



Family Law Information Hub
Project Evaluation

Final Report

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Table of Contents

1. Background	1
1.1 The Family Law Information Hub Project	1
1.2 Research and Consultations with Stakeholders.....	1
1.3 Purpose of the Family Law New Brunswick Website.....	1
1.4 The Target Audience	2
1.5 Key Design Features.....	2
1.6 Planning and Development of Website	2
1.7 Launch and Promotion of Website	2
1.8 Promotional Activities and Resources	2
1.9 Partnership Development.....	3
1.10 Project Governance and Oversight.....	3
2. Purpose of the Evaluation.....	4
2.1 Statement of Work	4
2.2 Data Collection Approach and Methods.....	4
2.3 Baseline and Follow Up Surveys	4
2.4 Interviews and Focus Groups with Stakeholders.....	5
2.5 Interviews with Family Law NB Website and Telephone Information Line Users.....	5
3. Quantitative Evaluation Findings and Results	6
3.1 Family Law NB Website Utilization Data.....	6
3.2 Baseline and Follow Up Survey Data	8
4. Qualitative Evaluation Findings and Results	17
4.1 Stakeholder Interviews	17
4.2 Focus Group Sessions	24
4.3 Overview of Interviews with Family Law NB Website and Telephone Information Line Users	28
5. Proposed Future Directions to Improve Effectiveness of the Family Law NB Website.....	32
6. Summary and Key Conclusions.....	35
Appendices	
A. Evaluation Framework	
B. Baseline And Follow Up SRL Staff Surveys	
C. Stakeholder Interview Guide	
D. Focus Group Interview Guide	
E. Family Law NB Website and Telephone Information Line User Interview Guide	
F. Summary of Responses to 'Open Ended' SRL Survey Questions	

1. Background

1.1 The Family Law Information Hub Project

In March 2009, the Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick (PLEIS-NB) developed and implemented a major family law information and support initiative: the Family Law Information Hub Project (referred to in public documentation as Family Law NB/Droit de la famille NB). The main funder for the Family Law Information Hub Project was Justice Canada.

The key objective of this project was to develop an on-line family law information source that would contain a wide range of information and tools to assist anyone who was representing themselves before the New Brunswick Family Law System.

The rationale for undertaking this project was a recognition that the number of Self-Represented Litigants (SRLs) appearing before family law proceedings in the province had grown significantly, and was expected to continue to do so. In addition, from an administration of justice perspective, it was recognized that there was a need to better prepare persons who were going to court without the services of a lawyer.

1.2 Research and Consultations with Stakeholders

Preliminary research using interviews and focus groups completed by PLEIS-NB during Phase I of this Project indicated that more SRLs were coming before the Court of Queen's Bench, Family Division than in the past, and had nowhere else to turn for help. Many SRLs believed that they could not afford to engage a lawyer; they often did not understand the legal requirements and protocols of the Court. At the same time, Family Court staff were spending considerable time in providing basic assistance; e.g., filling out forms, and helping SRLs to understand and follow basic court procedures.

PLEIS-NB has been responding to webmail and telephone inquiries through its toll free Family Law Information Line for the past several years, and has maintained a record of the nature of inquiries and questions raised by callers. The agency was well aware of the wide range of issues, concerns and challenges faced by many SRLs when attempting to navigate the NB family justice system.

1.3 Purpose of the Family Law New Brunswick Website

These above findings were the basis of one of the main features of this initiative; the design and implementation of a website targeted at individuals who self-represent at any stage of the New Brunswick family justice system. Overall, the project was designed to:

- Assist SRLs in finding the information needed to access, and otherwise 'navigate' the legal system.
- Encourage SRLs to explore out-of-court options for resolving family law matters, and to seek legal advice at critical stages throughout the legal process.
- Lessen the strain on the family justice system and court registrar by providing a referral resource to deal with the education, information and assistance needs of SRLs.

1.4 The Target Audience

The primary audience for the Family Law NB Website includes all individuals with family law problems who wish to inform themselves and to better prepare for seeking legal advice. However, many of the new self-help guides (such as Applying for Custody, Access, and Support, and form 72J) added to the website were particularly targeted toward SRLs at any stage of the legal process, including: becoming informed on the legal issues, obtaining and completing documents, swearing, filing, and serving documents, and going to court.

1.5 Key Design Features

The website was designed to provide information on issues, processes and questions with regard to a wide range of family law matters, including providing access to legal forms and procedures that individuals can complete by themselves on-line. The on-line fillable forms are further complemented and supported by on-line hypothetical examples so that users get a sense of the type of information necessary to put in the various sections of the form as it is being completed.

In addition, the Family Law NB Website initiative was complemented by the development of several new family law publications, new annotated court forms, the strengthening of the Family Law Information Line support system, and a project evaluation plan.

1.6 Planning and Development of Website

Phase I of the initiative involved most of the planning and implementation tasks; work activities involved many legal professionals and intermediaries who regularly come in contact with individuals encountering family law problems and situations requiring some level of legal remedy. This included lawyers, judges, clerks, registrars and various court staff. All of the materials developed were reviewed for legal accuracy by many of these legal professionals.

In addition, considerable efforts were taken to ensure that the information and advice provided was addressed to the most common type of issues encountered by SRLs. And care was taken to ensure that the information was presented in a plain language format for ease of reading and understanding. The most common challenges and issues encountered by SRLs completing their own forms and applications were identified and addressed in revising or preparing the self-help guides and materials.

1.7 Launch and Promotion of Website

In Phase II, the New Family Law NB Website was developed and launched (March 2010) with some 42 examples of forms on-line both in English and French languages; this included a new guide to completing Form 72J. Other fillable forms and guides in development include the affidavit, the trial record form, and various cover letters that are required for certain actions. All these materials were included on the website.

1.8 Promotional Activities and Resources

A province-wide communication and promotion strategy was developed and implemented during the initial launch of the Website. The media was a major part of this strategy. In March 2010, the New Brunswick Department of Justice and Consumers Affairs contributed to the promotional efforts by putting advertisements in all New Brunswick daily newspapers. Several subsequent radio interviews resulted from this coverage. Other promotional initiatives included: participating in conferences (e.g., midwinter meeting of the NB Branch - Canadian Bar Association, and Public Legal Education Association of Canada);

and engaging in other workshops and meetings with court staff and community agencies to promote the website.

In addition, the project developed and distributed several promotional materials and aids; these included: brochures, posters, bookmarks, and fridge magnets promoting the Website and toll free Information Line. These materials were widely distributed to the public through such locations as the Service New Brunswick offices, Court Offices, law firms, Pro Bono clinics, and other groups and organizations that individuals might turn to when looking for family law type information. The objective in promoting access to these materials and guides was to enhance and improve the abilities and experience of individuals who plan to represent themselves before the court in a family law matter.

1.9 Partnership Development

A Project Advisory Committee was established to assist with the development and promotion of the Family Law NB Website; Committee members included the NB Department of Justice and Consumer Affairs (various branches including: research and planning, court services, court staff, FSOC director, and Deputy Register); the NB Law Society; the Canadian Bar Association - CBA-NB; the Advisory Council on the Status of Women; the Women's Issues Branch, Executive Council Office; and the Pro Bono Program at the University of New Brunswick Law School.

The Advisory Committee proved to be a strong asset to the project on a number of levels. In addition to creating early buy-in among the key groups, Committee members helped to facilitate access to legal expertise, to other important legal groups and networks, and to front line staff and other service providers.

Advisory Committee partners supported the project on a number of practical levels as well. The Department of Justice and Consumer Affairs purchased quantities of the custody self-help guide, and distributed these guides to all the courts in the province. The Department also took out a promotional advertisement in all the daily newspapers on the province to help promote broad public awareness of the new website and its resources.

The CBA-NB Branch helped with promotion of the Family Law NB Website and resources through mail-outs to members of the Family Law Bar, and partnered with PLEIS at its midwinter meeting to offer a workshop describing the website and its resources. The Advisory Council profiled the website in their e-newsletter that is distributed to thousands of recipients, and the Women's Issues Branch included an article in their quarterly report. Other partners provided various levels of in-kind support over the course of the project; e.g., reviewing written drafts of various information/resource materials for accuracy and ease of reading, and assisting with promotion activities in various ways; e.g., linked the Family Law NB Website logo to their own business or organization's website.

1.10 Project Governance and Oversight

The Family Law Information Hub Project was implemented under the supervision of Dr. Deborah Doherty, Executive Director, Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick. Dr. Doherty also acted as the Evaluation Coordinator for the Project, and provided direction and support to the evaluation consultant over the course of the evaluation.

2. Purpose of the Evaluation

2.1 Statement of Work

The evaluation of the Family Law NB Website initiative was designed to measure for the following project outcomes:

- The success of the Project in creating public awareness of the Family Law NB Website, toll-free line, and other family law resources.
- The effectiveness of the Family Law NB Website and resources (e.g., annotated forms) in assisting self-representing litigants in finding the information needed, and otherwise 'navigating' the legal system.
- The extent to which the Project has helped to lessen the strain on the family justice system and court registrar by providing a referral resource to deal with the education, information and assistance needs of SRLs.
- The satisfaction expressed with the website by other stakeholders, such as the Family Bar, the Law Society, and other relevant community agencies.

2.2 Data Collection Approach and Methods

An evaluation framework was created based a review of background documents and internal reports relevant to the Family Law Information Hub Project. A copy of the framework is attached in Appendix A.

A 'mixed methods' approach was used to collect evaluation data, including:

- a review of the Family Law NB Website utilization data for the past year;
- a baseline and follow up survey questionnaire designed to collect data from a wide spectrum of stakeholders including: Family Court staff, Family Law Solicitors, and Family Court Judges within the province;
- a series of interviews and/or focus groups conducted with Advisory Committee members, project stakeholders, court staff, Family Law Solicitors, and, to a limited extent, SRLs who had used Family Law NB Website.

2.3 Baseline and Follow Up Surveys

The objective of the baseline and follow up surveys was to attempt to determine whether or not there were any measurable impacts on the frequency, nature and extent of demands placed on Family Division Court staff as the result of the availability of the Family Law NB Website.

The baseline survey was administered in June 2010, just prior to a provincial-wide initiative to promote the website and its resources. The follow up survey was administered in March 2011 some ten months after the promotional campaign.

The surveys were conducted using an electronic survey questionnaire designed for both Anglophone and Francophone respondents. The survey was distributed widely to legal professionals, court staff, and other stakeholders in the NB family justice system. A copy of each questionnaire is attached in Appendix B.

The data from both surveys represent one of the methods used to measure the impacts of the various Family Law NB Website and its resources on the nature and extent of time demands being placed on the various legal professionals, judges and others who come into contact with SRLs.

2.4 Interviews and Stakeholder and Focus Group Interviews

A series of telephone interviews were completed with project stakeholder (note: stakeholders included individuals who were involved in some way with this project; e.g., someone who was a member of the Advisory Committee, a participant in the initial consultations, a community partner). In addition, two focus groups were conducted with stakeholders and staff working in the family justice system. One session was held with Anglophone participants in Fredericton (8 participants), and a Francophone session was held in Bathurst (7 participants). In both instances, the objective of the interviews was to explore the views and perceptions of interviewees and group participants regarding the impacts and outcomes of the Family Law NB Website.

Structured interview questions were used to guide the interviews in each case. A copy of the Stakeholder Interview Guide is attached in Appendix C, and the Focus Group Interview Guide is in Appendix D.

2.5 Interviews with Family Law NB Website and Telephone Information Line Users

A small sample of Family Law Website and Information Line users were identified in two ways:

(1) Four website users indicated on the 'Your Opinion Matters' on-line website evaluation form that they would be prepared to participate in a follow up telephone call - they provided their e-mail address as contact information.

(2) The Family Law Information Line Officer identified a total of ten website and information line users who agreed to participate in a telephone interview to provide feedback regarding their experience.

Again, structured interview questions were used to guide these interviews. A copy of the User Interview Guide is attached in Appendix E.

3. Evaluation Findings and Results

This section of the report provides a summary of the quantitative data findings and results; this includes a twelve month profile of the Family Law NB Website utilization data; and the results of both the Self-Represented Litigants (SRLs) baseline and follow up survey questionnaires.

3.1 Family Law NB Website Utilization Data

Data tracking the 'traffic' on the website was collected from the 'Google analytics' data base. The following tables outline the 'traffic' on both the English and French websites.

