

Legal Hotline Quarterly

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Legal Hotline Self-Evaluation Measures

Project Report

I. Introduction

In Fall 2002, the AARP Foundation Technical Support for Legal Hotlines Project invited a cross section of legal hotline managers/executive directors to participate in a workgroup for the purpose of devising measures and collecting data for the formulation of yardsticks to assist hotline developers in planning their services and hotline managers to evaluate their operations.¹ Participating hotlines agreed to collect data for the creation of tables for comparison. Their anonymity was protected as a condition of participation.

In this report, the Technical Support for Legal Hotlines Project presents the data collected by participating hotlines, as well as the averages and medians² from aggregation of the data. We expect the data will be useful to managers for program planning and self-evaluation purposes. However, the data presented in the report does not constitute scientifically random samples nor statistically significant tabulations. They are not intended to infer that hotlines whose productivity falls above or below these “norms” are superior, inferior, or abnormal. Each hotline must decide for itself what its goals are, and by rigorous self-evaluation, determine whether it is meeting those goals. Towards that end, we hope the workgroup “measures” serve a helpful purpose.

1. The Legal Hotline Self-Evaluation Project was conceived by Wayne Moore of AARP in Summer 2002. At that time Wayne was Director of AARP Foundation LCE/Legal Advocacy Group. He now holds the position of AARP Director of Advocacy Planning and Issues Management.

2. The median was calculated by arranging the numbers highest to lowest and fixing the number in the middle. The median is more enlightening than the average in this context because it is less influenced by the extremes in the range of the data.

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Summary of Findings

Eleven diverse hotline programs participated in the Project. At least five programs collected data for tabulation on each of the following measures. Results are summarized as follows:

- Average number of cases handled per FTE in 2002 (all advocate time counted) was 1,476; median number of cases handled was 1,456.
- Average number of cases handled per FTE in 2002 (phone duty time only counted) was 1,758; median was 1,763.
- Average percentage of cases closed by hotline unit in a full service program in 2002 was 69%;
- Average number of calls coming into the hotline per month Feb.-March 2003 was 4,582; median was 4,042.
- Average number of calls answered per hotline per month was 1,502; median was 1,202. Percentage of calls answered compared to calls coming in equaled 33%
- Percentage of ineligible callers compared to all calls answered was 36%.
- Average number of calls assisted per Hotline per month was 835; median number of calls assisted was 735.
- Percentage of cases where material was sent to the client call averaged 35% but ranged widely from 3.7 through 99%
- Average wait time on telephone queue was 11.7 minutes; median time was 8.75 minutes.

All data is presented in detailed tables in section IV of this report.



II. Methodology

A. Selecting the Measures

Twelve hotline managers/executive directors accepted the invitation to participate in the Self-Evaluation Workgroup meeting in Washington, D.C. held on October 10-11, 2002. The participating programs included both senior and low-income legal hotlines, stand alone and intake-to-full service hotlines, statewide and local hotlines. The workgroup participants believed that the development of evaluation measures and the collection of data from a cross-section of legal hotlines to create some performance “norms” would be useful for program management and self-evaluation functions.

The variety of functions performed by the legal hotlines in the workgroup varied somewhat but the workgroup members agreed that each of their programs performed at least the basic hotline functions of intake, eligibility screening and denial of services, provision of legal advice, and referral to in-house units or other agencies. The participants suggested and discussed numerous measures to evaluate various criteria of hotline management including system change, client satisfaction, staff satisfaction, client outcomes, hotline reach, types of services rendered, productivity, and quality. The context of the discussion was influenced by Julia Gordon’s report to the group on the Equal Justice Project’s *Client Outcomes Assessment Report*.³ Her findings indicated that clients who followed hotline advice were usually successful in achieving a positive outcome but that a significant number of clients did not follow the hotline advice and that clients who received some sort of written material after the hotline consultation were more likely to follow the advice.

The workgroup members suggested a wide variety of possible measures that programs might undertake. The group voted on whether each of the suggested measures met certain criteria described below and, based on these criteria, the group devised possible measures for data collection.

3. The full report can be read at www.legalhotlines.org or nlada.org.

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List 1 consists of measures that a majority of the group believed were important for self-management (either essential or nice to know), collection of data for the measure was feasible (the burden of collecting the data did not outweigh the benefit) and where aggregate data or “norms” from a cross-section of programs would have value for self-management.

List 1: Data important for self-evaluation, aggregate data valuable

- 1 Total number of calls for hotline service
- 2 Total number of calls answered
- 3 Total number of callers ineligible for service
- 4 Total number of calls assisted
- 5 Total number of hotline cases handled
- 6 Number and percentage of clients receiving written materials, literature or documents printed from the web in addition to the hotline consultation
- 7 Total number of unsuccessful call-backs
- 8 Number of calls assisted per hour on duty
- 9 Percent of time on the phone with clients per hour on duty
- 10 Cost-per-case
- 11 Client outcomes- other than money obtained or loss avoided
- 12 Client understanding of information or advice
- 13 Client satisfaction ratings including whether the service provided made a difference to the client

List 2 includes measures that the majority of workgroup participants judged important for self-management and worthy of collection by individual hotlines for internal review but for which aggregated figures for comparison were not especially valuable. Individual programs would have to decide whether the burden of collection was the worth the benefit.

Wait time to be connected to an advocate is a List 2 measure but was included in the data tabulation because at least five programs were able to provide the information with little difficulty.

List 2 – Internal data important for management, aggregate data not necessary

1. Comparison of service area census demographics with current clients
2. Wait time for callers
3. Detailed service codes tailored to hotlines-e.g. explained client rights, advised how to solve problem, helped client fill out pro se form
4. Types of literature sent
5. Reason why hotline clients were rejected for service
6. Number of cases in substantive areas of law
7. Amount of time dealing with substantive areas of law
8. Number of conversations per case
9. Dollar amount obtained or avoided

At the meeting, each of the participants agreed to notify the Project on which measures it was willing to collect data for a four month period from February - May 2003. At this point, one of the hotlines declined to participate further so data was collected from eleven programs. Each manager also filled out a detailed profile about his program including information such as the number of full-time equivalent hotline advocates.

