

THE ELEVENTH DISTRICT COURT

THE SELF REPRESENTED RESOURCE CENTERS

"Facilitated Self Help in the Courts"

William C. Birdsall, District Judge
Grant L. Foutz, District Judge
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The Self Represented Resource Centers recognize the rights and abilities of individuals to process their own cases through the District Court. It makes no distinction on income. No legal advice is provided, only process and procedural information.

What makes the Self Represented Resource Centers unique and easily copied is that they condense many agencies and services into one time and place where litigants can fully prepare for their hearing in front of a judge. By use of this method, the Self Represented Resource Centers concentrate on long term, sustainable results to assist litigants in completing the decisions of the court.

In an era where community opinions and expectations regarding successful court results are changing, the Self Represented Resource Centers are providing a new answer to a long term trend of persons who represent themselves.

ELEVEN DISTRICT COURT
New Mexico

The SELF-REPRESENTED RESOURCE CENTERS

“Facilitated Self Help”

Honorable Grant L. Foutz

Honorable William C. Birdsall

Gregory T. Ireland, Court Administrator

November 2000

Justice Achievement Award winner August 2000!

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE SELF-REPRESENTED RESOURCE CENTERS

"Facilitated Self-help in the Courts "

The Self-Represented Resource Centers provide legal information, various services, and process or procedural direction to litigants representing themselves in order to manage their own cases through the district court.

The Self-Represented Resource Centers provide *facilitated self help* by exposing parties to a wide array of services that they will most likely need to process their cases. The services are grouped into a condensed time and place instead of being diffused by the daily realities of a large complex court system. The Centers also reach out to form partnerships with private business and other government agencies so that the litigants will not be traveling from place to place.

For years the courts have faced criticism that they are not accessible for most people having common legal problems. Acting in what they believed were the best interests of the litigants, courts have dismissed requests for help and direction in the belief that the issues involved were too complex and the ramifications of incorrect decisions too far reaching. Further complicating the environment has been the legitimate concern to avoid any action by the court staff which could be misconstrued as biased or advantageous to one of the parties. Add to these concerns the very serious statutory prohibition against unauthorized practice of law and it becomes clear that the chant of "no legal advice" has been an almost absolute bar to assisting litigants with even the most common of legal problems.

The Self-Represented Resource Centers are an effort to provide *facilitated self help*, not legal advice, for those growing numbers of individuals who choose to represent themselves. Nationally the number of individuals representing themselves is rising and the research is starting to clarify the dominant profiles. First of course, in the lower courts it has been and remains common for individuals to represent themselves in civil and misdemeanor criminal actions. Second, in the general jurisdiction courts litigants are primarily filing a variety of "family" matters: divorce, custody, child support, paternity, and other human relations difficulties. Other research tells us this group is composed of. High numbers of single mothers who cannot afford to hire trained lawyers. Third, the newest profile, are those middle and upper middle class individuals, economically comfortable, who only have an occasional matter and do not want to work with a lawyer. Lastly, there are always those who comment that they would not choose a lawyer at any price, perhaps more of a reaction to the adversarial system than lawyers. In order that the middle class not be shut out of these services there is no provision at the Centers for low income qualification.

For many of these parties the most daunting barrier of the court system is not factually based -it is process and procedurally based. In the broadest sense the Centers are designed to get parties to the right place, with the right conditions met, with the correct documentation

completed, and with a basic understanding of the rules so that they can face the judge in the courtroom to tell their complete story.

The challenge of the Centers is that these goals must be accomplished while remaining impartial, neutral, and without crossing the line into areas of providing legal advice.

