

The 26th Judicial District SelfServe Center



2008: An Annual Glance

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SELSERVE CENTER NARRATIVE REPORT 2008

OVERVIEW

Serving over 12,000 citizens in 2008, the Mecklenburg County SelfServe Center has established itself as the community portal for citizens who cannot afford traditional legal services. The Center, is located on the third floor of the Mecklenburg County Courthouse in Suite 3350, and offers a variety of services including legal clinics, educational videos, attorney for the day, community and legal referrals, web-based legal research tools, instructional packets containing forms to initiate or answer legal claims and a list of attorneys who are willing to provide limited scope services.

THE EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE “4ALL” PROGRAM

On Friday, April 4, 2008, the 26th Judicial District participated in the statewide Justice 4All program. The North Carolina Bar Association, Mecklenburg County Bar Association and The Charlotte School of Law collaborated to make the Justice 4All program a great success. Volunteer attorneys, law students, paralegals, and interpreters were on hand to assist 41 litigants that participated in the event. 4All is the signature project of the North Carolina Bar Association and the NCBA Foundation for 2007-2008. The project was led by the 4All Task Force. Derived from the last line of the Pledge of Allegiance “With Liberty and Justice for All”, 4All was designed to address the unmet legal needs of the poor by promoting public awareness of the growing number of North Carolina citizens living below poverty level.

As part of the one-day event, The SelfServe Center hosted an Equal Access to Justice Day. Members of the Mecklenburg County Bar volunteered their time to ensure the accuracy of forms completed by pro se litigants seeking to establish court-ordered Child Custody/Visitation, and Absolute Divorce. These volunteers ensured pro-se litigants understood the procedure for filing the forms and addressed any questions regarding the filing process.

Through the communications infrastructure of the Trial Court Administrators Office, the SelfServe Center launched a media campaign geared towards the entire Mecklenburg County community. Various news mediums were used to cover and promote the event. Darwin Rice, the SelfServe Center Coordinator, communicated the purpose and mission of the Justice 4 All Program thus increasing the volume of litigants visiting the SelfServe Center and awareness of the SelfServe Center. News mediums included: CBS Radio, WNOW-FM; WNOW-AM; WBZK-AM; WSTP-News Talk 1490-AM; News 14; Mecklenburg Times; Charlotte Weekly; La Noticia; and Que Pasa. Public service announcements were included in daily commercial rotations and broadcasted live on the above mentioned news mediums.

THE JANE V. HARPER PRO-BONO AWARD

In 2008, the inaugural Jane V. Harper Pro Bono Award was presented to Attorney Angelina Maletto. The purpose of this award is to recognize an attorney who works with the 26th Judicial District SelfServe Center in an effort to provide free legal assistance to the over 8,000 litigants who enter the SelfServe Center annually. Attorney Angelina Maletto has worked with the SelfServe Center for many years. She has conducted family law clinics for pro se litigants. Attorney Maletto has served as the attorney for the day in the SelfServe Center many times and has designed and presented the training to other attorneys to volunteer in this capacity. Attorney Maletto has also

trained students from the Charlotte School of Law to be able to conduct family law clinics, thereby increasing the number of clinics available to the public.

THE ATTORNEY FOR THE DAY PROGRAM

In collaboration with the Mecklenburg County Bars' Volunteer Lawyer Program and the Lawyer Referral Service Program, the program is in its second year. The Attorney for the Day Program was designed to assist low-income, pro se litigants in the area of family law. The program links pre-screened customers who have requested information in the area of Divorce and/or Child Custody with attorneys who provide thirty-minute consultations at no cost. The consults for the Attorney for the Day Program are conveniently conducted within the SelfServe Center. In 2008, the number of consultations scheduled and conducted increased due to the dedication of attorneys and partnership of the Charlotte School of Law.

In 2008, there were 177 consults scheduled and 140 conducted. This marks a favorable attendance rate of 79 percent. The number of volunteer hours donated by attorneys totaled 251. There continues to be a high level of interest and satisfaction from the private bar. Likewise, customers expressed great gratitude for the assistance in negotiating a complex and intimidating legal system. In 2008, 30 new attorneys were recruited. Below is a list of attorneys who participated in the program in 2008.

Angelina Maletto*	Eric Galuszka	Erin Maxon	Melinda Vervais
John Ascenzo	Jennifer Gauger	Fred Parker	Heather Ward
Sarah Brady	Russell Hendrix	Morgan Rogers	Neya Warren
Christopher Buchanan	Catherine Huie	Cecilia Rutherford	David Wiles
Jon Carroll	Catherine Hutasuhut	Todd Sprinkle	Charlotte Williams
Holly Chamberlain	Erin Janssen	Nicole Tharrington	Richard Wright
Naadei Dzani	Luciona Johnson	Nicole Thompson	Kimberly Zirkle
Daniel Ellowitch	Michael Long	Deepa Tungare	

*** 2008 Jane V. Harper Pro Bono Award Recipient**

FREE LEGAL CLINICS

Free Legal Clinics were first made available to the public in 2002. The clinics are designed to educate the public on the most commonly used packets in the Center - Child Custody/Visitation and Divorce. In 2008, the SelfServe Center started offering Custody Trial Prep Clinics to coach Pro Se litigants preparing for upcoming child custody trials. The Child Custody/Visitation clinics are conducted in the courthouse, held on the first Wednesday of every month. The Absolute Divorce clinics are offered on the third Wednesday of every month. The Custody Trial Preparation clinics are held on the third Thursday of each month.

