

Southwest Georgia Legal Self- Help Center

Justice for All Pilot Project Final Report

June 1, 2018 to December 1, 2019



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Executive Summary

We are pleased to share the final report of Creating Law Libraries as Self-Help Resource Centers pilot project. In this report we want to:

- Describe implementation grant activities we accomplished during the award period and how these activities impacted of Strategic Action Plan.
- Explain the challenges and unexpected positive developments related to our implementation efforts.
- Share the overall impact on access to justice the implementation project created.
- Detail our evaluations, sustainability. Fundraising, and communication activities during the award period.

Between June 1, 2018 and November 30, 2019, the Southwest Georgia Legal Self-Help Center has served 14,497 self-represented litigants from 101 counties in the state of Georgia. The most common service has been providing legal options to our users as well as referring patrons to the most appropriate resources. The most common referral was to private attorneys and the clerks of the Superior Courts in each Judicial Circuit. 79% of our patrons were first time users, while 10 % came back a second time and 11% of our patrons visited 3 or more times.

Our feedback from patrons was phenomenal! Out of 14,497 patrons surveyed, 99% were very satisfied with the services and help they received because: they understood their situations better and were less anxious about the court procedures; they understood their situations more completely and could better identify their legal problem; they obtained better clarity as to what they needed to do next; and they were able to resolve their issues in a professional manner due to improved departmental cooperation throughout the court system.

They also reported that the staff center personnel clearly explained the distinction the services that can be provided by a Legal Navigator versus an Attorney. They were very satisfied with the attorneys and resources to which the Self-Help center staff referred them.

We have partnered with 25 organizations and agencies both individually and as a consortium on various projects and events. We have added the opportunity to consult with an attorney via videoconferencing using attorneys from Lawyers for Equal Justice and members of the Dougherty County Bar Association. We have received many positive responses from the attorneys to whom we referred patrons, and many of the attorneys in the southwest Georgia area are coming aboard to help our patrons with free consultations and limited unbundled services. As they did last year, Georgia State University's Center for Access to Justice are scheduled to send law students to help produce self- help videos in Albany through an Alternative Spring Break program in March 2020.

We received eight grants to date totaling \$184,382.20, and we have two grant applications in process as of the date of this report. We continue to participate in the Amazon Smile program. As a 501(c) (3) organization, we will seek out charitable donations from individuals and organizations as we work with professional fundraisers to secure long term funding and sustainability.

In May 2018 we repurposed the Law Library's conference room into the temporary location of the Southwest Georgia Legal Self-Help Center. As previously stated, our current usage during this grant period has been 14,447 patrons. Since we have expanded current services and added new services we have had to serve lay patrons in the one-room Law Library as we provide attorney CLE classes and meeting space in the adjoining conference room. At times we have had to also use Chief Judge Willie E. Lockette's conference room as well. We frequently have to place a folding table and chairs in the hall and serve patrons there.

We have learned a great deal from the beginning of the grant period to this final report date as we implemented the Justice for All Pilot Project. As we share the information in this report, we continue to expand and grow, now reaching more into the region than before and bringing Access to Justice for all.

Creating Law Libraries as Self- help Resource Centers

Background:

The Dougherty County Law Library was founded in 1981. When she became Library Manger in 2004, Laureen Alford J.D., M.L.I.S., at the request of then Chief Judge Hon. Loring A. Gray, began providing forms, information and reference assistance to self-represented litigants in Southwest Georgia in person as well as by telephone, email and the website that Ms. Alford developed. The Self-help center at the Dougherty County Law Library is currently funded by grants and donations. As the Self-help center continues to expand and serve a multi- county region, our purpose was and continues to be a legal information nerve center for the entire region.

In 2017, after an extensive assessment of the components of Georgia's Access to Justice Landscape, the Justice for All Working group developed a Strategic Action Plan intended to meet the needs of consumers for civil legal services so that they can get help right where they are geographically, institutionally and financially. We requested \$70,720 from Justice for All as seed money to fully staff and develop a regional multi-county self-help center pilot that could be replicated in other areas of the region to increase meaningful access to justice for middle- and lower-income Georgians in the Southwest Georgia region.

The Southwest Georgia Legal Help Center is currently staffed by several volunteer and on-call attorneys, two full time Legal Navigators, one part time Legal Navigator and one on call-substitute. Sufficient and sustainable funding is still needed keep staff and to hire additional staff as the services and user needs grow. As demonstrated by the total number of patrons we have served, there is a great need for legal services in this region. When the civil legal needs of ordinary citizens are properly resolved, their lives are improved while the local economic base is impacted in a positive way.

Current Project Model Services and accomplishments that have been Created, Enhanced and Strengthened

When we first implemented the Justice for All Strategic Plan we developed a number of goals. They were outlined and developed in the strategic plan as follows:

- **Triage, Diagnosis and Referral. The first step in solving users' legal problems is to find out what they need.**

At first, we tried to ask a series of questions because many times the issue the patron was actually describing was different from what they actually needed. We developed a triage area where the patrons fill out a short form with their names, phone numbers, counties of residence and a short description of the legal issue they think they have. Then each patron is assigned a Legal Navigator who listens and asks questions in order to analyze the problem. The Legal Navigator then gives the patron a series of options, and the patron chooses the desired option. If the patron is unsure of the best option, or if we determine that the problem is too complex to handle without the assistance of a lawyer, then we refer the patron to an attorney or another appropriate legal resource. The Legal Navigator may make the initial call to the attorney or legal resource before giving the patron the contact information for follow-up.

- **Substantive and Procedural Underlying Law. Users will be connected with the best information about the area of law that may govern their situation.**

Many times, we have found that a patron does not know what area of law covers a particular situation. For example, we have had patrons ask for power of attorney forms to transfer real estate belonging to a loved one who has died. The patron does not understand that a power of attorney cannot be used to administer an estate. During the interview, the Legal Navigator is trained to recognize and direct the person to the appropriate source of information for the area of law that governs the problem. In our example, we would refer the patron to information about estate administration on the Georgia Council of Probate Judges website. When in doubt, the Legal Navigators refers the question to one of our volunteer attorneys or refers the

patron to an attorney who can answer the question. Patrons do not have the desire or the ability to research the law that governs their situations. They want immediate answers. Many are intimidated or have problems with literacy.

- **Court Submission Tools (Forms and Document Assembly and Assistance).**

Our website provides the most commonly used forms. Users can find even more forms in our forms books and databases. However, we strongly encourage patrons to get guidance from us as they select their forms because many of Georgia's judicial circuits have their own preferred forms. We can connect them with forms for all of Georgia's judicial circuits. Some circuits require more or fewer forms than what is required in Dougherty County. Some circuits will simply not accept any forms but their own. We help them with forms from any Georgia circuit. This service saves patrons and the courts time and money. In addition, the service has encouraged trust and cooperation between counties and circuits.

- **Court Preparation Tools. Self- represented litigants need to know how to gather the evidence that will prove their cases.**

This means teaching them about evidence and pre-trial discovery. To this end, we have collaborated with Georgia State University's Access to Justice Center to produce how-to videos. The GSU law students come down during Spring break each year and create a series of videos on various topics. Our patrons are able to access these videos online and apply the concepts as they may choose. The self-help center offers brochures and individual assistance to help litigants find the information they need. We also provide tools and information from other legal resources and other help centers as appropriate.

- **Follow up Tools and Assistance. Self -represented litigants need help in enforcing, challenging, modifying and complying with court orders.**

After we assist patrons, we always follow-up with information on enforcing, challenging, modifying and complying with court orders. Either through lack of understanding the law or lack of respect for the law, many people simply refuse to follow a court order. This can exacerbate an already difficult and dangerous situation which can quickly spin out of control. This is one area where the Southwest Georgia Self-Help Center shines. Before a patron leaves the self-help

center, the staff explains how to respond if the other party refuses to comply with the court order. For example, we always tell patrons in a divorce, legitimation or custody case that they should always keep a copy of the court order and parenting plan with them. When disagreements about visitation occur, emotions between the parties are strong. We encourage patrons to avoid confrontations or self-help remedies. Instead, we tell them they can come back to the self-help center for information and assistance. We provide various forms for modifying, challenging and complying with court orders.

- **Planning Services.** The staff at the self- help center assist patrons with finding information and resources that pertain to starting a business, local and state laws as well as information on resources pertaining to Internal Revenue and their resources.

Many problems happen to people because they simply do not know or understand the law. Problems can also occur when people fail to plan ahead by getting a will or power of attorney. People could avoid many legal problems if they understood the basics of common legal topics such as landlord-tenant law, car repossessions, and divorce or child custody. Staff at the self-help center provide information and classes so that people can plan ahead to avoid legal problems.

Collaborative Partners

In order to further our Strategic Action Plan, we have partnered with 20 organizations in Georgia. As the statistics will demonstrate, we have served patrons come from 101 Georgia counties.

- **AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF LAW LIBRARIES.** **Emily Feltren, Director of AALL** Government Relations, has shared with us strategies to obtain funding for ongoing project sustainability.
- **ATLANTA LEGAL AID.** Kristin Verhill, Michelle Fleetwood, Currey Hitchens and Viveca Sibley and Laureen Alford applied for the Legal Innovations for Rural Georgia Crime Victims Project Grant. Unfortunately, we were not awarded that grant. However, Atlanta Legal Aid provided a continuing

education workshop for the attorneys in our region which resulted in building positive relationships in our legal community.

