

Federal Courts Branch  
Australian Attorney General's Department  
Robert Garrar. Offices  
3-5 National Circuit  
BARTON 2600  
ACT

January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2009

To Whom It May Concern:

**Ref: Improving Access to Justice Review**

Court Network has been providing information, support and referral services to court users in the federal jurisdiction since 1984. We welcome the consultation paper's direction and it's emphasis on deriving greater effectiveness and efficiencies from the resources deployed.

Our perspective is that of the court experience for the litigant, particularly those who are self represented, and make the following observations as our contribution to the review:

**Court Structure**

Any move to simplify court administration and remove structural duplications is a worthy and necessary pursuit, particularly when savings can be used to strengthen other parts of the family law system. At times, the system appears designed to support those who work within it rather than those for whom they are appointed to serve. Whilst we accept that is a challenge in any organisation, there are particular considerations such as safe space and information services that do not match well with a strong, customer focussed culture.

**Security**

The arrangements at a number of the larger registries appears a little too fulsome. Not being aware of the security events, this observation may be trite but we do receive feedback from court users that the overt security presence and protocols increase their anxiety levels.

**Future Vision**

The desirable characteristics of the court shown on page six of the review are worthy and we would like the Department to further consider these aspects:

Patrons:  
The Honourable Chief Justice  
Diana Bryant  
Family Court of Australia

The Honourable  
Chief Justice Marilyn L. Warren  
Supreme Court of Victoria



Court Network  
*For Humanity*

**Court Network**

Incorporated as  
Victorian Court Information  
and Welfare Network Inc.  
Reg. No. A2254B  
ABN: 85 517 169 601

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Court Network is a statewide  
service which offers personal  
support, information and referral  
to people going to court.

- **respectful:** litigants have access to legal aid, procedural information, support services and the power balance with staff is based on the dignity of citizenship
- **accessible:** litigants have access to services than can assist them to interpret and decode the language and behaviours of court, it's systems and expectations
- **customer focussed:** whilst litigants do not always get the decision they seek from court, they should at least have an experience whilst at court that is fully understood by them and reflects well on the Federal Government and the Department

### **The Court Network Service**

This organisation currently provides assistance in Melbourne and Dandenong courts and for the remainder of the financial year, the court in Brisbane.

Court Network's purpose is that of access to justice and we attend to numerous elements of the aspirational components of the review. Our 2008 proposal to the Department to duplicate the service to all registries would facilitate the more effective running of the court and achieving the outcomes of this review, as demonstrated by the Family Transitions 2007 report "Court Network Service in the Family and Federal Magistrates Courts of Brisbane: Pilot Evaluation".

In the 2007/2008 year, Court Network provided assistance to over 20,000 people with outcomes such as court door settlements for litigants, support for highly emoted litigants and self represented litigants who simply do not understand the system.

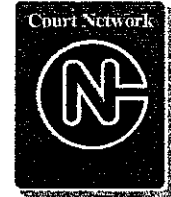
I am happy to make further contribution to the review at a later stage should it be useful.

Sincerely

Nicholas Bolto  
Executive Director

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Diana Bryant  
Family Court of Australia

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