The attorney and/or certified paralegal conducting the clinic inform litigants of step-by-step procedures, explains the written instructions on how to complete the form and reviews forms for completeness. In 2008, the attendance of the clinics remained steady and the feedback gathered from the evaluation forms reflect a high level of customer satisfaction. Of the 610 customers who pre-registered for clinics in 2008, 325 attended. For public convenience, the clinics are offered at various times and days of the week. One-third of the clinics are scheduled in a conference room in the Courthouse, between 12:30 PM – 1:30 PM. The other clinics are scheduled at the Charlotte School of Law at 6:00 PM – 7:00 PM; and at the Mecklenburg County Bar Center from 10:00 AM – 11:00 AM on Saturdays.

PRO SE CLINICS TAUGHT BY THE CHARLOTTE SCHOOL OF LAW

In February 2008, the SelfServe Center and the Charlotte School of Law joined forces to expand the Pro-Se Clinics offered on Child Custody & Visitation and Divorce. Students received roughly seven hours of training by attorneys, paralegal and court personnel and in February, six groups began teaching clinics every Wednesday and Saturday.

Each clinic is monitored by a supervising attorney and on occasion a Family Court official. This partnership has allowed the SelfServe Center to conduct six more clinics per month increasing the total number of clinics conducted per month to nine. With the help of the Charlotte School of Law, the SelfServe Center is now conducting approximately 60% of its clinics in the evenings or weekends when litigants are most often available. The partnership has proven so productive that the SelfServe Center and the Charlotte School of Law are making plans to conduct Landlord Tenant clinics in 2009.

THE FAMILY LAW FACILITATOR PROGRAM

In 2006, the 26th Judicial District and the Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services collaborated to create the Family Law Facilitator Program. The primary goals of the program include: (1) reducing the number of children entering the foster care system; and (2) assisting self-represented litigants navigate a complex legal system. The Family Law Facilitator Program offers quality legal assistance in child custody cases that are referred by the Department of Social Services.

In 2008, the Family Law Facilitators assisted kin-care providers draft and file legal pleadings, execute service of process, prepare for court appearances and negotiate consent agreements on behalf of 133 children. Of the 133 children served, 67 children (or 50.4%) achieved permanence by means of the court entering a permanent child custody order. Another 15 children (or 11.3%) achieved stability as a result of the court entering an interim or temporary child custody order pending final resolution of the legal claim. In sum, the high-risk of entering foster care was reduced, if not eliminated, for 82 children served by the program in 2008.

THE INTERACTIVE COURT FORMS PROJECT

The I-CAN! project was introduced to the public in 2008, and is a low cost online application that assists litigant complete Mecklenburg County court forms by asking simple questions and placing their answers on the forms in the correct place. Using friendly on-screen guides, users are able to create properly formatted pleadings while learning the required steps needed to bring their case before the court. At this time, modules are available to assist in filing the following claims: divorce and name change (for minors and adults). The software allows the litigants to build an account so that they can update and return to the forms for later use. I-CAN! Is available 24/7 and accessible through the Web anywhere in the world. There are also friendly on-screen modules available for Spanish-speaking litigants. From July 2008 to December 2008, 35 individuals utilized the service. The following forms are scheduled to be launched in 2009:

- Child Custody and/or Visitation
- Child Custody, Visitation and Child Support
- Modification of Child Custody and/or Visitation
- Modification of Child Custody, Visitation and Support
- Contempt

LIMITED SCOPE OR UNBUNDLED SERVICES PROGRAM

The SelfServe Center has as one of its' primary mission to link litigants with attorneys who are willing to provide "limited scope services." This term is used to describe the wide range of discreet tasks that an attorney might provide short of full representation. Limited Scope Services makes the total cost of legal assistance more affordable as litigants elect whether to use counsel at each phase of the case.

An effort to recruit attorneys providing limited scope or unbundled services began in 2002. At that time there were only six attorneys serving in this capacity. In 2008, the number of attorneys reached 24 with the addition of three newly recruited attorneys. The SelfServe Center Coordinator maintains profiles of attorneys willing to provide unbundled services. This information is routinely provided to customers visiting the Center.

