

THE 26TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT
SELFSERVE CENTER



2009: An Annual Glance

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MISSION STATEMENT

The SelfServe Center strives to achieve equal access to justice in the area of family law for Mecklenburg County residents. By presenting patrons with information about community resources, offering legal clinics and providing information on the court process, the SelfServe Center is a valuable resource to the community. The SelfServe Center paves the way for members of the court and the community to work together to create more satisfactory resolutions of family law matters.

OVERVIEW

The SelfServe Center is a voluntary service offered by the 26th Judicial District that is designed to help citizens access the courts. The Mecklenburg County SelfServe Center has established itself as the community portal for citizens who cannot afford traditional legal services. The SelfServe Center offers a variety of services including free legal clinics and attorney consultations, educational videos, an attorney for the day program and legal referrals. In addition, the SelfServe Center also offers 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.

In 2009 the SelfServe Center assisted 8,225 people inside the SelfServe Center office. An additional 7,365 customers filled out a disclaimer form on-line and used the SelfServe Center's web site. This represents a 7% increase in the use of the web site over 2008. These totals do not include those customers who came into the SelfServe Center but did not receive an instructional packet. These customers sought information, used local computers to perform research or draft legal motions and availed themselves of the educational resources. The SelfServe Center averaged a weekly flow of 216 customers a week who did not receive instructional legal packets, totaling 2,600 for the year. This represents a 6.5% increase from 2008. This brings the total number of customers assisted by the staff to 10,825 for the year 2009.

In addition to assisting the general customer base, the SelfServe Center also offers Continuing Legal Education Classes. These classes prepare members of the Mecklenburg County Bar for volunteerism in the SelfServe Center.

STAFFING

The SelfServe Center is an operational unit of the Family Court Division. It is managed daily by the SelfServe Coordinator, Darwin Rice. This position is an extension of the staffing assigned to the Family Court Division and is a discretionary service. No dedicated state or local funding is provided to staff the SelfServe Center. The current staffing is inadequate to meet the growing demands of the Center. Sustained operation is made possible through the heavy recruitment of interns and volunteers.

In 2009, the SelfServe Center was supported by student interns from the Charlotte School of Law, University of Georgia School of Law, Campbell University's Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law, UNC Charlotte Foreign Language Department, UNC Charlotte Paralegal Studies Program and Central Piedmont Community College Paralegal Studies Program, In 2009 the SelfServe Center was supported by 10 interns and 2 volunteers who provided 2,080 staffing hours, this is equivalent to the hours of one full time paid employee.



STATISTICAL INFORMATION

The following data is based on information voluntarily self-disclosed by the customer. In some instances, customers elected not to disclose personal information. The information was gathered from disclosure forms completed by each customer.

While some of the demographic information remained constant from 2008, there are some notable differences:

Income. Data gathered for 2009 shows an increase in lower income customers. In 2008 the average income ranged between \$9,001 and \$25,000, in 2009 the average income of \$0 to \$9,000 was reported by 27.6% while income ranging from \$9,001 to \$25,000 was reported by 27.8%.

Customer Profile. The typical customer of the SelfServe Center is an African American female between the age of 26-35 whose annual income could be \$0 - \$9,000, or between \$9,001 - \$25,000 per year. The typical customer is most likely to ask for information about divorce, 31.5% or custody/visitation, 20.3%.

Education. Another notable difference is the educational level of the average customer. In 2008 the average customer reported having a high school diploma or GED. In 2009 the average customer reported having some college education 33.3%, while those with a high school diploma or GED represented 26.9%.

Language. The language spoken by most customers is English, 90.5%.

Rationale of Self-Representation. The average customer reported that they use the SelfServe Center due to the cost of hiring an Attorney, 48.3%. Most customers reported learning of the center through a family member or co-worker, 22.8%, court personnel, 18.1% or by having seen the Center while in the Court House, 17.6%.

FORMS GIVEN OUT

CENTER

Absolute Divorce	2,588
Custody/Visitation	1,723
Custody/Visitation/Support	637
Child Support	227
Non-Parent Custody/Visitation & Support	249
Modification of Custody/Visitation	492
Modification of Child Support	276
Answer/Counterclaim to Custody/Support	128
Contempt	415
Domestic Violence: 50B	179
Civil No Contact: 50C	41
Limited Driving Privileges	16
Small Claims (Money Owed)	161
Small Claims (Summary Ejection)	89

Adult Name Change	437
Minor Name Change	500
Expungement	67
TOTAL FORM PACKETS DISTRIBUTED IN THE CENTER	8,225
TOTAL WALK-IN'S (litigants who did not receive packets)	2,600
TOTAL INTERNET USERS	7,365
TOTAL CUSTOMER BASE	18,190

CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

In 2009, the SelfServe Center in conjunction with the Mecklenburg County Bar conducted three continuing legal education (CLE) seminars. Entitled “Assisting Self-Represented Litigants Navigate the Court System” this seminar prepares members of the Bar to enhance the volunteerism in the SelfServe Center. The first CLE was conducted at the Charlotte School of Law on January 21, 2009. There were 21 participants who attended the Charlotte School of Law CLE. The law firm, McGuire Woods Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) was the gracious host of the second CLE which was a video replay conducted on July 30, 2009, where there were 16 participants in attendance. The final CLE for 2009 was courteously hosted by Alston & Bird LLP, on October 20, 2010 and was also a video replay. There were 11 participants who attended the third CLE. In total these three CLEs produced 34 trained attorneys who were added to the list for Attorney for the Day program and 14 who were already in the AFTD program and were updating their skills with the CLE’s. These attorneys oversee the free legal clinics as well as the Attorney for the Day program.

FREE LEGAL CLINICS

The SelfServe Center offers free legal clinics on the topics of divorce, child custody/visitation and trial preparation. These clinics assist customers in understanding the forms and the procedures involved with their legal issues. It helps them better understand the legal system, their obligations, and what to expect in the courtroom. The SelfServe Center had 543 customers sign up for the free clinics held in 2009 (this represents clinics given at the SelfServe Center and at the Charlotte School of Law).

The free legal clinics were attended by 333, 61% of those who signed up for the clinics. The legal clinics allow the customers' paperwork to move smoothly through the legal system by ensuring that all paperwork is completed correctly.

Student volunteers at the Charlotte School of Law conducted clinics on divorce, custody/visitation and landlord/tenant evictions, volunteering 30 hours in training and conducting the clinics. Students are supervised by Attorneys to ensure accurate information is provided to the customers. These clinics are conducted during the evenings from 6pm to 7pm to accommodate customers who work during the day and cannot attend the day clinics. This provides litigants with more access to justice and the legal system.

