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**Final Report of Evaluation Activities  
For the  
Family Index Evaluation Project:  
May 2001 Through March 2002**

**Submitted by the  
Claremont Graduate University Evaluation Team  
of the  
Institute of Organizational and Program Evaluation Research  
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**Final Report of Evaluation Activities  
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**Executive Summary**

Overview

This report summarizes the Claremont Graduate University Evaluation Team's (CGUET) evaluation activities and findings of the Riverside County Superior Court System's Family Index Project (FI). The FI Project itself is on going, having begun approximately at the beginning of 1999. The report discusses the overview of the FI project as well as presenting information on the evaluation goals, purpose, and approach. Findings from data collection focused on the following:

- The current court and information gathering process.
- The feasibility and utility of the FI enhancement for court personnel, staff and associated constituents (e.g., mediators, lawyers).

Finally, challenges, limitations, suggestions and conclusions are presented concerning evaluation activities.

Overview of the Family Index Project

The Family Index (FI) is a software enhancement to the Riverside County Court Systems' already technologically savvy case management system (GENESIS). The primary goal of this project is to create a means by which family members can be linked within the courts' computerized records.

Although the FI appears to have been conceptualized primarily with the Family Law and Juvenile Courts in mind, it is anticipated that the FI will enable accurate, quick and efficient access of information to court personnel and program staff affecting all court cases.

The Index promises to accomplish the following

- Minimize conflicting judgments and orders.
- Provide up-to-date, comprehensive information on families to courts and public service organizations.
- Aid in the elimination of duplication of efforts in the information-gathering process.
- Decrease actual time spent and long-run cost of gathering important and relevant information.

Overview of the Evaluation Approach and Strategy

Evaluation Purpose and Goals

The purpose of the evaluation was to conduct a four-phase evaluation covering pre-program needs, program design/development, program implementation, and program outcomes. Due to setbacks experienced by the Family Index Design Team, the

project has not progressed past the design and development stage. Therefore, CGUET was forced to limit this evaluation to pre-program assessment.

### *Evaluation Approach*

CGUET's evaluative approach was one that encompassed several strategies ranging from a theory-driven, to a client-centered and utilization-focused approach. From a theory-driven perspective, CGUET sought to accomplish the following:

- To develop and revise questions according to the theory or rationale of those who are most involved with the program.
- To use the questions and concepts developed in both academic and non-academic literature to inform the project.
- To continue to refine instruments after continued discussions with key stakeholders and consumers.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected.

### Summary of Key Evaluation Findings

In the original evaluation proposal, evaluation questions were developed for guiding data collection. These questions and the corresponding answers (where available) follow.

#### **1. Was information from other courts available prior to program implementation?**

For the most part, a sample of court files from the existing case management system indicated that case information was available. However, there is room for improvement in the methods by which clients are matched with cases. When an individual is equipped only with a client name, it can be difficult to obtain linked cases. The FI could certainly improve the efficiency of these sorts of tasks. One potential problem with existing records is in regards to a great deal of missing information regarding variables such as date of birth, gender, ethnicity, addresses, social security numbers, and drivers license numbers. This sort of data may be particularly important in the linking process. It will be necessary for the FI to develop methods for linking individual court clients with their families, and a large amount of missing data regarding this type of basic identifying information may make the linking process rather difficult.

Interviews with court clerk supervisors and staff were conducted to assess the information available and to assess accessing procedures prior to program implementation. First, information was collected regarding the types of information clerk staff regularly access. The greatest need for the FI for court clerk staff appears to be in relation to tasks such as determining jurisdiction and criminal background checks. While court clerk staff indicate a great deal of satisfaction with the existing GENESIS case management system, they also indicate that searching for information can be quite time consuming because there is not an existing system for cross-referencing cases and information.

Surveys of court clients (both adult and juvenile) indicated that many clients perceive misinformation in court proceedings. They either believe the judiciary or court

staff to be unaware of other cases, other family members' cases, or merely having some inaccuracies in information. While this is merely a perception by court clients and not necessarily an objective assessment of the accuracy of existing data management, it is interesting to note and would be interesting to compare with post-implementation perceptions.

**2. Is case processing time affected by implementation of the Index?**

According to interviews with court clerk staff, entering data on a case file can take anywhere from a few seconds to 25 minutes with an average of 7 minutes per case. Clerks indicated that they entered from 0 to 90 cases per day with an average of 13 cases per day. Of course, this information would be most informative in comparison with post-implementation case processing time.

Court clients and attorneys were surveyed and interviewed regarding the frequency of continuances. Data suggest a relationship between the number of continuances and satisfaction with the court system. However, the frequency of continuances is not really that useful without comparison with post-implementation data to determine whether the FI may reduce the frequency of continuances.

**3. Does the Index impact Court Proceedings?**

Courtroom observations indicated that court staff likely to be affected by the FI consisted of judges, commissioners, court clerks, courtroom assistants, mediators, attorneys, and clients. Information gathering occurred in 23% of the cases observed, and 25% of the cases had references to other court divisions. Problems with inaccurate data were observed in 19% of the cases. These results indicate that the efficient access to information is very important in day-to-day court proceedings. The FI has a great deal of potential in further facilitating information access.

The FI will probably most beneficial to court clerk staff. Judicial interviews indicate that a majority of their information gathering is conducted by the clerk staff.

Courtroom observations indicate that mediators are often called on to do a great deal of investigation, and their recommendations are followed a majority of the time. However, interviews with mediators indicate that the FI may not be readily accessible to them as there are a number of obstacles for them to access the existing case management system. It will be interesting to determine the extent to which the FI will be made accessible to mediators and how mediators' workloads may be affected.

**4. Does the Index affect Coordination of Efforts between the various divisions?**

In interviews with court clerk supervisors and staff, we found that information from other court divisions is available in the current case management system. However, obtaining this information can be cumbersome and time consuming. Twenty-six of the 85 court clerks interviewed or 31% indicated that they were required to contact supporting agencies to obtain information. Often, it is necessary to use alternative means for obtaining information. Information is obtained from other agencies most often by means of telephone. This indicates that the FI may fill a need for easily accessing additional information.

Interviews with judges indicate that criminal court may be least impacted by FI implementation because the activities of family members is not relevant to deciding guilt or innocence in criminal matters. However, the FI may be useful in determining bail and in resolving scheduling conflicts.

**5. What percentage of clients does the Index potentially affect?**

As already mentioned, in 23% of the court cases we observed, other court divisions were mentioned. Of adult clients surveyed, 32% reported having multiple cases, and juvenile client surveys indicate that 34.5% of the juveniles surveyed reported that they had family members currently involved in Riverside Courts. The majority of these family members (47%) appeared to be involved with Criminal Court suggesting that the FI may impact Juvenile Court proceedings the most by providing access to Criminal Court information.

**6. What are the characteristics of the clients affected by the Index?**

Adult clients surveyed were 63% female and 34% male (6% did not respond), and while a majority of respondents were White (41%), there was a good proportion of Latino (22%) and African American (13%) individuals, as well.

In our review of the existing court database, gender was unavailable in 81.7% of the cases. Of those for whom gender was available, 22% were female and 78% were male. Ethnicity was unavailable in 93.7% of the files reviewed. Of those in which ethnicity was available, 25% were White and the remaining 75% were Latino.

While neither of these methods are particularly accurate at obtaining a truly representative estimation of clients' demographics, the client surveys probably are more representative than the review of case files because of the frequency of missing data.

**7. What is the nature of the potential impact**

Unfortunately, information regarding this question was quite limited because interviews with judges and commissioners were difficult to obtain. The rest of the data collected from court clerk supervisors and staff, from mediators, and from attorneys did not provide information regarding the potential qualitative impact of the FI on decision-making. The information obtained primarily pointed towards an increase in efficiency for staff in obtaining the information they need from other court divisions. All interviews, surveys, and archival data indicate that the FI will affect family law, probate, juvenile and civil courts the most.

Program Design / Development

The FI currently still is being designed and developed. While little information is available to make conclusive statements, the data we have indicates quite significant problems with the development of the FI. First, the design team has been limited to upper-level administration without involving many of the individuals who will ultimately be responsible for using the FI on a day-to-day basis. Even among those included in the development process, there are individuals who feel their input was ignored or discarded. This may be an explanation for the inconsistency in Project Team membership.

A second possible source of difficulty in development is in regards to the strategy that will be used for linking individuals to their families. Of those interviewed, there was no consensus regarding how these links will be created. Information obtained from the software design company contracted to develop the software indicates that there were significant time delays in developing the specs. These are the plans provided by Riverside Courts to conceptually direct the software development. These delays in delivering the specs may be a result of the extreme difficulty involved in establishing an effective process for linking families. While the Riverside Courts are extremely technologically advanced, it is not possible to rule out the possibility that developing the FI is not feasible given the existing resources available.

### Challenges/Obstacles, Project Limitations

Although the Family Index Project is clearly a worthwhile endeavor, there were a number of challenges/obstacles as well as project limitations that plagued the Family Index Project and subsequent evaluation. Below we briefly highlight each.

#### *Challenges and Obstacles to the Family Index Project Team*

- The Project Team was plagued by competing time commitments.
- There was a change in upper level administration.
- The software consultant was found inadequate and was dismissed from the project.
- Project Team membership was inconsistent. There were changes in membership, and some members did not consistently participate.

#### *Challenges and Obstacles to the CGU Evaluation Team*

- Access and cooperation from stakeholders (judges, lawyers, court staff, etc.) was limited.
- Evaluation anxiety appeared to be manifested by individuals from just about every group interviewed and surveyed.
- There was resistance or lack of cooperation from select Project Team Members.

#### *Evaluation Limitations*

- Less than expected sample sizes due to resistance or lack of cooperation by those interviewed and surveyed as well as by administrators and project team members limiting access to sample.
- Inability to conduct process and outcome evaluation, as well as cost-benefit analysis due to lack of project development and implementation.
- Inadequate support from Riverside County Superior Court.
- Lack of awareness of the project by stakeholders (judges, lawyers, court staff, etc.). This limited interviewees ability to comment on the utility of the FI. However, it should be noted that this may have improved following program implementation and may have been an indicator of project success and utilization if there had been improved awareness.

### Conclusions: Assessments, Suggestions and Recommendations

CGUET provided assessments, suggestions and recommendations for the Family Index Project based on the data collected. These assessments, suggestions and recommendations are intended to provide realistic and feasible suggestions for change, especially change that can better enhance the performance and effectiveness of the FI.

#### *Assessment of the Family Index Project*

Although CGUET has collected a significant amount of data, it should be noted that data can only serve to provide a cross-sectional view of how the court process *currently* functions, prior to implementation of the Family Index.

For the most part, CGUET's data sources confirmed that the current court information gathering system is one that is adequate, if not at many times, extremely adept at providing useful information on which to facilitate court decisions and provide pertinent information.

Data sources illustrated that most, if not all constituents use a variety of methods to obtain information, and in many cases those methods are relatively failsafe and relatively easy to use. It would appear that even without the Family Index, despite its proposed usefulness, the courts function in a fairly efficient manner. It is perhaps because of this factor that the development and subsequent implementation of the FI has progressed as slowly as it has. It is speculated that a "if it isn't broke don't fix it" mentality may exist and that may prove to delay if not (in worst case scenario) derail the full implementation of the Index.

Nonetheless, despite the apparently adequately functioning court system, the data collected clearly demonstrates that the Index could result in a great deal of potential benefit to the Riverside County Superior Court system.

#### *Suggestions for Project Improvement*

- Consider lower level administrators and judicial court staff as active members of the project team.
- Consider arranging for the computer software designer to work closely with those who would use the Index most frequently.
- Adhere to the project timeline.
- Decide on a clear linking process for the enhancement.
- Make clear decisions about how the Index is to be implemented.
- Consider methods for disseminating information about the FI to educate all those who would be affected by its implementation.

#### *Recommendations for Future Evaluation*

CGUET proposed that Riverside County Superior Courts consider supporting an on-going evaluation program to serve as a continuous feedback mechanism. It is believed that a continuous feedback mechanism will allow for the fine-tuning of the enhancement as well assessing its ability to adapt to the changing nature of the court system and clientele that it serves. To this end, the following aspects were suggested.

- Formulate an evaluation team that will be primarily responsible for developing on-going and updated strategies for program improvement as well as evaluation.
- Continue to benchmark other court systems that can be helpful in assisting Riverside Superior Courts to maintain and innovate the use of technology in its case management systems.
- Conduct process and outcome evaluation when the Family Index is implemented.

Concluding Remark

Data collected for the Family Index demonstrate that although the Riverside Court System is one that is already technologically savvy, there is certainly room for improvement. It appears that all constituents (from judiciary to associated second tier stakeholders such as mediators and lawyers) could use the FI in enhancing the efficiency of information gathering as well as information *accessing*. The Family Index promises to provide an innovative link that can perhaps move the Riverside County Superior Court System to a one family, one judge courtroom. It is possible that the FI can serve to provide information that can be used by all levels of court staff and personnel as well as court clients. It can serve to economize the current system in terms of time and finances, as well as provide quick accurate, and efficient information.

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**Introduction**

This report summarizes the Claremont Graduate University Evaluation Team's (CGUET) evaluation activities and findings on the Riverside County Superior Court System's Family Index Project (FI). The FI project itself is on going, having begun approximately at the beginning of 1999. Evaluation activities (originally scheduled to begin in February of 2000) officially began in May 2001.

We begin the report with an overview of the Family Index Project as well as the evaluation goals, purpose, and approach. The final sections denote findings from data collection, which focused on a) the current court and information gathering process, and b) the feasibility and utility of the FI enhancement for court personnel, staff, and associated constituents (e.g., mediators and lawyers). Data is presented according to the methodology used. Finally, challenges, limitations, suggestions and conclusions are presented concerning the FI project and subsequent evaluation activities.

**Section I. Overview of The Family Index Project**

The Family Index (FI) is a software enhancement to the Riverside County Court Systems' already technologically savvy case management system (GENESIS). The primary goal of this project is to create a means by which family members can be linked within the courts' computerized records. For example, when a client's case comes before a judge in juvenile court, the FI would link the present case with any existing computerized records relating to court activity of the client's parents.

Although the FI appears to have been conceptualized primarily with the Family Law and Juvenile Courts in mind, it is anticipated that the FI will enable accurate, quick and efficient access of information to court personnel and program staff thus affecting all court cases. In addition, the FI will aid the Riverside Courts in their move towards instituting a "one-stop" court visit, in which all cases within one family will be handled in one courtroom with one judge. Given the current process in which each court case is

settled in the division under which it falls regardless of family connections, the Index proposes to a) minimize conflicting judgments and orders, b) provide up-to-date, comprehensive information on families to courts and public service organizations, c) aid in eliminating duplication of efforts in information-gathering, and d) decrease actual time spent and long-run cost of gathering important and relevant information. It is possible that a successfully implemented FI system may be replicated in other counties throughout the state and country, thereby increasing the efficiency of the court process.

#### ***A. Background and Context of the Riverside County Superior Courts System***

The Riverside County Superior Courts is composed of five court branches, six jurisdictions (Banning, Blythe, Hemet, Indio, Perris and Riverside), approximately 48 judges and 20 commissioners, and over 700 employees providing administrative and clerical support. The FI is intended to bring together information from the diverse types of cases handled throughout the Superior Courts System.

On a very general level, the branches are as follows (also see Figure 1 for more detail):

- **Probate Court** handles conservatorship, guardianships, and the lawful distribution of a decedent's estate.
- **Family Law Court** covers issues dealing with divorce, separation, custody, support, and domestic violence and restraining orders.
- **Juvenile Court** handles delinquency, status offenses, and dependency cases involving minors.
- **Criminal Court** handles all charges that arise out of an act committed or omitted in violation of a law that forbids or commands it and which, upon conviction, results in a sentence of either one or a combination of the following punishments: (1) death; (2) imprisonment; (3) fine; (4) removal from office; (5) disqualification to hold and enjoy any office of honor, trust, or profit.
- **Civil Court** handles non-criminal issues to recover property, to force someone to honor a contract, or to protect one's civil rights.

(Please see Figure 1 for complete layout of county courts).

While each court division and jurisdiction operates independently, it is expected that the judiciary shall, "in a fair, accessible, effective, and efficient manner, resolve disputes arising under the law; and shall interpret and apply the law consistently, impartially, and independently to protect the rights and liberties guaranteed by the Constitutions of California and the United States. To this extent, it is the Superior Courts continuing goal to increase the public's access to justice while providing efficient and courteous service at decreased costs." (Flango, Flango, & Rubin, 1999). In addition to judiciaries, there are also several levels of court and affiliated staff. They are listed below.

The Clerk's Office is responsible for managing the flow of cases through the court, maintaining court records, handling financial matters, and providing other administrative support. These duties require the processing of all paperwork and include entering new petitions and case information into the case management system. The clerk's office also checks documents for accuracy.

Clerk Supervisors are responsible for supervising the clerk's office and examiners, reviewing court calendars and court records/documents, and providing improvements and recommendations. They supervise the certification of legal documents and records based on established procedures, codes, and regulations; prepare correspondence and statistical reports to disseminate detailed information (legal mandates, court decisions, operational regulations); serve as the resource to line staff on highly complex and technical problem resolution; resolve the most difficult issues with the public, government agencies, other County departments, title companies, and others; and may research changes in government codes and regulations.

Examiners investigate the status of clients in cases, obtain information for judicial action, inform clients of legal rights, and make notes of new discoveries into the case management system so as to allow access by supporting agencies and court personnel.

Clerks receive and process legal documents for all judicial departments. They research case events, prepare and issue writs, warrants, and other official court documents. They prepare and update court calendars, and also review case files for completeness, and conduct further processing requirements prior to court proceedings.

Interpreters translate from one language to another, including translation for parties who are deaf or speak a different language.

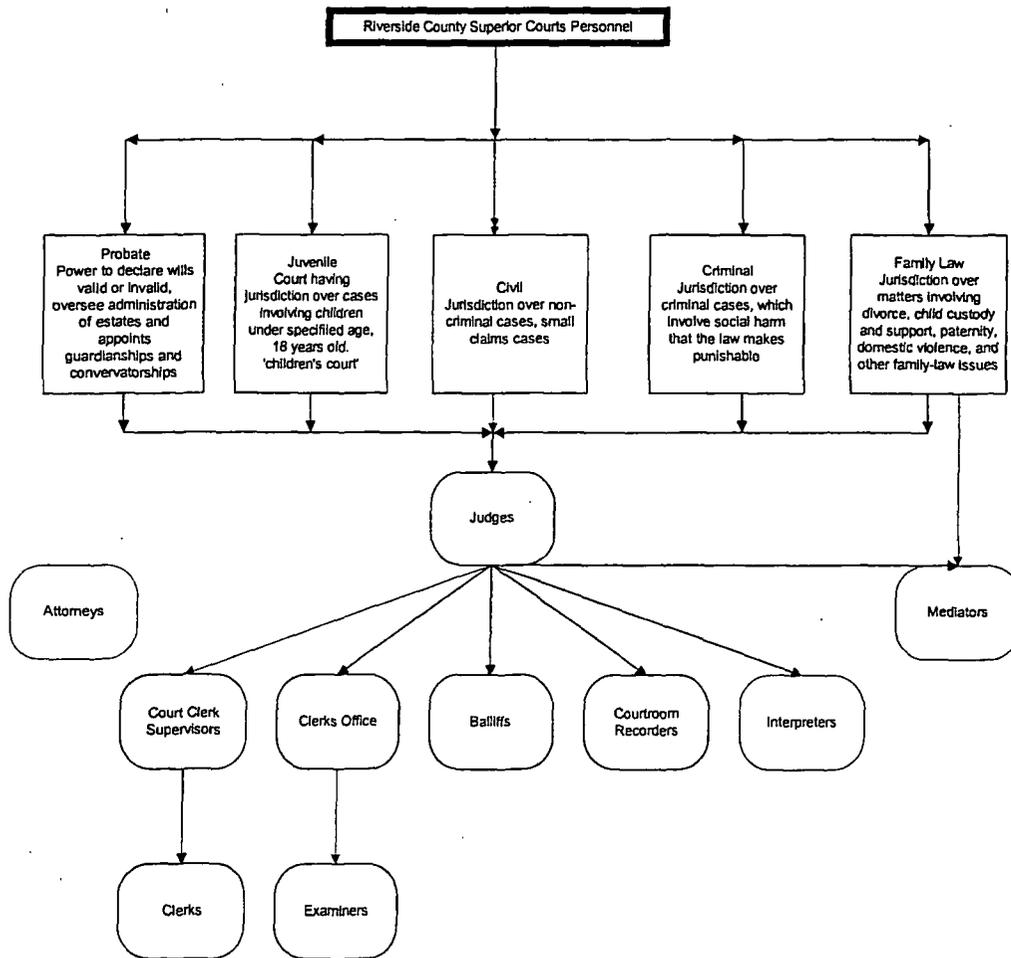
Bailiffs are court officers who maintain security and enforce the regulations of the courts and preserves order among spectators and participants in court proceedings. In addition, bailiffs respond to requests for assistance from judges or commissioners, supervise jurors during their deliberations to insure that legal procedures and regulations are accurately carried out, take defendants into custody, arrange for transportation for the court and jury to scenes in question, obtain and deliver requested legal papers, books, and documents, and when not needed in the courtrooms, serve limited civil and criminal papers or assist in processing office paperwork.

Court Recorders record court activities using electronic recording equipment for the purpose of preparing a verbatim script. In addition, they are responsible for archiving court reports and transcripts, organizing official records, processing transcript requests, and researching medical, legal, technical terminology, and case citations.

Mediators reduce acrimony between parties by conducting conferences, facilitating conflict resolution, problem solving, and short-term counseling to improve alternative dispute resolution. In addition, they investigate and evaluate facts, conduct diagnostic interviews and psychological testing, solicit information from third parties, and prepare and maintain case files, reports, and statistical records.

Each of the abovementioned has, at some level, access to all court information and in many cases has the ability to cross-reference other courts. (Please refer to Figure 1 for exact organizational layout).

Figure 1. Organizational Chart of the Riverside County Superior Court System



Technology and Information Storage

As mentioned previously, Riverside County Superior Courts are perhaps some of the most technologically savvy courts in the state. The courts have access to a variety of computer systems and software including WestLaw, Lexis Nexus, E-filing (electronic filing) and web-based systems (i.e., imaging documents on the internet). However, the most advanced aspect of Riverside's technology is the fact that although Riverside

County Superior Courts operate independently, they are also intimately connected with one another through their court record case management system, GENESIS.

GENESIS is the case management system on which all the courts (probate, civil, juvenile, family law and criminal) operate. GENESIS allows for the cross-referencing of case information across courts, and in the case of some courts such as family law, allows access to constituencies ranging from the general public to public county agencies such as Child Protective Services, to high-ranking court personnel. Additionally, Riverside County has taken its system to new heights; it is available on the World Wide Web to any user. There are two GENESIS systems, civil (which includes civil, juvenile, family, and probate case records) and criminal (which exclusively houses criminal case records).

Although the GENESIS system is extremely technologically savvy and possesses a great deal of positive features ensuring the availability of court case data, the system is more limited in regards to the type of information available. To protect court client confidentiality, most personal identifying information (e.g., driver's license, social security number) is omitted, and clients are identified only by case numbers. As well, links to other cases that fall within other court divisions such as juvenile and criminal courts are unavailable. Court specific GENESIS systems operate completely independent of one another, thus making it difficult to obtain information on clients who may have cases pending in other courts. It is this latter aspect that the Family Index seeks to remedy.