Table #1 - English Family Law NB Website Data

Year	2010									2011		
	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
# of visits	1164	1086	1130	1324	1566	1567	1732	1689	1270	1786	1608	2107
Unique visitors	807	722	711	784	953	982	1038	1001	847	1191	1085	1422
Page views	6644	6595	5932	6614	8046	7747	8142	7621	5581	8523	7545	9957
Average page views	5.71	6.07	5.25	5.00	5.14	4.94	4.70	4.51	4.39	4.77	4.69	4.73
Time on site (minutes)	4:53	5:34	4:45	4:41	4:58	5:04	4:52	4:56	4:22	5:12	4:47	5:25

The utilization 'traffic' on the English website has trended higher since the March 2010 launch, with the total number of both site visits, and visits by unique visitors, almost doubling over the twelve month period. Other data highlights include:

- The top traffic source (47%) was direct contact which suggests that the promotional resources are encouraging people to visit, and perhaps bookmark, the site.
- The top four key words searched were: family law in New Brunswick (or some variation thereof), child support, child custody and divorce.
- The most viewed/downloaded pages were: family law forms; FAQs and Self-Help Guides.

Table #2 - French Family Law NB Website Data

Year	2010									2011		
	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
# of visits	251	151	215	176	205	215	251	261	181	313	218	296
Unique visitors	169	118	165	125	138	138	166	183	134	209	165	234
Page views	1193	689	885	741	887	938	1196	1076	841	1150	867	1344
Average page views	4.75	4.56	4.12	4.21	4.33	4.36	4.76	4.12	4.65	3.67	3.98	4.54
Time on site (minutes)	4:09	3:40	3:55	4:23	3:39	3:53	4:42	4:41	3:44	4:18	3:25	3:54

Utilization trends on the French language has also continued to increase since the March 2010 launch, but the increase has been generally more gradual. Other data highlights include:

- Again the majority of visitors (44%) came directly to the site.
- The top three key words searched were: droit de la famille, aide juridique, pension alimentaire.
- The most viewed/downloaded pages were: formulaires, publications and guides pratiques.

Note: The utilization data regarding Francophone users has trended a bit low; given the population dynamics in New Brunswick, one would expect that about 30% of all users would be on browsing the site in French. However, it has been PLEIS-NB's experience that many Francophone organizations/individuals often place publication orders on the English side of the site, so it could be that a percentage of traffic on the English site may be French users.

Table # 3 – Combined (English and French) Family Law NB Website Data

Year	2010									2011		
	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
# of visits	1415	1237	1345	1500	1771	1782	1983	1950	1451	2099	1826	2403
Unique visitors	976	840	876	909	1091	1120	1204	1184	981	1400	1250	1656
Page views	7837	7284	6817	7355	8933	8685	9338	8697	6422	9673	8412	11301
Average page views	5.54	5.89	5.07	4.90	5.04	4.87	4.71	4.46	4.43	4.61	4.61	4.70

The combined utilization trends indicate that the Family Law NB Website has seen a consistent, increasing level of traffic since the March 2010 launch date (with the exception of the month of December - which is understandable as this is the Christmas season and people tend to be focused on other seasonal activities).

Other PLEIS-NB Activity that Supports the Family Law NB Website

PLEIS New Brunswick monitors the Family Law NB Website activity and provides support on three levels:

- (1) Individuals visiting the website occasionally send emails with further questions and inquiries; over the past year PLEIS-NB has responded to 177 email requests asking for information and clarification on family law procedures and forms.
- (2) Since September 2010, PLEIS-NB has been offering access to our enhanced family law toll-free line. The Family Law Information Officer offers information and education assistance to individuals on family law matters generally, and explains family court procedures and the use of forms in particular. This past year, close to 900 people called the Information Line to ask for information relating to their family matters and to get help with handling their own cases. While the use of the French side of the website is lower than one might expect (as noted above), about 50% of the callers to the family law line were Francophone.
- (3) PLEIS-NB monitors Website inquires and concerns and takes steps to address access issues, clarify any information that users may find confusing, and to periodically add new information to ensure that the content on the site is up-to-date.

3.2 Baseline and Follow Up Survey Data

Purpose of Surveys

The objective of the baseline and follow up surveys was to determine whether or not there were any measurable impacts on the frequency, nature and extent of demands placed on the NB Family Justice System as a result of the availability of the Family Law NB Website and its resources.

Methods and Timing

The pre and post surveys were conducted using an electronic survey questionnaire (both English and French versions). The survey population for both the pre and post surveys included: Family Division court staff (administrative staff, clerks, and legal supervisors), judges, staff of the Family Support Orders Service (FSOS), private family law lawyers, family solicitors with the New Brunswick Legal Aid Services Commission (NBLASC), and other family justice system staff who may have received the invitation to complete the survey.

The pre survey (baseline survey) was administered in May 2010 just prior to a province-wide initiative to promote the Family Law NB Website to a wide range of stakeholders, and the public generally. The key objective of the baseline survey was to collect 'bench mark data' with regard to how Self Represented Litigants (SRLs) were impacting the family justice system, and the workload of staff working at various levels within the system.

The follow up survey was conducted in March 2011; approximately 10 months after the website was launched. The key objective of the follow up survey was to determine if there was any measureable impact and/or differences in the experience and workload of those individuals who deal with SRLs, as a result of the availability of the Family Law NB Website.

Distribution to Potential Respondents

PLEIS-NB prepared a contact list of stakeholders such as Family Court/Justice managers, Family Solicitors (NBLASC), the Family Law Bar (CBA), and judges to whom the survey was to be forwarded with a request for its completion. A covering letter/email was also prepared to briefly outline the purpose of the survey, and the importance of having everyone take the time to complete it. In keeping with a recommendation made by those who participated in the 'pilot test' focus group, PLEIS arranged for key supervisors and an Assistant Deputy Minister in the Department of Justice and Consumer Affairs to send the email to potential respondents across the family justice system.

The surveys collected data in a number of areas, including the frequency of contact with SRLs (contacts, how many hours), the nature of the contact (what type of issues do they need help with, how do staff respond, challenges encountered, etc), and the impact of the demands currently being placed on the family justice system.

Limitations

Given that the surveys in both instances were sent out to a wide spectrum of family justice staff and family law lawyers and solicitors working across the province of New Brunswick, it is not possible to tell whether the same people completed both the baseline and the follow up survey questionnaires. It is highly likely that some of the same people did, but it is also likely some who completed the follow up questionnaire may not have completed the baseline questionnaire. Hence, the survey results can only attempt to reflect trends or patterns at a broad level.

Overview of the SRL Baseline and Follow Up Survey Results

The following section provides a summary of the results of both the initial baseline survey (June 2010), and the follow up survey (March 2011). The results are presented in the same sequence as the survey questions, and the data for both the baseline results and the follow up results are presented in the same table to allow the reader to see the results from both surveys.

A. Profile of Survey Respondents

At the outset, it was estimated that the potential number of persons to receive the survey would be between 250-300 persons (includes Family Court staff, lawyers, judges from all across NB).

A total of eighty-nine (89) respondents completed the baseline survey; sixty-three (63) of these respondents were Anglophone, while twenty-six (26) were Francophone. A total of fifty-eight (58) respondents completed the follow up survey; thirty-nine (39) of these respondents were Anglophone, while nineteen (19) were Francophone.

Language	Baseline - 2010	Follow Up - 2011
Anglophone Respondents	63 (71%)	39 (29%)
Francophone Respondents	26 (67%)	19 (33%)
Total	89	58

Although the exact number of people who received the survey is not known; it appears that the response rate was in the 25-30% range; this is generally considered a good response rate for a survey of this type.

Note: Both the baseline and follow up surveys were distributed to the same target population using the same distribution methods. There is no obvious explanation as to why there were fewer completed surveys for the follow up survey. While the time frame between the two surveys was 10 months, it is possible that some staff quickly looked at the survey invitation, may have remembered the initial survey, and concluded that they had already completed it. Another possible explanation might be that the follow up survey was distributed in the month of March; this month can be a busy month (March break, etc.)

B. Position of Respondents within Family Law System

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the nature of their work roles within the family justice system. The majority of the respondents were direct line service providers; e.g., a family law practitioner, private family law lawyer, Family Court staff, and Department of Justice staff.

Position	Baseline - 2010	Follow Up - 2011
Family Law Lawyers	28*	16*
Family Court Staff	25	17
Justice Staff (FSOS)	22	8
Family Court Staff - Legal	5	4
Judges	4	5
Other	5	4
Missing Data	0	4
Total	89	58

* This figure includes both private family law lawyers and legal aid solicitors.

Note: 'Other' included other family justice system staff who may have received the invitation to complete the survey.

Survey Question # 1: Frequency of Respondent Encounters with Self-Represented Litigants

The baseline survey revealed that more than one-half (57) respondents had either daily and/or weekly contact with SRLs seeking assistance, while another twenty-two (22) had at least monthly contact. The follow up survey revealed that almost three-quarters (44) respondents had either daily and/or weekly contact with SRLs seeking assistance, while another six (6) had at least monthly contact.

Table 1: Frequency of Encounters with SRLs		
Frequency of Encounters	Baseline - 2010	Follow Up - 2011
Weekly	29	21
Daily	28	23
1-2 times per month	22	6
Very seldom	10	8
Total	89	58

Survey Question # 2: Point of Initial Engagement with SRLs

Survey respondents indicated that SRLs engage at a number of significant stages within the legal/court process, including: obtaining, completing and filing documents; the court hearing stage, and after the conclusion of legal action.

Table 2: Point of Initial Engagement with SRLs		
Point of First Encounter	Baseline - 2010	Follow Up - 2011
Prior to legal action	44	40
Obtaining documents	55	29
Court hearings	52	37
Filing documents	40	28
After conclusion of legal action	37	21
Other	4	2
Total	232	157

Note: Because many of the respondents were likely to encounter SRLs at various stages of the family justice process, they were asked to check off all options that would apply regarding their experience with SRLs. This explains the difference in total counts between table 1 and table 2.

Other included: enforcement of court orders, and various telephone inquiries.

Survey Question # 3: Nature of Inquiries/Needs

Survey respondents indicated that seeking direction on the court process, legal questions, and technical issues were the most dominant areas of inquiry made by SRLs.

Table # 3: Nature of Inquiries/Needs		
Type of Inquiry/Request	Baseline - 2010	Follow-Up - 2011
Direction on court process	54	50
Seeking direction on legal questions/issues	65	47
Direction on technical Issues	64	47
Other	15	8
Total	198	152

Note: Again, survey respondents were asked to check all areas that applied regarding their experience with SRLs. Some of the 'other' comments include: requesting assistance with presenting evidence (providing proof of allegations); responding to an application; pleading an application; and requesting the support of an advocate.

Survey Question # 4: Amount of Time Spent Helping SRLs

The baseline survey revealed that twenty-one percent (21 %) of respondents spent between 1-2 hours each week assisting SRLs; twenty-one percent (21%) spent more than 1/2 hour each week; and seventeen percent (17%) spent less than 1/2 hour per week.

The follow up survey revealed that twenty-six percent (26%) of respondents spent between 1-2 hours each week assisting SRLs; twelve percent (12%) spent more than 1/2 hour each week; and fourteen percent (14%) spent less than 1/2 hour per week. However, twenty-two percent (22%) indicated that they spend more than 3 hours a week assisting SRLs.

Table 4: Time Spent (weekly) to Address Needs		
Amount of Time Spent	Baseline - 2010	Follow Up - 2011
1-2 hours	19	15
More than 1/2 hour	19	7
Less than 1/2 hour	15	8
More than 3 hours	6	13
None at all	6	6
No data reported	10	2
Total	75	51

Note: There is no obvious explanation as to why a greater number of survey respondents (13) in the follow up survey indicated that they spend more than 3 hours per week assisting SRLs. One possible reason could be that there may have been an overall increase in the number of SRLs seeking assistance.

Survey Question # 5: Impact on Respondents Own Responsibilities/Job

The baseline survey revealed that the requests that most impacted on people's job/work responsibilities included: seeking legal advice outside field of expertise (55); seeking help that is not part of the person's job tasks (47); taking up time needed for other job tasks (37); slowing down/interrupting the legal process (30).

Some thirty (30) respondents also noted that, while it may have been disruptive, it did provide them an opportunity to help someone.

The follow up survey results revealed a similar pattern. The areas most frequently noted by respondents in the follow up survey included: seeking legal advice outside field of expertise (42); seeking help that is not part of person's job tasks (29); it uses up time needed for other job tasks (21); slowing down/interrupting the legal process (22). Some respondents also noted that, while it may have been disruptive, it did provide them a chance to provide an opportunity to help someone (22).

Impact - Respondent's Role	Baseline - 2010	Follow-Up - 2011
Expect legal advice (outside immediate job tasks)	55	42
Expect help that is not normally part of my work	47	29
Taking time away from other work	37	21
Slows down or interrupts the legal process	30	22
Provides me with an opportunity to help	30	22
Other	10	8

Comments included under 'other' include: as they (SRLs) do not understand the process they often take the position that their issues are not given the attention they want; my client tends to end up being billed more because of (1) the time I take explaining things to the SRL; or (2) because of delays caused by inefficient communication.