EDUCATIONAL VIDEOS

Since 2001 the SelfServe Center has been offering educational videos to equip and educate pro se litigants. The following titles are available in the Center for private viewing:

- Custody or Visitation and/or Support
- Absolute Divorce
- Modification of Custody/Visitation
- Contempt
- Domestic Violence (new)
- Representing yourself in a Landlord Tenant Trial (new)
- Tips for when *pro-se* litigants present in court

In 2008, Legal Aid of North Carolina provided the SelfServe Center with two additional videos: Representing Yourself in a Landlord Tenant Trial and Domestic Violence. With the exceptions of the Landlord Tenant Trial and Domestic Violence, all video titles are in English and in Spanish. No appointments to view the educational videos are necessary, but customers visiting the Center are encouraged to view the video corresponding to the form packet requested. To ensure current information is provided, customers viewing the videos are given a list of relevant updates. If unable to view the video upon their initial visit to the Center, customers are invited to return at a more convenient time. For privacy, the SelfServe Center offers headphones. Currently, the VHS video tapes are being converted to DVD.



WEBSITE

Introduced in 2001 and with the public's ever increasing access to the internet, the SelfServe Center website helps reach a greater volume of citizenry. In 2008, the SelfServe Center has made several updates to their website to keep pace with the ever growing usage of the internet. Forms and instructions are conveniently available for download online. On average, 573 disclosure forms were completed online each month. This figure does not include those who visit the website without filling out the disclosure form. Plans are currently under development to overhaul the site to include streaming videos, virtual court tours and additional community resource links. The following forms are available on the SelfServe Center website.

- Child Custody / Visitation **ONLY**
- Child Support **ONLY**
- Child Custody, Visitation and Child Support
- Answer and Counterclaim for Custody, Visitation and/or Child Support
- To bring a Motion for Visitation before the court in a Child Support Case
- Modification of Child Custody/Visitation
- Modification of Child Support
- Violation of a Court Order for Child Support, Visitation, and/or Child Custody
- Domestic Violence
- Limited Driving Privileges
- Small Claims – Money Owed or Recovery of Personal Property
- Small Claims – Summary Ejectment
- Third Party Complaint for Child Custody or Visitation and/or Child Support
- Third Party Complaint for Child Custody or Visitation **ONLY**



STAFFING

The SelfServe Center is still faced with critical staffing challenges. The Center is both managed and daily operated by SelfServe Center Coordinator, Darwin Rice. This position is pulled from the staffing assigned to the Family Court Division and is a discretionary service. No dedicated state or local funding is provided to staff the Center. The Center relies heavily on interns and volunteers since the current staffing is inadequate to meet the demand. In 2008, the Center has been supported by interns from Campbell University School of Law, Central Piedmont Community College, Charlotte School of Law, Johnson C. Smith University, King's College, North Carolina Central School of Law, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Law and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. A total 18 interns and volunteers contributed over 2000 hours.

DISTRIBUTION OF FORM PACKETS

To date the following form packets are available in the SelfServe Center and on the website.

Absolute Divorce (*Instructions also available in Spanish*)
Custody/Visitation (*Instructions also available in Spanish*)
Child Support
Answer and Counterclaim for Custody/Visitation and/or Support
Modification of Custody/Visitation
Modification of Child Support
Contempt
Domestic Violence (*Instructions also available in Spanish*)
Civil No-Contact (*Instructions also available in Spanish*)
Motion in the Cause for Visitation
Child Custody Agreement for School Enrollment
Name Change - Adult (*Instructions also available in Spanish*)
Name Change - Child (Uncontested) (*Instructions also available in Spanish*)
Small Claims - Money or Property Owed
Small Claims - Summary Ejectment
Small Claims - Answer
Small Claims - Answer and Counterclaim
Limited Driving Privileges
Expungement
Motion to Appoint a Guardian Ad Litem

The following figures reflect the number of form packets distributed in the SelfServe Center in 2008:

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	TOTAL
445	540	380	470	549	607	598	293	629	594	459	556	6120

The following figures reflect the number of form packets accessed from the SelfServe Center Website in 2008:

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	TOTAL
534	610	594	566	560	424	628	609	601	578	588	591	6883

CUSTOMER VOLUME

In addition to customers who request a form packet, others simply visit the Center or contact the general information telephone line. In 2008, the Center assisted an average of 63 walk-in customers per month seeking general information. Also for 2008, the SelfServe Center has upgraded all telephone informational lines to better provide the needs for both English and Spanish speaking litigants.