B. Data Collection

After the meeting, a subcommittee of participants refined the definition of each measure and each of the 11 programs indicated, by way of a form, for which measures it would collect data from February-May 2003. The Workgroup determined that the client outcomes and satisfaction measures from List 1, while crucial to hotline management, could only be ascertained by client surveys and were outside the scope of the data collection phase of the project. A Phase II client survey component was discussed and tabled until completion of Phase I could be accomplished. The Workgroup also decided that at least five hotlines would need to contribute data for a particular measure in order for data for that measure to be worthy of aggregation and reporting. The programs sent in a monthly form with the data they collected for their agreed measures.

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At the end of the four-month period, Project Staff calculated monthly and four month totals, averages and medians for the reported measures. Those measures for which aggregate data was calculated, based on the five hotline threshold, are described below:

1 **Number of calls for service:**

Definition: The number of phone calls coming into the hotline program that are requests for legal help.

Description: This number includes abandoned calls but excludes website hits, calls to a program's other units, and calls from existing clients who have already been referred to another unit.

2 **Number of calls answered**

Definition: The number of calls where an intake screener or hotline advocate spoke with the caller. A hotline advocate is defined as the person at each program empowered to give legal advice to clients. For the participants these included attorneys or paralegals and/or law students under attorney supervision. An intake screener is defined as the person who collects demographic and eligibility information and sends calls on to a hotline advocate to handle.

Description: This number includes all calls where the client spoke to a screener or advocate including those calls where the caller was deemed ineligible for services and received no case number or service other than a referral to another program.

3 **Number of ineligible callers that contacted the hotline program**

Definition: The number of calls for service where the intake screener or hotline advocate deemed the caller ineligible for service because of but not limited to:

- 1 Conflict of interest
- 2 Caller not real party in interest
- 3 Geographical ineligibility
- 4 Financial ineligibility
- 5 Case type ineligibility
- 6 Immigration status

Description: This category is designed to capture some information about the level of unmet need in the service area for clients with characteristics or case types not served by the hotline. Even general advice hotlines have some case type ineligibility such as criminal or foreign law matters.

4 **Measure Number 5. Number of calls assisted**

Definition: The number of calls where the caller was deemed eligible and given legal advice, referral after advice, transferred to a full-service unit or provided another service by a hotline advocate.

Description: The number of calls assisted should be equal to the number of calls answered minus the number of ineligible calls. One call is not necessarily equal to one case although many hotline calls end with a case being opened and closed contemporaneously with the phone call. One call can generate several cases depending on the case types discussed. Several calls are frequently logged on the same case before it is closed. A call is counted on a existing case and on new case.

5 **Percentage of cases where materials were sent to the caller**

Definition: The percentage of cases closed by the hotline program where, after the client spoke with the advocate, the hotline sent the client written matter related to the case type of the call.

Description: Materials include (but are not limited to):

- 1 Advice Letters
- 2 Form letters (for client to send to resolve problem)
- 3 Brochures
- 4 Legal Forms
- 5 Self-help packets

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6. Wait Time

Definition: Average wait time between the time the client initiates the call until the caller is connected with the hotline advocate.

Description: Only data from programs that had telephone queuing systems capable of reporting client wait times were included in this calculation. A few programs routinely made call backs and reported their wait time in terms of “within 24 hours” and the like, but the Project determined that figures from those programs were not comparable for this measure so used only the hold-time in constructing the tables.

In addition to the new data collection the programs undertook for this study, all eleven programs agreed to provide the following data:

1 **Number of hotline cases opened in 2002**

Definition: A hotline case opened means a file number was assigned and information, advice, referral, brief service or other service was rendered by a hotline advocate.

Description: The number of cases opened by the hotline includes cases that were opened by the hotline in 2002 but referred to a different unit within the program and later closed by that unit. In cases where the hotline is free standing, the number of cases opened and closed will be the same. Although cases may overlap from one year to the next, the yearly overlap should be fairly consistent from year to year and therefore the number of cases opened and closed in 2002 are sufficiently illuminating for this study. With the data on full-time equivalents supplied in the hotline profiles, the Project was able to calculate the number of calls per full-time equivalent (FTE).

2 **Number of cases closed by the hotline in a full-service program in 2002**

Definition: The number of cases closed with a service from the hotline unit of the program should be the total number of cases opened by the hotline minus those sent to an

other unit for additional services at the same program.

Description: This measure was designed to determine the percentage of cases closed at the hotline level of services vs. the percentage of cases closed with extended services.

III. Participating Legal Hotline Profiles

A total of eleven hotlines provided data for this project. As discussed before, each provided at least telephone legal analysis and advice to eligible callers. The following is a brief profile of the participating hotlines:

A. Hotline Models

Of the eleven programs collecting data for this study, four hotlines were stand alone systems—they did not have an in-house full-service unit. However, two of those, in addition to providing legal advice to callers, coordinated the intake and referral of callers to the legal provider network in their service areas. One hotline performed the intake screening and advice functions for a single full-service office. Three hotlines performed the intake screening and advice functions for a multi-office full-service program and three hotlines performed intake screening and advice functions for more than one full-service program.

B. Hotline Clients

Three of the participating hotlines serve low income clients only, four serve low-income and over age 60 clients, two of the hotlines serve clients over 60 only; and two serve clients with less restricted income levels such as 200% of the poverty level.

C. Service Area

Two programs serve a local area, such as a large city and surrounding county, five are statewide programs and four serve a regional area (more than one county, less than statewide). Three programs described their area as mostly urban and seven described their service area as a mixture of rural and urban populations. None described its service area as mostly rural.

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D. Call Flow

Nine of the hotlines have automated call distribution where callers wait on queue to talk to the attorney or paralegal. Three of these incorporate voice mail where clients can leave a message and a hotline advocate returns the call. The remaining six do not ordinarily allow for voice mail except for certain case types or other specified situations. Two hotlines work mainly on a call-back system where a receptionist or answering machine takes a message and the hotline advocate calls back. At three hotlines where clients wait on queue, intake screeners or receptionists pick up the call, take information and put the caller back into a queue for the advocate; at the remaining six programs with ACD, the hotline advocates pick up the call, qualify the caller and render the legal service.

