

Community Legal Services
Staff Focus Group

I. Introduction

Pursuant to the “2004-2007 Strategic Plan,” Community Legal Services (“CLS”) conducted an agency-wide ‘Self-Evaluation’ to gather vital information on the impact its services have on the program’s client communities.

The “housing law” area was identified as the first to be evaluated, in order to identify unmet legal needs and measure the effectiveness of services in that area. To complete the assessment, information was collected in several ways, including client satisfaction surveys, through telephone interviews with members of the legal and client community, and the coordination of focus groups with key community stakeholders.

In addition to the methods mentioned above, a staff focus group was conducted to assess the views of CLS staff members regarding the impact CLS’ housing law area had on the client community and CLS as an organization. Focus groups are beneficial to an agency because they are an inexpensive way to collect qualitative data about the needs and concerns of a larger community. Focus groups are also favorable when working with staff members, because a group environment encourages participants to share information they may be hesitant to share if they were asked to fill out a paper survey or were interviewed on a one-on-one basis.

II. Background

The four objectives of the staff focus group were:

- To give participants an opportunity to assess the quality of housing advocacy undertaken by the program.
- To give participants an opportunity to review and react to key outcomes of the focus groups held earlier during the year.
- To give participants an opportunity to review and react to key findings of the ‘Client Satisfaction Surveys’ conducted over the past 3 years.
- To explore ways that Community Legal Services might respond to the needs of housing clients, given the results of the focus groups and surveys.

Staff members having expertise and experience in housing law were identified and given the opportunity to share their input and opinions on the housing issues affecting the low-income population. Attorneys and staff members from all CLS offices were invited. The staff focus group was held on June 9, 2006 in the Central Phoenix office.

III. Study Design and Methodology

John Tull, a former legal services lawyer who currently provides consulting services to legal aid programs, facilitated the focus group.

Managing attorneys from outlying CLS offices identified one to two staff members from their office to attend the focus group. All housing unit staff from the Central Phoenix office attended.

The following questions were asked during the focus group:

- What do you think are the most critical (or important) housing issues that your community faces?
- What are some of the factors/causes that contribute to housing and access to shelter problems (i.e. income, education, or discrimination)? Why?
- How well is CLS responding to these factors/causes?
- What might CLS do to alleviate these factors/causes?
- Are there vulnerable groups more dramatically impacted by these issues or factors than others (i.e. children, seniors, or the disabled)?
- How well is CLS responding to vulnerable populations and what might it do better?
- What are the legal needs affecting access to housing or shelter in your community?
- Based upon your personal experience, do you think CLS sufficiently addresses these needs in the community? Please explain your answer.
- What suggestions do you have to improve our services in your community?

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