

Oregon's State Courts

When our services are closed, so is the doorway to justice.

Only one of Oregon's 36 circuit courts is able to offer all of its public services from 8 to 5, five days a week. Learn more about what's at stake in keeping court services accessible to the public.

Customer Comments

"I was shown compassion, tolerance and kindness throughout this difficult ordeal."

"They went above and beyond. They helped me tremendously with a very difficult situation. I don't know what I would have done without their help."

"Patient, Kind. Made this ordeal so much easier."

"Facilitation was amazing, thorough and very helpful."

"They made everything easier and less stressful for a single mother who has nothing but stress. God Bless you. Thank you for your patience."

"They helped me put my papers together. I give them 100% in service, optimism and performance."

"I have been through hell over the past month and facilitation made me feel like they were on my side just by listening and not being dismissive."

"They were helpful and patient in moving forward past a mistake."

"Always a helping hand, Rock Stars! Patient and very nice to work with."

"These folks know what they are doing. Kudos to you."

Family Law and Court Facilitators

Thousands of people who come to our courts are not represented by a lawyer. At least 80% of domestic relations cases include at least one unrepresented party. Family Law and Court Facilitators can make all the difference. **The program serves justice, changes lives and saves the courts, and taxpayers, time and money. Here are some stories from Oregon's circuit courts.**

Helping a survivor of domestic violence

I recently worked with a low-income Spanish speaking survivor of domestic violence, whose husband was deported because she was brave enough to report his abuse... She needed assistance in filing for divorce and to get legal custody of their three children... She needed the family law facilitation program to understand how to file for divorce, to help fill out the paperwork in English, and to understand court procedure... The divorce for her was the last step in cutting her ties with her abuser and she told me that until she met me, she had lost hope that she would ever get divorced and had been too scared to even start the process. *LeeAnn O'Neill, Family Law Facilitator, Deschutes County Circuit Court*

Navigating the hardest times of their lives

Customers come to our Family Law Facilitators at a very stressful time in their lives. The impact of divorce is akin to a death in the family with the level of stress it creates for a person. Customers are often experiencing domestic violence in the family, economic difficulties or involvement with child welfare. They come with language barriers, illiteracy, or mental health issues and are overwhelmed with confusion. Our facilitators assist in navigating all customers through the court system by providing them with interpreters and access to tools that assist them in obtaining a judgment that will cover parenting time, child support, health care coverage, custody of the children and the division of assets. They help self-represented litigants understand the process from filing to judgment. This includes form review, direction to resources like the Oregon Law Center, assistance in how to prepare for trial and guidance in the mediation process. *Tammy L. Wheeler, Trial Court Administrator, Grant and Harney County Circuit Courts.*

"Countless times we have filers in tears as they feel the relief of help for an issue that is insurmountable in their eyes...We are here every day to help someone and change a life!"

Mary Herndon, Marion County Circuit Court

Customer Comments

Thank you for hiring kind and caring, warm-hearted, patient and understanding people like Colleen Carter-Cox!! It really makes a difference, when going through hard times, to work with people like her!!

Edie was most helpful in getting through the divorce process. She is a good person! She was friendly, helpful and made it possible for this to happen without an attorney. Those of us who have developmental disabilities especially rely upon extra help. Please retain this valuable service!

D. Campbell was incredible to work with! She was very kind and understanding and walked us through everything.

Wonderful staff. Very helpful. Highly intelligent.

Danita helped me so much. She is an amazing person and she deserves an award for being her! Thank you so much.

Appreciate the attitude of the staff and their willingness to help and provide comfort during a difficult time.

"They took the time to see what I needed. Their help made my experience more manageable. They were kind and polite."

"People always leave with a smile. Facilitation is an asset to the Family Law Department."

"I see a lot of confused people at the courthouse who are not sure where to seek help. It is nice to see Facilitators walk persons through the process to make sure they understand what they are doing."

When a child is in danger, help can't wait

A dad showed up at the front counter at 3:50 p.m. wanting to file for temporary custody of his child because the child was not safe with the mom. After a conversation about process and asking what he wanted to do, he chose to file a Motion to Modify his existing judgment and a Post-Judgment Ex Parte Motion for Temporary Custody under Immediate Danger. I gave him the choice of completing the forms before 5 p.m. or calling me for an appointment later in the week. He chose to work on his forms before the court closed. I reviewed his completed forms and was able to set a hearing on the temporary immediate danger motion the next morning at 8:30 a.m. The customer was grateful that we took him seriously about his child being in danger and that the court had someone available to help him through the process and review his forms in a short amount of time. *Julie Proffitt, Family Law Coordinator, Wasco County Circuit Court*

"(She was) crying tears of relief that her ordeal was over, and she was no longer tied to her abuser."

