not be approached as a template, narrowly defined. Rather, user needs should be considered community by community and courthouse by courthouse.

In addition, some interview participants were of the view that a move towards replication would best be met by the development of an integrated provincial strategy. Further, if several centres were to be set up, there would be a benefit in developing an integrated management structure.

There was general enthusiasm for extending self-help services to other court locations, with the most cited reasons being user need and equality of access. This enthusiasm was tempered by several factors: the Centre, while off to a very strong start, does not necessarily have its full range of services developed; and additional efforts would be required to demonstrate efficiencies for the court.

Figure 63: Select comments on replication of SHC services

I get a lot of calls from other areas. It would be a great help if we could tell callers that there was a centre in their own neighbourhood. It's too bad it's only downtown Vancouver. – Service provider

I think we should expand Court Self Help to other Centres and think about integrated management. If you had five to six Centres, you would have one manager – the staff in the Centres would be using the same resource, responding to common problems. The manager could be part of government or they could contract that out. The important thing is that it has its own identity and is its own stream. I think you would be liable to have more pro bono support that way, as well. – Partner

I think it would be great to expand because we have these people driving in, and it would be especially great to expand up north where there are few pro bono clinics and a limited number of lawyers. Even it was open a couple of days a week, it would be great to have a Centre available. - Staff

I don't think we should be looking at replication just yet. It's too early. I don't think we have a total grasp of what the need is. - Partner

Replication in other centres will pose some additional challenges when you don't have necessarily a full range of services developed. I think this is surmountable but it is going to take some work. At least we would want to see a really thorough canvass of what is possible in those other locations. At the end of the day if this [current model or version thereof] is all we can offer given the location and the community-based resources, we might decide to go ahead. But we don't want it to be the default. - Partner

T. Future directions

Partners gave their assessment of the Project at the end of its first year. In summary, they emphasized that the Project was “off to a good start” but that more needs to be done. They reflected on the accomplishment of having initiated a completely new service that provides access to the courts, and emphasized that while an excellent foundation has been laid, the Centre needs to continue to evolve. In order to accomplish the goals of the Centre with limited funds available, partners focused on the need to “be imaginative and creative,” to seek new sources of funding, and to maximize user access to the resources the Centre has already developed.

Renewed commitment to collaboration

With funding available from the provincial government for a year, partners interviewed identified the need for an ongoing commitment from government and community partners to continue the collaboration. A first step will be for the Executive Committee to open a discussion as to who might be involved in the ongoing collaboration and what role each partner might play. The Project Charter laid the foundation for the pilot project. It may be that a similar process could establish the goal of ongoing collaboration in principle, then go on to define relationships and detail how the responsibilities, authority, accountability, and resource-sharing will function.

Some interview participants viewed formalization of the collaborative model as being timely and necessary. From this perspective, formalization would reinforce the vision, strengthen the partnerships, and maximize the possibilities

of continued future success. It would also serve to maintain visibility for the unique nature of this collaboration and of the respective contributions and commitments being made by the partners. Just as the Centre services are seen as giving profile to systemic issues and challenges faced by unrepresented litigants, the Centre's structure is seen as providing an opportunity to give higher visibility to ways in which a new cross-jurisdictional service landscape can unfold.

A first step will be for the Executive Committee to open a discussion as to who might be involved in the ongoing collaboration and what role each partner might play. The *Project Charter* laid the foundation for the pilot project. It may be that a similar process could establish the goal of ongoing collaboration in principle, then go on to define relationships and detail how the responsibilities, authority, accountability, and resource-sharing will function.

Identity of SHC services

A discrete identity for SHC may serve to profile the needs of unrepresented litigants and to foster ongoing awareness of this group within the justice system.

If the SHC is going to expand its range of services and continue to evolve, it may well need support beyond that which the government has been able to provide. In practical terms, this may prove a powerful impetus for building a discrete identity for SHC services. For example, a discrete identity would best position the SHC to apply for funding from foundations in order to support its initiatives.

Governance

One of the outstanding issues identified during the evaluation process was the need for clarity as to which decisions should be made at an operational level and which decisions should be made at the Executive Committee level.

Expansion opportunities in the wider context of ongoing reform

Partners and some service providers related expansion issues to the other reform initiatives taking place that will affect services to unrepresented litigants. In particular, reference was made to the findings of the Family Justice Reform Working Group, which envisions a "hub" of family services. Clearly, when government implements reforms in response to the finding of the Working Group, one of the tasks facing the SHC will be to define how it relates to the other services that may emerge.

