

BC Supreme Court
Self-Help Information Centre
Initial Evaluation Report

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A. Introduction

This report is a “year-to-date” summary of the BC Supreme Court Self-Help Information Centre (SHC) service model experiences, challenges, and degrees of success in meeting stated goals. It provides 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. Key interview information is also presented to document the degree of Centre success in meeting user needs and in having desired efficiency impacts within the court and registry systems. From all of this, the report contains an initial analysis of the service model characteristics, efficiency issues and measures, and potential replication issues.

B. Project conception

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. The purpose of the 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.

In the fall of 2004, the BC Ministry of Attorney General offered to take a larger role and commit to service provision in family justice and augmentation of existing service provision resources in civil law on the understanding that the centre would be managed by government.

Government and non-government agencies collaborated in designing the Centre and determining the services that would help unrepresented litigants. Ministry of Attorney General contributions include staff salaries and the physical location as well as set-up funding. The pilot has received one-time funding from the Law Foundation of BC, the Vancouver Foundation, and contributions in kind from organizations participating in the project.

The BC 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.

C. Goals and objectives

The Project Charter defines the objectives, scope, contributors and major deliverables. 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) in the Vancouver location of the

Supreme Court of British Columbia, and through improved knowledge of the civil justice system, its options and processes, improve the efficiency of the unrepresented litigants involvement with the justice system.

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 structured in a manner that allows for the model to 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 the project goal and project objectives are 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.

D. Operational overview

The BC Supreme Court Self-Help Information Centre 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.

The Ministry of Attorney General's oversight of the project is directed by the Assistant Deputy Ministers of Justice Services Branch and Court Services Branch. The project has been identified as a priority for both branches.

Management: The Centre Services Committee manages the SHC. The Centre Services 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
- 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. This 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, managed by government.

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: 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. Staff members are provincial government employees and staffing is co-managed by Court Services Branch and Justice Services Branch (Family Justice Services Division). The family staff position is filled on a full-time basis while the two civil staff positions are filled on a half-time basis, with one shift of two employees working Monday through Tuesday, and a second shift working Wednesday through Friday.

A feature of the staff has been an exceptional level of expertise at start-up with extensive background in areas like court services management and family justice service delivery. Another feature of the staffing situation has been significant turnover in the family position during the first half year of operation.

Centre staff members provide legal information. They do not provide legal advice. Staff members have the responsibility to explain this to Centre users, starting with completion of the intake form.

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 the fax 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). While the small office is used for private meetings with users, many users explain their issue to a staff person in the open space. For security, staff have a “panic button” to contact sheriffs.

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, 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 help 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: Resources to help users access legal information include the following:

- staff who can provide legal information;
- a dedicated telephone linked to the Legal Services Society's LawLINE (implemented in June 2005);
- 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 with pro bono clinics, or 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 links to sources of:

- legal information;
- legal advice;
- alternate dispute resolution; and
- self-help materials.

The Centre has developed and published 11 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 website also links viewers to self-help materials produced by the project partners. An online presentation for unrepresented litigants has been prepared and will be posted on the website in the near future. The presentation will give an overview of court proceedings in the Supreme Court of BC and outline the issues that an unrepresented litigant should consider before getting involved in litigation. The website has approximately 2,500 visitors per month.

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 as the first public event of the new BC Attorney

General Wally Oppal. Articles on the Centre have appeared in several law and daily newspapers/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. Information on the Centre has also been posted on the website of the American network of self-help centres.

E. Focus and scope of the evaluation

Centre evaluation has tailored a series of data gathering activities designed to analyze pilot project goals. They are as follows.

Providing assistance to users

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

Developing a collaborative structure involving government and community organizations

The evaluators are looking 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 formal 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 improving ongoing efforts or to future efforts aimed at providing similar services.

Looking at effective practices and future program implementation

Because the SHC is a pilot initiative, all aspects of the evaluation plan are geared to providing relevant information and insight into what pilot experiences will mean for possible future efforts to replicate the service elsewhere, particularly in other provincial locations where the array of existing local resources – both government and community – is not the same as it is in a downtown Vancouver location. The federal Department of Justice's participation in the pilot evaluation also confirms its interest in looking at the model's relevance on a national scale.

Assisting with justice system efficiency

Government in particular is 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 is also focusing on tracking how users

move in and through the Centre and how services provided there may ease pressures experienced elsewhere within the justice system.

F. Phases of the evaluation

The evaluation process is divided into two phases to cover project preparation (January - March 2005) and project implementation (April 2005-April 2006). During Phase 1, the evaluators worked with the project evaluation subcommittee to determine ongoing evaluation requirements, develop an evaluation framework/workplan, and develop appropriate data collection tools.

Outcomes for Phase 1 included:

- A set of evaluation data elements to be tracked, gathered and analyzed, relating to project intake, administration, referrals and evaluation.
- Identification of specific database requirements regarding Centre intake, referral, administration and evaluation data gathering.
- An evaluation workplan covering both phases of the project. The workplan includes a matrix, mapping the questions, topics, indicators and strategies the evaluators are exploring for each objective through the course of evaluation implementation.
- A draft intake form for use by Centre staff to maintain administrative records and to gather relevant evaluation data.
- Efforts to document and assess data collected by organizations receiving referrals from the Centre, which may be relevant to the project evaluation.
- Sets of questions for the various target groups of key informants.

Phase 2 involves implementation of the different aspects of the evaluation workplan. It began with training of Centre staff in the use of the database and includes ongoing refinements to data gathering tools in response to feedback from implementation.

In addition to the preparation of this initial report, Phase 2 will include preparation of a *Draft Evaluation Report*, due January 31, 2006, and preparation of a *Final Evaluation Report*, due March 31, 2006. The latter is to include a "Centre Model Template" that addresses the issue of Project transferability and replication.

G. Evaluation methods

To meet goals and objectives identified for the pilot, the evaluation has relied upon a variety of data collection methods.

Collecting statistical information

When the pilot was initiated in April, a database system was developed and implemented to assist centre staff with the collection of administrative-type information. This has enabled the Centre to track patterns of usage, services delivered and referrals made to outside organizations. The database system was also designed to assist with evaluation. Knowing who was using the Centre, what sorts of needs users presented, and what kinds of services were being provided by staff to address user needs is of obvious relevance to an evaluation of the service model's design as well as its effectiveness in actual practice.

The system developed to track Centre users evolved to the point where users were categorized as either receiving "brief service" (involving fifteen minutes or less of staff interaction), or "full service" in situations where more extensive staff assistance was provided. A third category of user was also developed to record information for "frequent" users of the Centre, in some cases, users who utilize Centre resources on a largely self-directed and near daily basis.¹

The level of service delivery to brief users was recorded daily in an Excel spreadsheet. This has allowed evaluators to examine the nature and frequency of this type of user and service while minimizing the data entry overhead presented to Centre staff. Full service users, on the other hand, were requested to complete a detailed intake form comprising personal and other information which was subsequently entered into the Centre database. The intake form has been refined and adjusted with implementation.

¹ At the time of this report's preparation, consideration is being given to the creation of a fourth user category labeled "urgent" in response to staff reports of an increasing frequency of users arriving at the Centre in a state of panic or distress and requiring immediate information or forms preparation assistance with their legal issues. In the words of one staff member,

"What I've dealt with of late is individuals coming to me at the 11th hour as bailiffs are in the process of throwing their worldly belongings on the sidewalk; people materializing at the Centre at 3:45 p.m. with a final day filing deadline; users having to dash out because they just have so much time and filling out an intake form is the last thing on their mind...

"(M)y focus has been more towards getting whatever court paperwork needs to be done to get them on their way to the registry so I have not taken it upon myself to collect skeletal tombstone information to generate even the basics of an intake form without their assistance or input...

"The point is that we seem to be getting a significant number of these types of clients and for the most part they are not reflected anywhere. The sad fact is that these are the most difficult users to service as they are generally on edge, unfocused, in a state of panic and disarray..."

As is indicated, this category of user places major demands on staff time but, because they do not complete the data intake form, they cannot be classified as full service users and tracked as such. In order not to lose track of this category of user, information will be gathered outside the database system in such a way as not to impose onerous administrative responsibilities on Centre staff.

To complement this data, Centre staff recorded detailed information in regard to the areas of service delivery, the types of services delivered, and the resources at the Centre drawn upon by the user. They also recorded information regarding barriers they perceived users face in trying to access services, as well as referrals made to other services, within the justice system and beyond.

In addition to the main database system, the evaluation implemented other and more focused data collection procedures designed to gauge the Centre's impact and effectiveness in other areas of the BC Supreme Court system. With the cooperation of registry staff, information was gathered in June and July, 2005 to look at levels of efficacy amongst those using the registry. Through this period, plans were also developed to look at ways of gathering statistical information to measure the "efficiency" impact of the Centre on the functioning of the BC Supreme Court.

Interviews of SHC staff, users, stakeholders, & service providers

The other major focus of the evaluation data gathering concerned the conduct of interviews. Through the summer months and into the early fall, evaluators contacted 67 different people having some substantial contact or connection to the Centre and therefore in a position to offer comments and perspectives on the Centre's operation. Roughly 40 per cent 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 also interviewed as part of the same process. In addition, members of the Project Steering Committee, service providers connected to the Centre in some capacity, government officials and registry staff, and others including those within the pro bono sector were all canvassed for their opinions on the nature of the pilot, and its direction and experiences. Interview data was subjected to qualitative analysis and a report on the findings is presented further on in this report.

Limiting the use of direct quotations, and direct attributions

(a) Quotations

In assembling information from the round of interviews, evaluators have tried to avoid unduly "bulking up" the report with extended lists of supportive quotations. In most instances, when documenting responses to interview questions, efforts have been made to paraphrase content. In some instances and where deemed appropriate, statistics have been added to give an indication of the frequency of certain issues or points of view being mentioned.