Survey Question # 6: Most Challenging Aspects Process for SRLs

Survey respondents indicated that those parts of the legal process that SRLs find most challenging included: understanding, completing, and filing documents, and understanding and dealing with court protocols and processes. Survey results revealed that the pattern of responses between the baseline and follow up surveys were very similar in terms of what SRLs find most challenging.

Type of Task/Process	Baseline - 2010	Follow Up -2011
Using/including the proper forms and paperwork	58	42
Knowing what to do in court	55	42
Following the rules of court	53	44
Obtaining and/or creating the required forms	47	35
Filing of court documents	36	29
Serving documents	35	26
Swearing documents	35	29
Presenting evidence	32	36
Calling witnesses	23	28
Other	7	4

One respondent commented that SRL'S find the forms very repetitive, confusing and overwhelming.

Survey Question # 7: How Respondents Helped SRLs

Survey Respondents indicated that they frequently refer SRLs to legal aid, or strongly recommend that they seek legal advice/counsel; respondents also frequently provided law information resources, and other family law related forms.

Again, survey results revealed that the pattern of responses between the baseline and follow up surveys, were very similar in terms of how respondents helped SRLs.

However, there was two differences: the Family Law NB Website and the toll free Family Law Information Line were added to the follow up survey as options. Forty-three (43) of the respondents indicated that they have referred SRLs to the Family Law NB Website, while twenty-eight (28) respondents indicated that they have referred SRLs to the toll free Family Law Information Line.

Type of Help Provided	Baseline- 2010	Follow Up - 2011
Refer to legal aid	54	45
Strongly recommend a lawyer	53	43
Refer to Family Law NB Website		43
Refer to Family Law Toll Free Help Line		28
Provide law information resources and pamphlets	40	33
Refer to legal advice clinic	38	30
Advise re internet resources	37	24
Refer to another staff person internally	35	27
Provide certain family law forms	33	28
Refer to external groups and organizations	6	4
Other	24	3

Under 'other' respondents noted that they have referred SRLs to Mental Health Services, Income Assistance, and to other specialized programs.

The following series of questions on the follow up survey were different from the baseline survey; respondents were directly asked about their experience with, and perceptions of, the Family Law NB Website and its resources.

Survey Question # 7a: Did the Availability of the Family Law NB Website Add to Your Capacity to help SRLs?

This was a qualitative question and respondents were invited to comment on such things as whether or not they refer SRLs to the website; in what type of situations or for what reasons; was this helpful for them (saved time, etc), and was it helpful to the SRL.

A number of respondents indicated that they view the Family Law NB Website as a valuable referral resource, that they routinely refer SRLs to the site, and that there are positive benefits for both the SRLs

(information, direction, tools, etc), and for themselves (respondents feel good that they can offer a helpful resource, SRLs ask better questions, and there is some beginning indication that it is reducing time spent with SRLs).

Other respondents noted that many SRLs do not have the ability and motivation to go on-line to search out issues, and a number of respondents wondered whether a website with information and resources about family law and court processes is the way to go (i.e., what is needed is more access to legal aid, lawyers, SRLs should not be in the legal business).

A more detailed account of the actual observations and comments offered by respondents is attached in the Appendix F.

Survey Question # 8: Has Increased Access to Legal Information on the Family Law NB Website Reduced the Time You Spend Educating SRLs?

Twenty-two respondents indicated that access to the Family Law NB Website has reduced the amount of time spent dealing with SRLs, while 16 indicated that it has not reduced the amount of time.

Table 8: Access to Website has Reduced Time	
Yes	22
No	16
Please explain	16
Missing data	4
Total	58

Respondents who answered 'no' to this question were asked to explain why they believed this to be the case. Some indicated that many SRLs may not have access to a computer, or may wish to speak to someone in person. Others felt many SRLs are not aware of the Website, and that more promotion of the site is needed.

A more detailed account of the actual observations and comments offered by respondents is attached in the Appendix F.

Survey Question # 9: Have You Observed any Changes with SRLs Over the Past Year, That Suggests to You They are Better Prepared to Deal With Legal Issues and Processes?

Twenty-three respondents indicated that they have observed changes over the past year that indicates that SRLs are better prepared to deal with legal issues and processes. Thirty-one respondents indicated that they did not observe any indication of being better prepared.

Table 9: Changes - SRLs are Better Prepared	
Yes	23
No	31 *
Missing data	4
Total	58

* This number is high; a possible explanation might be that the overall number of SRLs seeking assistance continues to grow, plus many SRLs encountered may not yet be aware of the Family Law NB Website, or are making use of it.

Survey Question # 10 (a): In What Ways do They Seem Better Prepared?

This question provided respondents with a list of areas in which SRLs may be better prepared. The table below outlines their responses.

The results indicate that some SRLs are showing some evidence of improved ability in searching out/determining which forms are needed, and obtaining and completing the needed forms. There is less evidence that they are better prepared regarding the legal and/or court processes.

Knowing/deciding which forms they need to use	13
Obtaining the forms	16
Filling out forms correctly	12
Filing of court documents	11
Serving documents	7
Swearing documents	4
Following the rules of court	3
Presenting evidence	1
Calling witnesses	1
Other	2

10 (b). What Could be Done to Further Help SRLs be Better Prepared?

To further help SRLs better understand and work with the family law system, survey respondents indicated a range of additional services and supports. These are outlined in the following table.

A Toll-free line regarding information re directions on court procedures	34
Provide opportunities for SRLs to learn about court procedure and process	33
Pro bono legal advice	30
Small group info sessions on court procedure	25
Access to on-line forms	27
Better electronic access to information on process and procedure	20
Other	16

Respondents offered a range of additional suggestions in response to the 'other' option; the main themes running these suggestions including things such as having support available to complete the necessary legal forms, and more access to Duty Council and Legal Aid services.

A more detailed account of the actual observations and comments offered by respondents is attached in the Appendix F.

Survey Question # 11. As a final question, respondents were invited to offer any further comments regarding their experience with using/working with the Family Law NB Website. Many respondents indicated that it was a very useful and valuable resource, and felt that as time goes on its use will become more widespread. In terms of how to improve and strengthen the site, many noted that it needs more public profile and promotion. And finally, there were a number of respondents who felt that many SRLS need access to more legal help (legal aid, mediators, duty counsel), as well as simply access to family law information.

A more detailed account of the actual observations and comments offered by respondents is attached in the Appendix F.

Summary

Based on the quantitative results from the baseline and follow up surveys, it can be concluded that most of the survey respondents were aware of the availability of the Family Law NB Website and toll free Information Line. Many indicated that it was an important and valuable resource, and many actively promoted the website to any SRLs they may have encountered in their work. It is more difficult to conclude (from the quantitative data) whether or not the availability of the website has resulted in reducing the demand on people's time and workload.

However, the qualitative comments and input do indicate that, for many respondents, the website and its resources did have an impact on front line time and workload. Many respondents indicated that SRLs were using the website and becoming better informed and using the resources. This resulted in front line staff spending less time in answering questions, explaining processes, or copying various forms and other written materials. The qualitative data also indicated that, for a number of respondents, there continues to be a major gap despite the website and its resources and tools. In the view of these respondents the most pressing need for most SRLs was more access to legal services, mediation services, and educational support.

4. Qualitative Evaluation Findings and Results

This section of the report summarizes the findings and results of the stakeholder and focus group interviews, and interviews with users of the Family Law NB Website.

4.1 Stakeholder Interviews

Family Law NB Website stakeholder interviews included those individuals who had been, or continue to be, involved in some way with the initiative. A total of seventeen (17) stakeholders were interviewed by telephone; included in this group were: 5 lawyers - two private family law lawyers and three legal aid lawyers; two regional directors of court services; one supervisor of court services; four court clerk/administrators; two persons who worked with community based services (YWCA, women's groups); one person from the UNB Law School; the assistant Deputy Minister, Justice, and the Deputy Registrar's office.

The interviews were intended to explore the participants views and perceptions about the impacts and outcomes of the Family Law NB Website. Structured interview questions were used to conduct the interviews. A copy of the interview guide is attached in the Appendix C.

General Observation

All stakeholders were quite positive about the website's usefulness to SRLs, front line court staff, Family Law and Legal Aid lawyers, and community service providers.

'...the website provides the SRL with a wide range of basic but important information about legal issues and questions, the steps to take to resolve their issue, what forms are needed, and how the court process works....' (Stakeholder)

'.....a very useful tool for other stakeholders such as family law lawyers, legal aid lawyers, legal aid intake staff, front line court staff and program managers, law students doing research or providing support to legal advice clinics....' (Stakeholder)

'...the website and its resources have made a positive impact... 'absolutely'...' (Stakeholder)

Website Design and Presentation

In terms of awareness, all stakeholders were aware of the website and its resources, and commented on its professional design and 'look', its comprehensiveness in terms of the range of information, and its 'user-friendly' easy to navigate format and presentation. Stakeholders indicated that, while promotion of the website needs to be an ongoing effort, they believe that its profile and visibility has been steadily growing since the March 2010 launch date.

'.....the website is well developed, easy to access and navigate, and contains a lot of good general information that is presented clearly and concisely, and the videos add a lot to the information base....' (Stakeholder)

'.....the website is very well developed and is meeting an important need....it's a great tool for SRLs and anyone seeking general family law information....' (Stakeholder)

How Have Used/Promoted the Website

Stakeholders and family law staff have used and promoted the website and its resources in a number of ways.

'...our office receptionist will often suggest the site to clients who come in with family law issues and questions....we also have hard copies of a lot of PLEIS's resources and information brochures in our waiting room....' (Stakeholder)

'.....I work with Legal Aid and sometimes use the website 2-3 times a week myself to get information to clarify a question or process issue....the court forms are great....pretty easy to access and use.....they pretty well describe what information is needed, and how to complete....' (Stakeholder)

'...I have mentioned and discussed the website with other legal colleagues...even some of the family court judges...' (Stakeholder)

'.....I do not know how much the website has been used.....however, I do know that every SRL is referred to the website and information line by our staff...' (Stakeholder)

'.....I have been using PLEIS resources and its public information brochures for years....they consistently produce very informative materials, and always at a high quality...' (Stakeholder)

Positive Benefits and Outcomes

In addition to providing information and direction on dealing with a wide range of family law related issues and matters, some stakeholders indicated that the website achieves two other outcomes. Firstly, it helps to 'demystify' the legal process and the legal steps. SRLs (and others) can go on-line and read about how various legal actions are dealt with, the steps to follow, the forms needed, etc. Plus they can watch a video explaining various legal/court processes, what to expect in court, and how to address the judge in the court room.

Secondly, the website represents a concrete and tangible acknowledgement of the reality that not everyone can afford a lawyer, and that it is important that SRLs family law legal issues/needs are not compromised because they lacked knowledge about the steps to take, the forms to use, or what to expect in terms of the courtroom process. One stakeholder noted that from an administration of Justice point of view it's important to maintain this balance.

'.....this is why things like the website are so valuable.....it provides information to the person who has a legitimate family law concern or issue... so that they too can come before the justice system to seek a resolution...' (Stakeholder)

'.....I think the most positive outcome is that SRLs have been given tools to work with should they be unable to hire a solicitor to represent them.....not everyone has the means to have a solicitor represent them in cases.....this is a very positive measure from all standpoints....' (Stakeholder)

Information Gaps

Generally speaking most stakeholders felt that the website was quite comprehensive in terms of the nature and scope of the issues it covers, and the information and tools it contains. Only a few noted missing information gaps; these include:

- The Saint John Family Court Project has new forms dealing with divorce proceedings, these are not on-line yet but need to be; the Project is in discussion with PLEIS to have these forms on-line as well.

SRLs Need Additional Support

Stakeholders noted that access to the website and its resources is important for SRLs and others who are 'computer savvy'; however, there will always be those individuals who either do not have access to computers, or are not comfortable working 'on-line', who will continue to need additional support.

'.....there are some SRLs who do not have access to a computer, or who are just not comfortable dealing with things this way and who will continue to need help; some people will always need someone to take them through the process step-by-step....' (Stakeholder)

'.....the forms themselves are invaluable....however, there still is a need for a complementary education piece... while SRLs may have the correct forms they still need education and support on filling out the information.... many don't really know how to do this or what language to use when completing certain forms; e.g., my husband, ex-husband, the child's father, Joe Smith....' (Stakeholder)

'..... the variation to child custody order forms...I still meet clients at the legal advice clinic who still are wondering which forms to use....' (Stakeholder)

'..... I have heard that trying to access the toll free help line can be difficult....the line is often busy....' (Stakeholder)

Communication Strategy - Promotion of Website

Stakeholders indicated that the profile and visibility of the website has been steadily growing since the March 2010 launch date. However, while the promotional materials (brochures, posters, bookmarks, fridge magnets) have been helpful, several stakeholders believe that there are still many SRLs, and the public generally, who are not aware of the website and its resources. Front line court staff encounter people on a daily basis and having the promotional tools (e.g., bookmarks and magnets) available to them is important. New people come into the system every day so information on the service is probably most consistently passed out at the court counter or by telephone contact.