I was working with a woman who was trying to leave an abusive husband. She felt that she kept getting turned away and provided no information and that everywhere she turned they pushed her aside and did not help her. I spoke with her and explained the process of filing for divorce and helped her through the process. Through our resource center, she was able to successfully complete the first part of filing and the service on the other party. When it came time for the default through judgment, she attempted to file several times and kept getting her paperwork returned by the judge for various reasons. I called her and had her come in to review her paperwork. She ended up correcting some errors and was extremely emotional, as this divorce was still tying her to her abusive husband. We worked together on her forms and I was able to expedite the process and have a judge review and sign her paperwork within 20 minutes. She happened to still be here at the courthouse, so I called her to let her know it was finalized. She came in about 30 minutes later to get a copy and had spent the last 30 minutes crying tears of relief that her ordeal was over, and she was no longer tied to her abuser. *Amanda Durrant, Douglas County Circuit Court*

Helping kids and families

Many of our Family Law Facilitator customers are referred by DHS – Child Welfare. Patience and clearly communicated information are essential when working with people who are highly stressed, as these folks often are. By helping families establish custody and safety-focused parenting plans, we can often limit the need for foster care, avoid significant cost, and arguably provide better lifelong outcomes for the kids. *Steve Tilson, Treatment Court Coordinator, Klamath County Circuit Court*

Connecting a father with his daughter

I recently helped a young man that was referred to me by one of our judges out of a criminal trial. The man was a victim in an attempted murder case. The defendant that was convicted of attempted murder was a partner of his that subsequently had their child while incarcerated. The victim had been wrongfully advised (for upwards of a year) that he had no rights to the child and could not seek custody as long as the mother remained incarcerated. The child was placed with a family member following her birth through Child Protective Services. Because the father was not listed on the birth certificate and the mother did not name him as the father, he was never contacted. I connected him with Child Welfare. They subsequently established paternity through their agency process and I then helped him complete his custody paperwork. Ultimately, he was awarded sole custody of the child. While he lost out on nearly a year with his daughter that he could not get back, I was able to work with him and our community partners to achieve his ultimate goal of being a parent with legal custody of his daughter. *Jennifer Quillen, Family Law Facilitator, Josephine County Circuit Court*

“We give them hope when all seems lost”

I cannot express enough how important our roles in the circuit court are to the community. Most do not have the money to retain an attorney, so they fumble through the paperwork and come to us after they have it filled out to the best of their ability...Most would not have their judgment signed by a judge were it not for facilitators. Knowing we are here to offer support gives the public a sense of peace that their paperwork will be complete.

Every day I wake up knowing I will make a difference in someone's life. Someone on this day will thank me. Someone before the end of the day will need a hug. I have seen many tears fall during my time as a facilitator. Tears of sadness, relief and some just begin to fall after being shown kindness and respect. Our department is where happiness begins, and we are key to this part of their journey. Bottom line is they matter. People leave with their heads held a little higher and their steps a little lighter because we give them hope when all seems lost when they first walk through our door. *Darlene Hernandez, Marion County Circuit Court*

Disabilities shouldn't be barriers to justice

I assisted a woman with developmental disabilities. She had a caseworker who would accompany her to her visits with our office, however, even with the caseworker, she had a lot of anxiety about coming to the courthouse in general and especially about appearing in court to have her paperwork signed. I worked with her consistently throughout the course of her case and the caseworker thanked me afterwards, explaining that having the consistent help, provided with patience, eased her anxiety enough to file and finalize her divorce case. *Colleen Carter Cox, Lane County Circuit Court*

Respecting time and distance for rural residents

A large population that we serve live rurally. People can travel close to one hour to reach the only courthouse facility in our county. Location paired with travel difficulties and financial strains makes multiple trips to the courthouse nearly impossible. Parties often get rides from family members or wait hours to take limited busses here. With facilitation, I can help ease that burden. Often, we can complete the paperwork for a case, provide the self-represented parties with required service copies, and better explain the court process for them without the hardship of making multiple trips. *Jennifer Quillen, Family Law Facilitator, Josephine County Circuit Court*

Helping people complete the process

Court Facilitation has been essential in our court, especially to help people who aren't represented by a lawyer to finish out their case. We have a great system in place where parties can come right down after court and we can help them complete the final judgment to finalize their case. This has helped greatly in completing cases correctly and timely. Often, they can leave court the same day with a signed judgment.

In the past, parties have left court and never returned to finalize the case because they did not understand the next steps, or they were intimidated by the process of filling out the judgment. This led to cases being dismissed for want of prosecution. *Molly Nix, Family Court Specialist, Yamhill County Circuit Court*

Freedom from 30 years of abuse, with a flourish

Last year I started helping an older lady we'll call Martha. She first approached my office during walk-in hours and explained to me she needed to file for a divorce as her husband was moving into a local care facility and she no longer had to stay married to him. She had been bound to a very abusive man who spoke for her, drove for her, kept financial information from her, and kept her from her family. Their children, who were adults now, had talked her into getting a divorce from him to help her heal and find closure from a 30-year ordeal. She was a very bright person and explaining the process was easy. She successfully obtained the paperwork, filled it out, filed and had it served. As no response was filed she was able to get a default with some guidance from our Family Law Resource Center and her case closed. She had not asked for anything and just wanted to be free of him.