E. Staffing

Of the 11 participating hotlines, five are staffed with attorneys only, one is staffed with paralegals under attorney supervision, and five are staffed with a combination of attorneys, paralegals and/or law students. Hotline calls are handled mainly by part-time employees at five of the hotlines and mainly by full time employees at the other six.

As part of the study, we wanted to collect aggregate data on how many cases a hotline advocate handled per year. As part of this determination we tried to identify how much of the hotline advocate time was spent handling calls vs. other activities. The hotline managers were asked to describe what percentage of time the hotline advocates handled calls vs. time spent on other activities. The project participants did not collect data on this factor. They simply reported a percentage of hotline advocates' time devoted to various tasks, based on their program design and workflow. As such, this percentage is a well-educated estimate but not an actual count.

At four of the hotlines, the advocates spend approximately 80-100% of their time handling hotline calls and minimal amounts of time providing brief services or writing brochures, holding workshops or attending trainings and meetings. At the remaining seven hotlines, the advocates spend less than 80% of their time handling hotline calls and as much as 35% of their time doing brief services such

as research, document review, calling third parties, writing letters, preparing written materials, and attending trainings or holding workshops.

IV Data Collection Results

A. Cases per Full Time Equivalent Hotline Advocate

The yearly number of cases handled per full-time equivalent hotline advocate is perhaps the most useful piece of aggregate data for program design and evaluation. To calculate this figure, the 11 hotlines each supplied the Project with the number of cases opened by the hotline in 2002. We considered such cases "handled" by the hotline because the hotline advocate provided a service such as legal analysis and advice even if the case was then referred to and closed by another program unit. These included only cases where the client was eligible and a case file actually open for him. That is, this calculation sought to determine how many cases a hotline advocate can typically deal with in one form or another during a year.

Furthermore, we tried to isolate as accurately as possible, how many cases a hotline advocate could handle during the time he was actually on hotline duty. That is, we tried to adjust for time, based on managers' estimates, that the advocates devoted to tasks other than handling hotline calls. Since some hotlines are designed so that the hotline advocates are mainly dedicated to handling calls, while other models expect the advocates to do brief services or outreach, etc. we calculated the number of calls handled by advocates with both the time devoted to call duty and all advocate time figures. The results are described below in Table A.

The number of FTE total time and number of FTE hotline duty only time is the same for program 1, 2, 8 and 11 because they reported that their hotline advocates spent between 80%-100% of their time on handling hotline calls. We did not make any reduction in the number of FTEs for time spent on other tasks. The remaining programs had their FTEs reduced in the "Hotline Duty Only" column according to the percentage of time the managers estimated their advocates were involved in the other tasks described above.

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Accordingly, we see that the average number of calls handled by one full-time hotline advocate whose time is devoted to handling calls is 1,768 per advocate. If the extreme high and low figures are removed, the range of cases handled is fairly narrow-between approximately 1,100-2,500. The average number of cases actually handled by the advocates in the 11 programs, counting all their time, is 1,456. It is important to express that programs whose advocates handled less than that average are not necessarily under-performing or vice versa. Rather, in designing or evaluating one's program, hotline managers should examine the reasons why their advocates are handling more or fewer calls than the average.

Providing brief services to hotline callers is one factor affecting number of cases handled by advocates. The presence of intake screeners was distributed through both the high, low, and mid-productivity programs. This factor did not have a clearly favorable affect on hotline advocate productivity as might be expected. Of the four hotlines with the highest per advocate productivity, three did not have intake screeners - eligibility and advice was handled by the advocate. At two of these programs some brief services were performed by the hotline while at two others brief services were hardly performed. At the three programs with the lowest per advocate productivity, brief services were performed at all three programs. Two of these programs had intake screeners to perform intake and eligibility screening while one did not. At the four middle programs, where advocate productivity clustered in a narrow range in the 1,300-1,400s per advocate, one of the programs had intake screeners while at three programs calls were connected directly to the advocates. Two of these did some brief services while two did not.

In evaluating one's own program or in predicting productivity in a hotline design, the important principle is that advocate productivity higher or lower than the average should be the result of a policy decision by the designers taking into account the work that the hotline advocates are expected to perform and not the result of inefficient software, insufficient record keeping, too much or too little time spent schmoozing with clients, or some other identifiable and remediable factor in the workflow.

Table A Cases Handled per FTE in 2002

Program	# of FTEs Total time	# of FTEs On Hotline duty only	Total Cases Handled by Hotline 2002	Cases Handled per FTE (all advocate time)	Cases handled per FTE (hotline duty time only)
#1	1.5	1.5	2,645	1,763	1,763
#2	10.0	10.0	25,054	2,505	2,505
#3	6.0	4.8	5,550	925	1.165
#4	7.5	5.25	15,497	2,066	2,952
#5	4.5	3.6	3,850	856	1,069
#6	14.0	11.2	20,377	1,456	1,819
#7	9.0	6.75	12,000	1,333	1,778
#8	6.5	6.5	9,616	1,479	1,479
#9	17.2	13.8	15,019	873	1,088
#10	6.0	4.8	11,930	1,988	2,485
#11	5.0	5.0	7,144	1,429	1,429
Totals	87.2	73.2	128,682		
Average	7.9	6.6	11,698	1,476	1,758
Median	6.5	5.25	11,930	1,456	1,763



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B. Cases Closed by the Hotline

The 2002 data was analyzed to see what percentage of cases were closed at the hotline level of advice (or brief service) and what percentage were closed by another unit of the program, for those participants that were part of a full-service organization. Six of the eleven hotlines that were part of full service programs could report this data. The results are summarized below in Table B.

The total number of cases handled by the hotline includes all the cases in which the hotline provided a service, whether it closed the case or passed it along to another unit. The total cases closed by the hotline divided by the total cases handled by the hotline results in the percentage closed by the hotline.