#### *General Information Gathering Within Riverside County Courts*

General information gathering throughout the Riverside County Superior Courts varies by court district, but for the most part, information is gathered using telephone, fax, emails, and the GENESIS systems. Most information can be gathered in a matter of minutes or in more complicated and complex cases, days, weeks, or months. Although the system of information gathering has been described by many as ranging from good to adequate, there has been a growing need as the 21<sup>st</sup> century progresses to increase the efficiency and accuracy of the process. Additionally, there is some perception of current information gathering techniques as being slow and cumbersome, at least in

comparison to what is actually needed and is considered useful by today's standards. It is these concerns that the Family Index Project hopes to address by improving cross-referencing capabilities within families.

### ***B. Background of the Family Index Project***

The Family Index Project began as the result of an articulated need (identified by middle and upper level administration of the Riverside County Superior Courts) to increase the efficiency of court decision-making. This need became top priority after the discovery that several judiciary decisions were considered inaccurate and/or deficient because of faulty or incomplete information. A defining case that was considered particularly capstone: A father was given custody of a child in Family Law court, without the judicial official having information on the father's pending case in criminal court for child molestation. This case was viewed as the proverbial "straw that broke the camel's back" for some upper level court administration. Therefore, it was decided that there was a need to develop a mechanism to facilitate cross-referencing of key information, especially for those cases that originated in Family Law and/or Juvenile Courts, because those who would be most affected were those who were most vulnerable: minors.

After considering an upgrade to enhance the County Courts case management system (GENESIS), Riverside Project Team Members, Gary Whitehead, Carol Waterhouse-Tejada and Marita Ford applied for and were granted \$92,418 from the California State Justice Institute (SJI) to develop and implement the FI as well as conduct a formal process and outcome evaluation. The Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) provided additional funds (\$150,000) to conduct a comprehensive evaluation and provide information that would be useful not only on a county level and state level, but also on a national level as well.

Subsequently, a Project Team was developed to begin the process of facilitating the development and implementation of the enhancement. The team consisted of the Court Executive Officer, two Regional Court Administrators, three Court Service Directors, two Court Administrative analysts, a Programmer/Analyst and a Court Services Supervisor. At a later date, approximately two to three judiciaries also became

apart of the Project Team. From that larger team, a smaller “Project Design Team” was created to focus specifically on the development of the Index. This team consisted of the three court services directors representing the cities of Indio and Riverside.

The purpose of the Design Team was to conceptualize the process and implementation of the Family Index. The FI is an enhancement with the ability to link families within various courts and court cases, specifically family law and juvenile cases, for the purpose of generating accurate information on a court client. The program is presumed to make such linkages through female clients who a) often have primary custody of children, and b) are most likely linked to multiple partners. It is believed that this conceptualization will provide the easiest and efficient access to information (see Appendix B for an in-depth visual presentation).

While Riverside County Superior Courts is arguably one of the most technologically savvy courts today, the perception of the use of technology to provide detailed and efficient information is part of a growing trend in the justice field. In the next section, we present some of the current thinking concerning computer technology and the law.

## **Section II. Background Information on Technology, Family, and the One Judge, One Family Phenomenon**

The following sections provide a brief background on the issues we believe are intimately related to the Family Index Project, those of technology in the courts, the one judge, one family phenomenon and finally, how to define the concept of family.

### ***A. Status Of Family Court Use Of Technology To Support One Judge, One Family and Information Coordination Initiatives***

With the move of family law courts towards a “one judge, one family” processing of multiple court cases concerning related family members (Baer & Picciano, 2000, Petre, 1999), technology is proving to be perhaps the most efficient and savvy way to facilitate implementation. In an effort to improve the quality and timeliness of court decisions, courts use information technology (IT), and in particular, case management systems (CMSs) to reduce inefficiencies and to enhance information sharing,

collaboration, and communication among court staff, agencies, and judges. However, there are technological and organizational challenges that the courts must overcome in order to implement a truly useful system. For example, a decision is required about how the links will be made between family members and developing appropriate programs for maintaining this information. The challenge is developing an index linking families. Even a surface level discussion of this problem highlights the inherent difficulties. Traditional indicators for cross-referencing databases are inadequate. Birthdays, social security numbers, or driver's license numbers will not provide links between family members. To address this challenge, some courts have recognized the need to coordinate and link family cases upon intake, using both computers and personnel to screen for overlapping cases (Petre, 1999; Halemba, Hurst, & Montgomery, 2002). Other select courts rely entirely on their CMSs to identify members of the same family and those members' overlapping cases (Petre, 1999). Whatever the approach, the implementation of case management systems and other information technology forces organizational change regarding the way cases are processed, data is collected and maintained, and the way information is gathered. Such change can present unique challenges to the courts (Baer & Picciano, 2000).

For example, Beard (2001) found that in order for a technology to be used in the courts, it must meet the needs of the users suggesting that continued proper management of a technology project requires the following:

- 1) securing a project sponsor with seniority in the courts
- 2) winning the buy-in of staff that will actually use the technology
- 3) providing consistent, clear communication about the project's progress
- 4) engaging the users and decision makers in design and implementation processes to ensure usability.

Another technological challenge that courts face includes choosing a database that is appropriate for the court's immediate and future needs, and different types of databases are most appropriate for different information processing purposes. For example, an MIS database is often sufficient to use as a CMS, but a relational database is required for policy and program evaluation, and an aggregate database is best for government reporting (Baer & Picciano, 2000). As the 21<sup>st</sup> century progresses, courts

find that they must be able to meet state and federal requirements for information sharing and coordination.

Another challenge lies in translating the court's definition of "family" into a systematic means of connecting individuals in the CMS (Petre, 1999). There are two challenges. First, as already discussed, is simply figuring out which individuals are related. Second, a specific challenge in identifying family members is differentiating between two individuals with the same name. A unique identifier, such as a social security number, can be used. However, not all persons appearing in court have social security numbers. Furthermore, the courts must restrict access to and dissemination of social security numbers via the CMS (Petre, 1998). With the shift towards a one judge, one family approach, the courts are relying more heavily on CMSs to synthesize important knowledge about the families they serve. Careful project planning and implementation, continual maintenance, staff training, and error tracking are necessary to ensure that CMS can support the judge's, agencies, and court staff's information management needs (Beard, 2001).

#### *The Quest for a One Judge, One Family Courtroom*

The idea of a "one judge-one family" strategy towards case processing is based on a definition of the family that is not representative of the entire population (Gable, 1994). Many American families do not meet the traditional definition consisting of a married couple with children. They often consist of single parents, cohabitants, grandparent guardians, and foster parents (Schwartz, 1993; see the section on the family for expanded discussion). Most non-traditional families may be considered "post-nuclear" families, meaning that the parents were never married or the children do not have the same father (Schwartz, 1993; Armas, 2001). Such issues can have a significant impact on information processing and court proceedings.

#### *Background on the Family*

As we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century, information organization and management becomes increasingly important. The courts, in particular, need to manage information carefully and accurately to ensure that judgments rendered are based on correct, timely,

and complete information (Petre, 1999). Many courts strive to achieve an "integrated" computer database system. According to Myrent (2002) "...the purpose of an integrated system is to facilitate the transfer of case level records across agencies and jurisdictions." Integrated databases enable users to access information about an individual from a number of different departments. A simple example of this would be entering a defendant's name and having immediate access to all their court cases regardless of division (i.e. probate, criminal, family law, etc.).

While having access to an individual's court cases regardless of division is useful, it has been suggested by some that it is merely the first step in integration (Riverside County Superior Court, 2001). A more useful way to integrate the court database system is to link not only individuals across divisions, but also their families. By linking families, the courts are able to have a more global understanding of the circumstances that surround any individual. For example, would a judge in family law court find it useful to know that a father who is asking for custody of their child is being accused of abuse in juvenile court? Would a probate court judge find it useful to know that the new husband of the biological mother asking for guardianship of a minor has an ongoing family law matter? In each case, the knowledge about the activities of family members could potentially radically affect the judgments rendered.

In theory, linking family members sounds useful and relatively simple, in practice a number of obstacles quickly become apparent. The issue of "family" is one that has, in recent years, undergone a radical transformation (Petre, 1999). In the past, families could, for most part, be defined as "nuclear": biological father, biological mother, and children all living under one roof. Now, the nuclear family has given way to stepparents, half-siblings, baby's mother/father, and life partners (Petre, 1999). These different family forms create substantial challenges for integrating a database by linking family members (Petre, 1999).

But, from the court's point of view, how should the family be defined? By connecting certain individuals under one family, the courts hope to facilitate judicial decisions.

### **Section III. Evaluation Approach and Strategy**

This section focuses on the context, approach and strategy used by CGUET to guide the evaluative process.

#### ***A. Context of the Evaluation***

CGUET responded to a request by the Riverside Superior Courts in January 2000 to become the evaluator of the Family Index project. The project was described as an enhancement to Riverside's current court case management system. The Riverside County Superior Court System had received a grant from the State Justice Institute (SJI) and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to a) develop the enhancement b) guide its implementation, and c) evaluate its usefulness and effectiveness. It is this latter aspect that CGUET was contracted to conduct.

#### ***B. Evaluation Purpose and Goals***

The purpose of the evaluation was to conduct a four-phase evaluation covering pre-program needs, program design/development, program implementation, and finally program outcomes.

Pre-program Needs. For the Family Evaluation Project Evaluation, CGUET focused primarily on identifying the current process for cross-referencing information regarding judicial clients and thereby leading to judicial decisions. The Family Index is intended to address uniformed duplication across court divisions, and to promote efficiency of judicial decisions. Therefore, by initiating pre-program assessment, it is assumed that prior to the implementation of the FI, that judicial process and decisions are not optimally accurate or efficient because they may be based upon incomplete information, and/or that in many cases, complete information is difficult to retrieve. Additionally, it is assumed that there is duplication or inefficiency in obtaining information. CGUET sought to measure these pre-program needs to determine the extent to which the FI could effectively address these needs and to understand and clearly articulate the current court process (and to the level of satisfaction with that process).

Program Design/Development. Originally, it was thought that the Riverside County Superior Court System would be far enough along in the development process in order to allow CGUET to measure how effectively the FI addresses or accounts for the pre-program needs. Because of the tremendous setbacks that the Riverside County Superior Court Design Team experienced, program design and development is still incomplete.

Program Implementation. Program implementation refers to the various components and immediate intended consequences of the program. In the context of the current evaluation activities, CGUET had expected to collect and analyze data that would assist in determining whether the FI could provide useful information to the courts, and to assess to what extent court staff and personnel would actually use the FI. Again, due to setbacks during the development stage, program implementation could not be measured.

Program Outcomes. CGUET had anticipated measuring the actual short- and long- term impact and effect of the FI. In this case, the program outcomes were to refer to the observable, measurable benefits and effects resulting from the FI. Similar to the two previous phases, CGUET was unable to collect data to measure the *actual* impact and effectiveness of the FI. However, data collected during the pre-program need phase will allow for comparison with future measurement of program outcomes after the Index is implemented.

For each goal and strategy, several questions were used to guide data collection and provide an overall answer to effectiveness of current strategy, effectiveness of program design, effectiveness of program implementation and the overall effectiveness of the FI. Questions were developed by CGUET and approved by Riverside County Superior Courts, OJJDP, and SJI, as well as CGUET.

### ***C. Evaluation Approach***

Systematic data collection and analysis was used to guide the evaluative process. CGUET's role was envisioned as information gathering and reporting, as well as a source of feedback to assist in the development of the project. CGUET developed instruments and conducted data collection and analysis.

The evaluative approach was one that encompassed several strategies ranging from a theory-driven, to a client-centered and utilization-focused approach. From a theory-driven perspective, CGUET developed and revised questions according to the “theory” or rationale of those who are most involved with the program. In addition, questions were guided by those that were previously discussed in the literature (both academic and non-academic) as applicable to the use of technology in the courts. Please refer to Appendix A for visual model.

From a client-centered and utilization focused perspective, CGUET was concerned with ensuring that all stakeholder perspectives were represented, and that the concerns of Riverside County Superior Courts staff were heard. All instruments were consistently refined after talking with stakeholders through interviews and surveys were designed to accurately represent the particular issues at hand.

Data Collection. In accordance with the original evaluation proposal and contract expectations, data collection efforts were based upon the premise that no data source is bias-free or considered the best avenue to obtain data. Therefore, CGUET used a variety of methodologies including qualitative and quantitative methods. Both have strengths and weaknesses that overlap, yet complement one another. That is, while numbers can represent the findings in one manner, the richness of context data can give “voice” and explanation from a perspective that otherwise cannot be presented solely by quantitative data.

With this in mind, surveys, observations, and archival data provided quantitative data, and interviews, a review of the literature, and a comparison with other court information technology capability provided qualitative information (see Table 1).

Table 1. Types of Data Collected

<b>Quantitative</b>	<b>Qualitative</b>
• Surveys	• Interviews
• Observations	• Literature Review
• Archival Data Collection	• Comparisons

To provide consistent and close compliance with grant expectations, CGUET provided the following:

- Quarterly reports that served to provide regular feedback on evaluation activities, as well illustrating challenges and evaluation next steps.
- A day long, co-hosted site visit with the FI Project Design Team and Janet Chiancone of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to discuss pertinent evaluation findings and next steps.
- Regular correspondence with Project Design Team members and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

These efforts assisted CGUET in providing feedback concerning evaluation data, challenges and next steps for program development.

*Purpose of the Report.* The purpose of this final report is to accomplish the following: 1) provide a brief, but detailed presentation and summary of all data collected, 2) to illuminate challenges and obstacles in the evaluation as well as project level process, and 3) to serve as an information source to assist in the further development of the Family Index. It is expected that this document will be presented to Riverside County Superior Courts and its external funding agencies, specifically, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and the State Justice Institute (SJI).

#### **Section IV. Key Evaluation Findings**

The following section focuses on the findings generated from the pre-program assessment of the Family Index. Although the evaluation was able to answer some questions that apply to multiple phases of the evaluation, CGUET's efforts were limited to pre-program assessment because of the limited development of the Family Index. The questions answered are listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Contract Evaluation Questions Pre-Program Needs

Research Question	Data Collection Methods	Answer Available?
Was information from other courts available prior to program implementation?	1. Analyze court files 2. Interview and survey court personnel	Yes
Is case-processing time affected by implementation of the Index?	1. Analyze court files (pre and post) Interview court personnel (added)	Pre-implementation data collected for comparison after FI Implementation
Does the Index impact court proceedings?	1. Court observations (pre and post)	Pre-implementation data collected for comparison after FI Implementation
Does the Index affect coordination of efforts between the court divisions?	1. Interview and survey court personnel	Pre-implementation data collected for comparison after FI Implementation
What percentage of clients does the Index potentially affect?	1. Interview and survey court clients	Yes
What are the characteristics of the clients affected by the Index?	1. Interview court personnel 2. Interview/survey court clients	Pre-implementation data collected for comparison after FI Implementation
What is the nature of the potential impact?	1. Interview program staff 2. Interview court personnel 3. Survey court clients	Yes

### **A. Results: Courtroom Observations**

#### Introduction

Courtroom observations were used to answer the following question:

- Does the Index impact court proceedings?

Of course, to be more accurate, the question must be revised as:

- Is it likely that the Index will impact court proceedings?

Additionally, observations were intended to serve as a baseline for comparison (see program outcomes for evaluation question). Once the Family Index is fully implemented and integrated into the daily functioning of the Riverside County Superior Courts, additional observations can be made and compared to the current ones. By comparing these two sets of data, it is expected that any discernable differences may be attributed to the effects of the Family Index. Finally, observations attempted to provide CGUET with a greater familiarity with the court process and address the issue of confidentiality: how it is accomplished (especially in cases such as those referring to guardianship),

and what types of case should remain confidential from the general public and public service organizations such as Child Protective Services.

### Method

Observations were made in five separate courthouses: Family law, juvenile, civil, criminal, and probate. While observations were made in a number of these courtrooms they were generally limited to preliminary hearings and non-trials. It should be noted that juvenile courtroom observations were restricted (although this was not expected considering CGUET was promised access). Permission was granted to attend one courtroom on one day to conduct observations. In all, 83 court cases were observed across the five courts.

For clarification purposes in this report, CGUET made a clear differentiation between court clients and court participants. Court clients were plaintiffs and defendants or petitioners and respondents. Court participants indicated any non-court staff individual that was involved in a case. Examples of court participants included lawyers, witnesses, and family members of court clients.

### Measure

The Observation Checklist contained 17 items focusing on a) case demographics such as case number, b) participant information, c) computer consultation/information gathering d) obvious reference to another court division e) obvious shortcomings or mistakes with IT or records and f) any other comments about the proceedings.

### Results

The results will be discussed in two sub-sections. The first sub-section will discuss qualitative findings, while the second sub-section will discuss quantitative findings.

*A. Qualitative Findings*

Courtroom observations assisted CGUET in learning a substantial amount concerning the functioning of the Riverside County Superior Courts. First, each court has its own procedure in the structuring of a hearing or trial. When the Court Observation Checklist was first developed, it was done so after viewing cases in the family law courts. When the checklist was used in a different court, it was discovered that many of the basic assumptions did not transfer from one court to the other. For example, court clients in family law are referred to as petitioners and respondents; in civil and probate courts clients are referred to as plaintiffs and defendants. These discrepancies assisted CGUET in highlighting the ways in which the Family Index may affect the courts differently.

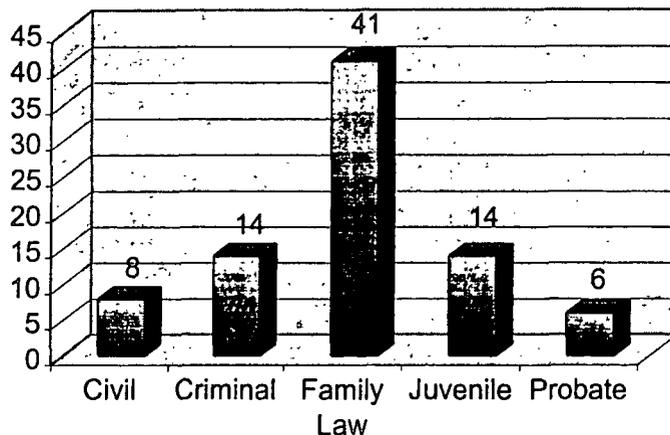
Courtroom observations were also useful in highlighting the key court staff and participants that may be affected by the Family Index. It was expected that judges and commissioners, court clerks, courtroom assistants, and mediators would be specifically impacted by the FI because of their consistent and regular interactions with the computer databases. However, it was discovered that attorneys and court clients would also be possible impactees. Finally, supporting agencies of the courts such the Child Protection Services (CPS) and the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) were also identified as consumers and impactees of the Index.

*B. Quantitative Findings*

*Demographics of the Sample*

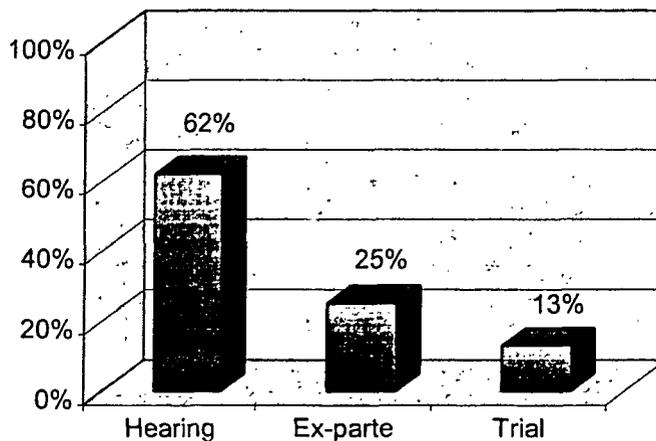
As noted earlier, observations were made across the five courts. Civil and probate courts had the least number of case observations with eight and six cases respectively. Criminal and juvenile cases were observed 14 times each and Family Law was observed 41 times (total n=83). (See Figure 2 below).

Figure 2. Number of Observations Made Per Court



Of the 83 court cases observed, 52% were adjudicated by a commissioner and 48% by a judge. Sixty-two percent of the cases were hearings, 25% were ex-parte hearings, and 13% were trials. (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. Percentage of Types of Cases



*Demographics of the Court Clients and Participants*

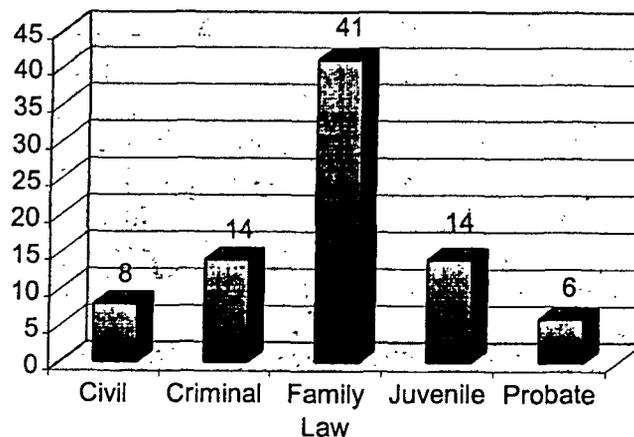
In many court cases there are no plaintiffs or petitioners, rather, it is the state that is bringing the case against the defendant or respondent. Of the 83 observed cases, 54 had a plaintiff or a petitioner and of these 54, 31% were male, 52% were female. In terms of ethnic background, the majority of the plaintiffs or petitioners in this study were

either Latino (31%) or Caucasian (48%). Of the 76 *defendants or respondents*, 59% were male, 21% were female. The majority of respondents were ethnically remarkably different than the plaintiffs: African Americans represented 21%, Latinos represented 33%, and Caucasians represented 43%.

### *Mediation*

Often in the family law courts and occasionally in other courts such as civil and probate, clients were referred to mediation for conflict resolution. Fifty percent of the civil cases, 17% of the probate, and 71% of family law cases had mediation involved in them. See Figure 4 below.

Figure 4. Mediation Involved in Court Case



When observing court cases, there were four aspects concerning mediation on which we focused: 1) if mediation was involved before the start of the court case, 2) if a recommendation was made, 3) whether or not the recommendation was followed, and 4) if mediation was recommended (or ordered) by the judge or commissioner. The purpose of this strategy was threefold. First, if mediators play a large role in the decisions of the court, then it informs us regarding the FI's usefulness for providing information to mediators. Second, if the advice of mediators is not followed or adhered

to, it may suggest that either the judiciary or the mediators themselves require better access to information, thus further indicating an area where the Family Index may be useful. Finally, tabulation of the number of times that the judge or commissioner suggests or orders mediation may provide information regarding the frequency with which mediation is used.

### *Mediation Mentioned*

Overall, mediation was mentioned in civil, probate, and family law court cases 34 times or, in 41% of the cases. Out of these 34 observed instances, 32% of the time mediation was recommended before the court case itself began, and 35% of the time mediation was recommended prior to the case, before reaching the courtroom. Finally, almost a third of the time (32%), either mediation was not recommended or the observer did not have adequate information to conclude that mediation had been suggested.

### *Mediation Recommended*

When a recommendation was made during the course of an observed case, 33% of the time the advice was not followed. Some of the instances of the judge or commissioner not following the advice of the mediator were explained by the changing circumstances for the clients between the time of mediation and the actual court date. Other instances, however, were due to the judge or commissioner stating that they thought the mediator did not have all the information pertinent to the case.

### *Information Usage*

Data also were collected regarding the number of instances when the judge or commissioner requested additional information by any means other than asking the court clients. Within the 83 cases observed, there were a total of 32 instances of information gathering observed. While taking into account that some court cases had multiple occurrences of information gathering, 23% of the cases had occurrences of information gathering.

Data also were collected regarding the number of references made referring to another court division. Overall, there were 27 occurrences of references to other courts.

However, when taking into account that some cases had multiple references, it was found that 25% of the cases had references to other courts.

