



**CALGARY'S FAMILY JUSTICE SERVICES  
CLIENT UTILIZATION SURVEY:  
FINAL REPORT**

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# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

In 2007-2009, the Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family conducted an evaluation of Alberta's *Family Law Act* (FLA) (MacRae, Simpson, Paetsch, Bertrand, Pearson, & Hornick, 2009). One of the objectives of the study was to evaluate the impact of the procedural changes that resulted from the enactment of the FLA, including the streamlining of court procedures. The study found that that an increasing number of individuals were proceeding with claims under the FLA without legal representation, resulting in a demand for resources that support self-represented litigants. Likewise, other jurisdictions have experienced a rise in the number of self-represented individuals in family court, and governments have attempted to address this problem by increasing the availability of information and the number of services designed to assist self-represented individuals (e.g., Hilbert, 2009; Malcolmson & Reid, 2006; Zorza, 2002).

More recently, it has been recognized that there is a serious access to justice problem in Canada, particularly within the family justice system, which is seen as being too complex, too slow, and too expensive (Action Committee on Access to Justice in Civil and Family Matters, 2013). In its report, *Access to Civil and Family Justice: A Roadmap for Change*, the Action Committee identified four priority areas: access to legal services; court processes simplification; family law; and prevention, triage and referral. The Canadian Bar Association's recent report, *Reaching Equal Justice: An Invitation to Envision and Act* (2013) also provides a strategic framework to address access to justice inequalities. The report discusses the growth of unrepresented litigants in Canada's courts, especially in family law matters, and recognizes that available resources are often insufficient to meet the demand for support.

In Alberta, these resources include Family Justice Services (FJS), which are a group of programs and services offered by Alberta Justice in collaboration with the courts of Alberta. FJS works directly with individuals to help them get appropriate solutions for their family law issues. Programs offered by FJS include:

- **Information Services**

- Family Law Information Centre (FLIC) Family Justice Services Offices and website

- **Education Services**

- Parenting After Separation (PAS)
- Parenting After Separation for High Conflict Families (PASHC)
- Focus on Communication in Separation (FOCIS)

- **Intake Services**
- **Mediation/Dispute Resolution Programs**
  - Family Mediation Program - Provincial Court and Court of Queen's Bench
  - Child Protection and Intervention Mediation Program – Provincial Court
  - Caseflow Conference – Provincial Court
  - Dispute Resolution Officer Program (Calgary)
  - Child Support Resolution Program (Edmonton)
- **Family Court Assistance**
  - Family Court Counsellors
  - Caseflow Conference
  - Court Generated Orders
  - Divorce Reviews
- **Parenting Intervention**
  - Brief Conflict Intervention Program - Provincial Court

The Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family (the Institute) conducted this study to examine clients' experiences with accessing Alberta's Family Justice Services. Developed from discussions and correspondence with Court Services representatives, the study will assist the Court Services Leadership Team in their efforts to promote continuous improvement of supports and services for families involved in family law proceedings. A proposal was submitted to Alberta Justice in April 2011, and on August 30, 2011, the Institute received confirmation that the project could proceed.

## **1.2 Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of the study was to assess the impact of court services on the experience of individuals involved in family law proceedings. The objectives of the study were as follows:

- (1) To establish a profile of individuals who access Calgary's Family Justice Services (e.g., demographics, nature of case, previous experience with family law system and Court Services, perceptions of their service needs, etc.);
- (2) To establish the combination of court services individuals receive when they access FJS;
- (3) To examine clients' experience and level of satisfaction with services received; and
- (4) To assess the impact of services received on outcomes in family law cases.

## 1.3 Methodology

### 1.3.1 Study Design

The study utilized a pre-test/post-test design where families were surveyed at their point of court service access (e.g., Family Justice Services), then again one year later. This design was chosen in order to determine the impact of Alberta Justice Court Services on these individuals as they proceed through the court process.

The pre-test survey was administered on a voluntary basis to a cohort of clients at their first point of service access – primarily, the FJS information window at the Calgary Courts Centre. The cohort consists of all those who accessed FJS between February 6 and August 31, 2012. Blank surveys and envelopes were placed on a table, and FJS staff members were asked to encourage clients to participate in the study by completing a survey. Clients were asked to complete the survey on site, seal it in the envelope provided, and drop it off in a bin located near the information window. Alternatively, clients were given the opportunity to complete the survey at home and mail it directly to the Institute in the addressed envelope provided. FJS collected the completed surveys and Institute staff picked them up periodically during the pre-test data collection period. A total of 102 completed pre-test surveys were received.

The pre-test survey was developed in consultation with representatives from Family Justice Services, and used a combination of open- and closed-ended questions to establish a FJS client profile – i.e., demographic information, previous experience with court services, nature of their case, perceptions of needs, whether they have legal representation, and their experience that day with the court services provided (a copy of the pre-test survey is contained in Appendix A). Data from the survey were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively, and the results were reported in *Calgary's Family Justice Services Client Utilization Survey: Results of the Pre-test* (Bertrand & Paetsch, 2012).

The pre-test survey form also asked clients to participate in a follow-up survey. Those who agreed to participate were asked to provide their contact information (i.e., address, phone number, e-mail address) and indicate the best method for the survey to be sent (i.e., mail, e-mail) so that the follow-up survey could be provided to them. A total of 43 clients who completed the pre-test survey agreed to participate in the follow-up survey. The majority of clients (n=31) requested that the follow-up survey be sent to them by e-mail.

The follow-up or post-test survey was administered one year following the initial data collection period, beginning in February 2013. Institute staff sent the survey by the method preferred by the participant. Clients were asked to complete the survey (either electronically or by hard copy) and return it to the Institute within two weeks of receipt. Clients who had requested the survey electronically were sent a reminder e-mail two weeks after the initial invitations to complete the survey were sent out. Clients were also asked to provide their first name and year of birth to allow us to link their responses

to the survey they completed the previous year. A total of 10 completed post-test surveys were returned, for a response rate of 23%.

Using a combination of open- and closed-ended questions, the post-test survey asked clients about the services received over the course of the year, their experience with these services, and whether their expectations were met. Clients were also asked to provide information on the nature and progress of their case in an effort to assess the impact of services on outcomes (a copy of the post-test survey is contained in Appendix B). Data from the post-test survey were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

### 1.3.2 Limitations

It should be noted that the results of this survey may not necessarily represent the views of all Alberta Justice Court Services clients because clients who voluntarily choose to complete a survey may be qualitatively different from those who choose not to participate. For example, clients may be more likely to complete a survey if they feel that they have had a negative experience and wish to voice their dissatisfaction. In addition, the sample size for the follow-up survey was very small, so caution should be exercised in interpreting findings from this survey or assuming that respondents are representative of clients who completed the pre-test survey. Lastly, the survey was only administered in Calgary, and therefore caution should be exercised in generalizing the results to Alberta.