ATTORNEY FOR THE DAY

The Attorney for the Day Program is offered to those customers who were in need of help that the clinics alone could not provide. Attorneys provided customers with more than 130 hours of free legal advice in 2009. Working pro bono, they provided additional legal advice to customers. The Attorney for the Day had a 60% attendance rate. The attorneys were able to assist the customer with legal questions that made the process easier to understand and less daunting. The following attorneys donated more than 130 hours in 2009 to the Attorney for the Day Program:

Kimberly Zirkle *	Jonathan Polking	Valerie Quick
Jo Hill Dobbins	Julie Seidenstein	Kristopher Jones
Tranzania Cannot-Eckerle	Melinda Vervais	Erin Steiner
Avis Edwards	Jim Hendry	Jeff Aldrich
Elizabeth Goodwin	Peggy Hey	Ben Thalheimer
Albert Hendrix	Holly Chamberlain	Naadei Dzani
Joyce Chandler Kaneko	Jennifer Turner	Catherine Huie

* 2009 Jane V. Harper Pro-Bono Award Recipient

THE JANE V. HARPER PRO-BONO AWARD

The Jane V. Harper Pro Bono Award is presented to Attorneys to recognize their efforts in providing pro bono services to clients in the 26th Judicial District SelfServe Center who could not otherwise afford legal advice.

The 2009, Jane V. Harper Pro-Bono Award recipient is, Attorney Kimberly Zirkle of Moore & Van Allen PLLC. She has been a dedicated member of the SelfServe Center's Attorney for the Day program since its inception in 2006. Even though her legal background is in finance, Attorney Zirkle gained a commanding knowledge of family law matters and led her peers in volunteer hours to the Attorney for the Day Program and the SelfServe Center. She volunteered over 40 hours of Pro Bono service and assisted over 60 litigants on matters of Child Custody and Divorce. Attorney Zirkle has exemplified the true spirit of public service.

THE INTERACTIVE COURT FORMS PROJECT

Introduced in 2008, the I-CAN!TM Project is a low cost online application that assists customers in completing Mecklenburg County legal forms. The web-based program offers the user a series of questions and places the answers in the correct fields on the form. The user-friendly on-screen guides allow the customer to create properly formatted pleadings while learning the required steps needed to bring their case before the court. This service provides the customer a user password to allow them to access their account 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. At the end of each session, the user is allowed to print complete documents and step-by-step filing instructions.

At this time the site contains two modules: Divorce and Name Change. The Child Custody module is scheduled to launch in 2010 and will include the following options:

Child Custody or Visitation

Child Custody, Visitation and Child Support

Modification of Child Custody and/or Visitation

Contempt

Non-Parent Custody

Non-Parent Custody/Child Support

Child Support

Modification of Child Support



SELSERVE CENTER WEB SITE

The SelfServe Center's website offers information for clients who cannot come into the SelfServe Center during the day. Forms and instructions are available for download online. In 2008 the SelfServe web site had an average of 574 forms downloaded monthly. In 2009 the average went up to 614 forms downloaded each month. This is an increase of approximately 6.5%.

The SelfServe Center's web site also offers community resources, videos, and information about the SelfServe Center's clinics, a legal glossary and much more. The website is updated during the course of the year to ensure that current information is available to the customer. The following forms are available on the website:

Child Custody/Visitation Only

Child Support

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 and/or Child Support

Third Party Complaint for Child Custody or Visitation Only

EDUCATIONAL VIDEOS

The SelfServe Center offers videos for customers to help them better understand the process of representing themselves in court. These videos show the customer's the steps that are required to bring their case to court and what to expect when they appear before the judge. Currently the following legal topics are supported by an education video:

Custody or Visitation and/or Support

Absolute Divorce

Modification of Custody/Visitation

Contempt

*Domestic Violence

*Representing Yourself in a Landlord Tenant Trial

Tips for Representing Yourself in Court

* With the exception of the Landlord Tenant Trial and Domestic Violence videos, all other videos are available in both English and Spanish. Litigants are encouraged to watch the videos that correspond to their form packet to give them a better understanding of the procedure associated with their forms.

The SelfServe Web Site also has videos on the following topics:

Child Custody

Absolute Divorce

Modification Contempt

Each of these videos on the Center's web site is in both English and Spanish in order to reach a wider range of customers.

LIMITED SCOPE PROVIDERS

One of the SelfServe Center's missions is to link clients 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 clients elect whether to use an attorney to handle their entire case or just with a particular phase of the case.

The SelfServe Center provides profiles of the attorneys willing to provide unbundled services. Profiles of the attorneys are handed out to customers by the staff, who explains the meaning of "unbundled services" and how it may help the customer afford representation. To date, there are 44 attorneys who actively offer limited scope services to customers. This represents a 50% increase from 2008. In addition to family law matters, these attorneys offer customers assistance with such matters as living wills, real estate, foreclosure, bankruptcy, immigration, tax law, establishing Limited Liability Corporations (LLC) and personal injury.

ELECTRONIC TESTIMONY

In the SelfServe Center's continued efforts to provide meaningful access to justice, the staff assists customers requesting to appear in an out-of-state court hearing via electronic testimony. Electronic Testimony allows the customer to give their testimony in a foreign court without the expense of traveling to that state. If a customer has completed the correct paperwork as required, by the foreign state and has met the requirements set forth in NCGS §50A-111(b), the SelfServe Center staff will contact the court that the customer is scheduled to give electronic testimony, verify the customer's identification, facilitate the testimony and if necessary, assist in arranging electronic testimony for the next court date. The SelfServe Center facilitated the participation of 48 litigants by electronic testimony in 2009.

MECKLENBURG COUNTY BAR LAWYER VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

The Mecklenburg County Bar's Volunteer Lawyer Program (VLP) was established to offer assistance to the SelfServe Center as well as other non-profit organizations. The SelfServe Center joined VLP in September 2006, and in that time has been able to further the goal of increasing pro bono services to the SelfServe Center. The SelfServe Center Coordinator, Darwin Rice is an active member of the VLP, attending monthly meetings to share updates of current projects and receive feedback on ways to improve the pro bono services offered by the SelfServe Center.

The VLP is an important building block in the SelfServe Center's continued efforts to build stronger ties to the legal community. In 2009 the SelfServe Center was able to offer 130 hours through the efforts of the Mecklenburg County Bars' (MCB) Volunteer Lawyer Program to the Attorney for the Day Program as well as the free legal clinics.

