

# INTAKE SYSTEMS REPORT

## INNOVATIVE USES OF CENTRALIZED TELEPHONE INTAKE AND DELIVERY IN FIVE PROGRAMS

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## Introduction

Over the past three years, a growing number of legal services providers have taken a serious look at the manner in which clients make contact with and receive services from their program. Many of these programs have come to the conclusion that services can be provided more efficiently and effectively, and in a more client-centered way, through a centralized telephone intake and delivery system.<sup>(1)</sup>

Five LSC-funded programs began operating centralized telephone intake and delivery systems in 1996 as a central feature of their provision of services to clients:

- Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut [CT-SLS]
- New Hampshire Legal Services (Legal Advice & Referral Center) [NH-LARC]
- Legal Services Law Line of Vermont [VT-LawLine]
- Volunteer Lawyers Project of the Boston Bar Association (Legal Advocacy & Resource Center) [Boston-LARC]
- Northwest Justice Project (Coordinated Legal Education, Advice and Referral) [WA-CLEAR]

LSC staff recently visited the programs in an effort to learn more about these intake and delivery systems.<sup>(2)</sup> While each of the programs has designed and operates its system differently, there are some basic similarities among them. Each program evidences a commitment to innovative delivery of services and responsiveness to client needs. Each treats client screening and evaluation as a "functional specialization," recognizing that the provision of high-quality counsel and advice, brief service, and referral assistance requires specialized expertise and supporting materials. Each program's system is part of a multi-faceted delivery network, which includes other parts of the program, other legal services and social services providers, the private bar, and clients representing themselves pro se.

In this report, we will describe the main elements of the five systems and note some of the differences and the commonalities among them. The report is not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, it seeks to highlight and discuss some of the key issues in intake and delivery systems for consideration by others in planning or modifying their systems. We also include "client flow charts," a list of sample materials used in the programs, and the names of program resource persons. This report complements a separate report entitled *Uses of Technology in Centralized Telephone Intake and Delivery Systems*, September 1997, which describes the uses of technology in the five programs' intake systems.<sup>(3)</sup>

For these programs, as for others, their intake and delivery system remains a "work in progress," subject to ongoing evaluation and change. The programs continue to confront problems, in particular with case management software and in managing high call volume with limited staff and resources. However, all five are generally pleased with the results to date. Large numbers of clients are receiving timely

assistance appropriate to their problem from the program or through referral to another provider. Access to the program's legal workers is prompt, and client satisfaction appears to be high.

Of the five programs, four are statewide, and one serves a large urban area (Boston). All five programs (or their intake components)<sup>(4)</sup> were specially designed as centralized telephone intake and delivery systems. Nonetheless, we believe that the techniques and approaches being used by these programs, and their experiences in operating the systems, are applicable to other types of legal services providers, regardless of the nature or size of the program or the service area.

## I. Mission

The provision of high-quality legal assistance to low-income residents through the operation of a centralized telephone intake and delivery system (or "hotline") that provides counsel and advice, brief service, and referral assistance is the central element of the missions of all five programs. Each program operates as part of a larger delivery system that includes other legal services providers and volunteer lawyer programs.

CT-SLS, NH-LARC and VT-LawLine are "free-standing" programs whose primary goals and activities are to provide intake and brief service assistance and to refer most clients needing more extended assistance to other legal providers. The three programs work cooperatively with other legal services providers in their states to facilitate the provision of a full range of services to eligible clients. CT-SLS seeks to inform, advise, and educate clients about the law. It believes that specialization, long a hallmark of the delivery of legal services to the poor, is not limited to assigning staff to discrete substantive areas of the law, but also applies to "functional specialization," the development of expertise in client screening and evaluation and the provision of brief service assistance. VT-LawLine believes that specializing in counsel and advice and brief service assistance allows it to "cast a broader net." It seeks to increase the number of clients who receive legal assistance through the effective use of all available resources in the state; to educate and empower clients to better help themselves deal with their legal problems where appropriate; and, acting as a "hub," to work cooperatively with other providers and the private bar in delivering the full range of services to low-income clients. NH-LARC's mission--to provide information, legal advice, and referral services to indigent residents of New Hampshire--is incorporated in a written mission statement.

WA-CLEAR and Boston-LARC serve as the hotline components of larger programs. WA-CLEAR is part of Northwest Justice Project (NJP). NJP has 10 field offices throughout the State of Washington. It also operates a large pro bono project via sub-grants with volunteer lawyer and pro bono programs operated by county bar associations. NJP's mission derives from the State Plan created by the Washington State Access to Justice Board. Hallmarks of its mission include equal access to the justice system and active client involvement. Boston-LARC is a sub-grantee of the Volunteer Lawyers Project of the Boston Bar Association (VLP). VLP operates a large pro bono program. It also has a staff attorney component that supports Boston-LARC by providing training and advice and consultation to Boston-LARC's staff on complex issues, as well as supporting pro bono work by working with pro bono attorneys on coordinated projects (for example, children's SSI cases) and handling extended service cases. WA-CLEAR and Boston-LARC retain individual identities within the larger programs and identify missions similar to those of the other three programs.