## 2.0 PRE-TEST SURVEY FINDINGS

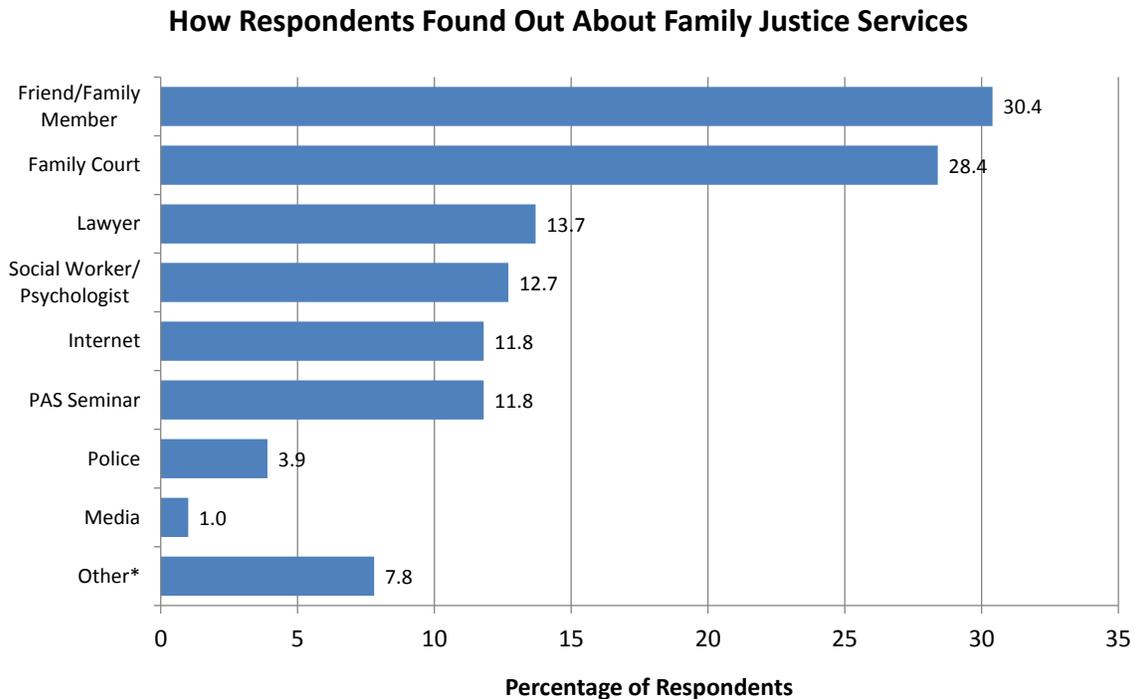
This chapter presents the findings from the Family Justice Services Client Survey. The findings are grouped into the following four areas: (1) Background Information; (2) Client Needs; (3) Client Experiences with Family Justice Services; and (4) Clients' Concluding Comments. Supplementing the findings are write-in comments made by the survey participants, which elaborate upon the opinions expressed in the survey.

### 2.1 Background Information

A total of 102 surveys were received. Over one-half of surveys (58%) were completed by females and 42% were completed by males. Respondents' ages ranged from 19 to 64 years (mean = 36 years).

Clients were asked how they found out about Family Justice Services (FJS) and their responses are presented in Figure 2.1. The most common response was through a friend or family member (30%), followed by in family court (28%) and through a lawyer (14%). Least common responses were from the police (4%) and through the media (1%).

Figure 2.1



Source of data: Family Justice Services Client Survey

Total N=102

Multiple response data

\*Other includes: ex-spouse; by myself/research; Legal Aid; Passport Office; Elizabeth Fry Society

Respondents were also asked if they had used any Family Justice Services in the past and, if so, which ones they had accessed. Over one-half of clients (60%) indicated that they had previously used services offered by FJS. As shown in Table 2.1, the most common services previously used by clients were attendance at the Parenting After Separation (PAS) Seminar (46%) and Family Mediation Services (46%), followed by the Family Law Information Centre (FLIC) (38%), Family Justice Intake Services (25%) and Family Court Counsellors (23%). Less than 10% of clients had previously used Child Protection and Intervention Mediation Services and Caseflow Conferences.

**Table 2.1**  
**Family Justice Services Used by Clients in the Past**

Services Used	n	% <sup>1</sup>
Parenting After Separation (PAS) Seminar	28	45.9
Family Mediation Services	28	45.9
Family Law Information Centre (FLIC)	23	37.7
Family Justice Intake Services	15	24.6
Family Court Counsellors	14	23.0
Dispute Resolution Officer (DRO) Services	11	18.0
Focus on Communication in Separation (FOCIS) Seminar	9	14.8
Parenting After Separation High Conflict (PASHC) Seminar	7	11.5
Child Protection and Intervention Mediation Services	6	9.8
Caseflow Conference	5	8.2

Source of data: Family Justice Services Client Survey

Total N=102

Multiple response data

<sup>1</sup>Percentages are based on the total number of clients who had used any Family Justice Service(s) in the past (n=61).

For clients who indicated that they had used FJS in the past, Table 2.2 presents the number of services they had accessed. Most commonly, clients had used one service (41%); just over one-fifth of clients who had previously accessed FJS had used two services (21%) and 18% had used three services.

## **2.2 Client Needs**

Clients were asked what issues had prompted them to visit FJS on the day that they completed the survey and their responses are presented in Figure 2.2. The most common issue, reported by almost two-thirds of respondents (61%), was parenting. Almost one-third (30%) indicated that they were visiting FJS to seek assistance with child support issues and 23% needed assistance with guardianship issues. Relatively few clients were looking for help with personal safety (8%), spousal support (7%), or property division (3%) issues.

**Table 2.2**

**Number of Family Justice Services Used by Clients in the Past**

Number of Services Used	n	% <sup>1</sup>
1	25	41.0
2	13	21.3
3	11	18.0
4	4	6.6
5	4	6.6
6	2	3.3
7	2	3.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source of data: Family Justice Services Client Survey