Although the Centers have not chosen to limit the types of cases coming to them the overwhelming number of litigants are interested in family matters. The Centers are held in the evening to assist those litigants who are working. When parties arrive at the Centers they are greeted and given a checklist of "booths" which may be important for them. The checklists are based upon three common legal problems of litigants: divorce, divorce with children, or child support/post verdict actions. Not all litigants will need to stop at all booths. The parties then avail themselves of the following stops based upon their individual needs:

- a) the "forms" booth is so that they can begin to fill in the factual details of their specific case in formats which promote court and judicial efficiency;
- b) the mediator booth is for clients who desire to resolve economic and child custody issues under a structured format promoting positive agreement;
- c) the County Clerk booth is for those who have land to divide or to change title;
- d) the Court Clerk booth stays open late for filing of their pleadings;
- e) the Department of Motor Vehicles booth will assist in changing title of vehicles.
- f) the copy company booth provides low cost copies;
- g) the child support booth will provide a hearing officer to assist with completing the state mandated child support work sheets;
- h) private process servers rotate on a schedule and provide low cost service;
- i) the judge's secretary booth is last so that the litigant's packet can be evaluated as to completeness and get the hearings set;

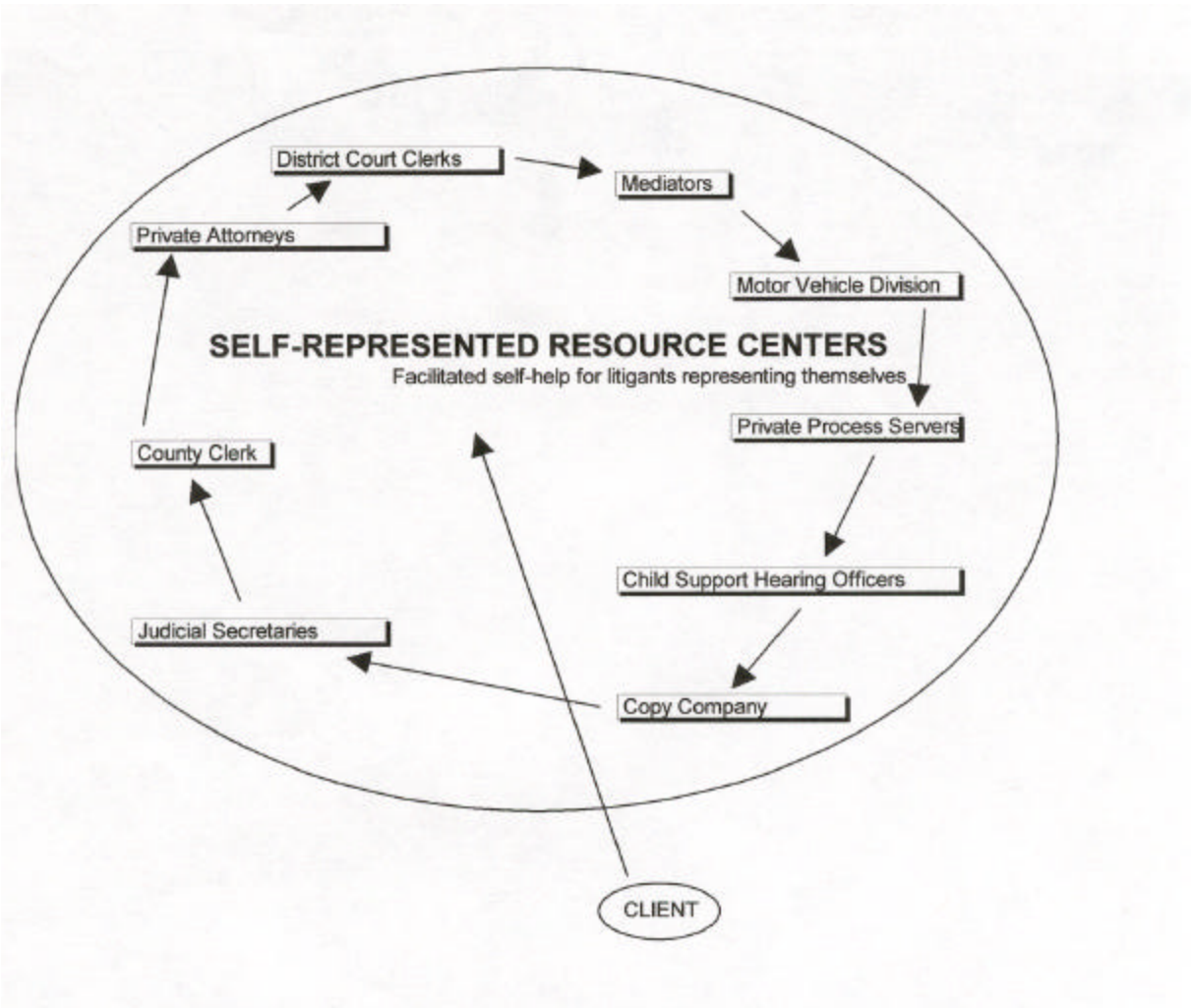
After the litigants have been to the Centers they should either be fully prepared for their hearing or know what they need to secure in order to be prepared. When they go before the judge they should have a better understanding of what is important in the eyes of the judge. Only under these conditions will citizens in the community start to believe that the system treated them fairly. Likewise, only under these conditions will the court be able to process their cases more fully and with less delay.