Exceptions to this approach have been made in certain situations. First and foremost, efforts have been made to reflect fully and accurately the views expressed by Centre users. Given the Centre's status as a pilot project, it is of the utmost importance that the views of users – in areas ranging from expressions of

need, perceptions of barriers and views regarding the quality and scope of service given by the SHC – be fully documented.

Secondly, where having a quotation or a selection of representative quotations helps properly elucidate a point, verbatim quotations are used. Quotations have also been used in situations where they can assist in framing or contextualizing the answer to a question. A final area of exception is where quotations can assist in documenting work exploring key issues identified for the evaluation – such as the evolution of the Centre service model, or issues involved in potential future efforts to replicate SHC services elsewhere.

(b) Attributions

Similarly, the use of direct attributions with quotations to link them directly to specific individuals has been used on a restrictive basis. Exceptions have been made in situations where direct attribution is seen to serve a valuable purpose in documenting the way a particular point is made. Attributions have also been made in situations where not making them would be artificial.

H. Who uses the SHC?

Over the course of the period from April 19, 2005 when the Centre opened to September 02, 2005, the SHC had a total of 355 full service visitors and 993 brief service users.² "Full service" users are those who require more than 15 minutes of staff time. "Brief service" users are those who require 15 to 20 (or fewer) minutes of staff time.

Brief service users

In the interests of regulating staff data gathering and workload minimal information is gathered about "brief service" users. However, staff do record basic statistics to track the type and frequency of this category of user. For the period running up to September 2nd, staff has had almost 1,000 instances of brief service delivery. The following table summarizes the breakdown of brief service data.

Figure 1: Brief service user data

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
August	28	52	177	47	29	333	15.9	7.4
Sept.	4	7	25	6	8	50	25.0	12.5
	97	146	436	135	179	993	10.5	5.9

Centre staff provide a range of brief services, ranging from providing brief referrals and directions to directing people to Centre computers and distributing blank court forms. Although an issue may be "Out of mandate" staff report often spending significant time with these users before it is determined the issue is beyond SHC scope. Typically, however, staff do provide some information and guidance on where users might find help.

The "Providing directions" column is the number of people who cannot find an office or service within the building or in the court or government system and are given assistance locating the services they want.

² In the calculations that follow, the number of users and instances of service delivery vary from table to table. This is because of gaps in the data collection as users completing the intake form fail to fill in certain categories of information. Blank data on user intake forms are omitted from the calculations that follow.

“Brief referrals” reflect the “under 15 to 20 minute interactions” but also include all users where more time is spent but a proper intake form was not completed. Staff suspect that maybe 10 to 20 per cent in this category properly belong on the formal intake sheet.

The “Self-directed computer use” and “Blank forms without help” columns are both significant sub-categories of users whose nature is largely self-explanatory.

The columns on the right of the above table suggest that the overall incidence of “Brief service” is continuing to grow. Most of the growth has been concentrated in the “Brief referrals” sub-category. When this sub-category is factored out (far right column), the incidence appears more constant over time.

Full service users: where do they live?

Full service users visited the Centre and received services on 428 occasions. As the table in Figure 2 indicates, most users came from the lower mainland area of the province. Smaller percentages came from Vancouver Island and other parts of BC. A few users came from other parts of Canada and two from international locations.

Figure 2: Geographic location of SHC users

Area	Count	% of Total
Lower Mainland	275	92.3%
<i>(of which Vancouver has 149 users or 50 per cent of the overall total)</i>		
Gulf Islands or Vancouver Island	6	2.0%
Other parts of BC	15	5.0%
Outside BC	2	0.7%
Total locations	298	
No location given	55	

Figure 2 indicates that while the overwhelming majority of Centre users come from the lower mainland region of British Columbia, Vancouver residents account for only half the total. Lower mainland users residing outside of Vancouver are almost as numerous as those living within the city proper. This would indicate that the Centre is effectively establishing its “catchment area” as the surrounding region and not just the city of Vancouver.³

³ 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 the areas in the Fraser Valley for the express purpose of visiting the Centre, once they came to know of its existence.

Frequency of full service use

At the time of this report, most users are first time visitors to the Centre. This is shown clearly in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Frequency of SHC user visits

Visit Frequency	Clients	% of Total
More than four times	5	1.5%
Four times	2	0.6%
Three times	7	2.1%
Twice	29	8.7%
Once	292	87.2%
Total clients w. frequency information	335	
No information given	20	

Seven out of every eight users have visited the Centre only once during the first four and a half months of operation, with the next largest group reporting two visits. Slightly over four per cent of full service Centre users have visited three or more times.⁴ Further information regarding multiple SHC visits by the same user is provided later in this report in the section looking at SHC service breakdowns.

However, the 12 to 13 per cent of users making multiple trips to the Centre together account for more than 30 per cent of all full service visits at the Centre. The percentage of Centre services accounted for by repeat users has also tended to increase over time. Figure 4 tallies total Centre visits by user-type (single or multiple) for the four complete months of Centre operation.

Figure 4: Multiple or repeat users as a percentage of the total

Month	Multiple Users % of Total Visits
May	10.8%
June	43.4%
July	45.1%
August	28.0%

Despite the dip in August, the trend appears to be that, as time progresses, the number of repeat users at the SHC increases. Such might be reasonably expected

⁴ This figure does not include brief service visits for which client identity is not recorded. Nor does it take account of the "frequent" user category whose use of the Centre can number several times each and every week.

as a product of more litigants returning to access the Centre after gaining an initial awareness of its services.

Age & gender profile of full service users

Figure 5 depicts the age profile of SHC users, showing the largest block to be between the ages of 40 and 49.

Figure 5: User age profile

Age Group	Count	% Total
60+	18	6.8%
50-59	54	20.4%
40-49	108	40.8%
30-39	66	24.9%
20-29	19	7.2%
Total w. age information	265	
No age given	90	

Roughly 27 per cent of Centre users are older than 49 while about 32 per cent are younger than 40.

The next table summarizes the gender profile of Centre users.

Figure 6: User gender profile

Gender	Count	% Total
Female	143	45.8%
Male	169	54.2%
Total w. info	312	
Lacking gender info	43	

As can be seen, to date there have been 8.4 per cent more males than females using the Centre.

Are there age differences between male and female users? Figure 7 examines the age profile by gender for the 245 users providing both age and gender information.

Figure 7: Age and gender profile combined

Age Group	Females	% Total Females	Males	% Total Males
60+	3	2.7%	12	9.0%
50-59	18	16.1%	36	27.1%
40-49	49	43.8%	48	36.1%
30-39	29	25.9%	32	24.1%
20-29	13	11.6%	5	3.8%
Total w. info	112		133	
Lacking age & gender info	31		36	

The data confirm that female users tend to be younger than males. Almost half of female users are below the age of 40 while, for males, the corresponding figure is less than 30 per cent. At the same time, less than 20 per cent of females are age 50 or older while, for males, the figure is over 36 per cent.

The significance of this variance is difficult to characterize at this point. Later in this report, age and gender breakdowns will be revisited in the context of looking at SHC service areas and issues, with a view to exploring this question further.

Centre users are asked at the point of intake what language they speak at home. This approach was felt to offer the best insight into the language make-up of the user population and a point of research entry into the area of language difficulties and barriers. These issues have clear implications for service delivery and access. Figure 8 shows the overall patterns of responses.

Language issues of full service users

Figure 8: Do you speak a language other than English at home?

Another Language?	Count	% Total
No	181	56.9%
Yes	137	43.1%
Total w. info	318	
No language info	37	

As is evident, a sizeable block of Centre users report using another language at home. Major languages reported by the group answering "yes" to the previous question were as follows.

Figure 9: Other languages spoken at home

Which other language?	Count	% Total
Other	50	37.0%
Cantonese	19	14.1%
Spanish	17	12.6%
Punjabi	10	7.4%
Mandarin	10	7.4%
French	9	6.7%
Russian	7	5.2%
Farsi	5	3.7%
Korean	3	2.2%
Hindi	3	2.2%
German	2	1.5%
Total w. info	135	
Lacking specific language info	2	

Major Asian languages predominate – Cantonese, Mandarin and Punjabi – along with Spanish, French and Russian. Also of significance is the fact that the largest sub-group – 37 per cent of non-English speaking users – report another unspecified language.⁵

That being said, using a language other than English does not by itself indicate a problem with using English, or in the case of the SHC receiving services in English. Figure 10 shows responses to the intake form question designed to gauge language barriers to service.

Figure 10: Users reporting a problem with English-only services

Problem with services in English?	Count	% Total
No	266	91.7%
Yes	24	8.3%
Total w. info	290	
Lacking problem info	65	

⁵ This figure suggests that data intake procedures may have to be adjusted to take better account of the full range of possible user languages.

According to the information reported by Centre users, less than nine per cent see themselves as facing a problem because services are offered in English only.⁶

Full service user income & education

The following table looks at monthly income levels reported by Centre users.

Figure 11: Monthly income levels of users

Monthly income	Count	% Total
\$0-1,000	99	35.2%
\$1,000-2,000	74	26.3%
\$2,000-3,000	61	21.7%
Over \$3,000	47	16.7%
Total w. info	281	
Lacking income info	74	

The data confirm that a large percentage of Centre users come from lower income backgrounds – more than 60 per cent are reporting gross monthly income of \$2,000 or less.

Given the evident age difference separating male and female users of the Centre, it would be useful to examine income breakdowns of users in relation to gender. The following figure provides this comparison.

Figure 12: Monthly income broken down by gender

Monthly Income	Females	% Total	Males	% Total
\$0-1,000	49	38.3%	46	31.7%
\$1,000-2,000	36	28.1%	36	24.8%
\$2,000-3,000	27	21.1%	33	22.8%
Over \$3,000	16	12.5%	30	20.7%
Total w. info	128		145	
Lack income info	15		24	

Female users are somewhat more heavily concentrated at the lower end of the income scale – more than 66 per cent report gross monthly income of \$2,000 or less while the corresponding figure for males is slightly below 56 per cent.