About a month went by and I saw Martha in the lobby. She was wearing her wedding gown. Her fingers were laden with rings and her neck with necklaces. She was picking up a copy of her signed judgment! What a day for her. With a flourish only a free woman could do, Martha proceeded to take off the wedding dress and all the jewelry and give it to the next person in my line. She explained to the surprised lady what she was doing and that these items "no longer had bad ju ju"! Although to the common eye she seemed unbalanced, I knew how powerful and freeing it was for her to be able to do that. Without the push of her family and the simple guidance of the Family Law Resource Center she may not have been able to close that chapter of her life. I was honored to be a part of that for her. *Hannah E. Marchese, Family Law Facilitator, Jackson County Circuit Court*

Escaping fear and abuse

A couple of months ago, I met with a woman who was filing for a divorce. She had filed about 2 years prior, but her husband ended up assaulting her, and she was scared so she let it be dismissed. Without a divorce, she couldn't get him off the lease. The abuse continued, and he stole from her as well.

Finally, she decided to file again for a divorce. As I worked with her to make sure her petition was complete, I noticed major bruising along her arms. I asked her if she had recently had contact with her husband. She nervously looked at her arms and said yes. I let her know that if she had been abused or threatened with abuse in the last six months, was in fear for her safety and would like to talk with someone about her options, I could call a domestic violence advocate to talk with her. She said yes, and I had someone meet her outside my office when we were done. I think she felt relieved after that.

I worked with her to complete the divorce and she was able to get her husband off the lease. If it hadn't been for our facilitation services, she would likely be the victim of additional abuse and theft, or at the very least, living in constant fear. We were able to help her stay safe by telling her about domestic violence resources and helping her engage with them while we helped her navigate through the court system. *Elizabeth Vaughn, Clackamas County Circuit Court*

Overcoming language barriers

Last March, I met with a man whose first language is Vietnamese. The mother of his child had disappeared with their child a few days before Christmas. He had no contact with her. He faced many obstacles: language barrier, no knowledge about the court system, jurisdictional issues (the child had moved out of state), and problems with locating his wife to serve notice of the legal actions.

With the help of our Court Language Access Services, we scheduled an interpreter and helped the man complete his Petition for Custody forms. Once we were able to address the language barrier, I could help

him understand the multiple steps of the court process, including ways to serve notice. Eventually the wife's attorney responded, and the interpreter helped the man understand and respond to the attorney's letter. The case ended up in mediation and was resolved.

Had it not been for our facilitation services, the man would still not have any contact with his child. He'd be worried. He'd have to deal with the State of Washington, since the children are now living there, and would likely have just felt frustrated and given up. We hear that so often in our jobs from people who have limited to no English proficiency. *Elizabeth Vaughn, Clackamas County Circuit Court*

Going the extra mile

I was taught at a training that sometimes a person will only see one face of the court, and how that person acts and behaves sets the person's view of the court system as a whole. Since that one face is often me, I work to make sure each person leaves feeling heard and that they got the help they needed. I try to go the extra mile as much as I can because, to many, the court system is very confusing and intimidating. *Amanda Durrant, Family Court Specialist, Douglas County Circuit Court*

Helping a serviceman awaiting deployment

I helped a person who was trying to get his paperwork signed by the judge, as he was deferring deployment until his divorce was finalized. Since he lived out of state, it was somewhat difficult to reach him. We ended up communicating via email. I was able to send him direct links to each individual form that he was missing, and I took a screen shot of the areas of the forms that are common problems. He had prepared a judgment and was missing information when he submitted it, so I also scanned a photocopy of his judgment and sent it back to him with some notes and helpful tips. He was able to resend the corrected judgment. Again, I expedited it to get it signed and back to him for his deployment. *Amanda Durrant, Douglas County Circuit Court*

Facilitation is a good investment – for everyone

Before I took over the role of Family Court Facilitator six years ago, our county was without the position for several years. I can tell you firsthand how detrimental it was to our court to not have a facilitator available. Josephine County has a large self-represented party population. **Nearly 87% of family law cases proceed with at least one self-represented litigant.** Court dockets were clogged with cases that would have otherwise been settled if parties knew what a "stipulated judgment" was. Family Court clerks were inundated with frustrated, desperate people seeking any kind of guidance during their time of crisis. Case management became increasingly challenging as parties were filing documents untimely, without merit, and often on incorrect cases. *Jennifer Quillen, Family Law Facilitator, Josephine County Circuit Court*

When **Multnomah County Circuit Court** suspended facilitation back in 2009 for several years, I had a **particular document routed to me 11 times** because the person (who did not have a lawyer) could not figure out how to fill it out despite my being as clear as I could, by letter, on what was needed. This means that I touched it 11 times, my staff touched it 11 times, and **family law staff touched it 22 times**, coming and going. *Hon. Maureen McKnight*

By making sure that documents are reviewed and correct, Family Law Facilitation provides our judges with cases they know are vetted and ready to be heard without redoing paperwork or correcting paperwork in the courtroom. I can't begin to tell you the time we save in the courtrooms. *Mary Herndon, Marion County Circuit Court*

