Re-Engineering to Better Serve the Self-Represented:

the key to increased efficiency and effectiveness in court operations

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Renee Kimball, 43rd Judicial District of PA
Mike Williams, Bronx Family Court
Online resource center at srln.org
Monitors trends and events, and provides updates and analysis
Coordinates substantive working groups
Publishes scholarly articles, studies and reports
Conducts research and evaluation
Provides training and education
Fifth Judicial District of Pennsylvania, Family Division Self-Help Center

Renee Kimball
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Survey Question: “The court does a good job of assisting people who represent themselves or do not have an attorney”

- Court Users/Litigants: ranked 21 out of 25
- Judges and Court Staff: ranked 23 out of 38
- Not asked to Attorneys and External Partners
- Mean ranking for the 5th Judicial District was 4.44 but for the Family Division specifically was 4.26
Survey Question: “If it were possible to increase the current level of programs/services, or add new programs/services…which of the following would you MOST like to see…”

“Self-help/pro se assistance”
- Court users/litigants: ranked 5 out of 17
- Attorneys and justice system partners: ranked 8 out of 17
- Judges and court staff: ranked 5 out of 17
What an Innovative Idea!... Or Is It?

- Fifth Judicial District Taskforce

- Review of Successes Nationally:
  - Maricopa County, AZ
  - Orange County, CA
  - Hennepin County (Minneapolis), MN
Where Will We Begin, Where Will We End?

- Phase-in Process
  - Phase 1: Pro Se Motions Topic Areas
  - Future: All Family Division Subject Matter Areas

- Automation: 24/7, DIY Online Version of the Live Services
General Concept: Services Provided Based on Complexity of Case

- Common issue with minimal complexity?
  - There’s a workshop for that!
- Lot’s of things going on and not sure what your options are for resolving your issue?
  - One-on-One options counseling with court staff
- Really need some legal advice? – law students, volunteer attorneys, referral to unbundled legal services
Walk Me Through This...

- Automation
- First Floor, Family Law Center
- Wait
- One-on-One Options Counseling
- Check-In!
One More Time...

Client Accesses Information Desk

- Doesn’t have a scheduled event - SHC
- Doesn’t know what she wants or needs – SHC
- Has a scheduled event – directed to location of event

Client Accesses SHC

- Check-in and Intake
- Referral To service – workshop, options counseling, legal services, DIY computers (future)

Completion of Services

- Directions for Filing and Payment
- Next Steps Provided
- Dates Scheduled
Goal: Educate many people on less complex items at once

Preliminary Topics:
- Completing an IFP Petition
- Explanation of Custody Options
- Ideas?

Format:
- Classroom style interaction
- Court staff providing information
- Opportunity for Law Student/Volunteer Attorney Involvement in Q&A section of workshop
Options Counseling

- Completed by DRO Level Staff
- Process:
  - Client tells story
  - Options Counselor listens to story
  - Options Counselor explains court processes and options for resolution of problems
  - Client chooses option
- Options Counselor may refer to law student, volunteer attorney or unbundled legal services
- Options Counselor may NOT provide legal advice
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<td>Law Students</td>
<td>• Assist in Q &amp; A in Workshops&lt;br&gt;• Work on the complex cases&lt;br&gt;• Our Hope: Follow the case through to “finality”</td>
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<td>Volunteer Attorneys</td>
<td>• Assist in Q &amp; A in Workshops&lt;br&gt;• Work on the complex cases&lt;br&gt;• Option to follow the case through to “finality”</td>
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<td>The Bar</td>
<td>• Create a list of those willing to provide unbundled legal services&lt;br&gt;• List may include subject matter&lt;br&gt;• List may include collaborative law options</td>
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Partnerships: The Good and the Bad

- Steering Committee – A Must!
- Don’t forget internal Buy-In!
- Consider the partnership audience –
  - How familiar with the concept?
  - Burdens, Opportunities, Challenges
  - Training Needs?
  - Mutual concerns
How Did Things Shake Out?
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Clients referred to SHC</th>
<th>Clients referred to LAC</th>
<th>Scheduled for LAC Appt.</th>
<th>Assisted by Options Counselor</th>
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<td>326</td>
<td>98</td>
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Let’s Talk About What the Statistics Show

- We helped 909 clients
  - Our former program would have been able to help about 440 clients by now
- There has been a steady increase in traffic as the months progress
- Fully staffing the department has allowed more clients to be seen by options counselors
- The amount of fee waivers requested v. the amount of clients qualifying for the Legal Advice Clinic is low
- What do you see?
Let’s talk about what this shows:
• Days with the most traffic for the Legal Advice Clinic
• Need for volunteer attorneys and students
• This is the aggregate, what are the daily trends?