Finally, data were collected concerning obvious mistakes or shortcomings with the information to which the judge, commissioner or other court participants had access. Shortcomings might include misspelled names, incorrect records, missing documents, or illegible or unintelligible documents. Such inaccuracies have implications for the Index. That is, if information is inaccurate, the FI may have difficulty linking relevant court records together. Overall, there were 19 occurrences of shortcomings or mistakes with information. However, taking into account that some cases had multiple shortcomings, 19% of the cases had mistakes or shortcomings with the information.

#### Implications of Observational Data

Court observations were completed to give a behavioral demonstration of when the Family Index would be most useful. From the current observations, it appears that the FI's primary utility in the courtroom would be as an information-gathering tool as it was intended. As it has been conceptualized, the FI will provide up-to-date information on cases before and during hearings. Additionally, the FI also appears to have the capacity to impact the mediation process by providing mediators access to information that could help facilitate the development of more accurate and perhaps more timely recommendations. This has the potential of significantly impacting the Riverside Court system because mediation is involved in over one third of the court cases and hearings.

Finally, in 23% of the court cases we observed, there were explicit requests by court staff for additional information, and in 19% of the cases, there were informational mistakes requiring clarification of inaccuracies. It is possible that the FI could eliminate or diminish the amount of time spent verifying or obtaining additional information. However, some of the inaccuracies generated could easily be considered "human error," so the FI will require processes for monitoring and verifying data input if the problems with inaccurate information are to be addressed.

## ***B. Results: Interviews with Judicial Officials***

### Introduction

Interviews with judicial officials served to answer the following pre-program questions:

- Was information from the other courts available prior to implementation of the FI?
- Is case-processing time affected by implementation of the index?
- Does the Index affect coordination of efforts between the court divisions?
- What are the characteristics of clients affected by the Index?
- What is the nature of the potential impact?

### Overview

Judges and commissioners within the Riverside County Superior Court system must often make decisions that affect both the individual and the individual's family. For example, in the family law courts a Judge or Commissioner is often required to make a ruling on custody or visitation of a child. If the judiciary is unaware of other cases in other courts an inaccurate and potentially detrimental decision could be administered. The Riverside County Superior Courts hopes that the Family Index will help prevent or remedy such inaccuracies.

The purpose of conducting interviews with judiciaries was to establish a baseline upon which to measure the effectiveness of the Index, as well as provide vital information concerning court procedures and information gathering. Judicial officials were interviewed concerning the extent that they a) need information about family members to make decisions, b) have information about the other Riverside County Courts available to them, and c) how they would acquire such information if needed.

### Method

Due to the scheduling and in many cases, resistance on the part of judicial officials, CGUET completed only seven interviews. Interviews ranged from thirty minutes to one hour and fifteen minutes long. Two of the interviews were conducted

over the telephone, while four of the interviews were conducted face-to-face. Interviews were conducted with five criminal court judges, one probate judge and one family law judge.

## Results

### *Which Courts Are Most Affected By Family Data?*

CGUET was previously informed by the Design Team interviews that the Criminal Court would most likely be the least affected, and interviews with judicial officials confirmed this assessment. Criminal court takes precedence over all others in the Riverside County Superior Court system. For example, if an individual has a case in family law and a criminal case, the criminal case must take precedence. Additionally, most of the information needed to make a determination on a criminal case is contained solely in the criminal court files.

According to interview with judiciaries, the only time information would be required by criminal courts from other courts is:

- a) *To resolve scheduling conflicts.* If there is a concern of a possible scheduling conflict, a phone call is made or an email sent to ensure that the two cases do not occur concurrently. Additionally, information can be accessed through the GENESIS case management system.
- b) *To assist in determining bail.* Often a pre-trial release (bail determination) will examine the individual's family situation in order to determine whether or not they should be released into their own recognizance.

For instance, it is possible that a civil lawsuit will happen concurrently with a probate case. In this event, it may be necessary to acquire the case file of the civil lawsuit in addition to examining the probate file. Although interviewees admitted that this could be accomplished through the GENESIS system, judiciary often will request (and perhaps prefer) the paper file.

Although family circumstances often are considered unimportant in criminal cases, having access to family members' records in other courts such as probate can be vitally important to judicial decision-making. For instance, our interviewees disclosed that probate court does have a limited investigatory function in guardianship cases.

Probate investigators research potential guardians and periodically monitor conservatorship cases. In many of these situations, the judiciary will request additional information.

### *Methods of Acquiring Information*

The most often cited method of acquiring additional information was via telephone conversations and GENESIS. Interviewees indicated that they relied on clerks to acquire information but cited that they would generally make their own phone calls. Preferred methods of information gathering varied by judiciary. Some interviewees indicated that they preferred paper files; others stated that they felt comfortable utilizing a computer. It should be noted that none of the interviewees utilized GENESIS themselves; they relied on their clerks to acquire and/or printout information from the case management system.

### Implications of Judicial Interviews

Although a very limited sample due to resistance or lack of cooperation by judges and commissioners, judicial interviews generated two important possibilities:

1) While the FI may not directly impact criminal courts it may *indirectly* impact them. Criminal cases are often insulated from the other Riverside County Superior Courts. In many instances, information about other court cases and family members' court cases will be immaterial to the judicial decision to be made. However, should Riverside move to a one family, one judge courtroom, it is anticipated that the FI may have a significant impact upon criminal case rulings.

2) The FI may more directly impact court decisions by impacting court staff rather than the judiciary. As well, secondary agencies such as probate investigators, DPSS and other supporting agencies also might benefit from the information provided by the FI. From our interviews, we found that for the most part (but not in every case), judicial officials often rely on the information presented to them rather than conduct their own research. Given that information gathering is conducted primarily by staff and community agencies, it is speculated that the FI may have the largest impact on these

groups of individuals by facilitating information gathering so they can be more thorough, accurate, and timely.

### ***C. Results: Client Surveys***

#### Introduction

The client survey served to address three focal issues pertinent to the Family Index. The client surveys sought to determine:

- 1) The number of clients that have court cases in other court divisions.
- 2) The number of clients with family members with cases in the County of Riverside Superior Court system.
- 3) Client satisfaction with the services provided by the courts
- 4) Family structure and relationships of court clients to determine the types of family linkages that would be important to the development of the Family Index.

The pre-program questions the survey served to address are listed below.

- What percentage of clients does the Index potentially affect?
- What are the characteristics of clients affected by the Index?
- What is the nature of the potential impact?

#### Target Population

For the purposes of the survey, CGUET made a clear distinction between *court clients* and *court participants*. *Court clients* were either plaintiffs and defendants or petitioners and respondents. *Court participants* indicated any non-court staff individuals that were involved in a court case. Examples of court participants included lawyers, witnesses, and family members of court clients. Thus, the client survey was designed to target clients and non-lawyer participants.

#### Method

The client survey was distributed on location at each of the Riverside County courts. At the Family Law and Civil courthouses, surveys were collected while clients

waited in line at the clerk's office. At the Criminal, Probate, and Juvenile courthouses, surveys were distributed outside the courtrooms while clients and participants waited to enter for their cases. As well court clerks distributed several of the surveys to clients.

### Survey Items

Survey items were designed to assess satisfaction with the overall court system as well as discern how clients perceived the concept of family. Questions assessing the court system included, "Do you currently have a case pending in the Riverside County Court system?"; "Did the judge know about your other cases?"; "How satisfied are you, so far, with the court process?" Other questions addressed the respondent's perceptions of family such as, "I consider someone to be a family member if they are a blood relative," and "How often do you see your family?" Overall, there were 21 questions addressing the respondent's involvement with the courts. 36 questions addressing the respondent's perceptions of family, and five demographic questions.

### Results

#### *Cases in the Courts*

107 surveys were collected across the five courts: thirty-four (34) surveys were collected from Family Law, 15 from Probate, 6 from Civil, 27 from Criminal, and 25 from Juvenile. Of these, 82 (76.6%) of the respondents had at least one case pending at the Riverside court. The notable exception was in civil court; only 50% of those completing the surveys reported having a pending case. Twenty-four (28.6%) of the 82 clients with pending cases had more than one case pending and 79% of these reported having cases pending. Of the 107 surveys collected, 46 (43%) of respondents reported having had cases in the past. Of these 46, 22 (47.8%) had more than one case of which 46% reported having had two cases.

#### *Client Demographics*

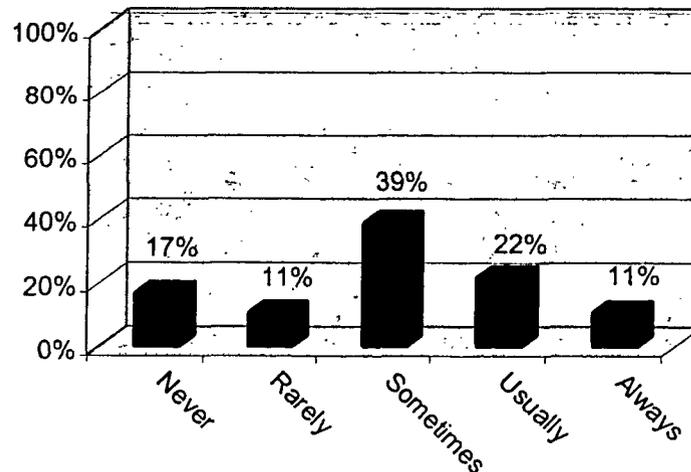
The gender demographic makeup of the respondents was 61% female and 34% male, (6% did not respond). Ethnically, 13% of the respondents were African American, 3% were Asian, 22% were Latino, 41% were White, 1% was American Indian, and 13%

were multi-ethnic. Of the 13% of respondents who identified themselves as multi-ethnic, 36% of them indicated that they were at least partially of American Indian descent. The ages of the respondents varied from 20 to 79 years old.

#### *Correct Case Information: Judiciary*

Thirty-four respondents indicated they had multiple cases either past or present. Of these, only 18 (53%) of the respondents believed that the judiciary had knowledge of their other cases. Of these 18, respondents reported whether the information the judge had about their other cases was correct never (17%), rarely (11%), sometimes (39%), usually (22%), or always (11%). (See Figure 5).

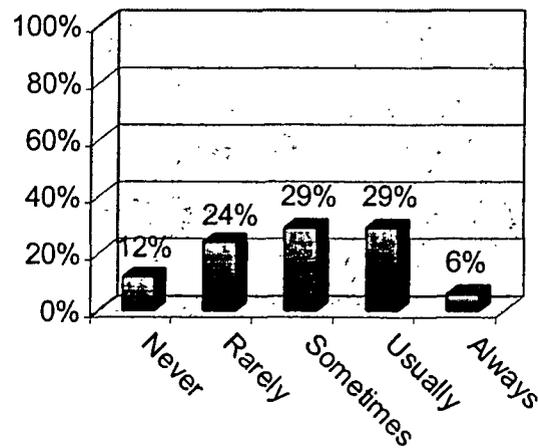
Figure 5. How Often Was the Information the Judge Had Regarding Your Other Cases Correct?



#### *Correct Case Information: Court Staff*

Of the 34 respondents who indicated that they had past cases, only 17 (50%) of the respondents indicated that they believed that the court staff had knowledge of those cases. Of these 17, 12% believed that the information the court staff had was never correct, 24% believed that it was rarely correct, 29% believed that it was sometimes correct, 29% believed that it was usually correct, and 6% believed that the information the court staff had regarding their other cases was always correct. (See Figure 6).

Figure 6. How Often Was The Information That The Court Staff Had Regarding Your Case Correct?



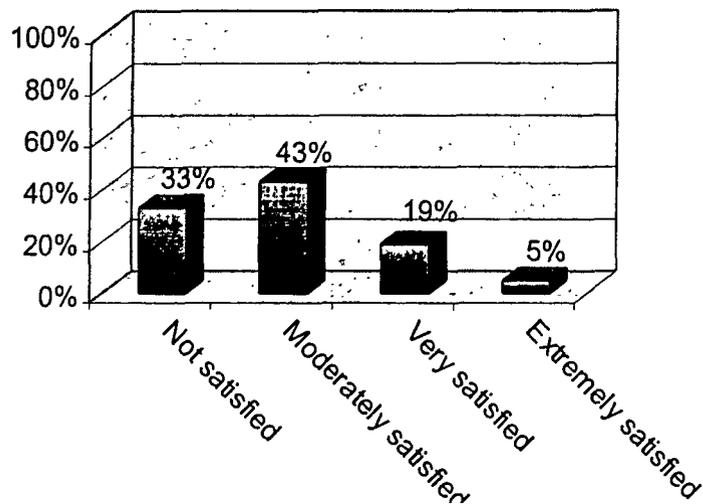
### *Continuances*

Of the 107 completed surveys, 45 or 42% of respondents reported that they had experienced continuances. Of this 45, 22 (49%) of them listed the number of continuances, ranging from 1 to 50 with 59% indicating two or less. Of the 45 respondents who reported continuances, 42 listed reasons for the continuances, 14 (33%) of which were due to lack of paperwork, lack of information, or because the courts needed to investigate the case further. Other reasons varied from "no reason" to illnesses and/or vacations (of court personnel or court participants) to attendance of other court participants (witnesses, lawyers).

### *Satisfaction*

Of the 107 responses to the client survey, 95 indicated their satisfaction with the court process. Thirty-three percent of respondents indicated that they were not satisfied, 43% indicated that they were moderately satisfied, 19% indicated that they were very satisfied, and only 5% indicated that they were extremely satisfied. (See Figure 7).

Figure 7. How Satisfied Are You, So Far, With The Court Process?



#### *Case Information: Relatives in the Court System*

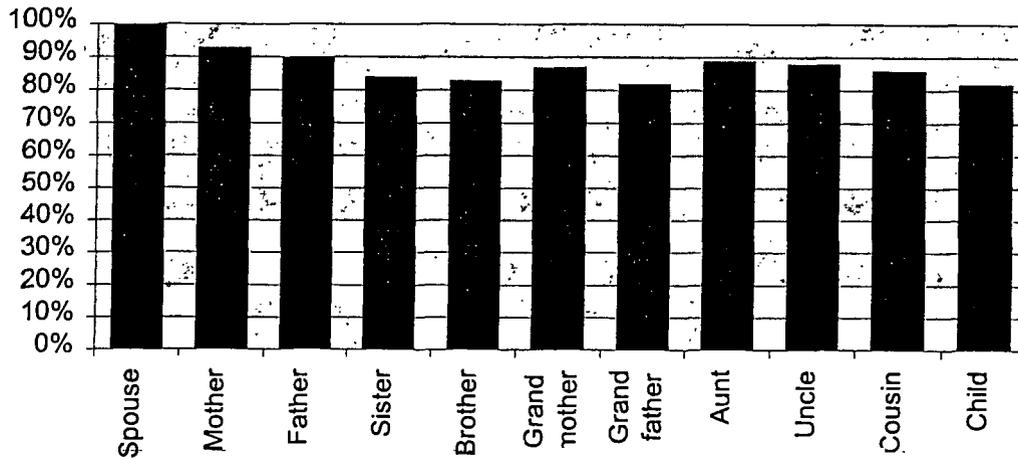
Twenty-seven (25%) of the respondents indicated that they had relatives involved with the Riverside County Court system with 69% of those 27 indicating that their relatives' cases were being handled in family law and juvenile courts. Only 8 (30%) of the respondents believed that the judiciary had pre-existing knowledge of their relative's case, and 37.5% (15) indicated that it took the judiciary no time to find out about their relative's case. However, 25% of the respondents who participated in the survey indicated that it took longer than a week for the judiciary to recover information on their relative's case. Additionally, when the judiciary became informed of the case, 60% indicated that they believed the information was incorrect.

#### *Who is Considered Family?*

When respondents were asked about whom they considered to be family, 88% indicated that a blood relative was family (see Figure 8), and 64% considered someone who married into the family as "family." On the other end of the spectrum, 27.6% considered someone they "knew for a long time" as family. Another 21.4% considered someone who was there in bad times to be family, and 26.5% thought someone who treated them like family was "family." Finally, 19.4% felt that someone who considered

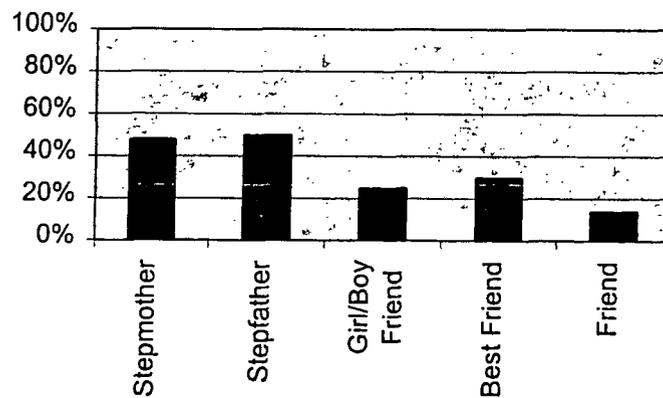
themselves to be family was "family," and 18.4% felt that someone who lived in the same household was family.

Figure 8. Breakdown of Family: Blood relatives



For non-blood relatives, the results were considerably lower with only 48% of respondents reporting that they considered a stepmother to be family, 50% considering a stepfather to be family, 25% considering a boyfriend or girlfriend to be family, and finally, 14% considering a friend to be part of their family. (See Figure 9).

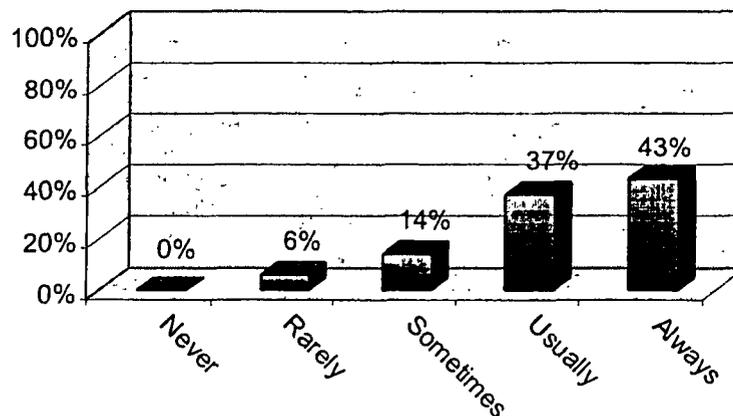
Figure 9. Breakdown of Family: Non-Blood relatives



Respondents also provided qualitative open-ended comments and listed some non-traditional family members that weren't originally included on the survey. Responses included foster or adopted children, grand children, nephew or niece, relatives-in-law, daughter's father, and clients' dogs.

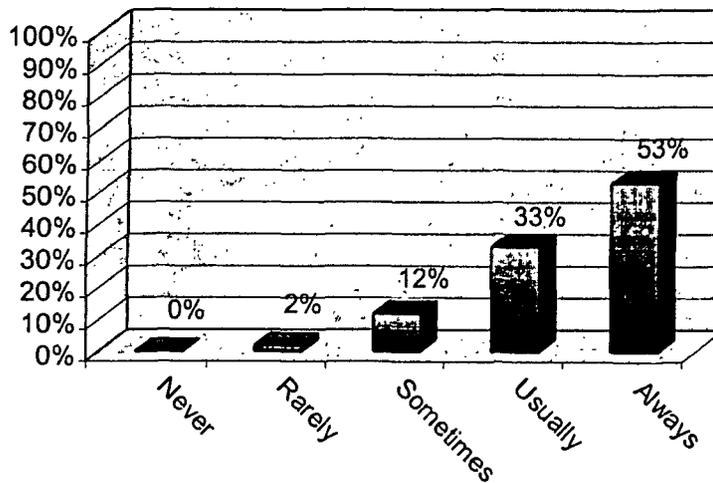
Finally and not surprisingly, respondents reported seeing and talking with their relatives regularly. These questions were asked to assess the degree to which families interact with one another to further verify the importance of indexing families within the courts' databases. When asked how often respondents saw their families, 0% of the 102 respondents reported never, 6% indicated rarely, 14% indicated sometimes, 37% indicated usually, and 43% indicated always. (See Figure 10).

Figure 10. How Often Do You See Your Family?



When asked how often they spoke with their families, 0% of the respondents indicated never, 2% indicated rarely, 12% indicated sometimes, 33% indicated usually, and 53% indicated always. (See Figure 11).

Figure 11. How Often Do You Talk With Family?



### Implications Of Client Survey Data

Client survey data yielded informative results of how well the current court system is equipped to handle case record information, as well as providing a concrete demonstration of how the Index will address case record information and in what manner. For the most part, clients indicate that there is definitely room for improvement in the courts' information gathering and management process. Respondents perceive a great deal of error and misinformation, which leads to a less than satisfying experience in the Riverside County Superior Court System. These data suggest that the FI may improve the court process by reducing time and error in the data collection and management process.

In addition, data were collected regarding family structure. During some of the earliest interviews, the FI Design Team indicated that one of their challenges was regarding how they were conceptualizing 'family' and how this conceptualization would impact data collection and organization. Consequently, CGUET decided to collect data regarding family structure. Currently, the conceptualization of the FI is based upon what may be considered a very traditional view of family (the mother as the main link to family and related members). Survey results indicate that, in order for the Index to be truly effective, the way in which the family is conceptualized and used for linking data might need to be reassessed because of the prevalence of non-traditional family relationships reported by the courts' clients.

## ***D. Results: Mediator Interviews***

### Introduction

Consistent with the expectations of a positive and useful impact of the Family Index on the personnel that practice within Riverside County Superior Courts, CGUET included mediators in the interview process. Mediators in Riverside County Superior Court solely work with the Family Law Courts and are referred to as “recommending mediators” because they provide recommendations to the judges or commissioners regarding custody and visitation matters of the family. A primary job function is to meet with parents who cannot agree on child custody matters and assist them in coming to terms with a reasonable plan for custody. However, if no agreement can be reached, it is the responsibility of the mediator to synthesize the existing situation and recommend a shared parenting plan that is in the best interest of the child or children.

CGUET’s purpose for interviewing mediators was based upon the belief that the Family Index would directly impact the jobs of mediators, by providing the ability to cross-reference from other court divisions. Therefore as part of the pre-assessment phase, our interview questions focused on how mediators’ obtained required information, and the level of effectiveness and satisfaction with current methods and technological resources to gather that information. The questions CGUET hoped to address are listed below.

- Was the information from other courts available prior to program implementation?
- Is case-processing time affected by implementation of the Index?
- What is the nature of the potential impact?

### Method

A total of five in-person interviews were conducted. Time lengths of interviews varied between 15 to 45 minutes and were audio recorded. The interview protocol developed was designed to investigate the details of how mediators obtain vital information regarding the parties, and how they go about compiling information to suggest a recommendation. Questions requested information regarding the mediator’s

background, computer usage, frequency of continuances, confidentiality issues, knowledge of the Family Index, and level of satisfaction.

## Results

### *The Computer as a Research Tool*

Of the five mediators interviewed, all but one indicated the use of computers for general purposes including accessing email and creating memos. In regards to the use of the case management system (GENESIS), mixed responses were provided. Although mediators have limited access to a statewide case management system (CLETS), they do not have direct access to GENESIS. Mediators indicated that a secretary or a staff member researched the information that is housed by GENESIS. When asked how long it took to research that information, interviewees estimated the average time to range from approximately five minutes to one hour.

### *Other Research Tools*

In general, interviewees stated that mediators obtained needed information from the initial meeting with the parents. If needed, more research was conducted after that initial meeting. Interviewees indicated that they obtain additional information by contacting therapists, doctors, social workers, or relatives of the party through telephone, fax, or email. In contrast to computer research, the process of obtaining this information takes much more time. Mediators estimated that gathering this information can take from minutes to weeks.

