

Access to Family Justice Online Evaluation Report – 2012-2013

The Access to Family Justice Online Report:

- focuses on the Family Justice Online pilot project, including the development and launch of the Nova Scotia Family Law website (nsfamilylaw.ca), and gathering initial feedback from users and stakeholders
- discusses the website development process, and focuses primarily on the methods used to gather feedback from users and stakeholders, including:
 - a pre-launch computer lab training session with stakeholders
 - baseline, post-launch, and website-based surveys from stakeholders, including court staff
 - focus groups with stakeholders/court staff
 - website-based surveys and interviews with service users
 - monthly Google Analytics
 - meetings with the Website Working Group.

Evaluation Objectives

The objective of the Access to Family Justice Online initiative was to develop an online family law information source that would contain a wide range of information and tools to assist parties involved in family law disputes. The purpose of the evaluation was to consider whether the Access to Family Justice Online website (the NS Family Law website), meets this objective by focusing on key evaluation questions:

1. Was the initiative fully implemented? Were any changes made to the design or delivery of the website based on feedback obtained during the initial evaluation period?
2. What has been the impact of this expanded service on family justice matters (for court staff, judges, lawyers, and service users)?
3. Is the website effective in assisting parties involved in family law disputes to find the information needed and 'navigate' the family law system?
4. Does the project create public awareness of the NS Family Law website?

5. Has the website lessened the strain on the family justice system (for example, judges, lawyers, and court staff members) by providing a referral resource to address the education and information needs of parties involved in family law disputes?
6. Are other stakeholders (i.e. judges, lawyers, and court staff members) satisfied with the website?

Key Findings

The website was fully implemented, with a 'soft' launch occurring in May 2012, and a 'hard' launch (with advertising to the public) occurring in July 2012. Feedback from evaluation efforts was considered and implemented into the site's design and content where applicable.

The website is a valuable tool used by both service users and service providers. Both groups agreed that the implementation of the website has allowed for family law resources to become much more widely available and accessible. It was also found that:

- This website is unique from other Canadian family law websites because of its collaborative nature, in that several professional organizations came together to oversee and advise on the creation and implementation of the site. The inter-professional perspective allowed for a holistic approach to providing relevant and comprehensive information for family law issues.
- Information provided on the website was accurate, current, relevant, and sufficient in meeting the inquiries and needs of family law clients.
- Self-represented litigants were more prepared and knowledgeable of their legal responsibilities prior to entering into legal proceedings, after accessing the website.
- An increased understanding of court processes and procedures was found to decrease delays and allow services to be provided in a timely and efficient manner.
- Users had an increased awareness of the availability of appropriate alternatives to court, which further served to reduce the amount of time spent in court, as well as legal fees incurred by litigants.
- The workload of the majority of family justice staff was positively impacted by the website.

- The website provides a primary resource to refer clients to for basic family law information, reducing the need for staff to provide legal education on an individual basis.
- As information about numerous external community resources and agencies was provided on the website, users were able to locate and access services across a variety of relevant fields. This served to promote collaboration between family justice partners and strengthen the network of service providers offering support to individuals involved in family law disputes.

Who is using the NSFL website, and how?

Location of visitors

The traffic to the website has mostly been from Canada (91%), but the website has also been visited from places in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, India, Columbia, South Africa, the Philippines, and China.

Of the visits from Canadian locations, 33,409 visits have been from Nova Scotia; 6,511 visits from Ontario; 1,343 visits from Alberta; 1,298 from Quebec; 1,257 from British Columbia; 1,201 visits from New Brunswick; 336 from Newfoundland and Labrador, 228 visits from Manitoba; 235 visits from Prince Edward Island; 232 visits from Saskatchewan; 46 visits from the Northwest Territories; and 23 from the Yukon Territory.

Traffic Sources

Traffic to the website came from a variety of sources, including:

- Search Traffic (45%), where the visitor first searched for the website to locate it
- Referral Traffic (31%), where visitors followed a link from another website
- Direct Traffic (23%), where the visitor entered the website by using the URL (nsfamilylaw.ca).

For those who did an online search through a search engine (like Google), search terms included “nsfamilylaw.ca”, “ns family law”, “family law nova scotia”, “emergency protection order nova scotia”, “child support nova scotia”, “common law nova scotia”, “importance of extended family”, “spousal support nova scotia”, “divorce lawyer Halifax nova scotia alimony” and “joint custody in Nova Scotia.” It should be noted that only keywords with more than 20 hits are recorded here; however, there have been 4,619 different keywords that have been used to search for the website.

Content Searched

Many website users appeared to review the content for both general and specific information and services. Common information searched included that for divorce, custody and/or access, child support, spousal support, division of property, child protection services, changing an existing order, family law forms, court preparation, and finding a lawyer.