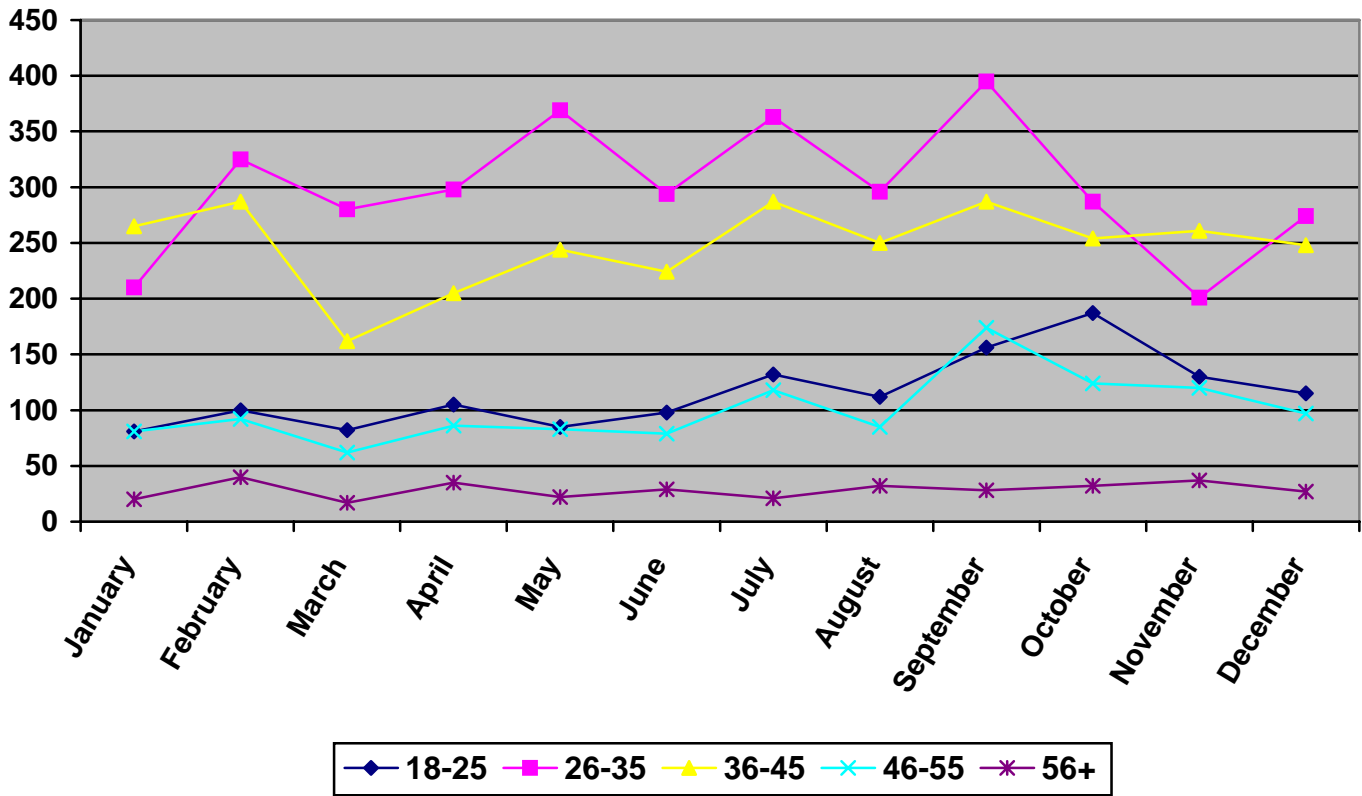


SELF SERVE CENTER STATISTICAL REPORT 2008

As demonstrated in the graphs that follow, customer demographics generally remained consistent across the twelve months of 2008. This information is captured by the completion of the disclosure form, which each patron must sign in order to receive a packet. Completion of the demographic information section is optional. Though most customers elect to fill it out, some do not. This accounts for the differentiation in number totals for the charts and the number of packets distributed per month. The information in the graphs provided below is from both walk-in and internet patrons.

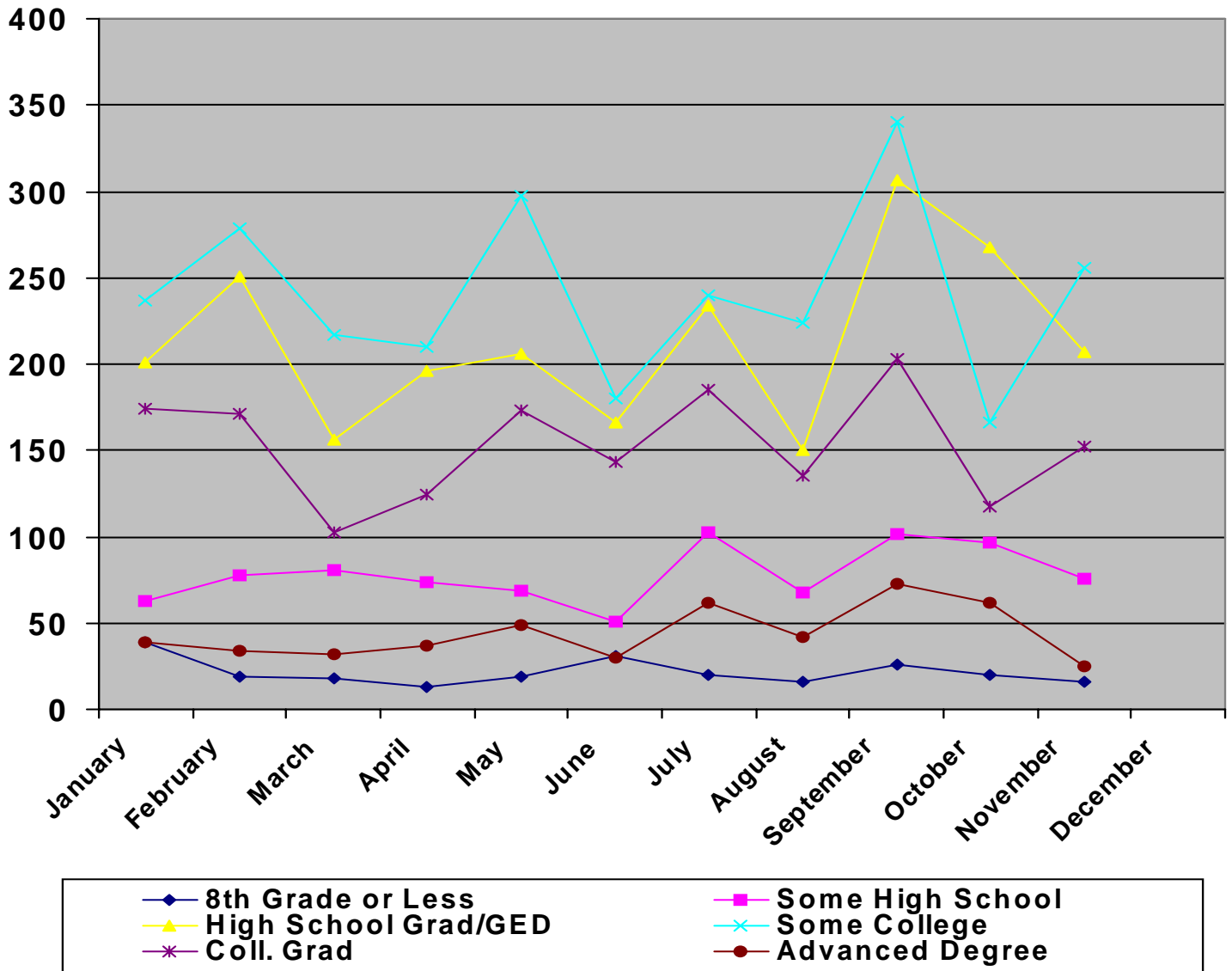
AGE: The majority of customers were between 26 and 35 years of age. The next highest group served fell between the ages of 36 and 45. Customers age 56 and older represented the smallest user group.