Legal advice

The availability of legal advice is the area of greatest unmet need identified by the evaluation. The Law Society's Taskforce on Unbundling of Legal Services may open up the path to changes. In the long term the SHC may be able to fulfill

its vision of having legal advice available to users as part of its service. Again, the SHC will need to be poised to take advantage of opportunities and work in close cooperation with pro bono service providers and the legal profession.

Opportunities for “virtual expansion”

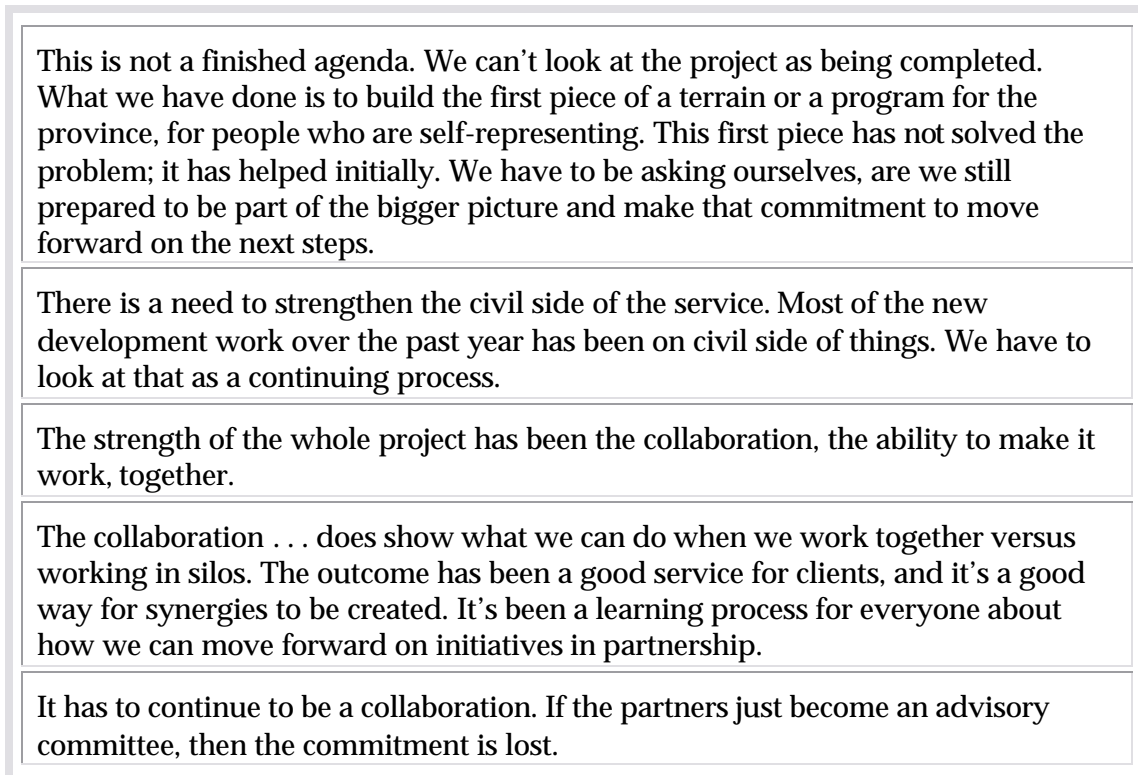
Exploring the potential for “virtual expansion” through the website was cited as a top priority for future directions. The capacity of the Internet to answer users’ questions and the provide support to users may help address the unmet needs of unrepresented litigants, in particular those who do not have physical access to the downtown Vancouver location.

Efficiency measures and assessments

As the Centre services beyond the project phase, there is an ongoing need to provide for ways to assess their effectiveness. Partners identified two needs in particular. First, there is a need to obtain feedback from SHC users who have completed their interactions with the courts. Second, there is a need to obtain feedback from users about what use they actually made of the resources they accessed online or took away from the Centre.

The comments in the following figure provide a flavour of partners’ perspectives on next steps.

Figure 64: SHC partners’ focus on future challenges and opportunities



If there is no budget to extend our services physically, are there ways of extending our services by virtual means? We're looking at models where people can be anywhere and still get help, online.