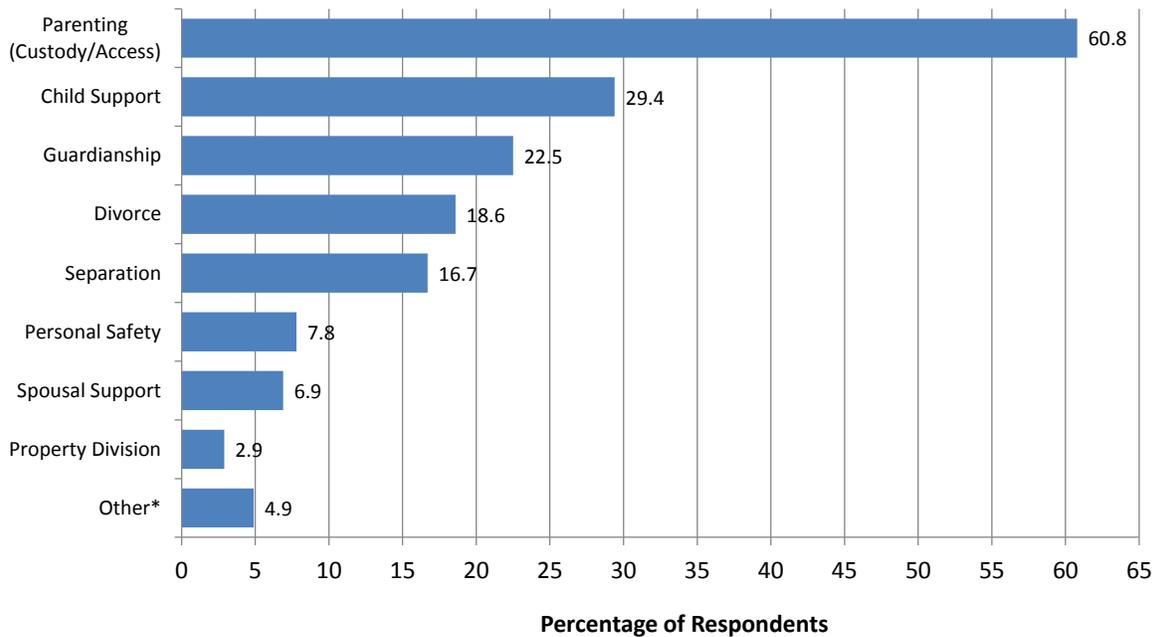
Total N = 102

Multiple response data

<sup>1</sup>Percentages are based on the total number of clients who had used any Family Justice Service(s) in the past (n=61).

**Figure 2.2**

**Issues that Brought Respondents to Family Justice Services**



Source of data: Family Justice Services Client Survey

Total N=102

Multiple response data

\*Other includes: passport applications; guardianship/parenting for grandson; Hague Convention; and templates.

Table 2.3 provides information on the services that clients thought they needed from FJS. Almost one-half of respondents (49%) said that they were looking for general information, while 46% indicated that they needed help with completing forms. Approximately one-third of respondents said that they needed legal advice (36%) and mediation services (32%). Fewer than 10% of FJS clients said that they needed assistance from FJS with child support recalculation, parenting assessment/intervention services, education seminars, financial assistance, supervised visitation/exchange, and child protection and intervention mediation. The same proportion of clients said that they needed one (27%) or two (27%) services from FJS; 13% indicated that they needed three different services.

**Table 2.3**

**Services Respondents Think They Need from Family Justice Services**

<b>Services</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
General information	50	49.0
Help with forms	47	46.1
Legal advice	37	36.3
Mediation	33	32.4
Child support determination	16	15.7
Restraining order/Emergency protection order	14	13.7
Legal Aid	14	13.7
Counselling	11	10.8
Child support recalculation	9	8.8
Parenting assessment/intervention services	8	7.8
Education seminars	7	6.9
Financial assistance	5	4.9
Supervised visitation/exchange	4	3.9
Child protection and intervention mediation	3	2.9
Other <sup>1</sup>	4	3.9

Source of data: Family Justice Services Client Survey

Total N=102

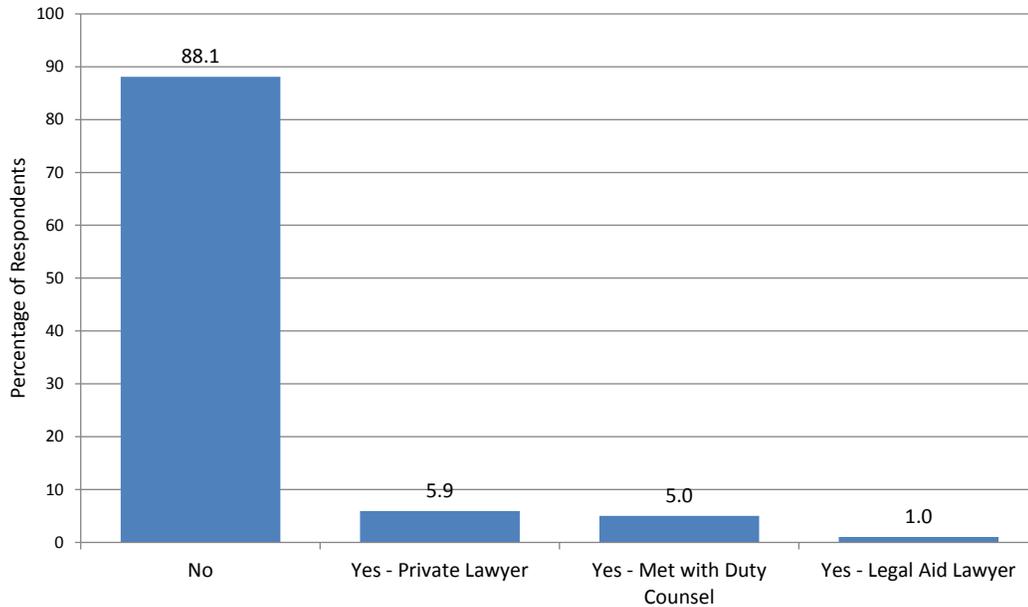
Multiple response data

<sup>1</sup>Examples of "Other" services include order restricting relocation, sworn document, and custody/access.

When asked if they currently had a lawyer helping them with their family law issues, the substantial majority of clients said that they did not (88%; see Figure 2.3). Similar proportions of respondents stated that they had a private lawyer (6%) or had met with duty counsel (5%); only one client indicated that he or she had a lawyer from Legal Aid.

**Figure 2.3**

**Whether Respondents Currently Have a Lawyer Helping them with their Issues**



Source of data: Family Justice Services Client Survey  
Total N=102; Missing cases=1

### **2.3 Client Experiences with Family Justice Services**

Clients were asked a number of questions regarding their experiences with FJS during their current visit. When asked how many lineups they had to stand in at the Courthouse that day, responses ranged from 0 to 10 with an average of 2 lineups. The most common responses were that they did not have to wait in any lineups (28%), or that they had to wait in one (29%) or two (26%) lineups.