CT-SLS, NH-LARC, and WA-CLEAR seek to serve as the primary point of access to legal services for all low-income persons with civil legal problems in their states. In each case, some clients continue to contact other legal services providers in their communities. While clients are encouraged to call the central access point, and other providers generally refer clients to the program, the other legal services providers also maintain their own intake functions for agency referrals, former clients, and clients with special needs.

In all five programs, the management teams are fully committed to the missions. Each has a strong interest in exploring how new approaches and methods of delivery can be used to improve services to clients, and each demonstrates a willingness to adjust its system with this goal in mind. Program leaders have clearly articulated their visions to staff, who are proud of the work they do and of their contribution to the client community. The programs communicate their mission, goals, and objectives to staff via regular staff meetings, internal e-mail, periodic program retreats, and their procedures manuals.

- *Each program emphasizes "functional specialization," the development of expertise in the intake, evaluation, and brief service functions of the delivery of legal services.*
- *Each program is a central part of a larger delivery system that includes other legal services providers. Three of the programs*

*seek to serve as the primary point of access to civil legal services in their state.*

- *Each program continues to explore how new approaches and delivery methods can be used to serve clients better, and is willing to adjust its systems with this goal in mind.*

## II. Client access

Client access to services is the primary goal for each program. While each has developed different methods to provide and facilitate access, their systems share some common features: Each program maintains a toll-free number, either local or an 800 number; each makes special arrangements for emergencies and for walk-ins; and each conducts in-person interviews for clients with special needs (such as mental illness, cultural barriers, communication impairment, or no access to a telephone).<sup>(5)</sup>

**Publicity:** The programs have publicized the operation of their systems through meetings with bar associations, judges, social services providers, community groups, and others to explain the services they provide and how clients can obtain assistance. NH-LARC, VT-LawLine and WA-CLEAR have developed brochures describing their services, which are widely distributed.

**Hours of operation:** Each program sets specific times during which it will accept calls and publicizes this schedule within the client and provider community. Both CT-SLS and Boston-LARC take calls daily from 9-3, except for one day when the hours are 9-1 to allow time for a weekly staff meeting or training. NH-LARC accepts calls daily from 9-1, WA-CLEAR daily from 9:30-12:30. CT-SLS tried providing intake one evening each week from 6-8, but did not get enough calls to justify continuing this schedule. VT-LawLine makes callbacks, with screening done by Vermont Legal Aid, another statewide provider.

**Telephones:** The programs recognize the importance of telephones in the operation of their systems, and have acquired sophisticated systems with an auto attendant, automated call distribution, and voice mail. Because of the complexity and high cost of such systems, CT-SLS found it beneficial to use a telephone consultant in selecting and purchasing its system. Boston-LARC has begun discussions with a

consultant to address telephone problems.

**Review of documents:** The programs have found that legal workers<sup>(6)</sup> are usually able to determine the nature and significance of documents from the client's description. However, if there is any doubt, the worker reviews the document before giving assistance. The programs have made arrangements with other legal or social services providers to have documents faxed to the legal worker. In addition, many clients have access to fax machines. WA-CLEAR maintains a toll-free fax line, but it does not receive a great deal of use.

**Direct access vs. callbacks:** Client interviews are handled either by direct caller access to a legal worker, callbacks to the client, or a combination of the two approaches. Each approach has strengths and weaknesses. Telephone systems with automated call distribution (ACD) facilitate direct access by enabling the programs to establish "queues" for clients to speak with the appropriate legal worker in the initial telephone call. Clients hold until the worker is available or leave messages for a return call. However, high call volume often results in busy signals or long hold times. Callbacks afford greater scheduling flexibility and avoid long holds. On the other hand, reaching clients on callbacks is often difficult, and sometimes requires a number of attempts.

*Direct access:* CT-SLS and Boston-LARC provide access with "queuing" and have very few callbacks. Callers to CT-SLS first speak with a screener (after an average hold time of 3 min., 20 sec.), and then are placed on hold in a queue depending on the type of legal problem and whether the client is monolingual in Spanish. Callbacks are used only when the caller has held for a long time. The average time on hold for a legal worker is about 10 minutes. Callers to Boston-LARC speak directly with a legal worker after waiting in queue, with an average hold time of 15-20 minutes. The phone system allows up to nine callers to wait in queue. Callers can override the queuing system and get to a supervising attorney in an emergency.

*Combination of Direct Access and Callback:* NH-LARC and WA-CLEAR use a combination of direct access and callbacks. NH-LARC handles more than half of its clients directly, or "live," the rest via callbacks. Callers select a queue (using ACD) depending on the type of legal problem (1-family, 2-housing, 3-benefits, 4-consumer/other) and hold for up to 15 minutes, at which time they are transferred to a voice mail box to leave a message. NH-LARC's phone system allows it to adjust the hold time, and it has set times ranging from 10 to 24 minutes. Callbacks are made by the end of the next day, and usually the same day. WA-CLEAR's callers may stay on the line until a legal

worker answers or may choose to go to voice mail at 10-minute intervals. The average wait time is about 15 minutes. Callers are asked in the voice message for a brief description of their problem, including any deadlines. Calls are generally returned that afternoon. Emergencies are identified and given priority for callback. Many callers hang up during the hold time (including some who are over-income or have a criminal problem), and it is sometimes difficult to reach clients on callbacks. NH-LARC and WA-CLEAR hope to increase their capacity to handle more calls "live," which would be beneficial both from the caller's perspective and an efficiency standpoint, by having more legal workers on the phones, including volunteers.