Age



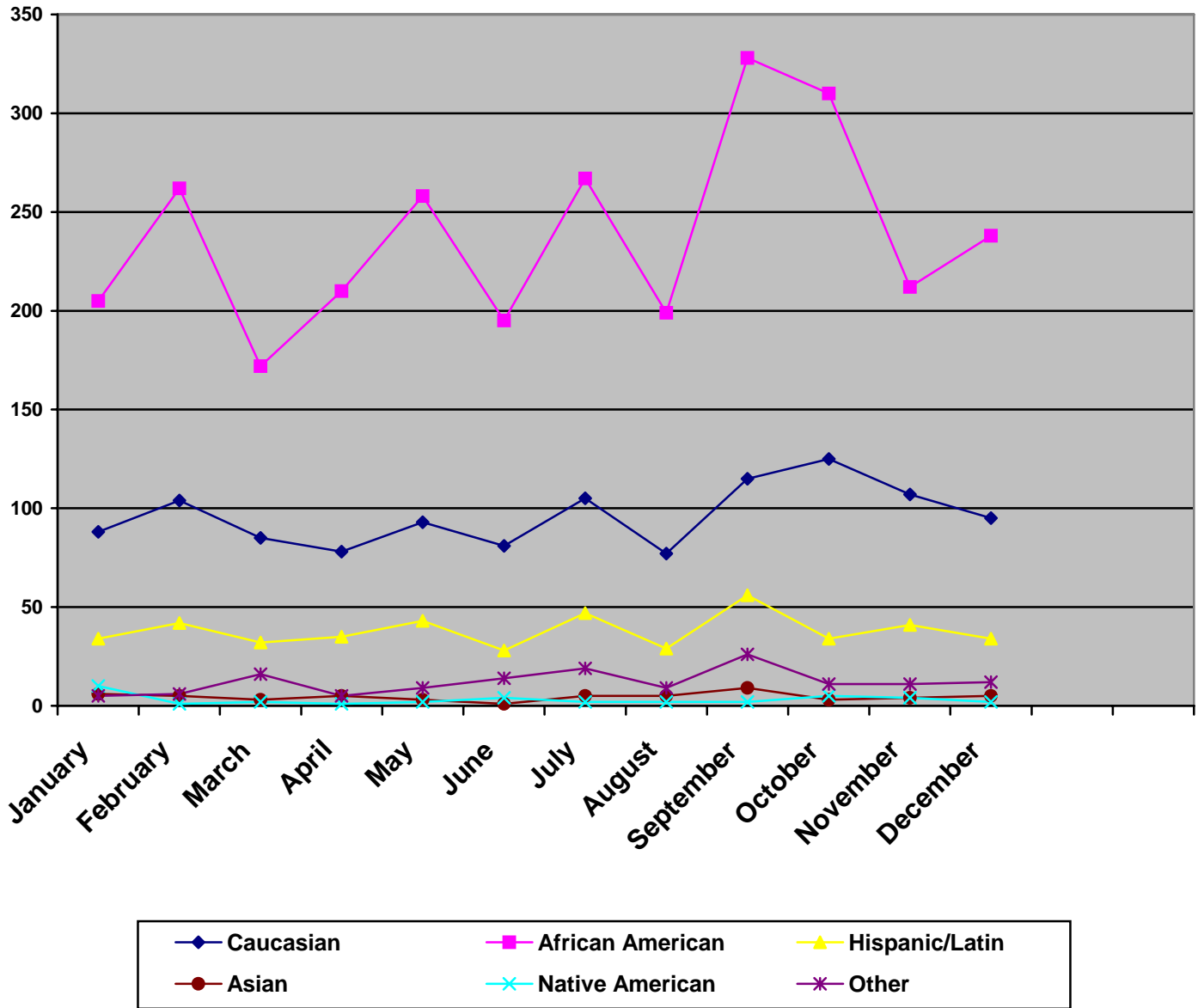
EDUCATION: The majority of customers reported having obtained a high school diploma or a GED. Those who have an education of eighth grade or less and those who have an education with advanced degrees represent the two lowest reported categories. It is interesting to note that the Center consistently serves more people with a high school diploma or higher.