- **CITY OF ALBANY DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (DCED).** We have connected with Betty Jackson- Burton and her organization, which provides housing assistance, emergency housing, mediation and enforcement of Landlord- Tenant issues for our patrons.
- **DOUGHERTY COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION & THE C. B. KING BAR ASSOCIATION.** The Southwest Georgia Legal Self-Help Center has had the support of past and present bar association presidents. John Kirbo obtained the 501(c) (3) status for the Southwest Georgia Legal Self-Help Center, Inc. Shaleia Threadcraft has helped provide training for attorneys in limited scope representation. Christopher Flowers has helped many of our self-help litigants with limited scope services. Gerald Williams has been invaluable to mission and services of the self-help center with encouragement, direction and suggestions. As the center grows, many attorneys have volunteered their services on a limited scope basis.
- **GEORGIA APPLESEED.** Under the direction of Tally Wells and Terrance Wilson, the Southwest Georgia Legal Self-Help Center has partnered with Georgia Appleseed to stop the school to prison pipeline. The center is part of a consortium in which we have referred many patrons and their families to the various resources under Georgia Appleseed and its partners. It is our goal in the future to become more active with this project.
- **GEORGIA COMMUNITY SUPERVISION.** We have partnered with Leslie Lamb, the Community Coordinator at the Department of Community Supervision and Georgia Prison Reentry Initiative. The Center staff refers patrons on a continual basis to this resource. Many patrons who have been arrested, imprisoned and then released face many obstacles not only related to the offense but to housing, custody of children, jobs and rights. The center staff refer these patrons to Community Supervision and work with probation and parole departments in several counties to help the patron achieve successful results.

- **GOODWILL CAREER CENTER.** We will be partnering with Goodwill Career Center each week in an effort to help people find jobs, re-enter society successfully and succeed.
- **GEORGIA LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAM.** Our local GLSP office as well as the Atlanta office continue to work with us on many issues such as Domestic Violence. One GLSP attorney is on the board of the Self-Help Center. We participated in GLSP's Family Day in October, 2018.
- **GEORGIA PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM.** The Georgia Public Library System is a treasure in our state. Many times, after their legal issues are resolved, patrons have no idea what to do next. The issues they face are lack of education and job skills, as well as a lack of experience with resume writing, job applications and interviews. In an effort to prevent the legal situations from recurring, the staff at the help center will discuss a plan of action with patrons and refer them to the proper resources. The public libraries many resources and classes with the job application process. Public libraries offer a wealth of information and services. We can train librarians on how to handle legal reference questions as well as how to make appropriate referrals. Our former director, Laureen Alford, who now works for the Dougherty County Public Library, can provide this training and is an invaluable resource to the library system. Ms. Alford spoke about our pilot project at the Winter Georgia Public Library Directors meeting in Savannah in an effort to inform our public library directors about our pilot project and to offer training and outreach across Georgia.
- **GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR ACCESS TO JUSTICE.** Georgia State University won a grant for \$8500 to support their Rural Justice Initiative. In 2018, students from Georgia State University came to the Southwest Georgia Legal-Self Help Center and created a series of videos that our patrons understand and enjoy using on how to represent yourself in court. We look forward to the students returning spring, 2020.
- **JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF GEORGIA'S ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS.** We continue to work with the AOC's Standing Committee on Access to Justice to ensure the sustainability of the pilot project.

The Self-Help Center has made and continues to make many partnerships with various individuals, lawyers, judges, organizations and judicial circuits across Georgia. The AOC has been instrumental in helping us connect with partners who strive to bring access to justice for all Georgians. We now have positive professional working relationships with judges, clerks of court and court administrators across the state. We thank the Administrative Office of the Courts for their continuous support. They have tirelessly advocated for all we do and accomplish.

- **LAWYERS FOR EQUAL JUSTICE.** We now have the privilege of working with Lawyers for Equal Justice. The Dougherty County Technology department set up the free videoconferencing so our patrons can talk to their lawyer's face-to-face at no cost.
- **LOS ANGELES LAW LIBRARY.** Sandra J. Levin, Director of California's LA Law Library has shared many lessons she learned when advocating for funding. She has also shared her website which offers topics on classes offered for self-help represented litigants.
- **NEW YORK JUSTICE FOR ALL AWARDEES.** On August 14, 2018 we had our first telephone conference with the New York JFA awardees. In the months following that first call, we shared ideas, concepts, plans and strategies for developing a sustainable self-help center. This relationship culminated in a week-long trip to New York where we saw and learned first-hand how we could expand our self-help center. We visited many departments in the New York court system in Suffolk County and saw from start to finish how patrons can access the system easily and competently. We were introduced to an organization called Legal Hand directed by Helaine Barnette, who will speak to us about the possibility of expanding Legal Hand to our area.
- **MACON SECOND CHANCE.** Evelyn Jones (GCIC) who directs Macon Second Chance is called the "Angel of Expungements and New Beginnings." If there is a way, Evelyn will find it for our patrons. We are proud to consider Evelyn a partner with us. Our referred patrons return to us with smiles on their faces and praise for Evelyn and a new life.

- **DOUGHERTY COUNTY CHILD SUPPORT COORDINATOR.** Laurie Haswell is the Child Support Coordinator for our region. Laurie helps men prove or disprove paternity and refers men who are proven fathers to us to complete the process of Legitimation to improve the lives of Georgia's children. Laurie has been a strong advocate for the self-help center.
- **GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES.** The Southwest Georgia Legal Self-Help Center continually refers men and women to the Fatherhood Program which provides many services to non-custodial parents. Many times, fathers express their fear at legitimizing their children or neglect to legitimate their children because they are unemployed and cannot afford to pay child support. The center staff discusses the benefits of being in the Fatherhood Program and Legitimation. As a win- win situation for all concerned.
- **WIN GEORGIA.** Through Georgia Appleseed, we have partnered with WIN Georgia. The focus of WIN is to ensure that children and young adults get the care they need while supporting the family in the recovery process. The Legal Self-Help Center sees many patrons who have family issues which contribute to bad choices or decisions that are not appropriate. While helping the families to resolve their legal issues, the Self-Help Center can then follow up and help the parents to restore their lives and the lives of their children. We do this by asking brief questions about what they plan to do with their lives or situations after they resolve their legal issues. The staff finds that most patrons when given directional options to choose from start on a path that lessens recidivism in not only their family but their community.
- **ATLANTA VOLUNTEER LAWYERS FOUNDATION.** The Self- Help Center has partnered with the Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation to combat Landlord Retaliation in Southwest Georgia. Many patrons come to the center holding eviction court dates. Upon interviewing them, we find that that many of them have asked the Landlord to fix a structural problem with the home. The tenant has given the landlord a 30-day notice of problems with the home which are ignored. A few days before the month ends the tenant is served with an eviction notice. The Landlord then refuses the rent and tells the court the tenant is being evicted for nonpayment of rent. Through Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation many of the clients who we refer to them return to us and express

their gratitude and appreciation for this referral because their issue was resolved.

- **PAVES** (Parents Accessing Visitation & Educational Services). The Self-Help Center continually refers non-custodial parents to PAVES. This service connects non-custodial parents to their children for visitation and quality time and counsel parents on co-parenting for the benefits of the child (ren). Many times, parents who are divorcing or who break-up use their children as weapons against each other. The parents cannot agree on a parenting plan, get themselves arrested and spend time in jail for either disorderly conduct or contempt. The children wind up suffering for the behavior of their parents. The goal of the Self-Help Center is to minimize the cycle of parents returning to court for contempt and many issues that interfere with building healthy family relationships. To this end, PAVES is a positive asset to the Self-Help Center and pilot project.
- **IMMIGRATION LEGAL SERVICES.** Catholic Charities of Atlanta provides quality legal immigration services to immigrants. A multi-lingual nine-person staff specializes in Immigration Law to help immigrants to obtain legal services so they can obtain permanent status, naturalization, and legal counsel during deportation hearings. When an immigrant patron arrives at the self-help center, they are immediately given an interpreter. Many times, they will bring their own interpreter. Family Law issues are intertwined with the immigration issues. We refer also to the Latin American Association in Atlanta, Georgia and the Southern Poverty Law Center in Alabama. We are in the planning stages of setting up classes and workshops for clergy to provide a resource for all immigrants.
- **EVICTION PREVENTION PROJECT.** A part of the GSLP, the Eviction Prevention Project serves residents in Dougherty County, Georgia who are at 200% or less of the poverty level. In addition to eviction, the project deals with fair deposits, fair housing, repairs, code enforcement, and crime free housing and wrongful conduct by landlords such as Landlord self-help eviction.
- **VOICES FOR CIVIL JUSTICE.** On August 18, 2018 we had our first meeting with Voices for Civil Justice. As required by the JFA grant, we worked

to develop a communications plan that supports one or more grant objectives and to implement the plan over the grant term.

- **ALBANY POLICE DEPARTMENT.** Under the direction of Captain Angel Bradford, the Police Pastoral Academy was founded. The Southwest Georgia Legal Self-Help Center has partnered with APD to train officers out in the field by equipping the officers with the information and resources that are available in the Self-Help Center to reduce arrests and prevent situations from rising to the level of criminal activity. We do this by holding workshops for Law Enforcement and participating in the ongoing training of all officers in the departments.
- **REGIONAL JUDICIAL CIRCUITS.** We have built many relationships with other judicial circuits in Southwest Georgia. By identifying what we have in common and identifying the needs of patrons outside of Dougherty County Judicial Circuit, we have been able to spread Access to Justice for all in many other counties in Southwest Georgia and earn the confidence, trust and respect of lawyers and judges alike. We provide and help patrons with forms from their judicial circuit. We take the initiative to call the Clerks of Court to ensure that the proper papers are gathered so the job of the Clerk of Court is made easier due to more complete forms packets being filed. We have been able to cut down litigation on the bench 54%.

This project would not have been successful without the various people in the above agencies and organizations and all their support and information and willingness to help us help the patron and for that we are greatly indebted to them.

- **STATE BAR OF GEORGIA PRO BONO RESOURCE CENTER & THE STATE BAR OF GEORGIA.** We are greatly indebted to the Access to Justice Committee for their help in making possible the Justice for All Creating Law Libraries as Self-Help Resource Centers pilot project. We want to especially thank Mike Monahan, Director of the State Bar of Georgia's Pro Bono Resource Center and his staff for giving us tremendous support and guidance during the project. In addition, we would like to thank Justice Benhem and Justice Hodges and all the Justices who worked on this project with the Southwest Georgia Legal Self-Help Center for their wisdom and guidance, their

patience and their experience. A special thank you to Tabitha Ponder for all her support, encouragement and for always being our greatest advocate and asset.

- **OHER COUNTIES IN SOUTHWEST GEORGIA.** Our outreach to other counties has expanded to 101 counties in Georgia. That is 62.89 % of the state!