The bottom line of the Self-Represented Resource Centers is that litigants can represent themselves with a much more complete and comprehensive conclusion to their family legal problem with the added benefit that the court can provide these results more quickly.

For more information contact:

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The Self Represented Resource Centers support facilitated self help in an after hours setting. The Centers do not provide advocacy or legal advice.

THE ELEVENTH DISTRICT COURT SELF REPRESENTED RESOURCE CENTERS

DESCRIBE THE EXISTING PROCESS AND SPECIFIC PROBLEM

The right to represent one elf is firmly established, even in the most difficult criminal cases.

The number of self-represented litigants in New Mexico's courts, especially in domestic relations matters, has been growing steadily over the past ten years. This trend parallels the experience in other states. It also parallels the development of a broad-based "do-it-yourself" philosophy affecting many aspects of American life. Self-service gas stations, "for sale by owner" real estate transactions, "no broke service" stock market transactions, home schooling, and "educated patient" medical services are now part of our culture.

The desire of persons to re resent themselves in court strains the court and the bar. The rules and procedures of general jurisdiction trial courts are geared to lawyers, not to non-law-trained-persons. The legal system does not provide simply written court-approved self-help materials and forms for such persons to use. We do not have well developed procedures for non-law-trained persons to follow in presenting their cases in the courtroom; we have particular problems when one party in a case represents himself while the other is represented by a lawyer.¹¹

For years the courts have faced the criticism that they are not accessible for most people having common legal problems. Acting in what they believed were the best interests of the litigants, courts have dismissed requests for help and direction in the belief that the issues involved were too complex and the ramifications of incorrect decisions too far reaching. Further complicating the pro se environment has been the legitimate concern to avoid action by the court staff which could be construed as biased or advantageous to one of the parties. Add to these concerns the very serious statutory provisions against unauthorized practice of law and it becomes clear that the chant of "no legal advice" has been an almost absolute bar to assisting self-represented litigants with even the most common of legal problems.

For many of these parties t e most daunting barrier to the court system is not factually based --it is process and procedurally based. The public has little or no direction on processing even the most simplistic cases, but y legal issues cannot be simplified. For instance, how does

¹ Excerpted from "Restoring Public Confidence in the New Mexico Court System – Recommendations of the Joint Supreme Court/State Bar Committee 1998."

the court simplify the technicalities and legal requirements which have grown up around child support litigation? To further complicate matters for pro se litigants, there is an astonishing variety of unofficial forms available from hundreds of jurisdictions, "legal" publishers, and software sources. Many times they are used in the wrong context.

It is clear that all of these accumulated problems are eventually funneled into the courtroom where the judge is forced to use valuable court time for simplistic matters..... *repeatedly*. For example, excessive time is wasted in the courtroom with the judge on the bench searching for missing documents, explaining statutory requirements, completing incomplete documents, and advising parties on what issues need resolution prior to final resolution of their cases.

Experience teaches us that *the court is only a portion of the final resolution* of many cases. If the public can negotiate the court, they have very little knowledge of how to negotiate *other* agencies to make their results complete. We have found, for instance, that if a party in a domestic relations case is awarded the residence by the court, the court's intention is to consummate by a transfer of deed.. If the deed isn't transferred because the winning party doesn't know how to accomplish the task then the case is often *reopened*; and the judge is again confronted *with the same case!* Many of these cases are repeatedly reopened to correct past discrepancies or oversights.