The website is good and can be used by anyone, anywhere. We also need to make sure that providing access to legal advice services remains a key function at the Centre.

There is more to do on this agenda. The fact that there isn't government money for expansion doesn't mean we can't keep moving on the agenda. There is lot more to be developed, both on the family side and on the civil side.

U. Conclusions

The Centre provides a unique set of services and is part of the broader context of emerging services for unrepresented litigants. Evidence assembled in the course of the evaluation has demonstrated that it is highly effective in satisfying user needs and in helping users prepare themselves for court. It has also demonstrated that it is effective in connecting users to appropriate services, and is seen by other service providers as facilitating referrals. At the same time, it appears to yield real and perceptible efficiencies at the level of court proceedings and the operation of the registry. For reasons such as these, the Centre is already serving as a model in other Canadian jurisdictions in the areas of program design, collaborative process, and government-community partnership.

In specific terms, the evaluation has established the following:

- Users reflect a particular demographic characterized by higher than average levels of education, lower than average levels of income, stated overall facility with computer technology, and personal attributes that point to certain levels of self-efficacy and capacity.
- Users are coming to the Centre in significant numbers and continue to express satisfaction with its services. "Having someone to talk to" is an asset of the model they frequently identify. Overall, users are generally of the view that the services help them in a substantial way to prepare their matters so they can be carried forward within the justice system.
- Partners, service providers, and members of the judiciary perceive general benefits from the Centre's capacity to provide information to unrepresented litigants and give them direction to next steps.
- Staff are seen by all respondent groups to be highly-skilled. Further, their ability to assist one-on-one with information about document preparation and court procedures as well as to make appropriate referrals is widely

acknowledged as going well beyond a function limited to the provision of general information.

- Service providers including registry staff see the Centre as playing a positive role. A major asset identified is “having somewhere to send unrepresented litigants.”
- While the original vision was for an integrated advice and information/education service, the Centre has not been able to offer legal advice. Users who require legal advice must currently be referred out. The provision of in-house legal advice would greatly enhance the service and meet user needs.
- Legal advice providers report that the flow of referrals to and from their organizations is proceeding smoothly. In some instances legal advice providers report that their work has been facilitated by the Centre’s ability to refer clients.
- There is a perception amongst members of the judiciary that unrepresented litigants are better prepared than they were in the past, and that this is a likely consequence of the Centre’s presence and work.
- The pilot period saw a high level of activity by partners in the development of resources for unrepresented litigants, in particular online resources. This was particularly noticeable in the area of civil law. Before the project began, there was very little information specifically for unrepresented litigants dealing with a civil matter in the Supreme Court. However, more needs to be done both in the civil and the family law areas.
- At the widest level, the work of the Centre is seen as giving needed profile to systemic issues that act as barriers to unrepresented litigants.
- The judiciary has been very supportive of the SHC since its inception. While members of the judiciary are aware of the Centre’s existence and purpose, further outreach with the judiciary would enhance an understanding of the ways in which SHC services help unrepresented litigants access the courts.
- Outreach to the private bar would enhance understanding by its members of the ways SHC services are facilitating users’ access to legal advice, including the use of private bar lawyers.
- The collaboration between government and community has been both highly innovative and very successful.
- The SHC services may benefit from the development of discrete identity, to maintain a focus on the needs of unrepresented litigants, to support reforms to the system, and to seek additional sources of financial support

for ongoing initiatives.

- Further research might be able to yield a fuller analysis of user outcomes – both in terms of resource use and in terms of court efficiencies.
- The Client and service data system used at intake would benefit from a reassessment of its overall role and function in SHC operation now that the project has moved beyond the pilot phase.
- While the project has met with significant success, the work of providing services to unrepresented litigants has just begun. Much needs to be done and SHC services must continue to evolve.

Appendix: SHC replication model template

Context

This section describes the model template that has emerged from the evaluation of the BC Supreme Court Self-Help Information Centre (SHC) pilot project.

This template should be reviewed in conjunction with rest of this report as well as *Developing Models for Coordinated Services for Self-Representing Litigants*.¹⁶

Given the increasing numbers of self-representing litigants, it seems highly likely that future services focused specifically on the needs of this group will emerge beyond the current project's immediate jurisdiction of Vancouver. Further, given the numbers of self-representing litigants at all court levels, it also seems likely that there will need to be a response to anticipated demands for self-help services at the Court of Appeal and Provincial Court levels.