*Callbacks:* VT-LawLine uses a strictly callback system. Clients are told they will receive a return call within 48 hours. Calls are made by staff with particular expertise in the problem area. As with NH-LARC and WA-CLEAR, VT-LawLine staff often have a difficult time reaching clients. This problem increases with the length of delay in returning the call.

**Access problems:** As noted above, three principal access problems are common to the programs: a high incidence of busy signals, long hold times, and difficulty in reaching clients on callbacks. CT-SLS's phone system reports show between 13-30 busy signals per day (some of which may be from repeat callers). WA-CLEAR's reports show a higher number, around 60 per day. Callers to NH-LARC and to Boston-LARC report that it often takes 2-3 tries to get into the system. Once in the system, callers then often face hold times averaging 10-20 minutes. Many callers hang up during the hold time; in some cases after holding, the caller is only able to leave a message for a return call. All programs experience difficulties in reaching clients on callbacks.

**Responses to access problems:** While these problems might be considered acceptable in light of the promptness of access to legal workers and provision of service offered by telephone intake and delivery systems, as confirmed by high client satisfaction, (see part VII), the programs continue to look at ways to respond to the high volume of calls and the resulting access problems. For example, CT-SLS has used a telephone consultant to help design call flow, and reviews its telephone system reports to learn where to make adjustments in its system. Boston-LARC has begun training and using students as screeners, and is planning to use volunteer attorneys, working in their own offices, to provide counsel and brief advice. VT-LawLine callers are asked to identify times for return calls, in an effort to reduce difficulty in making contact. NH-LARC has adjusted its hold times to be able to handle more callers "live" and is exploring using volunteer screeners and attorneys. WA-CLEAR reduces the number of

callers in the system by using an initial telephone message that clearly explains that it provides only civil legal services for low-income people. It is adding additional queues to its phone system for specific substantive areas so volunteers can take calls only in the areas in which they have received training.

**Non-English-speaking clients:** All the programs have legal workers who speak Spanish. WA-CLEAR and CT-SLS's phone systems have special queues for Spanish-speakers.<sup>(7)</sup> WA-CLEAR has experienced lower use of its telephone intake services by the Hispanic community, both farmworker and non-farmworker, despite publicity efforts and Spanish-speaking intake staff. It believes some persons may find the phones intimidating or are more used to coming into offices. WA-CLEAR intends to conduct more outreach and other efforts to reach clients. As a general matter, all of the programs recognize they cannot rely solely on telephone intake and that a corollary to centralized telephone intake is systematic outreach to populations who might not find their way to the intake system.

- *Each program provides toll-free telephone access, makes special arrangements for emergencies and for walk-ins, and conducts in-person interviews for clients with special needs, including lack of access to a telephone .*
- *The programs set specific times to receive and return calls and reserve some times when no calls are handled to enable staff to work on cases, attend staff meetings and training sessions, and work on special projects.*
- *Each program makes arrangements to review client documents when necessary.*
- *The programs use different forms of direct access and callback systems. While each approach has positive and negative aspects, four of the programs prefer direct access systems.*
- *Access problems include busy signals, long hold times, and difficulty in reaching clients on callbacks. The programs are using various strategies to address these problems.*
- *Each program has legal workers who speak Spanish.*
- *Each program recognizes that it cannot rely solely on telephone intake and engages in outreach to clients and to populations who may have difficulty with telephone access.*

### III. Staffing

**Initial contact:** A goal for each system is to enable the legal worker to speak with the client about her problem as close to the initial point of contact as possible. CT-SLS uses screeners, providing quicker personal contact. The screeners record statistical data, initially determine income and case eligibility, and place eligible callers in queue for the appropriate legal worker. The screeners also perform the clerical work associated with the operation of the intake system. Many callers to CT-SLS are over-income or have a legal problem that CT-SLS does not handle (e.g., criminal or fee-generating). The screeners refer these callers to other sources, conserving legal worker time. In the other programs, calls are handled initially by legal workers. This avoids some duplication in determining eligibility. NH-LARC and WA-CLEAR have a receptionist who can be reached by callers either with or without a touch-tone phone. She will place callers in the proper queue or give them a referral.

**Legal workers:** Staffs include both attorneys and paralegals. Many of the attorneys and paralegals have extensive legal services backgrounds. Others have come from private practice or other advocacy programs (e.g., pro bono projects). Some are newer attorneys. The programs believe that they benefit from the combination of staff with different experiences and backgrounds. All staff interviewed have a high sense of value in their work. The mix of attorneys and paralegals varies among the programs. The programs find that attorneys generally require less supervision (see discussion on Quality Control, part VI).