In the broadest sense the Self Represented Resource Centers are designed to mitigate these difficulties by getting parties on the right place, with the right conditions met, with the correct documentation completed, and with a basic understanding of the rules so that they can face the judge in the courtroom to tell their complete story. The challenge of the Self Represented Resource Centers is for center staff to accomplish these goals while remaining neutral, impartial, and without crossing into clear areas of providing legal advice.

The Self Represented Resource Centers provide facilitated self-help by exposing parties to a wide array of services that they most likely need to process their cases. The services are consolidated into a condensed time and place instead of being diffused by the daily realities of a large complex court and government system. The Centers also reach out to form partnerships with private business and other government agencies so that the litigants will not be traveling from place to place.

TARGET GROUP

Nationally, the number of individuals representing themselves is rising and research is starting to clarify three dominant profiles. First of course, it has been and remains common for individuals to represent themselves civil and misdemeanor criminal actions in the limited jurisdiction courts. Second, in the general jurisdiction courts litigants are primarily filing a variety of "family" matters: divorce, custody, child support, paternity, and other human relations difficulties. Other research tells us this group is composed of a high degree of single mothers

who cannot afford to hire trained lawyers. Third, the newest profile, are those middle and upper-middle class individuals, economically comfortable, who have only an occasional legal matter and do not want to hire trained counsel. Relatively sophisticated, educated, and able to learn quickly, they often comment that they would not choose a lawyer at any price.

The Centers have chosen to provide their services to all of these groups. There is no income qualification. The Centers help those who are very poor, but are rejected by Legal Aide because of its heavy caseload. The Centers help those who are also low to middle income, but not of such low income that they qualify for Legal Aide. The Centers also provide services to the working middle class who often report that they cannot afford a lawyer.²

Finally, with no income qualification, the Centers assist those who can afford a lawyer but choose not to use counsel. They include numbers of upper middle class who are relatively sophisticated and college educated. The Centers sometimes assist wealthy people who have no disagreements and choose mediation or stipulation. They often report that they are trying to avoid the expense of litigation in the adversarial system.

WORK TEAM

Early in the design phase decision was made to expand the design group outside of the court to include other agencies. I was also recognized that there would be more appeal to the program if the court's efforts could be combined with private enterprises. In addition, an attempt was made to provide litigants with ADR mechanisms that would avoid the formalisms of court litigation entirely.

A working group of volunteers from many agencies and interested attorneys was quickly established. They brought a variety of skills and interests and included:

- **District Court judge** -the judges were familiar and frustrated with the problem in the courtroom of unprepared litigants;
- **Probate Judge** -this judge was (and is) a leader in helping litigants process their own cases;
- **judicial secretary** - this individual had experience in screening litigants and their form pleadings in order to ascertain whether the matter was assigned to a "routine" calendar or whether the matter required more direct individual attention in a hearing with the judge;
- **Representative from Legal Aide** -this individual (an attorney) had developed form

² The very poor are defined as household income of less than \$13,000 per year. Low middle class is defined as household income between \$13,000-\$30,000 per year. Middle class is defined as household income between \$30,000-60,000 per year.

pleadings for common legal problems of the local area and was familiar with the needs of low income individuals;