One program did not have a separate close code to indicate whether the case was closed by the hotline or full-service unit. 32% of that program's cases were closed with advice and counsel although probably a small percentage of those were closed by the full-service unit rather than the hotline after receiving the case from the hotline unit. One program reported its cases closed by the hotline vs. full-service unit in percentages rather than numbers. The number of cases closed by the hotline for that program was calculated by multiplying the total cases handled by the hotline by the reported percentage of cases it closed. The average percentage of cases closed by the hotline component of a full-service program is 69%.

In five of these programs, the range of cases closed by the hotline was 68-80%. One program reported a lower hotline close rate of 48% and explained that protocols for referrals to full-service are still being developed there. That program manager expects the number of cases closed at the hotline level to rise as the program gets more experienced.



Table B Cases Closed by the Hotline Unit

Program	Total Cases Handled by hotline 2002	Total Cases Closed by Hotline Unit	Total Cases Closed by other program unit
#1	2,645	2,126 (80%)	519 (20%)
#2	25,054	18,791 (75%)	6,285 (25%)
#3	5,550	3,744 (68%)	1,806 (32%)
#4	9,616	6,539 (68%)	3,077 (32%)
#5	11,930	8,351 (70%)	3,579 (30%)
#6	7,144	3,398 (48%)	3,746 (52%)
Totals	61,939	42,954 (69%)	18,985 (31%)
Average	10,323	7,159 (69%)	3,164 (31%)
Median	8,380	5,142 (69%)	3,328 (32%)

C. Number of Calls for Service/ Number of Calls Answered

The Number of calls for service was defined as the number of phone calls coming into the hotline program. This number includes abandoned calls but excludes website hits, calls to a program's other units, and calls from existing clients who have already been referred to another unit. The number of calls answered are those where an intake screener or hotline advocate spoke with caller including those calls where the caller was deemed ineligible for services and received no case number or service other than a referral to another program.

The purpose of this measure is to get some idea of the aggregate demand for service that could not be met by the participating hotlines. Five programs were capable of reporting calls into their system that were unanswered as well as the number of calls that were actually answered. These figures include multiple calls by the same callers who keep trying to get through. There is no way to determine how many of those were counted. The results are summarized below in Table C.

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Column 1 represents total number of calls coming into each hotline during the four month period, February-May 2003. There was some variance in the number of calls coming in every month at each of the hotlines but no pattern could be discerned. At one program, February was somewhat slower than March-April. At two programs, April was the busiest month. Column 2 is the average monthly number of calls coming for each reporting hotline. Column 3 represents the total number of calls that the hotline answered. Column 4 represents the average number of calls answered by the 5 reporters per month. Column 5 represents the number of calls answered as a percentage of the number of calls coming into the system.

Four programs counted calls coming in only for those hours the hotline was open and these are reported below. One of these programs was able to calculate that if the number of incoming calls was counted for all hours, the calls would increase by about 30%. Program #1 below reported all the calls coming in during 24 hours. As a result, its ratio of calls answered to calls coming in much lower.

The average percentage of calls that were actually answered by a person is only 33% of the total calls coming into the five hotlines with a range of 12-75% of calls for service being answered. If we eliminate the Program 1 figures from this calculation because they counted 24 hours of incoming calls, the four remaining programs counted 51,231 calls coming over the four month period and were able to answer 25,154 calls, or 49%, of the demand. Even though this data is unrefined and inexact, it is inescapable that these hotlines are not able to provide service to a substantial percentage of callers seeking legal assistance. It is also interesting to note that although the number of incoming calls recorded covers a wide range from 6,000-40,000, the ability of the programs to answer the calls falls within a much narrower range, with three of the programs able to answer calls in the 4,000s range over the 4 month period.

Table C Calls for Service/Calls Answered					
	1	2	3	4	5
Pro-gram	Number of calls into system 4 month period (five programs)	Average number of calls coming in monthly per hotline	Number of calls Answered 4 month period	Average number of calls Answered Per hotline-monthly	% of calls answered
#1	40,412	10,448	4,690	1,172	12%
#2	17,470	4,368	9,397	2,349	54%
#3	16,169	4,042	6,709	1,677	41%
#4	11,462	2,866	4,469	1,170	41%
#5	6,130	1,533	4,579	1,144	75%
Total	91,643		30,054		
Average per hot-line	18,329		6,011		33% (30,054/91,643)
Median	17,470		4,690		
Range	6,130-40,412		4,690-9,397		12-75%
Monthly average per hot-line	4,582		1,502		
Median	4,042		1,202		
Range	1,016-11,083		896-2,490		

D. Number of Ineligible Callers

This measure sought to determine the number and percentage of calls where the intake screener or hotline advocate deemed the caller ineligible for service. This category was designed to glean some information about the level needed for legal assistance for clients with characteristics or case types not served by the hotline. Six programs reported the number of callers they identified as ineligible. The number of ineligible callers was then compared with the number of calls answered by these six programs to get the percentage

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The participating hotlines with eligibility restrictions conforming to the Legal Services Corporation financial guidelines had to turn away the greatest percentage of callers. The two programs with expanded financial eligibility had markedly few ineligible callers. Results for this measure are summarized below in Table D. Of all the calls answered at these six hotlines, 36% were deemed ineligible for service. The percentage of ineligible callers at each of the hotlines ranged from 5% to 52%.

- Column 1 represents the numbers of calls answered by the six programs that reported both the number of calls answered and the number of ineligible callers.
- Column 2 represents the monthly averages of calls answered at each program.
- Column 3 is the number of ineligibles reported at these six programs over the four month period. Two of the programs have very few ineligible callers. These correspond to programs which have generous criteria including moderate income callers.
- Column 4 shows the average number of ineligibles monthly at each of the six hotlines.
- Column 5 shows the percent of callers who were determined to be ineligible at each hotline. The total percentage figure represents the total number of ineligibles compared to all the calls answered at the six reporting programs.