THE FAMILY LAW FACILITATOR PROGRAM

The Family Law Facilitator Program is a collaborative effort of 26th Judicial District and the Department of Social Services. This program helps reduce the number of children entering the foster care system by assisting family members to gain custody of children whose permanent placement is at risk. Discrete legal services provided to litigants include: drafting and filing legal pleadings, executing service of process, preparing for court appearances, and negotiating consent agreements. The program served 177 children in 2009 of which 104 achieved permanency in stable relative homes.

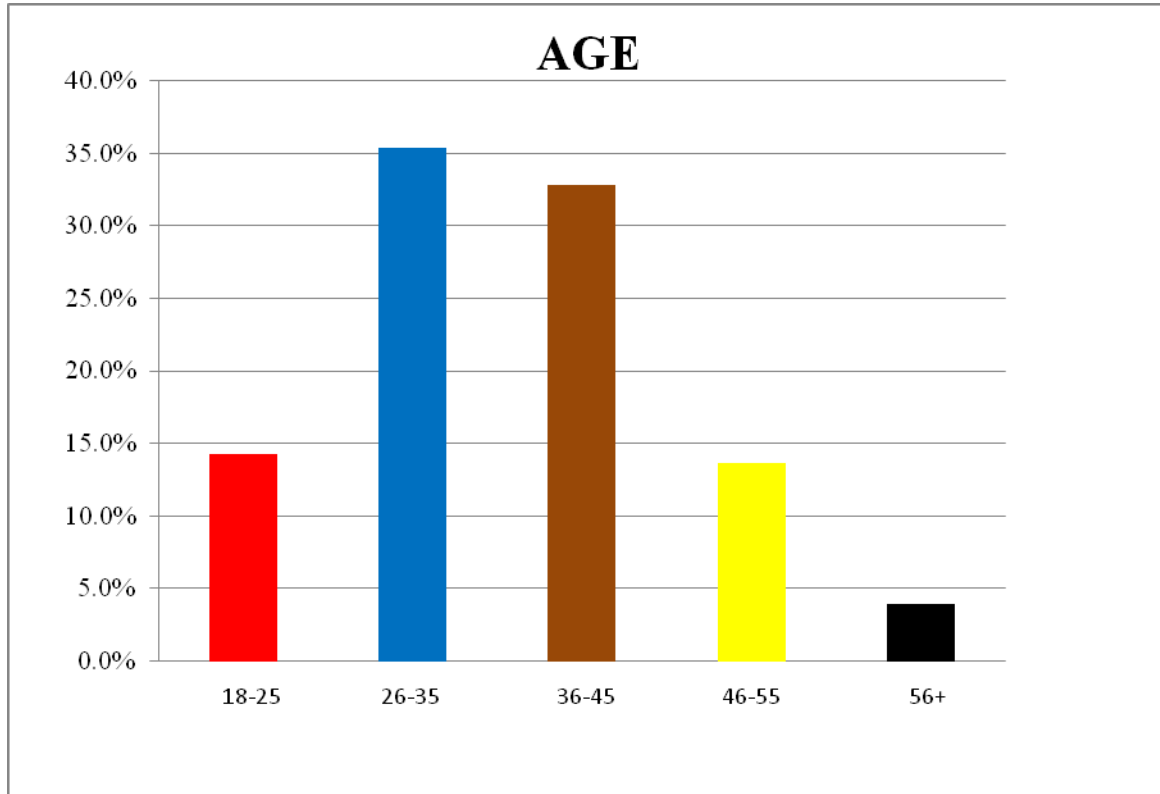
APPENDIX A:

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION



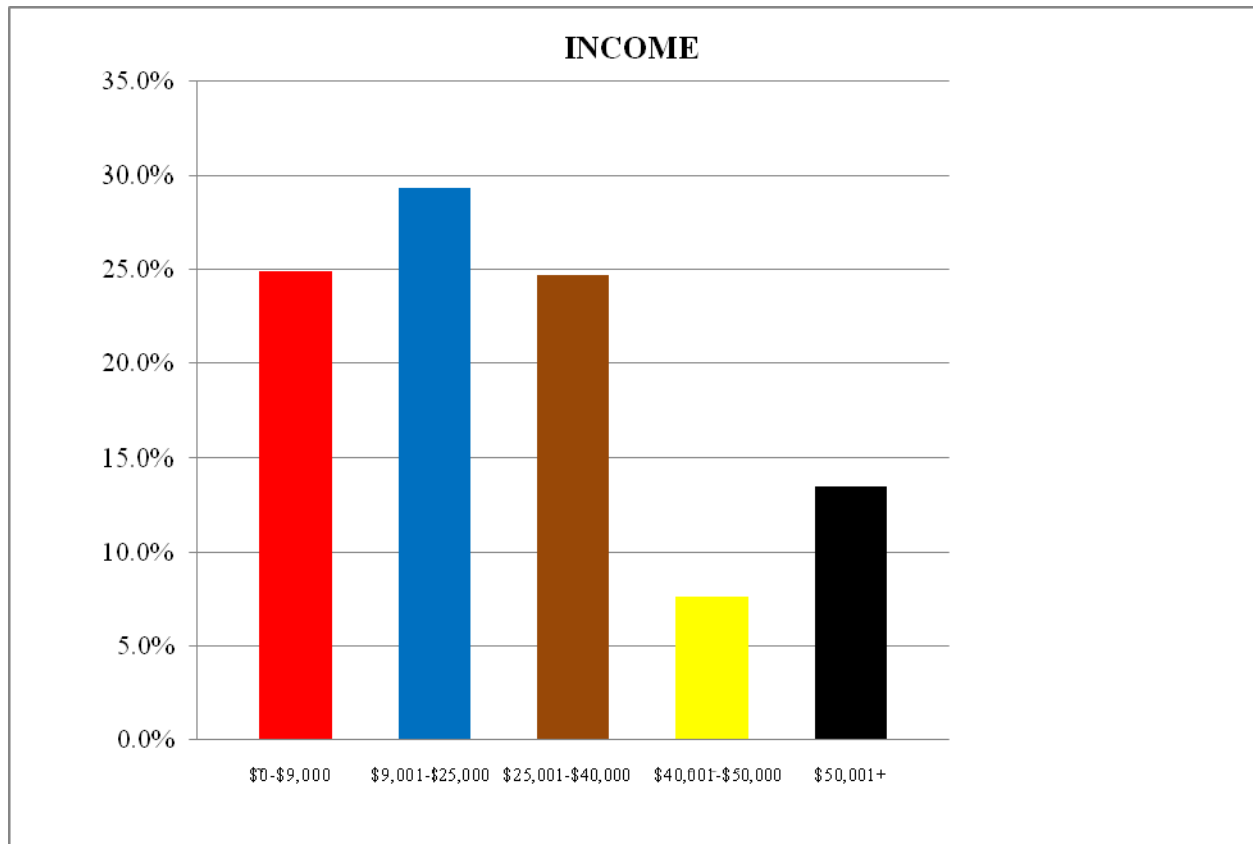
AGE

In 2009 36% of the customers were between 26 and 35 years of age. The next highest group fell between 36 and 45 years of age. The age of the customer coming into the SelfServe Center stayed the same from 2008 to 2009.