Education



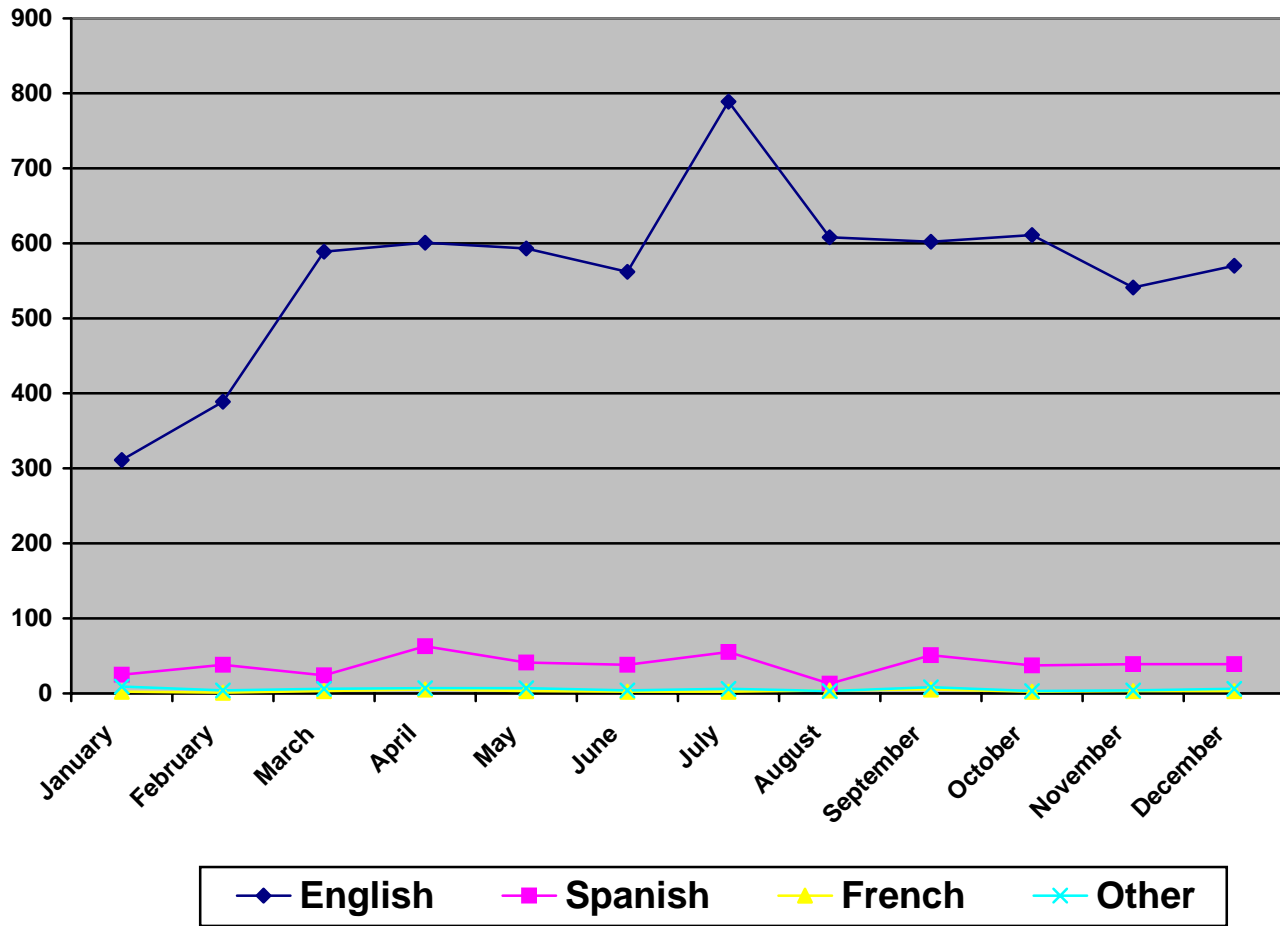
ETHNICITY: African-American was the highest reported ethnic group using the Center in 2008. Caucasian ranked second. Native American is the lowest reporting ethnic group recorded to use the clinic for 2008.