	1	2	3	4	5
Program	Number of Calls answered Four Months (6 reporting)	Number of calls answered Average per month	Number of Ineligible callers 4 months (6reporting)	Average number of ineligibles Per month	Percent Ineligible callers
#1	12,556	3,139	6,540	1,635	52%
#2	4,690	1,172	250	63	5%
#3	4,784	1,196	47	12	1%
#4	6,709	1,677	3,628	907	54%
#5	11,288	2,822	4,367	1,091	38%
#6	4,679	1,170	1,456	364	31%
Total	44,706		16,288		36%
Aveg. Per hotline	7,451		2,714	679	
Median	5,747		2,542		
Monthly Avg. Per hotline	1,863		679		
Monthly Range	896-3,582		10-1,913		

E. Number of Calls Assisted

10 of the participating 11 programs were able to report the number of calls that were assisted, that is, were deemed eligible and received a service from an attorney or paralegal/law student under an attorney's supervision. This measure describes the capacity of the programs to deliver telephone legal assistance. Table E below summarizes the results of this measure. The average number of calls assisted per month per hotline was 835; the range was from 185 to 1,750 calls assisted. The number of calls assisted correlates with the size and resources of the programs.

Program	Number of calls assisted 4 months (10 reporting)	Average Number of calls assisted per month
#1	6,016	1,504
#2	4,440	1,110
#3	1,280	320
#4	4,737	1,184
#5	3,081	770
#6	6,921	1,759
#7	2,672	668
#8	2,639	660
#9	884	221
#10	740	185
Total	33,410	
Average Per hotline	3,341	
Median	2,877	
Range	740-6,921	
Monthly Average per hotline	835	
Monthly Median	735	
Range	167-1,889	

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F. Percentage of Cases Where Materials Were Sent

Seven of the programs reported a percentage of cases handled by the hotline where some form of written material, whether an advice letter, pamphlet, self-help guide, or form, was sent to the client after the call was completed. The percentages demonstrate a great difference in programmatic philosophy regarding follow-up with mailed material. At one program, the policy dictates that all callers receive a follow-up letter; at other programs, written material is hardly ever sent, and at most of the programs, material is sent in a significant fraction of cases at the discretion of the advocate handling the call.

Table F Percentage of Cases Where Materials Sent

Percentage of cases with materials sent (7 reporting)	
#1	22%
#2	15%
#3	55%
#4	40%
#5	99%
#6	3.6%
#7	9%
Average	35%
Median	22%
Range	3.7-99%

G. Average Wait Time

Six of the nine programs with automated call distribution reported their estimated wait times to the Project. The average and median wait times are calculated with the approximate minutes provided by each of the six reporters. The results are summarized below in Table G. Average wait time on hold was 11.7 minutes.

The two programs that worked on a call-back system both reported that messages were returned usually the same day as the call came in and no later than 24 hours. Their data was not included in the Table.

Table G Average Wait Time	
Program	Average Wait Time in minutes (6 reporting)
#1	11.0
#2	6.0
#3	24.5
#4	17.0
#5	5.2
#6	6.5
Average	11.7
Median	8.75
Range	6-24.5

V. Conclusion

We hope that the aggregation of data on these various measures of legal hotline management proves useful for the purposes intended. When performing program self-evaluation, the workgroup participants believe it will be useful to know the average and median number of cases hotline advocates handle at this sampling of programs, as well as the number of cases closed at the hotline level of service. Hotline managers can now also have a picture of the varied policies regarding mailed materials and can compare their wait times to the ranges reported. These can be used to provide a yardstick of program performance where little data existed before. We also anticipate that programs looking to install a legal hotline component can use the data reported here as an aid to determine how many advocates they will need, how much phone capacity they should acquire, and what policies they will adopt regarding using intake screeners, allocating advocate time for brief services and other tasks, and sending out written follow-ups.

We also anticipate that having data on the number of calls for service that the programs lack capacity to answer, and the number of ineligible who are turned away, will be useful for statewide planning of legal service delivery.

Phase II of the Self-Evaluation Project calls for interested Work Group members to develop an evaluation instrument to address hotline client outcomes.



Georgia Senior Legal Hotline Outcomes Project Abstract *(from www.lsc.gov).*

Atlanta Legal Aid Society's Georgia Senior Legal Hotline (GSLH) developed an outcome assessment project to evaluate how effective GSLH's services were in resolving their client's legal problems. GSLH launched this project using three volunteers. The volunteers contacted clients and administered a satisfaction survey to determine if the client's legal problem was resolved and what action the client had taken to follow up on the advice they received from GSLH. The survey asked whether the client was advised to take any action, whether the client took the action, and whether the client's problem was resolved. If the client still had the same legal problem, a GSLH supervisor reviewed the case to see what GSLH could do to assist the client. GSLH then contacted the client to suggest additional steps to resolve the problem or to offer additional help. GSLH found that calling clients two to three weeks after the services were rendered provided clients with enough time to take action, but was not too far removed from their interaction with GSLH.

Statistics gathered from the surveys indicated that approximately 20% of closed cases needed additional follow up. In instances where GSLH's supervising attorney decided that GLSH could not provide additional assistance aside from a referral, form letters were sent to the client detailing the process. They are available below.

The survey also helped refine GSLH's outcomes. When cases are closed, advocates record case outcomes using modified Kemps codes, which correspond to Atlanta Legal Aid's general "outcomes" categories. These codes indicate the main benefit for the client and whether the client recovered money or avoided additional financial expenditures. The survey helped GSLH determine whether the outcomes recorded, which are based on the advocate's "best guess" at the time of case closing, were accurate, or whether they should be updated.

The information gathered by GSLH through this outcome assessment project elicited important information for GSLH that revealed both strengths and weaknesses in their hotline services and allowed

GSLH to take steps to improve their service delivery accordingly. In doing so, GSLH was able to ensure that clients were accessing services from other agencies and to follow up to clients whose problem was not resolved after their initial contact with GSLH. More recently, these statistics have been used in the state planning process to develop additional resources in the private bar. To learn more about this project, access the client satisfaction survey, the code form, and the client form letters below.