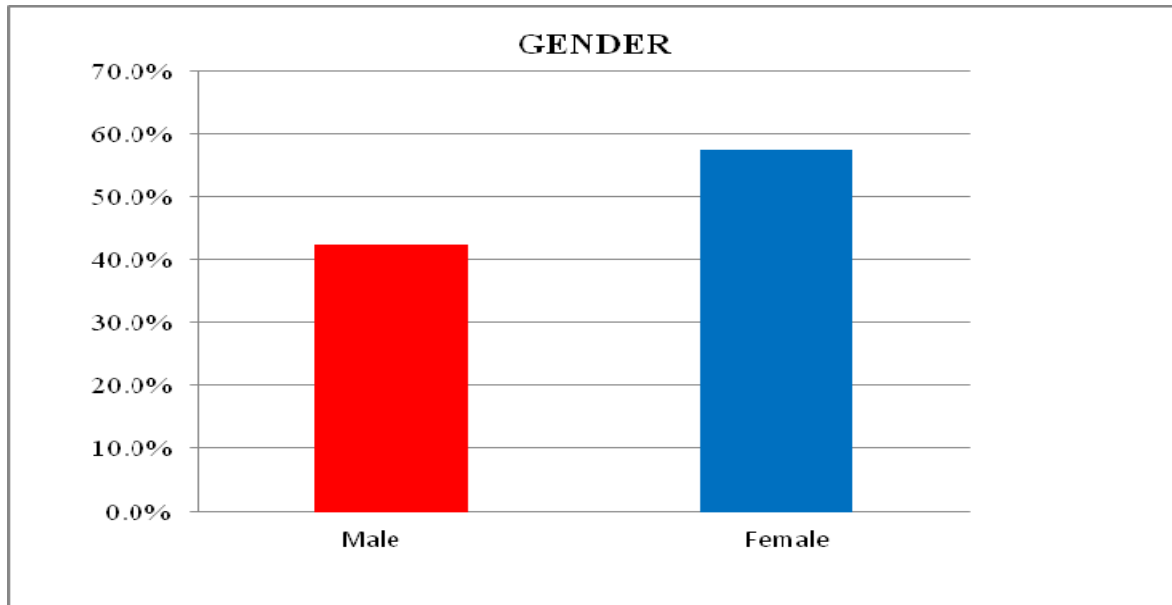
INCOME

There is a difference seen in the area of income from 2008. During the 2008 reporting year the representative income ranged from \$9,001 -\$25,000. During the 2009 reporting year there were two categories of income that were almost identical. The income of customers during 2009 fell between \$0-\$9,000, 27.6% and between \$9,001-\$25,000, 27.8%. These numbers show that more lower income customers were using the Center's services in 2009 than in 2008.



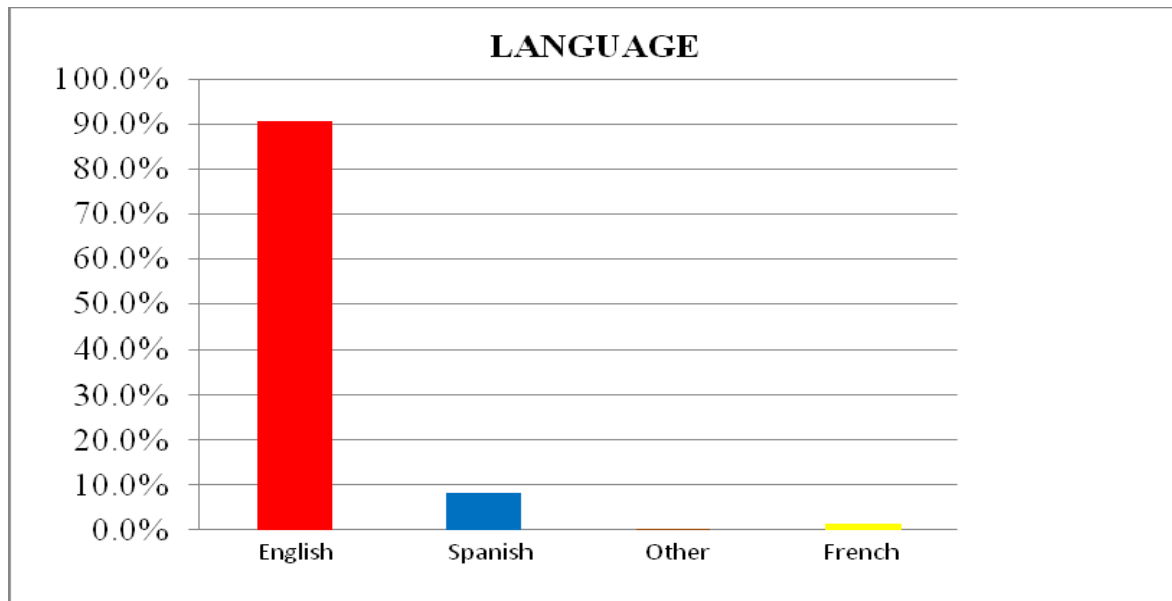
GENDER

As in 2009, female customers continued to be the highest group served. Females represented more than 57.5% of customers coming into the SelfServe Center.



