

NANAIMO FAMILY JUSTICE SERVICES CENTRE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE EVALUATION — ADDENDUM

The Nanaimo Family Justice Services Centre Implementation Phase Evaluation highlights the implementation strengths of the centre, including the benefit of having the centre close to the courthouse, the high rate of internal and external referrals, and the high level of understanding about the centre among key partners of all service components.

However, the evaluation identified a number of areas for growth, such as addressing clients' non-family civil issues, increasing staffing levels, reviewing the existing staffing model, and creating a mechanism to more quickly resolve policy issues that arise.

Many of these areas for growth were addressed during and immediately following the Nanaimo Family Justice Services Implementation Phase Evaluation. They are described below.

A New Vision: Justice Access Centres

The evaluation notes that many of the centre's clients were dealing with civil matters in addition to family matters. For example, a client might be experiencing a family breakdown as well as finding it difficult to find a place to live. Following the implementation of the Nanaimo Family Justice Services Centre, the need for a more integrated approach to resolving people's legal problems resulted in the vision of a Justice Access Centre.

The Justice Access Centre was envisioned as a holistic approach to providing services that would help people achieve early and lasting solutions to their issues. Justice Access Centres would increase people's understanding of how to better navigate the justice system, as well as increase access and resources to resolve both family and civil legal issues through dispute resolution and mediation services.

Given that the Justice Access Centre model extends services to non-family issues, the Legal Services Society (LSS) and the Ministry of Attorney General (MAG) decided to incorporate the services of the current Nanaimo Family Justice Services Centre into a Justice Access Centre. Nanaimo is one of two locations where a Justice Access Centre is being piloted.

Scope of Services

One of the areas for growth identified in the evaluation was the scope of services provided at the Family Justice Services Centre, which was limited to family issues.

The Justice Access Centre model addresses this by expanding the scope of services to include support to deal with debt, consumer, employment, housing, income, immigration, and human rights issues. Clients' poverty issues would be addressed through needs assessments, advice and assistance (such as helping people be better prepared for court), referrals to advocacy organizations, community agencies, and government or government agency services (some of which are on-site).

Staffing Issues

Another area for improvement highlighted in the report is staffing levels at the Nanaimo Family Justice Services Centre. This issue arose, in part, because the increase in client visits to the Nanaimo Family Justice Services Centre was not anticipated to the level that it occurred. As well, the project was subject to staffing recruitment time lags and staff turnover issues that exist in any organization.

The Nanaimo Family Justice Services Centre was initially staffed by an Office Manager for MAG staff, with administrative support; two Family Justice Counsellors; a new Family Justice Interviewer; a new Child Support Officer; advice counsel; and a staff person who spent 50% of her time as an Intake Legal Assistant and 50% of her time as a Legal Information Outreach Worker. During the evaluation time period, an additional Legal Information Outreach Worker was hired to work full time in the Resource Room, which was the main area impacted by the shortage of staff. Further administrative resources were added and work began to add an additional Family Justice Counsellor. Most recently, administrative responsibility for some family justice programs was shifted from the Nanaimo office to reduce the workload of the Local Manager.

Another concern raised by the evaluation of the Nanaimo Family Justice Services Centre was that LSS staff did not have a manager on-site and reported to a multi-layered structure outside the centre. To address this, a Managing Lawyer for LSS staff was hired in addition to the Local Manager for MAG staff.

Meanwhile, in the development of the Justice Access Centre, the scope of the centre was reviewed to determine the appropriate staffing levels required. As a result, additional staff were hired for the Nanaimo Justice Access Centre — an Administrative Assistant, Paralegal, and Aboriginal Community Legal Worker. It was also determined that in-depth training would be provided to all staff.

Policy Protocols

The evaluation identified the lack of a structure for dealing with policy issues when they arose between LSS and MAG. Differences between the client confidentiality protocols followed by the centre's partners arose as an issue during the implementation phase. LSS staff's ability to exchange client information with various government ministries was limited by solicitor-client privilege, while the exchange of information between the Ministry of Attorney General and its agencies was subject to different legislated standards.

Recognizing the importance of confidentiality, a specific confidentiality policy was developed for the Justice Access Centres. It includes a mechanism to address applicant and client confidentiality issues through the collaborative efforts of the Nanaimo centre's managers. The JAC policy and procedure manual also includes policies around the scope of services, urgent cases, service integration, joint use of space, and file management, among other issues.