Contact Information:

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**Georgia Senior Legal Hotline
Consumer Survey**

The mission of the Georgia Senior Legal Hotline is to provide brief, accurate legal advice and referrals to older Georgians and their families with a focus on those who are socially or economically vulnerable. Our goals are to increase access to services and to aid seniors in remaining self-sufficient. Please take a minute and tell us about your experience with the Georgia Senior Legal Hotline.

- 1. Date Case Closed (from call sheet) _____
- 2. Date of Client Satisfaction Interview (from call sheet) _____
- 3. Problem Code (from call sheet) _____
- 4. How many calls to the hotline did it take to get assistance on this matter?
first call _____ second or third call _____
- 5. Did the hotline attorney return your call
that day _____ next business day _____ more than 3 days later? _____
- 6. The attorney who returned your call was: (check one box)
(Courteous) 5 4 3 2 1 (Discourteous)
- 7. The information or assistance provided was:
(Very helpful) 5 4 3 2 1 (No help at all)
- 8. Were you satisfied with the services provided by the Hotline?
(Very satisfied) 5 4 3 2 1 (very dissatisfied)
- 9. Who was the staff member who handled the case (from call sheet)?
Staff Number _____ or
Staff Name _____

- 10. Did your case involve a referral to the private bar for more in depth assistance?
Yes, hotline provided referrals _____
No, no referrals were necessary _____
- 11. Were you advised to take any action on your own by the Hotline attorney in order to resolve your case or question? Yes _____ no _____
- 12. If you were advised to do anything following the call, did you take the action?
yes _____ no _____
- 13. If you did not take additional steps, why?
N/A _____
Illness prevented _____
Client did not understand needed action _____
No money to pay lawyer _____
Transportation problems _____
I thought attorney would handle and that I did not need to do anything else _____
Other _____

Additional Comments about the Georgia Senior Legal Hotline

Thank you for taking the time to respond. We value your input. If you have requested that follow up action be taken by Hotline staff, you will hear back by telephone or letter.

Bay Area Legal Services (Florida) Centralized Telephone Intake Update



Bay Area Legal Services, Inc. (BALS), is the urban pilot project for legal services programs within the State of Florida to develop a centralized telephone intake program. BALS initiated its centralized telephone intake (CTI) program in September 2002. At that time all Tampa callers and callers from two of Bay Area's four branch offices were directed to BALS' bilingual CTI Call Center, which was then staffed by four screeners. This past year all of Bay Area's branch offices were phased in to the Call Center, and all applicants eligible for services through LSC and Title III funds and who do not present a legal emergency were initially screened and scheduled through the CTI program for a telephone callback appointment. The attorneys and paralegals who staff the intake program provide legal advice and an initial assessment of the client's problem over the telephone, and refer clients for social services and extended legal representation when appropriate.

In January 2004, as part of a regionalization project involving Gulfcoast Legal Services, Legal Aid of Manasota and the Community Law Program in St. Petersburg, BALS will double its client service area by providing centralized telephone intake services in five Florida counties. BALS has hired additional screening and legal staff, and the regional partners have developed a referral matrix so clients who qualify for extended representation will be referred to the appropriate provider to meet their legal needs. By March of next year BALS plans to provide "hotline" services – legal advice and referrals immediately after client screening – to the clients in the regional service area.

Contact:
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Report on Site Visits to Identify Best Practices

Excerpts from a 2001 report by L. Zazove, A. Alop, A. Cohen, L. Corbett, S. Megan and B. Shapiro on observations from their visits to Illinois programs, Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago, CARPLS, Prairie State Legal Services, Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation, and out of state programs in Washington, Hawaii and New Jersey. (Read the full report at www.lstech.org)

Best Practices

****.

In this section, we have tried to identify the practices that contribute to improved access to legal services in the areas of intake, brief services, extended representation, access to the courts, technology and statewide coordination. One overall observation is that all of our programs are struggling to balance the allocation of our limited resources to provide access to a full range of services.

1. Intake, Advice and Referral

We observed several different intake models. They included free-standing hotlines such as CARPLS, partially free standing such as LSNJ, and those that provide intake and advice services for a full service program such as PSLS, LOI, CLEAR, [Washington] and ISLANS [Hawaii]. Other than LSNJ and ISLANS hotlines, all of the programs are experiencing a high volume of calls that exceeds current capacity. As one managing attorney in a field office told us, the hotline serves a gatekeeper function. He particularly liked the fact that it generally relieved the field offices of having to say "no". However, the high demand for telephone services can create a tension over allocation of resources in full service programs. As full service programs move to implement hotlines, there can also be issues involving how to integrate the hotline and its staff into the program's delivery system.

Some best practices in the intake area are:

- Quality control, ongoing staff training and back-up materials are critical. Effective quality control should include hands-on case review on a regular basis, preferably by a supervisory

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staff person rather than at a staff meeting to conserve staff time. Comprehensive initial and ongoing substantive training is essential. Also, a Desk Reference Manual must be developed and regularly updated in addition to fact sheets that can be used to supplement telephone advice. In full service programs, branch office staff should periodically review the cases from their service area that are closed by the hotline. If the intake staff are not licensed attorneys, then scripted questions may be necessary.

- An investment in a good telephone system with call management software is required. The phone system should be able to automatically distribute calls and queue them based on certain factors, such as language. Call management software should be able to report on calls dropped, busy signals, hold times, and calls in queue.
- Callbacks should be discouraged. All of the programs except LSNJ reported problems with doing call-backs, because of the difficulty reaching the client even with repeated calls, which wasted staff time. If callbacks are used, they work best if set for pre-scheduled appointment times.
- Affirmative steps must be take to integrate the hotline and its staff into the rest of the program. CLEAR had taken some noteworthy steps to achieve integration. Their mentoring program and assigning CLEAR staff to regional NJP offices with periodic visits promote integration. CLEAR also set up an advisory committee for input on CLEAR services. Also, the hotline should be supervised by management level staff who is involved in regular programwide management meetings.
- Hours of operation should meet needs of different clients. CARPLS' hours from 9:00am to 4:30pm and two evenings a week promoted better access for working clients.
- Full service programs should also provide other points of intake to promote access, especially for clients with special needs. Most of the hotlines were experiencing dropped calls, busy signals and hold times. As a result, many clients with high priority cases may have difficulty accessing services via telephone intake. In addition to developing ways to screen for high priority cases before calls are places in queue, there must be other ways to access services. The court-based domestic violence and landlord/tenant projects provide intake at the point the client's needs legal advice and possibly extended services. Offsite intake at locations convenient for clients should also be considered, such as homeless shelters, senior citizen centers and nursing homes.

