

EVALUATION OF
LAW HELP ONTARIO
AS A MODEL FOR ASSISTING
SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS IN
THE ONTARIO SUPERIOR COURT OF JUSTICE
AT 393 UNIVERSITY AVENUE IN TORONTO



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Final Report

By Ken Smith, Ph.D
The Resource for Great Programs, Inc.

November 5, 2009

I. Introduction

Self-representation is a growing phenomenon in the Ontario Superior Court of Justice in Toronto.

Approximately 10 to 15 percent of the 42,900 civil litigants who entered the Superior Court in 2008 – between 4,300 and 6,400 people – were self-represented. These percentages reflect the range of subjective estimates by Court staff and judiciary who serve these litigants on a daily basis.¹

The economic downturn of 2008-09 has increased the challenges this phenomenon presents to the Court, which include additional strain on an already overburdened court system, more litigants showing up with missing papers, more litigants needing explanation of fundamental concepts before the court process can proceed, more aborted hearings, and higher costs for all parties.

In late 2007, the Law Help Ontario (LHO) project was launched as a response to these challenges. Founded by Pro Bono Law Ontario (PBLO), the LHO project was the product of a two-year strategic planning effort by PBLO staff, Superior Court judges, Managers of Court Operations and partners from several of Toronto's leading law firms. In this process, LHO's founders did extensive research and applied the results to build into the LHO model the best practices from self-help assistance programs across North America.

One of the terms of LHO's funding – a pilot project grant from the Law Foundation of Ontario – was that the project be rigorously evaluated after the first year of operation.

1. See Appendix A for derivation of this estimate.

THIS REPORT AT A GLANCE

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Our firm, *The Resource for Great Programs, Inc.*, was selected to conduct the evaluation.

This evaluation shows that LHO is working. Major stakeholders agree it is delivering valuable results. We are recommending two kinds of next steps: Building on what is already working to make these results available to more clients and adding elements that will leverage what LHO has learned in its first two years of operation.

II. Questions Addressed by the Evaluation

- Who are the clients of the LHO project?
- What are their legal problems being presented for resolution?
- What services are being provided?
- What outcomes are clients achieving as a result of the services they receive from LHO?

■ How is LHO performing from the perspective of the following other stakeholders?

- ▶ Judges and Masters of the Superior Court
- ▶ Front-line court staff at 393 University Avenue
- ▶ Pro bono lawyers who volunteer at LHO
- ▶ Law firms who provide their lawyers to serve as pro bono duty counsel at LHO

■ What opportunities do these results suggest for improving services and outcomes of the LHO model?



III. Methods Used

Our evaluation team conducted face-to-face and telephone interviews with major LHO stakeholders including Superior Court judges and Masters; front-line Court staff and managers at the Superior Court building at 393 University Avenue in Toronto; law firm litigation partners; individual private lawyers who had served as pro bono duty counsel at LHO; and LHO front-line staff. We collected supplemental data from a broader sampling of stakeholders through on-line, web-based surveys of Court staff; judges and Masters; and pro bono lawyers. In addition, we analyzed intake data and other operational client and service statistics collected by LHO staff during 2008, and conducted a scientific telephone survey of clients who had been served by LHO in 2008-09.

IV. Purpose and Design of the LHO Project

A. Purpose: LHO Addresses Serious Challenges Faced by Self-

Represented Litigants in the Superior Court.

In interviews with Court staff, judges, LHO law firm litigation partners and the LHO's founders, we asked about the challenges they think there are for self-represented litigants and the implications for other stakeholders having important roles to play in maintaining the effective and efficient functioning of the Court. Exhibit 1 presents a tabulation of the responses volunteered by interview participants in response to our open-ended question about challenges they see.² Following is a summary of their responses.

■ **For self-represented litigants,** the central challenge is navigating the Superior Court system without access to a lawyer or the money to pay for one. The stresses of litigation are compounded by the extraordinary complexity of the Superior Court process and the intimidation litigants feel as lay people facing highly trained and skilled lawyers on the other side.

² Please see Appendix B for details regarding the interviews conducted for this evaluation.

METHODS USED IN THE EVALUATION

Interviews

- ▶ Justices and Masters in the Superior Court
- ▶ Front-Line Court Staff
- ▶ Law Firm Partners and Pro Bono Duty Counsel
- ▶ Staff of the LHO project

Scientific Telephone Survey

- ▶ 100 Clients Served by LHO

On-line (web) surveys

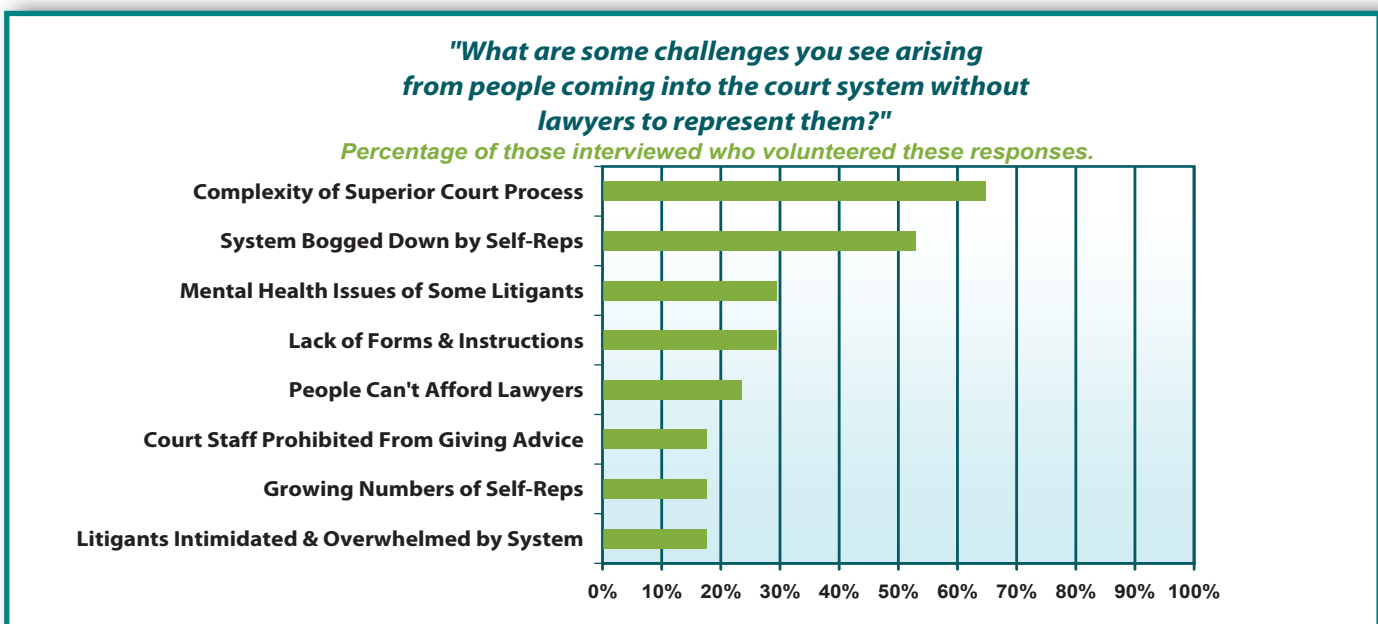
- ▶ Justices and Masters
- ▶ Front-Line Court Staff
- ▶ Pro Bono Lawyers Who've Served as Duty Counsel at LHO