**Specialization:** CT-SLS and NH-LARC legal workers are specialists, assigned to substantive units headed by a supervising attorney. They have also received cross-training in one or more other legal areas. Staff in Boston-LARC, VT-LawLine, and WA-CLEAR function as generalists (although many have recognized areas of expertise). All receive extensive substantive law training. WA-CLEAR believes that non-specialization allows more flexibility in staffing and avoids problems associated with client self-identification of issues. On the other hand, CT-SLS believes that certain legal areas, especially public benefits, are sufficiently complex to require a specialist's expertise when conducting the interview and providing assistance.

**Staffing patterns:** CT-SLS, Boston-LARC, and WA-CLEAR have primarily full-time, permanent staff. VT-LawLine uses a number of

part-time attorneys, finding that this allows recruitment of skilled staff who want to work part-time and avoids negative effects from the more repetitive aspects of the work. NH-LARC has found it to be both efficient and economical to have some part-time staff and two part-time contract attorneys. Boston-LARC has made effective use of attorney and law student volunteers who agree to commit a significant amount of time and who participate in Boston-LARC's extensive training program.

**Computer Responsible Persons:** CT-SLS has two part-time CRPs on staff, responsible for network administration and training. NH-LARC has a staff paralegal who spends 1/4 to 1/3 of his time as network administrator and designing the program's web site. The other programs contract for maintenance and have a staff person who does troubleshooting.

**Time on the phones:** Legal workers in the programs typically spend 22-25 hours per week handling cases on the phone (the number of hours is less for VT-LawLine's staff, some of whom are part-time and who do not do initial screening). The remaining time is spent on follow-up, providing brief or extended service assistance, or working on special projects (e.g., community education). Workers spend an average of 20-30 minutes per call, and typically handle 10-13 calls per day.

**Work stations:** The programs have designed work stations to facilitate telephone intake and delivery. The programs recognize the need to consider principles of ergonomics in their work stations, given the length of time workers spend on the phones. All legal workers use head sets as they speak with clients, allowing them to enter statistical data and case information, including detailed case notes, directly into the database. The telephones have a feature that holds the next call until the worker has finished the "wrap-up" (completing the case record, etc.) on the current call, which typically takes 2-7 minutes. CT-SLS's phones have a function that allows the program to set the interval between calls, which can be extended by the worker. Work stations are provided with resource manuals and other materials to assist the legal worker in advising and responding to the client (see part IV). Calls to Boston-LARC are taken in a large, open room with cubicles. Staff have separate personal offices for times when they are not working on the phones.

**Supervising attorneys:** Each program uses highly experienced supervisory attorneys to oversee the operation of the intake system and development of training and resource materials. In addition to reviewing case records (see part VI), the supervisory attorneys are

available to give contemporaneous support to the intake workers. Boston-LARC has a supervising attorney present in the intake room for support and to take over difficult calls when necessary. CT-SLS's and NH-LARC's supervisors also head up substantive units.

**Staff training:** All programs have invested considerable time and resources in staff training. Prior to providing services, Boston-LARC legal workers receive 15-20 hours of comprehensive training, 2/3 in substantive areas of the law, 1/3 on program procedures (including issue-spotting and interviewing techniques) and technology. There are regular monthly update training sessions on legal issues. Boston-LARC has developed a document, the "Code of Conduct," that establishes minimum standards for staff and provides guidance on issues such as confidentiality, objectivity, and credibility. WA-CLEAR has established a written training protocol that includes 50-70 hours of training in substantive areas (through review of materials and live presentations by specialists); review of the WA-CLEAR policy manual; software training; observing experienced advocates; handling mock interviews; and conducting interviews with a senior attorney observing. NH-LARC employs similar methods, covering legal issues and program procedures, with training spread over a two-month period. Each program has ongoing, in-house training sessions, usually once per month.

**Communication:** The programs recognize the importance of internal communication, and schedule regular meetings of legal workers (at CT-SLS, by unit) to discuss emergent or common legal issues and system operations, and for training purposes. The programs also use internal e-mail to keep staff updated on legal issues, changes in referrals and program procedures, and other matters.

- *Each program attempts to enable a legal worker to speak with the client as close to the initial point of contact as possible. Two of the programs use screeners, while calls to the other programs are handled initially by legal workers.*
- *The programs are divided on whether legal workers should be generalists or specialists. The mix of attorneys and paralegals varies from program to program.*
- *Legal workers enter statistical data and detailed case information into the database as they speak with the client. Work stations are designed to facilitate telephone intake and delivery.*

- *Each program uses experienced attorneys to supervise the intake system.*
- *Each program provides extensive initial and ongoing training and has regular internal communication on systems procedures and substantive issues.*

## IV. Provision of services

**Range and type of services provided:** CT-SLS, VT-LawLine, Boston-LARC, and WA-CLEAR have identified as a central element of their respective missions the provision of some level of legal assistance across the full range of civil legal problems confronting poor people, including addressing legal problems that prior providers had determined were beyond their resources. NH-LARC has established priorities, taking into account services offered by other legal services providers in the state, in the areas of family, housing, benefits, and consumer law. All of the programs provide a high level of counsel and advice and (except for VT-LawLine)<sup>(8)</sup> referral assistance. All provide lesser levels of extended assistance because these services are provided by a network of other legal services providers in the state (CT-SLS, NH-LARC, VT-LawLine) or by other components of the program as well as other legal providers (Boston-LARC, WA-CLEAR).