2. Brief Services

There is no uniform definition of brief services. These services range from negotiation via the phone or letter for a client to *pro se* clinics or limited representation models where clients are assisted to represent themselves. Brief intervention in appropriate cases fills the gap in services when advice is not enough and extended representation is not available.

- A separate brief services unit can fill the gaps between advice and extended representation. LASH has taken the concept of brief services and institutionalized it, not only within its own program but within the judiciary as well. LASH Hotline staff identified the need for an alternative for cases that were typically denied full representation services, but required additional assistance beyond the hotline's telephone advice. The creative use of Americorps staff effectively increases LASH's capacity to handle these cases.
- Before referral to pro se clinics, the hotline should be used to screen out clients for whom pro se is not a good option. LASH uses ISLANS to screen clients and cases before a referral to a *pro se* clinic. This insures appropriate referrals.

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- Brief services that involve preparation of legal documents and instructions on self representation will be most effective if coordinated with the local court system. The CEJ works hand-in-hand with the Hawaii Judiciary's Ho'okele Customer Service Centers at both Family and District Court. CEJ staff help clients with forms and route the users to Ho'okele to be instructed on process and filing instructions. Providing limited representation for unrepresented litigants at court in family and landlord/tenant cases is an effective way to deliver services at the point they are needed.
- Program initiated follow-up is essential to monitor outcomes for pro se assistance. LASH initiates follow-up with the clients who attend its *pro se* clinics to determine if they need additional assistance or whether they obtained a judgment. This follow-up has resulted in an 80% success rate for participants.

Questions that arose on the subject of brief services centered around outcomes. What does it mean to increase access to the legal system? Can we effectively empower clients to represent themselves? Or are we doing them a disservice? Are *pro se* clinics and forms a way to ease our conscience about not being able to provide extended services? In what cases are brief services exactly what some clients need? Does providing those services divert staff time and resources from cases or projects that require extended services? We don't have a collective answer to these questions. Evaluation and further dialogue on these issues is still needed.

3. Extended Representation

Extended representation, by which we meant the wide range of services beyond advice and brief services, is a critical ingredient in the full mix of legal services that must be available to low-income clients. Full service programs should maintain a good balance among services rendered to their clients. At the foundation of any legal services program must be the ability to provide to clients lawyers and parale-

gals able to resolve a broad range of difficult legal problems. In the words of Alan W. Houseman, "[t]he lawyers provided [the poor] must know the substantive legal problems of the poor and be trained to advocate competently in courts, administrative agencies, legislative bodies, and other forums." NLADA Briefcase, March, 1978 at 44.

- Programs should invest time and personnel to maintain a "coverage" of substantive law areas that impact heavily on the lives of the poor. Shrinking resources have often forced legal services agencies to narrow their focus and eliminate categories of cases where representation will be provided. Yet the poor may find no advocates able to fill these gaps. Programs should not abdicate a presence entirely in certain complex areas, such as mortgage foreclosure defense and FMLA cases or employment discrimination matters. By retaining some level of expertise and basic knowledge in a number of areas, programs preserve their ability to extend representation in the most compelling circumstances.
- Extended representation should include a wide variety of approaches to solving legal problems. "Poor and vulnerable people's problems are susceptible to effective civil legal solutions across a very wide range of forums, and through the use of a wide range of methods and tools". Ada Shen-Jaffe. A lawsuit may solve one client's dispute while another client would benefit from a mediation, and a contact with a sympathetic newspaper reporter would resolve a third client's problem. Community economic development projects are also integral to the mission of legal services.
- Given what is at stake and the absence of other available sources of representation, complex litigation efforts should be a staple in the daily practice of legal services programs. The poor, like all others today, frequently confront complex legal problems. For example, a mortgage foreclosure involving HOEPA and usury defenses may present difficult challenges to litigate. A prolonged child custody battle may re-

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quire a great deal of agency resources. The capability of a legal services program to successfully engage in complex litigation – in a broad range of legal areas – preserves equal access to the justice system for low-income persons.

In addition to the clear benefits to clients that extended representation may produce, professional staff will benefit. Extended representation cases will facilitate professional development of staff and success in these efforts should increase staff morale.

4. Access to the Courts

All state court systems are experiencing unprecedented numbers of unrepresented litigants. A large number of those will have problems or questions. The problem is particularly acute in family, housing and small claims courts, where many litigants are not represented. Some state court systems have responded by implementing programs designed to address the needs of unrepresented persons. The Hawaii State Judiciary is an exemplary example. In the words of Chief Justice Ronald T. Y. Moon, “The ...judiciary must be responsive to the needs of the court users and accessible to those with special needs. It must strive to reduce the aura of complexity surrounding legal proceedings and reach out to help the public understand the judicial system.”

Legal services programs have a role to play in ensuring access to the courts for low-income litigants they are unable to provide with representation. The Hawaii Court Navigation Project identifies barriers faced by unrepresented users and addresses those problems on their behalf with the judges and clerks. It also provides limited legal services at court.

- As part of the state planning process, legal services providers must enlist the support of and work with the judiciary, including the state Supreme Court, to address barriers to the courts for unrepresented litigants. The Hawaii Citizens Conference on Access to Justice is a good example of collaborating with the courts. LASH staff served on several task forces set up as a result of the conference. The Office on

Equality and Access in the Hawaii court system demonstrates the court’s commitment to serving the citizens of the state. The result is a comprehensive system of assistance for unrepresented litigants.