Analysis of service statistics kept by the LHO

- ▶ Numbers of and characteristics people served
- ▶ Types of Services Provided

■ **For Court staff,** the most significant challenge is the additional workload created by a growing volume of self-represented litigants seeking direction and information. Since an estimated 10 to 15 percent of all litigants are self-represented, each taking much more time to serve than the lawyers and process servers who appear on behalf of other litigants, Court staff wind

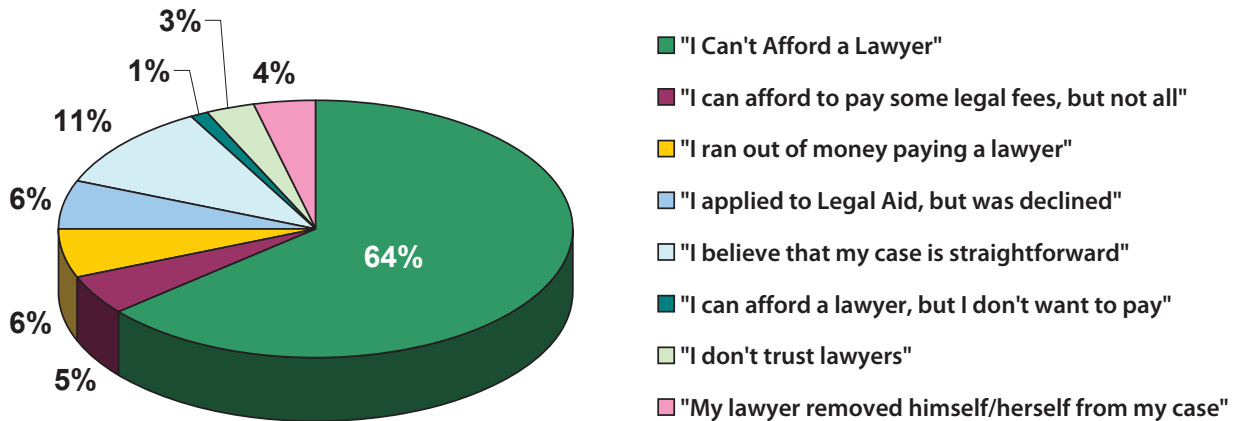
Exhibit 1 Self representation presents challenges both to litigants and the Court.



"I CAN'T AFFORD A LAWYER."

The overwhelming reason people come into court without a lawyer is they believe they can't afford a lawyer. Eighty-one percent of respondents to a client survey by LHO gave economic reasons for coming to LHO. This problem has been exacerbated by the economic downturn of 2008-2009.

Reasons Clients Use LHO



up spending a disproportionate amount of their time serving “self-reps.” Moreover, this work can be stressful and frustrating. Litigants expect court staff to help them, and often don’t understand the distinction between information about the court process (which court staff can provide) and legal advice (which they can’t provide.) They leave dissatisfied, sometimes angry, and Court staff are left feeling their efforts at helping have been unsuccessful.

■ **For judges and Masters**, the central challenge is trying to provide a fair process while keeping the docket moving in an over-burdened court system. Like Court staff, judges have to spend more time explaining the process to self-represented litigants. Often they must adjourn hearings when litigants show up without key documents that are required under Court procedures.

As a result of these challenges, the people we interviewed feel that the Superior Court is being bogged down by the growing number of self-represented litigants. Several of the judges, masters and court staff we interviewed emphasized that the Superior Court is not designed for “do it yourself;” it operates on the presumption that all litigants will be represented by lawyers who will make the process go smoothly. Yet, for economic reasons, people are compelled to go it alone, bogging down the Court and imposing additional costs on all parties with negative consequences.

The problem is exacerbated by characteristics of some self-represented litigants.

■ **Language and cultural diversity.**

Toronto has been described as the most diverse city in North America. According to the LHO 2008 Annual Report, 28 percent of LHO clients speak English only as a

second language. (For comparison, one to five percent is a typical figure for U.S. legal aid programs we have evaluated, although the number is higher in cities such as San Francisco and New York.) Self-represented litigants who are not fluent in English face exceptional difficulties in navigating the Superior Court system.

■ **Mental health challenges.** Thirty of the judges and court staff we interviewed volunteered the observation that mental health issues can make it especially challenging for litigants to represent themselves and for the Court to serve them.

Several people we interviewed pointed out that the experience of self-represented litigants, good or bad, affects their perception of the entire court system. (See the box, “*The Public’s Perception of Fairness* on page 4). Litigants are already under stress

as a result of their legal situation. If they perceive they have been treated like second-class citizens, they often leave feeling angry and frustrated. They blame “the system” for their bad experience. This is particularly troubling because their tax dollars fund this very system.

B. Design of the LHO:

The Model Combines “Best Practices” from Pro Se Assistance Programs Across North America.

Law Help Ontario was designed as a pilot, incorporating the best practices found by the implementation team in a review of self-help assistance programs across the United States and Canada. Many of these programs are located in California, where in 1999 the state legislature appropriated \$10 million (US) per year for self-help assistance projects. This predictable funding stream has launched about 100 self-help projects across the state and fostered widespread innovation in models and tools for assisting self-represented litigants.



THE PUBLIC’S PERCEPTION OF FAIRNESS

By helping litigants navigate the Court process, LHO levels the playing field for those without lawyers.

The experience that litigants have in Superior Court affects public perceptions about fairness of the court system. Litigants...

- ▶ Are already under stress.
- ▶ Do not understand why court staff can’t help them.
- ▶ Do not understand why the law doesn’t support their side.
- ▶ Are intimidated by the other side having a lawyer.

If those using the Court feel they have been treated as second-class citizens, they often leave feeling angry and frustrated. They blame “the system” for their bad experience.

The LHO project is having a positive impact on that perception.

- ▶ Fifty-two percent of LHO clients whose cases were complete reported they had received favorable rulings from the Court.
- ▶ A solid majority – 64 percent – of all LHO clients we surveyed felt that the justice system had dealt fairly with them.