The programs benefit from the past experience of staff in handling extended service cases. However, because legal workers currently provide very little extended service assistance, this benefit may diminish over time. The programs recognize that continuing involvement in some full-service representation can prevent legal skills from atrophying and ensure that legal workers keep in touch with the court systems, social services agencies, and other institutions affecting clients, as well as providing legal workers with more diversity in their work. CT-SLS and NH-LARC have set numerical goals for the numbers and types of extended service cases staff will handle.

**Procedures:** The programs have each created a number of internal systems, most of which are incorporated in written policies. CT-SLS has a procedures manual with sections on financial eligibility, priorities, conflict checks, closing cases, and other matters. Boston-LARC's training manual includes its Code of Conduct (see p. 11) and written procedures on "how to handle a hotline call." WA-CLEAR maintains written procedures on interview scope, support staff tasks.

case notes, and other matters.

**Computer systems:** Each program is committed to the effective use of technology in its intake and delivery system and has acquired high-quality computer equipment. The programs use five different client intake and case management applications. Each has presented some problems, which are often time-consuming, but they have not significantly interfered with the operation of the intake systems. The respective applications and their uses by the programs are described in more detail in the pamphlet entitled "Uses of Technology in Centralized Telephone Intake and Delivery Systems," September 1997.

**Resource manuals:** Each program recognizes the critical importance of preparing and maintaining resource materials for use by staff in providing assistance. CT-SLS, Boston-LARC, and WA-CLEAR have each developed and assembled comprehensive manuals, one (or more) covering the major substantive areas of law (including checklists and standard responses to legal issues) and one describing the various social services resources available in each community they serve. NH-LARC is in the process of completing its manuals. These manuals, the product of considerable staff effort, are well-organized, continuously updated, and used regularly by legal workers in advising and assisting clients. They are an important tool in ensuring the correctness and consistency of the assistance provided.

**Confirming letters:** Because the programs expect many clients to act on their own behalf rather than benefiting from direct program intervention, each recognizes that providing advice and counsel orally is often not enough. Clients are more likely to retain that information if it is confirmed and supported in writing. CT-SLS has developed a set of computerized confirming letters that can be customized and are sent to almost all clients. The other programs, while not sending confirming letters as a matter of course, also often send such letters or materials.

**Educational materials:** All of the programs make extensive use of educational materials, with or without a personalized confirming letter. With the help of other providers and agencies, the programs have compiled and developed a range of brochures, publications, pamphlets, pro se packets, and other informational and educational materials, to be used by legal workers in assisting clients and by clients in assisting themselves. The materials are well-written and cover a wide range of legal topics. At the conclusion of the telephone interview, legal workers select appropriate materials to send to the client to support the advice or referral given. WA-CLEAR maintains an index of materials, with codes keyed to LSC's Case Service Report (CSR) numbers. The legal worker enters the appropriate code(s) in the computer after

speaking with the client, and the related materials are pulled and mailed to the client by support staff.

NH-LARC has tested pamphlets for 8th-grade readability and has created a community education coordinator position to focus in part on developing materials. WA-CLEAR has undertaken responsibility for maintaining and updating such materials, which are used by all legal services providers in the state. Each program has identified a goal of establishing and maintaining a comprehensive library of educational materials for use by staff and clients alike. The materials also serve as training materials for new legal workers and as "scripts" for giving complete and consistent advice. In addition, they are used in outreach and community education efforts.

**Continuing assistance:** Clients often need further information or assistance, particularly when representing themselves pro se, and are encouraged to call back. Clear, detailed case notes are necessary to allow other workers to understand the problem and the assistance already provided when responding to a client who is calling back about the same problem. WA-CLEAR and VT-LawLine workers give clients a direct number so they do not have to go through the intake process from the beginning.

- *The programs concentrate on counsel and advice, brief service, and referral assistance, with fewer resources spent on extended service cases. Four of the programs provide assistance across a wide range of legal areas, including legal problems that the prior providers had determined were beyond their resources.*
- *Each program has instituted internal systems for operation of the intake system.*
- *Extensive use of sophisticated technology is a cornerstone of each program's system.*
- *The programs have developed and maintain comprehensive resource materials for use by the staff. These materials help to ensure the correctness and consistency of the assistance provided.*
- *One program sends confirming letters as a matter of course. All of the programs use educational materials to confirm and support assistance provided.*

- *Clients are encouraged to call back for additional assistance. Case notes are usually sufficiently detailed to eliminate the need for the caller to speak with the same legal worker.*

## V. Referrals and other assistance

**Referrals:** Serving as the primary point for client access to civil legal services in a state or region requires that the program identify, develop, and maintain a comprehensive and effective referral network. CT-SLS, NH-LARC, Boston-LARC, and WA-CLEAR have done this by establishing ongoing relationships with the various providers of legal services in their service areas.<sup>(9)</sup> Other providers recognize the importance of receiving appropriate referrals and have cooperated with the programs in establishing and maintaining clear guidelines for referrals.