'.....PLEIS needs to keep up its promotion efforts....continue to distribute posters, bookmarks, and fridge magnets to various offices....keep working at a number of levels to get the word out.... it's an ongoing effort....' (Stakeholder)

'.....my sense is that many SRLs still don't know about the site generally...when I do a session at the clinic I spend the first 15 minutes speaking about resources available....I always make them aware of site and how to access it....' (Stakeholder)

'.....staff at our office include the website bookmarks in any of the materials that we mail out to those seeking the divorce kits, etc....' (Stakeholder)

Further Initiatives/Activities to Improve Awareness

As noted above, stakeholders indicated that promotion of the website is something that will be an on-going process. A number of suggestions to further develop and improve awareness of the website were offered:

- Get the information about the website out to all the community-based, early intervention types of agencies in the province; agencies such as: women support groups, family support services, day care and early childhood development centres, family physicians, and other front line service providers such as social and community services, and public health nursing.

- Set up and conduct more 'hands on' type workshops for SRLs, front line staff, and other professional groups in various parts of the province; this provides people with a chance to look at the site, look up the information on certain issues and questions.
- Ensure that the information is available in 'hard copy' as well as the on-line version; it is important to have the information in both formats.
- Ensure that key agencies such as NB Family Court Division, NB Department of Justice and Consumer Affairs, the Law Society, and the NB Bar have a direct link to the Family Law NB Website on their home website.
- Consider preparing and running a series of radio and/or TV ads describing the site's resources, and providing information on how to access its resources.

Impact of Website and Resources on SRLs

Many of the stakeholders did not work directly with SRLs and were not able to comment directly on this question. However for those who were able to comment they offered the following:

'....the website has helped people...we get very few people returning for further information from court staff once they have been referred to the website and information line....' (Stakeholder)

'....my sense is that many SRLs are using the divorce information section of the site....' (Stakeholder)

'....I have seen a lot of instances where the forms from the website are being used....' (Stakeholder)

'....the videos seem to have 'resonated' with people...they are well done....the processes are well explained and clear....I have a sense that people have been listening to the videos and find them helpful....' (Stakeholder)

The stakeholders interviewed who were lawyers, and those who work with family legal aid cases, confirmed the value of the website and the on-line resources.

'....I often encounter SRLs who are usually unprepared regarding knowing how to deal with their legal issues before the court....this always causes delays for everyone....this whole area is definitively an important issue to address...' (Stakeholder)

Some of the lawyers noted that they encounter SRLs on 'the back end of a case' (usually the spouse or partner of someone they are representing), and indicated that the website was helpful to those SRLs who did access its resources.

'....on two occasions in the past few months I suggested to the SRL on 'other side' that there was a website that had good information about the court processin both cases they did visit the site and both seemed appreciative that I gave them this information....there was a noticeable difference in how they dealt with things at the court hearing....' (Stakeholder)

'....it was also a benefit in that the case didn't get adjourned because they weren't prepared and things worked more efficiently....even the time spent on phone with the SRL was more effective because we were dealing with the right issues....the SRL knew what

they could claim and what they couldn't claim because they were better informed....'
(Stakeholder)

'....what was most helpful was they seemed to know that there was a process to follow....they were more prepared for the court process, how to address the judge, how to get their issues heard, more clear about what they wanted, and were more 'on top of' working with the forms....' (Stakeholder)

'...they now know they just can't show up unprepared and throw themselves at the mercy of the court...' (Stakeholder)

'...when I serve a notice of application on a SRL...on the receiving end of a legal process....while acting for my client....I always include information about the website, the brochure, bookmark, something with the site address...' (Stakeholder)

Impact on Family Justice System

Again, while not every stakeholder was able to comment directly on this question, many were able to offer observations and comments.

The most positive outcome from a front line perspective is that counter staff now have a information source to which they can refer people.

'...the website information is given to every SRL who visits our front counter.... this has allowed staff to step back from providing lengthy explanations at the counter and has saved a great amount of time...' (Stakeholder)

'...the website is a useful resource and we do not often have SRLs return for further information once they have accessed the site.... this resource has definitely eased the burden on front line staff....' (Stakeholder)

'...not sure if it (the website) does save time or reduce my work load.... but it has resulted in dealing with a more informed client who has a better sense of the issues they want to address...' (Stakeholder)

'...I would say it has made a difference in the workload of the Clerk of the Court as well since previously, any legal-type questions concerning process would have been referred to the Clerk....' (Stakeholder)

'...I do not see any great differences so far as saving actual court time...many SRL's do their own divorces and motions to vary....and the amount of deficiencies seem to be remaining fairly consistent....' (Stakeholder)

'...we still have people who believe they can do the paperwork and skip the reading of the instructions to ensure that it is done properly....plus others may not have the capability to complete documents under any circumstances so the website does not impact on this group at all....in speaking with our court stenographer there appears to be little impact on the courtroom activity with respect to the website...' (Stakeholder)

'...the website is a good resource....we have made front line staff at all levels (front counter clerks, court clerks, family advice lawyers, etc.), aware of the website and advised them to refer SRLs to this site....it is also a good resource tool to orientate new staff to the

family law field...it has a lot of good basic information that is well laid out and explained....' (Stakeholder)

'... the staff at the new Family Law Centre in Saint John (pilot project) has two computers for public use....the website is promoted there as well...we also have printed off the various pages and documents in hard copy for those who are not comfortable working with computers....' (Stakeholder)

Usefulness of website, resources to other parties

Some stakeholders noted that other groups, outside the family law court stream, are aware of and have used the website to a certain extent.

'...I have made staff at my child's day care aware of the site and its resources... they have referred parents to the site... ' (Stakeholder)

'... law students, especially those interested in family law, find it a very beneficial resource....it is very useful to have the information 'well packaged' and all in one site....' (Stakeholder)

'....PLEIS is doing a very good job at what they do....they have taken on a lot of very important public education initiatives and developed some really good information resources and tools....' (Stakeholder)

'...I work in a legal advice clinic....we use it as an information tool with people who attend the clinic.... I have encouraged clients to use it....some are already aware of the website and have used it to search out certain information....' (Stakeholder)

'....one lady was 'quite proud that she found the information for herself' - after doing her own website search and finding the information she needed....' (Stakeholder)

'...have also referred women to the Toll Free Family Law Information Line...they find this support helpful as well....' (Stakeholder)

How the Website could be strengthened

The Family Law NB Website is a very good start and a 'work in progress' that can be further developed and supported. The opportunities for the future of the site are broad. As time goes on more people will go on-line for information. As more people become educated and comfortable around computers, using the internet will be seen as an effective way to do business. Stakeholder offered a range of suggestions to strength the website and its capacity.

- Ensure that the Family Law NB Website is linked to the websites of all other relevant government departments and legal groups and associations; e.g., Law Society, Family Bar offices, Legal Aid offices, and other sites.
- When navigating through the site, it might be useful to set up a 'funnel approach'; i.e., start with a list of questions that might direct the user; e.g., if actually divorced - click here; if recently separated - click here. In this way, individuals would be directed to a particular part of the site. This would help people 'zero in' on the section of the website most helpful to their particular need or situation.
- Create some new videos; (1) around language and terms within the court (addressing the judge), dress, decorum, during court hearing, what the courtroom looks like; (2) stressing that the judge

and lawyers need to focus on the factual points around the issues to be resolved to get best results for parent, child, and that the level of emotion needs to be minimized; and (3) what Legal Aid offers.

- Continue to work with family law lawyers to address their concern that they are 'giving away' potential work if they refer SRLs to the website. Reframe the approach; i.e., the reality is that there is a whole group of people with serious family law issues, and cannot afford a lawyer but need their issues resolved.

'...most lawyers don't practice family law so why not post the website link on their business sites...the message could be we don't do family law but here is a website that might help you... the profession needs to acknowledge the reality there is a segment of New Brunswick citizens that can't afford legal services....' (Stakeholder)

'...for those lawyers who do family law, having the prospective client better informed could save time and the lawyer might be able to work more efficiently with a better informed client...the website can have a positive benefit for both client and lawyer...' (Stakeholder)

- Continue to do ongoing promotion to increase awareness of, and access to, the website and its resources; place computer kiosks at courthouses, and other public places.
- Develop and deliver 'hands on' Family Law NB Website awareness and education workshops; deliver these sessions in various parts of the province on an annual, cyclical, basis.
- The website should not be a 'stand alone' effort; it should be part of a continuum of information and support services; e.g., the website, the Family Law Information Line info, Legal Aid Services, the private bar, and so on.
- Ensure that website content is periodically reviewed and updated to ensure that it remains relevant, up-to-date, and continues to be presented in a 'user friendly' and plain language format and style.

Summary

Generally speaking the website and its resources is viewed by all stakeholders as a very positive and necessary development to help address a large information gap for SRLs in the province of New Brunswick. The project has been rolled out in a strategic manner, and in the view of all stakeholders, it has made a positive contribution and impact on a number of levels. It has helped to ensure that SRLs have access to information, tools and supports that allow them to get their legal issues and needs before the Family Law/Court System. It has provided front line family law staff in particular with a resource that they can easily refer SRLs to, and this has resulted in reduced time spent in informing and supporting SRLs at the 'front end'. Stakeholders believe that the website represents 'a very good start', and efforts should continue to further develop its capacity, and to actively promote it more widely within the province.

4.2 Focus Group Sessions

Overview of Findings and Results of Focus Group Sessions

Two focus groups were conducted to collect evaluative information from legal professionals and court staff who are involved with the family justice system. One session was held with Anglophone participants in Fredericton (8 participants), and a Francophone session was held in Bathurst (7 participants).

The focus group sessions were intended to explore their views and perceptions about the impacts and outcomes of the Family Law NB Website Project.

Structured interview questions were used to guide the discussions. A copy of the interview guide is attached in the Appendix D.

Awareness

All participants in the focus groups were aware of the website, its purpose, and scope and nature of the resources contained on the site. They indicated that the website was well announced through a PLEIS promotions and communications campaign, complete with a package of promotional materials and tools for staff in courts, law firms and clinics to distribute (brochures, posters, bookmarks, fridge magnets). In addition, court staff who worked on the front desks (e.g., in courts, law firms, clinics) received additional information through internal e-mail communication and through staff meetings. The bookmarks and fridge magnets were popular promotional tools, and provided a *'quick and easy'* way to distribute the contact information to the public.

Participants indicated that the site could benefit from continued ongoing promotion - *'can never do too much promotion'*. Some wondered if the site is referenced in the phone book, and whether PLEIS (or some agency) should do periodic Public Service Announcements (PSAs) on radio and television.

Familiarity with Website Contents

Among the staff participating in the focus group sessions, 12 out of 15 participants had visited the website and were familiar with the resources. Those who visited the site indicated that they found the site easy to access and navigate - *'it's very easy for a lay person to understand and follow'*. They noted that the layout was *'very good'*, that the site colors were attractive and welcoming, and the capacity to work with the various forms on-line was a very important feature.

'...the site is not intimidating...it welcomes you.... doesn't scare you...' (Focus Group Participant)

Several participants noted that they use the website to seek information on a question or issue.

'...I use the website a lot to quickly update myself on certain issues or questions I'm dealing with....I find the forms and annotated 'pop-ups' very helpful guides, and it's reassuring to know that you are following the right steps and giving out the right information....' (Focus Group Participant)

Promotion of Website as Referral Source

Several participants in each focus group are the first point of contact at their respective workplaces, and they indicated that they frequently refer clients to the website, in particular to the section providing information to a divorce action in New Brunswick. Participants distribute the website bookmarks or a brochure with the Family Law NB Website address underlined.

One participant noted that she may average 5-6 calls a day with family law type of inquiries. In addition to providing the caller with information about the website, there are times where she will go on the site with the client and help the caller get familiar with the site and the resources.

'...I can help them find out about the 'rules of court', find certain forms....' (Focus Group Participant)

'....the only negative thing is you can't print off the forms....' (Focus Group Participant)

While it is difficult to know for sure as many people who they refer to the website do not get back to them, several participants indicated that they believe that clients who do go on the site find it helpful.