### *What Type Of Information Is Needed?*

Given that mediators are responsible for determining the best living situation for the child or children of parents who are undergoing a separation or divorce, interviewees reported that mediators must investigate the existing situation and carefully assess under what shared parenting plan the child would best flourish. Information needed from both parents includes current job status, to which parent the child exhibits the most attachment, any Child Protective Service involvement, any past criminal

history, an estimate of how much time is currently devoted to the child or children, and any issues with drug or alcohol use, dependence, or abuse.

### *Continuances*

Interviewees indicated vastly different percentages of continuances. Two mediators indicated that over 50% of their cases require continuances. In contrast, the remaining mediators stated that continuances rarely occur. Despite this discrepancy, a reason as to why continuances are required includes the need to wait for documentation from an outside source. For instance, mediators may require clients to attend a treatment program, and participation in treatment programs can take three to four weeks. In order to make a recommendation, mediators often must wait for documentation of completion of the program. Common contacts for information include schools, social workers, doctors, daycare providers, therapists, alcohol or drug counselors, or probation officers. The estimated amount of time needed to obtain such additional information can require hours to days.

### *Mediation Sessions*

The Riverside County Superior Court allows one mediation session per family. Interviewees reported that in a given day, the courts require the mediators to handle three cases, two in the morning and one in the afternoon. Given the limited time for sessions, mediations can require multiple sessions. Depending on the level of complexity, the mediation process can last from a few hours to weeks. Once again, this time span depends on the complexity of the case and whether the parties are required to attend treatment programs. However, interviewees indicated that mediators do strive to limit the sessions to one meeting.

### *Access to Confidential Information*

Interviewees indicated that mediators have access to confidential information about their clients, provided that clients sign a release form. As well, they have the same access to case files as judges and commissioners. Such information includes medical records, psychological evaluations, and/or information from therapists. This

information can be obtained from the existing case file or directly from the outside source once a signed consent is produced.

### *Types of Recommendations*

In the event that two parties are unable to reach an agreement, the mediator must develop a recommendation. Such recommendations may include creating a shared parenting plan that takes into account all the circumstances presented during the initial interview and via supplemental research, including interviews with the children. Once a recommendation is made, most interviewees indicated that the judiciary follows those recommendations 70% to 100% of the time.

### *Satisfaction With the Information Gathering Process*

All interviewees were either satisfied or very satisfied in their ability to obtain the information needed to make a recommendation. Reasons for this level of satisfaction include confidence in the methods of obtaining the information, as well as cooperation from the bench officers. Some reasons as to why some mediators were not very satisfied include time constraints and the need to contact other professionals that have similar time constraints, which leads to delays.

### *Knowledge of the Family Index*

In terms of knowledge of the Family Index, none of the interviewees were aware of the FI. From all outward appearances, it would seem that Family Index has little impact on the work of mediators. For the most part, mediators seem very resourceful in gathering information. It was stated that judiciary, lawyers, and mediators have the same access to client and case information. At times, with signed consent from clients, the mediator may obtain more information than the judges and commissioners.

### Implications Of Mediator Interviews

Most likely, the FI will impact more than just judges, lawyers, and clients in the traditional courtroom context. Interviews with Riverside County Superior Court mediators indicate that they provide a vital source of information for the judiciary

process (e.g., provide recommendations that are often followed). It seems likely that the Index would affect mediators as much as the judiciary who make the court determinations and decisions. However, it still remains to be seen who will have access and utilize the Index, and specifically, whether mediators will have access and utilize the FI. This question is raised because a) mediators report that they often rely on their clients for a significant amount of information rather than utilizing the courts' data systems, and b) they report little knowledge regarding the development of the Index. This suggests that mediators may not have been included or given an opportunity to provide feedback in the development process. Additionally, their access to the existing database appears to be limited, so mediators also might have limited access to the FI once implemented. Because of the move from litigation to mediation, and the reliance of court personnel on mediators to assist in the decision-making process, it seems equally important for mediators to have a clear understanding of the FI and the integral role it may play in the development of their recommendations.

### ***E. Results: Attorney Interviews***

#### Introduction

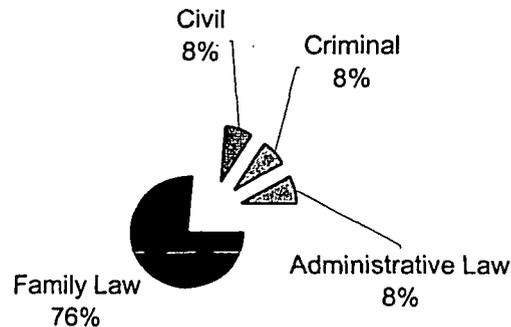
The purpose in conducting interviews with attorneys was to determine how the Family Index would affect them in their process of obtaining information regarding cases and clients. It has been informally speculated that attorneys would most likely benefit from use of the Family Index as part of the information gathering process. Therefore, interview questions focused on the attorneys' personal experiences in obtaining required information and the level of effectiveness and satisfaction with current methods and technological resources. Below are the pre-program questions CGUET strived to answer.

- Was information from other courts available prior to program implementation?
- Is case-processing time affected by implementation of the Index?
- What is the nature of the potential impact?

### Target Sample

The County of Riverside provided CGUET with the Riverside County Bar Association's list of members within the Family Law courts, which included judges, commissioners, attorneys, and retired attorneys. Therefore, from the list of 66 individuals, 47 attorneys were contacted and 13 attorneys agreed to a telephone interview. Of the 13 attorneys interviewed, most stated they practice within various divisions. Although CGUET was interested in all types of attorneys, the Family Index is expected to more greatly impact the decisions made in Family Law cases. Thus, 76% of attorneys either practiced only in the family law courts or practiced on family law cases in addition to other types of cases (criminal, employment law, personal injury, etc.). Only 24% of the attorneys practiced non-family law cases exclusively. See Figure 12 below for visual of breakdown.

**Figure 12. Attorneys: Divisions within Riverside County courts**



### Method

As opposed to in-person interviews, telephone interviews were conducted due to the varying locations of attorneys. Interviews varied between 15 minutes to 45 minutes.

### Interview Protocol

The interview protocol used was designed to investigate how attorneys obtain vital information for a case. The interview questions requested information regarding the attorney's background, computer usage, frequency of continuances, confidentiality

issues, knowledge of the Family Index, and the attorney's level of satisfaction with information gathering techniques.

It should be noted that following some of the initial interviews, the protocol was modified to more accurately assess the impact of the Family Index in future attorney interviews. Modifications were needed due to the realization that many of the interviewees were completely unaware of the Family Index. Thus, at the end of the interview, a brief explanation of the Family Index was provided for the attorneys and in turn, the attorneys provided feedback on whether the Family Index would be a system that they believed would improve their information gathering process.

## Results

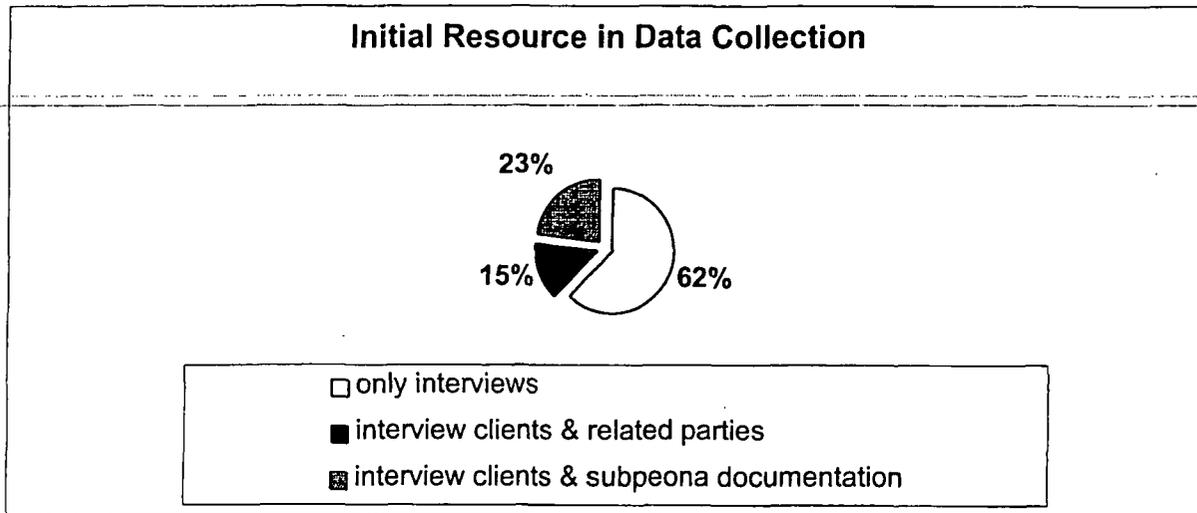
### *Information Gathering*

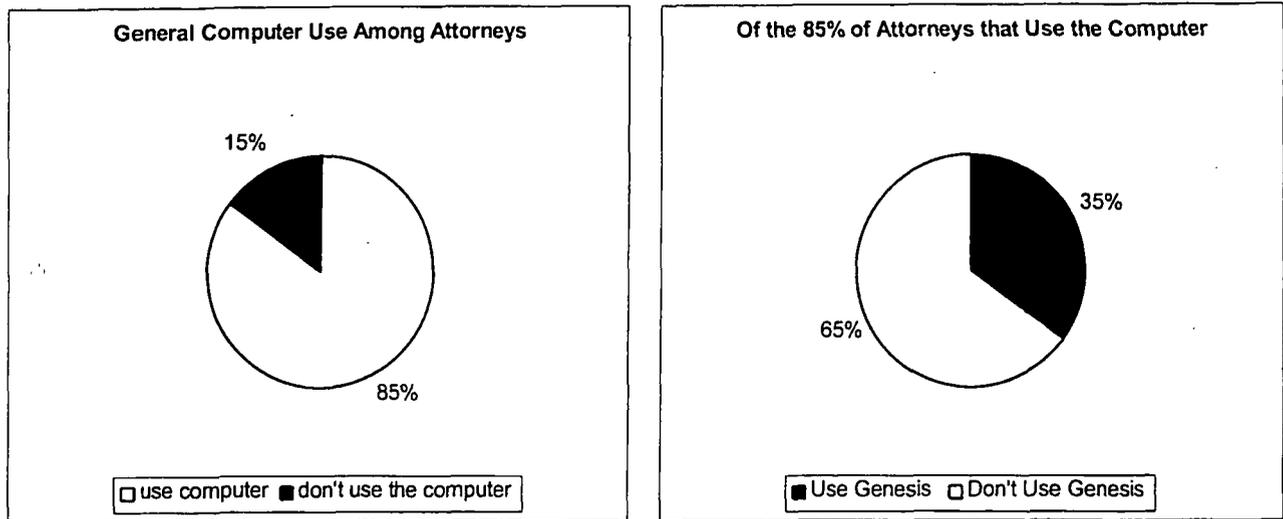
Of the thirteen attorneys interviewed, data indicate that attorneys feel that they may only have an occasional need for the Family Index. This low expectation is due to satisfaction with their current method of obtaining information regarding cases and their clients. Most placed a high level of confidence in their clients, feeling secure that the information received is sufficient and helps to ensure a thorough understanding of cases. 100% of the interviewees stated that their main source of information was directly derived from interviews with clients, which includes what is termed a "discovery process," a legal method of gathering information.

In addition, 62% of our interviewees stated that they rely *exclusively* on clients to provide all pertinent case information. Other methods of gathering information mentioned include formally subpoenaing records or directly meeting with parties related to the clients. When probed further about the level of confidence many of the attorneys place in their clients to provide all the pertinent information regarding a case, interviewees indicated that the honesty and thoroughness of the client's information is directly reflective of the quality of service that will result from that information. Thus, if a client is dishonest and does not provide all relevant information, the case is jeopardized and as a result, is more of a disservice to the client themselves than to the attorneys.

In reference to the use of the Family Index for information gathering, attention was specifically focused on the use of computers. Although 85% of attorneys use the

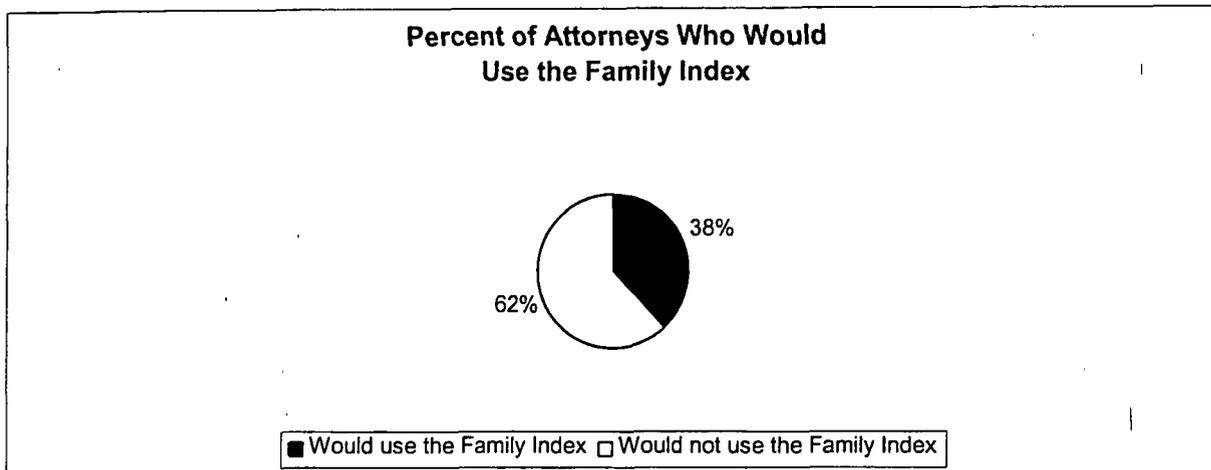
computer for general purposes, such as non-case related research, word processing, and email, only 38% of attorneys stated that they use the Riverside County Superior Court case management system, known as GENESIS. Realizing the Family Index would be a program branched off of the GENESIS system, use of the enhancement by attorneys would initially require a commitment to use the GENESIS system. Attorneys indicated that they did not use the existing GENESIS system because of monthly payment costs, computer illiteracy, and their confidence and satisfaction in current non-computer methods. Some attorneys also indicated a preference for physically visiting the Clerks Office to obtain hard copies of documents from the actual case file (See Figure below).





### *Usefulness of the Family Index*

Of the attorneys interviewed, 77% either worked only in the Family Law Courts or worked on Family Law cases in addition to other types of cases (criminal, employment law, personal injury, etc.). The attorneys who work on Family Law cases exhibited the most interest for the Family Index. Interest is focused primarily on the additional access the Index would allow to case and client information from the Riverside Courts, which could enhance their existing capabilities in obtaining essential information. However, attorneys still admit most information is revealed during initial meetings and interviews. Although attorneys indicated that the Family Index is a wonderful concept, when put into the context of using the GENESIS system, referencing the Family Index would be rare. Of the attorneys who were asked if they would use the Family Index, only 38% displayed a definite interest. See Figure below.



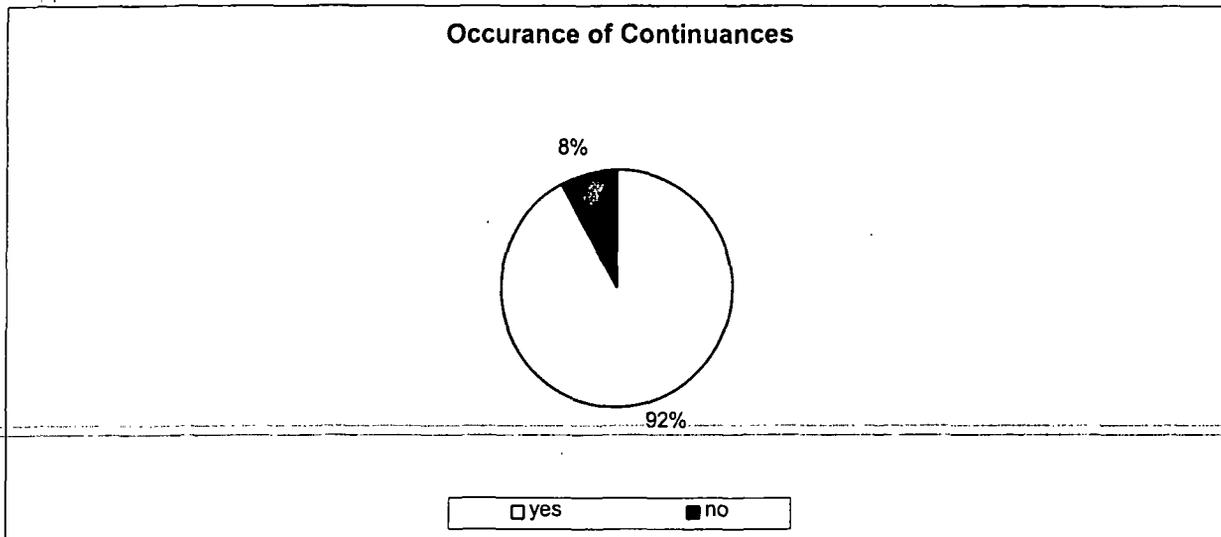
### *Satisfaction with Information Available*

Overall, 62% of the attorneys interviewed stated they are satisfied with their current method of obtaining necessary case and client information. In addition, 15% of attorneys indicated they are very satisfied with their current method of obtaining necessary case and client information. In contrast, 23% expressed dissatisfaction with current information gathering methods.

Attorneys indicated some level of dissatisfaction with the information available to them regarding cases and clients and provided suggestions as to the kinds of improvements and revisions they would recommend to the Riverside County Superior Court. Interviewees felt that information should be readily available and easily accessible. However, many stated that attorney's often run into roadblocks that restrict their access to case and client information and this results in dissatisfaction with the courts. Recommendations to ratify the existing system include creating an entirely new case management system that is more user-friendly. Currently, the GENESIS system functions on manually entering commands to navigate within the system. Interviewees indicated that this process is archaic. In addition, dissatisfaction was attributed to the monthly GENESIS access fee. Overall, while interviewees stated satisfaction with their current methods, they also recognize and emphasize that the process could perhaps be improved.

*Continuances*

CGUET was interested in knowing whether or not the Index could decrease the number of continuances. 92% of attorneys interviewed stressed that there was often a



high number of continuances that occur for cases (See Figure below). Reasons stated as to why they occur were missing information that needed to be provided by outside sources, scheduling conflicts, and personal reasons unrelated to the case.

*Access to Confidential Information*

Once the Family Index is created, the issue of who will have access will need to be addressed. 92% of the attorneys interviewed indicated that they do have access to confidential information regarding their clients and cases. In general, attorneys stressed the client-attorney confidentiality clause, which legally requires all client and case information to remain confidential.

Implications of the Attorney Interviews

For the most part, the attorney interviewees we spoke with are satisfied with their current ability and methods to obtain necessary case information. Nonetheless, they also support and value the FI's concept and intentions. Lawyers indicated that the FI

could have the most value for them if it would make researching clients and cases easier. However, attorneys questioned the degree to which they would have access to the Family Index citing potential or probable costs. Additional pertinent problems that may need to be addressed to maximize the FI's impact is regarding computer illiteracy. This appears to be a primary reason why some attorneys do not use the existing GENESIS case management system. Even so attorneys report a desire for more access to the type of information which will be provided by the FI.

### ***F. Results: Archival Data Analysis***

#### **Introduction**

As part of the pre-program assessment, CGUET sampled client case files as it is essential to assess the current procedures utilized in documenting, processing and storing case records. The purpose for using such methodology was to: (1) explore accessibility and accuracy of documents, (2) determine the capabilities of case files to match clients to case files, (3) determine if information is easily accessed within case documents, (4) study existing procedures for both access and confidentiality of court records when relevant, (5) determine if all information needed is available, (6) determine which indicators are used to file documents and finally, (7) determine the capability of cross-referencing within the county.

Below we highlight the questions we anticipated that an archival search would address.

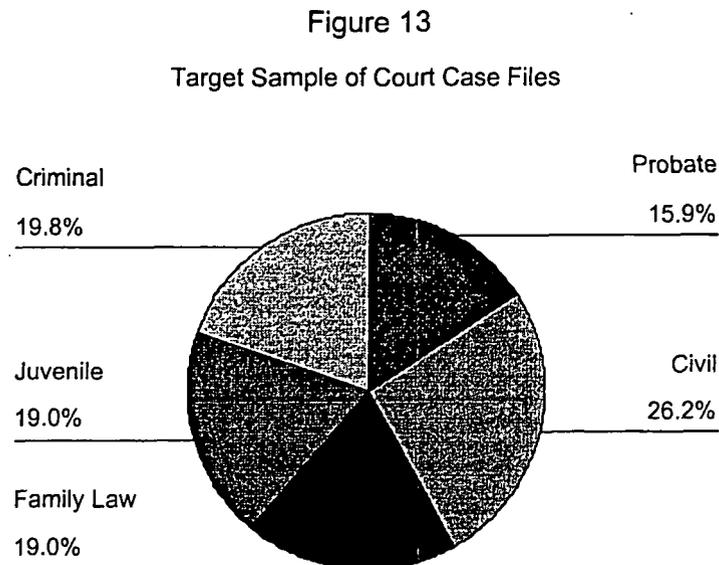
- Was information from other courts available prior to program implementation?
- Is case-processing time affected by implementation of the Index?

Because the FI still has not been implemented, these data have limited utility. Originally, these data were collected for comparison with post-program implementation data. We still report this information for comparison with post-implementation data should Riverside choose to collect additional data in the future. In addition, this information provides a profile of clients who may be affected by FI implementation.

Target Sample

The target sample consisted of client case records that were randomly selected from each of the five courts of the Riverside County Superior Court system. 126 cases were selected from the following courts in Riverside County: Family Law (N = 24), Juvenile (N = 24), Probate (N = 20), Civil (N = 33) and Criminal (N = 25). See Figure 13 below. The number of cases researched for the different cities are as followed: Riverside (110), Banning (6), and Palm Springs (5).

Figure 13. Target Sample of Court Case Files



CGUET utilized two separate databases (the court calendar browser and the Web) to select a representative sample. Court calendars are posted weekly and can be accessed by the public via the Internet. CGUET used these calendars to extract cases from probate, civil, and family law courts. The second database, *Imaging On the Web*,

an Internet server, was used to acquire court case numbers for juvenile and criminal cases. It should be noted that the server is only for use by Riverside County Superior Courts and requires several levels of access before entering the main server.

## Method

### *Protocol*

A protocol was designed to examine the current filing methods used by the county courts. The protocol consisted of 28 items for adult cases and a total of 34 items for juvenile records, which took into consideration parent and family information. The first 10 items consisted of demographics, including respondents/defendants name, case number, name, date of birth, gender, address, social security, drivers license, ethnicity, martial status, and living arrangements. Questions 11-20 were dichotomous and asked the coder to indicate whether or not the item was present. Sample items included incarceration, social work or social services involved, probation, arrests, and convictions. For the juvenile protocol, questions 29-34 were demographic items that inquired about parents and family.

### *Selection of Cases*

As previously mentioned two methods were used in selecting case numbers. The case numbers for civil, family law, and criminal were downloaded from the calendar on the Riverside County Superior Court web site. A list of court cases was printed out for that particular week, and case numbers were selected by randomly counting every fifth or thirteenth case. Case numbers selected on the *Imaging On the Web* calendar for juvenile and probate were selected based on availability and without using any kind of pattern.