⁶ It may be that this figure understates the degree of the language barrier. Some users come to the Centre with family or friends to interpret and may answer this question in the negative because they are able to make do with this arrangement. Staff report instances of potential Centre users turning away from accessing services because of perceived language problems. See the discussion on page 45.

The next table looks at the reported education level of Centre users.

Figure 13: Users' education levels

Education	Count	% Total
Grade 8 or less	7	2.3%
Grades 9 to 11	36	11.8%
High school graduate	63	20.7%
Some college or university	84	27.5%
College-university degree	115	37.7%
Total w. info	305	
Lacking education info	50	

On average, Centre users display comparatively high levels of education. More than a third report having a college or university degree and close to two-thirds report having at least some level of higher education. These figures confer an educational standing on SHC users that is significantly higher than for the population at large.⁷

Education qualification can be summarized in relation to user gender. The following table provides this comparison.

Figure 14: Gender breakdown of users' education levels

Highest Level of Education	Female	% Total	Male	% Total
Grade 8 or less	1	0.7%	6	3.8%
Grades 9 to 11	16	11.8%	20	12.6%
High school graduate	30	22.1%	32	20.1%
Some college or university	37	27.2%	42	26.4%
College or university degree	52	38.2%	59	37.1%
Total w. info	136		159	
Lacking education info	7		10	

Gender differences in levels of education are not pronounced. On the whole, female users have slightly more educational qualifications than do male users with fewer females falling into the Grade 11 or less levels.

⁷ Information from the 2001 Census for BC residents aged 25 to 64 shows 19.1 % having less than Grade 12 (SHC figure is 14.1%), 24.2% having high school completion (SHC figure is 20.7 per cent), and 56.4% having some post-secondary education (SHC figure is 65.2%) Statistics Canada, *Education in Canada: Raising the Standard, 2001 Census*, Catalogue 96F0030XIE2001012, March, 2003.

Full service user computer access

Intake surveys also measure the degree to which Centre users have access to a computer they can use. The following table reports the pattern of responses.

Figure 15: Access to a computer

Computer Use	Count	% Total
No	104	34.4%
Yes	198	65.6%
Total w. info	302	
Lacking computer info	53	

Close to two-thirds of users report having the ability to access and use a computer system. This variable is of relevance in assessing the ability of Centre users to access a growing volume of self-help resources available on the Internet. It is also relevant to the evolution of the SHC service model and the methods chosen to distribute resources and supports to users.

Full service users accessing the SHC

Users report various ways and methods of coming into contact with the Centre. At the point of intake, full-service users are asked how they came to know of the Centre's existence. Figure 16 shows the distribution of answers.

Figure 16: How users discover the Centre

How do users discover the SHC?	Count	% Total
Court registry	147	45.2%
Family justice counsellors	34	10.5%
Family Maintenance Enforcement Program	31	9.5%
Internet	30	9.2%
Other	23	7.1%
Legal aid office	16	4.9%
Community agency	14	4.3%
Lawyer/duty counsel at court	9	2.8%
LawLINE	6	1.8%
Judge / master	5	1.5%
Family and friends	2	0.6%
Library	2	0.6%
By chance	2	0.6%
Workshop	2	0.6%
Self-help books & pamphlets	1	0.3%
School	1	0.3%
Total w. info	325	
Lacking discovery info	30	

As can be seen, 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 the point of Centre access for almost three-quarters of all full-service users. If Legal Aid system sources (LawLINE and the Legal Aid office) are factored in, the total coming from the top four sources rises to over 82 per cent – almost five out of every six Centre users

The proportion coming by way of each source has shifted somewhat over time. This can be demonstrated by comparing users' source of first contact with the Centre in the first two months of operation (mid-April to the end of June), with that evidenced for the following two months (July 1 to September 2). The following breakdown emerges of initial contact sources.

Figure 17: Source of SHC users by time block: top four categories

Reported Source of User Access	% of users coming before 7/1/05	% of users coming after 7/1/05
1. Court registry	69 per cent	31 per cent
2. Family justice system (total)	69 per cent	31 per cent
3. Internet	56 per cent	44 per cent
4. Legal Aid (total)	68 per cent	32 per cent

Actual “before” and “after” percentages for each of the four categories are not important. What are significant are differences between the four main sources of SHC access *within* each of the two time periods. The latter comparison shows the percentage breakdown for the court registry, family justice and Legal Aid sources – the first, second and the fourth largest sources of user access into the SHC – as near-constant over these two time blocks. However, the proportion of Internet users finding their way to the SHC after July 1 is significantly higher. This suggests that the Internet is increasing in importance as a source of user knowledge of the existence of the Centre and the assistance it can provide. Over the course of subsequent evaluation reporting, it will be important to see what becomes of this suggested trend.

Full service users’ prior & current assistance with legal matters

Six of ten Centre users report receiving assistance with their legal matters prior to accessing services at the SHC.

Figure 18: Have you been helped before?

Have you been helped before?	Count	% Total
No	123	40.2%
Yes	183	59.8%
Total w. info	306	
Lacking prior help info	49	

Users report receiving help in various ways and from a range of sources. The following table shows the breakdown of responses for users answering “Yes” to the previous question.

Figure 19: Where did users receive prior help?

Helped before: what or where?	Count	% Total
Legal advice (incl. legal aid & pro bono)	69	41.1%
Online information	24	14.3%
FJC / FMEP	16	9.5%
Community services	16	9.5%
Court/masters/judges	9	5.4%
Friends	9	5.4%
Other government services	5	3.0%
Court registry	5	3.0%
Other	6	3.6%
LawLINE	4	2.4%
Library	3	1.8%
UBC (LSLAP student clinic)	2	1.2%
Total (multiple responses possible)	168	
Lacking specific help info	15	

As can be seen, the most sizeable groups report having had prior legal advice, using online resources or receiving assistance through the family justice system or outside community-level services. Smaller percentages report a range of other types of help.

Users are also asked at intake whether they are currently retaining the services of a lawyer. Figure 20 shows the response pattern.

Figure 20: Do you currently have a lawyer?

Do you currently have a lawyer?	Count	% Total
No	294	94.8%
Yes	16	5.2%
Total w. info	310	
Lacking current lawyer info	45	

Only a small percentage reports currently retaining the services of a lawyer. For the close to 95 per cent who report not having a lawyer, the reasons offered breakdown as follows.

Figure 21: Reasons for not having a current lawyer

Reasons for not having a current lawyer	Count	% Total
I cannot afford to hire a lawyer	216	60.2%
I need more information before I decide	45	12.5%
Legal aid said they could not help me	43	12.0%
I don't want a lawyer	22	6.1%
Other	21	5.8%
I do not know how to find a lawyer	12	3.3%
(multiple selections possible)	359	

For most users, not being able to afford a lawyer is the main reason for not currently having one. Other cited reasons account for much smaller percentages of reasons offered.

Close to 40 per cent of full service users report having had a lawyer in the past. Of this group, roughly half said they “could not afford to continue.” Another 20 per cent said their past lawyer “wasn’t helpful.” The remainder cited other reasons for not continuing to have a lawyer represent them.

I. What services are provided at the SHC?

The 355 full-service users of the Centre made a total of 428 recorded visits to the Centre over the course of the period April 19th to September 2nd, 2005. This section of the report offers statistical breakdowns of and commentary on the nature of services provided during these visits.

SHC users are 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 22: User status

User status	Count	% Total
Applicant / plaintiff	252	67.7%
Respondent / defendant	89	23.9%
Other	31	8.3%
Total visits w. info	372	
Lacking service status info	56	

As can be seen, about two-thirds of users identify themselves as either applicants or plaintiffs in their legal matters. Just under a quarter say they as respondents or defendants and a smaller group cite the “Other” category.

Service areas

Users are also asked about the type of action they are pursuing or responding to. The following breakdown applies here.

Figure 23: Type of legal action

Status	Count	% Total
Initial application	121	35.8%
Application to vary	110	32.5%
No application filed	68	20.1%
Ongoing matter	30	8.9%
Emergency application	9	2.7%
Total w. info	338	
Lacking legal action type info	90	

Roughly 70 per cent of matters concern initial applications or applications to vary. Slightly over 20 per cent say that no application has been filed with smaller percentages selecting either “ongoing matter” or “emergency application.”

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

Figure 24: Areas of law

Area	Count	% Total
Family	291	76.0%
Civil	69	18.0%
Judicial Review	23	6.0%
Total w. info	383	
Lacking area of law info	45	

As can be seen, more than three-quarters of SHC services provided to date fall within the family law area. Civil matters and judicial review-related services together account for the remaining 24 per cent.⁸

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

⁸ The data in this table appear at odds with that tallied for sub-areas of user service in Figure 28. This anomaly may indicate an under-reporting of Judicial Review areas in Figure 24 and warrants further investigation. See the discussion following Table 28.

Figure 25: Gender breakdown of Centre service areas

Area	Female	% Total	Male	% Total
Family law	141	82.5%	131	70.4%
Civil law	25	14.6%	42	22.6%
Judicial review	5	2.9%	13	7.0%
Total w. info	171		186	
Lacking service area info	20		21	

Centre family law services are distributed across a range of sub-areas. The following table offers a breakdown.

Figure 26: Family law sub-areas: service distribution

Sub-area	Count	% of total visits
Child Support	129	30.1%
Divorce	129	30.1%
Custody	57	13.3%
Other	57	13.3%
Access	37	8.6%
Property Division	33	7.7%
Spousal Support	31	7.2%
Guardianship	23	5.4%
Restraining	10	2.3%
ISO-REMO	5	1.2%
Adoption	2	0.5%
	493*	within a total of 428 visits

* The total of the above Count column is 493 because each instance of service delivery can potentially span multiple sub-areas.