Ethnicity Group



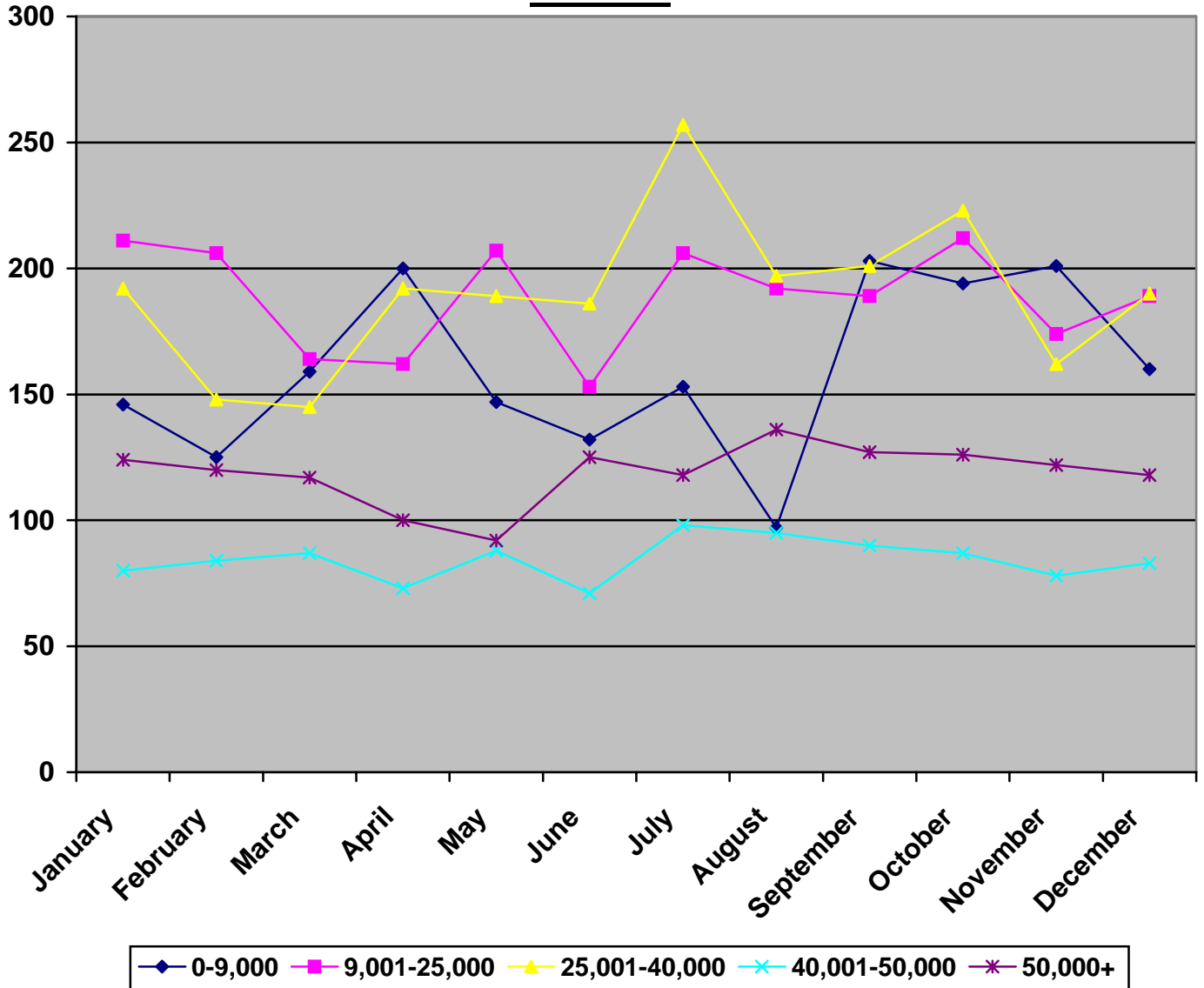
LANGUAGE SPOKEN: The vast majority of customers in 2008 were English speaking. Of the non-English speaking customers, Spanish speaking customers comprised the second largest user group. A bilingual friend or family member often accompanies Spanish-speaking customers.