The programs have solicited from other providers information about the particular types and numbers of referred cases each would accept, eligibility guidelines, the geographic area served, and any other factors or limitations. WA-CLEAR sent a comprehensive questionnaire to each provider (including NJP's own field offices), asking the types of services provided in each of 54 legal problem areas and the types of cases within those areas for which referrals should be made. This information has been entered in a database, which is constantly updated based on changes in the ability of a provider to accept referrals (for example, due to staff vacancy, one provider currently cannot accept bankruptcy cases). The legal worker searches the database (for type of problem and location), determines whether the client's problem fits within the provider's specific referral criteria, and makes a referral where appropriate. WA-CLEAR's referral procedures, including conflict checking and contacting the provider, are set forth in a written protocol. Boston-LARC, after discussions with the providers, drafted the protocols themselves and sent them to the (28) providers for their review, rather than relying on each provider to submit the necessary information. Referral information is updated monthly. Although CT-SLS and NH-LARC have not yet established written protocols for all of their primary referral sources, they talk and meet regularly with the directors and staff of those agencies to discuss referrals and other issues concerning operation of the intake system.

Each program has also established protocols governing the manner in which clients are referred to another provider. If the program

believes a case should be referred, the worker discusses this with the client, obtains the client's permission to make the referral and checks with the provider (generally by fax) for a conflict. CT-SLS, NH-LARC, and WA-CLEAR fax the intake sheet and case notes to the appropriate provider. The client is told to contact the provider, or that he will be contacted. Boston-LARC, with many referral organizations, generally tells the client to call the provider. It can transmit data electronically to other parts of VLP and to the largest other referral source.

The general rule among the programs and the other providers is that once a client is referred to a provider the client will not be referred back to the program. This is to ensure that the client is not "bounced" from place to place. By maintaining clear, up-to-date information about the services available from other providers, as described above, the programs have been able to make appropriate referrals for the great majority of clients.

**Private attorney involvement:** The private bar represents a primary referral source for all of the programs. Each program either operates, or has a close relationship with, local PAI programs. CT-SLS and VT-LawLine have each designated a staff member pro bono coordinator to develop private attorney involvement and handle placement of cases. VT-LawLine's panel includes about 600 attorneys statewide. VLP operates a large pro bono program with close to 1,000 lawyers on its panels, and Boston-LARC is planning to expand its role in identifying and preparing cases for referral. NH-LARC meets weekly with the state pro bono program, its sub-grantee, to ensure that referrals (mostly family law cases) are of high caliber. In Washington, NJP has sub-grants with a large number of volunteer lawyer programs throughout the state and makes referrals to those programs, as described above. WA-CLEAR has taken over much of the intake function for the pro bono programs. This has enabled the programs to place a greater number of cases with pro bono attorneys and clients to receive service more promptly.

**Pro se assistance:** All the programs actively promote appropriate pro se representation. Clients who receive pro se assistance are encouraged to call back for further assistance. VT-LawLine assesses the obstacles for unrepresented persons in the judicial systems and the nature of the results obtained by people acting on their own behalf, and is taking steps to make pro se representation more effective and humane for clients by meeting with judges, conducting client education efforts, and similar activities. Both VT-LawLine and CT-SLS have recently completed follow-up telephone surveys of clients to whom they gave pro se advice.

**Community legal education:** Each program has developed high-quality educational materials to assist clients in understanding their legal situation and acting effectively on their own behalf. The programs also advance this goal in other ways. CT-SLS has created a part-time outreach coordinator position to publicize its services and to oversee the development of community education programs. NH-LARC also has a community education coordinator, who helps set up clinics and develops materials. VT-LawLine's community education component includes pro se clinics, presentations, and a regular show on public access television. WA-CLEAR refers clients to clinics and educational programs presented by NJP or private attorneys. Because WA-CLEAR handles the lion's share of intake, NJP's field offices are able to do much more "capacity building": educating and training the private bar, legal and social services providers, and clients themselves to assist clients in handling their legal problems.

- *The programs have developed and maintain extensive referral networks based on a clear understanding of the legal assistance offered by other providers. One program has entered referral information into a database for on-line use by legal workers in making appropriate referrals.*
- *Each program either operates or works closely with private attorney involvement programs, which are a primary referral source for extended service cases.*
- *The programs have actively incorporated pro se assistance into their service delivery options. Two programs are engaging in follow-up and analysis of the effectiveness of the pro se assistance provided.*
- *Each program makes extensive use of community legal education to supplement its advice, brief service, and referral component.*

## **VI. Quality control**

Each program recognizes the critical importance of ensuring that the legal assistance it gives clients is correct, complete, understandable, and appropriate to the client's legal problem. Some of the methods they

employ to achieve this goal have already been discussed, including **staff training** and the development and use of comprehensive substantive **resource manuals** and **educational materials**. Other methods include review of case records and regular meetings.