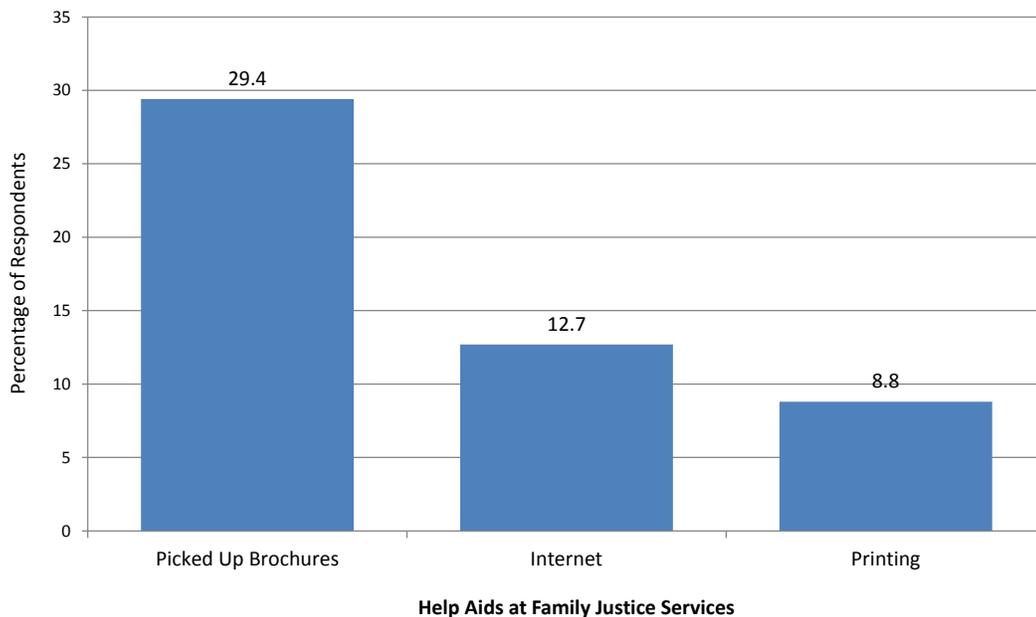
Few respondents (16%) indicated that they had spent time waiting in a wrong lineup. Of those who had spent time waiting in a wrong lineup, the most common reasons they provided for this were that the signs were unclear (44%) or that someone had misdirected them (38%).

When asked how long they spent waiting in line at the FJS window, responses ranged from 0 to 90 minutes, with an average of 7 minutes. The most common responses were that they did not have to wait at all (25%) or that they had to wait five minutes (20%). Few clients indicated that they had children waiting with them in line during their current visit (12%). Approximately one-half of respondents (48%) said that they had an appointment booked for that day.

FJS provides a number of help aids that clients may use during their visit to the Courthouse. Figure 2.4 presents the proportion of respondents who indicated that they made use of these aids during their current visit. Almost one-third of clients (29%) said that they had picked up brochures, while 13% said that they had used the Internet while there and 9% had printed materials while they were there.

**Figure 2.4**

**Whether Respondents Used Various Help Aids at Family Justice Services**

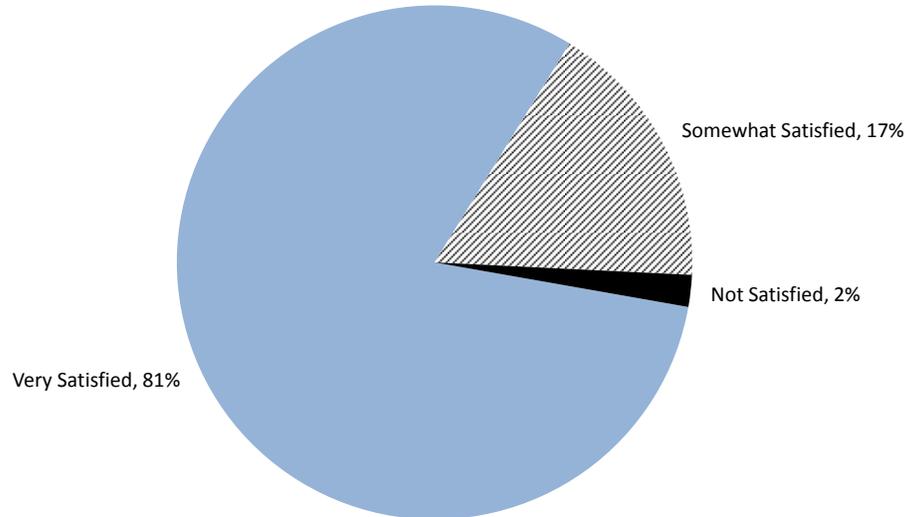


Source of data: Family Justice Services Client Survey  
Total N=102  
Multiple response data

Finally, clients were asked how satisfied they were with the assistance they received during their current visit to FJS (see Figure 2.5). Overall, clients expressed high levels of satisfaction with the assistance they received, with 81% saying that they were very satisfied and an additional 17% indicating that they were somewhat satisfied. Only two respondents said that they were not satisfied with the assistance they received during their current visit to FJS.

**Figure 2.5**

**How Satisfied Respondents Were with the Assistance they Received**



Source of data: Family Justice Services Client Survey  
Total N=102; Missing cases=2

## 2.4 Clients' Concluding Comments

Survey respondents were asked what would have made their experience more helpful, and 48 clients provided 49 comments. Over half of the comments provided were very positive, with clients stating that the information they received was very helpful and that the service was great. Examples of these comments are:

*The person that helped us was great – really knew her stuff!*

*Nothing – our mediator was wonderful – pleasant and helpful. So was our legal counsel amazing. Thank you for not making this experience painful.*

*[Staff member] was exceptionally helpful in providing guidance regarding the overall process and procedures where duty counsel failed. Easy, step-by-step directions regarding next steps are much appreciated.*

*Staff could not have been more informed, cordial, and compassionate. Keep up the great work in such a thankless environment.*

*Fast, friendly and informative services. [Staff member] was very helpful and is a huge asset to your office!*

*Nothing, I felt very assisted and was directed in all directions by [staff member]. Also all my questions were answered and explained so I could grasp exactly what I needed to do.*

*The group at the front desk were very helpful. Much appreciated.*

*I was helped by [staff members] and both of them were exceptional. They cleared up a lot of questions I had and helped me with all the forms. They are both an asset to family justice and the public at large.*

Survey respondents also provided suggestions for making their experience more helpful. Some of these comments related to waiting times or lack of time, such as:

*Lawyer was very busy and I did not know if she would be finished in time to help me in front of judge – lucky – she did come.*

*I finally saw a judge at 2:45. I have been here since 8:30.*

*Less rushed, more time explaining.*

*Knowing that I had to see a Family Court Worker. I felt rushed.*

*If we have an appointment waiting 17 minutes seems silly when walk-ups were addressed faster.*

*Faster service.*

*If I got to go in right away.*

*If there were not so many applications for one thing at a time, both applications into one court date, not ten.*

*The knowledge of EPO and access for Court of QB needs to be in one day.*

Other suggestions related to the information provided, or the service received from staff members, such as:

*Clearer instructions during telephone interview with clearer instructions via e-mail regarding forms.*

*Having legal counsel available in mediation that mediator could call upon for questions, that represents neither party.*

*More information on support for solo parents – everything is directed at co-parent situations. What about parents and kids where no other parent is involved.*

*Not having two of the three people direct me to the wrong person.*

*By chance the personnel at Family Justice Services are welcoming because at the filing counter it is another story. Why do they need to make you feel as though you are uninformed, unwelcome, bugging them?*

*Staff member did not seem as well versed as others I've dealt with.*

*Correct information.*

One client had a practical suggestion: *"The sitting just outside clerk's station should be removed. Every time I have been there is always confusion as to who is next because people loiter."* Another client acknowledged the inherent difficulties involved: *"If getting divorced wasn't so confusing and hard, especially after over 2 years of separation."*



### **3.0 POST-TEST SURVEY FINDINGS**

This chapter presents the findings from the Family Justice Services Client Follow-up Survey. The findings are grouped into two areas: (1) Background Information; and (2) Client Experiences. The chapter concludes with some analyses of data from clients who completed both the pre-test and the post-test surveys.