Other information that individuals sought regarded parental rights in abduction and parental alienation situations, relocation, the rights of children after separation, and the division of assets. Topics related to domestic violence and high conflict situations, as well as services for family counseling, were also common issues. Content on the separation process, including how to prepare and manage finances, was also searched.

Feedback

Feedback gathered from service users has been positive. Of the 261 service users who completed the online survey:

- 43% had not sought legal advice prior to using the website
- 67% agreed that their knowledge of family justice improved based on spending time on the website
- 60% were more confident with the information they needed to deal with their legal case
- 47% felt more prepared for settlement or court.

Perhaps most importantly of all, 17.5% of service users completing the online survey indicated that the website helped them resolve their legal dispute, thus requiring no further court action.

The majority of participants reported being satisfied with the website. In the web-based survey of 261 visitors to the website:

- 66% were completely satisfied with using the website
- 68% enjoyed using the website
- 80% were confident in using the website
- 86% would recommend the website to others.

Website Promotion

Several promotional activities occurred around the time of the hard launch of the site, and in the Spring of 2013, and these are noted in the report. Around the time of the launch, in July 2012, the following promotional activities took place:

- An information kiosk at the National Family Law Conference included website demonstrations on a large screen TV and individualized tutorials of website navigation on laptops
- Media conference and news releases about the website went out, and were timed to coincide with the National Family Law Conference
- Rack cards (5000) and posters (100) were developed and distributed to court sites, law offices, and family resource centers to raise public awareness of the website
- An article about the website appeared in *Lawyers Weekly* and *InForum* (NS Barristers' Society publication).

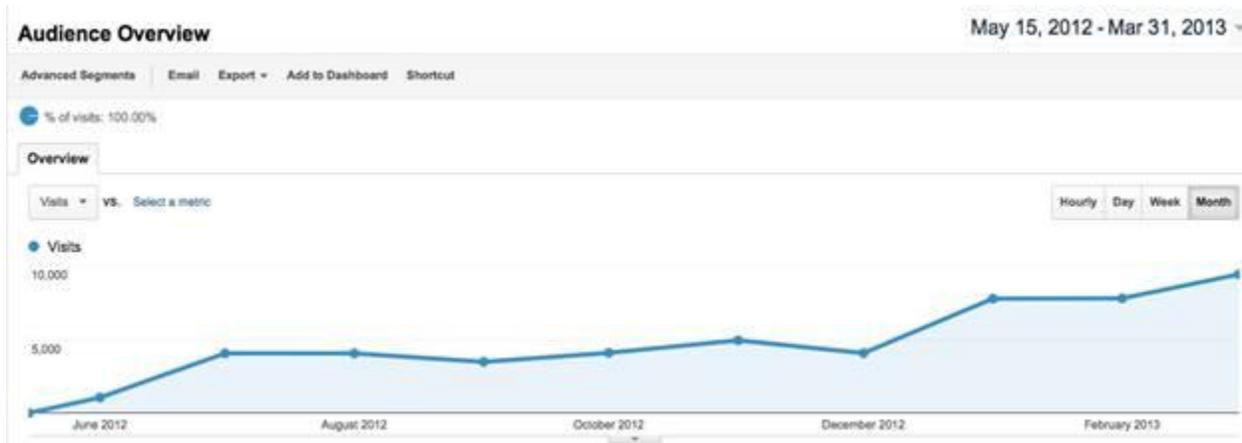
Later, in the Fall of 2012, a social media campaign was launched, via Twitter and Facebook, to promote the site and distribute family law information to the public and stakeholders. Presentations were made to community organizations and justice stakeholders throughout Nova Scotia to raise awareness about the website.

The larger promotional campaign, managed by Communications Nova Scotia with funding from Justice Canada, took place in February and March, 2013. This campaign involved the following initiatives:

- Transit Shelter Poster Campaign (posters displayed at bus shelters in the HRM, Sydney and Kentville from February 11th to March 10th, 2013)
- Movie Theatre Poster Campaign (posters displayed in 10 Empire Theatres locations for the month of March 2013)
- Online Campaign (ads on the websites of external organizations, including the Chronicle Herald newspaper, the Weather Network, and the CBC)
- Advertisements for the website began running on digital display screens in Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations offices, and these ads will run for an indefinite period of time
- Business Card Design and Printing
- Gold Sponsorship at Divorce Fair
- Additional Print Run of Posters/Rack Cards.

These promotional efforts were successful, as evidenced by the resulting rise in both the number of website hits, and the number of unique visitors, during and after the promotional campaign. There was an average of 4357 website hits in the three months before the promotional campaign (October, November and December, 2012), and an

average of 8240 hits in the three months during and after the campaign (January, February and March, 2013), with the number of hits in March coming in at 9410. These trends are outlined in the figures below.