**Case records:** As noted above, legal workers enter information directly into the database describing the client's legal problem, the disposition of the case, and the advice or assistance given. This case documentation is accessible to everyone within the program. To be effective, case notes must have sufficient detail that they can "stand on their own," facilitating review by the supervising attorney and allowing other staff members to understand the problem and disposition if the client should call back at a later time. While each program uses a different case management software, each application is designed to facilitate the entry of this information. CT-SLS, NH-LARC, and WA-CLEAR have each developed a set of abbreviations for words frequently used in case notes to expedite entry.

Supervising attorneys review the case record either in hard copy or on the computer screen. Contemporaneous review ensures that legal workers sufficiently document clients' problems and the advice given and that the assistance is appropriate. The programs attempt to use supervising attorneys most effectively, given the need to review large numbers of cases. The extent of necessary supervision varies according to the legal worker's experience and the mix of attorneys and paralegals.

CT-SLS' three managing attorneys are available for questions during intake periods. Each supervisor reviews hard copies of the case notes and the accompanying letter sent to the client for all intakes in her substantive unit, generally on the day of the interview. The supervisor considers such issues as the completeness and consistency of the advice, whether there may be other issues or available benefits, and the appropriateness of any referral. If she agrees with the disposition, she initials the hard copy. If she has a concern, she returns the form with an explanation. This process takes about two hours per supervising attorney per day. Recurring problems are discussed at unit meetings. Boston-LARC's supervising attorneys also review cases on the day of the call, giving staff appropriate feedback. In addition, a supervising attorney is always present in the intake room, immediately available to provide support and to take over difficult calls, if necessary.

NH-LARC's unit supervisors review case notes for each case on the computer screen, using a larger, 17" monitor. A coding system is used to highlight more urgent cases for immediate review and to indicate the

need for follow-up by the worker. Because VT-LawLine is a smaller program, all review is done by the executive director. WA-CLEAR supervisors review legal workers' case records on a random basis (about 10 records per week for each worker, more for newer workers). Supervisors hold periodic reviews and training on the importance of maintaining case notes that embody a clear and understandable description of the client's problem and of the legal assistance that has been provided.

**Regular meetings:** Each program has regular meetings for discussion of particularly complex cases, recurring or systemic issues, and system operation. The meetings often include training on legal issues. CT-SLS has regular unit meetings as well as bi-weekly staff meetings.

- *Experienced supervising attorneys review case records contemporaneously to ensure that clients are given correct, complete, understandable, and appropriate assistance. In some programs, supervisors review all cases; one program has found review of a random sample to be sufficient. The amount of supervisor time spent reviewing case records depends in part on the mix of attorneys and paralegals and the experience of the legal worker.*
- *Regular meetings afford the opportunity for further case review as well as for training and discussion of recurring issues.*

## VII. Assessment

Because these are new systems, each program finds itself in a constant process of review, evaluation, and adjustment. There are three primary sources of information that the programs use to help assess the effectiveness of the services they provide: review of Case Service Report (CSR) and other statistical data; client satisfaction surveys; and feedback from other providers and agencies.

**Statistical information:** To date, CSR data indicates that the total number of clients being served by the programs (based on number of cases closed) is comparable to the number of persons who received assistance from the IJSC-funded programs in 1995. Despite lower

funding levels and far fewer staff than their predecessors.<sup>(10)</sup> As would be expected, the data confirm that most closed cases involve counsel and advice, brief service, or referral assistance, with extended service assistance being provided by other legal services providers (or for Boston-LARC and WA-CLEAR, by other components of the program), including the former LSC recipients. CT-SLS, NH-LARC and WA-CLEAR have reviewed client addresses and confirmed that their services are reaching clients throughout their states.

**Client satisfaction surveys:** Each program has attempted to measure the effectiveness of its services by sending out written client satisfaction surveys. Boston-LARC regularly mails surveys to a random 10 percent of its clients. WA-CLEAR's surveys focus on factors it can control, such as how the client was treated, whether information was presented in an understandable manner, whether busy signals or hold times presented obstacles, and whether the assistance helped the client resolve the problem. The programs have supplemented written surveys by contacting clients by telephone. Each quarter, NH-LARC calls all clients served in a particular month. Client responses have indicated a high level of satisfaction with the programs' services. Clients appreciate and value the opportunity to speak with an attorney or paralegal and get prompt assistance, often stating that a wait on the telephone is an inconvenience they are willing to bear.

CT-SLS, NH-LARC, and VT-LawLine have used supervised interns to conduct telephone surveys to follow up on the effectiveness of pro se assistance, assessing the client's satisfaction with the program's services, her experience in representing herself, and her satisfaction with the results obtained.

**Other providers:** Each program meets regularly with other primary legal providers and obtains feedback from other providers and referral sources. CT-SLS and VT-LawLine receive regular case disposition reports on cases referred to the primary legal providers. WA-CLEAR sends a written survey to social services agencies and other providers to get information on the effect of its services on clients and the agencies.