#### **3.1 Background Information**

A total of 10 completed post-test surveys were received. A small sample of this size cannot be assumed to be representative of those who completed the pre-test survey and findings cannot be generalized to the population. Two-thirds of the surveys (67%) were completed by females and one-third (33%) were completed by males; gender was missing for one respondent. Respondents' ages were somewhat higher than at the pre-test, and ranged from 39 to 54 years (mean = 45 years); two respondents did not give their age.

Respondents were asked if all the issues that brought them to Family Justice Services (FJS) a year ago were resolved, and one-half said yes and one-half said no. The five respondents who answered yes were then asked if the Family Justice Services they received assisted them in reaching a resolution. The majority (80%; n=4) said yes. The five respondents who said that all the issues that brought them to FJS a year ago were not resolved were asked what issues they were currently dealing with. Four respondents were dealing with child support, two respondents were dealing with parenting (custody and access) issues, one respondent had guardianship issues, and one respondent was dealing with spousal support (two respondents had multiple issues).

#### **3.2 Client Experiences**

The follow-up survey asked clients if they had used particular Family Justice Services in the past year. As shown in Table 3.1, seven clients used the Family Law Inquiries Counter, five clients used Family Court Counsellors, and four had used Family Justice Intake Services. Three clients attended the Parenting After Separation (PAS) Seminar, and one client attended both the Focus on Communication in Separation (FOCIS) Seminar and the Parenting After Separation High Conflict (PASHC) Seminar. Three clients used a Caseflow Conference, three clients attended Family Mediation Services, and one client used the Dispute Resolution Officer (DRO) services. Nobody who completed the follow-up survey used Child Protection and Intervention Mediation Services in the past year.

Respondents were also asked if they accessed any other agencies or services to help them with their family law matters in the past year. The results are presented in Table 3.2. Five respondents used the Maintenance Enforcement Program, and four clients hired a private lawyer. Two clients each had used Legal Aid Alberta and

Calgary Legal Guidance. One client each used the University of Calgary's Student Legal Assistance, a private mediator, and the Child Support Recalculation Program.

**Table 3.1**

**Clients' Use of Family Justice Services in the Past Year**

Services	Service Used					
	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Parenting After Separation (PAS) Seminar	3	30.0	7	70.0	10	100.0
Family Mediation Services	2	20.0	8	80.0	10	100.0
Family Law Inquiries Counter	7	70.0	3	30.0	10	100.0
Family Justice Intake Services	4	40.0	6	60.0	10	100.0
Family Court Counsellors	5	50.0	5	50.0	10	100.0
Dispute Resolution Officer (DRO) Services	1	10.0	9	90.0	10	100.0
Focus on Communication in Separation (FOCIS) Seminar	1	10.0	9	90.0	10	100.0
Parenting After Separation High Conflict (PASHC) Seminar	1	10.0	9	90.0	10	100.0
Child Protection and Intervention Mediation Services	0	0.0	10	100.0	10	100.0
Caseflow Conference	3	30.0	7	70.0	10	100.0

Source of data: Family Justice Services Client Follow-up Survey

Total N=10

Multiple Response Data

**Table 3.2**

**Clients' Use of Other Agencies/Services in the Past Year**

Services	Service Used					
	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Legal Aid Alberta (LAA)	2	30.0	8	70.0	10	100.0
Calgary Legal Guidance (CLG)	2	20.0	8	80.0	10	100.0
University of Calgary's Student Legal Assistance (SLA)	1	70.0	9	30.0	10	100.0
Private lawyer	4	40.0	6	60.0	10	100.0
Private mediator	1	50.0	9	50.0	10	100.0
Child Support Recalculation Program	1	10.0	9	90.0	10	100.0
Maintenance Enforcement Program	5	10.0	5	90.0	10	100.0
Other family law agencies/services <sup>1</sup>	2	10.0	8	90.0	10	100.0

Source of data: Family Justice Services Client Follow-up Survey

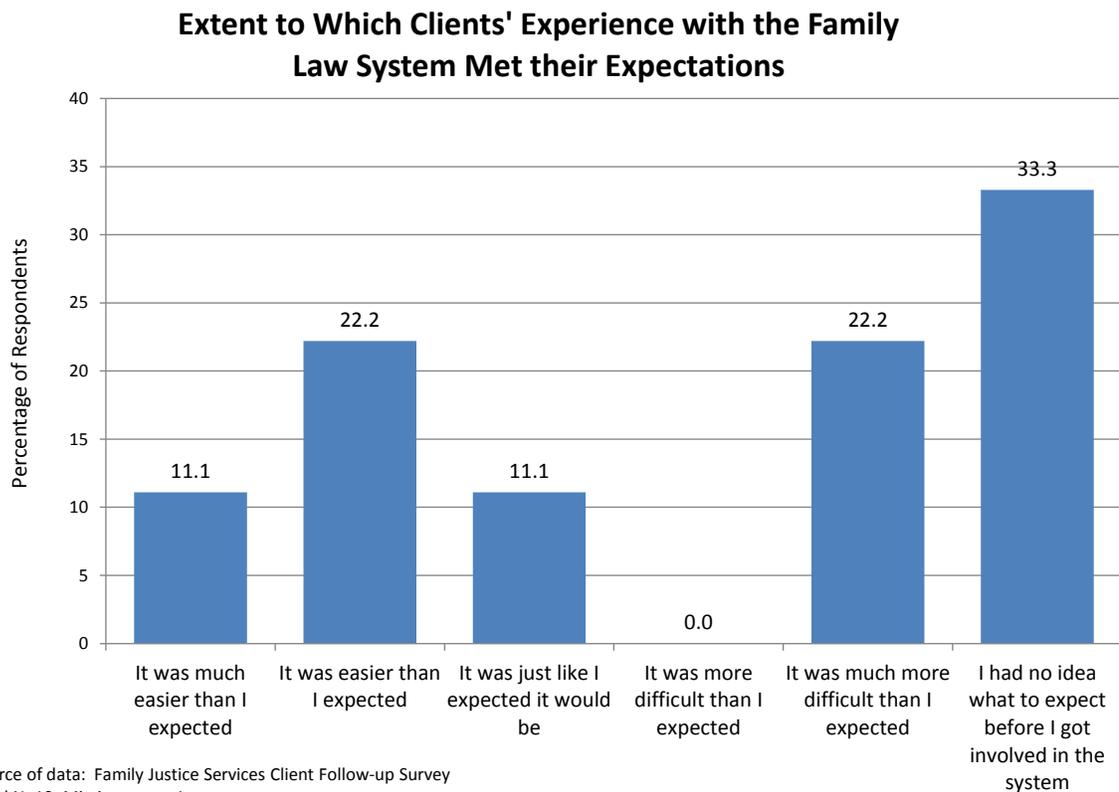
Total N=10

Multiple Response Data

<sup>1</sup> The other family law agencies/services used were not specified.