CHALLENGES AND UNEXPECTED POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS RELATED TO OUR IMPLEMENTATION EFFORTS

At the implementation of the Justice for All Pilot project, we planned for a gradual increase in patrons by delaying any formal marketing of the project. But the response exceeded our highest expectations! From June 15, 2018 to the present time we have served 15,000 patrons. This was all by word of mouth. When we advertised on social media, the response grew even faster. With a staff of 3 full time employees and one part time employee we were taxing staff capacity to help and breaking out of the physical space.

In addition to guiding the Legal Navigators in helping the patrons, our former director, Laureen Alford, did all the administrative work for both the Dougherty County Law Library and the Southwest Georgia Legal Help Center while one of our Legal Navigators, Traci Kelly, was writing grants to not only fund the Self-Help Center but to earn the staff salaries. Traci's task was and is truly a challenge. Nancy Long tracked all the statistics. All of these tasks were carried out while we dealt with patrons, sometimes multitasking. We have loved every minute of it!

We also dealt with the challenge of mentally challenged individuals. Ms. Long's training and education as a Forensic Psychologist became a great asset for these situations. Our part time Legal Navigator, Karen Lawson keeps everyone on task from triaging the patrons to keeping the center supplied and ready to go as well as keeping the county finance department in the loop.

When we first implemented the pilot project, we were faced with much criticism and skepticism. Many attorneys though we were taking business from them. They soon learned that we were more than happy to send these patrons their way. The tide turned as the attorneys became overwhelmed with the number of *pro se* litigants who needed help. They began referring these patrons back to us for legal information and resources.

Another issue we faced from attorneys was their fear of unauthorized practice of law by the center's staff. As our reputation grew, we were able to effect a positive change in their attitude towards us and gain their trust and respect. Our former director, Lauren Alford, provided excellent training, and we all clearly know the legal boundaries. As of this report we have developed positive and cooperative relationships with many departments in not only our county but in the region, which will transition us now into spreading the pilot program into the region.

One of the positive developments is that our patrons will advertise for us after we help them. We ask them to take a brochure to their friends, churches and neighbors. We tell them about our website and have had over 6,000 web hits a month. Family Law accounts for 72% of all web hits. This includes legitimation, custody, child support, and domestic violence. In the southwest Georgia region, many people live in poverty, and when they receive help, most will ask how they can say thank you. We hand them a brochure and ask them to pass the information around.

A constant challenge we face is funding. The staff of the self- help center is funded by grants which pay for 40 hours per week; however, each staff member works 10-20 hours of unpaid time each week. On average 10% of our time is finding grants to fund the ongoing projects before one or more grants run out.

Another challenge we face is space. We support our attorneys in positive ways to thank them for the many hours they provide to our patrons when they can help them or answer our questions. To this end, we provide continuing education sponsored by the State Bar of Georgia. We also provide a space where attorneys from all over the tristate area can hold depositions, conferences and interstate court trials. Many times, we have patrons in the Law Library itself, while attorney ICLE events are happening in the conference room of the Self-Help Center and depositions are held in the conference room of the Hon. Willie E. Lockette, Chief Judge of the Superior Court. On those days we serve patrons in the hallway outside the Law Library.

Another positive development was the Expungement Clinic that was held at Mt. Zion Baptist church in April 2019. Although we encouraged appointments, more

than 300 people arrived with and without appointments, and we had to reschedule or turn some patrons away. Lawyers from our area came to help and support us and many people were helped that day to start a new life. Under the direction of Tabitha Ponder and Mike Monahan, the clinics have spread to various regions in Georgia and continue to be a success.

One of the JFA Grant requirements was to partner with New York and plan a trip to visit and experience how they provide services to *pro se* litigants. The trip was awesome! Not only did we gather resources and information, we were also able to implement many of those practices into our Self-Help Center. We were encouraged by the unity that was demonstrated in the Suffolk County Courthouse from the time the citizens walked through the doors until they filed their papers and received court dates and resolutions. We visited Legal Hand, which was founded by Helaine Barnette. We were very impressed with how Legal hand operates. We attended the Suffolk County Bar Association meeting, where we learned that miles may separate people but not problems. We met with many positive people in the courthouse who were excited about sharing their information and resources with us.

Most important, the staff at the Southwest Georgia Legal Self- Help Center works as a TEAM. We believe that recognizing, appreciating and acknowledging each other as individuals as well as co-workers and capitalizing on each person's talents and abilities, made this project a TEAM success. We learned quickly that an organization can have the greatest technology and resources; however, if we do not value each other each other's dignity as persons, we cannot project that outward to the people we serve. As any organization, we have our highs and lows; but we had fun. We all love what we do and will continue to do it regardless of any obstacles.

THE OVERALL IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY.

The overall impact on the community has been phenomenal. On average, the Self-Help Center serves 80-100 people per day. The center has served 14,668 patrons since June, 2018. Many patrons return to thank us and tell us that they can now move forward with their lives. By partnering with employment agencies for persons who have criminal backgrounds and/or arrests, we can now give patrons

who desire to become productive citizens the opportunity to contribute to society and improve the economic base of the community.

We have recently partnered with the Albany Police Department in Dougherty County, Georgia. This will be a tremendous asset to the community. We will now be able to meet the community out in the field. After being trained under the direction of Captain Angel Bradford and the Southwest Georgia Legal Self-Help Center, the officers will take the resources with them on calls in the field where they can distribute the resources and refer the community for positive alternatives to arrest, incarceration, family violence, custody and many other issues. One of the goals of this program is to change the perception of law enforcement officials in the community by encouraging the community to see the police as a positive asset and encourage cooperation in preventing criminal and civil issues before they happen.

Many of our patrons have had some issue either civil or criminal with the law. We give legal information and meet the patrons where they are. For example, we refer patrons to Evelyn Jones who is director of Macon Second Chance. Evelyn is our “Angel of Expungement.” If there is a way to clear or minimize that impact of the charge or issue, Evelyn is the “go to” person. If it can be solved, it will be. Many patrons we referred to Evelyn now have jobs, educations, families and now lead productive lives.

The Southwest Georgia Legal Self-Help Center is a big supporter of the fatherhood program. Many patrons are men who want to be fathers to their children and face many obstacles in the local communities. For example, we had a father whose wife left him with three small children four years and younger. He came to us because even though he was legally married to his wife before his children were born and he was the biological father of all those children he was told by another agency he had no legal rights and could not get his children immunizations, put them in school or sign for any legal paper work. After consulting with our staff attorney, it was not only a matter of bias because he was a man but the agencies who “advised” him were giving out legal advice they were not qualified to do. The attorney explained his rights as a father to him. We referred him to one of our employment partners. We helped him find adequate housing, childcare and a fatherhood support group so he could move out of his mothers’ home and become self-sufficient. We contacted another partner program, WIN, which is a wraparound program whose team meets the needs of the family physically,

mentally and socially and spiritually. The father was self-motivated but did not know what resources were available. We then provided legal information about divorce and child custody. Recently, we had the pleasure of seeing the results of our efforts. He returned to the center to thank us. He now has his own home with his children. He is employed full-time in a high paying job; his children are in Head-Start and daycare while he works, and he won sole custody of his children.

Another positive development is that we reconfigured the current Law Library space to facilitate the Self-help center. To this end, the Dougherty County Sheriff's Department has given us space that will accommodate a conference room for attorneys to have continuing education for our attorneys and at the same time have attorney depositions and videoconferencing of hearings and trials both in and out of state. We will at the same time be able to help our patrons in one room and hold classes on legal topics in another room while our staff has offices to do any administrative work necessary. We are in the process of finalizing the list of classes for our patrons, and have obtained a contract for the attorney ICLE's from the State Bar of Georgia. We have developed staff training and policies. We work as a team. Life happens; so, we cross train in all tasks and readily step into other roles and tasks when needed.

The staff focused on setting up and stabilizing the actual services and projects we spoke of in the mid-year services. Due the number of patrons we served and the need for more staff, we are now in the middle of marketing new services. We have partnered with many other agencies throughout the region. Our former director, Laureen Alford, has partnered with the public libraries on many initiatives to unite the public libraries with the law libraries. We met in Savannah with other librarians and law librarians to discuss ways we can work together and formed a working group. Funding for these initiatives in many libraries continues to be needed.

One of the ways we are developing methods of success for the pilot project is that the three boards are working collectively to mainstream services and to arrive at ways that the Law Library, the Southwest Georgia Legal Self-Help Center and the Dougherty County Public Library can be under one umbrella model of services and provide long term sustainability for each organization. Additionally, we will be have a production company in Atlanta, Georgia that will provide documentaries and media coverage for us. Our former director, Laureen Alford, has spoken at various library conferences in Atlanta and Savannah. Ms. Alford has been

instrumental in promoting the goals of the pilot project through the American Association of Law Libraries and the public library system.

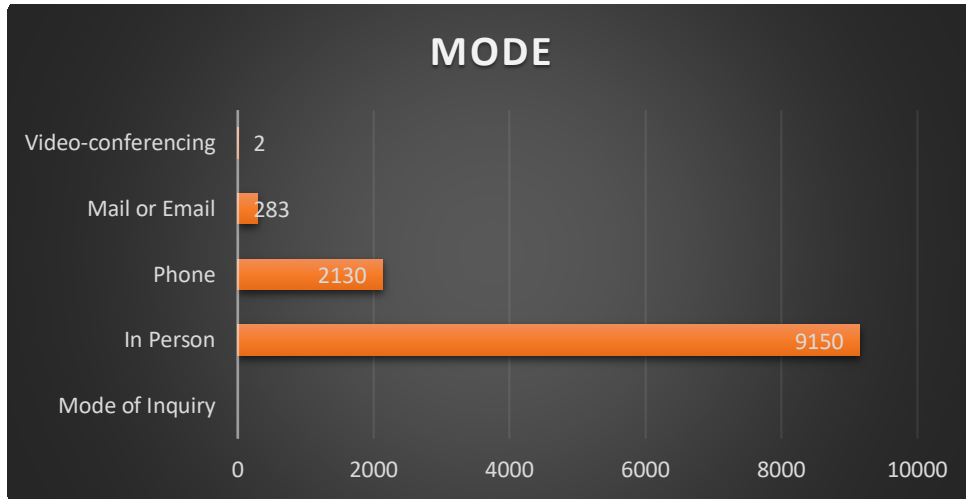
We have reached out to other judicial circuits in the Southwest Georgia region. As previously stated, the response from judges and attorneys alike was skepticism and resistance. Many felt we were competing with services already offered in their circuits. To alleviate this issue, we reached out to the attorneys and judges to find common ground. We used surveys, calls and visits to find out what their needs were and open a dialogue. The results were very positive. The judicial circuits we reached out to now refer patrons to us for legal information and assistance through the legal process. We have improved access to justice and eased the burden on the courts, cutting litigation on the bench by 65%.