- **County Clerk** - the County Clerk could assist with the land transfers and deed requirements which often accompany changes in family status;
- **Representative from the Child Support Enforcement Bureau (CSEB)**- this individual would assist with the child support regulations and state mandates such as a Child Support Worksheet which are statutorily required before the judge can grant a final decree in a divorce action;
- **Representative from the Department of Motor Vehicles** - this individual would assist with the automobile transfers and title requirements which often accompany changes in family status;
- **Court Clerks** - the Court Clerk's office would remain open after hours for filings. The clerks would determine the forms necessary for litigants, distribute copies of statutes or rules, and would assist with petitions to proceed without cost;
- **Mediator** - the mediators would assist the parties in defining issues of child custody and in preparing a Parenting Plan acceptable to the court, also statutorily required before the granting of a final decree in a divorce action. For custody matters the mediators worked for the court at a fixed fee; however, if the parties had other disputes such as property, then the mediators could proffer services as private vendors of mediation and charge according to the market.
- **Representative of copy companies** - since New Mexico state statutes mandate the judiciary to charge ¢.35 per copy, these companies donated copiers that only cost litigants ¢.05 per copy;
- **Interested attorneys** - attorneys helped in two ways. First, there were those kind souls who always volunteer for pro bono/public service projects for low income litigants. Second, there are litigants who come to the Centers who can afford counsel and whose matters are too complex for the Centers. The Centers advise them to seek legal advice by qualified counsel. The Centers wanted to have private attorneys available to help these individuals and in this capacity they would act as private vendors of legal services. The attorneys also assisted in defining the line between legal process information and legal advice.
- **Representative of the Sheriff's Office** -the deputy would help with service of process requirements for those parties granted free process. He also explains the difficult technical procedures for proper service or ensure service for a fee.

- **Representative of private process servers** - these companies take turns in assisting litigants with service need as private vendors. Again, because of statutory rates imposed upon the sheriff by the legislature, these process servers are allowed to charge lower rates as a result of increased competition.

ALTERNATIVES AND SELECTED SOLUTIONS

The first alternative was to maintain the status quo. In The Eleventh District Court the status quo had two stereotypical versions.

First, in the casetype of Dissolution of Marriage (Divorce) the status quo was the following: a petition filed by an attorney, response filed by opposing counsel, conferences set by the judge for settlement discussion, hearings to determine evidentiary issues, pleadings submitted by counsel, experts called by both sides, all leading to a conclusion. These cases take an extended period of time to reach disposition because, while the attorneys are well versed in moving cases through the court, they are engaged in an adversarial proceeding.

The second version of status quo came with the realization that approximately 55-60% of divorce cases were filed by self represented litigants. Only 10% of divorce actions in the Eleventh District have representation for both parties. Typical problems included the following: They filed form pleadings that were not relevant in New Mexico. They were unaware that they had to request a hearing. They often got to their hearing only to find out that they needed a parenting plan or child support worksheet. When the judge inquired about who was getting the residence the wife might respond that she was, but when asked whose name the house was in she would respond that it was in the husband's name, unaware that title had to transfer. It was common for the time allotted for a hearing to expand from 15 minutes to 2 hours or more with the only result being that the parties would have to reset for an additional hearing sometime in the future. The parties were confused and the judges were frustrated. Some of the parties never came back. The time from filing to disposition lengthened with no real resolution to the case. In essence the self-represented litigants were clogging the system.

Both of these versions of the status quo were declared unacceptable.

On paper the most promising alternative appeared to be a pro se "department." Several examples from around the country provided models. No one, however, could come up with a plan to fund the personnel involved to get started. The working group also observed that pro se departments routinely screened clients for income, thereby assisting the poor and deleting the middle class. The working group made an evaluation that this was addressing only a small percentage of the need. For those deemed income-acceptable to such a pro se department, the department itself presented a limited scope on total resolution of their legal problem. Lastly, there was no space of any kind in any of the courthouses to locate another department of any size. The Pro Se department concept was also dismissed because of the fear that too high a public profile would raise objections with the organized bar that would doom the effort before it could