When people first become involved in the family law system, they often have expectations about what the experience will be like. Respondents were asked to what extent their experience with the family law system met their expectations, and the results are presented in Figure 3.1. For three clients, their experience was easier or much easier than they expected, and for two clients, their experience was much more difficult than they were expecting. One client said their experience was just like they expected it would be, and three clients had no idea what to expect before getting involved in the system.

**Figure 3.1**



### 3.3 Clients' Experiences Over Time

Clients who completed the pre-test survey were asked if they would be willing to complete a follow-up survey one year later. Of the 43 clients who agreed to participate in the follow-up survey, 10 completed the post-test survey. Clients were asked to provide their first name and year of birth to allow us to link their responses to the survey they completed the previous year, and eight clients provided this information. Even though the number of linked surveys is small, the data provided information regarding the family law issues that clients were still dealing with and the combination of services they received.

Of the eight matched surveys, six were completed by females, and two were completed by males. Respondents' ages ranged from 38 to 53, with a mean age of 44. Three of the eight clients reported that all the issues that brought them to FJS a year ago had been resolved, leaving five clients with unresolved issues. Of these, four clients were dealing with child support issues, two were dealing with parenting issues, one had a guardianship issue, and one was dealing with spousal support. Two of the clients were dealing with multiple issues.

One of the objectives of this study was to establish the combination of court services individuals receive when they access FJS. Respondents were asked in the pre-test which Family Justice Services they had used in the past and, in the post-test, which services they had used in the past year. The results varied greatly (see Table 3.3). Of the 10 Family Justice Services specified in the surveys, clients used an average of 5 services, with a range of 1 to 9, and no discernible pattern. The two clients accessing the most Family Justice Services (8 and 9 services each) were both dealing with unresolved parenting issues, and appear to be high conflict cases (having both attended the Parenting After Separation High Conflict Seminar).

**Table 3.3**

**Combination of Family Justice Services Used by Matched Clients  
Prior to the Pre-test and in the Past Year**

<b>Client #</b>	<b>Family Justice Services</b>
1	Dispute Resolution Officer
2	Family Law Inquiries Counter; Parenting After Separation Seminar
3	Family Law Inquires Counter; Family Court Counsellor; FJS Intake
4	Family Law Inquires Counter; Family Court Counsellor; FJS Intake; Caseflow Conference
5	Family Law Inquires Counter; Family Court Counsellor; FJS Intake; Caseflow Conference; Family Mediation Services; Dispute Resolution Officer
6	Family Law Inquires Counter; Parenting After Separation Seminar; FJS Intake; Caseflow Conference; Family Mediation Services; Focus on Communication in Separation
7	Family Law Inquires Counter; Parenting After Separation Seminar; Parenting After Separation High Conflict Seminar; FJS Intake; Caseflow Conference; Family Mediation Services; Focus on Communication in Separation; Dispute Resolution Officer
8	Family Law Inquires Counter; Family Court Counsellor; Parenting After Separation Seminar; Parenting After Separation High Conflict Seminar; FJS Intake; Caseflow Conference; Family Mediation Services; Focus on Communication in Separation; Dispute Resolution Officer

Source of data: Family Justice Services Client Survey and Family Justice Services Client Follow-up Survey.

Total N=8

Respondents to the post-test survey were also asked what other agencies or services they had accessed for help with their family law matters, and the results are presented in Table 3.4. Five of the eight respondents reported that they had used the Maintenance Enforcement Program in the past year. While none of the respondents had hired a lawyer at the time of the pre-test, one half ended up hiring a private lawyer in the ensuing year. Of the four clients with lawyers, two had resolved all of their issues and two still had unresolved issues. When combined with Family Justice Services, matched respondents used an average of 7 services for family law matters, with a range of 1 to 14.

**Table 3.4**

**Other Agencies or Services Used by Matched Clients in the Past Year**

<b>Client #</b>	<b>Other Agencies/Services</b>
1	--
2	Maintenance Enforcement Program
3	Private lawyer
4	--
5	Private lawyer; Calgary Legal Guidance; Maintenance Enforcement Program; Other <sup>1</sup>
6	Maintenance Enforcement Program
7	Private lawyer; Legal Aid Alberta; Private mediator; Child Support Recalculation Program; Maintenance Enforcement Program; Other <sup>1</sup>
8	Private lawyer; University of Calgary's Student Legal Assistance; Maintenance Enforcement Program

Source of data: Family Justice Services Client Survey and Family Justice Services Client Follow-up Survey.

Total N=8

<sup>1</sup> "Other" agency or service not specified

One of the research objectives of this study was to assess the impact of services received on outcomes in family law cases. Unfortunately, there were not enough data to properly address this research objective. It does not appear that the number of services received is correlated to the resolution of the case. In this small sample of matched clients, three of the eight had resolved all of their issues, and two had received a total of four services, while one had received a total of nine different services. When looking at the three resolved cases, all three had accessed the Family Law Inquiries Counter, Family Court Counsellors, and the FJS Intake Service. Two of the three had hired a private lawyer.



## 4.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the study was to assess the impact of court services on the experience of individuals proceeding in family law cases. The objectives of the study were as follows:

- (1) To establish a profile of individuals who access Calgary's Family Justice Services (e.g., demographics, nature of case, previous experience with family law system and Court Services, perceptions of their service needs, etc.);
- (2) To establish the combination of court services individuals receive when they access FJS;
- (3) To examine clients' experience and level of satisfaction with services received; and
- (4) To assess the impact of services received on outcomes in family law cases.

The Family Justice Services Client Survey was a pre-test that collected data from a sample of clients visiting Calgary's Family Justice Services (FJS). The purpose of the survey was to establish a FJS client profile – i.e., demographic information, previous experience with court services, nature of their case, perceptions of needs, whether they have legal representation, and their experience that day with the court services.

The Family Justice Services Client Follow-up Survey was a post-test that collected data one year later from clients who completed the pre-test and agreed to participate in the follow-up survey. The purpose of the post-test survey was to examine clients' experiences with the services they received over the course of the year, and whether their expectations were met.

This chapter presents summaries of both the pre-test and post-test survey findings, and discusses conclusions that can be drawn from the findings.

### 4.1 Summary of Pre-test Survey Findings

#### 4.1.1 Demographic Characteristics

- Over one-half of the 102 survey respondents were female.
- The average age of respondents was 36 years.
- When participants were asked how they had found out about FJS, the most common response was through a friend or family member, followed by in family court and from a lawyer.

- Over one-half of clients indicated that they had previously used services offered by FJS. The most common services previously used were attendance at the Parenting after Separation (PAS) Seminar, Family Mediation Services, and the Family Law Information Centre.