Family law services are most concentrated in the child support, divorce and custody sub-areas with these three found in close to three-quarters of all family law service instances. Other sub-areas occur with less frequency.

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

Figure 27: Civil law sub-areas: service distribution

Sub-Areas	Count	% of total visits
Wills Litigation	12	2.8%
Consumer Contract	11	2.6%
Personal Injury	9	2.1%
Consumer Other	3	0.7%
Consumer Bankruptcy	2	0.5%
Consumer Foreclosure	2	0.5%
Wills Procedure	1	0.2%
Adult Guardianship	1	0.2%
	41 within a total of 428 visits	

As can be seen, the incidence of civil law service delivery at the SHC is significantly less than that found in the family arena. The most common sub-areas here are related to procedural issues surrounding wills, and consumer contracts.

The following figure offers a sub-area breakdown for Centre services offered in the judicial review area and in small claims.

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

Sub-area	Count	% Total visits
Human Rights	38	8.9%
Other	7	1.6%
Landlord-Tenant	5	1.2%
Small Claims	5	1.2%
Motor Vehicle License	2	0.5%
	57 within a total of 428 visits	

Interestingly, at 57, the total count of services for judicial review and other sub-areas exceeds that for the civil area (41 services). This tabulation appears inconsistent with the information reported in Figure 24. However, many instances of "Human Rights" service delivery have been recorded under the "Other" field in the database when Judicial Review is not recorded as the primary "area of law" for locating the user's issue.⁹

⁹ This "anomaly" will need to be reviewed with Centre staff to see if either a change in the database or a change in methods of data entry is warranted.

Service Delivery

What kinds of services are provided by SHC staff? In general, services fall into one of three main categories: information, assistance with forms, and referrals. The table in Figure 29 offers a summary of services provided during the first four and a half months of the Centre's operation.

Figure 29: Summary of SHC services, by type

Service	Count	Frequency
Information	334	78.0%
Forms Assistance	268	62.6%
Referral	74	17.3%
Total services	676	

A total of 676 services provided over the course of 428 user visits represents an average of 1.6 services per visit. As the table shows, the most common type of service offered is the provision of information (found in 78 per cent of user visits), followed by assistance with the completion of court forms (found in about 63 per cent of visits). Referral services are provided just over 17 per cent of the time, or about one visit in six.

Types of resources provided to users break down as follows.

Figure 30: Summary SHC resource categories

Service categories	Count	% of Total Visits
Resource room	209	48.8%
Internet	198	46.3%
Computer	173	40.4%
Photocopier	153	35.7%
Printer	141	32.9%
Publications	133	31.1%
Interview room	66	15.4%
Centre phone	27	6.3%
Computer disks	16	3.7%
LawLINE phone	3	0.7%
Sum of individual resources provided	1,117	
Total full-service visits	428	
Average resources per visit	2.6	

An average visit to the SHC has the user accessing 2.6 different services. The six resources at the top of the table in Figure 29 all occur on average more than 30 per cent of the time. In the case of resource room use and Internet access, these services occur almost 50 per cent of the time.

The Centre's intake process also records data for return visits to the SHC by users. A total of 85 users fell into this category. The data in Figure 31 summarizes the reasons users provide for why they are returning to the Centre.

Figure 31: Reasons for user return visits

Reasons	Count	% Total return visits
Accessing centre resources again	56	65.9%
Needs help with forms	32	37.6%
Has additional questions	30	35.3%
Responding to new documents	14	16.5%
Other	9	10.6%
Next step in the process	8	9.4%
Court appearance upcoming	3	3.5%
	152 reasons for 85 return visits	

In close to two-third of cases, users return to utilize Centre resources again. More than a third of the time, they return to ask additional questions or to get new or further help with the completion of their court forms. Other reasons – such as responding to new court documents or getting ready for the next step in a legal process – occur less frequently.

Referrals to other services

The intake database system developed for use at the Centre also tracks user referrals. The intention here is twofold: to provide concrete service and assistance to users, and to provide a base of information capable of offering insight into the connections users routinely make in negotiating their way through services and supports, both inside and outside the court system.

The table in Figure 32 shows a monthly tally of SHC referrals made during the time of its operation.

Figure 32: Monthly SHC referral tally

Month	Total referrals made	Days of SHC operation	Average referrals per day
April	34	9	3.8
May	59	20	3.0
June	37	17	2.2
July	48	13	3.7
August	53	21	2.5
September	7	2	3.5
	238	82	2.9

The data in the table show that on average and despite month-to-month fluctuations, the SHC makes approximately three referrals per day of operation.¹⁰

In what legal areas are most referrals occurring? Figure 33 provides a breakdown.

Figure 33: Legal area of SHC referrals

Legal area	Referral count	% Total
Family	103	76.3%
Civil	23	17.0%
Judicial Review	9	6.7%
	135	

Three-quarters of Centre referrals fall within the family law area with the other two main service areas sharing the remaining quarter. The pattern of referrals suggested here closely matches the overall pattern of SHC service delivery by legal area (see Figure 23). It would appear that Centre staff are making referrals in close proportion to the actual volume of service delivery by legal area.

The following figure shows where users are being referred.

¹⁰ These referrals are in addition to the "brief referrals" itemized in the discussion of "Brief Service" delivery earlier in this report.

Figure 34: Referral destinations

Referral to:	Referral count	% Total
Pro bono services	43	23.6%
Duty counsel	36	19.8%
Registry	26	14.3%
Private bar lawyer*	19	10.4%
Other referral	16	8.8%
LawLINE	12	6.6%
Family Justice Counsellors	9	4.9%
Legal Aid applications	7	3.8%
FMEP	4	2.2%
Courthouse library	3	1.6%
CLAS	2	1.1%
Mediation-dispute resolution services	2	1.1%
Counselling	1	0.5%
Interpreter-translator	1	0.5%
Workshops	1	0.5%
	182	

* 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. In this case, the SHC can steer users in appropriate directions to seek further assistance of this nature.

The top four referral destinations account for more than two-thirds of all referrals. All fall within the justice system. Referrals to destinations outside the circle of other legal resources are sparse within the service model.

The following table examines the top four referral destinations by month of referral.

Figure 35: SHC referrals by month

Month	Registry	Duty Counsel	Private bar	Pro Bono
Apr-05	4	7	0	4
May-05	2	6	0	5
Jun-05	4	11	1	4
Jul-05	9	2	4	16
Aug-05	6	10	11	12
Totals	25	36	16	41

The most striking thing about this referral pattern is the growth over the past two months in referrals to lawyer advice services. What these patterns suggest is that the SHC has begun to solidify connections into this area. The latter is a theme that will be explored in greater detail in the analysis of interview data to follow.

User barriers

Centre intake also records information related to barriers users experience in accessing and using legal resources. The following figure provides a summary of the major types of barriers reported. (For users' language issues, see Figures 8 and 9, above.)

Figure 36: User barriers to service

Barrier type	Count	% Total	Explanation
Other	31	56.4%	(hours, parking, fees, computer, distance)
Transportation	10	18.2%	
Location	6	10.9%	
Disability (health)	5	9.1%	
Literacy	2	3.6%	
Child care	1	1.8%	
	55		

As can be seen, over the course of 428 user visits, a total of 55 barriers were reported by users. This would indicate a "one in eight" ratio of barrier cited to user visits. However, users can report more than one barrier in the course of a single Centre visit. Only three users did this so, as a consequence, its impact on the overall level of reporting is minimal.

Because of this, the actual incidence of reported barriers is less than what is indicated above.

J. SHC interview information

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 37: Interviews by status of interviewee

Status	Interviews Conducted
Registry staff (DDR, clerks, administrative)	8
Judges & masters	5
Service providers & stakeholders	26
SHC staff	4
SHC users	24
Total	67

Technically, registry staff fall into the category of service providers and stakeholders. However, they along with judges and masters are selected for special consideration because their views are relevant to specifying and tracking efficiency benefits for the justice system. For this reason, the two groups have been separated out.

Stakeholders and service providers 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, 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.

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

- How and why the SHC is being accessed
- Overall and specific impressions of SHC service
- General and specific suggestions for SHC service changes
- User referral issues, patterns and experiences
- User barriers
- SHC service model experiences and suggestions
- Efficiency measures and assessments
- Service model replication experiences and ideas

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, stakeholders, registry personnel or judges and masters are properly reflected in the discussion.

SHC access – views of users

User interviews confirm the overall pattern of Centre access reflected in Centre database statistics. The largest block of users reports having been referred from the court registry. Smaller groups report having heard of the Centre's existence from judges, contacts in the family justice system, and from friends and family.

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.

Quality of service – views of users

When asked about the general quality of their experiences at the SHC, the overwhelming pattern of user responses is positive. The vast majority of users said that they were treated by staff with dignity and respect, and that they obtained necessary help. The positive character of responses is, however, qualified in important ways. A sample of user interview comments is provided below to convey a sense of the overall mood of qualified appreciation.

Figure 38: Select user comments regarding overall SHC service quality

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.
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.
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.
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.
I think the service is extremely good. The average person has no idea about litigation. Certainly having a place like this helps a lot.
Overall the service is OK. But I wouldn't say I feel 100 per cent prepared.
It is very helpful. But people who come here need to know their case well. The staff here can direct the person but there's a limit to what they can do because they are not lawyers.

The comments convey both a clear sense of appreciation and satisfaction, tempered by a realization that the SHC cannot meet all of their legal needs. For

this reason, user comments are often characterized by varying degrees of disquiet and anxiety along with feelings of vulnerability and fear.

Users reported accessing a range of specific Centre services. Over half of those interviewed 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 the services 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 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.

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 39: 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 to 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.

In some cases, the barriers are surmounted once users gain access to the Centre. For example, one user spoke of having to produce documents without having access to key resources like a computer or the Internet.

