RFJS

Reforming the
Family Justice System

Overview of Research Student Activity

September 2014
Prepared for the Reforming the Family Justice System Initiative
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Overview of Student Research Activity

The Department of Justice and Solicitor General hired three post-graduate students – Kara Davis, Stephanie Lo, and Chance Watchel – to provide research support for the Reforming the Family Justice System (RFJS) initiative. The primary task they undertook during the summer months was the compilation of an annotated bibliography of access to justice resources. Along the way, however, each was assigned additional tasks to complete for the benefit of our collaborators. These included executive summaries of the Action Committee reports, a summary of the two questionnaires given to collaborators early in the initiative, summaries of the two workshops, a list of legal services information providers in the province, a summary of the existing gaps in Alberta's legal services, and a list of innovative legal services and initiatives in other jurisdictions, both in other Canadian provinces and in other countries around the world. The following overview provides a brief summary of each of the documents produced by Kara, Stephanie, and Chance, and highlights how working groups can make use of the information they provide. The order in which they are listed here is intentional – these resources should be approached in sequential order.

Executive Summaries of the Reports by the Prevention, Triage, and Referral Working Group, the Family Justice Working Group, and the Action Committee's Final Report

Overview of the Document: The final reports of the Prevention, Triage, and Referral Working Group and the Family Justice Working Group provide a set of recommendations around which the collaborators of this initiative will focus their efforts. These recommendations have been categorized and reorganized into six areas of focus:

1. Early resolution of disputes, shifting focus from adversarial process to early resolution
2. Education and information for families (legal, financial, social, etc.)
3. Research and evaluation into the operation and administration of the family justice system
4. Education for family law lawyers, law students, and paralegals
5. Legal advice and representation for parents and children
6. The structure of and procedures in family courts

Included are brief explanations of each area of work, highlighting the relevant recommendations from the Action Committee reports.

In addition to outlining the Guiding Principles for Change endorsed by the RFJS collaborators (pages 1 – 2), the summary document contains each of the recommendations of the two reports (pages 2 – 24), organized into the six areas of work listed above. Also contained within is a summation of the nine-point action plan as it is outlined in the Action Committee's final report (pages 25 – 35).

How to Use This Document: This summary can be used by working group collaborators to better understand how these recommendations have been organized by the convenor group, what the guiding principles of the initiative are, and the action plan as it has been outlined by the national Action Committee. It should be used as a primer for those who are unfamiliar with these Action Committee reports. This summary is not a replacement for these reports, but it will assist collaborators by highlighting the main points.

The Early Resolution Services Sector: An Introductory Hand-Out

Overview of the Document: This short document provides an overview of the early resolution services sector (ERSS). It outlines what a well-functioning ERSS should do, the key functions, and the types of services that comprise the sector.

How to Use this Document: This document complements the Executive Summary Reports. It is a primer document that collaborators will use to inform themselves of what a successful ERSS system looks like and the services that are offered.

List of Legal Services Information Providers

Overview of the Document: As the province currently lacks a single, publicly available, universally accessible, complete list of legal services available throughout the province, this document provides a short list of information service providers Albertans can use to find and access legal and legal-related health and social services offered by non-profits, the provincial government, and the federal government.

How to Use This Document: This list provides all contact information for the information providers and how to access the information the providers have, in what languages it can be accessed, and the organizations responsible for the service. It can and should be used by collaborators to identify potential opportunities to strengthen specific area- and province-wide services, and to avoid replication/duplication of services.

Gaps in Legal Services in Alberta

Overview of the Document: The Gaps in Alberta Legal Services document is based primarily on the Alberta Legal Services Mapping Project (ALSMP), which was a multi-year collaborative action project which produced a series of reports created between 2007 and 2011 by the Canadian Forum on Civil Justice, to better understand the legal needs of Albertans, the extent to which those needs are currently being met, gaps and recommendations to improve access to needed services. This brief document is divided into two sections: the first lists issues and shortcomings that exist across the province, while the second identifies gaps specific to certain judicial districts.

How to use this Document: Collaborators can use this to identify opportunities for program and service development in specific areas of the province. Like the Legal Services Information Provider document, it provides collaborators with an understanding of where there are shortcomings in services and programs. Collaborators must be aware of the publication dates for the ALSMP reports, as information contained in these reports has not been updated since publication, so while these will be a valuable starting point for Working Groups, the details may not be current.

RFJS Inventory of Resources – Working Document

Overview of the Document: This document is organized according to the six areas of focus identified for this initiative. The document is comprised of five columns: the first includes each of the recommendations of the above-mentioned reports from the Prevention, Triage and Referral Working Group and the Family Justice Working Group organized into six areas of focus. The next two columns identify the recommendations of those reports, including the page range of those recommendations. The fourth column identifies current initiatives, programs and

services within the province of Alberta as they relate to each of these recommendations, and the fifth column includes initiatives and innovative practices outside of Alberta. An annotated bibliography includes all of the services identified in this document, and these will be linked when the two resources are available online for collaborators. This is a Working document, to which resources will continue to be added as we move forward.

How to Use This Document: The final two columns of this table contain the substance of the document, setting out both what is currently in place in Alberta, and innovative new practices currently in place or being implemented in other jurisdictions. Working Groups will likely refer to these for inspiration, as they contemplate reforms and new services to address the RFJS objectives.

Reforming the Family Justice System – Summary of Questionnaires and Workshops

Overview of the Document: This is a summary of responses to the two questionnaires and the discussions among collaborators during the April 7, 2014 and May 5, 2014 workshops. The workshop discussions are presented in the form of mind maps. It contains feedback on the objectives of the initiative, as well as answers to more specific questions regarding issues such as resource commitment and areas of priority.

How to Use This Document: The information in this document is useful in understanding what was discussed at previous collaborator meetings, what members of each sector have agreed to and suggestions made. It can also inform participants who have recently joined the initiative about the goals, priorities and contributions which collaborators have committed to the initiative.

Annotated Bibliography

Overview of the Document: The annotated bibliography contains a list of sources reviewed as potentially useful for members of the working groups as they move forward. Bibliographic information includes the title, author(s), date of publication, geographic region to which the source is specific, the source, any organizational affiliation, the type of document, a list of keywords, to which area(s) of work the source applies, a brief summary, and page ranges for especially relevant material. Sources will continue to be added to this document throughout the initiative, including additional sources provided by collaborators.

How to Use This Document: The annotated bibliography should prove a useful tool for the working groups going forward. Groups can make use of the identified resources to assist them in program planning, idea generation, research, evaluation design and methodology, and to learn of recommendations made in other jurisdictions. The resources are catalogued by a set of keywords. The bibliography, and links to specific resources will be included on the RFJS website.