Based on the lessons reviewed by the implementation team, the LHO project was established as a walk-in help centre on the first floor of the courthouse at 393 University Avenue. It provides:

- **An on-site location** – A convenient place for self-represented litigants to obtain help;

- **Intake and triage** – Trained paralegals interview each applicant and steer him/her to appropriate resources;
- **Written materials** – “How-to” guides, forms, sample documents;
- **Computers** - for use by clients in preparing documents;
- **“Access to Justice” software** – automated document assembly for commonly-needed court forms and documents;
- **Assistance in using resources** – from paralegals and law students;
- **Legal advice** – from pro bono lawyers (“duty counsel”);
- **Referrals** – To other legal and non-legal agencies that can help;
- **Representation** in Superior Court – if resources permit and if the client’s situation warrants it (thus far limited to a few instances).

V. Evaluation Findings: The LHO is working.

As an overview, we found broad agreement among the stakeholders we surveyed and interviewed that LHO...

- Is helping clients.
- Is filling a crucial gap in the justice system.
- Provides a model and a service that should be expanded.

The stakeholders we talked with believe that the pilot project has been a success. It is having a significant impact in addressing the challenges presented by the growing trend toward self-representation among litigants in the Superior Court of Justice.

With that overall consensus as a starting point, stakeholders also made suggestions for ways in which the model could be improved.

The opportunity most frequently suggested would be to address the problem of conflicts of interest for pro bono duty counsel, which all too often prevents lawyers from being able to help particular clients. Another often-mentioned suggestion was increasing the capacity of LHO to serve more clients and reduce wait times. Extending

the model to other locations in Ontario and expanding opportunities for pro bono lawyers to represent litigants in Court hearings were other suggestions.

These findings are presented in more detail below from the perspectives of four major stakeholders of the LHO project:

- **The clients** – the self-represented litigants who were served by LHO;
- **The pro bono lawyers** – the lawyers who volunteered their time to serve as pro bono duty counsel at LHO;
- **The judges** – the judges and Masters who are seeing a growing number of self-represented litigants in Superior Court;
- **The court staff** – the Managers of Court Operations (MCOs) who serve self-represented litigants each day at the court intake desk on the 10th Floor at 393 University Avenue.

A. The Client's Perspective: *"I could not have done this without LHO. I am not eligible for free legal aid and I could not afford to pay a lawyer any more money."*

The LHO project served 2,914 clients in 2008, its first full year of operation.

Based on Court staffs' and judges' estimates of the percentages of all litigants who are self-represented, this figure translates into between one-sixth and one-fourth of the self-represented litigants who used the Superior Court in that year.

We surveyed a random sample of 100 of those clients by telephone for this

PROFILE OF LHO CLIENTS	
2008 Statistics	
Total # Client Visits	2,914
Average # Visits Per Client	2.07
Age	
18-34	16%
35-54	47%
55-64	23%
65+	14%
Education	
Below high school	15%
High school	21%
Some university/college	23%
College graduate or above	41%
Languages	
English as a second language	28%

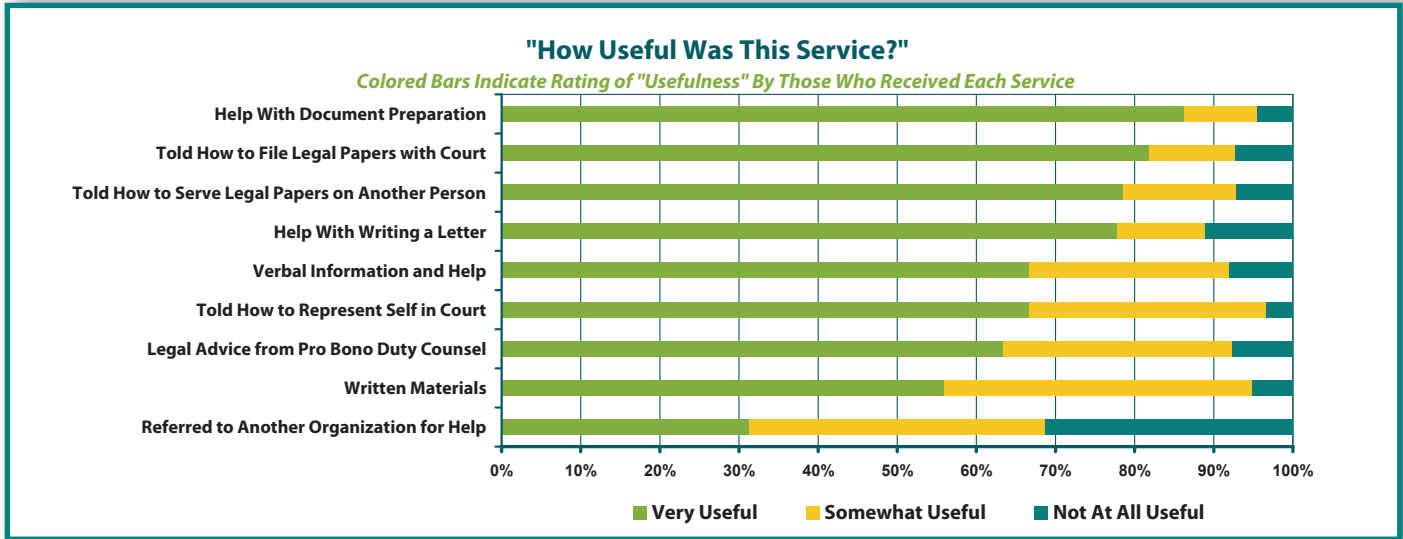
evaluation. In the interviews, we asked about the legal matters that brought the litigants to Superior Court; the services they received from LHO; the action they had taken using the resources and services they had received; the results (outcomes) they had obtained; and their feelings about the experience.³

Services received by clients. Clients told us that LHO provided a place to get legal help, including resources for completing each step of the litigation process and guidance from a trained paralegal. Litigants obtained access to computers and specialized document

³ Please see Appendix C for details of the client survey conducted for this evaluation.



Exhibit 2 All of LHO's Services Were Deemed Useful By Large Majorities of Clients Who Received Them.



assembly software; guidebooks and forms for navigating the Superior Court process; legal advice from pro bono duty counsel; and in a few cases (resources permitting), representation by a pro bono lawyer in Superior Court.

Usefulness of the services and resources obtained from LHO. Exhibit 2 (above) summarizes the ratings clients gave to the services they received. “Help with document preparation” topped the list; 95 percent rated this service to be “highly” or

“somewhat” useful to them. All but two of the services received “highly” or “somewhat” useful ratings from over 90 percent of those who received them. The exceptions were “help with writing a letter” (89 percent) and “referred to another organization for help” (69 percent).