Three users said they were in a state of confusion, fear and anxiety in trying to move their cases forward. Another user talked about her difficulty in being able to remember key information related to taking action on her legal matter.

The most common circumstance cited was lack of the funds to hire a lawyer, a factor mentioned by four different users who were interviewed. 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 produced knowing his former partner's family is arranging for counsel in court when he does not have representation.

Many of the users had been referred to the Centre by the registry. One user talked of not being able to count on consistent levels of assistance when dealing with counter staff within the registry.

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. Another made reference to difficulties experienced in his family-related issue involving both federal and provincial spheres of jurisdiction.

A sample of user comments relating to barriers is provided below.

Figure 40: 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 find that with the registry people, their service and friendliness is really uneven. Sometimes it is quite good and sometimes it is not.
I'm doing an appeal. The court sent me here but they have said they can't help me.

User suggestions for service improvement

All users were asked and many offered suggestions as to how Centre services might be changed or improved. Three of 24 users replied that the service was OK as it currently stood. For those proposing changes, the following issues were raised.

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 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.
5. *Physical resources*– users offered a range of comments on the nature and configuration of resources at the Centre.
 - Three users suggested that having a private meeting space would better meet their needs and increase their comfort level when discussing sensitive issues.
 - Two users felt that the SHC computers should be upgraded to newer or faster models.
 - Two users wanted to have the courthouse library's online capacities accessible from the Centre.
 - One user, who had viewed the video about judicial case conferences, wanted more videos at the Centre explaining the court process.
 - Three users, who all appreciated the ability to print documents, wanted to ensure they had access to low-cost printing or were able to bring their own paper. One also wanted a fax machine, a heavy-duty stapler and punch.
 - One user identified the need for a free phone available in the room.

Stakeholder, service provider and staff perspectives on Centre services

Stakeholders and service providers involved with the SHC had various general comments regarding their experiences with the Centre. The perspectives differ from those of users in that they reflect widely varying degrees of contact and/or connection with Centre operation. In some cases, stakeholders or service providers lacked direct experience with what the Centre does and how it

functions, but had reflective or at times speculative comments on the nature and direction of the services it provided.

To many stakeholders and service providers, the Centre was the fruition of a new idea and a new approach to offering direct services to litigants lacking legal representation. For some, this new approach was unsettling in relation to their experiences with how services have traditionally been made available to clients or members of the public. Where the Centre might go in the future was still uncertain to them. And exactly what level of benefit it could reasonably be expected to produce was also seen as unclear.

However, through all of this, there was a shared sense that the benefits to be had from its operation were tangible ones. There was also a sense of realism, at times resigned, to the effect that delivering these kinds of services to users was necessary and that, properly piloted and managed, the Centre model had valuable things to offer, on many levels and to different groups and interests.

Many of the more general comments referenced the start-up challenges involved in forging a shared view of an operational service model.

A pro bono lawyer offered the view that, with trends leading to the unbundling of lawyers' services, this model was "better than nothing at all." A service provider opined that lawyers would find the model a challenge, owing to their difficulty in accepting an unfamiliar "coaching role" with clients. Others, from diverse vantage points, referenced expected benefits and efficiencies.

In general terms, stakeholders, service providers, registry people and Centre staff held to the general view that the SHC was a valuable service that helped complement rather than compete with other services offered to unrepresented litigants. This sentiment recurred throughout the interview round and was referenced directly in close to 70 per cent of all "non-user" interviews. Interviewees emphasized the value of providing informational resources to litigants. They drew attention to key focal areas of service, such as assistance with the preparation of court forms. And they underscored a need for the Centre to define its role carefully and articulate its functioning with other available services.

Specific comments on services and their impact

- *The SHC is generally accessible to users*

Centre staff report feeling that most users having a relatively easy time finding and accessing the Centre. Some users are tentative upon first locating the Centre but, once gaining familiarity with Centre services and modes of operation, have little problem coming to access resources. (Interviews with users tend to confirm this observation.)

These views have to be qualified somewhat by specific service recommendations made in regard to hours of operation and location, factors which have a clear impact on the accessibility of service. They need also to be qualified by an acknowledgement that measuring access amongst those who indeed make it to the Centre effectively filters out recognition of those who, by virtue of barriers like language, anxiety, confidence or mental health factors, fail to make it over this threshold. Those who come and use the Centre have, in the words of one stakeholder “persistence, diligence, stubbornness and discipline that tons of people just don’t have.”

- *The SHC has helped boost users’ confidence in taking on their issues*

This observation is widely shared amongst the different categories of people interviewed for the evaluation. The comments below reflect the general tenor of what stakeholders and service providers said.

Figure 41: Select comments regarding user confidence

<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. - AG Ministry stakeholder</p>

- *The SHC is having clear and immediate benefits for staff and work flow at the registry*

As indicated before, the court registry has been a principal source of direct referrals to the SHC as well as a recipient of referrals made from the Centre.

A perceived beneficial impact emerged clearly out of interviews undertaken with eight staff in the court registry through the summer months. Registry staff working at the family, civil, and other counters all report the presence of the SHC as having a salutary impact on their ability to do their work. The reason is quite simple. People come to the registry with difficult issues or questions they expect to have answered and staff are limited in the time they can spend with them. It

is inappropriate to their role to field detailed questions from the public, particularly when these interactions can lead to significant backlog at the registry counters. Prior to the existence of the Centre, staff reported, they had few if any options as to where to send these people for additional assistance with forms or to answer technical questions.

Registry staff now report an improvement in the level of focus or preparedness on the part of people who have used the Centre. Exchanges with SHC users are also seen to carry less acrimony and Centre users are seen to possess increased confidence and a clearer sense of the direction they are heading.

It should also be emphasized that, when interviewed at an earlier stage of planning for the SHC, some registry staff had expressed considerable skepticism regarding the potential value of the SHC service model. Indeed, such views were common prior to the model being implemented in April, 2005. These perspectives have changed significantly in light of experiences gained since the Centre opened its doors.

Examples of registry staff comments are provided below. These few comments are broadly representative of the “registry perspective,” in light of the initial four months direct experience in making SHC referrals, receiving referrals from the SHC, and dealing with users who have used form completion and information services at the SHC.

Figure 42: Select comments regarding user referrals from the registry

<p>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)</p>
<p>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)</p>
<p>I see less line-ups and my 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. This has been very obvious to me. - Registry administrator</p>

- *The SHC allows for a more efficient use of time for legal advice lawyers who make or receive referrals*

This emerged as a key issue amongst staff, stakeholders, 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 43: Select comments regarding SHC impact on lawyer time

<p>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.</p> <p>- Supreme Court family duty counsel lawyer</p>
<p>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.</p> <p>- Supreme Court family duty counsel intake worker</p>
<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>- Pro bono intake worker</p>

- *Referrals to and from the SHC have facilitated user access within the justice system*

Making and receiving referrals has from the start been a part of the SHC service model. The most common referral experience cited by stakeholders 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.

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

Figure 44: Select comments regarding SHC referrals to and from other services

<p>The referrals are becoming increasingly easier with the passage of time. With the Salvation Army pro bono clinic, the person there emails us every week with a list of openings that enables us to facilitate getting users in to see a lawyer.</p> <p>- SHC staff</p>
<p>The communication between us [Access Justice] and them [SHC] has greatly improved so clients can be more quickly referred to help. What we would like is for that to develop further and for clients to be directly booked by the Centre. The use of our clinics has greatly increased – the clinic is booked up ten days in advance on civil.</p> <p>- Pro bono service provider</p>
<p>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.</p> <p>- Supreme Court master</p>
<p>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.</p> <p>- Supreme Court family duty counsel</p>

- *Specific referrals are determined by perceptions of client efficacy*

The type of referrals made with clients will be largely determined by judgments as to client capacity and efficacy. These judgments play a role in determining whether clients will be able to deal with the specific challenges that await them as they make decisions about how to proceed. Stakeholders and service providers report that there are different kinds of inter-group referrals that are restricted to users having higher levels of perceived self-efficacy. The following comments reflect these kinds of considerations.

Figure 45: Referrals and perceptions of client efficacy

Usually the person we send has an idea of what's going on and what they need to do. They may not be computer literate but they have some idea. They need to do their financial statement and make an affidavit. - Supreme Court family duty counsel intake worker
We also have the judicial review clinic. The clinic is for people who are doing judicial review themselves and usually the clients have done some research on the web themselves. Some come from the Centre... - Community advocacy lawyer
Depending on the person's skill level, most people can do this themselves with a little help [from the SHC]. They can do the documents by themselves. It makes our job a lot easier to give them advice on specific items. - Supreme Court family duty counsel

Client efficacy issues – views of stakeholders & service providers

The previous section of this report touched on the impact that service providers' assessments of client efficacy had on referral patterns. The purpose of this section is to explore perceptions of efficacy on a more general level.

By itself, poverty is not necessarily a client barrier. Income statistics cited in the first part of this report would likely place upwards of two-thirds of SHC users below the poverty line (using, for example, Statistics Canada's *Low Income Cut-Offs*). While poor people do face enormous difficulties accessing timely legal assistance, SHC database information documenting user access and service delivery reflects the fact that many do seek out and use resources to assist with a legal matter.

That being said, poverty often goes hand-in-hand with a range of other factors – such as language barriers, cultural isolation, gender inequality and mental health challenges. In conjunction with any of these factors, poverty can clearly be seen as a barrier. Further, any of these factors can by themselves impede access to timely legal assistance.

By far the largest efficacy issue identified in interviews with stakeholders and service providers was that of disorientation, where clients lacked the capacity to find their way through difficult legal procedures or to organize and complete necessary court documents. Registry staff report a high incidence of these individuals, many of whom are now referred to the Centre. SHC staff echo this assessment.

Figure 46: Staff references to user disorientation

People often ask, why is everything so complicated? When people come in here they are sometimes very frustrated. There's usually lots of rigmarole attached to various legal procedures.