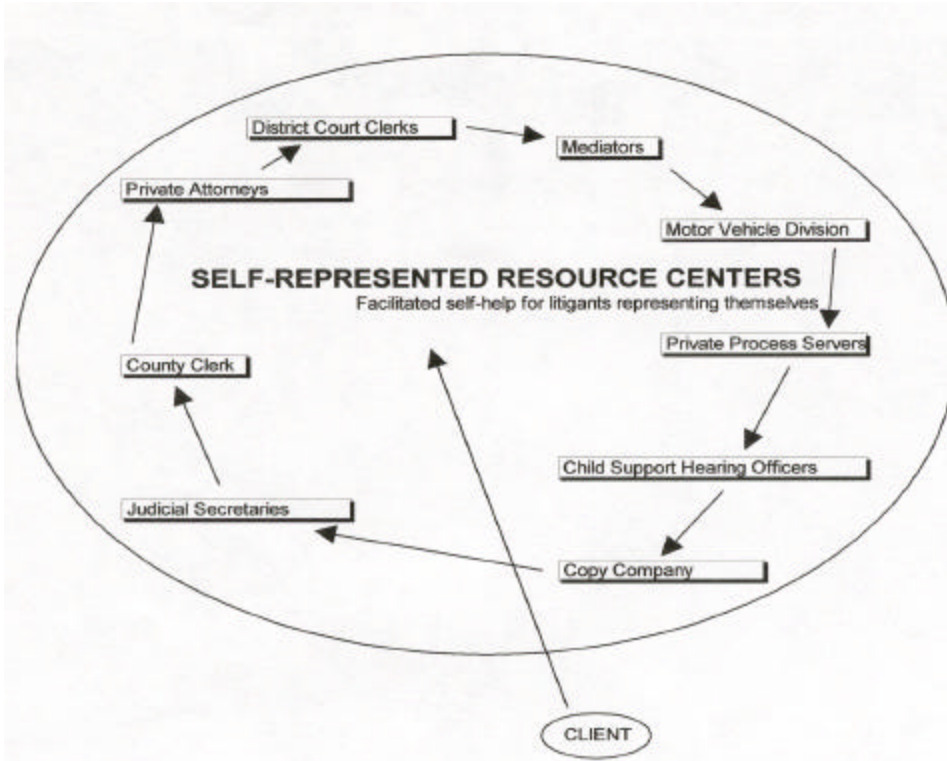
flourish.

It was then that the concept of an after hours clinic, with no income screening, with a wide range of available services began to take shape. All of the forms and information delivery could come from the court clerk's office, which would not increase the clerk's current burden since they were already dealing with pro se litigants on a regular basis. All of the other agencies such as the Motor Vehicle Department, the County Clerk, and the Child Support Enforcement Bureau agreed that assigning personnel to the Centers for a couple of hours would save frustration and multiple problems when these litigants showed up at their own departments.

The most attractive element of the Self Represented Resource Centers are their ability to

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The Self Represented Resource Centers support facilitated self help in an after hours setting. The Centers do not provide advocacy or legal advice/

create a comprehensive solution to legal problems in a very short period of time without providing legal advice. Witness the "typical" Center client: The typical clients are seeking a divorce with children involved. They come to the Centers (or have come into the Court Clerk's Office beforehand) and are provided with form pleadings such as a petition for dissolution, a marital settlement agreement, and a final decree. Without any legal advice they are advised to fill in the factual details of their specific case. If they have a house or land they are directed to the County Clerk for forms and assistance with transferring titles through deeds. If children are

involved the parties go the Child Support Enforcement Bureau (CSEB) booth to consult with a CSEB officer. There is a computer available with software to calculate the child support worksheet. They then proceed to the mediator to address the parenting plan. A model parenting plan is provided, but if the parties need more mediation they can make additional appointments with the mediator. If they own vehicles, they are directed to the MVD booth for the proper forms. (The Centers hope to set up an MVD terminal to process titles on-line.) Many of those present complete their pleadings at that time and then go to the judge's legal assistant for a review to ensure that all the required pleadings are in order and that all the pleadings are completed. If all is complete, they are given a final hearing date that is approximately eight days later. The parties then proceed to the Court Clerk's Office for filing. After filing they can take their case to either the Sheriffs booth or the private process server booth for service. At the final hearing eight days later the judge visits with the parties regarding potential legal issues to ensure that all is correct, that all details are complete and that all is in compliance with applicable statutes. The Final Decree is often signed at that time. Although many parties complete their case in eight days some parties also come to the Centers the first time to learn and then return to the next Center to file. For those parties this has the effect of lengthening their case time to approximately 40 days.

Ultimately, the Self Represented Resource Centers were born because of the comprehensive and sustainable nature of the client's results. The "never-ending" cases began to end.

PROJECT DETAILS

At the Court Administrator's request the working group started meeting in the Fall of 1997. Although the general concept of full service Self Represented Resource Centers was generally agreed upon, it was quickly clear that a couple of problems had to be overcome.