The Honorable Loring Gray has recently joined us as one of our volunteer attorneys. Judge Gray brings many years of education and experience to us because he helped modernize the Dougherty County Law Library with the help of Lauren Alford.

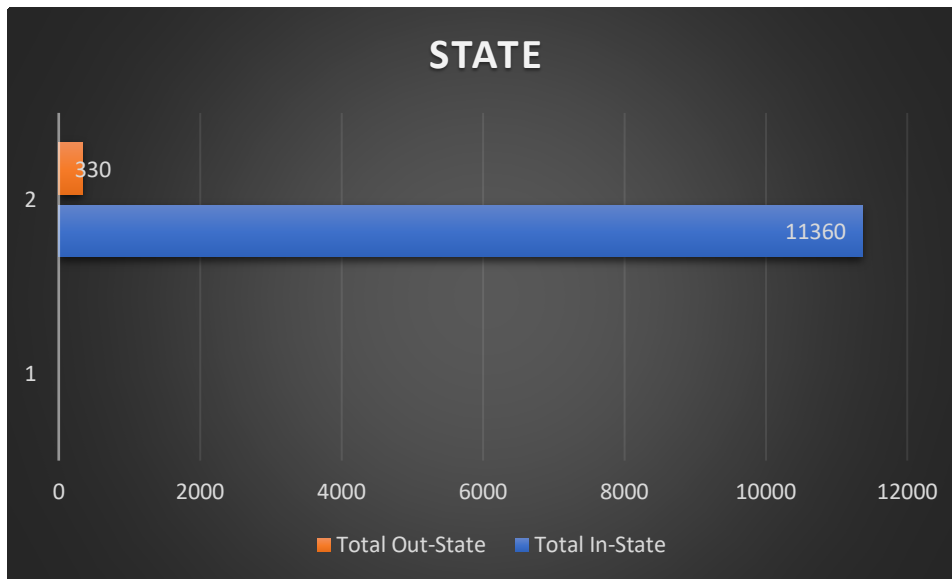
We created easy-to-navigate websites for the self-help center with content that is easily accessible from smartphones and other mobile devices. Our patrons can call us, get the website information, print off the paperwork, fill out as much as they can, and have us check it over to make sure that the paperwork is complete. This eases the burden of having to collect paperwork multiple times, file it, and send it through the system. The clerks now can forward a complete packet to the respective court and a resolution can be reached much more quickly.

We connect patrons to academic law libraries when they have extensive research needs. These libraries have a wider and more updated collection of resources on certain issue and lawyers who can assist with difficult legal research.

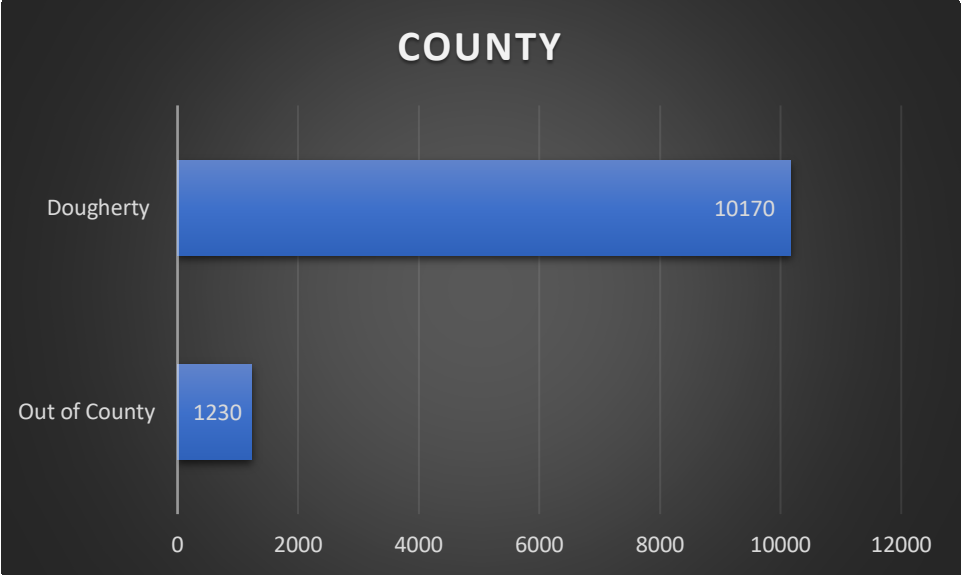
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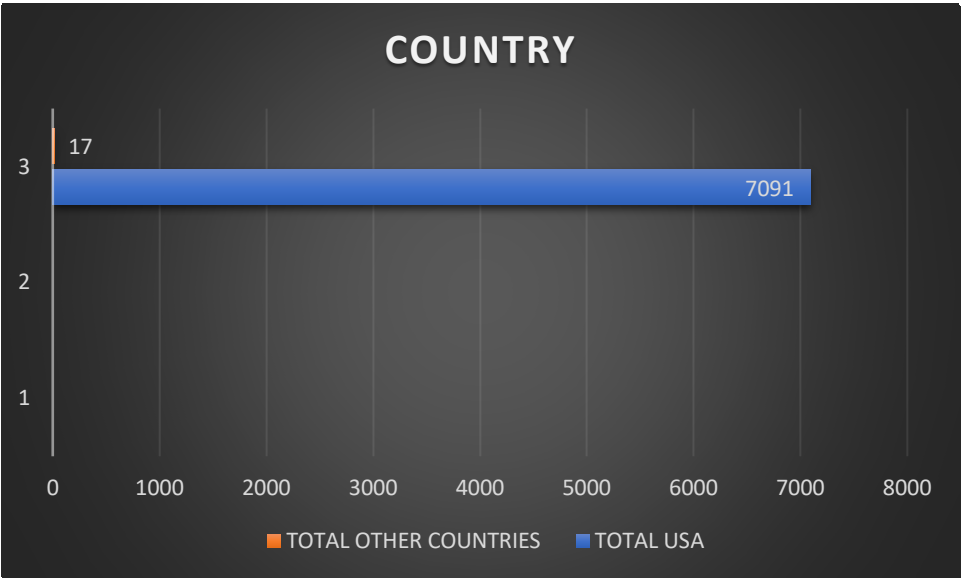
We served a total of 11565 patrons in an 18-month period. The percentage of walk in patrons was 79.1% followed by 18.4% call in and 2.4% are either mail or email.



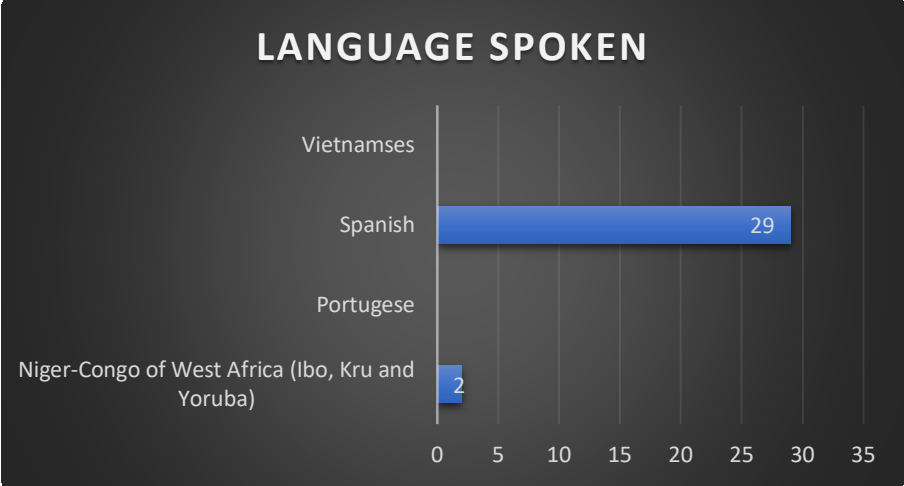
We served 101 counties in the state with 97.2% in the state of Georgia and 2.8% came from outside the state of Georgia.



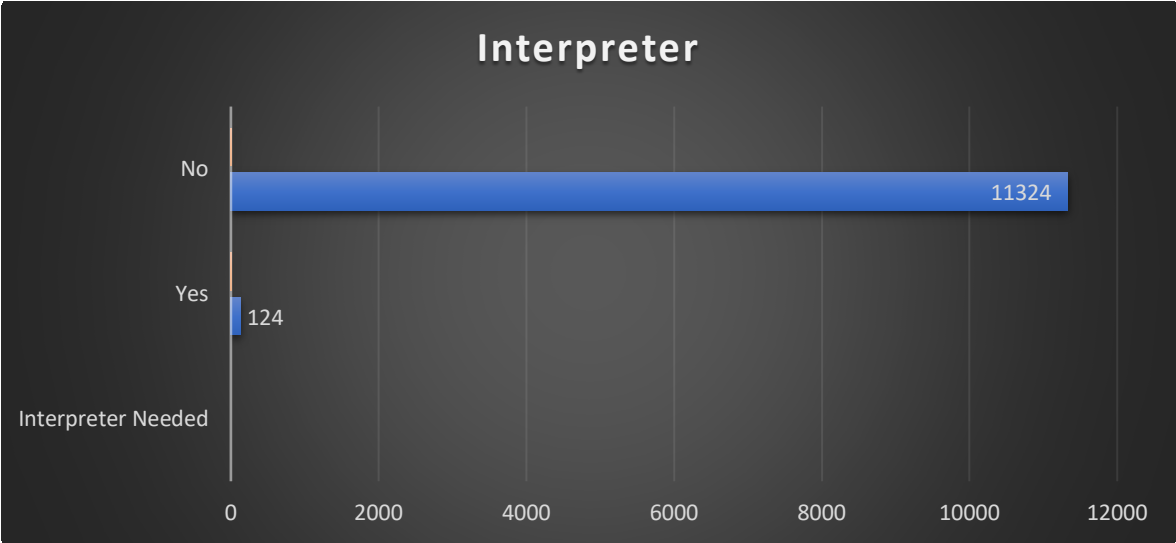
Our patrons came from 101 counties in the state of Georgia. In our home county, 82.4% came from Dougherty County and 10.8% came from counties outside of Dougherty County, Georgia.