Some people have struggled with their issues for years and not gotten very far.

Some people are intimidated. They have a lot of difficulties. They're not sure how to handle the issues.

Language barriers loomed as the second most frequently cited barrier facing people using the Centre. Registry staff also identified this issue as a huge one affecting their ability to provide service at the counter. In the absence of alternate language service at the Centre, the issue reflects a significant area of unmet need. SHC staff had the following comments about this issue.

Figure 47: Staff references to user language barriers

There are a lot of challenges faced by users who come in here. This creates a need for different materials in different languages. If there is a language barrier it needs to be addressed. We get a lot of people here who speak Mandarin, Cantonese, or Punjabi.

The other thing that is needed is language support. There are a lot of people lacking the skills to be able to convey a sense of their problems, let alone deal with what's being said to them.

I really wish we could access interpreting services. Some people come with a friend to interpret, but that person may not be familiar with legal terminology. There are times when I've had to tell people I just could not help them, because of language.

In discussions with evaluators, SHC staff said that the database used to track full-service clients effectively understates the degree of the language problem. This is because staff perceives a significant body of potential Centre users leaving the premises when they encounter a perceived language barrier. This category of potential user is not currently captured in the SHC database or in "brief service" statistics.

Two service providers also identified literacy as a significant barrier facing users.

Specific staff, stakeholder, and service provider suggestions for SHC service changes

In more specific terms, stakeholders and service providers offered the following comments in regard to how services at the Centre might be improved.

- ***Enhanced information resources*** – Centre staff as well as stakeholders and service providers identified specific areas where new or better information resources should be provided to users on-site at the Centre. These included
 - more templates or “macros” of court documents,
 - precedents and examples from previous court actions,
 - specialized information on probate and bankruptcy, and
 - specifics on court cost recovery.

Most of these comments reflect the perspectives of those working in frontline contact with unrepresented litigants and for that reason have a highly practical and specific focus.

- ***Interpretation services*** – Staff emphasized that interpretation is a significant area of demand and that access to professional services would be a benefit in cases where there is necessity and urgency. (To date, the staff solution in such cases has been to go looking in the registry for someone who can speak the language.) This is an area that staff see as being under-represented in the statistics gathered at the Centre. Only a small number of users report difficulty receiving language in English (less than 10 per cent). However, Centre staff stress that a significant number of non-English speakers do not successfully make it over the service delivery threshold. In a number of cases, people may come to the door, take a quick look at the physical layout, do an assessment of what is needed to use the Centre, and walk away. Such people are not captured as Centre users and are therefore not reflected in Centre statistics.¹¹
- ***Closer proximity to other court services*** – Duty counsel, the courthouse library, legal aid, family justice counsellors, the registry and PLEI service providers were all mentioned in the context of considerations of the need to situate the SHC close to other court system services. For one stakeholder, having closer proximity to other court services offered the potential for the SHC to evolve into a coordinating hub.
- ***Private areas for user consultations*** – Two stakeholders echoed concern identified by three users – that the open space configuration of the SHC does not accommodate the need for private consultations with users.
- ***Changes in hours*** – A number of stakeholder and service provider interviews echoed user sentiments to the effect that the SHC should

¹¹ “If there was a way we could access interpreters at MOSAIC or SUCCESS, it would be really helpful. Is there was an ability to work with an interpreter we could work out a protocol to access these services.” - SHC staff member

investigate ways of remaining open over the lunch period and possibly extending hours into the evening or to weekends. Interviewees cited in particular the difficulties litigants who work regular hours have in accessing Centre services.

- *Changes in service scope and parameters* – Possibilities identified for consideration by stakeholders and service providers include provincial court issues (family), court of appeal cases, and possibly federal court matters (if funding support for this could be obtained from the federal Department of Justice).
- *Centre promotion with private bar lawyers and with the bench* – This idea was expressed in the context of a consideration of service linkages developed to connect the SHC with pro bono service providers. It was also mentioned in the context of building credibility in the profession for the role of legal information services in the developing environment of “unbundled services.”
- *Other specific service-related ideas* – These included placing duty counsel at the registry counter one day at week to address the needs of unrepresented litigant right there, and the swearing of affidavits at SHC.
- *Ideas for staff training* – SHC staff had specific comments related to training. In this connection, two staff called for “cross-over training” to allow those with work backgrounds in family law to gain greater familiarity with the civil side, and *vice versa*. Another staff member called for training in different, more specialized areas of court process, seeing this kind of “minutiae” as key to offering quality service because that “is what people need.” A third idea centred on seconding registry staff to the SHC to deliver service while offering more extensive training to SHC staff on the workings of the registry.

The need for additional and/or more specialized training was an idea echoed by stakeholder representatives working in the family justice system. It was also a concept that arose in discussions of how the model might take shape in other locations. For this reason, it will be revisited in the context of this report’s discussion of replication ideas.

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. In the words of one stakeholder from the public legal education sector,

“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.”

This approach extends to some of the resources developed for use at the Centre. To the same stakeholder,

“It indicates a lack of understanding about what is required to reach people who don’t have legal skills. From the legal systems point of view they are perfectly OK. From a user’s point of view they aren’t accessible or useful.”

There is also evidence from the interviews that outside 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. Issues like language and personal capacity appear to figure in these decisions. The following comment was made by a referring service provider.

“There are times when we do not refer a client to the Centre. If they have no grasp of what is needed, we don’t send them. If they have language barriers, we don’t send them.”

Another critique of the SHC model comes for the most part from members of the legal profession. In its general form, this critique can be paraphrased as follows.

Cuts in legal aid coverage have created a growing volume of people with pressing legal issues who are unable to afford a lawyer or otherwise access legal advice. These individuals are vulnerable and deserve proper representation. Any self-help initiative falling short of that goal is at best a half-measure and at worst a deception that can lure people into choices that have bad consequences.

Drawing on variants of this view, members of the legal profession conveyed sentiments that run the gamut from qualified endorsement to serious reservation. The following sample of interview comments conveys a sense of the views involved.

Figure 48: Service model reservations: members of the bar

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.

You can provide a beautiful service where the client feels that finally his voice is being heard, and he won’t discover until two or three years later that he has not got the right remedy. The client can feel good but is not really helped.

Justice Brenner at the opening said that self-representation was “empowering.” It is if you win.

Service model, staff roles and staff turnover

An important theme among service providers and stakeholders was the recognition of the demands placed upon the staff in providing services. Both service providers and stakeholders commented on the ability of the initial start-up staff to cut through the complexity of people's issues. One stakeholder commented in particular that this high level of experience is crucial to the Centre's ability to serve people. From this perspective, there is an acknowledgement that Centre staff provides more than an information service; they provide assistance and guidance to users along with the information.

A related theme was the importance of relationships between Centre staff and other service providers. These relationships have been facilitated by SHC staff having extensive background in areas like court services management and family justice service delivery.

However, concerns were raised in some evaluation interviews about staff turnover during the Centre's pilot phase. This was also an issue commented on in an interview looking at the consistency of contact between the Centre and the Supreme Court Family Duty Counsel Project. These views highlight a specific evaluation concern that high or continued staff turnover will have an adverse impact on the consistency of service delivery during the pilot period of SHC operation.

Service model evolution: connections with the pro bono sector

The service model designed for use at the SHC rests on a distinction between offering legal information on one side, and providing legal advice on the other. In the spring of 2005, the pilot service model developed for use in Vancouver ruled out offering legal advice to users as part of in-house Centre services. The way the SHC has dealt with this issue has been to develop expanded communication and referral linkages into pro bono organizations operating in the Vancouver area. The linkages work in both directions: as sources of referrals for users to free legal help and as a resource for pro bono lawyers to use when their clients need assistance with legal information, or help in assembling and completing needed court documents. Growth in the level and density of these connections is clearly reflected in referral statistics gathered at the Centre and summarized in Section H of this report. At the time of this report's preparation, the links have developed to the point where SHC staff are booking appointments on-line with one of the two major pro bono service providers. Pro bono providers are also reporting a significant increase in the demand for their services as a result of links with the SHC.

Development of these linkages constitutes perhaps the most important example of how the SHC service model has evolved from the time the Centre's doors were opened in the spring. The linkages have also served to consolidate important connections that, through referrals, extend the concrete supports

offered to users while beginning to break down the hostility and suspicion of the legal profession. The following comments illustrate these points.

Figure 49: Comments on links with the pro bono sector

<p>There is a crying need for what the Centre is providing and we think it should be done in tandem with lawyers giving advice. - Pro bono lawyer</p>
<p>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</p>
<p>Mostly the collaboration is a success. Access Justice/Salvation Army (and Supreme Court duty counsel) all have people who are really very good at their job and that makes our job a lot easier. - SHC staff</p>

How this issue will continue to evolve into the future is not yet clear. For two Centre staff, having access to legal counsel would provide a valuable resource in allowing them to field difficult questions from users. And to at least two stakeholders, the need for on-site legal help is a real one that will have to be revisited in the future.

It is also unclear at this juncture how the solidification of relationships connecting the Centre with pro bono service providers serves to offset users' (and others') concerns regarding the lack of an on-site legal advice service. To the extent that users are able to gain timely access to lawyers through the Centre's referral contacts with pro bono services, some of these concerns may be covered off. It is an issue that evaluators will need to give attention to in the next stage of the evaluation plan for the pilot.

Stakeholder and service provider views on SHC effectiveness

Stakeholders report a range of opinions regarding the ability of the SHC to have a beneficial impact on the efficiency of the justice system. Gauging the efficiency impact of the Centre is an idea addressed in Objective 4 of the Centre evaluation plan.

"To determine the degree to which the Centre, by increasing unrepresented litigant's access to justice, also facilitates efficiencies in the court system"

The focus of these expected efficiencies was on two areas: the Supreme Court registry and the courtroom.