First, the representatives from private industry were mystified by the constant debate between judges and lawyers as to what constituted "legal advice" vs. "procedural information." The lawyers were supportive, but still believed that the Self Represented Resource Centers were intruding too far into the realm of practicing attorneys. The concern went further when the group considered how this controversy would translate into practice when the clerks were actually assisting clients in the Self Represented Resource Centers. The Court Clerk was also concerned that her staff would be accused of practicing law and perhaps prosecuted for this offense.

Much of this disagreement was dissolved when the court obtained Pro Se training materials from the Michigan Judicial Institute under the direction of Kevin J. Dowling³. These materials, in very brief and concise form, set forth a basis for defining the role of *facilitated self-help* for the Self Represented Resource Centers which all could agree upon.

³ Legal Advice v. Access to the Courts, Do YOU Know the Difference?" 1997 Kevin J. Bowling, JD, Director, The Michigan Judicial Institute, PO Box 30205, Lansing, MI 48909, 517-334-7805, bowlingk@state.mi.us

Second, the judges and attorneys looked at a great number of standard form pleadings from many pro se projects around the county, from office supply stores, and from Internet sources. They compared various features of all the forms and factored in requirements specific to New Mexico. They came to an agreement using many forms from the local Legal Aide office, which they further abbreviated.

Third, the next hurdle was logistically how to provide so many services and accommodate such a great need without additional staff or money. There were no rooms left in any of the courthouses and no additional money to pay staff. The working group had previously decided to conduct the Self Represented Resource Centers after traditional court hours to accommodate working clients. Then it was suggested that since the operations of the court would be closed after hours, we could use the immense space in the lobby. There then followed quick agreement by the Work Release department (of the jail) to come on a regular Center schedule and set up tables, chairs, computers, and signs before the Center, and to take them back down after the Clinic. Hence, the San Juan County Center is conducted in a beautiful domed setting with tile, carpet, and floor-to-ceiling windows, but has no real home. It can be relocated to any facility which provides convenience for consumers.

Ultimately, the planning process was lengthened from 3 months to 6 months and the first Center was held in March of 1999.

The cost to implement was virtually zero. The clerks who worked at the Center were given compensation time the next morning. The cost of supplies, consisting of copy paper for the various form pleadings, was absorbed by the District Court, but is believed to be about \$1,000 for the year of 1998. The court purchased some signs and additional tables, recycled some used computers, and secured inmate labor to set up and take down the Center.

Later in the year a decision was made to pay the court clerks overtime wages which would amount to approximately \$9,600 on an annualized basis. The cost of continuing operations for year 1999 is budgeted at \$10,500.

EVALUATION

The original criteria for success were identified as 1) reduce time in the courtroom, 2) reduce the number of reopened cases, 3) respond to the needs of the middle class, and 4) reduce time spent by court clerks at the public counters.

The client evaluation of the Center on an emotional level has been overwhelmingly positive. Based on exit surveys clients report great satisfaction with the court's efforts to assist them. Of those completing the exit questionnaires, the clients reported that the Center was beneficial or very beneficial in a ratio of 130 to 4 who did not find the Center beneficial. They comment frequently that they didn't realize they needed so many services, but that once they realized what they needed, they were delighted to find them all in one place. The litigants also

report greater confidence in speaking with the judge. They report a greater understanding of the issues.

The judges are delighted. They have reported that they speak to more educated litigants who are prepared for the hearings. When litigants speak they are more aware of the rules and are more on point. The judges feel they can be better at what they were trained for by listening and explaining on a more meaningful and detailed level.

Time in the courtroom has been dramatically reduced. Prior to initiating the Center, judges would routinely schedule 3~4 days per month for pro se matters. This often turned out to be extended by unpredictability in the courtroom. For these reasons 'time in the courtroom was identified as an original criteria for success. At present all pro se matters are being assigned to one judge. The judge has reduced the time allotted for these matters to 1/2 day every six weeks. This represents a reduction in courtroom time of approximately 87%!