Goal

The overall goal of the BC Supreme Court Self-Help Information Centre (SHC) Project is to improve access to justice for unrepresented litigants involved in civil actions (including family) and, through improved knowledge of the civil justice system, its options and processes, to improve the efficiency of the unrepresented litigants involvement with the justice system.

Core components of the model

Core components of the SHC service as follows:

- Provision of services that meet the needs of unrepresented litigants who are involved in civil actions (including family).
- Delivery of services that are user-focused, complement existing services, are tailored to individual communities, and responsive to the changing legal landscape.
- Evolution of a collaborative and consultative structure in which government and non-government partners continue to meet the challenges of working together with success.

¹⁶ This document is available on the website of the Law Courts Education Society of BC: www.lawcourtsed.ca/Self_Help_Information_Research

Development of a provincial strategy

An integrated provincial strategy needs to develop a vision and implementation plan based on the core components of the model.

The outcomes of the SHC project clearly indicate that the current model should not be approached as a template, narrowly defined. Rather, user needs should be considered community by community and courthouse by courthouse. While each community would need to situate its self-help services within the evolving range of services for unrepresented litigants, it would be assisted in its work by the development of an integrated provincial strategy. An integrated provincial strategy would also support the ongoing evolution of the current SHC in Vancouver.

- An integrated provincial strategy would be user-focused, have the ability to respond to local needs, and facilitate the provision of common assets. It would provide vital support at the local level as individual courthouses/community implement a local self-help centre.
- An integrated provincial strategy would help ensure standardization of services, and systematic sharing of resources, and standardized training. It would also recognize and utilize the capacity of the website to reach multiple audiences in all BC locations.

The following summarizes the key issues that have been identified with respect to expansion to (a) different levels of court and (b) replication of the model in other locations.

Expansion to other levels of court and to other locations

There is a need for all parties to consider a range of issues before expansion to different levels of court or to other locations is actively contemplated or planned, with user needs being the number one priority.

Essential questions to be addressed with respect to these issues include:

- What is a user-based rationale for expansion? How do we balance, for example, volume of user need with degree of user need?
- What is the strategic vision for both current and expanded SHC services?
- What impact does the strategic vision have upon the expansion plan in terms of evolution, timing and rationale?
- What kind of needs assessment should be carried out? Who should be involved?
- What would be the implications for the current Supreme Court service? Impact on staff? On qualifications? On the referral networks? Space?
- What would be the resource implications?

If the expansion contemplated is to a new location, questions to be answered include:

- What are local user needs? What are the local diversity issues? What is possible, given the design of the courthouse?
- What is the user-based rationale for expansion to the proposed location? How can volume of user need be balanced with degree of user need?
- Could there be an “abbreviated” Centre, or a Centre open on a part-time basis? If so, how would that work?
- How would an individual Centre be managed?
- Who would staff the Centre and how would they be trained?
- What qualifications would staff need?
- What would the relationship be to other local services? Would pro bono services be available at or near the location? If there is no duty counsel service providing advice and opening files, what would that mean for the nature of the service?
- What would be the relationship to the existing Supreme Court SHC in Vancouver?

If the expansion contemplated is for a number of Centres, questions to be answered include:

- What is the long-term plan for the development of other service locations and how does this fit in with a provincial vision for this kind of expansion and networking?
- How would the Centres best be managed overall?
- What would be the relationship between Centres?
- How would the resources be assembled to build an integrated provincial model?
- How would the online resources be made available relating to Centres in different parts of the province?

Focus of needs assessment

Any needs assessment for any form of expansion to other levels of the court and/or to other locations, would need to canvass the following issues:

- Decision-making as to site selection
- Needs assessment within individual communities
- Adaptation of the model to meet local needs

- Integrated provincial service delivery and networking among Centres
- Integrated management and governance systems
- Resource implications and needs

Essential features of SHC service

Outcomes of SHC pilot project indicate the following as essential features of the service.

SHC services are user-focused

The SHC model provides a range of user-focused self-help information services to unrepresented litigants. It also plays a vital role in directing litigants to legal advice (like pro bono lawyers) or in suggesting the need for private bar assistance where appropriate. It also helps people to understand and access relevant information and use it to gain access to other legal services, and to the court.

