

Community Legal Services
Community Focus Groups

I. Introduction

In accordance with the “2004-2007 Strategic Plan,” Community Legal Services (“CLS”) implemented a ‘Self-Evaluation’ process to gather information on the impact of its services in client communities (Maricopa, Mohave, Yavapai, and Yuma/LaPaz Counties in the State of Arizona). The “housing law” area was identified as the first to be evaluated.

Focus groups are utilized in qualitative research analysis and evaluation processes, and are a vital tool to measure client satisfaction of services provided. Focus groups also serve as networking opportunities, and foster connections to constituents in service areas.

II. Background

The focus groups were conducted to assist CLS in three specific ways:

- To evaluate the effectiveness of housing services, and determine the impact of those services to the CLS client community.
- Help CLS recognize the most critical housing issues in each geographical area, and develop substantive priority areas for the delivery of services to clients.
- Identify suggestions and comments to aid CLS in improving the quality of services to low-income residents.

The goal was to collect qualitative data regarding housing needs from individuals who had a vested interest in CLS. Individuals identified were applicants who were denied service by CLS, former CLS clients, or collaborative community partners. CLS also sought participation from agency representatives, judges before whom CLS staff appeared in housing related matters, and attorneys with whom CLS staff had collaborated. While it was impossible for participants to be selected in demographic percentages that corresponded exactly with the areas they represented, participants did represent a diverse group.

Five focus groups were held at the Maricopa County Central Phoenix Office, the Maricopa County East Valley Office in Mesa, the Yavapai County Office, the Mohave County, and Yuma/LaPaz County Office in Yuma. Groups met on Saturday, from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm. A light lunch was provided and each participant was offered a \$25 honorarium as compensation for their time. Nine CLS managers were placed on teams of two, with one manager facilitating and the other hosting the location of the focus group.

III. Study Design and Methodology

Office managing attorneys identified representatives from their community whom they would like to participate in the focus groups, and mailed them invitations. Sessions were scheduled for 90 minutes in which the following questions were asked:

- How did you find out about Community Legal Services?
- What do you think are the most critical (or important) housing issues that your community faces?
- What are some of the factors that contribute to housing and access to shelter problems (i.e. income, education, or discrimination)? Why?
- Are there vulnerable groups more dramatically impacted by these issues or factors than others (i.e. children, seniors, or the disabled)?
- What are the legal needs affecting access to housing or shelter in your community?
- Based upon your personal experience, or to your knowledge, do you feel 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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