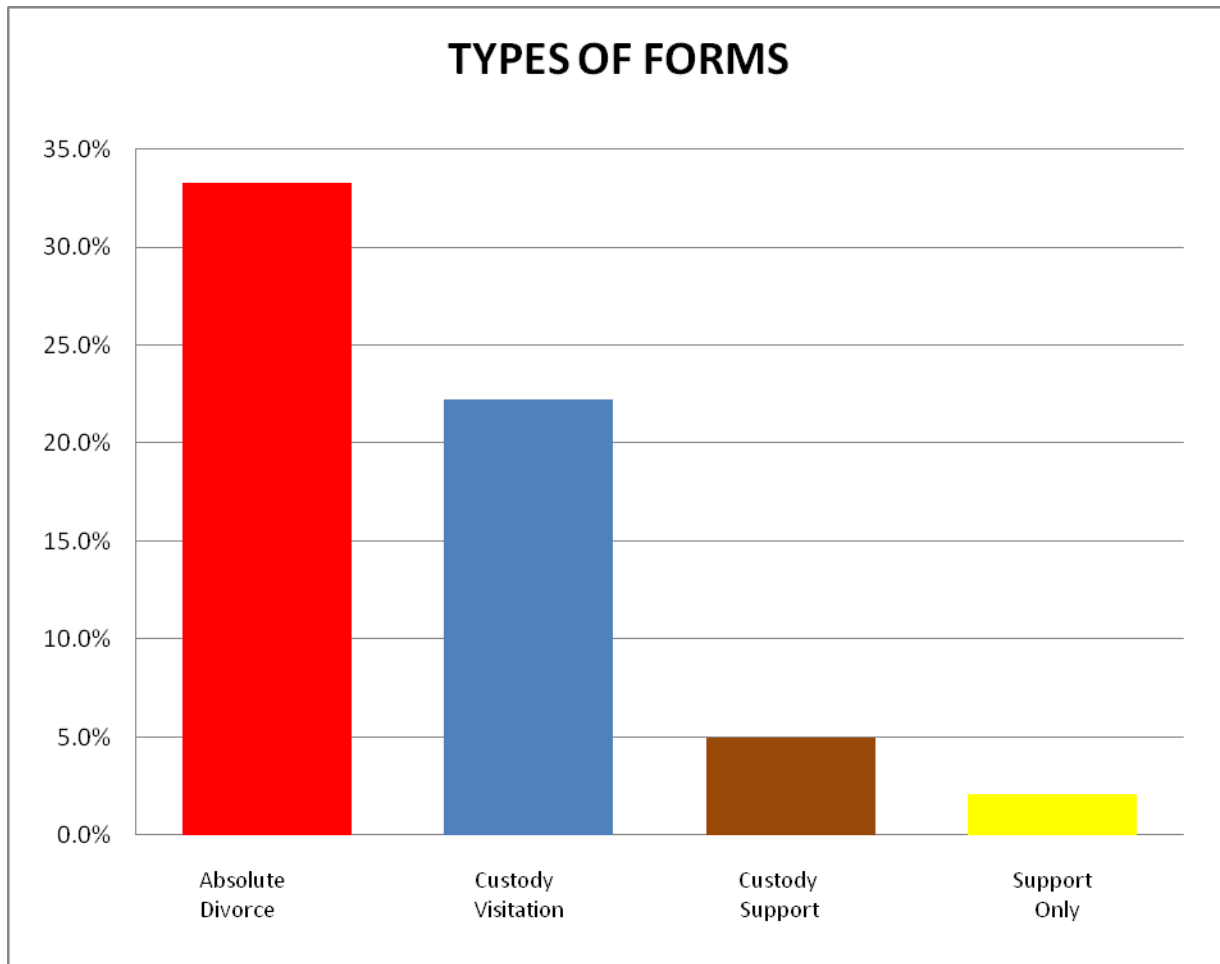
LANGUAGE

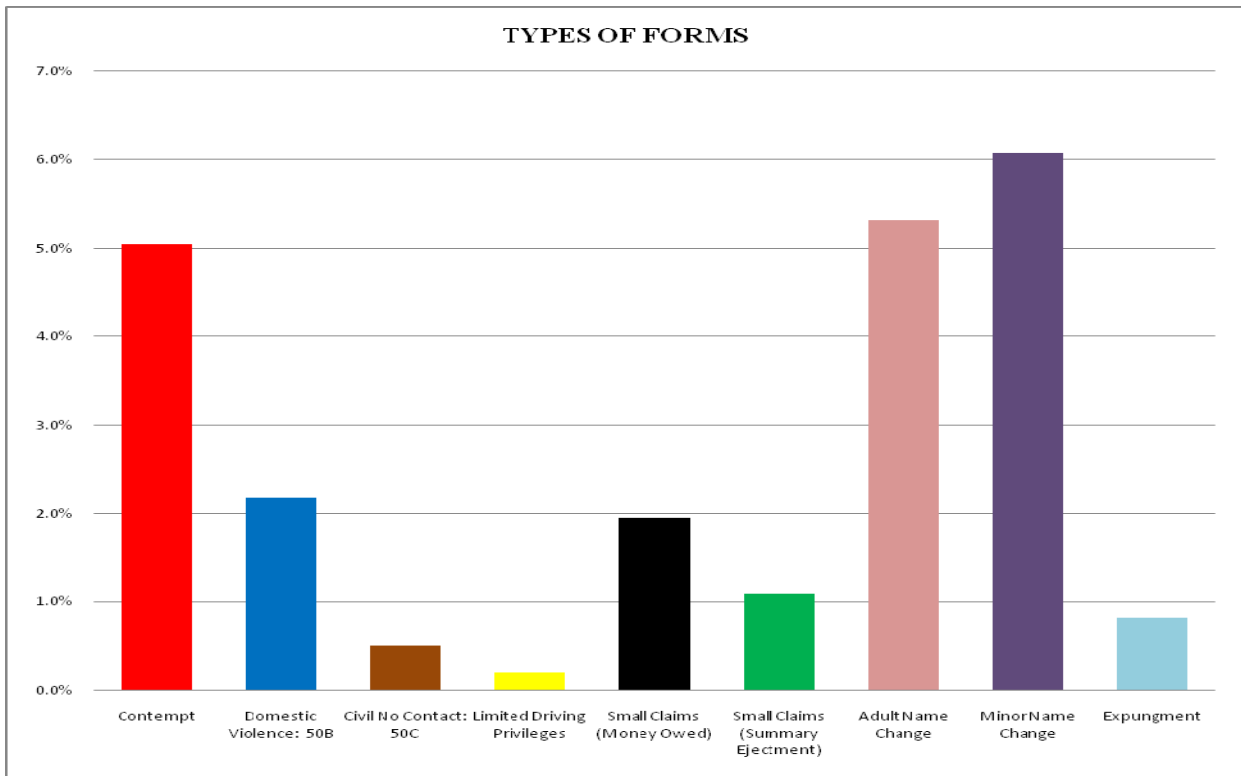
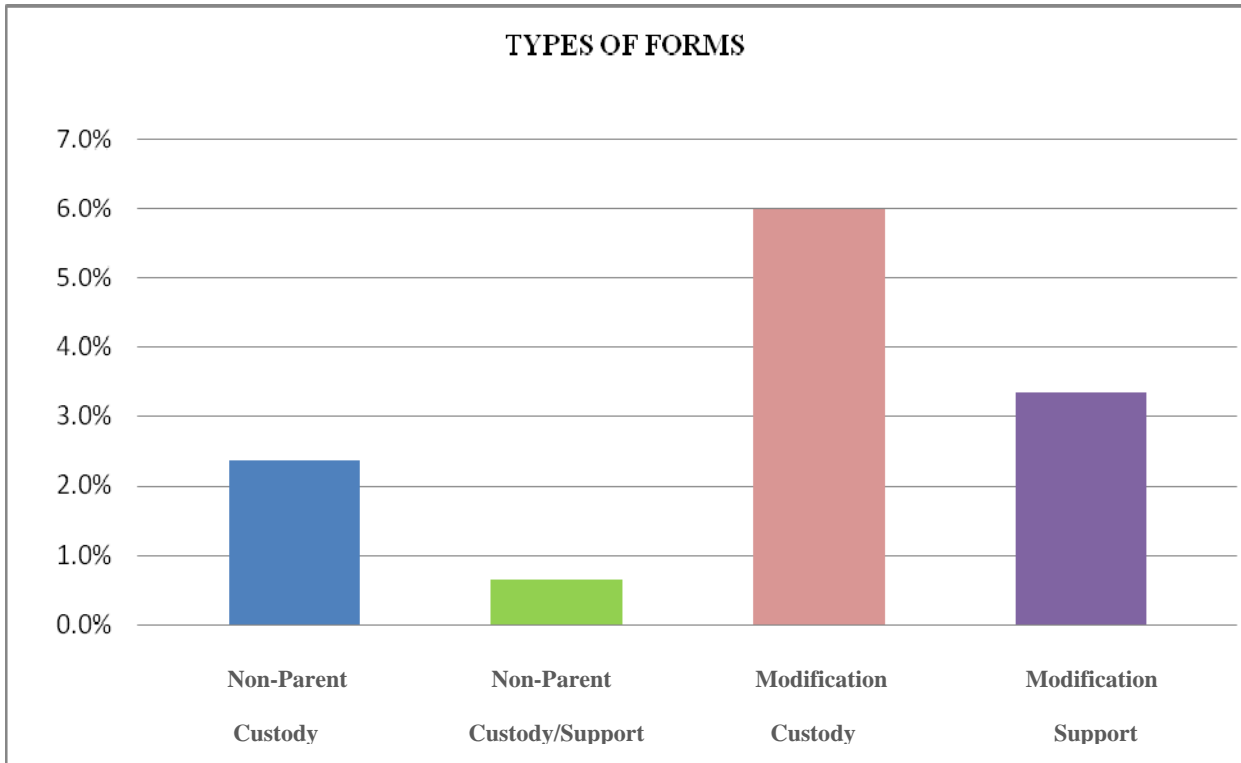
As in 2009, English was spoken by 90% of the customers who visited the SelfServe Center.