## Results

### *Overview*

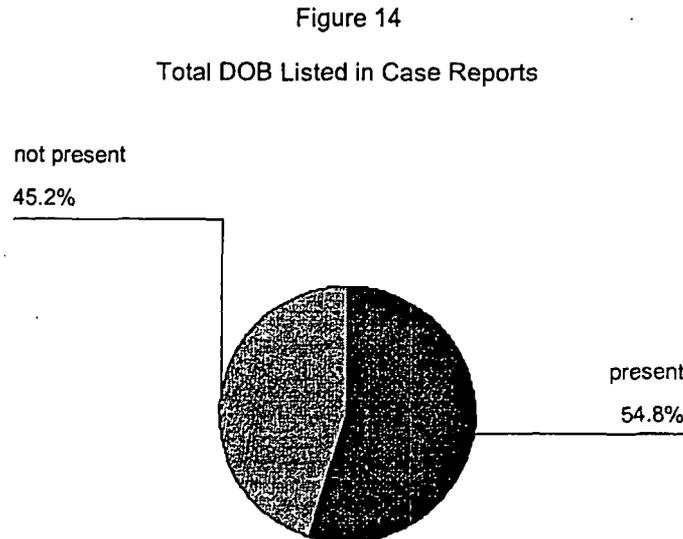
For the purpose of the current report, data will be presented in three separate sections. The first section consists of results from demographics questions, section two presents results regarding case content and finally, the third section focuses on items

that inquired about parental and familial information. The latter is mainly pertinent to juvenile cases.

*Section I.*

This first section reports demographic information. These data originally were collected to provide information useful in describing the characteristics of individuals to be affected by the FI. However, much of the information was missing from court files. This missing information may make it difficult for an Index to be developed linking family members. Our analyses indicated that case numbers and respondents' names were present in all case files, and date of birth (DOB) was found to be present in 57 (55%) of the case files sampled. See Figure 14 for visual presentation.

Figure 14. Total Date of Birth (DOB) Listed in Case Reports.

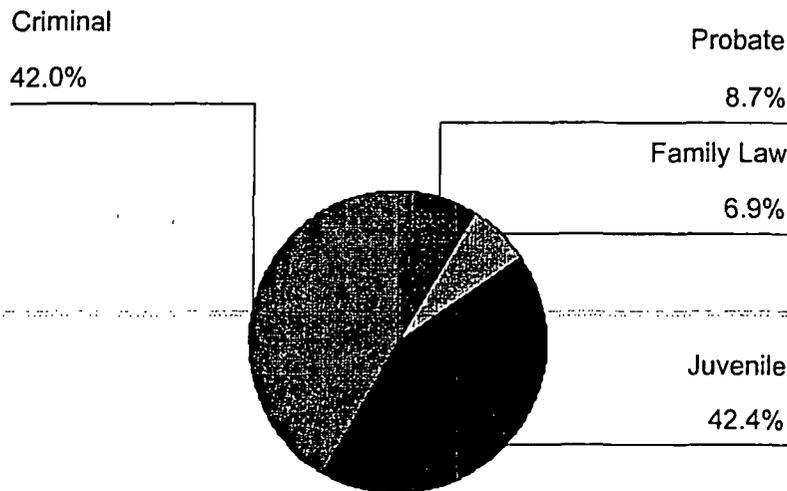


Further analyses were conducted to identify which court cases were more likely to indicate date of birth. Results indicated that juvenile and criminal courts were the two courts most likely to enter or list date of birth (57 cases). Out of the 57 cases that listed DOB, the percentage of cases within the different court divisions was distributed as

follows: probate (8.8%), family law (7.0%), juvenile (42.1%), criminal (42.1%) and 0% in civil. See Figure 15 below.

Figure 15. Date of Birth Listed by Court

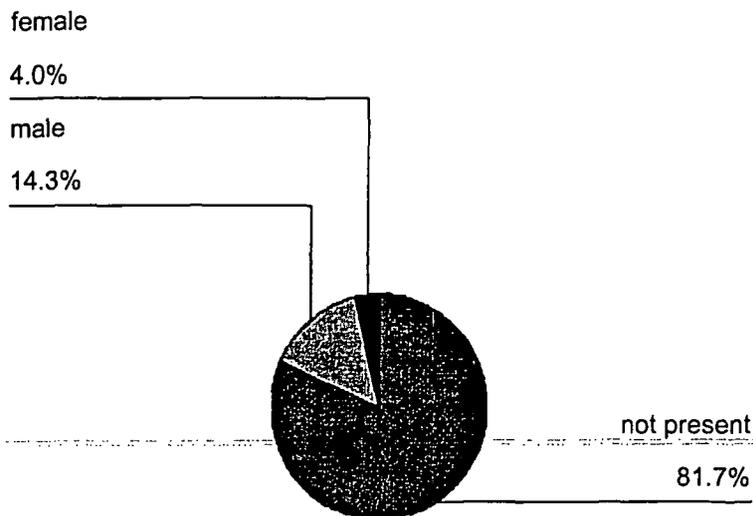
Figure 15  
Date of Birth by Court



Our analyses indicated that gender is a demographic that rarely seems to be used by the courts. However, it is an item that is usually found in documents that deal with children and custody cases. Gender was listed in probate (3 out of 20 or 15%), civil (3 out 33 of or 9%), family law (8 out of 24 or 33%), juvenile (8 out of 24 or 33%), and criminal (0 out of 25). Gender was listed in a total of 22 (17%) of the case files. Five were Female and eighteen were Male.

Figure 16. Breakdown of Gender Listing

Figure 16  
Breakdown of Gender Listing



Address was listed in a total of 72 (57%) of the case files: probate (11 out of 20 or 55%), civil (14 out of 33 or 42%), family law (14 out of 24 or 66%), juvenile (14 out of 24 or 58%) and criminal (19 out of 25 or 76%).

Figure 17. Breakdown of Address Listing in Case Files

Figure 17  
Breakdown of Address Listing in Case Files

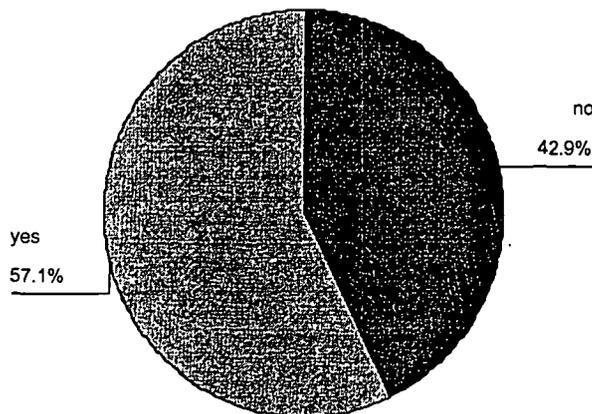
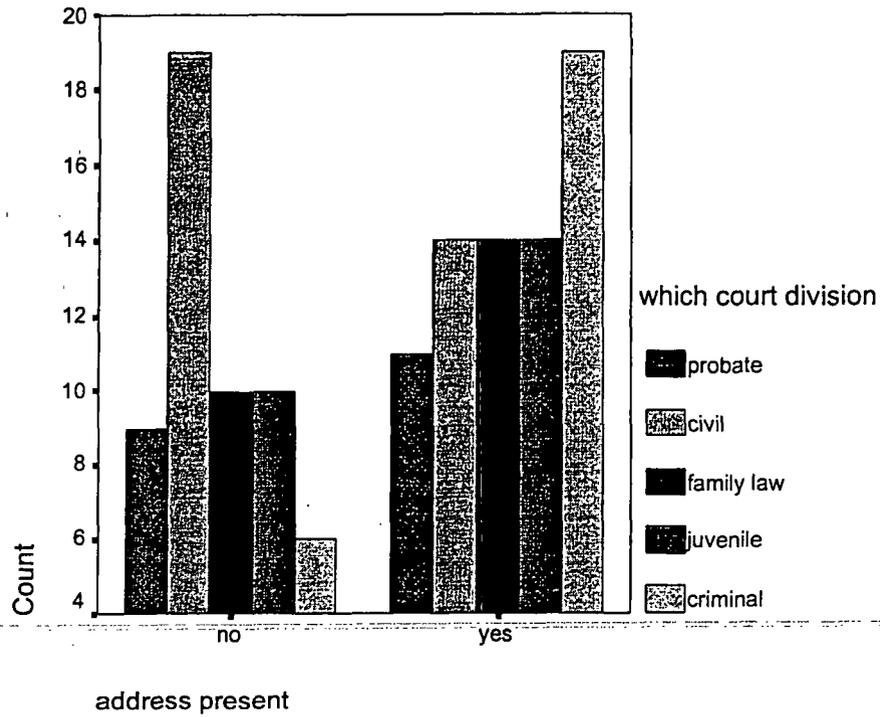
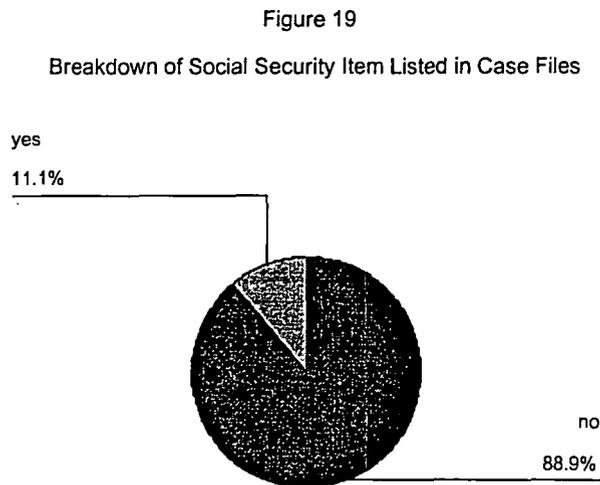


Figure 18. Number of Cases with Address Listed by Court.



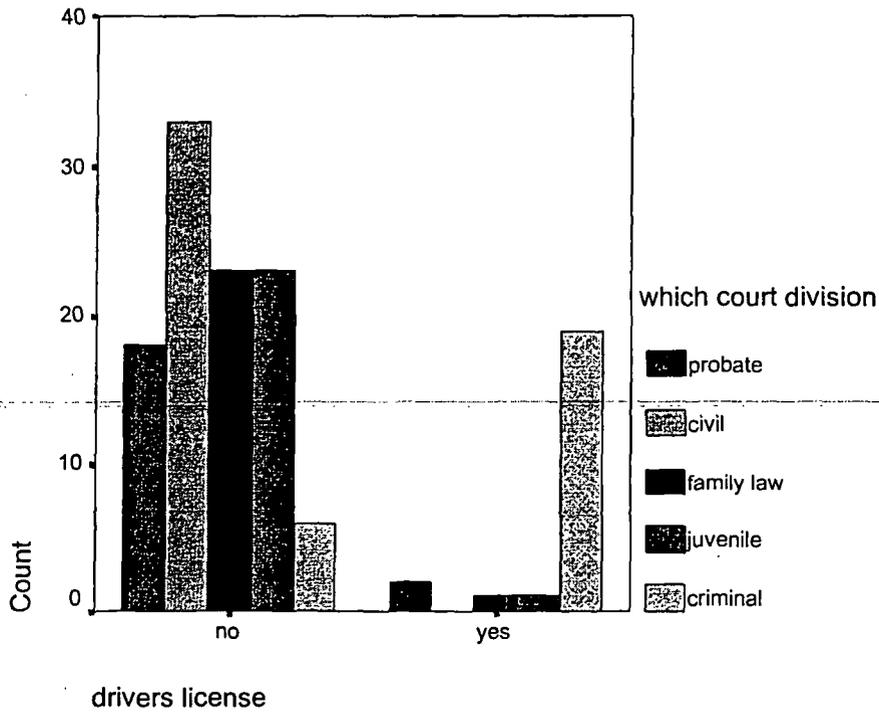
Analyses indicated that the social security indicator is seldom listed. Social security was listed in 14 (11%) of the case files and found in the following court case files: probate (3 out of 20 or 15%), family law (6 out of 24 or 25%), and juvenile (5 out of 24 or 21%).

Figure 19. Breakdown of Social Security Item Listed in Case Files.

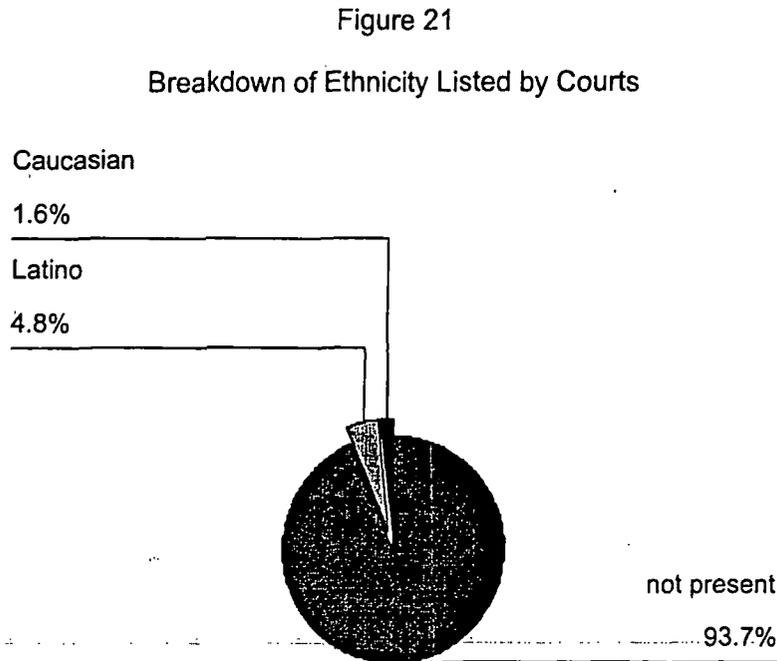


Driver's license numbers were most often found in criminal case files. The indicator was found in the following: probate (2 out of 20 or 10%), family Law (1 out of 24 or 4%), juvenile (1 out of 24 or 4%), and criminal (19 out of 25 or 76%).

Figure 20. Number of Cases with the Listing of Driver's License.



Interestingly enough, CGUET found that ethnicity was found to be the least documented demographic. Even for those cases where ethnicity was listed, only two were documented: Caucasian and Latino. They were found in the probate (1 out of 20 or 5%), family law (2 out of 24 or 4%), and juvenile (5 out of 24 or 21%) courts.

Figure 21. Breakdown of Ethnicity Listed by Courts

Marital status was listed in case files four times: probate (1), family law (1), and juvenile (2) court. As well, living arrangements were listed only eight times in case files, present in probate (1) and juvenile (7) court cases respectively.

## Section II

This section consisted of items that would be found in a case report including, but not limited to, arrests and convictions.

### Incarceration

An incarceration was usually mentioned in juvenile (10 out of 24 or 42%) or criminal (13 out of 25 or 52%) case files. Overall, the item was listed in both juvenile and criminal almost 50% of the time. For the juvenile case files incarceration was listed on both the minutes and the actions pages. Of course, it is not surprising that information regarding incarceration was only reported in juvenile and criminal courts. However, it is surprising that so few of these cases listed this information.

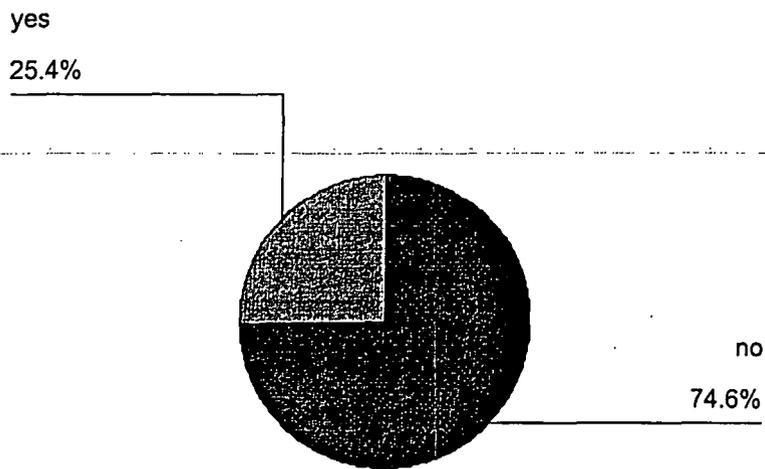
**Social Services**

Social Services was listed 32 times (25%) in the case files reviewed. For the most part, mediation was the overriding social service listed. Services were listed in the probate (4 out of 20 or 20%), family law (17 out of 24 or 71%), and juvenile (11 out of 24 or 46%) courts.

Figure 22. Breakdown of Cases Listing Social Services.

Figure 22

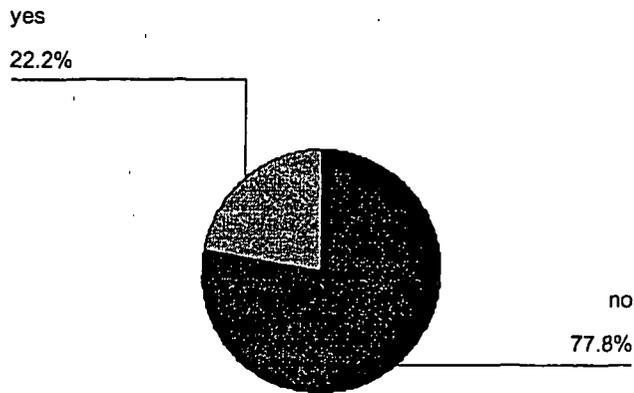
Breakdown of Cases Listing Social Services



Probation was listed in 24 (19%) of the case files and found primarily in juvenile (12 out of 24 or 50%) and criminal (12 out of 25 or 48%) courts and 28 cases (22%) listed an arrest. Once again the courts that listed an arrest were juvenile (10 out of 24 or 42%) and criminal (18 out of 25 or 72%).

Figure 23. Arrest Listed in Case Files.

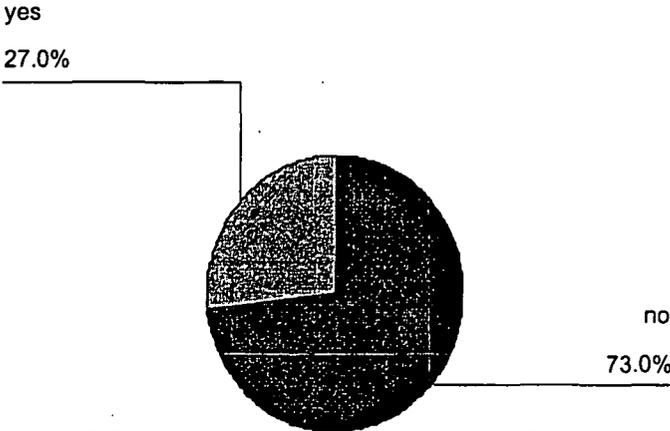
Figure 23  
Arrest Listed in Case Files



Convictions were listed in 27 (21%) of the case files, and were found in juvenile (7 out of 24 or 29%) and criminal (20 out of 25 or 80%) courts. Convictions listed in the juvenile case reports were found in the context of the case report while convictions listed in criminal case reports appeared on the *Actions Page* and the *Charges Page* of the database. Criminal offenses were listed 34 times (27%) and found in juvenile (13 out of 24 or 54%) and criminal (21 out of 25 or 84%) case reports.

Figure 24. Breakdown of Criminal Offenses Listed in Case Files

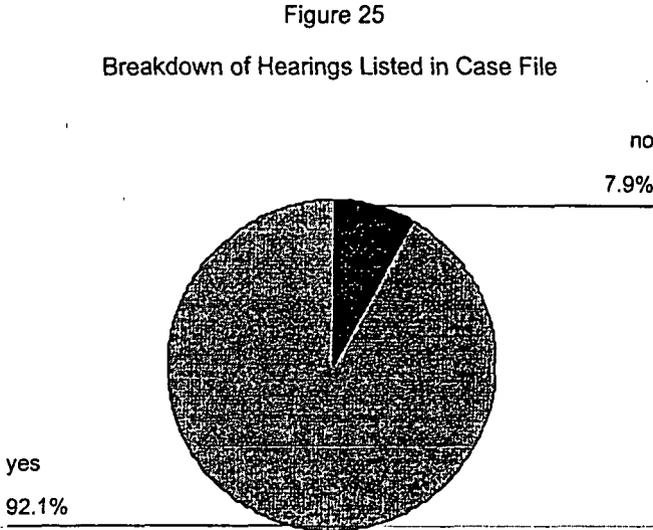
Figure 24  
Breakdown of Criminal Offenses Listed in Case Files



*Number of Hearings*

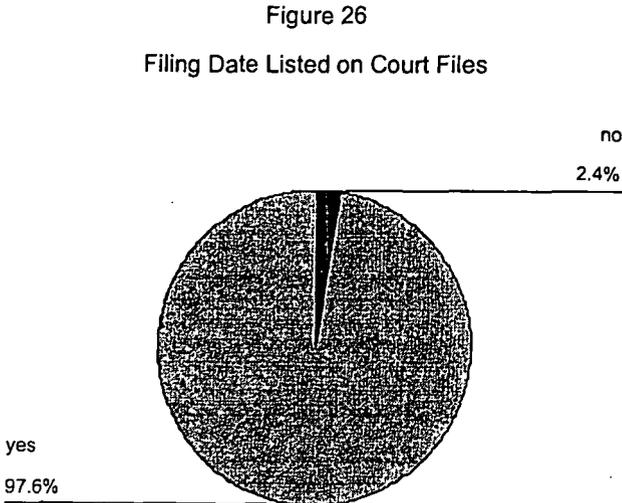
116 cases listed the number of hearings in each case report. Although listed in the case report, much like continuances there was no numerical number on the document that listed the number of hearings for each particular case.

Figure 25. Breakdown of Hearings Listed in Case Files



Over 95% (123) of the cases listed the initial filing date on the case report. Other items found were name, type (plaintiff, defendant), category (type of case, i.e. damages, custody etc.), case number, and the filing date for each case number. Most or all of the case files had the filing date listed: Probate (20 out of 20 or 100%), civil (33 out of 33 or 100%), family law (24 out of 24 or 100%), juvenile (23 out of 24 or 96%) and criminal (23 out of 25 or 92%). See Figure 26 below.

Figure 26. Was Filing Date Listed on Court Files?



Fifty-six of the cases listed a court ruling, 93 listed the case was closed, and 94% (118) stated the nature of the offense. Only two of the cases listed contacting other courts to for further information.

### *Section III.*

This section provides information concerning family and parents. Most of the results generated were related to juvenile, and family custody cases. Twenty-seven cases listed parents' name (probate [2], family law [3], and juvenile [22]). Thirty-three of the cases listed parent or stepparent's date of birth, and ten listed the birth dates of siblings.

### Implications of Archival Data

The information provided via archival data proved perhaps some of the most revealing concerning how the current court system functions in the county of Riverside. Below we discuss some of the findings in detail.

- *Accessibility and accuracy of documents.* Our research indicated that it was quite time consuming to conduct searches on individual clients. In addition, key demographic information such as date of birth, gender, ethnicity, addresses, social security numbers, and drivers license numbers has spotty presence in files. Given our understanding of the FI, it will be necessary to develop methods for linking individual court clients with their families, and a large amount of missing data may make the linking process rather difficult.
- *The capability of matching clients to case files.* CGUET found that matching clients to case files was often difficult and tedious. The team found that the database was not structured for easy access of information; often, minimal information was available, especially when conducting a name search. Such data indicates that databases would benefit from more structure as proposed by the FI.
- *Confidentiality issues.* The current case management system has been developed to conform with existing disclosure and confidentiality requirements. Most court records are available for public use, limiting only information regarding juveniles

and other cases deemed confidential by the courts. It is anticipated that the FI will also conform to these requirements.