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<th>DAY OF THE WEEK</th>
<th>NUMBER OF REFERRALS</th>
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<td>Monday</td>
<td>45 (12%)</td>
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<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>102 (26%)</td>
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<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>63 (16%)</td>
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<td>Thursday</td>
<td>106 (27%)</td>
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<td>Friday</td>
<td>70 (18%)</td>
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Automation Goals

- A2J Author
- Simultaneous work
- Self-writing – really challenging!
Thank You!

- Questions?
The Bronx Family Court

Michael Williams, Clerk of Court
mwilliams@nycourts.gov
In July 2013, The Bronx County Family Court opened its new Help Center. This Center takes a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to serving the legal, procedural and informational and diverse needs of our court users.
This new space, designed with access to justice as a priority and allowed us to expand upon our volunteer legal services partnerships.

All Help Centers are part of NYS Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Fern Fisher’s Access to Justice Programs.
Why the Bronx Needed a Center

- The Bronx had the most Judicial Filings of any Family Court in NYS (approx. 57,000)
- Poorest County in NYS, great demand for legal services
- Large non-English speaking population
- Lowest educational levels in NYS
- Old building, difficult to navigate
- Poor service, long wait time, cutoffs
What was needed?

- Petition room or docketing room?
- Public Access terminals/workstations?
- More A2J/LHI interviews?
- Space?
- More Staff?
- Money?
Breakdown of Bronx Help Center

- Eight room complex conveniently located on first floor
- Large waiting area
- Petition or docketing room
- DIY (A2J) room with 10 Public access workstations
- Courtroom
- Interview rooms for partners and pro bono
Bronx Help Center Gallery

DIY WORKSTATIONS

COURTROOM
Gallery cont’d

COUNTER

WAITING AREA
Anatomy of Bronx Help Center

- Eight room complex conveniently located on first floor
- Large waiting area
- Petition or docketing room
- DIY (A2J) room with 10 Public access workstations
- Courtroom
- Interview rooms for partners and pro bono
Services Provided in Help Center

- File a petition, motion or OTSC (over 200 p/day)
- Appear before the Intake Judge/Referee in the Help Center courtroom
- Meet with a Volunteer Attorney for legal advice
- Request and/or receive a copy of court order
- Select from an array of informational booklets.
Other features

- A “Greeter” (who is also a Spanish Interpreter) to answer basic questions and navigate people to the right area expeditiously.
- A large screen TV playing court created informational videos.
- A LIFT (Legal Information for Families Today) table to assist litigants.
The NYC Volunteer Lawyer Project
Court Advocate Project (Sanctuary for Family)
Kinship Caregiver Project
Domestic Violence Advocate Assisted Petition Program
Public Administration Interns (new)
DV-APP

- Started as pilot in Bronx County March 2013, within 18 months available in all 62 Counties
- DV advocates file petition offsite via LHI, all data and pedigree info electronically transferred to Court System’s case management system.
- When litigant comes to court takes on average 20 minutes to docket, appear before judge and receive paperwork,
- Since inception, 8,000 petitions filed.
Results

- Improved our court efficiency and overall operations
- Increased overall productivity
- Reduced waiting times and drastically improved services
- Increased DIY/A2J/LHI interview and document generation usage
In the first month of opening, the Bronx Family Court filed over 20% more petitions on average with less staff.

By placing 10 DIY Form public access terminals (with headsets) in the waiting room that host multiple types of NYS Family Court A2J interviews via the Law Help Interactive site, we double the number of DIY filed forms.
What did we learn?

- LHI hosted interviews like A2J and the DV-APP was key in improving services to litigants and efficiency to court processes.
- Reduces employee workloads and everyone stress levels.
- Partnerships.
- Need continue to improve and expand services and conduct continual operational assessments.
Thank You!

- Questions?