TYPES OF FORMS

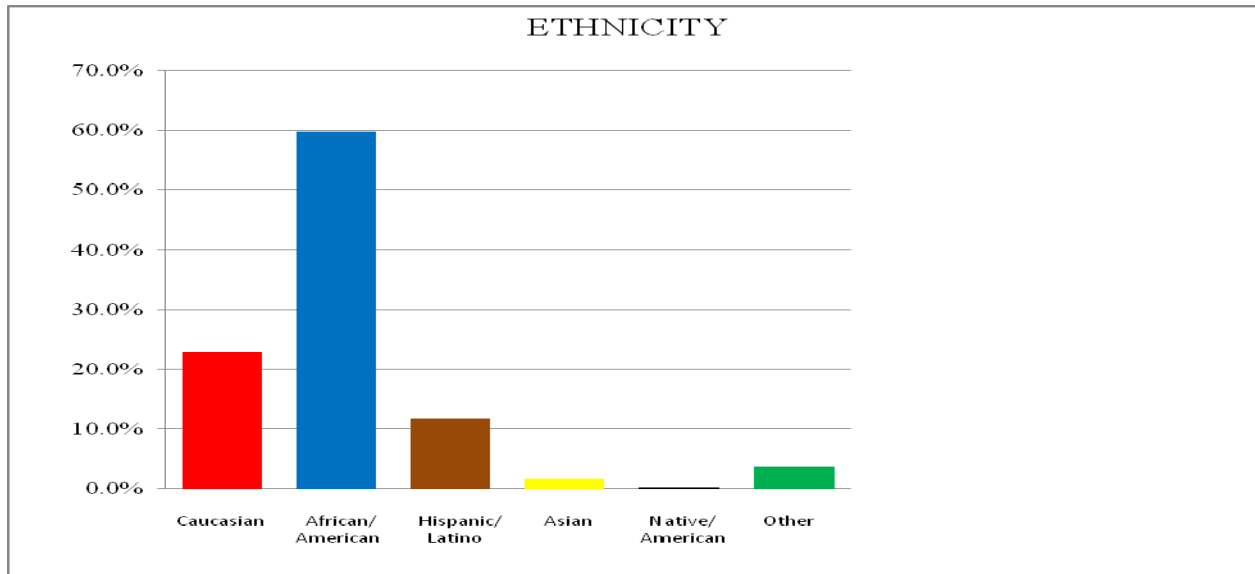
During the 2009 year, the SelfServe Center gave out more than 8,225 forms. The majority of the forms provided to the customers were Divorce forms. The Divorce packets represented 33.3% of the forms given out by the SelfServe Center. Custody/Visitation packets were the second most requested form at 22.2%. The Divorce and Custody/Visitation packets represented 55.5% of the forms given out by the SelfServe Center Staff.