(a) Registry efficiencies: the “Tracking Sheet”

To address this evaluation need with the Supreme Court registry, evaluators developed a data gathering exercise in consultation with registry desk and supervisory staff. 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 contact and interactions with registry users. The exercise was conducted during a two-week period starting in late June of 2005. The period was subsequently extended to the end of the third week of July in order to extend opportunities for data collection.

The data form used at the registry was designed to differentiate registry users who had used the SHC from those who had not. It was also intended to track the degree of preparedness and orientation of users in the pursuit of their legal matters at the registry. The figure below shows the structure of the data form used.

Figure 50: Registry Tracking Sheet

Self-Help Centre	
Tracking Sheet	
Date: _____	File Number: _____
Had the person been to the Self-Help Centre?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Did the person know what he/she needed to do?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/> Small amount
<input type="checkbox"/> More	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Did the person ask informed questions?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/> Small amount
<input type="checkbox"/> More	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Were documents complete and ready for filing?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/> Small amount
<input type="checkbox"/> More	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
What was their reason for visiting the Registry?	
(check all that apply)	
<input type="checkbox"/> To file originating documents	
<input type="checkbox"/> To file subsequent pleadings	
<input type="checkbox"/> To file Notice of Hearing/Notice of Trial	
<input type="checkbox"/> To file an application to the court	
<input type="checkbox"/> To ask questions	
<input type="checkbox"/> To file other documents	

The form was tested and refined in conjunction with registry staff input during May and early June. Over the period June 22nd to July 27th it was implemented by registry staff. Owing to the pressures of their work, registry staff members participating in the data gathering subsequently reported that nowhere near the

total volume of users was captured by the survey. Despite this, they felt information was gathered from registry users on a near-random basis.

Data was collected for 57 registry users over this period. Reasons reported for visiting the registry were as follows.

Figure 51: Reasons for registry visits

Reason For visit	Count
To file originating documents	24
To file an application to the court	13
To ask questions	7
To file other documents	6
To file subsequent pleadings	5
To file Notice of Hearing/Notice of Trial	1
No reason provided	6
Total reasons provided	62 (multiple reasons possible)

Of the 57 users, nine had been to the SHC prior to their visit to the registry. The following section summarizes pattern of responses for the nine SHC users as compared with the 48 non-users for the three different “efficiency” and “orientation” measures found on the sheet.

Figure 52: Did the person know what he/she needed to do?

Response	Non-users	Users
No	7	0
A small amount	19	1
More than a small amount	13	1
Yes	8	7
Totals	47	9
More & Yes as % total	44.7%	88.9%
No & Small Amount as % Total	55.3%	11.1%

SHC users were twice as likely percentage-wise to be classed by staff as in “More than a small amount” or “Yes” categories, and only one-eighth as like to be classed as either “No” or “A small amount” categories.

The second measure related to staff assessments of “the quality” of questions users asked.

Figure 53: Did the person ask informed questions?

Response	Non-users	Users
No	5	0
A small amount	16	1
More than a small amount	19	3
Yes	8	3
Totals	48	7
More & Yes as % total	56.3%	85.7%
No & Small Amount as % Total	43.8%	14.3%

SHC users were judged far more likely to ask informed questions of staff (“More than a small amount” and “Yes”). They were only a third as likely to ask “uninformed” questions (“No” or “A small amount”).

The third and final measure related to users’ perceived degree of preparedness with their documents.

Figure 54: Were documents ready and complete for filing?

Response	Non-users	Users
No	24	1
A small amount	11	1
More than a small amount	4	3
Yes	6	4
Totals	45	9
More & Yes as % total	22.2%	77.8%
No & Small Amount as % Total	77.8%	22.2%

Users were three and a half times more likely to be judged “document ready” than non-users, and less than a third as likely to be seen as unready.

The results of this data gathering exercise, while promising, are not conclusive owing to the small size of the data set. As mentioned, discussions with registry staff indicate the data gathering tool was not consistently implemented. More information should therefore be gathered. However, the clear differentiation of result patterns for SHC users and non-users across each of the three performance/readiness measures is suggestive of a positive impact of the SHC on work within the registry.

Evaluators plan to repeat the registry data gathering sometime later in the fall in the hope of expanding on the size of the data set and offering more definitive

conclusions. Results from this second round will be published in the next evaluation report.

(b) Court system efficiencies: views of judges, masters, and court clerks

Evaluators interviewed two Supreme Court judges in order to explore how, from their unique vantage point, Centre services were having an impact on the courts. One judge reported she had not yet referred anyone to the Centre, nor had she seen anyone in court who she knew had visited the Centre. She was, however, aware of what the SHC did and was enthusiastic in her support of the services she had heard it offered to unrepresented litigants.

The other judge did report experience with making a referral to the Centre – of an applicant appearing before her who had not had his supporting documents in order. She went on to say she never saw the man again but was glad to have had the opportunity to send him to a place that offered services clearly relevant to his needs.

Both judges saw the need to distribute information about the Centre's existence and the services it provides more widely on the bench. One noted that an upcoming judges' conference in November would provide an excellent opportunity for a Centre representative to do a presentation.

Efforts to reach Supreme Court masters resulted in three interviews. All of the masters offered words of support for the SHC concept and felt that it would have a beneficial impact on their work and the functioning of the court. In brief comments, one master cited a potential ability to stand-down cases and send users for brief informational input of support from the Centre. However, only one of the masters had a clear picture of what the SHC did by way of concrete services (beyond "providing information"). Two of them did not feel themselves in a position to comment on how well Centre users were faring in their dealings with the court, compared with those not using the Centre. The master who said he had had experience dealing with SHC users made the following comments about how the court deals with unrepresented accused and the impact he sees the Centre as having.

"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."

"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?"

Finally,

"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..."

It gives them a lot more confidence if they know that their paperwork is not going to be criticized and rejected.”

The Supreme Court law officer commented on the awareness of the Centre on the part of judges and masters. She noted that “some judges are relieved that it exists,” but went on to add that knowledge of the Centre and what it does is not widespread on the bench and, despite her efforts and those of others to disseminate information about the SHC, more needs to be done to educate judges and bring them up to speed on the Centre’s role.

Properly canvassing the views of the bench is vital to the conduct of the evaluation. Judges and masters are in a unique position to witness and assess the impact of people appearing in court without legal representation. Obtaining their views will also be an important part of evaluators’ efforts to gauge the impact of the Centre on court operations and efficiency.

Court clerks were contacted on two occasions but reported that none of their number had as yet formed impressions of the impact of the Centre to contribute anything substantial to this initial report. Efforts to solicit their perspectives will be continued in the next phase

K. SHC and system considerations

Government – community collaboration

A key goal of the SHC pilot is to develop a collaborative and consultative structure in which government and community-level groups work together to deliver services. For this reason, a central goal of the evaluation has been to determine the effectiveness of the collaborative structures that have been created to link government and community partners in the development and operation of the Centre.

Over the course of evaluation interviews, all staff, stakeholders and service providers were asked variants of the following questions.

- How do you see the collaborative model of government/community organizations working?
- What factors are required to implement a collaborative structure involving both government and community partners?
- What challenges does a government/community collaborative structure face in delivering a service like this?

The purpose of this section of the report is to summarize responses to these questions.

In looking at patterns of responses, one thing that emerges clearly is a differentiation of perspective between SHC staff on the one side and stakeholders/service providers on the other. Staff were much more disposed to

offers answers that had practice service delivery implications. Stakeholders and service providers on the other hand were more inclined to look at “big picture” and policy-related questions. For members of the staff, the SHC had been launched in a climate of uncertainty about the nature of underlying collaborative relationships and how they would function in actual practice. Over the course of the Centre’s four to five months of operation, relationships linking partners and stakeholders are seen to have started to gel into durable and sustainable patterns.

On a practical level, staff see this trend reflected in the patterns of referrals that have taken shape and in the cross-organizational links that have come into being. These connections are seen to make for an easier flow of diverse resource to assist Centre users with their various needs. In specific terms, these relationships are most clearly reflected in the development of stronger communication and referral links with stakeholder groups like CLAS which can assist clients with judicial reviews, and with pro bono organizations that offer legal advice to unrepresented litigants. Staff also report a broadening of contact with other community-level organizations expressing an interest in linking up with the Centre.

Discussions with service providers linked to the Centre picked up on the theme of developing service and referral networks. Numerous service providers appreciated the fact that there was a resource available for unrepresented litigants (“now I have somewhere to send them”).

Both service providers and stakeholders acknowledged the need for further development of the networking among services. For example, one service provider commented that the Centre and the Law Line are still new to each other and that there could be a closer mesh them, as well as between the LIOW (Legal Information Outreach Worker)¹² and the Centre. There was also some discussion of the need to maintain the priority of drawing upon the contributions of the collaborators, and to continue to “park the egos at the door” and “avoid the temptation towards duplication.”

Other stakeholder groups tended to offer perspectives more focused on the larger, policy-related areas. Many individuals expressed satisfaction that the unique collaborative venture underlying the launch of the Centre – a joint government / NGO relationship focused on contributions by all partners in pursuit of a common service goal – had borne evident fruit in the time since the Centre opened its doors in April.

¹² LIOW stands for Legal Information Outreach Worker. This is a Legal Services Society program in which outreach workers help people find legal information, fill out court forms, and use the LawLINK public access computers. One LIOW is co-housed on a part-time basis at the Vancouver Law Courts with the Family Justice Centre and the Supreme Court Family Duty Counsel Project.

Individuals from diverse quarters referenced the difficult birthing process the Centre went through with the decision by the Ministry of Attorney General to take a more directive and hands-on role in Centre operation. Despite these problems, most felt that the difficulties had been worked through and that the partnership was stronger for having had this experience.

When asked about the necessary ingredients for successful collaboration, the following items rose to the top of the discussion.

- 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.