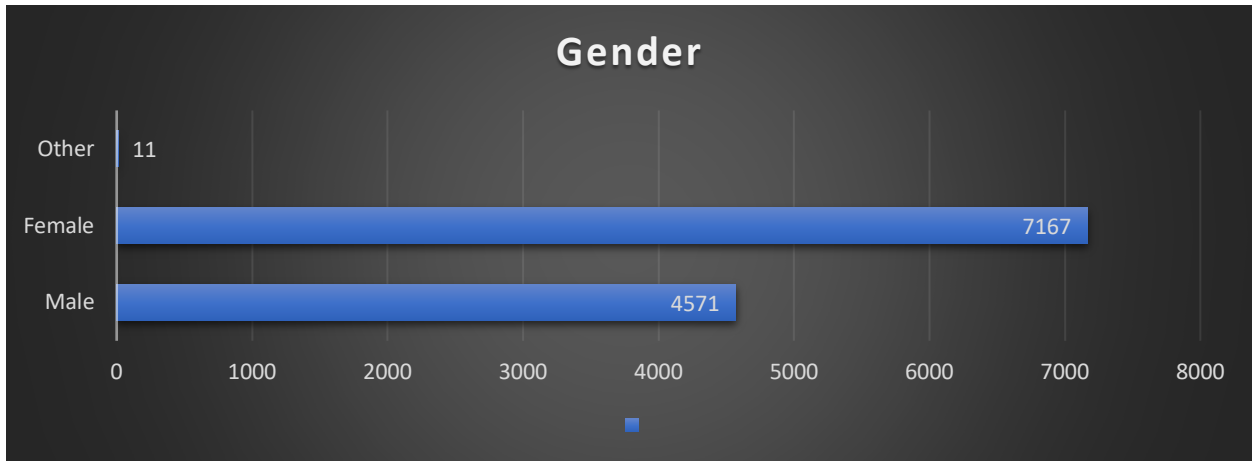
We had patrons from several countries in which 99.8% came from the United States and .2% came from outside the United States.



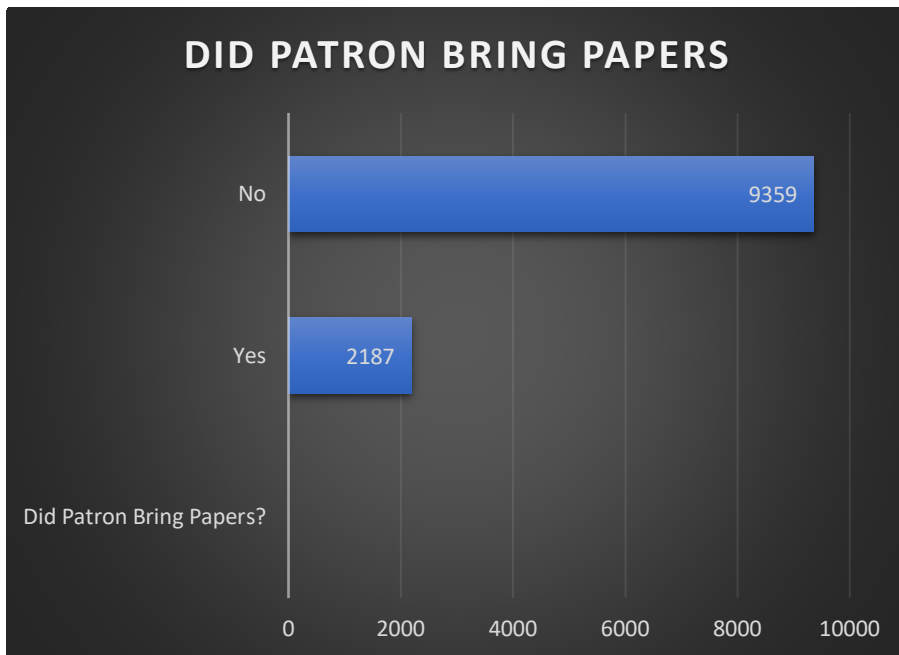
Many of our patrons come from Spanish speaking countries. Hispanic patrons account for 93.5% of non-English speaking patrons and 6.5% speak in dialects from Niger-Congo of West Africa (Ibo, Kru, and Yoruba).



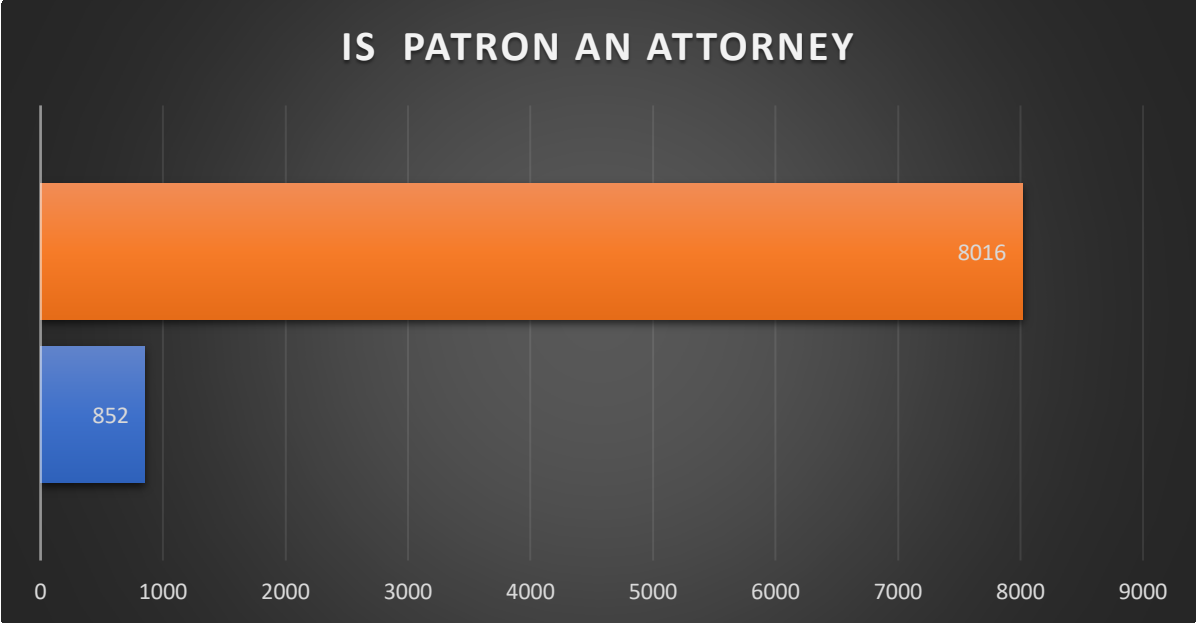
We offer interpreter services; however, 98.9% do not require and interpreter and 1% of our patrons require and interpreter.



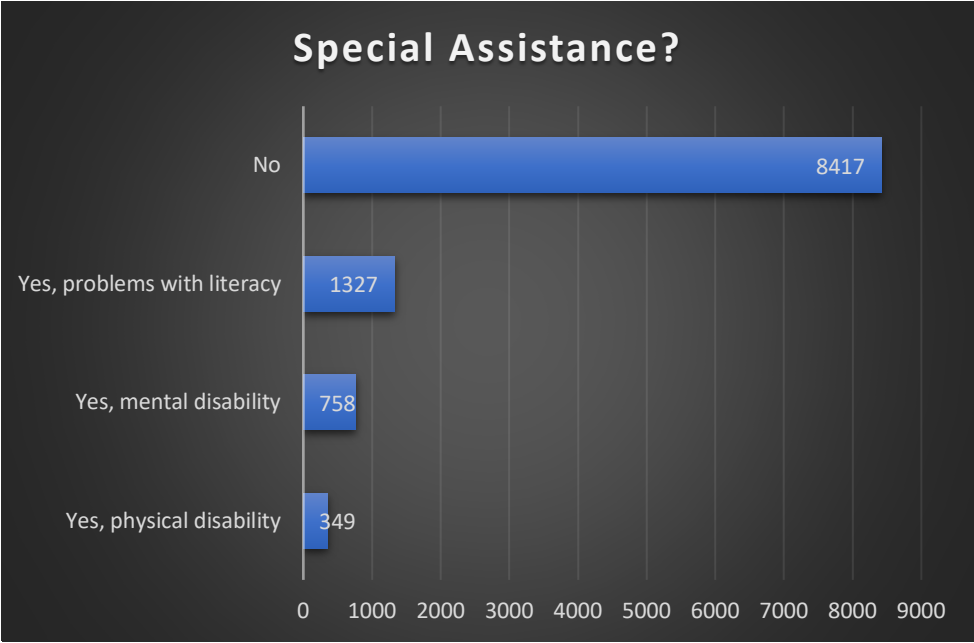
Of all the patrons we served, 61% were female and 38.9% were male with less than .10% identifying as other.



Many of our patrons did not bring papers. Many patrons stated that they did not know what papers to bring. Some brought papers that were not applicable to their situations at all. The percent of patrons who did not bring papers with them was 81.05% and those who did bring the correct papers were 18.9%.