- *Availability of necessary information.* For the most part information was available, but this information was not easily accessed. Many documents had to be thoroughly searched in order to find relevant information. It is unknown the degree to which the FI will modify the accessibility of this information beyond its intentions to link families' records.
- *Indicators used to file documents.* The indicators that are used to file case information are somewhat different for the two databases. For the civil database the indicators that are used are name, type (Plaintiff/Defendant), case name, case number and initial filing date. However in the criminal database, cases usually list defendant's name, date of birth, next court date, legal status, driver's license number, arrest date, number of counts, and violation date. These differences between databases make it more difficult to gather, combine, or cross-reference information.
- *Capability of cross-referencing in the county.* The most significant problems for cross-referencing information is in regards to the large time requirements, and at times, the type of information available. If well-conceptualized, the FI has the potential to make cross-referencing easier.
- *Effect of the Family Index.* Archival data indicate that, consistent with data collected through other means, the FI will affect family law, probate, juvenile and civil courts. Although not necessarily related to decisions made by criminal courts, it would be necessary for the FI to link data from criminal court cases to inform decisions made by other court divisions.

## ***G. Results: Court Clerk Supervisors' Interview***

### Introduction

Clerks in the Riverside County Superior Court system often provide judges with information to make decisions that affect both the client and the client's family. Court staff continuously run inquiries, conduct research, and obtain information from other courts.

CGUET interviewed court clerk supervisors to discern the extent that a) information about the other Riverside County Courts is available to them, b) there is a working knowledge of how to acquire such information if needed, and c) access to necessary information was reasonable.

### Method

An interview protocol was developed to better understand the role of the court clerk, and the manner in which they gather information. Clerks were interviewed on the following issues: a) information technology (computer and case management system use), b) information gathering (how, where, and when), c) importance of information (which agencies they work closely with and what information is relevant for them to have), d) confidentiality, e) Family Index, and finally, f) overall satisfaction. Below we list the questions that CGUET expected the clerk interviews to cover.

- Was information from other courts available prior to program implementation?
- Is case-processing time affected by implementation of the Index?
- What are the characteristics of the clients affected by the Index?
- What is the nature of the potential impact?

### Target Sample

Five (5) clerk supervisors were interviewed from each of the county courts. The interviews ranged from thirty minutes to one hour long. All five interviews were conducted face-to-face at the Riverside County Courts.

### Results

Our interviews revealed several reasons as to why clerks would contact other Riverside Courts.

- *To ensure that the court has jurisdiction over the petition.* Clerks are often asked to ensure that a similar request has not been placed in another court, or to make sure that a decision made in one court will not affect the decision of another. For instance, some courts have precedence over others, especially when dealing with children and adolescents.
- *To obtain a background check or criminal history.* Often court clerks will need to access information in order to conduct a background check or to highlight criminal history.
- *To inquire on timely update of cases.* Some cases may not have not yet been processed. Clerks contact the court(s) in question to obtain information on pending case(s).
- *To obtain information on court codes from a different court in the County of Riverside.* Clerks often contact other counties to obtain court codes to inform a particular case.
- *To resolve scheduling conflicts.* Usually, a phone call is made or an e-mail is sent ensure that a client's cases aren't scheduled at the same time.

Out of these activities, those that will probably be affected the most by the implementation of the FI are inquiries regarding the jurisdiction of a petition and background checks for criminal history.

### *Probate, Family Court and Decision-making*

Probate and family law court clerk supervisors were particularly concerned with making sure they were aware of the client's cases in other courts. For example, it is often the case that an individual may have a case in probate court for guardianship. The child in question can be concurrently involved in a family law case. In addition to examining the probate file, it would be necessary to acquire the case file from family law and as well as any other case file and history of the guardian/parent(s) involved. Our interviewees indicated that clerks generally search GENESIS to acquire this information.

### *Relevant Case Information*

As already confirmed in other sections of this report family member information is very important in all court cases except criminal. This is especially true in probate, juvenile and family law. Records can be accessed through the GENESIS system or through inquiring about information via phone or email to other courts. The only court that perhaps might be more difficult than others for obtaining information is juvenile. This is due to the fact that juvenile cases are often sealed and can only be accessed by judiciaries and authorized court personnel (usually juvenile court personnel).

### *Research and Inquiries*

Interviewees all agreed that searching for information was very time consuming, and not an easy task primarily because information is not linked. Cross-referencing usually requires accessing several databases and screens. This can be especially difficult when the client's name is common and he or she has more than one case. The most often cited method of acquiring additional information GENESIS, Internet or Intranet, and telephone conversations. Additional methods of acquiring information mentioned were: background checks, asking the client themselves, sheriffs department, district attorneys, social services, child protective services, and the civil jail.

### Implications of the Clerk Supervisors interview

From the sample of clerk supervisors interviewed, three conclusions can be drawn: First, except under unusual circumstances, the Family Index may not directly impact criminal courts and it is unknown how it will affect or influence decisions regarding juveniles tried as adults.

Second, it is clear that although clerk supervisors were content with the GENESIS system, enhancements to the system were needed. Interviewees noted that proposals had been made to IT, about adding functions such as automatic links to other databases, mouse features, touch screen, and spell check.

Third, for the most part clerk supervisors were very receptive to the FI and stated that they looked forward to its implementation, as they believe the enhancement will significantly improve their work and productivity.

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## ***H. Results: Clerk Survey***

### Introduction

In addition to interviews with court clerk supervisors, CGUET surveyed court clerk staff to discern the extent that a) information about the other Riverside County Courts is available to them, and b) how much time it took to catalog and access such information. Establishing clerks' current workload (the amount of demographic and court case information that is entered into the current database by each court) and comparing that workload after FI implementation, can serve to highlight any time savings (or increased time costs) associated with the FI. To this end, CGUET sought to answer the following evaluation questions:

- Was the information from other courts available prior to program implementation?
- Does the Index affect coordination of efforts between the court divisions?

### Target Sample

The target sample consisted of court clerks, court assistants, and any other court personnel whose main responsibilities include entering and maintaining court records.

For the purposes of this report, this composite of personnel will be identified as “court clerk staff.” 85 participants were surveyed from the five Riverside County Superior Courts: Family Law (N = 35), Juvenile (N = 3), Probate (N = 4), Criminal (N = 13), and Civil (N = 30). See figure 27 below.

Court clerk staff was also asked the length of time they had been working for the Riverside County Superior Courts. Ten respondents (11.8%) had been employed less than one year, 28 (32.9%) had been employed 1-5 years, 17 (20%) had been employed 6-10 years, 13 (14.1%) reported having been employed 16-20 years, and 5 (5.9%) reported having been employed by the county courts for over 20 years. See Figure 28 below.

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Figure 27. Target Sample by Court

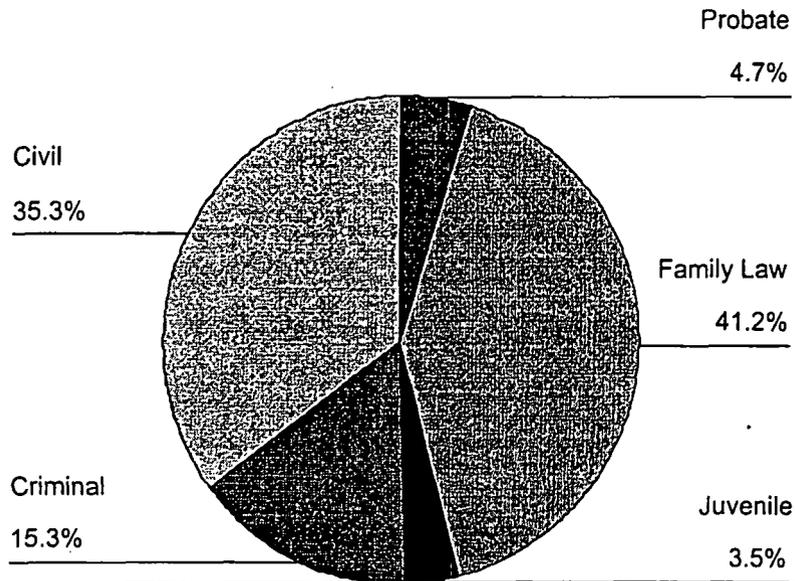
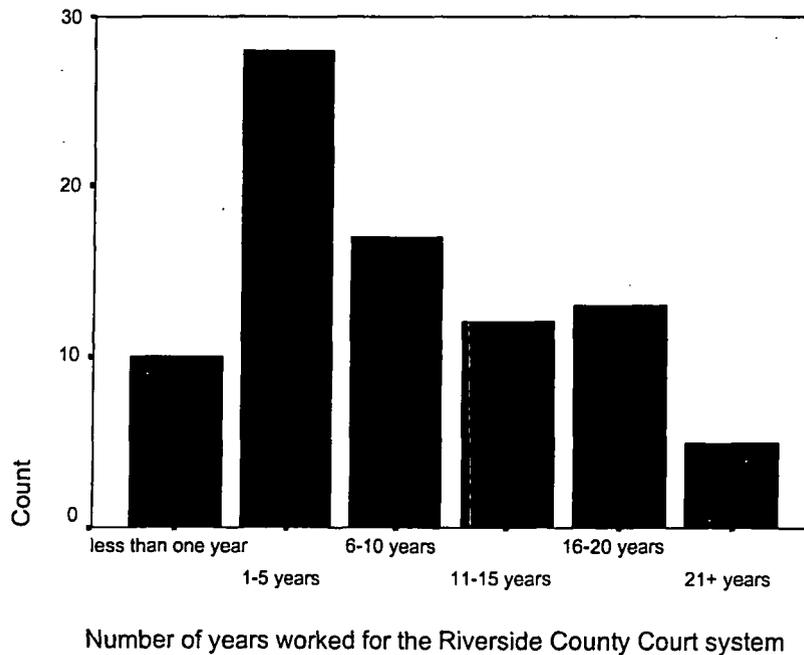


Figure 28. Number of Years Worked for the Riverside County Court System



## Method

### *Protocol*

A three-page survey was distributed to all court clerk staff. Survey questions included five (5) questions pertaining to case management (e.g., "How many new cases per day do you generally enter into the computer"), seven (7) questions exploring other sources of information (e.g., "Do you contact any of the other courts when preparing a case print"), and two (2) questions assessing demographic information.

## Results

### *Overview*

For the purpose of the current report, data will be presented in four sections: Case Management System, Other Sources of Information, The Family Index, and Satisfaction.

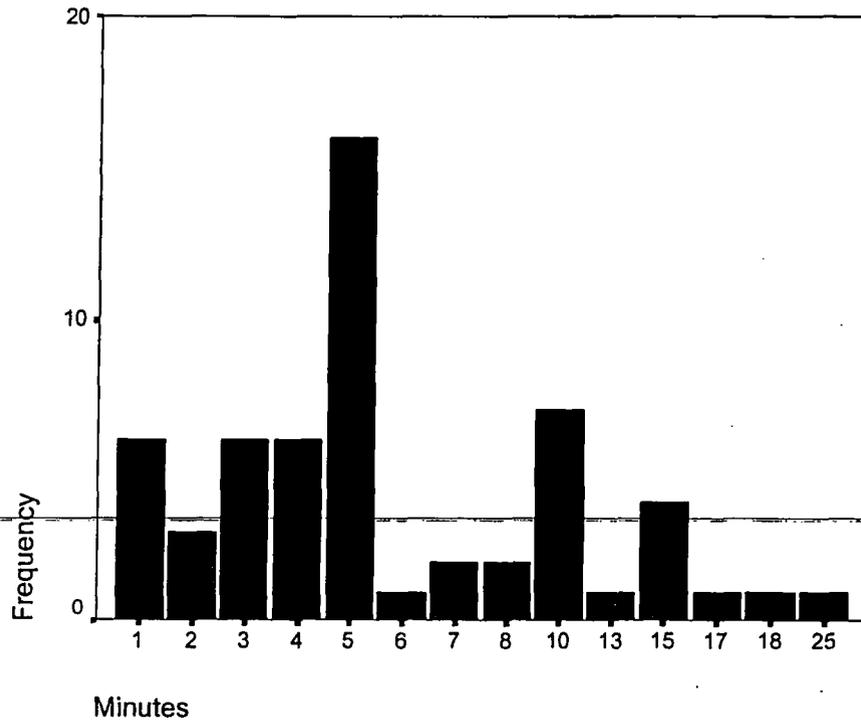
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### *Case Management*

Court clerks were asked to check which indicators were available in a case file. Our analyses indicated that the following items were available: name (N = 67), alias (N = 38), maiden name (N = 29), defendant number (N = 8), social security (N = 56), address (N = 22), date of birth (N = 24), driver's license (N = 34), parents' names (N = 13), parents' dates of birth (N = 63), children's names (N = 22), and children's dates of birth (N = 29).

Court Clerks also were asked how long it took to enter data from a new case into the CMS. They reported that entering data took anywhere from a few seconds to 25 minutes with an average of seven minutes per case. See Figure 29 for visual presentation.

Figure 29. Time Taken To Enter New Data Into The Computer

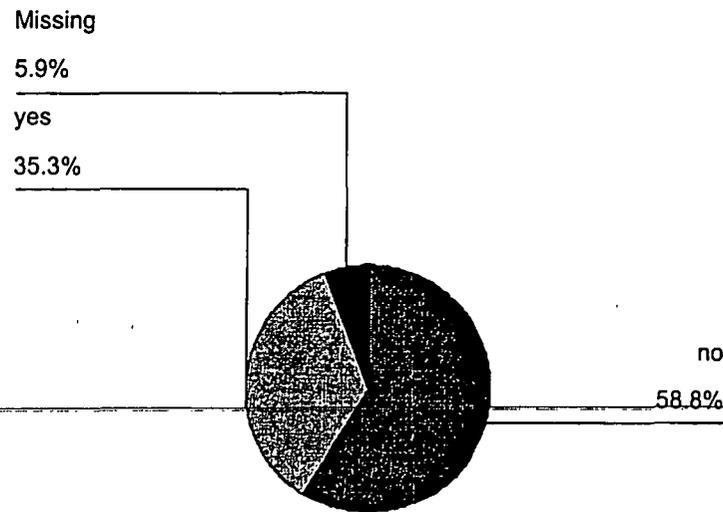


Clerks were also asked how many cases they enter per day. Responses ranged from 0-90 cases with an average of 13 cases entered per day.

*Other Sources of Information*

In addition, court clerk staff was asked to indicate other sources they use to obtain the information they need. When asked if they contact any other courts when updating a case, responses indicated that 37.5 % (N = 30) of court clerks contacted other sources. See Figure 30 below. On average these court clerks contacted Probate (N = 3), Family Law (N = 4), Juvenile (N = 2), Criminal (N = 2) and Civil (N = 3).

Figure 30. Contacting Other Riverside Courts When Updating a case



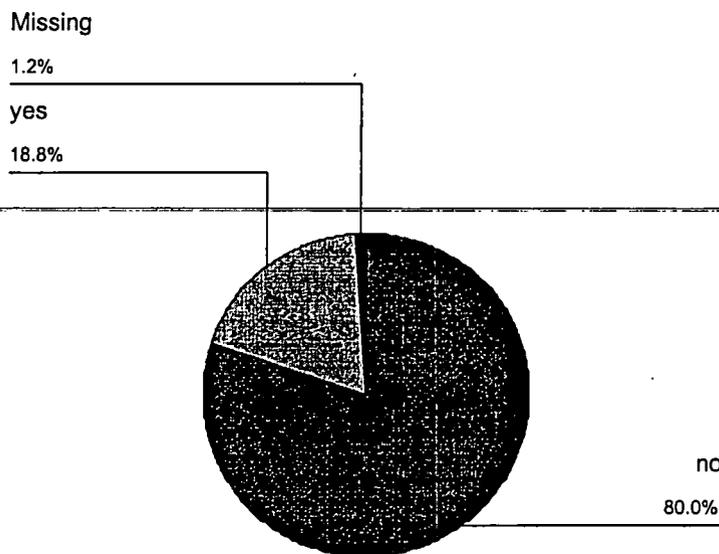
Court Clerks were asked if they contacted other supporting agencies (i.e., DPSS, CPS, etc.) to obtain information for a case. Responses indicated that 26 of the 85 court clerks (31%) did indeed use other supporting agencies. Some of the agencies listed are as follows: Court services, CPS, DCSS, DA, various shelters, Department of Child Services, Support Services, DOIT, DPSS, Riverside County Courts, sheriff services, and the sheriff's court services. Data also indicated that the court clerks had specific preferences in contacting these supporting agencies; telephone was used most often. Other methods included e-mail, message services, and FAX.

### *Family Index*

Court Clerks were asked for their opinions and thoughts concerning the FI. Results indicated that the majority (80%; N =68) of the clerk staff surveyed had never heard of the Family Index, while 16 individuals knew of the basic concept of the FI (see Figure 31 below). Those respondents who felt they were familiar with the basic concept

of the FI reported that it was: 1) a database for cross-referencing on individuals with previous or current filings; 2) a method of keeping a family's case together to be heard by one judicial officer; and 3) a method by which to obtain information on a case to link with other cases involving members of one family so that the judiciary has more efficient control of court orders.

Figure 31. Respondents Knowledge of the Family Index



Staff was also asked which courts the Family Index would most affect. The following courts were mentioned: Probate (N = 16), Family Law (N = 17), Juvenile (N = 15), Criminal (N = 14), and Civil (N = 14). They also were asked to list additional agencies (besides the courts) that the FI would most likely affect. Responses were 1) those who research court records, 2) the general public, and 3) law enforcement.

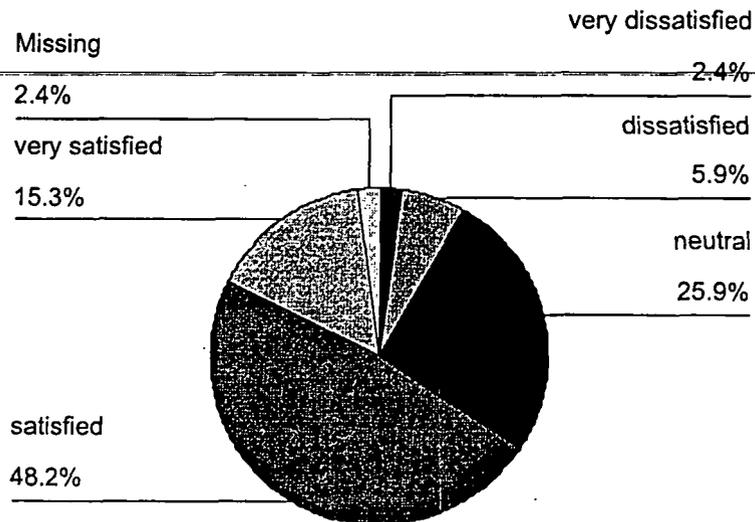
Court clerk staff was asked if the Family Index would make their job easier. 14 out of 17 (82%) said that the Family Index would indeed make their work easier. They noted anticipation regarding the improvements such as a) cross-referencing, b) complete information on families, c) increased efficiency in locating cases, d) increased

time efficiency regarding other research activities, and e) easier access to information from other courts.

*Satisfaction*

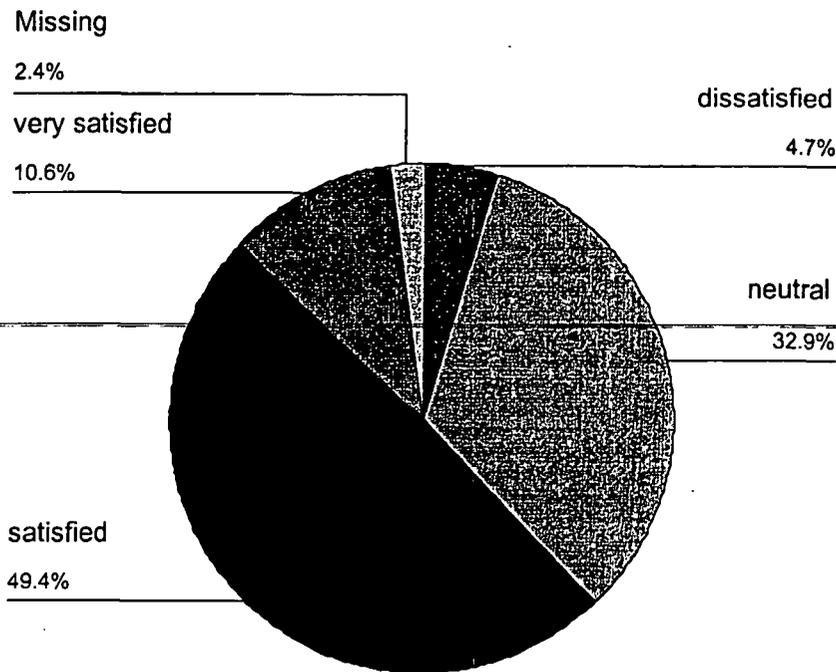
Finally, court clerk staff was asked how satisfied they were with the technological performance of the court system. Our analyses indicated that court clerks were, for the most part, satisfied with the performance of the court system (see Figure 32 below).

Figure 32. How Satisfied Are You With the Performance of the Court System?



Staff also were asked how satisfied they were with the Office of Informational Technology. Respondents indicated that, for the most part, they were satisfied (see Figure 33 below).

Figure 33. How Satisfied Are You With the Office of Informational Technology?



Implications of the Court Clerk Staff Survey

Interviews with court clerk supervisors served to inform the court clerk staff survey process, and thus some of the information gathered echoes that from the interviews. That said, it is indeed confirmed that court clerk staff are adept at using, and in many ways are content with the GENESIS system. For the most part, necessary information is either already present in the case or can be gathered via other mediums (FAX, telephone, e-mail) and takes minutes to obtain. Those who had knowledge about the FI were positive and could cite the usefulness of the database enhancement. However, it should be of concern that many of the staff were unaware of the FI primarily because those who would be most affected by implementation of the FI (i.e., court clerk

staff) seem to know the least about it. Given the high level of satisfaction with the current information gathering methods, it might be important that all court clerk staff have a full understanding of the Index prior to its implementation to ensure buy-in and encourage proper use.

## ***I. Results: Juvenile Survey***

### Introduction

Similar to the survey of adult clients, the juvenile survey was designed with two primary goals in mind: 1) to discover the number of juvenile clients with family members who have court cases in the Riverside County Superior Court System; and 2) how the court dealt with those cases in terms of gathering and processing information. In addition, the survey included questions regarding juvenile clients' satisfaction with the service they received from the Courts. Pre-program questions that guided the survey process are the following.

- What percentage of clients does the Index potentially affect?
- What are the characteristics of the clients affected by the Index?
- What is the nature of the potential impact?

### Method

#### *Participants*

Eighty-four (84) male residences in a Riverside County juvenile detention facility were surveyed. The survey addressed the participants' perceptions of how information was gathered and used while they were in court. Participants ranged in age from 12 to 19 years old.

### Measures

A 26-item survey was developed to measure juveniles' perceptions of how information was gathered and used in court. Thirteen questions addressed the juvenile's and their family's involvement with the court system (i.e. "How many cases do you have currently pending in the court system?"), seven questions addressed information usage

in the court system (i.e. "Did the judge know about the other cases you had in other courts?"), one question addressed satisfaction (i.e. "Were you satisfied with the court process?"), and five demographic questions were added to assess sample characteristics.

### Procedure

With the approval of the Riverside Juvenile Hall Director, the survey was administered at a Riverside juvenile detention facility with ten juveniles at a time filling out the survey under the supervision of a CGUET researcher and juvenile hall staff.

### Results

Out of the 84 juveniles surveyed, 53 (63%) indicated that they had had a previous case. Of these 53 with previous cases, 39 (74%) had more than one previous case. Eleven (21%) believed that the judicial official was unaware of the previous case, and 15 (28%) believed that the other court staff was unaware of the previous case.

Respondents were asked, "How often was the information the Judge had regarding your other cases correct?" Participants' most frequent responses were that the judges information was correct often (26%) and sometimes (26%; see Figure 34 below).

When asked, "How often was the information the court staff had regarding your other cases correct?", the most common response was often (30%; see Figure 35 below).