'...I feel that they have been helped....they have information they can go back to and review, and they are given 'step-by-step' advice on how to proceed to get their issues resolved...' (Focus Group Participant)

Impact on Role and Workload

Several focus group participants indicated that having the website as a referral source for SRLs (and others) has relieved some work pressures in that less time is now spent providing explanations to questions and inquiries. And because of the website, there is less time spent making photocopies of various documents and forms. They indicated that it's their perception that clients are less frustrated because they are given a concrete tool that provides them with a lot of information to deal with their questions and concerns. It is also more satisfying for the staff because they have something helpful to give to SRLs and the public generally.

'...it is a lot easier and quicker to deal with some clients and their questions....there is a lot of information....there are videos to watch...you can find the type of forms you have to use....learn how to fill the forms out....there is a lot of good information and tips....' (Focus Group Participant)

'... the fact that many do not come back with more questions is a bit of a sign that they must have gotten their questions answered by going to the site....' (Focus Group Participant)

'...people can print off the forms and guides and use them....this is helpful....I know that some clients are doing this because when they bring in the form the information that they filled in is in 'blue'....' (Focus Group Participant)

'...court clerks are having to handle less paper, less documents, and less time being spent in copying things....' (Focus Group Participant)

Focus group participants indicated that there seems to be less frustration being experienced from both front desk staff and clients generally. They noted that while it may be a little bit more work to inform the clients about the website and information line initially, it is better than just saying 'go see a lawyer'. They indicated that the SRLs seem to be happy to receive the information and the tools to deal with their questions and 'therefore we are too'.

'...in the last few months there seems to have been a reduction in the number of complaints from people since we have been referring them to the website...' (Focus Group Participant)

Website Content - Any Information Gaps?

Generally speaking all participants indicated that the nature and scope of the content on the site was very comprehensive, and well prepared and presented. In terms of missing information or gaps, participants noted a few areas, including:

- The area regarding the final child support payment needs more clarification as the current information/direction on the site regarding this issue could be misleading. It was suggested that, for clarification purposes, that the final support payment date should be specified in the court order as a reminder to everyone.
- The current financial calculation forms and guides does not seem to be able to easily accommodate changes or new situations such as alimony recalculations or other special expenses.
- There is a relatively new Family Law Pilot Program in Saint John using a different type of form regarding the divorce application, and these new forms are not on the site yet. PLEIS has been notified of this.
- In the Fredericton area the Wilmot Church offers a free legal clinic; it may be useful to provide information on the website where these types of clinics are located in the province.
- The site does not currently have any guides or forms regarding consent orders; both Alberta and Manitoba have done work on consent orders and clauses in various orders; is this an area that can be developed?

Impacts on SRLs

Other than some general comments, participants indicated that they have received very little specific feedback from those who they may have referred to the website. Their perception is that people they refer do go to the website and find the information, resources and tools helpful. Some have had the occasional person say *'I did exactly what they said in the guide' or 'In the guide....'*

A few participants noted that they have heard people comment that the toll free Family Law Information Line was a very helpful resource as well.

Usefulness of website, resources to other parties

A group representing the rights of grandparents to have access to their grand children was referred to the website. They used the site to become better informed about how the family court system works, what are the legal rights of families (including grandparents), and the different steps in the legal process. The information helped to remove some of the mystery of the court process for members of this group.

Some participants indicated that they have had lawyers tell them that they have referred clients, and others who have called their office, to go to the site for information about family law questions and matters.

The Advisory Council on the Status of Women, and the Women's Issue Branch, have a link to the Family Law NB Website.

Future Potential

Generally focus group participants were unanimous in their view that the Family Law NB Website was well developed, well presented, and well received.

'....this is an excellent initiative that has met a real need....' (Focus Group Participant)

'...the public is generally intelligent....if the resource is well developed, has relevant and helpful content, and is 'user-friendly'....they will use it....' (Focus Group Participant)

Participants noted several areas where the website might be strengthened and improved; these include:

- Extend and expand promotional efforts for the website and the toll free Family Law Information Line; offer 'hands on' information workshops in specific venues and groups; legal advice clinics, women's groups, and emergency shelters.
- Work with the NB Family Bar to do periodic promotional mail-outs.
- Promote the website and toll free Information Line through Service New Brunswick offices; ensure that posters, bookmarks, and fridge magnets are available for distribution through these sites; plus ensure that the various legal forms are available and free of charge through these sites as well.
- Ensure that the information stays current and up-to-date, continue to use plain language regarding legal terms and references.
- Develop and place on-line standard guides and forms to use for developing consent orders.

Summary

Focus group participants were very positive with about the website. Many were impressed with the range of content included on the site, and the design and presentation of the site. Many indicated that they are using it both with SRLs who make inquiries, and for themselves to become better informed regarding certain questions and issues. Participants who work in a front line role indicated that, by having the website available as a resource, they are spending less time answering questions and copying documents, and there seems to be fewer 'comeback questions' from SRLs once they were referred to the website. In terms of further development, participants noted that efforts should be made to ensure that the information on the site remains current and up-to-date, and that there should be ongoing promotional initiatives, particularly more 'hands on' type of workshops and activities.

4.3 Overview of Interviews with Family Law NB Website and Telephone Information Line Users

Users of the Family Law NB Website and the toll free Family Law Information Line were, for the most part, individuals who were researching and handling their own family law issues.

A small sample of fourteen (14) Family Law Website and Information Line users were identified in the following two ways: (1) The 'Your Opinion Matters' on-line website evaluation forms were used to identify possible participants; four website users indicated in their evaluation feedback that they would be prepared to participate in a follow up telephone call (they provided their e-mail address as contact information). And (2) the Family Law Information Line Officer identified ten (10) website and information line users who agreed to participate in a telephone interview to provide feedback regarding their experience.

In total, nine (9) telephone interviews were completed. One (1) interview was with a user who had responded to the e-mail invitation; eight (8) interviews were completed with those users identified through the Family Law Information Line Officer.

Structured interview questions were used to conduct the interviews. A copy of the guide is attached in the Appendix E.

Awareness of Website

Users became aware of the Family Law NB Website through a variety of ways; five users received a bookmark with contact information for both the website and Information Line from a front line staff at an office (such as a Family Court Office, the Department of Justice). One person used Google and found the reference to the site; and three were introduced/referred to the website after they had made contact with the Family Law Information Line.

Ease of Access and Use

Six out of the nine interviewees indicated that they needed the guidance and support of the Information Line Officer to navigate and utilize the website. They were able to '*ask very specific questions*' with regard to their issues and situation. With this guidance and instruction, they did find out the information they needed.

Two interviewees were able to navigate the site easily, were able to find the information they were seeking, and found '*it all good information*'.

One user described his situation as unique (was dealing with an family law issue that involved another provincial jurisdiction), and he depended upon the Information Line Staff Officer to help guide him through the site, and find and work with certain legal forms.

One user who was Francophone experienced some difficulty in locating the site because she only found the English version. Once she accessed the Francophone site, she was easily able to navigate through it. She did note that '*there were some translation errors (French) which were annoying*'.

Difficulties or Obstacles Encountered

Users noted some difficulties encountered:

- One of the financial statement forms that a user was trying to use was not initially available in French, and she had to use the English form. The user is aware that this since has been changed and this form is now available in both languages.

- Some of the French forms do not have enough space on the form to fully complete the section; this user would like to have more space in various places on the form so that she can complete the form in its entirety before printing.
- Another user indicated that there seemed to be 'too many links' to follow in navigating the website; she was unsure if she was accessing the right forms as some forms look the same; she needed help to be sure she was using the right forms.
- Another user did not always have access to a computer and hence was not able to always access the information in a timely way.

What About the Website was Most Helpful

Once they became familiar with the website, most users felt it had a lot of good information about many family law issues and questions. Being able to access and complete the necessary forms; having access to the forms, and the guidance and support in working with them from the toll free service, was viewed as a real strength of the site and the support service. Others watched some of the videos and found these informative and helpful.

'...I was able to get some good information from the website with ____'s guidance...I would have given up trying to use the website without ____'s help....she helped me find the variation section and walked me right through the process....' (User)

'...the detailed guide and the support of the 1-800 service were most helpful...' (User)

What About the Website was Least Helpful

For the most part, users noted their own lack of comfort with, or lack of confidence in working with computers and searching for things on-line. As noted earlier, six out of the nine users interviewed indicated that they relied heavily on the support from the toll free information line. One user noted their difficulty in searching out and completing the forms relevant to her issues; another noted that his issue involved two provincial jurisdictions and the site did not have all the pertinent information and forms needed for his situation.

Another user noted the initial difficulty in accessing the French language version of the site, and having difficulty getting the information and instructions in her own language.

'...as a Francophone it was stressful and difficult to use an English form.....the English guide was available free from government (Department of Justice)....but I had to search the French version from the web and print a 30 page document....' (User)

Importance of the Family Law Information Line Support

As noted earlier, almost all users who had contact with the Family Law Information Line Officer were very positive about their experience. Seven out of nine users interviewed indicated that they did have a better understanding of their situation in terms of their legal issues and how to deal with them more effectively after accessing the information on the website. However, they were also quick to stress that they would not have been as successful in 'navigating' the website without the support received from the Family Law Information Line.

One user stressed that this support system is, in his view, critical in order for many users to effectively access and work with the resources on the website.

'...I credit 95% of my success in dealing with my issues to _____....she was able to refer me to the website for certain things...it would have been more difficult without her.....it was absolutely important that I had someone who was knowledgeable to talk to....' (User)

Represent Yourself or Hire a Lawyer

Many of the users noted that they could not easily afford a lawyer and they were not sure if they would qualify for legal aid. Five users interviewed indicated that they were able to deal with their issues before the court by using the resources on the website, but depended quite a bit on the support from the Toll Free Information Line Officer.

'...doing things yourself when you have never done something like this before is a different ball game....how to present your concerns, how to speak to the judge, how to act in court...you need help to do this right....' (User)

'....I feel more informed and more confident about what I need to do....but I am not sure if I could complete all the steps in the forms and the court process without support...without someone to talk things over with....' (User)

Two other users spoke with more confidence about their experience; they indicated that by accessing the website and using the resources, and with some support from the Information Line Officer, they were able to represent themselves in court and felt good about their experience and the result.

'...I represented myself in court....I had all the required documents and I am very thankful for the information on the website....it enabled me to do this....' (User)

Another user noted that she felt a 'boost' in her overall sense of self-esteem; she felt she had the knowledge and tools to go forward, and indicated that by accessing the website she was successful in representing herself before the court.

One other user indicated that it was too early in the process to determine if he needs to get the services of a lawyer or not.

Areas on the Website to Change or Improve

Users offered several suggestions.

- Do more public promotion of the Family Law NB Website and the toll free Family Law Information Line; consider some PSA's on TV or radio; perhaps do this in conjunction with some relevant public awareness/education theme such as during 'family week'.
- Is it possible to post some family law legal precedence cases or case studies that provide some indication how family law courts have been dealing with various child custody and division of property questions or issues?
- There appears to be some differences with regard to the forms you can get on-line and those that you can get through the Service New Brunswick Centres offices; this should not happen, the forms should be the same no matter where you get them from.
- Ensure materials are written and presented in plain language; use more common language since legal words and phrases are unfamiliar to most people; e.g., explain in plain language what an affidavit is, and what its purpose is.

- All documents should be available in both official languages, and in both hard copy and on-line, at the same time.
- List all required documents (cover letters, forms, financial statements) for a particular situation, and then have a direct link to each document if on line, or contained in the same package if it is in hard copy. E.g., Alimony: documents required include:
 - Cover letter (a sample would appear as you click here instead of being referred to a section on of the site)
 - Form # 72 (this form would appear as you click on 'form here')
 - Financial statement (this form would appear as you click on 'form here')

Scale of Satisfaction with Experience with Website and Information Line Support

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 - least satisfied and 5 - very satisfied), seven users interview rated their experience a 5, and the remaining two rated their experience a 4. Almost everyone noted that the toll free Information Line support was a critical factor in their rating of their experience.

'.....people are always going to need that person to talk to one-on-one....need someone to be your cheerleader...to say to you 'you can do this'....' (User)

Other Thoughts and Comments

One user commented that she was grateful to have been exposed to the website and its resources; she was not aware that this type of information and support was available on-line. She felt that the website is a good way to make much needed information accessible, but wondered if the on-line approach may be something that the younger generation is more comfortable with.

Summary

Generally, website users who were interviewed stressed the value and importance of the toll free Family Law Information Line in terms of their experience. For most of those interviewed, this was the most important feature. The website and its resources were helpful, but many believed that the telephone support directly with a knowledgeable person is a necessary, complementary function, that added to what the website provided.