#### 4.1.2 Client Needs

- Almost two-thirds of clients said that the issue that prompted their current visit to FJS was parenting. The next most common issues reported were child support and guardianship.
- When clients were asked what services they thought they needed from FJS, the most frequent response, provided by one-half of participants, was general information, followed by help with completing forms, legal advice, and mediation.
- The substantial majority of survey respondents said that they do not currently have a lawyer helping them with their family law issues.

#### 4.1.3 Client Experiences with Family Justice Services

- Clients reported that they had to stand in an average of two lineups during their current visit to FJS and few clients said that they had spent time waiting in a wrong line.
- Clients said that they had spent an average of seven minutes waiting in line at the FJS window.
- Very few clients said that they had children waiting with them in line during their current visit to FJS and approximately one-half said that they had an appointment booked for that day.
- When asked what help aids they had made use of during their current visit to FJS, almost one-third said that they had picked up brochures, while relatively few said that they had used the Internet or had printed materials while they were there.
- The substantial majority of clients indicated that they were very satisfied with the assistance they had received at FJS during their current visit.

## 4.2 **Summary of Post-test Survey Findings**

### 4.2.1 Background Information

- Two-thirds of the 10 survey respondents were female.
- The average age of respondents was 45 years.

- One-half of the respondents said the issues that brought them to FJS a year ago were resolved, and of these, most said the Family Justice Services they received assisted them in reaching a resolution.
- One-half of the respondents were still dealing with issues that brought them to FJS a year ago, and these issues were child support, parenting (custody and access), guardianship, and spousal support.

#### 4.2.2 Client Experiences

- The most common Family Justice Services used by clients over the past year were the Family Law Inquiries Counter, Family Court Counsellors, and Family Justice Intake Services.
- The most common other services used by clients over the past year were the Maintenance Enforcement Program and a private lawyer.
- When asked to what extent their experience with the family law system met their expectations, the results were mixed, with three clients stating it was easier or much easier than they expected, and two clients stating it was much more difficult. One client thought it was just like they expected it would be, and three clients had no idea what to expect.

#### 4.2.3 Clients' Experiences Over Time

- Eight clients completed both the pre-test and post-test surveys, and six of these were female.
- The average age of matched respondents was 44 years.
- Three of the eight matched respondents said the issues that brought them to FJS a year ago were resolved.
- Five of the eight matched respondents were still dealing with issues that brought them to FJS a year ago, and these issues were child support, parenting (custody and access), guardianship, and spousal support.
- Of the 10 Family Justice Services specified in the surveys, clients used an average of 5, with a range of 1 to 9. When combined with "other" services, clients used an average of 7 services, with a range of 1 to 14.
- The most common "other" program accessed by matched respondents was the Maintenance Enforcement Program.

- Four of the eight respondents hired a private lawyer in the year following completion of the pre-test survey.
- The number of services used by matched respondents does not appear to be correlated with the resolution of their case. Indeed, it may be more indicative of high conflict cases.

### **4.3 Conclusions**

Most Canadian jurisdictions have experienced a rise in the number of self-represented parties in family court, and governments have attempted to address this issue by increasing the availability of information and the number of services designed to assist these individuals. In Alberta, these supports include Family Justice Services (FJS).

The Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family (the Institute) conducted this study to examine clients' experiences with accessing Calgary's FJS. The data collected from the pre-test survey established a profile of individuals who access Calgary's Family Justice Services and examined clients' experience and level of satisfaction with services received. The data collected from the post-test survey provided additional valuable information regarding the progress and outcome of clients' cases.

This section of the report discusses the findings within the context of the research objectives stated in Section 1.2

#### **4.3.1 Profile of Calgary's FJS Clients**

The pre-test survey findings indicated that the substantial majority of respondents did not have a lawyer at the time of their visit to FJS. This is not surprising since one of the goals of FJS is to provide assistance to self-represented parties. In addition, many individuals visit FJS early in the family breakdown process; it is possible that some of these individuals will go on to have legal representation as their cases progress. Indeed, the post-test survey found that 40% of the respondents hired a private lawyer in the ensuing year.

Over one-half of pre-test survey respondents indicated that they had made use of one or more Family Justice Services prior to their current visit. This suggests that clients find the services offered by FJS useful and that they are willing to visit the centre multiple times as their needs change while moving through the separation or divorce process. Most commonly, clients said that they were looking for general information or assistance with completing forms during their current visit to FJS. Also, over one-third of respondents said that they were looking for legal advice; however, relatively few clients said that they were seeking Legal Aid.

The most common help aid that clients reported using during the FJS visit was accessing brochures, which is consistent with the majority saying that they were looking for general information. It is therefore important that FJS ensures that the information contained in the available brochures is current, and periodically assesses whether written materials on new topics should be made available to members of the public.

Almost one-third of respondents said that they needed mediation services. This is a positive finding and suggests that members of the public are aware that dispute resolution mechanisms other than the traditional litigation model are available and may be a desirable alternative.

The issues that clients said had brought them to FJS for their current visit were most likely to be child-related: clients were most likely to say that they were looking for assistance with parenting, child support, or guardianship issues. Few FJS clients said that they were seeking assistance with issues directly related to their former partner such as spousal support or property division. This suggests that achieving the best possible outcomes for children may be the paramount consideration for many individuals going through family breakdown.

#### 4.3.2 Combination of Court Services Received by Clients and Impact on Outcome

In the pre-test survey, over one-half of clients indicated that they had previously used services offered by FJS, and the most common services previously used were attendance at the Parenting after Separation (PAS) Seminar, Family Mediation Services, and the Family Law Information Centre. In the post-test survey, the most common Family Justice Services used in the past year were the Family Law Inquiries Counter, Family Court Counsellors, and Family Justice Intake Services. The most common “other” services used were the Maintenance Enforcement Program and a private lawyer.

Analysis of the matched respondents from the pre-test and post-test surveys found that clients used an average of 5 of the 10 Family Justice Services specified in the surveys, with a range of 1 to 9. When combined with “other” services, clients used an average of 7 services, with a range of 1 to 14. The number of services used by matched respondents does not appear to be correlated with the resolution of their case, but rather is more indicative of high conflict cases. This suggests that these cases may require a different response that specifically addresses the unique challenges present in high conflict cases. It may be beneficial to identify these cases early in the process and reroute them accordingly. Such an approach would be consistent with the Action Committee on Access to Justice in Civil and Family Matter’s (2013) recommendation that early “front end” services should include triage services to effectively channel people to required services.

#### 4.3.3 FJS Clients' Experience and Satisfaction at the Pre-test

Overall, clients were very positive about their experience during their visit to FJS and expressed very high levels of satisfaction in the pre-test survey. This is very encouraging, especially given the emotional turmoil surrounding family breakdown for most people. FJS staff should be commended for making the experience of visiting FJS so positive for many people. In fact, in open-ended comments, many clients mentioned specific staff members by name and expressed great appreciation for their level of knowledge and their assistance.

For the most part, the procedures in place at FJS for processing clients through the system seem to be working quite well: the majority of clients reported short wait times in lineups and indicated that they had to wait in few different lines during their visit. There were a few cases where clients indicated that they waited in a wrong lineup: the most common reasons that they provided for this were that the signs were unclear or that they had been misdirected.