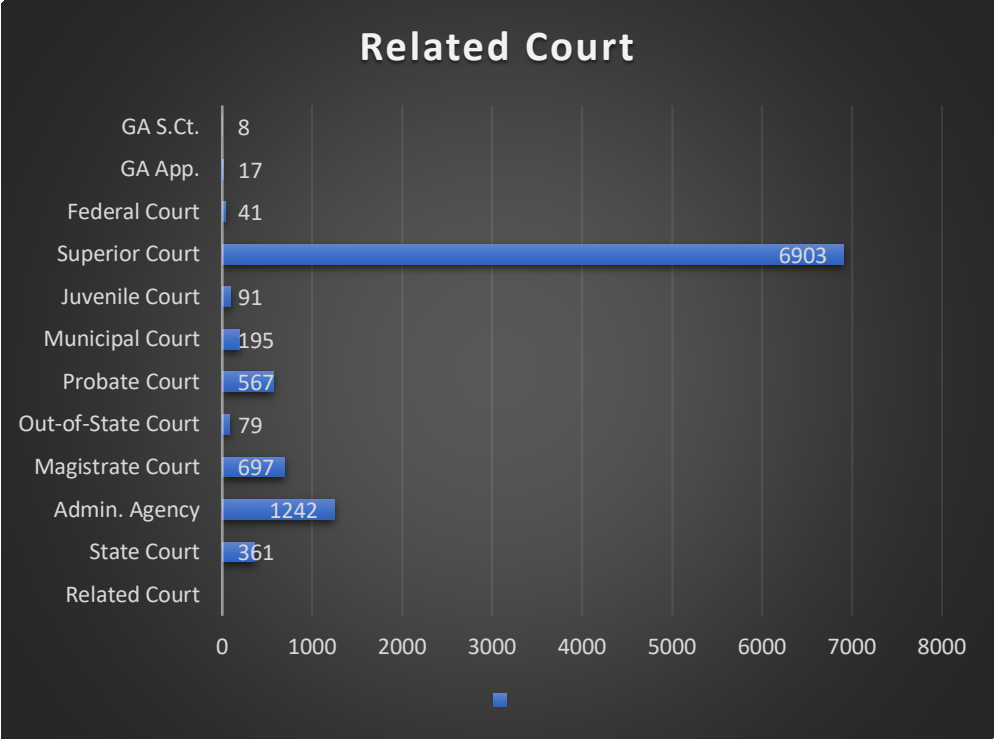
Those of our patrons who were not an attorney was 90.4% and the percentage of those who were attorneys were 9.6%.



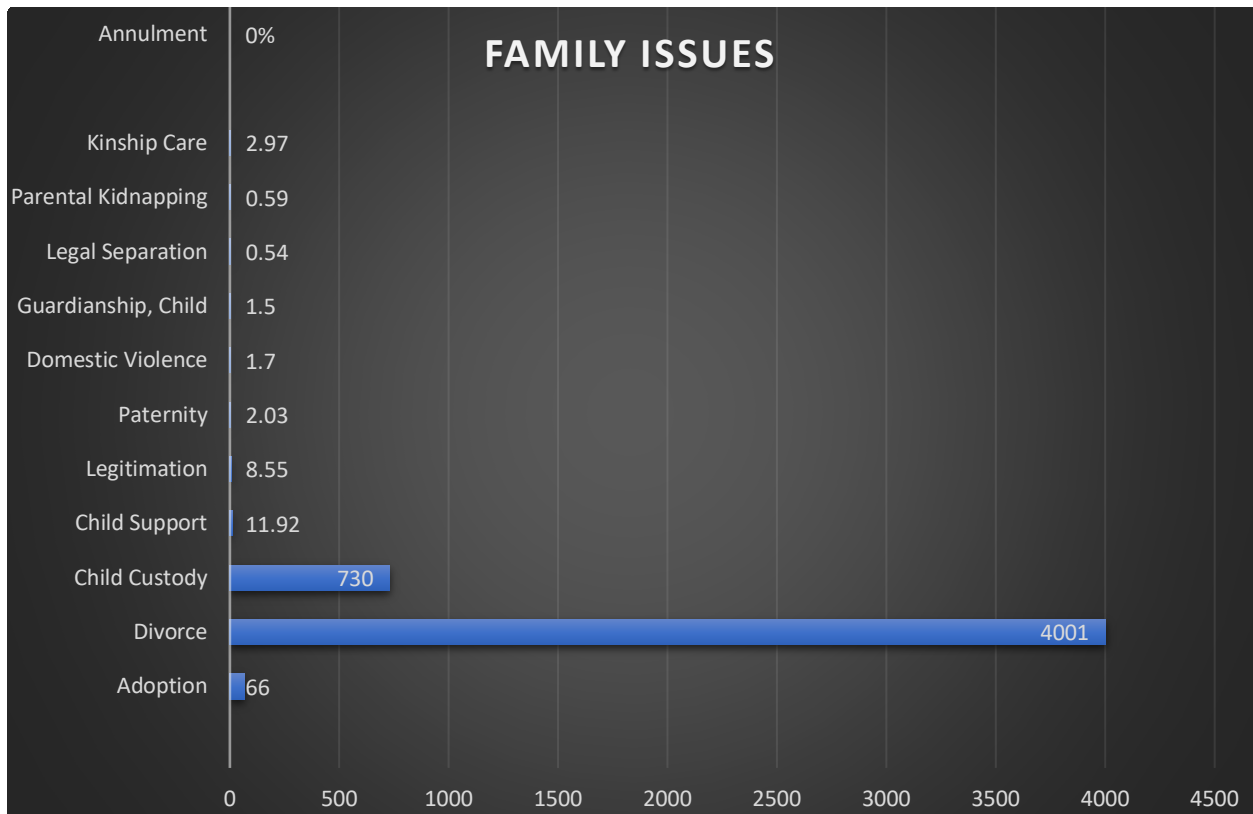
Out of the total number of patrons served 77.6% did not need any type of special assistance, 12.2% had problems with literacy, 6.7% were mentally challenged and .25% had a physical disability.



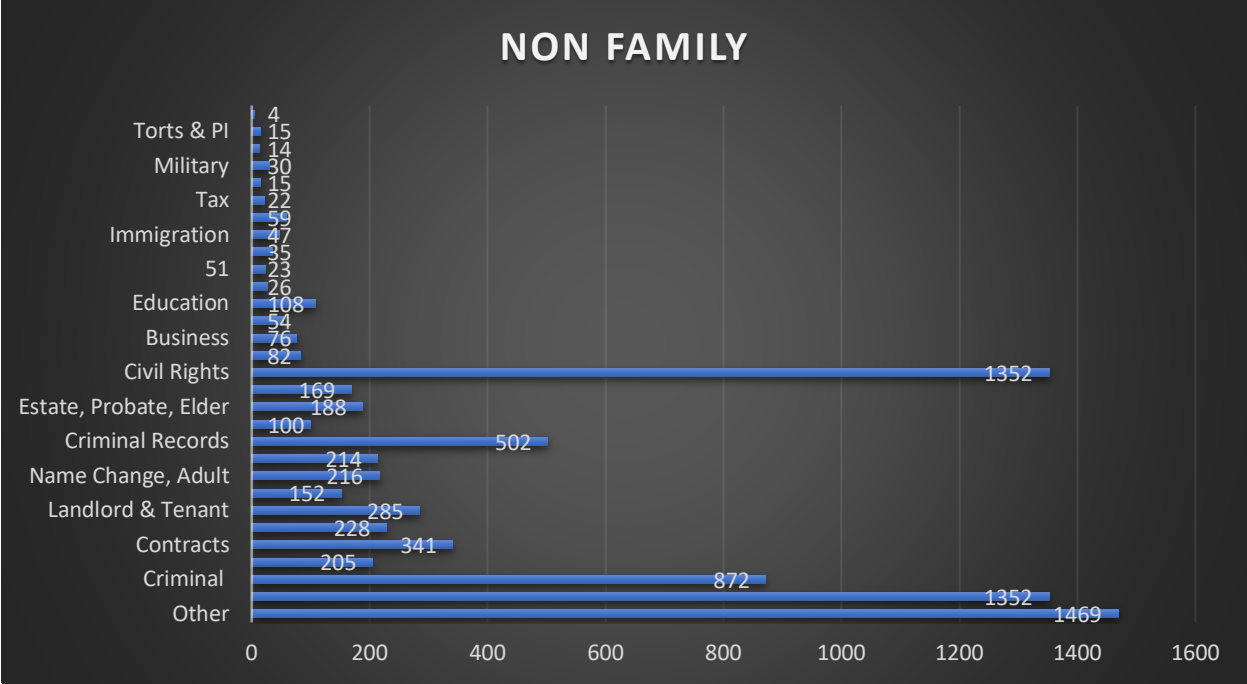
We always tell each patron that an attorney is the best option for them. However, many of our patrons cannot afford an attorney and do not meet eligibility guidelines for Georgia Legal Services. The percentage of patrons who did not plan to get an attorney was 95% and those who chose after hearing all their options was 5%.



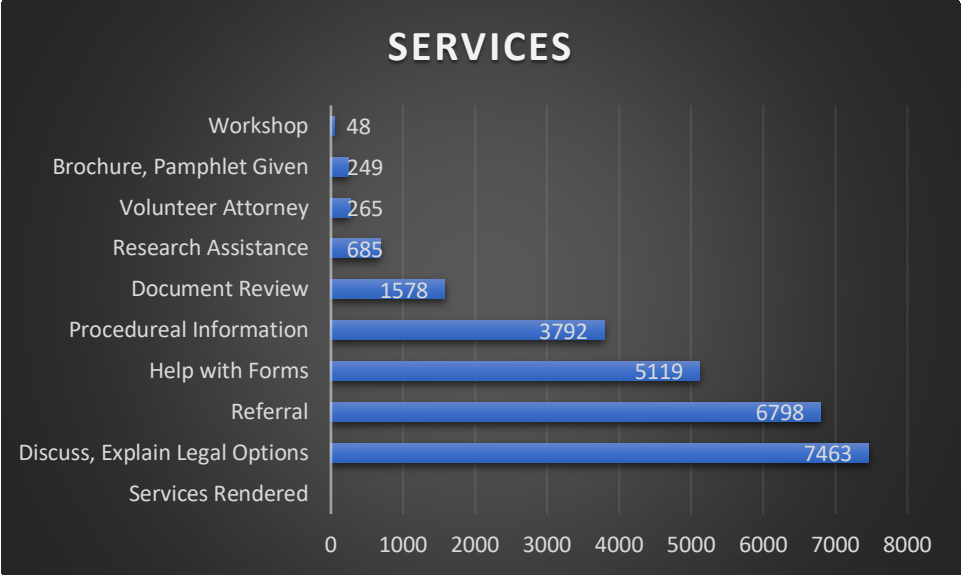
Superior Court is where 67.7% of patrons file cases, Administrative Agencies account for 12% while Magistrate Court handles 6.8%. Probate Court handles 5.5% of our patron cases, State Court handles 3.5% of patron cases, Municipal Court deals with 2% and Juvenile Court handles .89%. Out of State Courts handle .77% of the cases followed by Federal Court at .40%. Georgia Court of Appeals handles .17% of all of our patrons while Georgia State Court handles .08%.