Figure 34: How Often Was The Information The Judge Had Regarding Your Other Cases Correct?

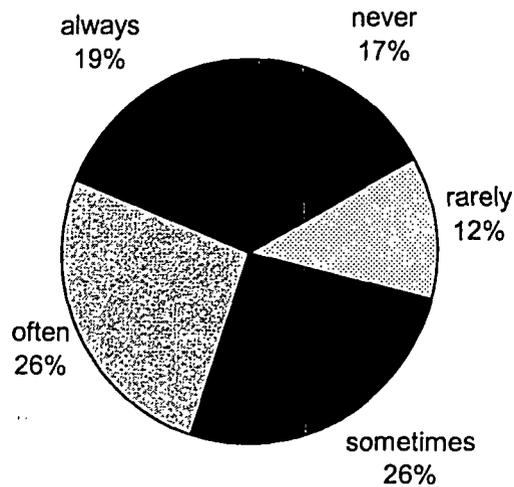
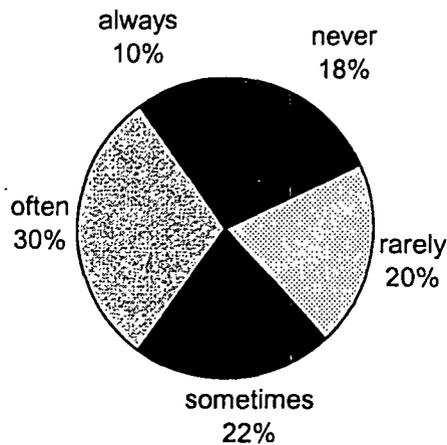


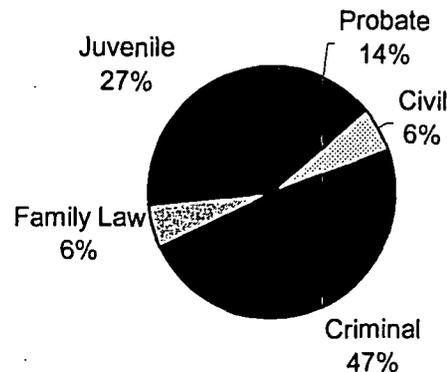
Figure 35. How Often Was The Information The Court Staff Had Regarding Your Other Cases Correct?



Participants also indicated that 29 (34.5%) had family members that were currently involved in the courts. Of those 29, 5 (17%) were involved in probate court, 2 (7%) were involved in civil court, 18 (60%) were involved in criminal court, 2 (7%) were

involved in family law court, and 10 (33%) were involved in juvenile court (see Figure 36).

Figure 36. With Which Court Divisions Are Juveniles' Family Members Involved?



Of the 29 respondents who reported having family members involved in other courts, 19 (66%) believed that their judiciary (presiding over their case) did not know about their family members' cases.

Finally, another interesting finding was that the number of self-reported continuances was negatively associated with satisfaction with court proceedings ( $r = -.24$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $N = 76$ ). That is, the more continuances, the less positive the client was about the court process. This is an interesting finding. While it may mean that individuals with more serious crimes that require more continuances are less satisfied with the Courts, it also may mean that the FI could possibly improve client satisfaction with the Courts by decreasing the number of continuances through increased efficiency.

#### Implications of the Juvenile Survey

Given that the Family Index is expected to primarily affect the family law and juvenile courts, juvenile responses are vital. Similar to the client survey data, the juvenile survey indicated that there is significant room for improvement in the courts' information gathering and management process. Similar to the adult court clients, juvenile respondents reported that there is a great deal of error and misinformation,

which leads to a less than satisfying experience in the Riverside County Court System. Again, CGUET sees this information as an affirmation of the need for the Index, especially in its potential ability to economize time and reduce error in the information gathering process. As well, the Index may help facilitate reasonable, quick and accurate decisions at the juvenile court level, which thereby might lead to more satisfying court experiences for juvenile clients.

## ***J. Results: Comparison Study of County and State Courts***

### Introduction

#### *Overview*

In order to further understand the Riverside County Superior Courts and the manner in which they operate, a study of other courts across the country was conducted to provide a comparison for Riverside County Superior Court's filing procedures, technological utility, and the extent to which the IT system is user friendly. Courts were sampled in select counties of California, Texas and New York. Although not a part of the grant expectations, CGUET felt that the comparison study would assist to address the following questions.

- Is (will) case processing time be affected by implementation of the Index?
- Does (will) the Index affect coordination of efforts between court divisions?
- What is the nature of the potential impact?

### Method

Information was gathered via in-person and/or telephone interviews. Court staff (e.g., court clerk supervisors) was asked to provide answers to several open-ended questions concerning current and past filing techniques, technological advances, and case management systems. Criteria included the following: 1) type of case management system used, 2) filing methods, 3) cross referencing courts through the use of a computer case management system, and 4) access to information. The

following section describes each county in detail concerning the methods, procedures and technology used by each of the courts to file documents and cases.

## Results

Interviews were conducted with staff from six other county courts from three different states. Courts were samples from California (Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, Orange County, and Fresno), Texas (Dallas County) and New York (Chautauqua County). Please see Appendix C for a condensed chart of comparison study results.

### *1. Riverside County*

The Riverside County Superior Courts began to store documents electronically in 1993 and introduced an online retrieval service in 1997. Riverside considers itself a leader in technological advancement, and the plan for the FI is a part of their continual technological development.

Riverside's current case management system is a UNIX system known as GENESIS. Via this system, files are imaged (scanned) into the case management system and court officials and personnel in any court in the County of Riverside can access documents through the server via the Intranet. As well, the public (which includes the district attorney's office, social workers, court clients, etc.) can also view these imaged documents at any of the Courts in Riverside. Attorneys and social service agencies can gain access to GENESIS for a monthly fee. In exchange for this monthly fee, they are given a restricted access code for reviewing court documents. This code restricts access to certain records and the use of certain functions, which protects client confidentiality when necessary.

### *2. Los Angeles County*

The Municipal Courts in the county of Los Angeles, prior to the unification of both Municipal and Superior Courts, developed a countywide, automated criminal case processing system for use in all Los Angeles Courts. The Municipal Court Information (MCI) system is a criminal case management system that utilizes one case processing

system to manage and process each criminal case from its beginning in the Municipal Court through disposition in the Superior Court, and it was adopted by all LA County courts in 1993. The MCI was later renamed the Trial Court Information System (TCIS). On January 22, 2000, the Judges of the Los Angeles Municipal and Superior Courts with provision from proposition 220 were able to unify all of the Los Angeles trial courts into one court. Along with the unification came a standard method of case handling procedures, and the adoption of county-wide uniform criminal Local Court Rules to provide consistency in the process by which criminal cases progress through the system.

Los Angeles County Courts (aside from the trial courts) are currently developing a technological innovation that will unify all court systems under the same case management system and will allow for cross referencing between the courts. Currently, L.A. uses several different case management systems. A tracking system is in place that allows all the courts in Los Angeles to conduct a case search via case number, plaintiff's name, defendant's name or even filing date. The system also provides court personnel with information concerning the department, the division and the court district in which the case file can be located. Three courts (civil, probate, and justice) use the same case management system, called SUSTAIN. Each CMS is stored on a separate and distinct server called AWS 400.

Los Angeles County uses three methods to file documents. First, all records can be filed using a traditional paper filing method. Second, information is imaged, in which documents are scanned so that they are available via the Intranet (only applies to Civil and Probate). The third method is data entry, in which court staff manually enter all information. The second and third methods are usually used in conjunction with one another; once they are imaged, they are then entered manually into the case management system.

Court personnel may access most information from the server via the Intranet; however, some information may be restricted, and access may vary depending upon the level of the personnel. Level of access is determined by an assigned code. This code restricts the access of the user, as well as protects client confidentiality as required.

In addition, the public may view their own case records as well as check their case status via the Internet or at the court viewing room. Clients can log on to the Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles via the Internet at <http://www.lasuperiorcourt.org/> to view tentative rulings, download forms, gather general information and view court calendars.

### *3. San Bernardino County*

The San Bernardino County Court system has recently commenced their ten-year development project that will culminate in the unification of all the courts in that county. The plan includes technological advances in the case management system in which the county hopes to implement a system that provides "instant data" to various officers of the court and control the flow of cases through the court system. Automated case management systems will be used to file, store, process, and track information. Other anticipated uses of technology include imaging, interactive voice response (IVR), bar coding, electronic filing and voice/ video conferencing. The goal is to achieve an integrated information system that unifies data elements for the following departments: consolidated courts, district attorneys, county marshals, probation, public administrators/coroners, public defenders, and the county sheriff's department.

San Bernardino County has accomplished one of its goals; they recently implemented an electronic filing system. Within the next year, they intend to convert their case management system GENESIS from an AWS 400 to a UNIX system (which is the system already in use in Riverside County). With this advancement, court files will be easily accessed via the Intranet. In terms of access, judiciary as well as all county personnel and contractors have access to records information. However, there are restrictions based on an employee's job characteristic and title. Codes used to identify employees restrict the access of the user as well and protects confidential information.

For the most part, San Bernardino County courts still use traditional paper filing methods. That is, once the client brings in a case file or sends it by mail or fax, the document is given a file and a case number. Then, the documents are entered manually into the case management system. Juvenile court only recently developed the capability

of imaging documents, and this is the only Court in San Bernardino with this capability. However, San Bernardino hopes to have imaged records for all Courts within the next year.

San Bernardino County court's website is <http://www.co.san-bernardino.ca.us/Courts/>. Via this website, clients can access information on court locations, court calendars and jury services.

#### 4. Fresno County

Our interview with Fresno County proved to be the most difficult. Nonetheless, we were informed that Fresno County courts have not established many technological advances. The courts have preserved the same filing methods that have been used for over one hundred years. Fresno courts receive case documents by mail, fax or in person. These documents are then given a case number, filed and later entered by hand into one of three case management systems (the staff member we interviewed was reluctant to provide the names of those current systems).

The case management systems are used to enter, view and search for relevant information such as fees, additional documents, hearings, appointment notices, court calendars, minute orders, and statistical reporting about workload. Although we were unable to obtain names of the systems, we were informed that one of the case management systems is used for criminal court, the second system is used as the main frame, and the third case management system is used for other courts (this was not explained in detail).

Finally, we were informed that case files cannot be cross-referenced due to the varying case management systems in each of the courts. However, it is anticipated that Fresno County Courts will all share the same case management system called Banner Courts, within a year.

Clients can search the Fresno County website, <http://www.co.fresno.ca.us/2810/> to gather general information such as court operating hours, address and locations and inquire on the status of their court case using TCD (Trial Court Delay) Rulings (this screen only previews current rulings for that particular week).

### 5. Chautauqua County, New York

The state of New York is perhaps one of the most technologically advanced systems in this study, because they have developed a case management system that allows for the unification of all courts throughout the state. However, Chautauqua County Courts has just instituted the new system; until the transition, the county still used primarily traditional paper filing procedures. Files are given a docket (case) number, labeled and put into files. Each file contains not only standard court paperwork but also a petition and pre-court questionnaire. In the case of family court, the court receives petitions from clients who either file them through Probation, Support Collection, or through family court directly. Petitions are then filed into the ADBM system, a system specifically designed for the New York Superior Courts (the clerks we interviewed were unable to decode the acronym). It should be noted that the ADBM system also serves other purposes such as sending notices informing both the petitioners and respondents about specific court dates.

All courts in the county use the ADBM system, but each has their own database and, like other courts we have interviewed, is unable to cross-reference across courts. While each courts' computers are networked with the New York State computer system, and the State Capital has access to the information of each court, separate court divisions do not have "intra-court" access.

Imaging and Internet access is available in Chautauqua County. Thus far, petitions can be viewed on the web, with the possession of a correct case number. However, specific court documents can be accessed only through the court's SCT-IBM case management system. It is expected that case files will be available on the Internet within three years. The New York State website is <http://www.courts.state.ny.us/>.

### 6. Dallas County, Texas

Dallas County informed us that it will undergo several technological advances within the next the year. In October, the courts introduced an electronic filing system in which clients can file cases via the Internet. Despite the institution of the new system, Dallas continues to use traditional filing methods. Files are first delivered via mail, fax or in person and then processed by assigning the record a file and a case number. Finally,

the case information is manually entered into the case management system, which dates back to the sixties. Currently, negotiations are being discussed concerning updating the system, and it is anticipated that Dallas County will implement a new case management system within the next year.

### *7. Orange County, California*

Orange County's Case Management Systems consist of Banner Courts and Vision, both which are not web-enabled. Furthermore, the courts are unable to cross-reference or to link to one another since each of the courts use different databases and operate on two distinct case management systems (juvenile on Banner, criminal on Vision, and Probate has a custom built database). The probate court has a custom built data, and while it cannot exchange information with other courts, it can receive updated files and can query through them.

Orange County Courts still rely primarily on a traditional filing method that of manually entering data into the case management system and then filing a paper file. Records are assigned both an ID and an individual ID case number and filed. Although the courts image very few items at the present time, they are exploring the possibility of updating their current filing methods in the near future.

One final note: CGUET was informed that Orange County courts have recently installed a database that connects case information from several sources. This database was constructed in response to Prop 36. Orange County health care, and various agencies communicate and share information about individuals assigned to treatment programs. The content that is in this database is limited in order to protect the client and ensure that confidential information remains so. In this case, information can only be accessed using certain identifiers including adult ID number, name, and address.

### Implications of the Court Comparison Study

Phone interviews were conducted with staff from six other county courts (Riverside, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Fresno, and Orange County from California; Dallas, Texas, and Chautauqua, New York) demonstrating that Riverside County is by

far the most technologically advanced in filing methods, cross-referencing, and information access. First, all Riverside courts use the same case management system. And although each court may have a separate database, court personnel can access information from any of the five courts' case management systems. Documents are easily accessed and are available and retrievable through the intranet.

Although Riverside, San Bernardino, and Chautauqua County all use similar case management systems in their counties, the only court that has cross-referencing capabilities is Riverside County. While all courts are moving in the direction to update and enhance their case management system, such as San Bernardino, who is utilizing the same case management system as Riverside, most are limited in their provision of information. Most have expressed a desire to enhance their systems within a year or two year timeframe.

Dallas, Orange County and Fresno have not incorporated imaging as a filing technique, and have maintained manual hand filing techniques. Fresno has been using the same technique for many years and Dallas County is presently negotiating a contract to update or enhance their current system.

In terms of imaging, Los Angeles and San Bernardino Counties both confirmed the capability to scan case records for certain courts. In the case of Los Angeles, imaging is readily available to two courts, and the records are made available for the public. San Bernardino images only juvenile records, and they are only accessible to certain designated courts. However, the most advanced courts of all those in the current study, is Riverside and Chautauqua County. Both image court records. Riverside directly scans documents into their case system while Chautauqua County, on the other hand, has the city clerks image the documents. Unfortunately, the case management system used in Chautauqua is only available to one constituency. These data indicate that Riverside County is well advanced in technology and filing techniques.

The survey of Chautauqua, however, indicates that the state of New York has a more advanced method for linking counties throughout the entire state.

## **Section V. Challenges/Obstacles, Project Limitations**

The following section highlights some of the challenges and obstacles encountered by both the Project Design Team and the Claremont Graduate University Evaluation Team concerning the Family Index Project. Additionally, we note some of the project limitations.

### ***A. Challenges and Obstacles to the Family Index Project Team***

Although the Family Index Project is clearly a worthwhile endeavor, there were a number of obstacles and challenges that plagued (and continue to plague) the project and subsequent evaluation. As was mentioned in other sections, the Family Index Project Team and Design Team witnessed a number of setbacks during the early phase of funding. First, there was the change in leadership with the exit of Arthur Sims as Executive Officer and the replacement of Sims with José Guillen. This change in administration appears to have halted the project. Second, the first software consultant was found inadequate and was dismissed from the project. Basically, the consultant did not implement the recommended software that was expected to be adaptable to Riverside's current case management system. After dismissal of the consultant, the project was halted for nearly a year.

A third obstacle was in regards to inconsistency in Project Team membership. There were changes in membership, and some members did not consistently participate. Apparently, there were several changes in judicial representation and some team members were understandably more informed of the project's purpose than others. Finally, the Project Team was plagued by time commitments in other areas that relegated the Family Index Project to a lower priority. Perhaps the most poignant representation of the Index's priority were the statements made by several Design Team members who said that they had hoped the Claremont Graduate University Evaluation Team would be the catalyst in moving forward a quickly stagnating project. Although CGUET was prepared to assume this role, there were a number of setbacks for the evaluation team impeding our activities, as well.

## ***B. Challenges and Obstacles to Claremont Graduate University Evaluation***

### ***Team***

At the beginning of the granting period, the Riverside Design Team experienced significant setbacks. As a result of these setbacks, evaluation activities did not begin until one year and two months after the grant was originally awarded. Implementation of the FI is still in the design phase, so it was not possible to conduct a full process evaluation, outcome evaluation, or cost-benefit analysis as originally planned and stipulated in the evaluation grant proposal. Although we have listed several issues that were unforeseeable for both Riverside and CGUET, there were a number of obstacles that CGUET encountered due to the evaluation process itself.

Primarily, these problems revolved around the issue of gaining access to and cooperation from, high-level court constituents (judges, lawyers, etc.) and later, court staff and personnel. We realize that some of this was due, in part, to the busy schedules of court personnel. However, other reasons involved resistance or lack of cooperation, which may have been a result of evaluation anxiety (the apprehension of being evaluated in a negative fashion), lack of information concerning the Family Index project, and/or lack of information regarding the evaluation process and activities.

Evaluation anxiety has been defined as an anxiety produced reaction to the process of being evaluated, for fear of being presented in a negative light (Donaldson, Scriven & Gooler, 2002). This was perhaps the case from the beginning, but certainly progressed as the evaluation team conducted more in-depth data collection requiring close contact and interaction with various stakeholders.

During the co-hosted site visit with the Riverside Project Team, CGUET and Janet Chiancone of OJJDP, The Project Team agreed to address this possibility, especially when it was discovered that judicial and clerk staff were becoming increasingly un-cooperative. For instance, while conducting several interviews, as well in our correspondences with staff, CGUET discovered that there was a great deal of mis-information concerning the project. In many cases, staff and personnel were so uninformed about the project and evaluative process that many were reluctant to speak with CGUET, for fear of employment repercussions.

Although Riverside's Project Design Team agreed to address this concern during the site visit, and significant efforts were made on the part of the Design Team to alleviate these problems, we speculate that resistance to evaluation activities may have proven to be a significant obstacle. For instance, as was first noted in the October 15<sup>th</sup> report, evidence suggests that some interviewees limited the type of information they were willing to share or resisted being interviewed completely. Hence, interviews with high-level constituents were significantly fewer than expected (e.g., 7 of approximately 68 judges and commissioners despite numerous contact attempts). As well, although CGUET had been given permission to go into the courts and handle confidential information, there often was resistance from personnel and staff to grant access to that information. In some incidents, members of Project Team were also somewhat resistant, denying CGUET access to information to which we had previously been granted access. For instance, while stipulated by the grant, CGUET was unable to gain complete access to juvenile clients. Although the juvenile courts allowed CGUET to witness court proceedings, access to juveniles beyond survey methodology (as had been stipulated and agreed to in the contract between Riverside and CGUET) was uniformly and unilaterally denied. CGUET is unsure why resistance on this aspect was so high, except that there was little information about what the true purpose of the Family Index was and in what way it would be used.

Understandably, all of the aforementioned issues limited the amount of information and data to be gathered and this persisted throughout the course of the grant.

### ***C. Project Limitations***

As with any project, there are limitations to the type of information gathered, the manner in which it is obtained, and the types of conclusions, which can be drawn. With that in mind, the following section is devoted to discussing the limitations of the Evaluation of the Family Index Project, specifically, those that hampered data collection and evaluation procedures.

- *Less than expected sample sizes.* Originally, when the methodology of the grant had been conceptualized, CGUET had expected to collect a substantial amount of data from a variety of constituents, using a variety of methods. However, the amount of data we were able to obtain was severely limited. It is speculated that that a variety of issues (e.g., time factors, evaluation anxiety) limited the amount of pre-program data collected.
- *Inability to conduct process and outcome evaluation, as well as cost benefit analysis.* Perhaps the most challenging aspect was the circumstances under which CGUET found itself operating in terms of being able to conduct a full-scale process and outcome evaluation, and a cost benefit analysis. Due to the lack of implementation of the Index, there was little opportunity to collect post-implementation data as originally anticipated. The data that was obtained was limited to pre-program baseline information.
- *Inadequate support from Riverside County Superior Court stakeholders.* As already discussed in detail, a great deal of resistance or lack of cooperation was experienced as we tried to collect the data we were contracted to collect. Those we were supposed to interview and survey were often quite anxious about the evaluation process and resisted an open exchange of information. Occasionally this also occurred with the FI Project Team and resulted in a lapse in communication between Riverside Project Team Members and CGUET, and lead to misunderstandings about the evaluation process.
- *Uninformed stakeholders.* Although the Family Index project team assumed that stakeholders who participated in the evaluation were knowledgeable of the Index, CGUET found that this was not the case. In many cases, key stakeholders and thus evaluation participants, were unaware of the Index, its purpose, and whom it would ultimately serve. Understandably this aspect severely limited the data gathered. However, it should be noted that this may improve following program

implementation and may be an excellent indicator of project success and utilization.

## **Section VI. Conclusions: Assessments, Suggestions and Recommendations**

This section highlights the assessments, suggestions and recommendations for the Family Index Project. These assessments, suggestions and recommendations are intended to provide realistic and feasible suggestions for change, especially change that can better enhance the performance and effectiveness of the FI.

### ***A. Assessment of the Family Index Project***

Although CGUET has collected a significant amount of data, it should be noted that this data can only serve to provide a cross-sectional view of how the court process *currently* functions, prior to implementation of the Family Index.

For the most part, CGUET's data sources confirmed that the current court information gathering system is one that is adequate, if not at many times, quite adept at providing useful information on which to facilitate court decisions and provide pertinent information.

Data sources illustrated that most, if not all constituents use a variety of methods to obtain information, and in many cases those methods are relatively failsafe and fairly easy to use. It would appear that even without the Family Index, despite its proposed usefulness, the courts function in a reasonably efficient manner. It is perhaps because of this factor that the development and subsequent implementation of the FI has progressed as slowly as it has. It is speculated that a *"if it isn't broke don't fix it"* mentality may exist and that may prove to delay full implementation of the Index.

Nonetheless, despite the apparently adequately functioning court system, the data collected clearly demonstrates that the Index could result in a great deal of potential benefit to the Riverside County Superior Court system.

In the original evaluation plan, the program logic was organized into four components: Pre-Program Needs, Program Design/ Development, Program Implementation, and Program Outcomes. At this point, we return to these original four components to summarize our evaluation findings. Because the FI still has not been

implemented, the most information is available regarding pre-program needs. However, a small discussion is possible regarding program design and development.

### Pre-Program Needs

The Pre-Program Needs component refers to the situation or state that the program is designed to alleviate or improve. In the case of the present evaluation, the pre-program needs refer to the courts' need to cross-reference information regarding the justice system's clients and their families. The FI is intended to address or alleviate uninformed duplication and misinformation across court divisions. This suggests that prior to the program, judicial decisions were not optimally accurate or efficient because they may have been based on incomplete information or the information was more difficult to reference. In the context of this evaluation design, it was necessary to measure these pre-program needs to determine the extent to which the Index effectively addresses these needs.

In the original evaluation proposal, evaluation questions were developed for guiding data collection. These questions and the corresponding answers (where available) follow.