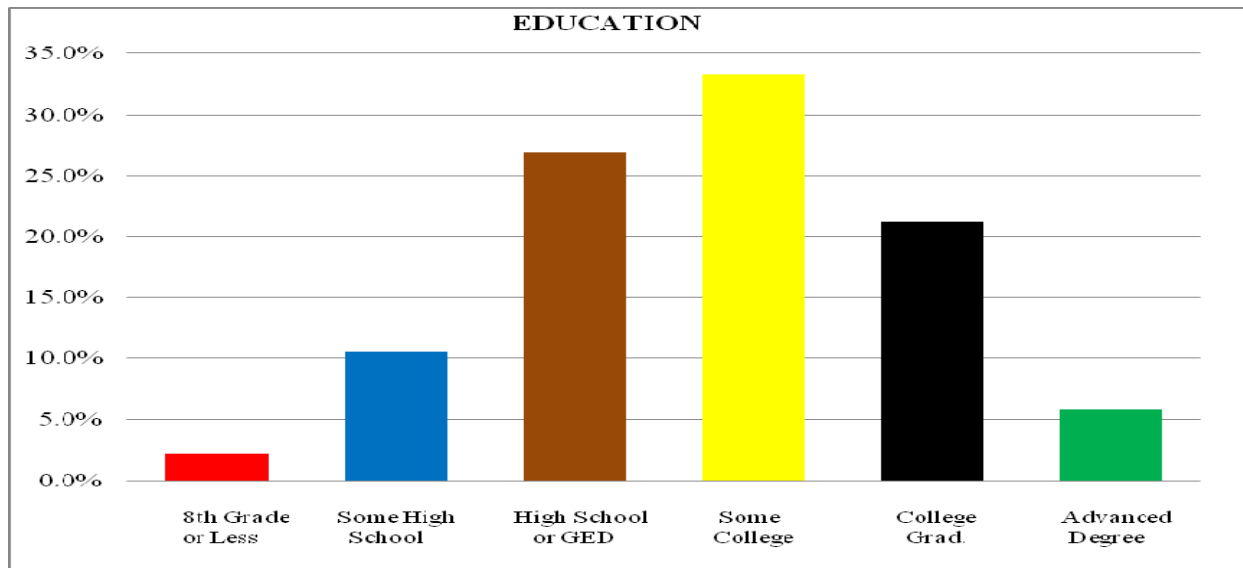
ETHNICITY

As in 2008, the highest reported ethnic group was African American, 58.5%. Caucasian represented the second highest group of litigants, 24.2%.



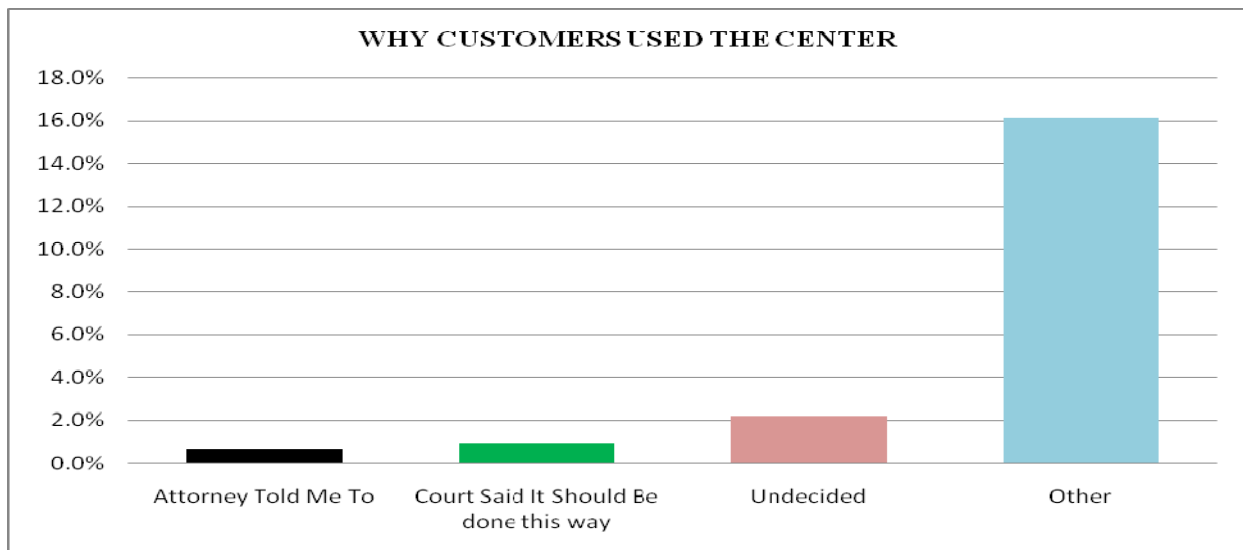
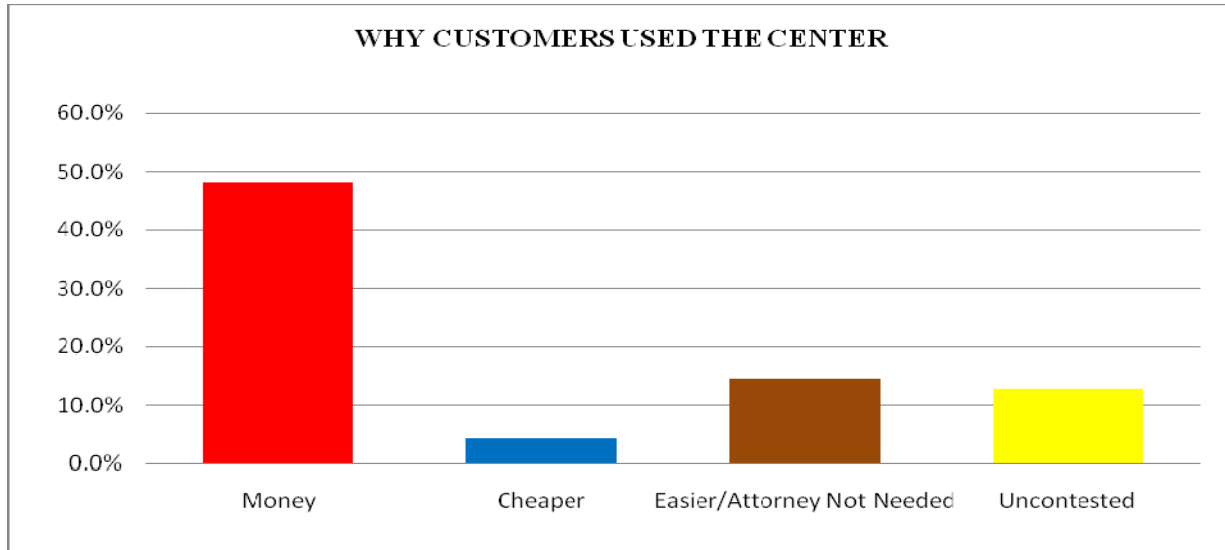
EDUCATION

In 2008 the reported educational level of the average client was a high school diploma or GED. In 2009 the reported educational level of the average client was some college, 34.1%. The second highest level reported was a high school diploma or GED, 29.3%. The two lowest categories of education continued to be advanced degrees and 8th grade or less.