Action taken by clients using the help they received. The survey indicated that services that require follow-up, such as instructions on how to file legal papers, were acted

upon by a high percentage of clients. Exhibit 3 shows that more than 75 percent of respondents answered “Yes” to the question, “Did you do what the advocate suggested?” for all categories of service. If we add in the responses from those who answered they “partially” did what they were advised to do, we find that between 85 and 95 percent of these clients took action based on the guidance they received from LHO.

Exhibit 3 The Vast Majority Of LHO Clients Reported They Followed Up On The Guidance They Received from LHO.

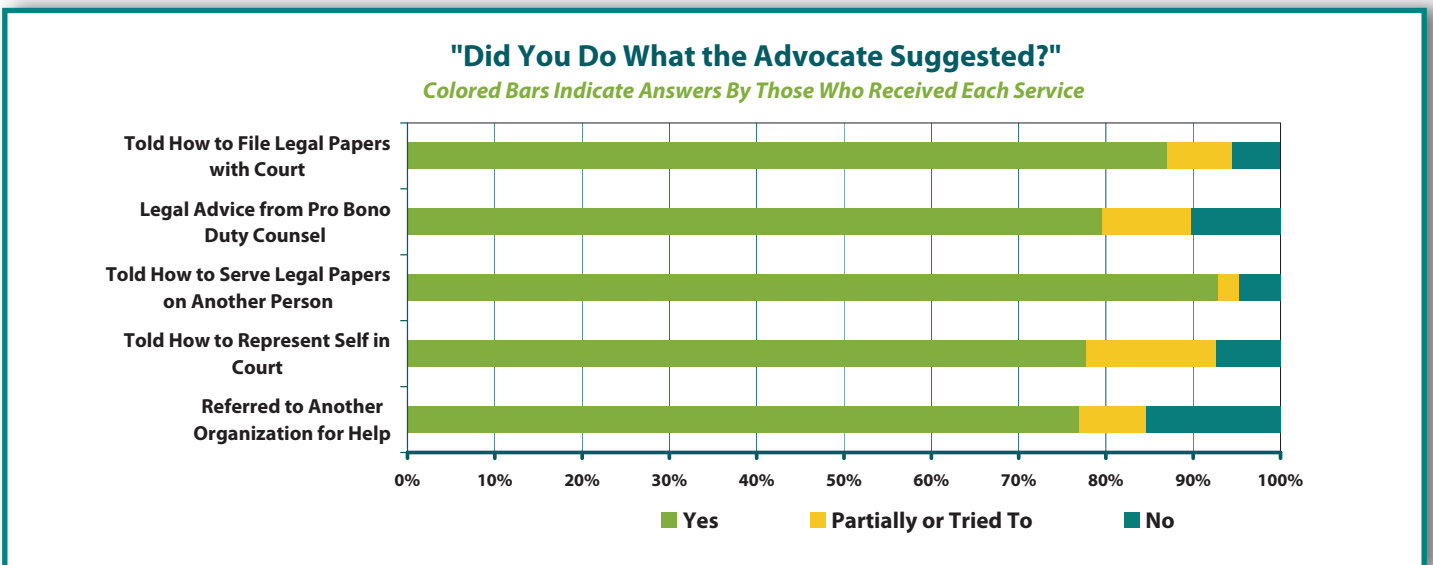
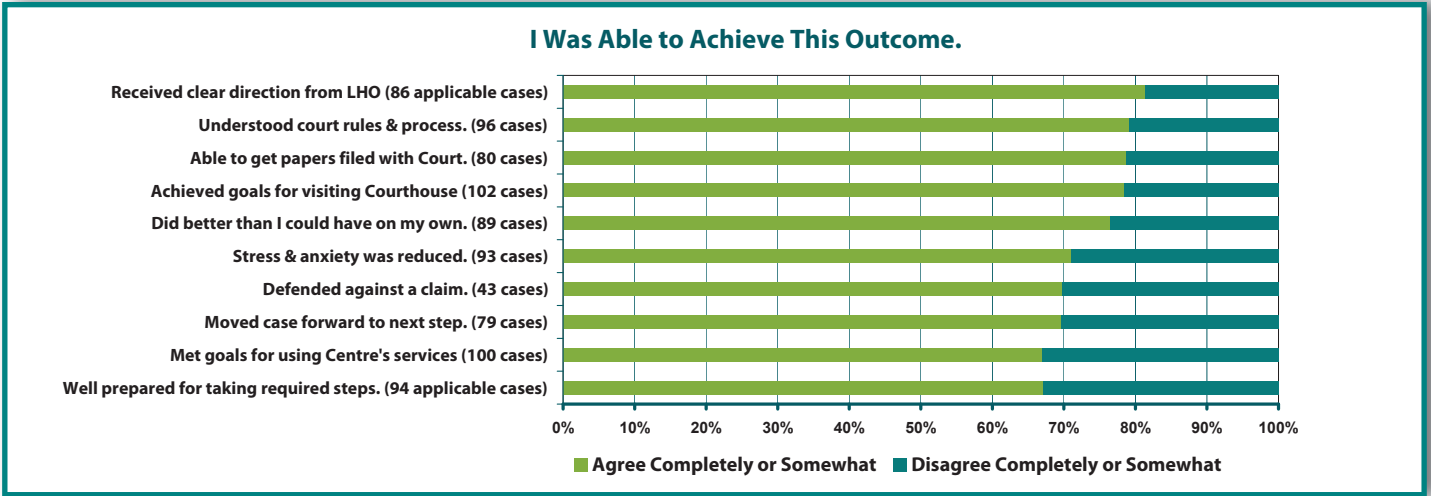


Exhibit 4 Between 64 and 80 percent agreed “completely” or “somewhat” that they were able to achieve positive short-term outcomes.



Outcomes achieved. In the survey, we asked clients if they agreed or disagreed with specific assertions about outcomes they achieved as a result of services they received from LHO. These we divided into two types: immediate, short-term outcomes such as understanding the court rules and process clients were involved in at the time they consulted LHO, and ultimate outcomes such as getting a favorable ruling from the Court.