2. **Was information from other courts available prior to program implementation?** A sample of court files were studied to determine what information is available from the various divisions of the court prior to program implementation, and court personnel were surveyed and interviewed to determine ease of obtaining information from the other divisions of the court prior to program implementation.

For the most part, a sample of court files from the existing case management system indicated that case information was available. However, there is room for improvement in the methods by which clients are matched with cases. When an individual is equipped only with a client name, it can be difficult to obtain linked cases. The FI could certainly improve the efficiency of these sorts of tasks. One potential problem with existing records is in regards to a great deal of missing information

regarding variables such as date of birth, gender, ethnicity, addresses, social security numbers, and drivers license numbers. This sort of data may be particularly important in the linking process. It will be necessary for the FI to develop methods for linking individual court clients with their families, and a large amount of missing data regarding this type of basic identifying information may make the linking process rather difficult.

Interviews with court clerk supervisors and staff were conducted to assess the information available and to assess accessing procedures prior to program implementation. First, information was collected regarding the types of information clerk staff regularly access. The greatest need for the FI for court clerk staff appears to be in relation to tasks such as determining jurisdiction and criminal background checks. While court clerk staff indicate a great deal of satisfaction with the existing GENESIS case management system, they also indicate that searching for information can be quite time consuming because there is not an existing system for cross-referencing cases and information.

Surveys of court clients (both adult and juvenile) indicated that many clients perceive misinformation in court proceedings. They either believe the judiciary or court staff to be unaware of other cases, other family members' cases, or merely having some inaccuracies in information. While this is merely a perception by court clients and not necessarily an objective assessment of the accuracy of existing data management, it is interesting to note and would be interesting to compare with post-implementation perceptions.

**2. Is case processing time affected by implementation of the Index?**

Originally, it was intended that pre-program case processing time would be compared with case processing time following program implementation. While the program was not implemented during the course of the evaluation, information is available regarding pre-program case processing time.

According to interviews with court clerk staff, entering data on a case file can take anywhere from a few seconds to 25 minutes with an average of 7 minutes per case. Clerks indicated that they entered from 0 to 90 cases per day with an average of

13 cases per day. Of course, this information would be most informative in comparison with post-implementation case processing time.

Court clients and attorneys were surveyed and interviewed regarding the frequency of continuances. Data suggest a relationship between the number of continuances and satisfaction with the court system. However, the frequency of continuances is not really that useful without comparison with post-implementation data to determine whether the FI may reduce the frequency of continuances.

5. **Does the Index impact Court Proceedings?** Originally, it was thought that the impact of the FI on court proceedings could be assessed by analyzing the content of case records to assess how often information from other court divisions would be mentioned. Pre-program case content analysis would be compared with post-implementation case content. However, as the evaluation progressed, it was determined that courtroom observations would provide more information regarding references to other court divisions.

Courtroom observations indicated that court staff likely to be affected by the FI consisted of judges, commissioners, court clerks, courtroom assistants, mediators, attorneys, and clients. Information gathering occurred in 23% of the cases observed, and 25% of the cases had references to other court divisions. Problems with inaccurate data were observed in 19% of the cases. These results indicate that the efficient access to information is very important in day-to-day court proceedings. The FI has a great deal of potential in further facilitating information access.

The FI will probably most beneficial to court clerk staff. Judicial interviews indicate that a majority of their information gathering is conducted by the clerk staff.

Courtroom observations indicate that mediators are often called on to do a great deal of investigation, and their recommendations are followed a majority of the time. However, interviews with mediators indicate that the FI may not be readily accessible to them as there are a number of obstacles for them to access the existing case management system. It will be interesting to determine the extent to which the FI will be made accessible to mediators and how mediators' workloads may be affected.

- 6. Does the Index affect Coordination of Efforts between the various divisions?** Court personnel were surveyed and interviewed to determine the level of Coordination of Efforts prior to program implementation. Specifically, do the various divisions consult and communicate when making decisions?

In interviews with court clerk supervisors and staff, we found that information from other court divisions is available in the current case management system. However, obtaining this information can be cumbersome and time consuming. Twenty-six of the 85 court clerks interviewed or 31% indicated that they were required to contact supporting agencies to obtain information. Often, it is necessary to use alternative means for obtaining information. Information is obtained from other agencies most often by means of telephone. This indicates that the FI may fill a need for easily accessing additional information.

Interviews with judges indicate that criminal court may be least impacted by FI implementation because the activities of family members is not relevant to deciding guilt or innocence in criminal matters. However, the FI may be useful in determining bail and in resolving scheduling conflicts.

- 8. What percentage of clients does the Index potentially affect?** The prevalence of cross division court activity (or duplication) was assessed by surveying clients and through courtroom observations. Specifically, it is necessary to determine what percentage of clients are actually impacted by the program and participate in more than one court division.

As already mentioned, in 23% of the court cases we observed, other court divisions were mentioned. Of adult clients surveyed, 32% reported having multiple cases, and juvenile client surveys indicate that 34.5% of the juveniles surveyed reported that they had family members currently involved in Riverside Courts. The majority of these family members (47%) appeared to be involved with Criminal Court suggesting

that the FI may impact Juvenile Court proceedings the most by providing access to Criminal Court information.

- 9. What are the characteristics of the clients affected by the Index?** Data regarding the ethnic characteristics, age characteristics, and sex characteristics of the affected clients were collected.

Adult clients surveyed were 63% female and 34% male (6% did not respond), and while a majority of respondents were White (41%), there was a good proportion of Latino (22%) and African American (13%) individuals, as well.

In our review of the existing court database, gender was unavailable in 81.7% of the cases. Of those for whom gender was available, 22% were female and 78% were male. Ethnicity was unavailable in 93.7% of the files reviewed. Of those in which ethnicity was available, 25% were White and the remaining 75% were Latino.

While neither of these methods are particularly accurate at obtaining a truly representative estimation of clients' demographics, the client surveys probably are more representative than the review of case files because of the frequency of missing data.

- 10. What is the nature of the potential impact?** Court personnel and clients were surveyed and interviewed to investigate the nature of the potential impact the improved accuracy and efficiency might have. Specifically, we were interested in determining how the index might impact judicial decisions, and consequently, how these decisions might impact clients.

Unfortunately, information regarding this question was quite limited because interviews with judges and commissioners were difficult to obtain. The rest of the data collected from court clerk supervisors and staff, from mediators, and from attorneys did not provide information regarding the potential qualitative impact of the FI on decision-making. The information obtained primarily pointed towards an increase in efficiency for staff in obtaining the information they need from other court divisions. All interviews,

surveys, and archival data indicate that the FI will affect family law, probate, juvenile and civil courts the most.

### Program Design / Development

The FI currently still is being designed and developed. While little information is available to make conclusive statements, the data we have indicates quite significant problems with the development of the FI. First, the design team has been limited to upper-level administration without involving many of the individuals who will ultimately be responsible for using the FI on a day-to-day basis. Even among those included in the development process, there are individuals who feel their input was ignored or discarded. This may be an explanation for the inconsistency in Project Team membership.

A second possible source of difficulty in development is in regards to the strategy that will be used for linking individuals to their families. Of those interviewed, there was no consensus regarding how these links will be created. Information obtained from the software design company contracted to develop the software indicates that there were significant time delays in developing the specs. These are the plans provided by Riverside Courts to conceptually direct the software development. These delays in delivering the specs may be a result of the extreme difficulty involved in establishing an effective process for linking families. While the Riverside Courts are extremely technologically advanced, it is not possible to rule out the possibility that developing the FI is not feasible given the existing resources available.

### ***B. Suggestions for Project Improvement***

Assuming that the Riverside Courts still intend to implement the Family Index, below we highlight some suggestions for FI Project improvement.

- *Consider lower level administrators and judicial court staff as active members of the project team. One of the striking aspects of the current project is that the project and design team is primarily composed of high-level administration and court personnel, but no lower level administration and staff. Interestingly enough,*

it is this latter group who will ultimately use the FI the most. Yet, they are not represented on the team and do not have an intimate knowledge of the project. We suggest inviting those who would be expected to be the most familiar with the FI to be prominently represented on the Project Team.

- *Consider arranging for the computer software designer to work closely with those who would use the Index most frequently.* Although this aspect is assumed to be the case with the development and subsequent implementation of the FI, it may be more helpful to work with users even earlier, thus allaying their fears and increasing understanding of the purpose and process of the Index.
- *Adhere to the project timeline.* The FI has been severely limited by project timeline setbacks, because of other more pressing court priorities. As was noted by the executive director during the site visit, because the project is considered an enhancement to an already existing database, it is of lower priority than other more immediate and pressing projects. However, it is possible that if no commitment is made to adhere to the project timeline, the project could be stalled indefinitely. We suggest that the County review its commitment to the project, especially because there are external funds and expectations from state and federal agencies.
- *Decide on a clear linking process for the enhancement.* Although the Project Team has conceptualized a general and overarching way of linking cases, there are still unanswered questions as to how problems will be solved in terms of back up, access, confidentiality and other issues. As well, there are varying "visions" of how the information will be displayed among team members. From the vantage point of CGUET, decisions concerning this aspect are being made unilaterally. It might be more useful to do a more thorough exploration of the possible linking mechanisms available, as well as soliciting ideas and strategies from those who would use the system most.

- *Make clear decisions about how the Index is to be implemented (to which court division).* As a follow-up to the aforementioned point, CGUET suggests that there be a clear understanding of which courts will ultimately be affected by the Index. Currently, opinions vary on this aspect and the variation (i.e., some believe it would be useful in all courts, some believe it won't be useful or affect the court system at all) leads to, at best, a haphazard understanding of the index and limited support.
- *Consider methods for disseminating information about the FI to educate all those who would be affected by its implementation.* This suggestion was originally pitched at the site-visit meeting, with the Project Team agreeing to take the idea under consideration. We strongly urge continued and serious consideration. Such a meeting would ultimately limit the amount of resistance that will undoubtedly occur in during the shift to the use of the FI.

### ***C. Recommendations for Future Evaluation***

CGUET proposes that the Riverside County Superior Courts consider supporting an on-going evaluation program to serve as a continuous feedback mechanism. This mechanism could be used to assist the Project Design Team as well as the County Courts and software designer to continually monitor the usefulness of the enhancement as well as to upgrade according to the changing needs of the court system and the clients it serves. It is our view that all stakeholders should be involved in the planning process, including lower level administrative employees. This involvement empowers each stakeholder to be an active participant in the implementation of the Family Index as well as the *evaluation* of it. We especially urge that data be collected on a regular basis. We believe that a continuous feedback mechanism will allow for the fine-tuning of the enhancement as well as assessing its ability to adapt to the daily changing nature of the court system and the clientele that it serves. To this end, we suggest a few key suggestions for evaluation including the following:

- *Formulate an evaluation team that will be primarily responsible for developing on-going and updated strategies for program improvement as well as evaluation.* It is recommended that a research team either internal or external, and in the best case scenario both, should be developed. The team should consist of those who are most familiar with court terminology and daily process, as well as those that are knowledgeable in research methods, program evaluation and technology. To this end, we suggest that the Riverside County Superior Courts consider retaining an external evaluator who can put primary focus on developing a continuous feedback mechanism to disseminate information that will be helpful in providing necessary information.
- *Continue to benchmark other court systems that can be helpful in assisting Riverside Superior Courts to maintain and innovate the use the technology in its case management system.* Riverside County Courts have been successful in their quest to remain on the “cusp of change” in the use of computer and Internet technology. We urge Riverside to continue to benchmark other court systems in order to assist in the measurement of its success, effectiveness and efficiency. For instance, as was illustrated in the comparison study, the state of New York has been moving toward a one family, one judge courtroom since the 1970's and is moving towards a unified court technology system.
- *Conduct process and outcome evaluation when the Family Index is implemented.* CGUET has collected enough baseline data by which the Courts can use to compare pre and post implementation. In order to truly conclude the long-term usefulness of the Index, it is important that the Family Index Project Team make an active and conscientious effort to conduct on-going process and outcome evaluation.

### **Concluding Remark**

Data collected demonstrate that although the Riverside Court System is one that is already technologically savvy, there is certainly room for improvement. It appears that

all constituents (from judiciary to associated second tier stakeholders such as mediators and lawyers) could use the FI in enhancing the efficiency of information gathering as well as information *accessing*. The Family Index promises to provide an innovative link that can perhaps move the Riverside County Superior Court System to a one family, one judge courtroom. It is possible that the FI can serve to provide information that can be used by all levels of court staff and personnel as well as court clients. It can serve to economize the current system in terms of time and finances, as well as provide quick accurate, and efficient information.

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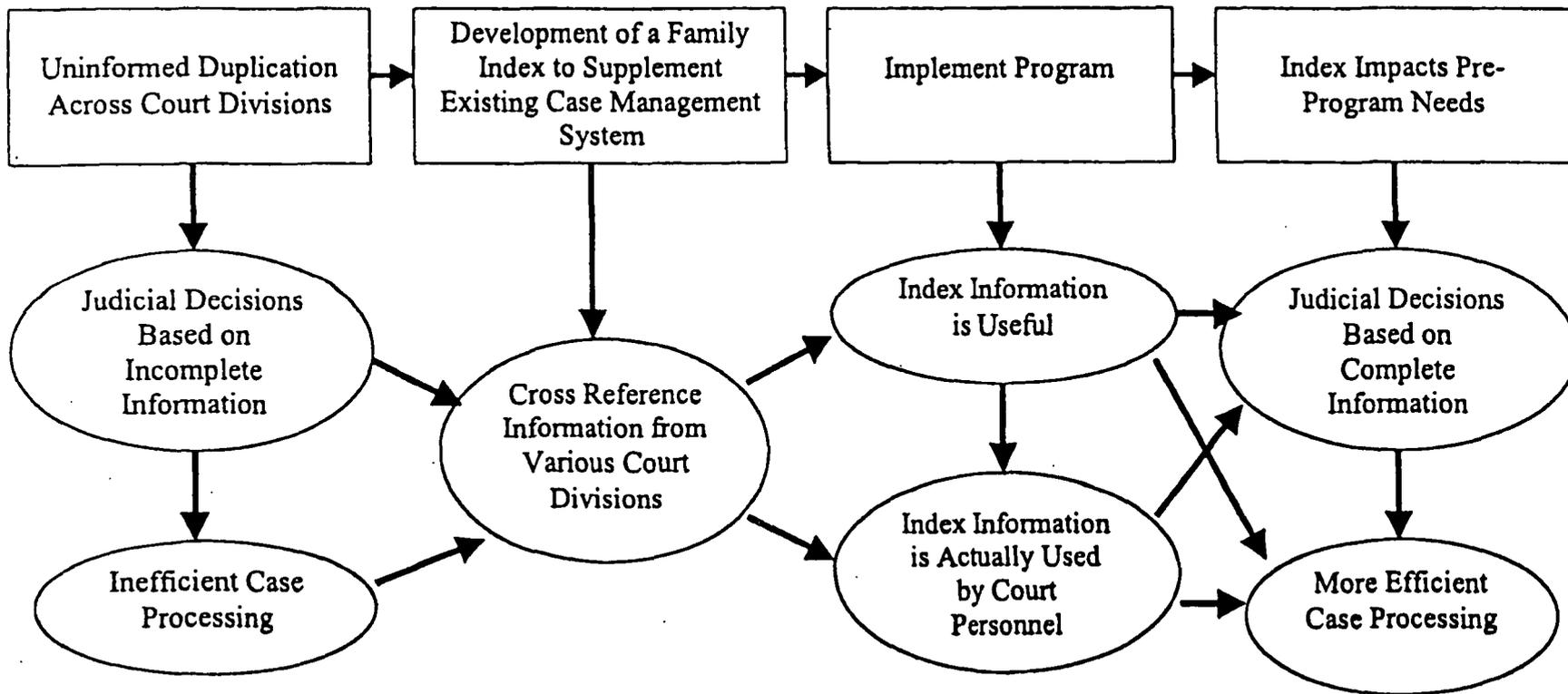
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Appendix A. Conceptual Model of Family Evaluation Project

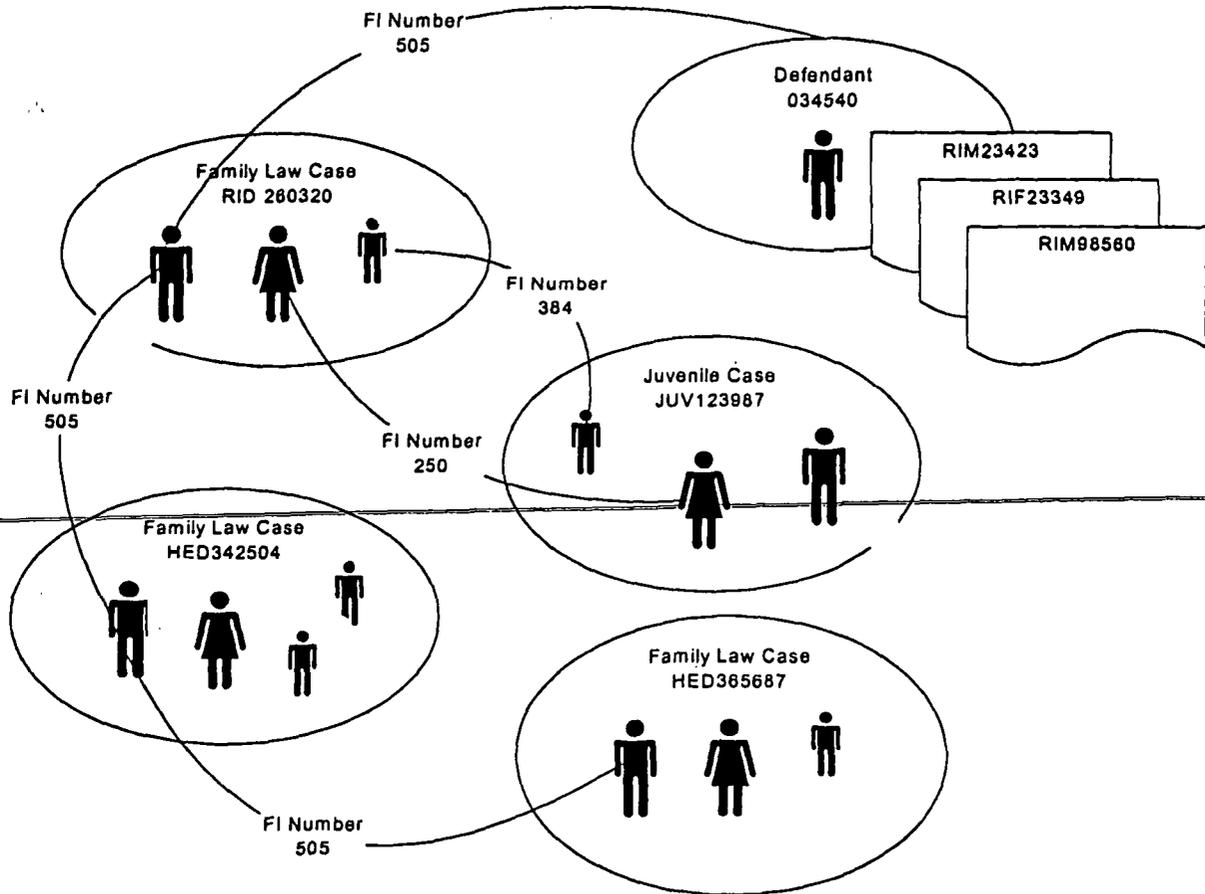
Figure 1. Program Logic

Pre-Program Needs	Program Design/ Development	Program Implementation	Program Outcomes
Pre-program Needs refers to the situation or state that the program is designed to alleviate or improve.	The Program Design refers to the program's overall plan for addressing the Pre-Program Needs	Program Implementation refers to the program's various components and the immediate intended consequences of the program	Program Outcomes refers to the program's impact on the initial Pre-Program Needs



Appendix B Model of Family Index

## Family Index Relationships



FI Number	Name	Case Number	Defendant Number
250	Jane Jones	JUV123987	
250	Jane Doe	RID260320	
384	Mike Jones	JUV123987	
384	Mike Jones	RID 260320	
505	James Doe	RIM23423	034540
505	James Doe	RIF23349	034540
505	James Doe	RIM98560	034540
505	James Paul Doe	RID260320	
505	James P. Doe	HED342504	
505	James Paul Doe	HED365687	

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Appendix C Chart of Court Comparison Study

	<u>Riverside County, California</u>	<u>Chautauqua County, New York</u>	<u>Los Angeles County, California</u>	<u>San Bernardino County, California</u>	<u>Dallas County, Texas</u>	<u>Fresno County, California</u>	<u>Orange County, California</u>	
<u>Case Management System</u>	◇ Genesis (UNIX system) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CLETS</li> <li>• CRIMES</li> </ul>	◇ ADBM System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All courts use same system, not interconnected</li> </ul>	*AWS 400 SUSTAIN *SUSTAIN Justice	AWS 400- Genesis	IBM program (database)	Banner Courts	Banner Courts and Vision	
<u>Imaging</u>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	
<u>Filing Methods</u>	<u>Traditional Paper Filing</u> ◇ Method still used	<u>Traditional Paper Filing</u> ◇ Method still used <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary method</li> </ul>	<u>Traditional Paper Filing</u> ◇ Method still used <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary method</li> </ul>	<u>Traditional Paper Filing</u> ◇ Method still used <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary method</li> </ul>	<u>Traditional Paper Filing</u> ◇ Method still used <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only method ever used</li> </ul>	<u>Traditional Paper Filing</u> ◇ Method still used <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only method ever used</li> </ul>	<u>Traditional Paper Filing</u> ◇ Method still used <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only method ever used</li> </ul>	
	<u>Computer Filing</u> ◇ Imaging ◇ Computer filing ◇ E-filing on the web	<u>Computer Filing</u> ◇ Data entry	<u>Computer Filing</u> ◇ Imaging (Civil only) ◇ Data entry	<u>Computer Filing</u> ◇ Imaging (Juvenile only) ◇ E-filing on the web	<u>Computer Filing</u> ◇ Data entry	<u>Computer Filing</u> ◇ Data entry	<u>Computer Filing</u> ◇ Data entry	<u>Computer Filing</u> ◇ Data entry ◇ Imaging
	<u>Other Methods</u> ◇ Internet ◇ Intranet ◇ Fax filing	<u>Other Methods</u> ◇ None	<u>Other Methods</u> ◇ Internet ◇ Intranet	<u>Other Methods</u> ◇ Microfilm ◇ Intranet ◇ Fax filing	<u>Other Methods</u> ◇ None	<u>Other Methods</u> ◇ None	<u>Other Methods</u> ◇ None	<u>Other Methods</u> ◇ None
<u>Cross reference by computer</u>	◇ Yes can cross reference across different courts	No	No	No	No	No	No	
<u>Access to information</u>	<u>Judge</u> ◇ Full access	<u>Judge</u> ◇ Full access	<u>Judge</u> ◇ Full access	<u>Judge</u> ◇ Full access	<u>Judge</u> ◇ Full access	<u>Judge</u> ◇ Full access	<u>Judge</u> ◇ Full access	
	<u>Personnel</u> ◇ Restricted access varies w/job description	<u>Personnel</u> ◇ Full access	<u>Personnel</u> ◇ Authorized staff and varying access	<u>Personnel</u> ◇ Authorized staff	<u>Personnel</u> ◇ Full access	<u>Personnel</u> ◇ Authorized staff ◇ Staff from other Fresno County upon request	<u>Personnel</u> ◇ Authorized staff and varying access	
	<u>Clients</u> ◇ Limited access	<u>Clients</u> ◇ Limited access	<u>Clients</u> ◇ Limited access	<u>Clients</u> ◇ Constituents upon request	<u>Clients</u> ◇ Limited access	<u>Clients</u> ◇ Upon request	<u>Clients</u> ◇ Upon request	