Some stakeholders and service providers reflected on the challenges the collaborators have faced. In particular, they described the ongoing issue that developed when the LIOW – a Legal Services Society employee – was available to cover off the Centre during the lunch hour but could not do so owing to union bargaining unit complications.

Lawyers active in legal advice services referenced a lack of use of lawyer-mediators on the duty counsel roster and recommended further action to realize dormant potential in that area. Others referenced the fact that, despite evident success in building links with the pro bono sector, the model required broader professional buy-in from the legal profession if it was to consolidate itself. Others made a similar point in relation to giving the Centre a larger profile in the eyes of the Supreme Court bench whose members still remain largely in the dark as regards the specifics of the Centre's operation and service model.

Among many stakeholders, there was a sense of having an opportunity now to build upon the initial success, as long as the collaboration remains committed to validating the contributions made by all partners.

Need for court system changes to accommodate unrepresented litigants

Several service providers and stakeholders offered opinions on the need for change in court procedures to deal with the increased numbers of unrepresented

litigants in the system. These included changes to registry practice (in terms of finding documents acceptable) and changes to court rules to make it easier for the unrepresented litigants, including Centre users, to act on their own behalf. While these issues were not identified as Centre tasks, they were seen as important features of the evolution of the wider collaborative environment within which the Centre is designed to operate.

Replicating the service model

Objective 3 of the Centre evaluation plan reads:

“To identify effective practices and/or any barriers in the implementation of the project to inform future program implementation.”

This objective underlines the priority attached to learning from the experiences of the Vancouver pilot with a view to clarifying needs, issues and challenges related to the possible creation of additional self-help centres in other places. This complex of issues is grouped under the rubric *replication*.

To this end, evaluators developed interview questions to canvass views on the issue of replication. Those interviewed were asked the following:

- Any thoughts about replicating this service model in other locations?
- What challenges are likely to be faced in any future effort to replicate the SHC service model in other locations?
- How might these challenges best be dealt with?

Responses dealing with the issue were gathered from 17 interviews with staff, stakeholders and service providers. Common to all interviews was the idea that replication could not be equated with duplication. Rather, replication of the service model in other venues would have to take proper account of both lessons learned from the pilot as well as differing needs and local resources available to address these needs.

As with other topics, SHC staff members were inclined to view replication from a practical vantage point. Staff identified the need to position any other SHC in close physical proximity to other required services – a law library, a registry, and pro bono/duty counsel services. Staff also identified the quality of user interactions with qualified staff as the key factor determining whether a service model finds acceptance and meets local needs. In addition, they underlined a need for adequate training and staff preparation in relation to whatever services are made to comprise the local service model. One staff member floated the idea of having a “circuit court” model of possible service delivery where a mobile service unit might visit multiple locations around the province on a rotational basis.

Stakeholders and service providers offered a range of views on the issue of replication.

The interviews elicited comments relating to obvious practical and resource-related questions: the need for adequate budget support, an accessible space close to other required services, a workable service configuration, an adequate range of Centre resources, both print and online, and a staff complement capable of providing agreed-upon services. In the terms of services, the interviews also generated different ideas regarding alternate modes of user access, including Internet, phone service, or teleconference services.

Different interviewees also offered comments on where replication should first occur. For five people, multiple regional locations were needed. Three saw New Westminster as a logical next destination. A couple suggested that, while replication was a desired goal, a higher priority should be given to waiting for the experiences of the Vancouver pilot to be fully understood and digested.

If there was a general theme running through the comments on replication, it was the idea that “one size will not fit all.” Those interviewed saw a need to define needs locally, in early and close conjunction with different interests and stakeholders. This exercise would serve the dual purpose of helping define a specific package of local service needs while identifying local resources capable of making collaborations work.

Stakeholders and service providers also felt it important to reflect closely on “scope of service” considerations used to develop the Vancouver pilot. This was because the scope of service areas – whether it includes areas like provincial family court matters, small claims or appeal court – would obviously affect the way services were delivered and who was involved in delivering them. One stakeholder felt that this kind of reconsideration might potentially be dovetailed with current family justice reform initiatives.

Several collaboration-related issues re-surfaced in the context of replication discussions. One stakeholder felt that negotiations undertaken to clarify privacy issues related to operation of the Centre’s collaborative model would make it easier to deal with similar issues elsewhere.¹³ Another referenced work done on the SHC Charter as offering a valuable “grounding” experience that could assist with service replication elsewhere in BC.

Apart from this, several individuals commented on what they saw as ground-breaking efforts to construct a government-community partnership with the pilot. Lessons learned in the areas of flexibility, compromise, and mutual respect, were all seen to carry over to potential new locations. As with the Vancouver pilot, there was general acknowledgement of the idea that developing

¹³ The Centre negotiated a privacy protocol with government that enabled evaluators to work with data collected in the course of the pilot while confirming that the protections afforded to users by privacy legislation extends to cover services offered via the Centre’s collaborative relationship.

a SHC service model for use elsewhere would require input and support from many sectors because the task was larger than what could be carried by any one organization alone.

One stakeholder emphasized that a consideration of replication provides the opportunity to address the question, is the Centre doing everything it can to help people? From this perspective, the ability of the model to reach its full potential depends on the ability of staff to provide information plus guidance and problem-solving functions. Staff would have the capacity to assist users in finding the proper context for their legal issues and in defining the concrete steps and options that lay ahead.

In this latter view, the crux to success or failure lies in the ability to hire and retain staff members with the right mix of life experience and knowledge. This goes beyond simply the provision of information, with the result that the position could not be classified as an "information position." Concomitant with this issue is the importance of maintaining staff continuity in order to avoid instability caused by turnover.

L. Directions: the Self-Help Centre & access to justice

1. The SHC service model is viewed as valuable and necessary, but with important qualifications.

Users' experience at the Centre is generally positive; they are happy to have the Centre as a resource; they feel they have been treated with dignity and respect; and they feel the Centre has saved them "time and grief." Users at or near the front end of their legal process are generally of the opinion that the information and assistance they receive at the Centre is either helping them or will help them deal with their legal problem.

Users also identified what is a significant limitation: the fact that SHC services may assist them in important ways but proceeding without legal representation remains a complex and difficult challenge. That being said, the development of tighter links with the pro bono sector may work to alleviate this type of concern.

Amongst Centre staff and others, there is a clear perception that the current service model does not adequately meet the language needs of current and potential Centre users.

For stakeholders and service providers within the court system there is a widespread perception that the Centre is having a beneficial impact on the functioning of the court by enhancing the capacity of users to act on their own behalf. Data from the registry and from masters suggests that the Centre is helping with efficiencies and that Centre users appear to be better prepared than others. However, more information is needed and will be sought from the

registry and the bench, in order to form a clearer picture of Centre impacts in these important areas.

Service providers and stakeholders generally see the Centre as complementary to existing justice system services. They are of the view that information resources make for more efficient use of lawyer time and are an asset within the overall spectrum of resources potentially available to unrepresented litigants. They are also of the view that the collaborative efforts thus far have been a success, and that the Centre needs to continue coordinating services to unrepresented litigants, to enhance resources available to them, and to build support for the Centre's work throughout the legal system.

2. Consequently, while the SHC model has broadened access to justice,

- i. It is not for everyone and meets the needs of those who have a basic level of self-efficacy.
- ii. Users face barriers, in particular disorientation with the system and language barriers.
- iii. It is not a substitute for legal advice but rather best seen as a complementary service that requires clear and direct connection to services which deliver legal advice to those in need.

3. Various suggestions for service model changes were identified in the course of evaluation interviews.

In this connection, the Centre Services and Executive Committees may wish to consider the following issues:

- i. The reach of the Centre. Who is the model reaching? Who is it not reaching? What might be done to enhance the reach of the Centre to cover those not currently using it?
- ii. Specific user barriers. What steps might be taken to overcome language barriers? Can the Centre make efforts to offer interpretation support, in conjunction with outside agencies?
- iii. Physical configuration factors. Can the model address user privacy concerns? Is it worthwhile to look at location issues in relation to other services?
- iv. Service hours. Can the model accommodate extended opening times, to cover lunch time or evenings?
- v. Staffing. What is the model's desired level of staff expertise? What are staff training needs and how are they best met? What issues arise regarding staff turnover?

- vi. Scope of service. Can the model accommodate services directed to other levels of court? What are the next steps to optimize co-ordination of services and to provide enhanced resources?
- vii. Service focus with respect to information / guidance / problem-solving. Is the model going as far as it can to help users? Can a more explicit "guidance" function be incorporated into the current model?
- viii. Service delivery and referral options. Can the model include other means of access, such as phone service? Can referral arrangements be broadened to include services outside the legal arena (as, for example, with language interpretation services)?

4. The need to better profile the Centre amongst members of the bench and the legal profession in general emerged as an important theme in the interviews.

The report has documented an uncertain reception of the SHC amongst members of the legal profession. It has also shown that the Centre's existence and service model is not yet widely understood amongst members of the bench.

A broader base of understanding and acceptance in both areas is seen to be crucial in securing both consolidation of the SHC service model in Vancouver and its potential replication elsewhere. Consideration might therefore be given by the Executive Committee to various ways of raising the Centre's profile with both groups.

M. Specific directions for the evaluation

There are additional evaluation issues identified in this report that will need attention in the period leading to the next report. These include the following:

Deeper investigation of service model suggestions and replication issues identified in the course of the interviews.
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Continued efforts to analyze the Centre's "efficiency impact" at the registry. Registry data gathering will be repeated with a view to developing our understanding of how the impact of SHC services.
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A more complete perspective as to the impact of the Centre on the functioning of the court.

Refinement of Centre data gathering with a view to addressing issue arising to date (e.g. language breakdowns of users and user barriers, capturing "urgent case" service provision, and clarification of judicial review data).
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Examination of the degree to which links with pro bono service providers may be covering off users' interest in having on-site legal advice.
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