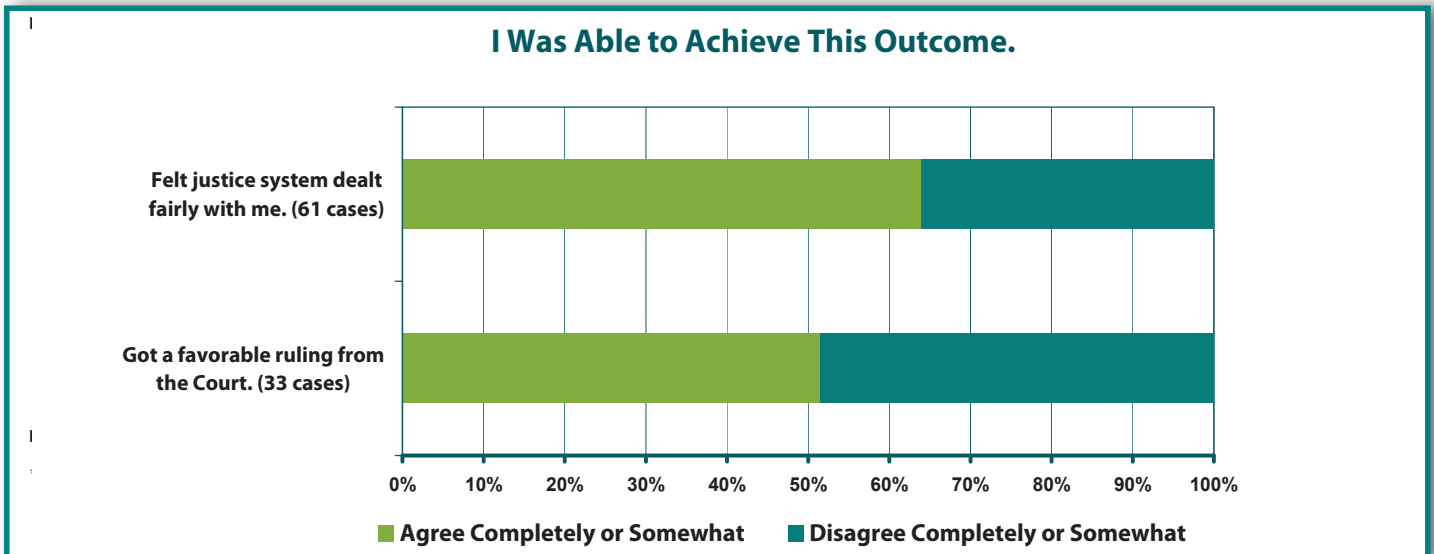
Exhibit 4 summarizes the responses to questions about short-term outcomes. The scope of these reflects the reality of the role LHO plays in the client’s case: LHO answers questions, provides resources, gives direction and advice, and helps the client move his or her case to the next step.

For these short-term outcomes, the percentages ranged from 64 percent who said they “felt well prepared for

taking required steps” to 82 percent who said they “received clear direction from LHO.”

Exhibit 5 shows the responses to two longer-term outcomes over which LHO necessarily has limited influence. For these, more than half (52 percent) felt they “got a favorable ruling from the Court” and 64 percent “felt the justice system dealt fairly with me.”

Exhibit 5 More than half of clients surveyed agreed “completely” or “somewhat” that they were able to achieve the following global outcomes.



WHAT THE LAW FIRM LITIGATION PARTNERS SAY ABOUT LHO

▶ **LHO provides helps young lawyers to gain useful skills.**

“It’s a great opportunity for our associates to think on their feet...get client counseling skills.”

▶ **Service at LHO is a positive experience...a boost for our lawyers’ morale.**

“The lawyers we send to LHO are enthusiastic.”...“They have universally loved the experience.”

▶ **LHO helps our firm to attract highly qualified young lawyers.**

“Some law students get excited about public service. LHO is a way to attract young lawyers who are seeking a firm that does pro bono work.”

▶ **LHO allows us to provide a service that enhances our image as a law firm.**

“It helps us attract clients who care about doing business with socially responsible firms.”

B. The Pro Bono Lawyer’s

Perspective: *“It’s a fantastic program... A valuable service to the public and should be expanded.”*

A major innovation by LHO founders was to make lawyers available to clients – pro bono “duty counsel” – on a walk-in basis throughout each day for consultation and legal advice. By comparison, most self-help programs across North America focus on providing information and materials that are primarily procedural – for example, how to conduct oneself at a court hearing or how to prepare and file legal papers. The availability of consultation and legal advice from pro bono duty counsel enhances the project’s ability to provide substantive legal assistance and provides the lawyer with a chance to provide a valuable public service.

Benefits of the pro bono duty counsel model. Our interviews with judges, pro bono lawyers and the litigation partners in their firms who coordinated their efforts made it clear that these stakeholders were enthusiastic about this model. The interviews revealed several benefits that stakeholders feel are valuable.

■ **For private practice lawyers and their firms,** the model provides opportunities to provide a much-needed public service within a structure that offers convenience in scheduling; administrative support from LHO; and a discrete time commitment. Lawyers reported that they enjoyed the experience. Moreover, the chance to work directly with clients and “think on one’s feet” offers professional development opportunities that are rare for many young associates at large law firms to get.

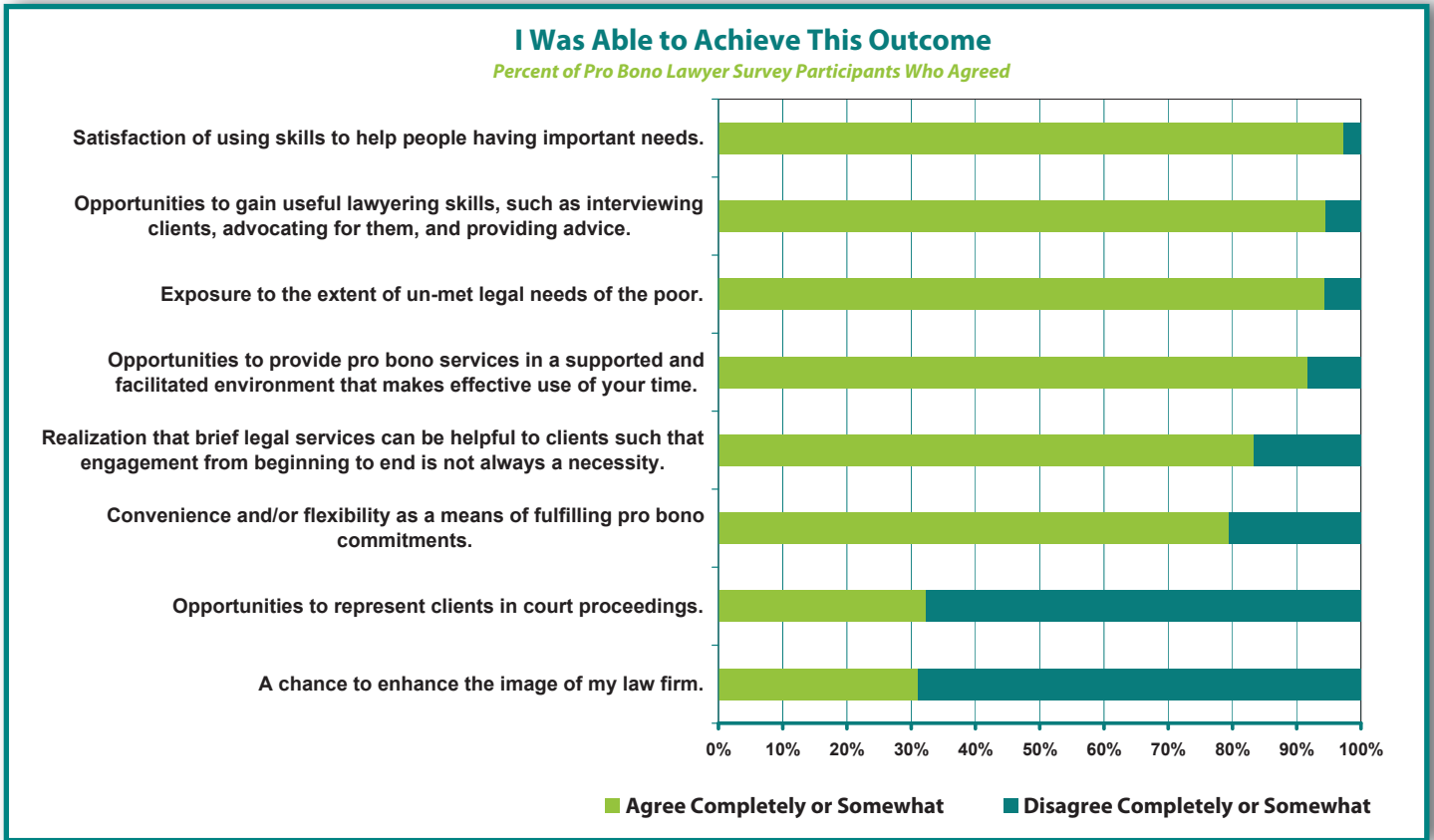
■ **For litigants,** this arrangement makes it possible to get help from a lawyer whose services they otherwise could not afford, at no