- Local pleadings should be simplified, uniform and readily accessible to the public. The Hawaii courts have simplified their family and landlord/tenant pleadings. The unified forms are available on the court’s website and on disk.
- Alternative dispute resolution in small claims and landlord/tenant cases should be available. The Hawaii district court requires mandatory mediation in small claims and landlord/tenant cases. Court personnel and LASH staff report that this results in better outcomes for low-income unrepresented litigants.

5. Use of Technology

The effective use of technology has become increasingly important to facilitate efficient delivery of service to clients. Because it can represent a significant commitment of resources, it requires careful planning on a program as well as a statewide level. As Kristen Maten of LSNJ said, “We use technology to provide equity among legal services offices.” Some ideas to use technology effectively include:

- Platform standardization. Statewide standardization of the hardware and software platform is cost effective and makes possible statewide technology support.
- Statewide websites – extranets and intranets. A statewide intranet for advocates, such as LSNJ’s, is an effective way to share information. A well-designed site should give advocates quick and easy access to a wide range of resources relevant to their day to day practice. Sites for clients and the general public should be coordinated statewide to avoid duplication of effort and to facilitate client access to services and materials.

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- Innovative use of technology can improve client access to services. LASH's plan to use video conferencing to link clients on remote islands with services on Oahu is an example of an effective way to improve access.
6. Statewide Coordination

Effective statewide coordination is essential to increase the capacity of providers statewide to meet the needs of clients. Time and effort must be spent on planning, communication and team building. As Pat McIntyre and Ada Shen-Jaffe told us, it is time-consuming and difficult, but the payoff is "unimaginable synergy, the unleashing of community-created dynamic energy and resources well beyond that which would otherwise have been available for the benefit of poor and vulnerable people." Some notable aspects of statewide coordination included:

- A statewide Access to Justice Conference involving the judiciary, clerks, legal services providers and private lawyers can be an effective starting point to address barriers to the courts for unrepresented litigants. The task forces set up in Hawaii after such a conference developed and implemented solutions with the Court's support.
- Annual or bi-annual statewide conferences or retreats for legal services staff can increase statewide coordination. Such conferences in Washington and New Jersey were used for substantive training, technology training, team building, planning and morale boosting.
- Statewide development of client education materials reduces duplication of effort. LSNJ prepared and made available an extensive set of client materials for advocates and the public, relieving local programs of the need to develop materials.
- Regional planning can be used effectively to involve more people in high priority client work and identify additional resources to meet

client needs. At the time of our visit, Washington state had just begun a regional planning process. Regional planning builds and expands on what legal services providers have historically done, by encouraging a broader planning focus that will lead to development of more integrated regional delivery networks. Because the planning is regional, more participants can be involved and plans can be more specific and tailored to the needs of specific parts of the state.

We are pleased to announce our updated website and Legal Hotline Directory Search are now active at www.legalhotlines.org

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From the Frontline

*By Carol Matthews**

ON BEING THANKFUL (OR NOT)



It is the holiday season and one is minded to be thankful, and so I am. I am thankful that I have a job that is worth doing, and congenial fellow workers to do it with. I am thankful that the clients I talk to all day are usually pleasant and appreciative of my efforts. It is a good feeling to be able to help. Except that not all clients fall into the pleasant category. There are a few who are rude, obnoxious, unbearably long winded, demanding, threatening, and just down right hard to take.

It is easy to feel trapped on the telephone, at the mercy of an unrelenting force at the other end of the line. Help! Maybe the fire alarm will go off and I can just bolt. The other day my son remarked incredulously, “Mom, why are you letting yourself be ordered about by a two-year old?” The truth is I enjoy being ordered about by my adorable granddaughter and I could stop it any time I wanted. (I think.) Since I don’t at all like being the victim of a difficult client, I have learned to deal with certain species of them.

There is the client who doesn’t agree with the law or my explanation of it. She was the favorite daughter and her mother would have wanted her to have everything even if she didn’t make a will. Her siblings don’t deserve anything and she doesn’t want to hear about intestacy or probate. Every time I explain the law she starts over with her view of the matter. Since I am not allowed to be rude to clients I just apologize to her for wasting *her* time repeating myself. I apologize twice and say goodbye.

**Carol Matthews is a hotline attorney with Legal Counsel for the Elderly in Washington, D.C.*

Some clients start out hostile. They may be loud or confrontational, and they don’t delete their expletives. Others become hostile when they don’t get what they want. Sometimes they will calm down when offered a substitute. Perhaps I can send them written materials or make a referral. Frequently, the caller is upset about an underlying issue that he hasn’t mentioned. If I can address that issue in a useful way it usually defuses the situation. As a last resort see above solution. Nobody has to put up with abuse.

The client who believes the law needs to be changed – say, the SSA Government Pension Offset Rule – gets a three minute course in political activism. The gentleman who wants VA benefits because he was once a Slovakian freedom fighter is referred to his Congresswoman; and the lady who complains that the workers at the DMV were rude is told to call her city council representative.

Some clients refuse to be turned down for services. On being told that we will not help her bring a libel and slander case one client asks what we *can* help her with. What other problems do you have, I reply. Could you just list all the kinds of cases you *do* take and I’ll pick one, she says. I no longer fall into that trap. Vagueness is the solution. A more assertive client just wants to go over my head to my supervisor for a more favorable decision. The trick here is to get to my supervisor first with the skinny on the reason for her call.

Some clients don’t have legal problems but insist they do, such as the lady whose husband won’t take out the garbage. A client came in the other day complaining because her car had been impounded. I thought she wanted to know how to get it back but all she wanted was a ride to the lot. My list of non-legal referral sources is as long as the legal ones.

Some clients have a mistaken notion of the legal system. I recently spoke to a lady who had gone to court to ask for an extension of time to pay the rent. When the judge refused, she was highly indignant: *What is L&T court for if not to help tenants!* she demanded. I have been chuckling about that for days. A sense of humor is always the best defense. For that I am truly thankful.