5. Proposed Future Directions to Improve Effectiveness of the Family Law NB Website

The Family Law NB Website is a very good start that can be further developed and supported. The opportunities for the future of the site are broad. Stakeholders, family justice system staff, community partners and groups, and website users offered a range of suggestions to strengthen the website and its capacity to help SRLs.

1. Areas on the Website to Change or Improve

Generally speaking all participants indicated that the nature and scope of the content on the site was very comprehensive, and well prepared and presented. In terms of missing information, gaps, and design or presentation issues to consider, the following areas were noted:

Things to Improve or Modify

- Ensure that the forms one access on-line and those that you can get through the Service New Brunswick Centres offices are the same (the forms should be the same no matter where you get them from).
- Ensure materials are written and presented in plain language; use more common language since legal words and phrases are unfamiliar to most people; e.g., explain in plain language what an affidavit is, and what its purpose is.
- Ensure that website content is periodically reviewed and updated to ensure that it remains relevant, up-to-date, is presented in a 'user friendly' format and style.
- Ensure that the information is available in 'hard copy' as well as the on-line version; it is important to have the information in both formats.
- When navigating through the site, it might be useful to set up a 'funnel approach'; i.e., start with a list of questions that might direct the user; e.g., if actually divorced - click here; if recently separated - click here. In this way, individuals would be directed to a particular part of the site. This would help people 'zero in' on the section of the website most helpful to their particular need or situation.
- The area regarding the final child support payment needs more clarification as the current information/direction on the site regarding this issue could be misleading. It was suggested that, for clarification purposes, the final support payment date should be specified in the court order.
- The current financial calculation forms and guides do not seem to be able to easily accommodate changes or new situations such as alimony recalculations or other special expenses.

Things to Add or Include

- There is a relatively new Family Law Pilot Program in Saint John using a different type of form regarding the divorce application, and these new forms are not on the site yet. PLEIS has been notified of this.
- In the Fredericton area the Wilmot Church offers a free legal clinic; it may be useful to provide information on the website where these types of clinics are located in the province.

- The site does not currently have any guides or forms regarding 'consent orders'; both Alberta and Manitoba have done work on consent orders and clauses in various orders; is this an area that can be developed?
- Create some new videos; (1) around language and terms within the court (addressing the judge), dress, decorum, during court hearing, what the courtroom looks like; (2) stressing that the judge and lawyers need to focus on the factual points around the issues to be resolved to get best results for parent, child, and that the level of emotion needs to be minimized; and (3) what Legal Aid offers.
- Post some family law legal precedence cases or case studies that provide some indication how family law courts have been dealing with various child custody and division of property questions or issues.
- List all required documents (cover letters, forms, financial statements) for a particular situation, and then have a direct link to each document if on line, or contained in the same package if it is in hard copy.

2. More Active Promotion of the Website

Many stakeholders interviewed or surveyed indicated that the ongoing promotion of the website is something that needs more focus and attention. A number of suggestions to further develop and improve awareness of the website were offered:

Further Initiatives/Activities to Improve Awareness

- Get the information about the website out to all the community-based, early intervention types of agencies in the province; agencies such as: women's support groups, family support services, day care and early childhood development centres, family physicians, and other front line service providers.
- Conduct workshops (both the website and toll free line) with SRLs, front line staff, other professional groups in various parts of the province on a cyclical basis; offer 'hands on' information workshops in specific venues and groups; e.g., legal advice clinics, women's groups, and emergency shelters.
- Consider preparing and running a series of radio and/or TV ads describing the site's resources, and providing information on how to access the website and toll free information line; perhaps do this in conjunction with some relevant public awareness/education theme such as during 'family week'.
- Work with the NB Family Bar to do periodic promotional mail-outs.
- Promote the website and toll free information line through Service New Brunswick offices; ensure that posters, bookmarks, and fridge magnets are available for distribution through these sites; plus ensure that the various legal forms are available and free of charge.
- Place computer kiosks at courthouses, and other public places; promote access to the website through these access-points.

3. More Education and/or Networking with Key Stakeholders

- Ensure that the Family Law NB Website is linked to the websites of all other relevant government departments and legal groups and associations; e.g., NB Department of Justice and Consumer Affairs, Law Society, Family Bar offices, Legal Aid offices, etc.
- Continue to work with family law lawyers to address their concern that they are 'giving away' potential work if they refer SRLs to the website. Reframe the approach; i.e., the reality is there are a whole body of people who have serious family law issues, cannot afford a lawyer, but still need issues resolved.
- The website should not be a 'stand alone' effort; it should be part of a 'continuum of information and support services; e.g., the website, the Family Law Information Line info, Legal Aid Services, the private bar.

6. Summary and Key Conclusions

Generally, the tenure and tone of the evaluation results from all data collection streams regarding the Family Law NB Website was positive on a number of levels. The utilization trend data revealed a steadily increasing level of traffic to the website, including growing numbers of unique visitors month by month. Over the first twelve months, the number of visits to the site almost doubled, with each visitor spending an average of 4-5 minutes on the site.

With respect to the qualitative data, many survey respondents indicated that the website is an important and valuable resource, and many actively promoted the website to any SRLs they may have encountered in their work. While it is more difficult to conclude (from the quantitative data) whether or not the availability of the website has resulted in reducing the demand on people's time and workload, the qualitative input does indicate that the website and its resources did have an impact on front line staff time and workload.

Many respondents noted that they do see indications that a number of SRLs are using the website and becoming better informed, and this has resulted in front line staff spending less time in answering questions, explaining processes, or copying various forms and other written materials. Other respondents noted that the website also helped to ensure that SRLs have access to information, tools and supports that allow them to get their legal issues and needs before the family justice system. However, the qualitative data also indicated that, for a number of respondents, there continued to be a major gap despite the website and its resources and tools. In the view of these respondents the most pressing need for most SRLs was more access to legal and other mediation services.

Family Law NB Website users who were interviewed stressed the value and importance of the toll free Family Law Website Information Line in terms of their experience. For most of those interviewed, this was the most important feature. The website and its resources were helpful, but many believed that the telephone support directly with a knowledgeable person is a necessary and complementary function to the website.

In summary, the website and its resources are viewed by all stakeholders as a very positive and necessary development to help address a large information gap for SRLs in the province of New Brunswick. The project has been rolled out in a strategic manner, and in the view of most stakeholders, it has made a positive contribution and impact on a number of levels. In terms of further development, many respondents noted that efforts should be made to ensure that the information on the site remains current and up-to-date, and that there should be ongoing promotional initiatives, particularly more 'hands on' type of workshops and activities.

Appendices

Appendix A

Evaluation Framework

Family Law Information Hub Project - Evaluation Framework

March 2010

Project Objectives:

1. To assist parties involved in family law disputes to seek appropriate legal alternatives to court.
2. To develop family law resources that can make the law more accessible and that serve to enhance the self-help skills of individuals with particular needs (e.g. annotated family law forms for uncontested divorce).
3. To assist self-representing litigants to be better prepared for their court appearance in the Court of Queen's Bench, Family Division.
4. To reduce the need for judges to educate self-representing litigants in court, and thereby increase the efficiency of the court process.
5. To lessen the workload of the Court of Queen's Bench, Family Division registry staff by providing them with a referral source to deal with education, information and assistance needs of self-representing litigants.
6. To create a network of agencies providing services to individuals with family law issues and promote collaboration.

Evaluation Outcomes:

The evaluation framework is intended to address the following Project outcomes:

- The success of the Project in creating public awareness of the Family Law NB Website, toll-free line, and other family law resources.
- The effectiveness of the Family Law NB Website and resources (e.g. annotated forms) in assisting self-representing litigants in finding the information needed and otherwise 'navigating' the legal system.
- The extent to which the Project has helped to lessen the workload of Family Division judges and court registry staff by providing them with a referral resource to deal with the education, information and assistance needs of self-representing litigants.
- The satisfaction expressed with the website by other stakeholders, such as the Family Bar, the Law Society, and other relevant community agencies.

Note: The following draft evaluation framework is intended to inform the proposal submission; prior to implementation, it will be necessary for the evaluation consultant to review the draft with the Project Team to ensure that all the important and relevant evaluation questions are identified.

Desired Outcomes	Key Evaluation questions	Indicators	Data Sources / Collection Method	Timing of data Collection
Creating Public Awareness	<p>1.1 What activities were undertaken to improve public awareness of family law supports during the project period?</p> <p>1.2 What new communication tools, methodologies or approaches were developed and implemented to improve public awareness?</p> <p>1.3 What were the outcomes achieved as a result of the implementation of public awareness activities and efforts?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> evidence of activities directed at improving public awareness of new family law resources, etc evidence of new tools, methodologies and approaches (website, toll free line, other on-line resources) evidence of clients and resource network using new information tools (website, toll free line, other on-line resources) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews with Project Coordinator Document review Interviews with Project Coordinator Document review Review of actual tools Interviews with Project Coordinator Data on website visits, use of toll free line, other resources, etc) Interviews and/or focus groups with users 	Time frames re the data collection will be determined with Project Team
Impact of Family Law Website and Resources for Users	<p>1.1 To what extent have self-representing litigants accessed and/or used the Family Law website and resources?</p> <p>1.2 What has been the usefulness and/or impacts of having access to the information, resources and supports?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> evidence of clients and resource network accessing and using new information tools (website, toll free line, other on-line resources) evidence that self-representing clients used the information available to become better informed and prepared re the court protocols and processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> review of utilization data from website, toll free line, other resources interviews and or focus groups with users 	
Impact on Family Division staff workload	1.1 Has the availability of the website information had any impact on the workload and time of Family Division staff?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> evidence that Family Division staff are encountering clients who are better prepared; court staff indicating that they spend less time working with/supporting self-representing litigants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> electronic survey of court staff interviews and or focus groups with court staff 	

	<p>1.2 Were there any other benefits (intended or unintended) re the workload of court staff?</p> <p>1.3 Were there any challenges and/or 'downsides' experienced by court staff vis-a-vis the project?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> evidence of other workload benefits evidence of challenges and/or 'downsides' experienced re the project by court staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> interviews and or focus groups with court staff interviews and or focus groups with court staff 	
<p>Usefulness of Website for Other Parties of Interest</p>	<p>1.1 Have other stakeholders and interested parties used the website and other resource materials or tools?</p> <p>1.2 For what purposes have they primarily used them for (e.g. general education, staff in-service, etc)</p> <p>1.3 Was the website easily accessible and were the resources 'user friendly'?</p> <p>1.4 What is the potential for this type of delivery (i.e. web-based, on-line) for these types of materials?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> usefulness of website resources and other family law supports offered through project to other stakeholders other stakeholders reporting on how materials were used other stakeholders reporting on accessibility of project materials other stakeholders reporting on this method of providing education and support to 'users' of judicial system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> interviews with representatives from key stakeholders groups interviews with representatives from key stakeholders groups interviews with representatives from key stakeholders groups interviews with representatives from key stakeholders groups 	
<p>Other Lessons Learned</p>	<p>1.1 Were there implementation issues or challenges encountered?</p> <p>1.2 Over the course of the project, were there 'lessons learned'?</p> <p>1.3 If so, what were these?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> perceptions of issues and or challenges encountered during project implementation; description as to how these were addressed perceptions of lessons learned description of lessons learned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> interviews with Project Team interviews with Project Team interviews with Project Team 	

Appendix B

Baseline and Follow Up SRL Staff Surveys

Baseline Survey - Self-Represented Litigants in Family Law Matters

Language/Langue

Click on the English or French link above to access the survey in the language of your choice.

- English
- French

Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick (PLEIS-NB) invites you to complete a survey on the impact of self-represented litigants (SRLs) on the family justice system. The survey consists of multiple choice questions and should take about 5-7 minutes to complete. In completing this survey, please reflect on your experience over the past year PRIOR to the recent launch of the Family Law NB website. This survey will help us understand the scope and nature of the impact of SRLs on the family justice system. It will also help us evaluate, over the next several months, the success of our new Family Law NB website and resources in helping to educate and better prepare SRLs for navigating the justice system. For your information, I wish to disclose the following: • We are not collecting, nor will we generate, any identifying information, other than the professions/occupations of the participants; • The findings will be reported as aggregate data; • All responses will be confidential and anonymous; • The survey database will be stored on a Canadian Server. Please note: The survey will close on June 25th. Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Note:

Note: In answering the survey questions, please reflect on your experience with family law SRLs over the past year PRIOR to the launch of the Family Law NB website.