cost. Moreover, this help arrives at key points in the litigation process where answers to questions and access to legal advice about how to proceed can be especially critical.

■ **For judges,** the fact that litigants can get advice from a lawyer at LHO provides an opportunity to refer self-represented litigants who clearly are struggling with the process. Judges we interviewed felt that this helps them to keep the docket moving and maintain a more level playing field. It also relieves judges from the role of assisting self-represented litigants, which is time-consuming and can be perceived as unfair by opposing parties who are represented.



Exhibit 6 Pro Bono Lawyers received positive outcomes as a result of their service at LHO.



WHAT THE PRO BONO LAWYERS SAY ABOUT LHO

- ▶ **LHO makes it easy for us as lawyers to participate.**
I appreciate the ability to devote a short, yet intense and focused period of time to the project...The staff is very organized which helps the lawyers focus on the provision of legal services.
“I am very pleased with the vetting process that goes on before the person seeking assistance reaches me... Each and every party that I meet with has a real, significant legal issue that needs to be addressed.”
- ▶ **LHO provides opportunities we don’t often get otherwise.**
“I can’t emphasize enough how useful the interaction with clients is through this service.”
“I am a retired lawyer. LHO helps me continue to use my legal skills and it is intellectually stimulating for me”.
- ▶ **The LHO model really works.**
It helps the legal system work better by addressing the needs of unrepresented litigants out of court, rather than during court time... the court does not encounter an unprepared litigant, thereby requiring either an adjournment or extra court time to address the issue.
Access to justice - one on one consultation - giving clients the confidence they need to pursue their rights.

Outcomes of the LHO project from the perspective of pro bono lawyers.

As a supplement to our face-to-face and telephone interviews, we conducted a web survey of LHO-participating pro bono lawyers. We sought the lawyers’ opinions about LHO’s services and their role in providing them. We also invited suggestions for improving the outcomes achieved by the project.

Exhibit 6 summarizes the lawyers’ responses regarding outcomes being achieved.

Outcomes from the perspective of law firm partners.

Our interviews with law firm litigation partners made it clear that the LHO model offers benefits deemed highly significant by the firms that provide members of their legal staff – mostly young associates – to serve as pro bono duty counsel.

Exhibit 7 Law firm partners were positive about their firms' participation in the LHO project.

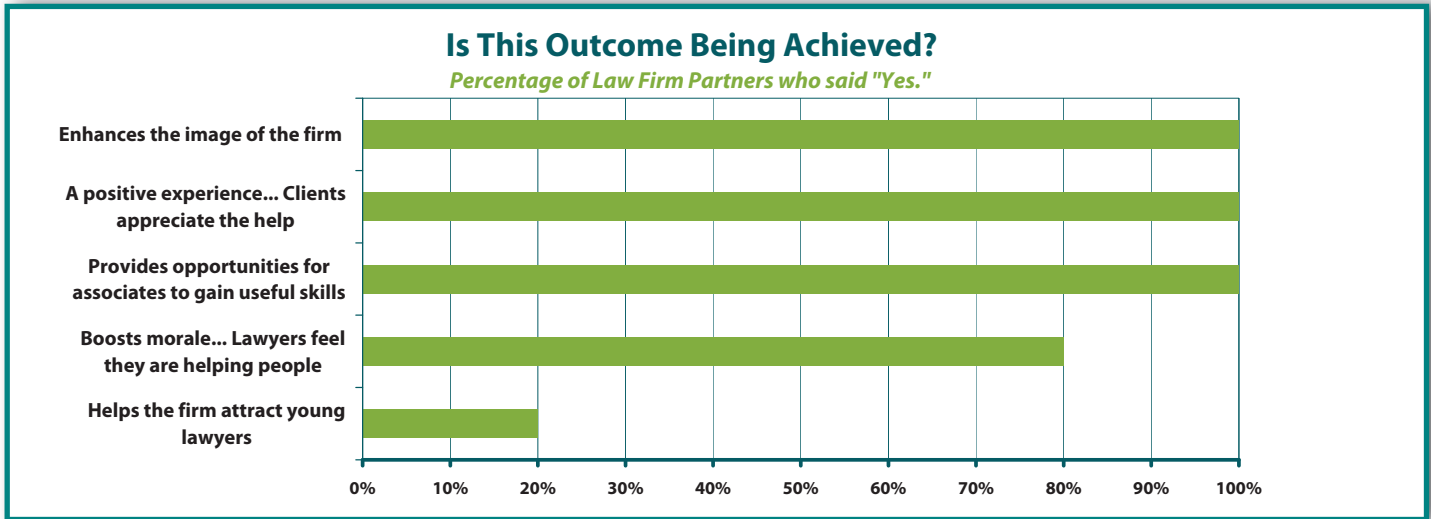


Exhibit 7 summarizes the responses to our question regarding whether or not certain outcomes important to law firms were being achieved. All felt the image of their firms was enhanced, especially with clients who wish to do business with firms that demonstrate good corporate citizenship.

All agreed that service at LHO is a good experience for their young lawyers, giving them opportunities to sharpen their skills as lawyers. Eighty percent indicated that their lawyers' morale was boosted by the opportunity to help people in need on a one-on-one basis.