**Planning:** Each program engages in ongoing internal planning, as well as formal and informal planning in conjunction with other legal services providers and the bar. These processes help the programs identify client needs and resources within the larger delivery system to guide them in improving the services they offer. NH-LARC established a number of six-month goals in 1996 and developed a list of specific "LARC Objectives for 1997" to assist it in meeting its goals and objectives.

- *The programs continue to assess their effectiveness by reviewing case statistics, conducting client satisfaction surveys, and obtaining feedback from other providers and referral sources.*
- *Each program engages in ongoing planning, both internally and jointly with other providers and the bar.*

## **Conclusion**

The five programs considered in this report have each made a transition to a new model for the delivery of legal services, integrating centralized telephone intake and delivery into a multi-faceted delivery network. In their intake systems, each of the programs sought to accomplish the same basic goals:

- Improved client access, centralized within the state or region
- Prompt, high-quality counsel and advice, brief service, and referral assistance
- Provision of a full range of legal assistance, including pro se, community legal education, and some extended service assistance
- Referral of clients needing more assistance to an appropriate provider
- Effective use of both telephone and computer technology
- Coordination of provision of services within the delivery system with the private bar and other providers

While the five programs have made a variety of different choices in designing and operating their systems, and have each faced problems and challenges, each is moving successfully toward accomplishing these goals. Program staff are well-trained, knowledgeable, and

dedicated. Effective management systems and extensive supervision help ensure the quality of the services provided. The programs are generally pleased with their systems, client satisfaction levels appear to be high, and other providers are responding positively.

Given the differences among the systems and the fact that each is continuing to evolve, it would be premature to single out the elements of an ideal system or to identify any one system as optimum. Nor is sufficient data available to draw final conclusions about the overall effect of the new systems on the delivery of legal services in the covered service areas. Nevertheless, the successes of the programs in operating their systems demonstrate that centralized telephone intake and delivery can provide a strong foundation for an effective, efficient, and comprehensive legal services delivery system.

## **Materials Available from the Programs**

### **CT-SLS**

Procedures Manual (Table of Contents)  
Paper Flow Outline  
Case Notes Abbreviations  
Client Satisfaction Survey  
Pro Se Advice Survey

### **NH-LARC**

LARC flyer  
Mission statement  
LARC Objectives for 1997  
Six Month Goals  
Case Notes Format  
Client Satisfaction Questionnaire

### **VT-LawLine**

Client Satisfaction/Court Outcomes  
interview instruments

### **Boston-LARC**

Hotline staff Code of Conduct

Training Manual (Table of Contents)  
How to Handle a Hotline Call  
Mailings Index

## **WA-CLEAR**

CLEAR flyer  
Voice message script  
Index of Publications  
Legal Resource Referral Questionnaire  
Referral Procedures  
Interview scope/Case notes/Brief service criteria  
Support staff tasks  
Training protocol  
Agency Survey

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## **Endnotes**

1. Telephone intake and delivery has been used successfully for a number of years by legal programs for the elderly, prepaid insurance plans, and other legal providers, including some legal services programs. The Corporation's Inspector General, in a report on *Increasing Legal Services Delivery Capacity through Information Technology*, August 1996, has also concluded that computer-assisted client intake and legal assistance telephone help lines could significantly increase delivery capacity. See also the brochure prepared by the Corporation entitled "Basic Elements of Centralized Telephone Intake and Delivery Systems," March 1997, which describes intake as an integral component in the delivery systems of six legal services programs.
2. LSC Program Counsels Alan Lieberman and John Eidleman were assisted on the visits by James Morrissey, working as a consultant for the Corporation. The visits took place in mid-1997.

3. This technology report and LSC's brochure entitled "Basic Elements of Centralized Telephone Intake and Delivery Systems" are available from LSC's website ([www.lsc.gov](http://www.lsc.gov)) or from the National Clearinghouse for Legal Services ([www.nclsplp.org](http://www.nclsplp.org)).
4. The term "program" as used in this report includes WA-CLEAR and Boston-LARC, although both are actually components of larger programs.
5. The programs have found that the great majority of their clients have (or have ready access to) a telephone.
6. The term "legal worker" refers to the person who conducts the client interview and provides legal assistance, and includes attorneys and paralegals.
7. WA-CLEAR also has a separate queue for persons over 60 to accommodate NJP's statewide Administration on Aging grant.
8. Because VT-LawLine's cases are screened by Vermont Legal Aid (VLA), most cases needing extensive service are handled by VLA. Other cases are referred by VLA to other providers, or handled by the pro bono program operated by VT-LawLine. VT-LawLine does refer cases to the law school legal clinic, the state Protection and Advocacy program, or VLA, as appropriate.
9. While VT-LawLine does not serve as the primary client access point (see note 7), it has also established ongoing relationships with the other providers of legal services in the state.
10. CT-SLS employs 7 attorneys, compared to a total of 35 employed by the three LSC-funded programs serving the state in 1995. However, the number of clients receiving assistance from CT-SLS has actually increased compared with the number assisted by the other three programs in 1995.