In summary, the findings from the pre-test survey suggest that FJS is providing very valuable services that clients find useful and are willing to access more than once as their needs change.

#### 4.3.4 FJS Clients' Experience at the Post-test

Clients were asked to what extent their experience with the family law system met their expectations and the results were mixed, with some clients stating they had no idea what to expect. It may be beneficial if clients could be told at the outset what they can expect regarding the process and procedures, requirements, and likely outcomes, i.e., a "reality check." The Canadian Bar Association (2013) makes the point that court staff must constantly walk a fine line to distinguish between legal information, which they can offer, and legal advice, which they cannot provide. This distinction is explained to clients during the process to ensure they have realistic expectations of the services they can receive from Family Justice Services.

In summary, almost two-thirds of the small number of respondents to the post-test survey reported that the assistance they received from Family Justice Services made their experiences easier or much easier, even in cases that had not yet received resolution.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **FAMILY JUSTICE SERVICES CLIENT SURVEY**



## FAMILY JUSTICE SERVICES CLIENT SURVEY

Family Justice Services wants to know more about the services our clients need, and how well we are meeting those needs. Completing this brief survey will help us. Please complete the survey, put it in the envelope provided, and drop it off in the bin located outside Window # 5 at Family Justice Services. We appreciate your help! Your answers will be kept confidential, and will have no effect on any services that you might receive.

This survey is being conducted by the Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family (CRILF) in accordance with Section 33(c) of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. If you have any questions regarding the study, please contact CRILF at 403-216-0340.

### YOUR BACKGROUND

1. Are you:     Female     Male
  
2. In what year were you born? \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. How did you find out about Family Justice Services?  

<input type="checkbox"/> Lawyer	<input type="checkbox"/> Internet
<input type="checkbox"/> Family Court	<input type="checkbox"/> Media
<input type="checkbox"/> Parenting After Separation (PAS) Seminar	<input type="checkbox"/> Friend/Family Member
<input type="checkbox"/> Police	<input type="checkbox"/> Social Worker/Psychologist
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____	
  
4. Have you used any of the following Family Justice Services in the past? (Check all that apply)  

<input type="checkbox"/> Family Law Information Centre (FLIC)	<input type="checkbox"/> Caseflow Conference
<input type="checkbox"/> Parenting After Separation (PAS) Seminar	<input type="checkbox"/> Family Mediation Services
<input type="checkbox"/> Parenting After Separation High Conflict (PASHC) Seminar	<input type="checkbox"/> Child Protection & Intervention Mediation Services
<input type="checkbox"/> Focus on Communication in Separation (FOCIS)	<input type="checkbox"/> Family Court Counsellors
<input type="checkbox"/> Family Justice Services Intake Services	<input type="checkbox"/> Dispute Resolution Officer Services

### YOUR NEEDS

5. What issues brought you to Family Justice Services today? (Check all that apply)  

<input type="checkbox"/> Separation	<input type="checkbox"/> Guardianship
<input type="checkbox"/> Divorce	<input type="checkbox"/> Spousal Support
<input type="checkbox"/> Parenting (Custody/Access)	<input type="checkbox"/> Property Division
<input type="checkbox"/> Child Support	<input type="checkbox"/> Personal Safety
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____	

6. What services do you think you need from Family Justice Services? (Check all that apply)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> General Information                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Financial Assistance                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Help with Forms                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Legal Aid                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education Seminars                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Child Support Determination                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Legal Advice                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Child Support Recalculation                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mediation                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Supervised Visitation/Exchange              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Counselling                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting Assessment/Intervention Services  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Restraining Order/Emergency Protection Order | <input type="checkbox"/> Child Protection and Intervention Mediation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____                 |  |

7. Do you currently have a lawyer helping you with your issues?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I have a private lawyer that I hired                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I have a lawyer from Legal Aid |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I have met with a Duty Counsel lawyer at the courthouse | <input type="checkbox"/> No                                  |

### YOUR EXPERIENCE TODAY

8. What is today's date? \_\_\_\_\_(dd/mm/yyyy)

9. How many lineups did you stand in at the Courthouse today? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Did you spend time standing in a wrong lineup?  Yes  No

If yes, why? (Check all that apply)

- Someone misdirected me
- The signs were unclear
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

11. How long did you wait in line at the Family Justice Services window? \_\_\_\_\_ minutes

12. Did you have children waiting in line with you?  Yes  No

13. Did you have an appointment booked for today?  Yes  No

14. Did you use any of the following help aids at Family Justice Services today? (Check all that apply)

- Internet  Printing  Picked up Brochures

15. How satisfied were you with the assistance you received today?

- Very Satisfied  Somewhat Satisfied  Not Satisfied

16. What would have made your experience today more helpful?

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## Thank you for completing this survey.

We are also interested in knowing what services you may receive over the next year, and if they are helpful. Are you willing to complete a follow-up survey in about a year?

- No, I am not willing to do a follow-up survey
- Yes, I am willing to do a follow-up survey, and here is my contact information (contact information will be kept confidential and will only be used to contact you about the follow-up survey):

Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Please contact me by:

e-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

**OR**

mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Once you have completed this survey, please put it in the envelope provided and drop it off in the bin located outside Window # 5 at Family Justice Services. If you cannot drop it off today, your completed survey can be mailed to the following address:**

**Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family  
Suite 510, 1816 Crowchild Trail N.W.  
Calgary, Alberta T2M 3Y7**



## **APPENDIX B**

### **FAMILY JUSTICE SERVICES CLIENT FOLLOW-UP SURVEY**





	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Not Satisfied
<input type="checkbox"/> Family Mediation Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Parenting After Separation High Conflict (PASHC) Seminar	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Child Protection & Intervention Mediation Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Focus on Communication in Separation (FOCIS)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Family Court Counsellors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Family Justice Services Intake Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Dispute Resolution Officer Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Did you access any of the following other agencies or services for help with your family law matters and, if so, how satisfied were you with that agency/service? (please check all that apply)

	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Not Satisfied
<input type="checkbox"/> Legal Aid Alberta (LAA)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Calgary Legal Guidance (CLG)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> University of Calgary's Student Legal Assistance (SLA)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Private lawyer that you hired	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Private mediator that you hired	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Child Support Recalculation Program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Maintenance Enforcement Program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Other family law agencies/services (please specify) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. When people first become involved in the family law system, they often have expectations about what the experience will be like. To what extent did your experience with the family law system meet your expectations?

- It was much easier than I expected
- It was easier than I expected
- It was just like I expected it would be
- It was more difficult than I expected
- It was much more difficult than I expected
- I had no idea what to expect before I got involved in the system

In what ways did your experiences meet or not meet your expectations?

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8. The assistance I received from Family Justice Services:

- made my experiences much easier
- made my experiences easier
- was of little help to me

What aspects of the assistance you received from Family Justice Services did you find especially helpful or not helpful?

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