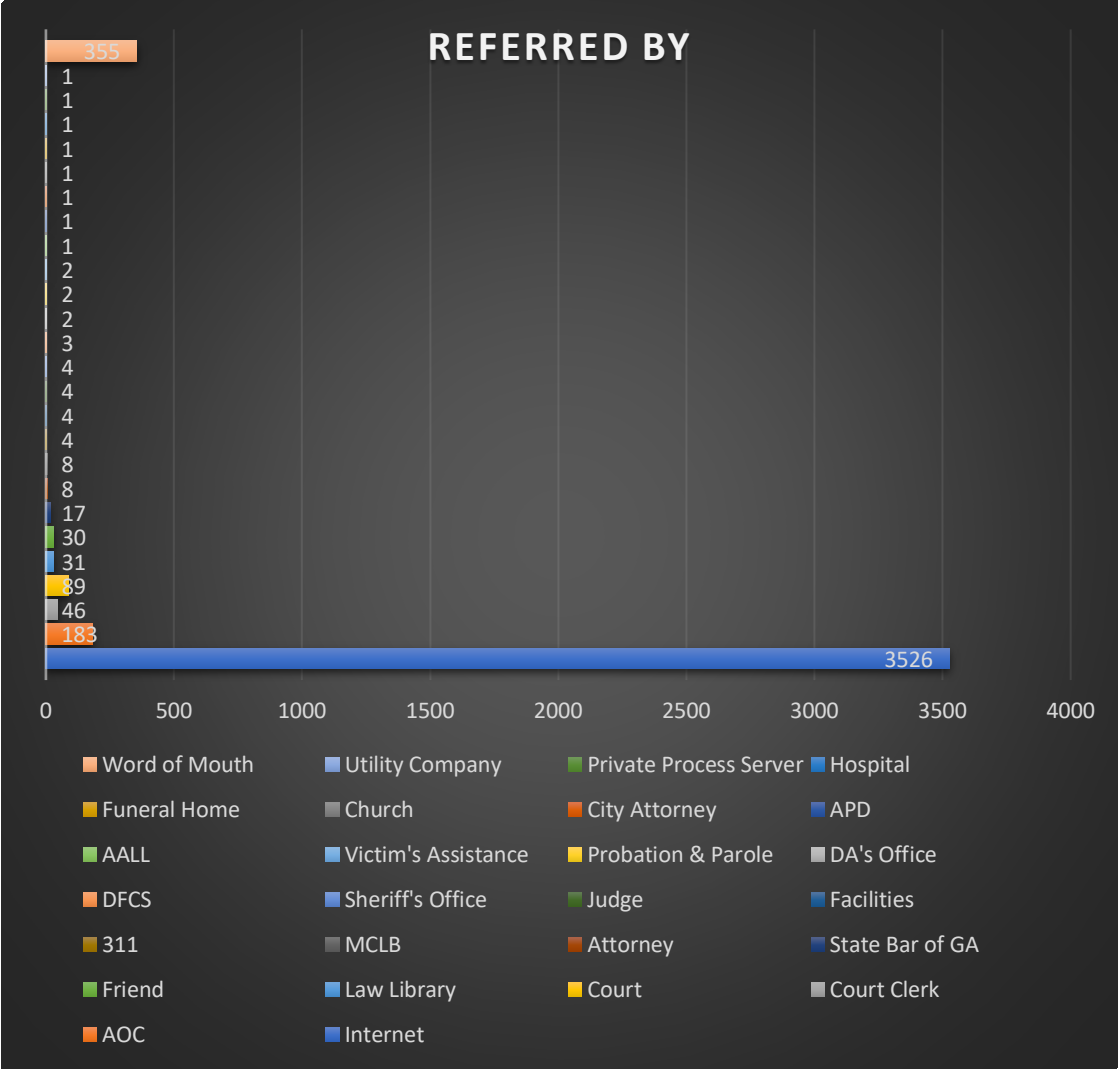
Family Law issues dominate most of our time because they are most demanding with several issues all incorporated into one case. Rarely do we see patrons who can file a straight divorce or other Family Law issues separately. Many Family Law issues such as Kinship, Parental Kidnapping, Legal Separation, Guardianship of a Child, Domestic Violence Paternity & Legitimation are intertwined with Divorce and account for 18.5% of all Family Law cases.



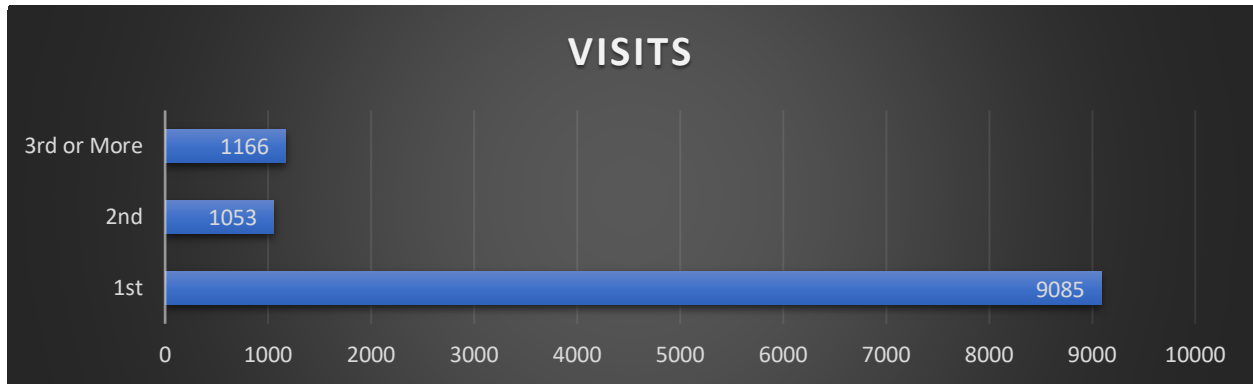
Most patrons we serve are not able to identify the core problem or trace back to how they arrived at their present problem. In the category of “other” 18% are not able to identify their core issue. Criminal issues account for 16.5% of our patrons. These issues include Expungement, Criminal Procedures, Probation & Parole, Attorney Referrals and patrons attempting to represent themselves in Criminal Proceedings. Civil Rights issues account for 16.6% of our non-family issues. Criminal Records account for 6.2%. Torts, Military, Tax, Immigration, Education & Business account for 7.6% combined total. Issues pertaining to Magistrate, Probate and Superior court account for 16.4% of the patrons we serve.



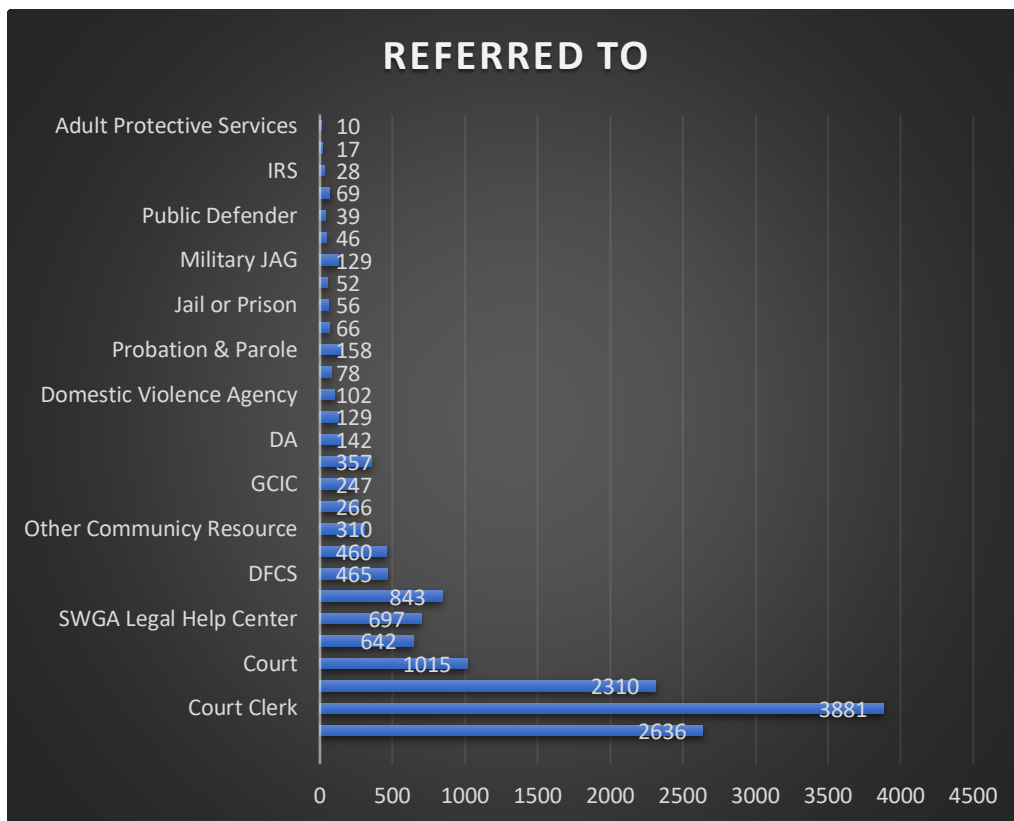
Total Services rendered for the entire grant period was 25,997 with 28.7% spent discussing & explaining legal options, 26.1% referring patrons to outside sources, 19.7% helping people with forms, 14.6% with Procedural Information, 6% reviewing documents and 2.6% is research. Both referring to a volunteer attorney & giving a pamphlet or brochure are 1% and running workshops are 2% due to staffing, space and time constraints.