A smaller percentage of those we interviewed – 20 percent – volunteered the opinion that the opportunity to serve at LHO was an employment benefit their firms could offer that attracts highly-qualified young lawyers for whom public service is an important professional and personal goal.

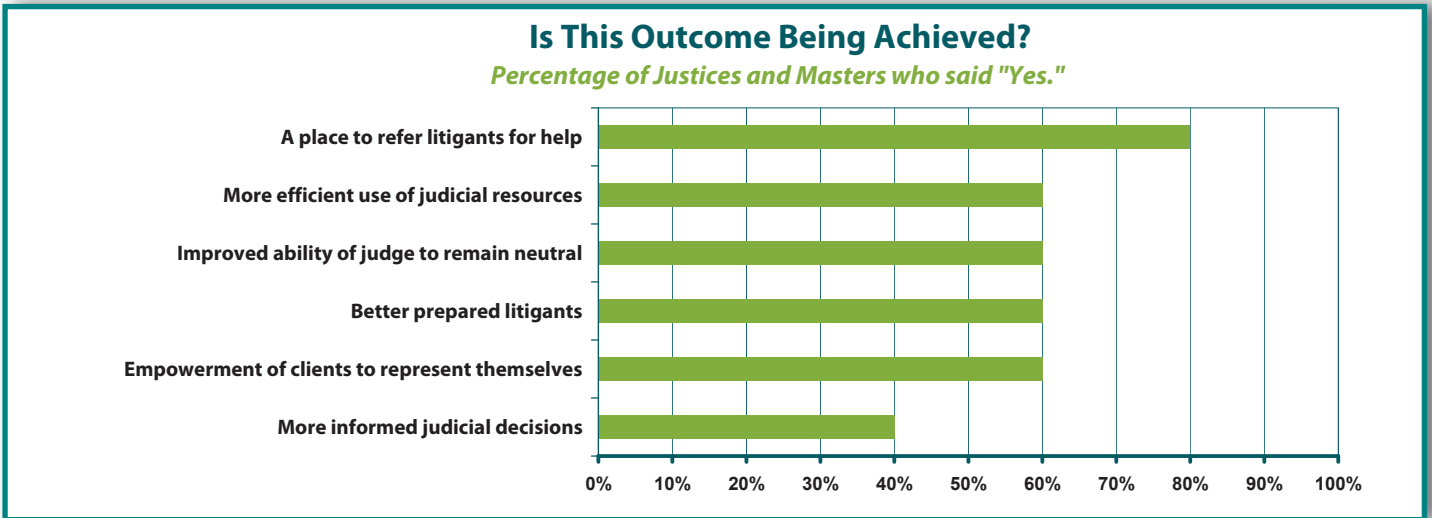
C. Judges' and Court Staff Perspective: "Self-reps are growing in numbers. Being able to refer them to LHO is huge."

As indicated by Exhibit 8, judges and court staff we interviewed universally

WHAT JUSTICES AND COURT STAFF SAY ABOUT LHO

- ▶ **LHO provides a place to refer litigants for help.**
"It's a wonderful safety valve. We can say, 'Go talk with LHO,' then maybe they can talk with lawyer on the other side and resolve the matter"... "I keep a pile of LHO tear-off stickies on my desk; if a person is floundering I give him one"
- ▶ **LHO enables litigants to be better prepared.**
"LHO can help people get on the right procedural track..." "People understand the system...the legal processes that get them before the Court." ... "Before LHO, I'd tell the lawyer on the other side: 'Give the person a sample motion.' I had nothing to give them."
- ▶ **Better-prepared litigants enable more efficient use of judicial resources.**
"LHO is really needed. I want everyone who leaves my court to feel they've been treated fairly. With 'self-reps,' you have to go to extraordinary lengths to achieve this. One has to spend five or six times as much time with them as if they had counsel. LHO is a beginning in helping us manage the burden of volume."
- ▶ **LHO improves ability of judges to remain neutral.**
"As judges we need to know that the opportunity has been given to litigants to obtain legal advice if they want it..." "It enhances the fairness of the system. People feel they got heard."
- ▶ **LHO empowers clients to represent themselves.**
"People have greater confidence that they know what to do. There is a noticeable sense about them that they know what material to present to the court. People who don't get help are shaking at the knees; they feel disadvantaged when the other side has a lawyer who does this for a living."

Exhibit 8 In interviews, judges said LHO provided valuable results for the Court.



appreciated having LHO as a place they could refer litigants to for help and advice. This was a relief especially to front-line court staff who face the daily challenge of serving self-represented litigants without having to cross the line between providing information and dispensing legal advice.

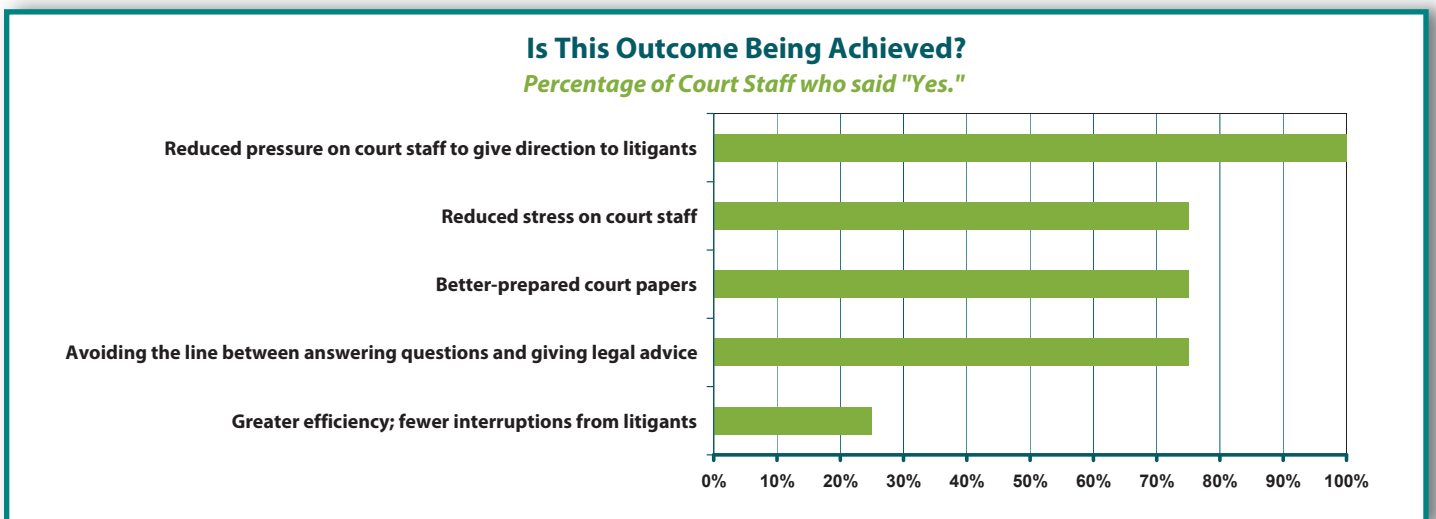
Outcomes, From the Perspective of Justices and Masters. Exhibit 8 summarizes the responses of justices and masters to our questions about whether or not particular outcomes were being achieved as a result of LHO’s services. A solid majority (80 percent)

felt that the assistance provided to litigants by LHO smoothed the court process. By helping litigants to prepare, LHO reduced the need for judges to provide guidance during hearings, saving time and making it easier for the judge to remain neutral. Judges said that LHO reduced the frequency of self-represented litigants’ delaying hearings by arriving without necessary papers or a basic understanding of the Superior Court process.