SHC services offer in-person, hands-on assistance

In-person, hands-on assistance is a crucial feature of the service. What users of the service want is a person to talk to. As one of the participants in the SHC evaluation commented, “Our greatest asset is personal service.”

SHC services are multi-layered and collaborative

Centre services include the office and staff *plus* the available products, whether they are at the Centre or online. The Centre is a front door not only to in-person assistance but also to partners’ array of resources.

SHC services assist unrepresented litigants to commence their matter

Litigants use SHC services in order to become better prepared to commence their action. The outcome is that users feel more comfortable with the process, have a better understanding of what to expect, know the steps they have to take, and know about the legal advice and legal resources they can use.

SHC services facilitate user access to services

Making and receiving referrals is a core part of the SHC service model. The SHC facilitates referrals within the network of service providers. Further, the SHC work actively with those other service providers to facilitate those referrals. Typically it helps set up a “back-and-forth” relationship as users move among the appropriate services.

SHC services require highly skilled service provision

Staff positions demand a high skill level as service provision involves much more than “directing” people to resources. The service provision demands a sophisticated range of skill sets — from familiarity with all aspects of registry service, an understanding of family and other civil law procedure, to high-level inter-personal skills and an ability “to think outside the box” in ways that are innovative within the justice system. These requirements need to be reflected in staff job descriptions and levels of remuneration.

SHC services cross traditional boundaries and mandates

SHC services are part of a “cultural shift” to client-focused integrated service delivery. Staff provide personal assistance that includes resource identification/introduction; detailed procedural information; service referral; printing out and checking of documents, and a steady measure of reassurance, confidence-building and encouragement. In doing this, they draw upon the resources and services of all partners to the SHC service model.

SHC facilitates user access to legal advice

SHC users need to access legal advice at strategic points. They may need advice at the start of the legal process, and advice and procedural assistance at other points in the process. Users want legal advice and they come to the SHC expecting to find it. Current referral arrangements to legal advice providers are a priority of SHC services.

While legal advice cannot be offered as an in-house SHC service at this time, it is possible that opportunities for in-house advice will arise in the future. Because SHC services place high priority on proximate and immediate access to legal advice, opportunities will be seized as soon as they arise.

Although the SHC does not make specific referrals to members of the private bar, it facilitates user access to legal advice by informing users when their matter would best be dealt with by a lawyer.

The SHC website is an essential component for providing links to resources

The website is an essential component of SHC services, providing information and online assistance. It is the information portal for unrepresented litigants across BC. With emerging technologies, online SHC will continue to expand.

While the front-line service is provided by staff in the physical location, Centre staff draw upon the resources developed by the Centre’s partners. In addition to using the materials that are developing according to the partners’ mandates, SHC staff actively identify user needs for additional resource materials, which in turn may be produced by partners, posted online, and offered to SHC users. This kind of synergy is a core feature of the evolution of SHC services.

SHC services are fundamentally collaborative in nature

Partners work together in a genuinely collaborative relationship to deliver a range of services that are user-focused. The collaborative operates at all levels, from developing plans to implementing operations. The elements for success in the collaborative effort are as follows:

- Good communication linking all those participating in developing the service model and a willingness to work through differences in pursuit of a shared goal.
- A recognition that all participating interests need each other because the scope of the undertaking exceed the reach and capacity of any single organization, whether government or community-based.
- Respect for the contributions made by all participating organizations and for the fact that different organizations have different skills and assets to add to the service mix.
- Compromise and movement away from fixed positions to embrace a broader interest in developing a functional service model that meets the needs of users.
- Involvement, from the earliest possible time, of local service providers so that local needs are clearly reflected in goal and agenda-setting.

Flexible approaches to structure

While the current model's structure has been implemented with success, it remains a work-in-progress. Different management structures could be considered in different locations while maintaining the priorities of having the Centre be user-focused and driven by community need.

The following is a summary outline of the range of possible different structures identified by evaluation participants.

The current model is staffed by Court Services/Family Justice and managed by Court Services' local registry and Family Justice.

This is the current model, which grew out of the feasibility study which led to the establishment of the SHC in Vancouver. That study identified civil (including family) needs in the Supreme Court as being the area where there was the highest level of need. However, it is worth noting that the feasibility study also contemplated services at the Court of Appeal level, and that the Court of Appeal has had an involvement from the beginning of the feasibility study.