The time from filing to disposition is falling dramatically. The court did not measure the time from filing to disposition for pro se matters prior to initiating the Center. However, the time from filing to disposition for the domestic relations caseload as a whole has been 8.5 months for 90% of the cases for many years. The Center is regularly producing dispositions in 10-40 days, thereby reducing disposition times by 85%! Although the result of court-wide case disposition time has not had a sufficient span for adequate measurement, it seems abundantly clear that reducing the time to get a divorce from eight months to eight days for 60% of the filings will lower case disposition times dramatically.

The reduction in time is important, but what is equally important is that case resolutions appear to be higher quality, comprehensive, and thereby sustainable over time. *There are fewer cases that reopen.* Lowering the number of reopened cases was identified as an original criteria for success. As of the date of this report the rate of reopened cases that go through the Centers is 7%. This compares with a rate prior inception of 30-40%.

The Center is responding to the legal needs of the middle class. The very poor, eligible for legal aid are often defined as earning household income of \$13,000 or less. Therefore, someone making \$14,000 per year is assumed to be able to hire an attorney. Fully 43% of Center users report middle class incomes of \$16,000- \$60,000. One percent of the self represented litigants report income above \$60,000.

The court clerks report less time taken at the front counters during the busy daytime hours by requests for information and assistance. They can refer clients to the Center.

The private business sector has been very supportive. The private attorneys and mediators have access to the court's large group of clients while providing a beneficial service for the court. For the process servers and copy company it allows them to prove how competitive they can be, which is a point of particular pride among them. Working along side the court while

being in a competitive environment is changing their views on government in general.

The Center has recorded demographic data since the Center inception. These results show no differentiation in results for income, ethnicity, or age groups.

TRANSFER-REPLICATION CHARACTERISTICS

As courts around the country search for better methods of accommodating self-represented litigants, this approach be replicated easily. Most of the agencies involved are very willing to help the court because they reap the same benefits in their own agencies; less time spent on frustrated, angry clients. While getting a consensus around the will to create a Self Represented Resource Center can time consuming, the organization is simplistic.

The court is now operating Centers in two counties. The Centers produce dramatic improvement in pro se case processing and the price to maintain them is very low. The budget for FY 2000 is \$10,500. For other courts wishing to follow this model the cost would be related to the expected client load volume. The cost is extremely low, and especially so when the political benefits are calculated --it is just very popular to provide process service and information regarding the courts to the middle class while using a number of agencies grouped in the same place.

ADDITIONAL RESULTS

The Centers have had two consistent problems. In one of our counties it is unpopular with the established bar association. Some prominent and influential attorneys have lobbied the judiciary to put an end to the Center. They believe that it is not the court's place to provide legal information to potential litigants, and, that despite the court's best effort, there is no real defining line between legal information and gal advice. In their eyes the court is providing legal advice. It is a testament to the Centers' popularity and the results produced for the court that these lobbying efforts have not yet been le to close the Center. However, in deference to this pressure, the court has not advertised or publicized the Center. Most Center users are referred by court clerks or by word-of-mouth advertising. This policy is not expected to change in the near future.

The second problem is our inability to "translate" certain complex processes into simplistic instructions. On exit questionnaires fully one-third of Center users report difficulty reading and completing form pleadings.

SUMMARY

The Self Represented Resource Centers are the Eleventh District Court's effort to provide facilitated self-help, not legal advice for those growing numbers of individuals who choose to represent themselves. It is not a newly defined problem, however using multiple agencies in one

place to provide a comprehensive solution is a new answer. By using a combination of public agencies and private vendors we believe that one effect on the community is that clients are coming in for needed legal services that are often left undone.

After the litigants have been to the Self Represented Resource Centers they will either be fully prepared for their hearing or know what they need to secure in order to prepare for their hearing. When they go before the judge they have a better understanding of what is important in the eyes of the law. Only under these conditions will the court be able to process their cases more fully and with less delay. Likewise, only under these conditions will citizens in the community start to believe that the system treated them fairly.

The bottom line of the Self Represented Resource Centers is that litigants can represent themselves with a much more comprehensive conclusion to their legal problem with the added benefit that the court can also provide these results much more quickly.