Outcomes, From the Perspective of Court Staff. Exhibit 9 summarizes the responses of Court staff members to

our interview questions about specific outcomes being achieved as a result of LHO’s services. A large majority (75 percent or more) reported that by referring clients to LHO they could avoid what had previously been a serious ethical and practical dilemma of attempting to meet the needs of litigants without crossing the line into giving legal advice. Another outcome they deemed important was that litigants’ court papers were better-prepared as a result of the assistance and resources provided by LHO.

Exhibit 9 Court staff said LHO reduced the pressure they felt from self-represented litigants.



VI. Recommendations: *Expand what's working now. Change or add elements to make LHO work even better.*

A. Expand What's Working Now

The following recommendations would expand the benefits already being offered by the LHO model to litigants, the Court and participating pro bono lawyers and their firms.

1. Expand LHO's capacity at 393 University Avenue in Toronto.

More LHO capacity would mean shorter waits for clients, less frequent need for clients to come back the next day, fewer adjourned hearings and smoother court operations. Implementation of this suggestion would require recruitment of more pro bono duty counsel and adding LHO staff to LHO to coordinate them as well as to handle more clients during peak traffic hours.



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Expand what's working now.

- ▶ Expand LHO's capacity at 393 University Avenue in Toronto.
- ▶ Address the problem of conflicts.
- ▶ Provide more outreach to justices and Masters to inform them of the resources LHO has to offer.
- ▶ Expand the LHO model to other locations.
- ▶ Expand in-court advocacy by pro bono duty counsel.

B. Change or add elements to make LHO work even better.

- ▶ Expand Web Resources.
- ▶ Add a Telephone "Help Line."
- ▶ Test other vehicles for helping clients with commonly-encountered topics; for example, specialized lawyers or clinics available to advise clients at specific times of the week.

2. Address the problem of conflicts.

By reducing the frequency of pro bono duty counsel being "conflicted out" from serving specific LHO clients, more clients could be served each day, resulting in more efficient

utilization of lawyers and less frustration for clients and lawyers alike. Two avenues for reducing conflicts were suggested: asking banks and other major businesses to waive conflicts for LHO clients; and asking the Law Society to modify the conflict rules to better fit the LHO model of brief legal assistance.

3. Provide more outreach to judges and Masters to inform them of the resources LHO has to offer.

Several of the judges and Masters we interviewed were not clear about what LHO does and does not do. More outreach would mean more judges knowing they could refer litigants to LHO, fewer delays from unprepared litigants and a more level playing field in the court.

4. Expand the LHO model to other locations.

This could reduce the need for clients to travel from elsewhere in Ontario and extend

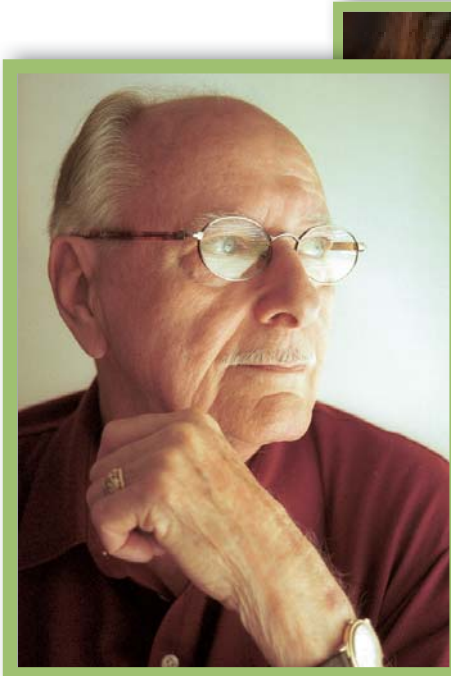
the benefits of this model to other locations. Expansion could provide opportunities to replicate elsewhere the best practices that have been proven successful in Toronto.

5. Expand in-court advocacy by pro bono duty counsel. The limited occasions on which pro bono duty counsel have accompanied LHO clients to their hearings have been well-received by judges and attractive as a professional development vehicle to pro bono lawyers and their law firms. Both stakeholders have expressed a desire for more of these opportunities. It would mean recruitment of more lawyers and expansion of logistical support from LHO staff.

B. Change or add elements to make LHO work even better.

A final recommendation is that PBLO and its partners apply the findings of the evaluation in a strategic review of opportunities for leveraging what LHO has already accomplished. The following are examples of elements that potentially could be added to the model in the future:

- 1. Expand Web Resources.** Continue building LawHelpOntario.org as an on-line source for guidebooks, court forms and other self-help materials. Features that could be considered: Live “chat,” on-line seminars, and videos that cover commonly-encountered processes and topics.
- 2. Add a Telephone “Help Line.”** Leverage the web-accessible materials (see above) with live assistance from LHO paralegals (and perhaps, pro bono lawyers) by toll-free phone.



3. Test other vehicles for helping clients with commonly-encountered topics. These might include making specialized lawyers (e.g., bankruptcy specialists) available by phone and/or conducting specialized seminars or clinics at specific times of the week.

VII. Summary: The LHO project is working. Its stakeholders would like to see it expanded.

This evaluation has confirmed that the LHO model is a viable strategy for providing legal assistance to self-represented litigants in the Ontario Superior Court of Justice. Stakeholders consulted in this evaluation made it clear that, in their view, the LHO project has gone a long way toward addressing the challenges presented by

the phenomenon of self-representation in the Superior Court. Expansion of LHO’s capacity, applying the elements that have proven successful, could mean that more people could be helped and Court operations in Toronto and elsewhere could be further enhanced.

The attractiveness of the LHO model to a critical partner – the private law firms that contribute the time of their associates to serve as pro bono duty counsel – demonstrates the feasibility of replicating LHO’s success at other locations in Toronto and elsewhere. This would further leverage the relatively modest dollar investment required to apply this model at other locations and in other courts as a way of addressing the challenges presented by the growing trend toward self-representation in Ontario’s courts.