An alternate centralized management model would also be staffed by Court Services/Family Justice

This model could be managed by a manager within the Ministry of Attorney General who would be responsible for all of the Self Help Centres in the province. Like the current model, this is also a government model. Centralized management this could ensure standardization of services, and systematic sharing of resources, and standardized training.

A third or “hybrid” model would be staffed by community/government and managed by a formal collaboration between the community agency (or agencies) and government. This staffing configuration would need to address collective agreement issues that arise from having staff from different organizations working collaboratively.

These three models all have common features. All three could share a single steering committee for the whole of the province, based on the current model of government/non-government collaboration *or* local steering committees. They all could draw upon a provincial strategy for implementation. All three models could also use a common website for critical tools. And, all three models would use local mechanisms to access pro bono services.

A fourth model could see staffing, management, and funding provided through a non-government agency or agencies. Within this model, the Centre would be managed by the community agency or agencies. While this seems to be the least likely option in the current environment, it is a possibility.

Operational overview

This section provides an overview of current operations at the SHC in Vancouver. It should be stressed that the SHC is a “work-in-progress” that will continue to evolve with changes in the environment in which it operates. It will endeavor to seize opportunities as they arise in order to better need user needs.

Scope: The scope of centre services would be decided by the steering committee (“Centre Services Committee”) on the basis of what services the needs assessment has shown to be necessary or desirable, and are based on what the partners can support, offer, or sustain through their respective organizations and on what government can support with the administrative capacity of the Centre office and staff, managed by government.

Collaborative management: The committee’s work could be guided by a Project Charter.¹⁷ Following the Charter model used in the pilot, a Centre Services Committee could be composed of representatives from the organizations that

¹⁷ The Project Charter for the SHC project is on the website of the Law Courts Education Society of BC: http://www.lawcourtsed.ca/Self_Help_Information_Research

contribute resources to the Centre. A typical configuration would be a mix of government and non-government representatives, with an executive committee and other sub-committees as needed, e.g., education, legal advice, and evaluation. An Executive Committee could be comprised of the chairs of the other subcommittee and others as requested by the committee.

Policy and Procedures: A Policy and Procedure Manual such as that developed in the pilot could provide details on the Centre's governance, facilities, staff, and operating procedures. It could also provide information on legal service providers, including, legal aid, family duty counsel, pro bono services, community advocacy groups, translation services, and alternate dispute resolution services.

Staffing: The staffing would be determined by the SHC structure. In all cases, however, staff would need to be highly skilled. At the Vancouver SHC, two staff members are present in the Centre whenever it is open. One staff position has specific expertise in civil law matters in Supreme Court and the other has specific expertise in family law matters in Supreme Court.

Services: In general, the Centre would provide information about the court system and procedure to enable users to make informed decisions about various dispute resolution options, including litigation. If users decide to proceed with litigation, the Centre provides basic information about how to obtain pro bono legal advice and how to proceed without legal representation. The services to which Centre users may be referred would be administered by both governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Specifically, Centre staff would help users:

- find legal information and other educational resources;
- find legal advice;
- get referrals to other legal services;
- locate and provide tools and resources to complete court forms; and
- find alternate dispute resolution resources and services.

Resources to help users access legal information would typically include the following:

- staff who can provide legal information;
- Internet access, in particular to the SHC website;
- a dedicated telephone linked to the Legal Services Society's LSS LawLINE;
- computers and printers;
- a photocopier; and

- a resource library.

Location: Ideally, the SHC should be located as close as possible to the courthouse, or if possible, within the courthouse. It is important that the location be readily accessible by public transport and have proper signage.

Website & online materials: In addition to resources located at the Centre, the SHC website (www.supremecourtselfhelp.bc.ca) provides self-help materials/videos and multimedia presentations, and links to:

- legal information;
- legal advice;
- alternate dispute resolution; and
- other online materials.

Outreach: The implementation of the Centre would include the development of publicity materials (a leaflet and press releases), ideally as part of a communications strategy. Outreach to the judiciary, the private bar, and the community would be essential components of an outreach.

Efficiency measures and service assessment: The Centre would put efficiency measures in place and conduct assessments. Evaluation of outcomes would include both the service received at the Centre and use of available resources.