Our patrons, 89% cite surfing our website and the internet as the primary way they located us. Word of mouth accounts for 8% and the remaining agencies listed above account for 3% of our referred patrons.

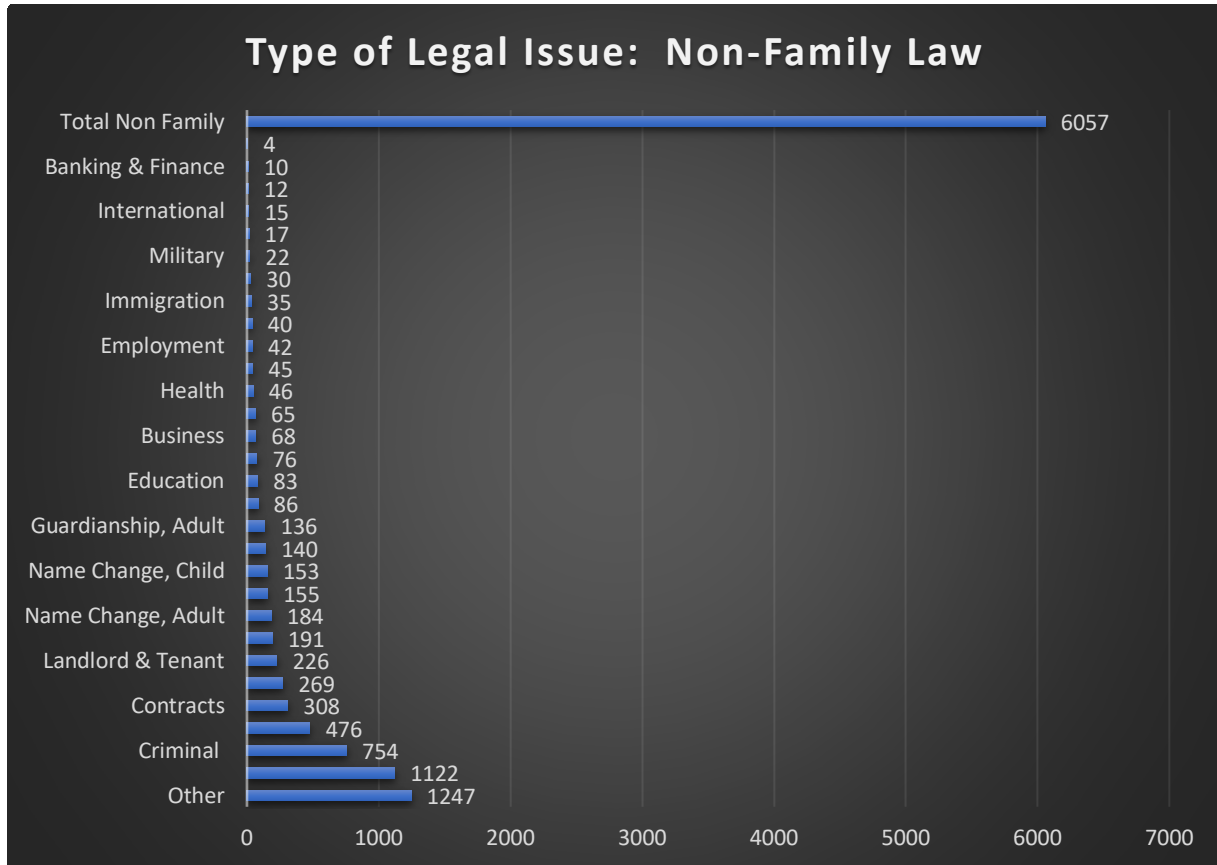


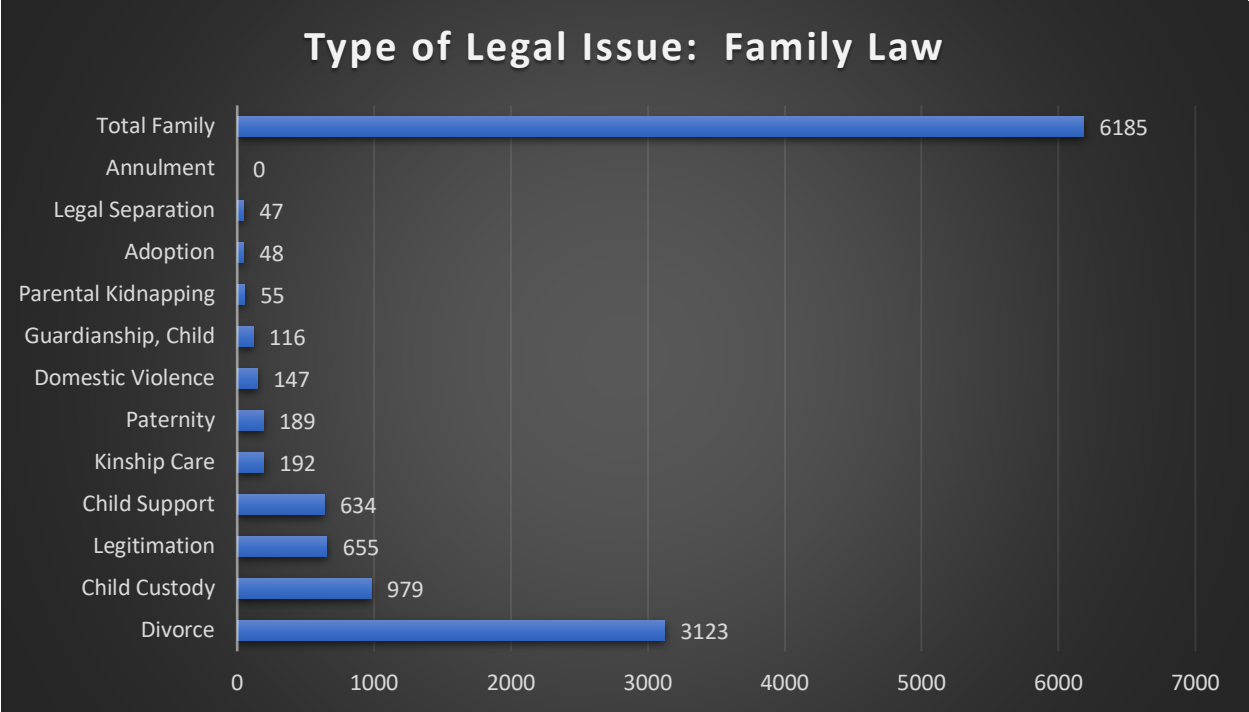
First time patrons account for 80.4% second time patron’s account for 9.3% and patrons who visit 3 or more times account for 10.3%.



Regardless of what the patron intends to file, the goal of the Southwest Georgia Legal Self Help Center is to diminish work for the court starting with the Clerk of the Courts. To this end, we referred 25.4% to the Clerk of Courts with packets ready to be filed, 21.8% to the court itself to complete any paperwork necessary to complete the case file. We reduced the time needed to litigant on the bench by 53%

by referring people to the proper agency to complete follow up on their cases. For example, Child Support cases in Dougherty County are referred to the Department of family & Children’s Services who have their own judge that signs any child support orders.





In comparison, the type of Family Law issues versus Non-Family Law issues percentage is an increase of .46%.



We are proud to report that 99% of our patrons are satisfied with the services and help they receive. Patrons comment that the staff was polite, courteous and made them laugh, that the services are truly needed & they felt better about their situation when they left the center.

SUSTAINABILITY & COMMUNICATION

We have accomplished a great deal since the Southwest Georgia Legal Self-Help Center opened on June 1, 2018. Our collective approach with our community partners is to continue to apply for grants that will sustain the center over the next two years and allow adequate time to secure a permanent funding source. A number of states fund their law libraries through the state judiciary budget. That would be a positive way to secure state funding so that rural counties can provide services comparable to what is available in larger cities.

Our collective long term approach with our community partners is to revise the existing county law library funding statutes to establish at least one properly staffed law library- based self-help center with an adequate collection of resources in each of Georgia's 10 judicial circuits. This "central" law library will serve as a Hub for all other county law libraries within its judicial district to remotely assist them as needed. In an effort to support these changes, all circuits within a judicial district should be required to provide financial assistance by apportioning 30% of their county's law library fees to the law library recognized as the "Hub" for the judicial district. We believe that there are several key elements to securing long-term sustainable funding. One important strategy is to get researchers at the National Center for State Courts or at state judicial branches to perform a return on the investment analysis so that we can show government officials the economic value of funding law library-based self-help centers.

Another important way to get funding is to reach out both to allies and opponents of our mission. We deal with resistance by being assertive, communicating clearly and remaining kind. We have a "Starbucks" type of coffee center for all court staff who come to the law library. We keep our governing boards informed and engaged in our mission. We build relationships with public librarians in each of the 10 judicial districts. We continue to host visits from university and county officials who want to create similar programs in their circuits.

We have developed a rapport with the local bar to provide ICLE education for the Legal community. We developed a brochure for attorney referral services and limited scope representation for self-represented litigants.

In addition, we have prepared packets to distribute in all judicial districts to present to their local governments. We also prepared packets to present to then judiciary regarding the current state of Law Libraries and the need for adequate funding. We created a website for the self-help center where patron can go to access information and forms. Our patrons also have access to PeachCourt to file their cases if they so choose. Finally, we have partnered with the Albany Police Department in Georgia to train the officers and command staff to take into the field information on what patrons can do to help themselves prevent and deal with situations before it becomes a court issue.

CONCLUSION

In the last 18 months, we never expected the response we received from the community and the people we served. The Self-Help Center grew from serving approximately 42 users to over 100 patrons per day. Many of our patrons have complex legal issues. The number we serve demonstrates the great need in this region for Access to Justice for all. The large response to the pilot program demonstrates that our model is effective and is serving many unmet needs. We are continuing our efforts to secure long-term funding because we do not want to close our doors on the people who need the service the most. To date we have serves 14,800 patrons in the center alone. We are grateful to for the support we have received from the National Center for State Courts, the Georgia Bar Foundation, and the Georgia Administrative Office of the Courts, our Community Partners & the Technology Support Team from the Lee County Public Library in Leesburg, Georgia. We will continue tirelessly to promote joint efforts that will secure more effective and widespread access to justice for all in Georgia.