Please indicate if you are:

- Court Staff
- Court Staff - Legal
- Justice Staff
- Family Law Practitioner
- Judge
- Other, please specify: _____

1. Over the past year, how frequently did you encounter self-represented litigants in your day-to-day work?

- Daily
- Weekly
- 1-2 times per month
- Very seldom

2. At what stage(s) of the legal process did you tend to become engaged with self-represented litigants?

(Please pick all applicable boxes)

- Prior to the commencement of a legal action
- Obtaining documents
- Filing documents
- Court hearings
- After the conclusion of a legal action
- Other (briefly explain) _____

3. What was the nature of their inquiries and/or needs?

(Please check all applicable boxes)

- Seeking direction on process (what to do first)
- Seeking direction on technical steps (which forms, how to complete)
- Seeking direction on legal questions or issues
- Other (briefly explain) _____

4. Describe how much time it took each week, on average, to address the inquiries and/or needs of self-represented litigants.

Note: Include all time spent in dealing with inquiries (i.e. over the counter, telephone calls, responding to e-mails, etc).

- None at all
- Less than 1/2 hour
- More than 1/2 hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2-3 hours
- More than 3 hours

5. What was the impact of self-represented litigants on your job?

(Please check all applicable boxes)

- No impact
- SRLs take time away from other important work
- SRL's expect me to help them in ways that are not normally part of my duties
- SRL's expect me to provide legal advice in situations where I am not permitted to do so
- SRLs interrupt or slow down the justice process when I have to stop to help them
- SRLs provide me with an opportunity to help people access the justice system

Other (briefly explain) _____

6. Based on your experience, what aspects of the legal process did SRLs find most challenging?

(Please check all applicable boxes)

- Deciding which forms they should use
- Obtaining or creating the forms they need
- Including the proper information on forms
- Serving documents
- Swearing documents
- Filing documents
- Knowing what to do if they have to go to court
- Following the Rules of Court generally
- Calling witnesses
- Presenting Evidence
- Other, please specify: _____

7a. How have you been helping SRLs address these challenges?

(Please check all applicable boxes)

- Take the time to provide the appropriate guidance to the SRL as required
- Refer SRL to another internal staff person familiar with the necessary procedures and forms
- Offer law-information resources (pamphlets, information packages)
- Provide certain family law forms
- Tell SRLs about internet resources
- Refer SRLs to a legal advice clinic
- Refer SRLs to Legal Aid
- Strongly recommend that they see a lawyer
- Refer SRLs to relevant external groups and organizations (If yes, who, which groups?)

7b. How have you been helping SRLs address these challenges?

Other

8. In your opinion what would help self-represented litigants better prepare for handling their own cases?

(Please check all applicable boxes)

- Opportunities to learn about court process and procedures.

- Better electronic access to the necessary information on procedure and process
- Small group information sessions regarding court procedures
- Access to electronic fillable forms
- Toll-free information line for direction on court procedure
- Pro bono legal advice
- Other (briefly explain) _____

9. Do you believe that increased access to legal information would reduce the amount of time you spend educating self-represented litigants

- Yes
- No

10. Do you wish to add any further comments about any of the issues raised in this survey?

Follow up Survey - Self-Represented Litigants in Family Law Matters

Language/Langue

Click on the English or French link below to access the survey in the language of your choice.

- English
- Français

Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick (PLEIS-NB) invites you to complete a survey on the impact of self-represented litigants (SRLs) on the family justice system. Many of you may recall that we had circulated a similar survey to you last year (May 2010). At that time we were interested in getting your feedback prior to the promotion of our Family Law NB Website; a website that was specifically designed to provide family law related information and resources to SRLs (and to others as well). Now that the website has been available to SRLs, and to NB citizens generally, for the past year, we are interested in knowing whether or not - from your perspective - the presence of the website has made any noticeable difference in encountering and assisting SRLs. Is there a sense that those SRLs that you have recently encountered seem better informed, better prepared, etc? You will note that many of the questions asked are very similar to the questions in the first survey. The questions are similar because we wish to compare people's most recent experience in dealing with SRLs with their experience of a year ago (prior to the launch of the Family Law NB Website). The survey consists of multiple choice questions and should take about 5-7 minutes to complete. For your information, I wish to disclose the following: • We are not collecting, nor will we generate, any identifying information, other than the professions/occupations of the participants; • The findings will be reported as aggregate data; • All responses will be confidential and anonymous; • The survey database will be stored on a Canadian Server. Please note: The survey will close on March 31, 2011. Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Please indicate if you are:

- Court Staff
- Court Staff - Legal
- Justice Staff
- Family Law Practitioner
- Judge
- Family Solicitor (Legal Aid)
- Other, please specify: _____

1. Over the past year, how frequently did you encounter self-represented litigants in your day-to-day work?

- Daily
- Weekly
- 1-2 times per month
- Very seldom

2. At what stage(s) of the legal process did you tend to become engaged with self-represented litigants?

(Please pick all applicable boxes)

- Prior to the commencement of a legal action
- Obtaining documents
- Filing documents
- Court hearings
- After the conclusion of a legal action
- Other (briefly explain) _____

3. What was the nature of their inquiries and/or needs?

(Please check all applicable boxes)

- Seeking direction on process (what to do first)
- Seeking direction on technical steps (which forms, how to complete)
- Seeking direction on legal questions or issues
- Other (briefly explain) _____

4. Given the availability of the Family Law NB website, describe how much time it now takes each week, on average, to address the inquiries and/or needs of self-represented litigants.

Note: Include all time spent in dealing with inquiries (i.e. over the counter, telephone calls, responding to e-mails, etc).

- None at all
- Less than 1/2 hour
- More than 1/2 hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2-3 hours
- More than 3 hours

5. What is the current impact of self-represented litigants on your job?

(Please check all applicable boxes)

- No impact
- SRLs take time away from other important work
- SRL's expect me to help them in ways that are not normally part of my duties
- SRL's expect me to provide legal advice in situations where I am not permitted to do so
- SRLs interrupt or slow down the justice process when I have to stop to help them
- SRLs provide me with an opportunity to help people access the justice system
- Other (briefly explain) _____

6. Based on your experience, what aspects of the legal process do SRLs continue to find most challenging?

(Please check all applicable boxes)

- Deciding which forms they should use
- Obtaining or creating the forms they need
- Including the proper information on forms
- Serving documents
- Swearing documents
- Filing documents
- Knowing what to do if they have to go to court
- Following the Rules of Court generally
- Calling witnesses
- Presenting Evidence
- Other, please specify: _____

7a. In what ways are you currently helping SRLs address these challenges?

(Please check all applicable boxes)

- Take the time to provide the appropriate guidance to the SRL as required
- Refer SRL to another internal staff person familiar with the necessary procedures and forms
- Offer law-information resources (pamphlets, information packages)
- Provide certain family law forms
- Refer SRL's to Family Law NB website
- Tell SRLs about other Family Law internet resources
- Refer SRLs to a legal advice clinic

- Refer SRLs to Legal Aid
- Strongly recommend that they see a lawyer
- Toll Free Family Law Information Line
- Refer SRLs to relevant external groups and organizations (If yes, who, which groups?)

7b. How has the availability of the Family Law NB Website added to or enhanced your capacity to help SRLs address their continuing challenges with the legal process?

8. In your opinion what things do we need to continue to do to help SRLs be better prepared to handle their own legal issues/cases?

(Please check all applicable boxes)

- Opportunities to learn about court process and procedures.
- Better electronic access to the necessary information on procedure and process
- Small group information sessions regarding court procedures
- Access to electronic fillable forms
- Toll-free information line for direction on court procedure
- Pro bono legal advice
- Other (briefly explain) _____

9. Do you believe that increased access to legal information on the Family Law NB website has reduced the amount of time you spend educating self-represented litigants?

- Yes
- No
- Please explain: _____

10. Because of the availability of the Family Law NB website, have you observed any changes with SRLs over the past year, that suggests to you that they are better prepared to deal with legal issues and legal processes?

- Yes
- No

10a. In which areas do SRLs seem better prepared because of this access to the Family Law NB website?

(Please check all applicable boxes)

- Deciding which forms they should use
- Obtaining or creating the forms they need
- Including the proper information on forms
- Serving documents
- Swearing documents
- Filing documents
- Knowing what to do if they have to go to court
- Following the Rules of Court generally
- Calling witnesses
- Presenting Evidence
- Other, please specify: _____

11. Do you have any further comments to add with respect to access to justice in family law matters by SRLs?

Appendix C

Stakeholder Interview Guide

Stakeholder Interview Guide

You have been invited to provide input into an evaluation of the Family Law Information Hub Project which includes the Family Law NB Website with its annotated fillable forms, ask an expert videos, and other enhanced family law resources. We will also ask for your comments on the efforts to promote awareness of this website. The Project is an initiative undertaken by the Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick (PLEIS-NB), with funding from Justice Canada and the support of an advisory committee of legal experts and community partners. Preliminary research using interviews and focus groups completed during Phase I of this Project indicated that:

- more self-representing litigants (SRLs) were coming before the Court of Queen’s Bench, Family Division;
- these litigants often did not understand the legal requirements and protocols of the Court; and
- Family court staff, judges, and other legal professionals were spending considerable time in providing basic assistance to these litigants.

These observations informed the creation of a “virtual family law information centre” through the Family Law Hub Project; the project has targeted individuals who self-represent at any stage of the family justice system in New Brunswick.

The website was designed to provide information on a wide range of family law issues, forms and processes, with a view to increasing the competence of SRLs who are handling their own family matters. Individuals can also obtain additional assistance in navigating the family justice system by calling the PLEIS-NB family law line and speaking to the family law officer who, without giving legal advice, can explain court procedures and family law forms.

This interview is one of a series of interviews that we are conducting with “stakeholders”. This refers to individuals who have been involved in some way with this project (for example, as a member of the Advisory Committee, a participant in the initial consultations, a community partner, etc). The interviews are intended to explore your views and perceptions about the impacts and outcomes of the Family Law NB Project. Your feedback and input will become part of a summary report that the evaluators will submit to the Executive Director of PLEIS-NB, as part of its reporting requirements to Justice Canada. You will not be individually identified in this report.

The nature and scope of the issues and questions to be explored in the interview include:

1. Development - Launch - Promotion of Website

1.1 To what extent do you feel the development and launch of the Family Law Information Hub (Website information, family law forms, other resources) has helped to address the needs and concerns of SRLs, and reduced the time and effort required of family court staff, judges, and legal professionals who come into contact with SRLs?

1.2 In your view, what are the positive outcomes of the availability of the website and the online forms, videos and resources? Do you have a sense of whether the Family Law Information Line has assisted people in using the website?

1.3 Are there any obvious information and/or resource gaps vis-a-vis the website that need to be addressed? If so, what are these?

1.4 Do you feel that the communication strategies to create awareness of the Family Law NB website (such as press releases, newspaper ads, media articles, and presentations to the Family Law Bar) as well as the subsequent distribution of Family Law NB promotional materials (such as posters, bookmarks, magnets), were generally effective in reaching SRLs.

1.5 Are there further initiatives and activities that could be undertaken to improve public awareness of the availability of the website and its resources?

2. Impact of website, resources on users

2.1 Are you in a position to know to what extent SRLs may have accessed and/or used the Family Law NB website and resources?

2.2 If so, what has been the usefulness of, and/or impacts on SRLs by virtue of them having access to the website information, resources and supports?

3. Impact on family justice system (in terms of impact on time, workload, etc)

3.1 Are you aware of the whether the availability of Family Law NB Website resources has impacted on the workload and time of family court staff, judges, and other legal professionals?

3.2 If so, what has been the impact(s) vis-a-vis the time required to deal with SRLs, etc?

3.3 Were there any other benefits (intended or unintended) for the family justice system as a result of the Family Law NB Website and resources? If so, what were these?

4. Usefulness of website, resources to other parties

4.1 Are you in a position to know if any other stakeholders and interested parties have used the website and other resource materials or tools? If so, which stakeholders and how might the website and resources have been helpful to them?

5. Other Lessons Learned

5.1 To date, what have been the most positive outcomes of this project? Were there 'lessons learned'? If so, what were these?

5.2 Were there any challenges encountered when implementing this project or over the course of the project? If so, what are these?

5.3 In terms of looking ahead, are there other ways in which the Family Law NB Website could be strengthened and/or improved? If so, what are these?

5.4 Do you have any final thoughts or comments to offer that any of the foregoing questions may not have directly touched on?

Thank you for Helping with the Evaluation!!!

Appendix D

Focus Group Interview Guide

Fredericton - Focus Group Guide

You have been invited to provide input into an evaluation of the Family Law Information Hub Project which includes the Family Law NB Website (www.familylawnb.ca) with its annotated fillable forms, ask an expert videos, and other enhanced family law resources. We will also ask for your comments on the efforts to promote awareness of this website. The Project is an initiative undertaken by the Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick (PLEIS-NB), with funding from Justice Canada and the support of an advisory committee of legal experts and community partners. Preliminary research using interviews and focus groups completed during Phase I of this Project indicated that:

- more self-representing litigants (SRLs) were coming before the Court of Queen's Bench, Family Division;
- these litigants often did not understand the legal requirements and protocols of the Court; and
- Family court staff, judges, and other legal professionals were spending considerable time in providing basic assistance to these litigants.