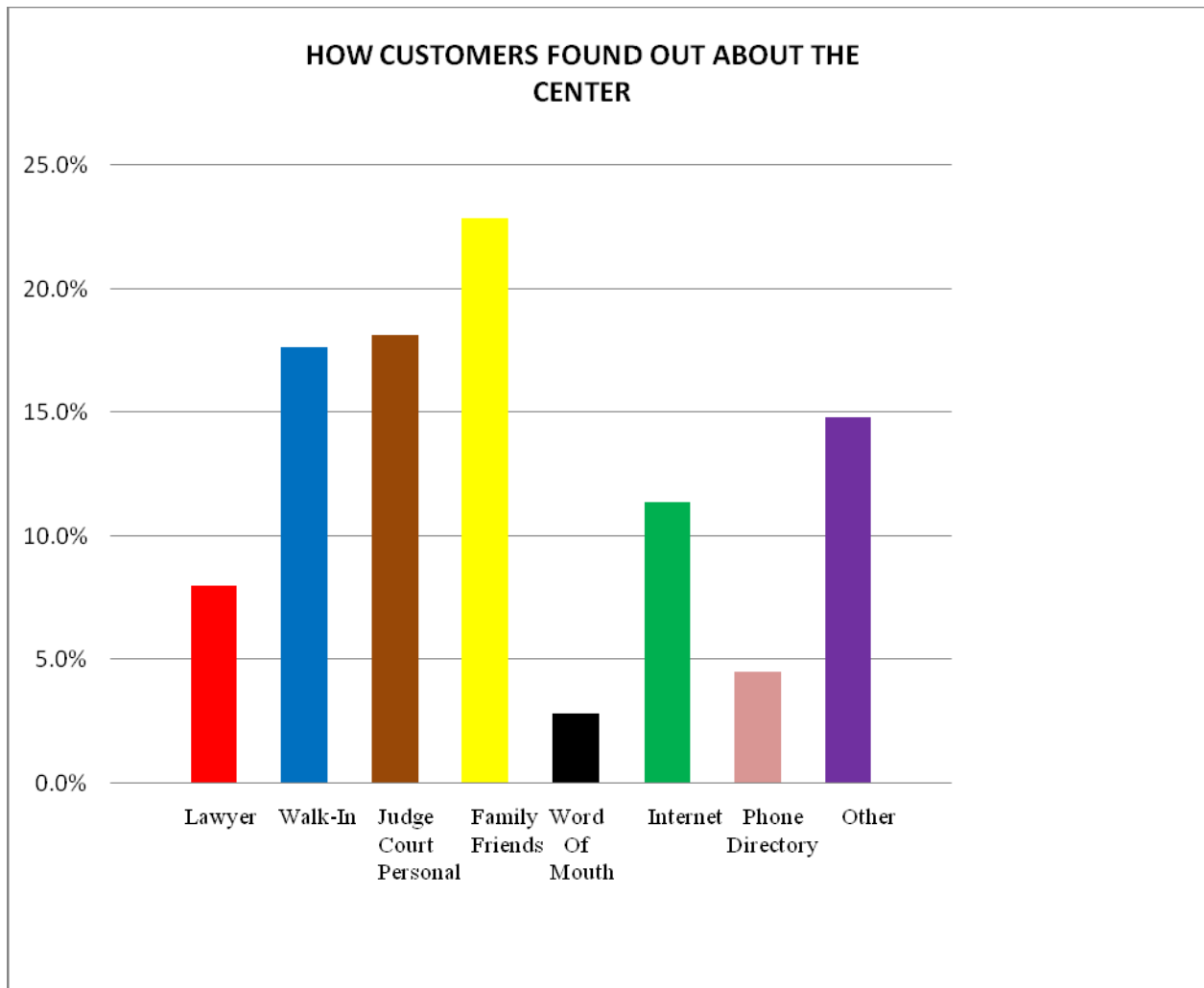
WHY THE CUSTOMERS CHOSE THE SELFSERVE CENTER

The majority of customers used the services of the SelfServe Center due to money issues, 51.4%. While some used the SelfServe Center because it was easier, 14.7%, or for other reason, 2.9% these represented less than 17% of the customers who responded to this question.



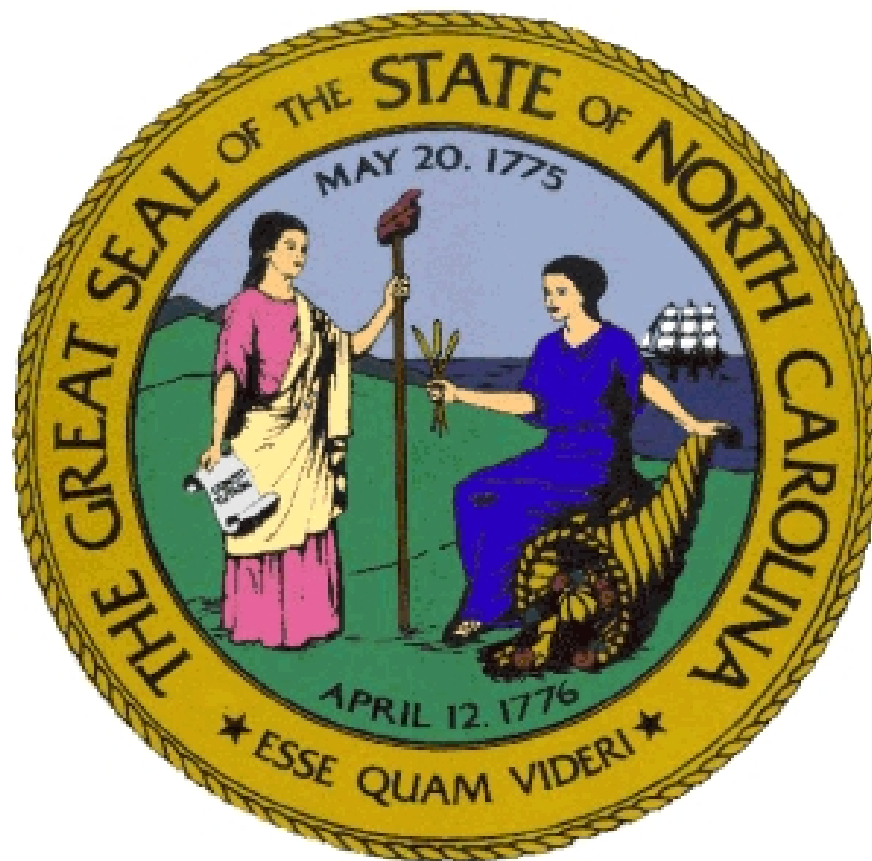
HOW CUSTOMERS FIND OUT ABOUT THE SELF SERVE CENTER

The Center continues to find new ways to get information out to the public about its services. Through ads, referrals from non-profit services and other sources the public has learned about the services of the Center. More than 20% of those who responded learned about the Center from family, friends or a co-worker. The second highest referral to the Center came from court personnel and those who found out about the Center when they were in the court house for other reasons.



THE 26TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

SELSERVE CENTER



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JUDY L. HARWOOD, SELSERVE CENTER INTERN