Appendix B: Summary of Contributions

The Ministry and its partners on the Centre Services Committee supported the project in various ways, through the provision of staff time, space, services, equipment, and/or knowledge. Many partners are important sources of information, education and/or advice to which centre users will be referred.

Ministry of Attorney General: Court Services Branch (CSB) and Family Justice Services Division (FJSD)

- **Space:** Building Occupancy Costs on Centre space were initially paid by CSB (large room) and FJSD (small room) and CSB now pays for all building occupancy costs. FJSD paid for furniture and tenant improvements that enabled the second room to be used when confidentiality was an issue. CSB also provided some tenant improvements (painting, etc.)
- **Staffing:** Each branch provided Coordinator services to the Centre. A number of Coordinators have been trained to work in the Centre with CSB relying primarily on 3 and FJSD relying primarily on one Coordinator to fulfill the daily responsibilities. Training for the Coordinators was provided by CSB and FJSD. Each partner of the Self Help Centre also contributed time to the training of the Coordinators.
- **Support Services:** The Ministry of Attorney General contributed the services of analysts, managers and other staff to the overall project. The Ministry staff co-chaired several key committees and provided resources, expertise and support services to draft the project charter, the policy and procedure manual, and the evaluation framework. Support service provision is ongoing.
- **Equipment:** For operational reasons, computers and equipment had to be purchased by government. CSB purchased some items and reallocated others to provide the majority of the equipment necessary for the Centre. FJSD is providing a photocopier/fax machine.

Legal Services Society (LSS)

- **Staff:** LSS staff participated actively in this project from its beginning and are currently providing key leadership and active participation on the majority of the committees.
- **Website and brochure:** LSS agreed to host and maintain the project website for the pilot year. To that end, LSS allocated a significant amount of staff time to the development and maintenance of the website. Similarly, LSS was instrumental in the development and printing of the

SHC brochure. Further contributions of staffing resources, expertise and time were allocated to this resource.

- **Service linkages:** LSS is a key information source as well as a referral partner. The Centre has onsite access to LawLink, a direct telephone line to LawLine, access to translators (for emergencies) through LawLine, and access to family law duty counsel.
- **Equipment:** LSS donated a photocopier/fax machine to the Centre for a portion of the evaluation year. Contributions of computer technical assistance were also provided.

Law Courts Education Society (LCES)

- **Staff:** Rick Craig created and organized the original unrepresented litigants project and was very active in working towards the signing of the MOU in February 2005. He continues to be an active member of several key committees. LCES held the Law Foundation grants as well as the contracts for the project writer and evaluation consultants. LCES staff also contributed to the development of the website and educational materials.
- **Educational materials:** LCES worked with the Supreme Court to develop a series of informational guides to the Supreme Court. Work was done on audio visual material with respect to how to behave in court (funded by the Department of Justice, but linked to this project). A program for self represented litigants and family law was also developed and aired on the Knowledge Network. This production was an initiative of LCES.

BC Courthouse Library Society (BCCLS):

- BCCLS continues to be actively involved in the committee work for the SHC. BCCLS arranged and ordered most of the primary resource materials that are now utilized in the SHC and they continue to arrange for the updates of that material. BCCLS receives user referrals from the SHC

People's Law School

- People's Law School developed and now hosts a workshop on evidence for the SHC. They have also actively participated in the committee work.

Community Legal Assistance Society (CLAS)

- David Mossop is an active member of several committees and has made available to the Centre documents to assist with the distinction between legal information and advice, as well as guides and information to assist unrepresented litigants. CLAS receives referrals from the SHC.

Court of Appeal and Supreme Court

- The Law Officers for both courts have been active participants in the project. The Supreme Court had been working with Law Courts Education Society for the development of a series of guides for unrepresented litigants.

Department of Justice Canada (DOJ)

- The DOJ were actively involved in the early phase of project development and they contributed \$5,000 to the evaluation.

Pro Bono Law of BC

- The Pro Bono Law of BC had some involvement with the committee work.

Law Society (Observer)

- The Law Society has had an observer on the Centre Services Committee, which has provided a helpful communications linkage.

Canadian Forum on Civil Justice

- The Supreme Court Self-Help Information Centre pilot project is being observed by the Canadian Forum on Civil Justice as part of their “Civil Justice System and the Public” research program. Mary Stratton and Diana Lowe attended Centre Services Committee meetings and Mary Stratton was part of the Evaluation Sub-Committee.