These observations informed the creation of a “virtual family law information centre” through the Family Law Hub Project; the project has targeted individuals who self-represent at any stage of the family justice system in New Brunswick.

The website was designed to provide information on a wide range of family law issues, forms and processes, with a view to increasing the competence of SRLs who are handling their own family matters. Individuals can also obtain additional assistance in navigating the family justice system by calling the PLEIS-NB family law information line and speaking to the family law officer who, without giving legal advice, can explain court procedures and family law forms.

This focus group is one of a series of methods we are using to collect evaluative information from legal professionals and court staff who are involved with the family justice system. The focus group sessions are intended to explore your views and perceptions about the impacts and outcomes of the Family Law NB Website Project. Your feedback and input will become part of a summary report that the evaluators will submit to the Executive Director of PLEIS-NB, as part of its reporting requirements to Justice Canada. You will not be individually identified in this report.

The nature and scope of the issues and questions to be explored in the session include:

1. Awareness and Impacts

1.1 Has the Family Law NB Website been well promoted? Are most people in the group today familiar with the Family Law Information Website and its online resources?

1.2 Have most people gone online to explore the website? What is your sense of the website in terms of its ease of accessibility? Ease of navigation, etc?

1.3 Have you (or others in your worksite) undertaken any initiatives within the workplace to promote the website and its resources?

1.4 Have you also promoted the Family Law Information Line?

1.5 Have you referred SRLs to the website?

1.6 With respect to your work/involvement with SRLs, what features of the website were most useful to you? What features were least helpful to you?

1.7 Has the availability of the website information had any impact on your role and workload?

1.8 Were there any other benefits (intended or unintended) regarding your workload and your involvement with SRLs?

1.9 What is your sense of the website in terms of the nature and scope of the information and resources that it contains? Are there any obvious information or resource gaps?

2. General SRL Awareness and Impacts

2.1 From your contact/experience with SRLs over the past 6-8 months, are there any indications (comments made by SRLs, use of on-line forms, other resources that SRLs indicated they used, found beneficial, etc) that SRLs have been using the website?

2.2 If so, how have SRLs been using the website and its resources? What features seem to be most used or most helpful? What features seem to be the least used or least helpful to SRLs?

3 Usefulness of website, resources to other parties

3.1 To your knowledge, have other stakeholders and interested parties (women's' self-help groups, etc) used the website and other resource materials?

3.2 For what purposes have they primarily used them?

4 Future Potential

4.1 In terms of looking ahead, are there other ways in which the Family Law NB Website could be strengthened and/or improved? If so, what are these?

4.2 Do you have any final thoughts or comments to offer that any of the foregoing questions may not have directly touched on?

Thank you for Helping with the Evaluation!!!

Appendix E

Family Law NB Website and Telephone Information Line User Interview Guide

Website/Resources User Interview Guide

You have been invited to provide input into an evaluation of the Family Law New Brunswick Website Project. The website was designed to help people who are unable to afford a lawyer, and are trying to get some resolution of a family law issue before the New Brunswick family justice system. The website provides information on issues, processes and questions with regard to a wide range of family law matters, including providing access to legal forms and procedures that individuals can complete by themselves on-line.

This interview is one of a series of interviews with individuals who have used the website and the online forms/other resources in some way; the interview is intended to get the users feedback and comments on their experience with the website. Your feedback and input will become part of a summary report that will be submitted to the Executive Director of Public Legal Education and Information Services -New Brunswick, and Justice Canada. You will not be individually identified in this report.

The type of questions to be discussed in the interview include:

1. Awareness of Website

1.1 How did you become aware of the Family Law Website?

1.2 Was the site easy to find and use?

1.3 Did you encounter any difficulties or obstacles when you tried to use the website? or use any of the forms or other resources?

1.4 What things about the website did you find most helpful (e.g. information, forms, procedures to follow in certain situations, etc)?

1.5 What things about the website did you find least helpful?

1.6 As a result of information on the website, did you have a better understanding of your family law issue? Did you decide to handle your own family law matter or did you go to a lawyer? Did you feel better prepared in dealing with the family justice system such as completing forms, serving documents, swearing affidavits, or going to court?

1.7 Are there areas within the website, or about the information and resources on the website, that you wish to see changed or improved?

1.8 On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 is least satisfied - 5 is very satisfied) What was your level of satisfaction with the information and resources you received?

1.9 Were there any other benefits (expected or unexpected) about your experience in using the website?

Thank you for Helping with the Evaluation!!!

Appendix F

Summary of Responses to 'Open Ended' SRL Survey Questions

Summary of Responses to 'Open Ended' SRL Survey Questions

Respondents to the SRL Follow Up Survey were asked to answer several 'open ended' questions regarding the Family Law NB Website and its impact on their work, and on SRLs generally. The following is a detailed summary of their responses to these questions.

Survey Question # 7a: Did the availability of the Family Law NB Website add to your capacity to help SRLs?

The range of positive comments and observations offered by survey respondents are summarized verbatim below:

- When an SRL makes contact, I immediately refer the person to the website.
- It has helped a lot; it is another great resource I can use to help.
- It is a great resource to recommend to the SRL.
- It provides me with an excellent resource to send SRL's to for help regarding many aspects of family court.
- I have somewhere to refer SRLs when they don't know where to get assistance; especially the various court forms that need to be completed and filed in the correct format.
- I always refer them to the website; some have told me later that it was helpful.
- Instead of giving them information I can refer them immediately to the site.
- It's another resource. The clients sometimes are limited in that they don't have access or are intimidated by computers.
- Very good initiative to offer access to justice to litigants.
- Gives me information, processes to follow and access to some forms.
- I recommend this site regularly to my clients, but I don't know how many have used it. I think the SRL's appreciate that there are resources such as this available.
- We can refer SRLs to this site knowing it is a positive tool that will help them navigate the justice system.
- If they decide to self-represent, I suggest they consult the website for information, forms, and general guidance.
- I am now able to have SRL's read the information on-line rather than have me explain it to them. It has also been helpful for them to be able to get the forms in a prepared version.
- It answers their basic questions about the state of the law and which forms to use.
- It definitely helps them to better understand the procedure. If the SRL's have consulted the website, they generally only ask brief questions. It is more to assure themselves that they have done all of the procedures correctly. Clients leave the counter satisfied that they have all the information that they will need to complete their own divorces.
- It gives us another resource to refer SRLs to, and helps people feel like the Justice system is more accessible, and easier to navigate. We feel like there is more help for them, and people tend to be going away happier and feeling like they aren't just being sent on a 'wild goose chase'.
- It has become extremely easy for SRL's to obtain the forms they need for filing court documents.

- It has provided a "one stop" opportunity for SRLs. It has everything on one site, and I feel it is very beneficial. The information is clear and concise. However, it is still difficult for SRLs with no education or limited education, and for those without access to a computer, but overall, it's great. I do believe there should be a local office in all centres where SRLs can go to get these forms and documents and some direction.
- The availability of the site allows me to refer the person to a resource which I indicate is a reliable source of information.
- The Family Law NB Website provides the opportunity to research the material available and direct SRLs regarding the various options to proceed for variations.
- The Family Law website has given us an added resource to refer SRL's - this information is given to every SRL who has access to a computer.
- It has reduced the number of times a client may have to return to ask questions.

There were also a number of respondents who were either not as confident that the website could be that helpful to SRLs (i.e. many do not have the ability, motivation, or access to a computer to help themselves), or whether a website with information and resources about family law and court processes is the way to go (i.e. what is needed is more access to legal aid, lawyers, SRLs should not be in the legal business).

These respondents also offered a range of comments and observations; these are summarized verbatim below:

- Some clients have limited abilities, and many are intimidated in dealing with such matters alone.
- I have given SRLs the number and website information, however this did not stop clients from contacting us first and wanting help directly from our office.
- I am not certain....more and more people who are SRLs appear in my court armed with information mostly in the form of "how to" documents that they rely on to prepare for the hearings they face. I am not certain if they get it from your website or elsewhere.
- I do not know as it is near impossible to evaluate unless I have been previously advised that they have consulted your site.
- A lot of people say they don't know how to use the internet
- I have no idea if it has had an impact but I see no reduction in the number of, or increase in preparedness by, SRLs.
- Many of the SRLs do not have access to the internet.
- I seen no positive effect at present time....I feel there may be some soon.
- unfortunately I do not believe that they use it properly....often the SRL's resent having to help themselves....they can be more demanding than paying clients.
- The site is a great tool but unfortunately the SRL's I work with do not access it enough or don't know how to access it. I have to say that a person with little education, the family law procedures are too complicated without the help of a lawyer.

Survey Question # 8: Has increased access to legal information on the Family Law NB website reduced the time you spend educating SRLs?

Twenty-two respondents indicated that access to the Family Law NB Website has reduced the amount of their time spent dealing with SRLs, while 16 indicated that it has not reduced the amount of time. For those respondents who answered no, they were asked to explain why they believed this to be the case.

The following comments and observations are summarized verbatim:

- A lot of SRLs do not enjoy reading through the forms online and would prefer to speak to a person.
- They need more publicity for this site. People are not up to date.
- I believe it may require more promotion to educate the general population of its existence just like the promotion of the FLIC.
- I have not seen a decrease in SRLs.
- More SRLs believe they do not need lawyers.
- There is a need for better access to legal aid, so there is always help from a lawyer.
- I have not noticed much change yet, but I am certain that once it (the website) has been established for a longer period of time, it will.
- I'm not sure, I don't ask where they are getting the information they use to help prepare.
- I am not that informed (about the website) myself at the present time.
- I think that people do not want to help themselves...they often have a sense of entitlement.
- Not a lot of people are informed about the new service and some clients don't have access to a computer.
- Not enough marketing of the website.

10. What could be done to further help SRLs be better prepared?

Respondents offered a range of additional suggestions; these are summarized verbatim:

- Court administration should have a mechanism to amend child support to reflect changes in residency of the children and vary payments based on gross annual income.
- Duty Counsel should be present at all hearings by SRLs.
- We need expanded duty counsel/legal aid capacity within the province.
- SRLs need to be educated as to how to prove allegations and what documents to procure.
- We need a person to help SRLs to fill out forms when they can't get legal aid and do not have money for a lawyer.
- We need to have a local office(s) where SRLs can meet with someone in-person to help them go over the necessary documents.
- We need mediators back in the family office.
- We need to improve legal aid services (have more access available).
- We need to offer tips/training to SRLs on how they should interact with lawyer on the 'other side'.

Survey Question # 11. As a final question, respondents were invited to offer any further comments regarding their experience with using/working with the Family Law NB Website. The follow is a summary of their responses:

A needed and important resource

- It is a great site, and should have been created long ago. But I still feel that we need local staff everywhere to help SRLs, because so many of them have limited education, no access to computers, and are just not able to navigate their way through this exercise. It has not reduced the staff time yet, but I am sure it will in time.
- This is an excellent website. Perhaps if individuals who may not qualify for Legal Aid could have access to the service on a computer at the Legal Aid offices it would be used better.
- The Family Law NB website is a great resource!
- This is a valuable resource to court staff. The website gives us some place to refer SRL's to and the information line is invaluable as well. A step in the right direction!
- Each SRL's case has unique types of information required. Generally the public should be given information with respect to proving each aspect of his/her argument.

Need for more promotion

- PLEIS needs to advertise the website more.
- Marketing is the key to make this tool successful. Have to find a way to find SRL's in the community. Should be promoted in the court as well.
- The general population needs to be more aware of the resources available to SRLs and there needs to be more resources available to them.
- There are too many people falling through the cracks, unable to access Legal Aid, due to refusal to consider actions under the Divorce Act.
- I think a meeting in the regions where people have had interventions with SRL would be beneficial.
- I think people in my community would appreciate free clinics being organized from time to time.

Need for more legal resources

- I feel that full time, and adequately remunerated, Duty Counsel is the best way to deal with the legal needs of SRLs.
- As a lawyer dealing with an SRL increases the time and cost of a file exponentially.
- I appreciate that some people have to represent themselves. However, the goal should be to increase the number of people with legal representation.
- Family cases are too complex for SRLs. Sadly legal aide is sometimes not available or the application process is too slow.
- Increase legal aid, availability of lawyers and mediation – with a minimum of 3 sessions.

We need more resources in the system. As an example, the mediation services that were in place helped many of these people and cases were resolved. The lack of Legal Aid services continues to be a problem as well.