Access to Family Law Online Website Utilization Data

	2012								2013			
Month	May*	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
# of visits	n/a	300	4048	4047	3467	4080	4927	4063	7555	7755	9410	50,622
Unique visitors	n/a	270	3080	2875	2558	3017	3686	3161	6006	6279	7272	35,363
Page views	n/a	1319	17379	15043	12090	14654	16753	12508	23401	21132	25696	163,033
Average page views per unique visitor		3.00	4.29	3.72	3.49	3.59	3.40	3.08	3.02	2.72	2.73	3.22
Time on site (min)	n/a	07:00	05:46	05:32	04:58	4:52	04:46	03:55	03:55	03:31	03:37	04:20

*The soft launch of the website occurred on May 30, 2012. Google analytics was not initiated until June 19, 2012 because codes needed to be developed. Therefore, this data represents only one week of activity on the website.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The evaluation report indicates strong positive feedback, demonstrating that the website is a valuable tool used by both service users and service providers. To further develop and continue to enhance aspects of this highly demanded resource, several key recommendations were made:

- It is imperative that a plan be developed to ensure the maintenance and sustainability of the site within the collaborative framework. This should include decisions around future funding for the website, including hosting fees and funds needed for improvements and additions to the site.
- Technical maintenance of the website was a primary area for improvement. The evaluation indicated that broken links and difficulty downloading forms were commonly experienced by users. Broken links were fixed in May 2013.
- Difficulty in locating and completing court forms was indicated. It was recommended that further descriptions of individual forms be provided on the site, as well as the necessary procedures for completing and filing them.
 - It was noted in the report that the development of 'forms kits' has been on the website workplan for some time now. These kits are in the early stages of development.
- It was reported that the addition of certain content was required, on topics such as grandparent rights, child rights, and responsibilities for individuals involved in family law proceedings other than custodial and non-custodial parents. Additional information relevant to minority cultural groups, specifically Aboriginal populations, was also highly recommended.
 - It was noted in the report that the development of specialized sections, e.g. for children and for Aboriginal families, have been on the website workplan for some time now. In particular, the need for a section for Aboriginal families was identified by the working group before the site went live, and a webpage with preliminary information was added to the site on May 2, 2012.
- The final recommendation in the report is the continued promotion of the Nova Scotia Family Law website. Findings in this report support the effectiveness of current promotional methods in increasing awareness, accessibility, and availability of family law information. Future strategies of promotion proposed by service users and professionals included televised and radio public service announcements, increased networking with community agencies, and providing electronic links on social networking pages, such as Facebook and Twitter.

- It was noted in the report that the website Facebook and Twitter accounts have been active since November 2012 and October 2012, respectively.

Recommended Response

Issue	Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Website maintenance and sustainability plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A sustainability plan, including funding proposals for future site hosting, will be discussed at the Advisory Committee level, and a plan developed to ensure that the NSFL website remains available to stakeholders, and is maintained so as to ensure efficacy and accuracy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technical maintenance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reports to be run by the site hosts periodically, with broken links being fixed by the site lead author - Routine maintenance and updates will be managed by Gesso Communications, per the hosting contract signed in July 2013
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Difficulty using forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Additional members have joined the Subject Matter Expert Team (originally assembled during the creation of the site) to create do-it-yourself order kits, which will include instructions, forms checklists, and links to required forms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Difficulty locating specific forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Links to any forms on the site will be changed to direct the user to the specific form indicated, rather than the page on which the form link is located - <i>[note: this work has now been completed, September 2013]</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Additional general content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Content will continue to be developed and added to the site as required, and in the areas identified in the evaluation report and survey feedback/comments from service users and stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Additional specialized content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Material to populate section for Aboriginal/Mi'kmaq families (draft received in June 2013, currently under revisions by author, September 2013) - Material to populate section for Family Law & Immigration currently in draft form and being vetted by ISIS & Legal Services (September 2013) - Subject matter expert group assembled in June 2012 to begin vetting materials for children to be added to the site - Material for African Nova Scotians currently being drafted by subject matter experts (September 2013)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Select individual forms already on the Courts' website (linked to from nsfamilylaw.ca) need templates added 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Templates drafted and approved in April 2013, and forwarded for adding to the Courts of NS website in May 2013
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of further promotional campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meeting held in May 2013 with Communications Nova Scotia staff to begin developing ideas for further campaigns - Follow-up meeting scheduled for September 24, 2013 - Next major campaign target: January & February, 2014 (<i>funding permitted</i>)

<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Development/addition of content in alternate mediums	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Sweep completed by Pro Bono law students, under the direction of Emma Halpern of the NSBS, of North American online resources relating to family law, in June 2013- Materials to be vetted by subject matter expert teams and links added to website on an ongoing basis