Language

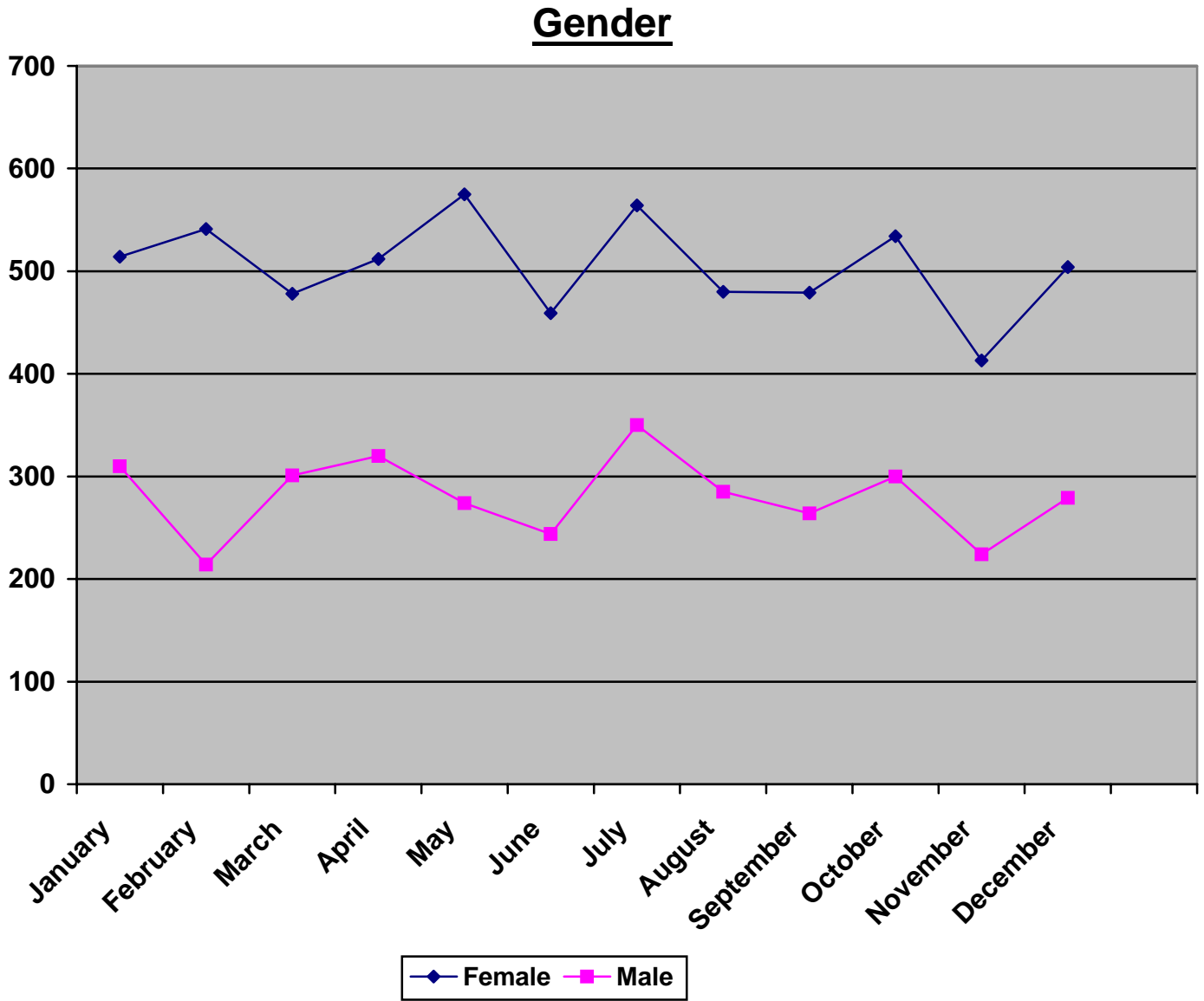


INCOME: The majority of the customers in the Center reported making \$9,001-\$25,000 per year. The next highest grouping reported making \$25,001-\$40,000. The least numbers of respondents reported making \$50,000 or more per year.

Income



GENDER: Throughout 2008, female customers were ranked the highest to be served.



MAJORITY PROFILE: The typical Serve Center customer fits the following demographic profile: African American female, 26 and 35 years of age, English speaking, with some college education and an annual income range of \$9,001-\$25,000 per year.

ANECDOTAL COMMENTS SELSERVE CENTER 2008



"It is great."- January 2008-Disclosure/Intake Forms

"It's a great place!"-January 2008- Online Disclosure/ Intake Forms

"Great Service." - February 2008 Clinic Evaluation Form

"Very helpful." – March 2008 Clinic Evaluation Form

"Very friendly and helpful"---October 2008 Disclosure/Intake Form

"Everything is great."— April 2008 Clinic Evaluation Form

"The Staff is very friendly and helpful. No suggestions" - June 2008 Disclosure/Intake Form

"I'm just glad ya'll are here to help in situations like this."---June 2008 Clinic Evaluation Form

"Nice to have in one place."— May 2008 Disclosure/Intake Forms

"They have excellent service."— May 2008 Disclosure/Intake Form

"Love it!"— June 2008 Disclosure/Intake Forms

"I greatly appreciate the services rendered to the public and myself."— March 2008 Disclosure/Intake Form

"Always have good experience in the SelfServe Center." --- July 2008 Disclosure/Intake Form

"Wonderful Service to low income or people who know how to do their own paperwork." -September 2008 Online Disclosure/Intake Form

"Lead me in the right direction."---March 2008 Disclosure/Intake Form

"This is excellent because some people do not have the money to pay an attorney and is the easy way to do it."--- December 2008 Disclosure/Intake Form

"Upfront great help!" --- November 2008 Disclosure/Intake Form

"Clean and efficient." --- August 2008 Disclosure/Intake Forms

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