



**A PROFILE OF FAMILY LAW LEGAL AID MATTERS  
IN ALBERTA: SEPTEMBER 1, 2011 – AUGUST 31, 2012**

Prepared for:  
Legal Aid Alberta

Prepared by:  
Lorne D. Bertrand, Ph.D.  
and  
Joseph P. Hornick, Ph.D.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  | Page |
|--|------|
| List of Tables and Figures.....                    | iv   |
| Acknowledgements.....                              | vii  |
| 1.0 Introduction.....                              | 1    |
| 1.1 Background.....                                | 1    |
| 1.2 Family Law Legal Aid Services in Alberta ..... | 1    |
| 1.3 The Present Project .....                      | 2    |
| 1.4 Limitations.....                               | 3    |
| 2.0 Findings.....                                  | 4    |
| 2.1 Family Matters Resolved .....                  | 4    |
| 2.1.1 Clients' Demographic Characteristics .....   | 4    |
| 2.1.2 Resolution of Matters .....                  | 7    |
| 2.1.3 Certificates Issued.....                     | 8    |
| 2.1.4 Service Plans.....                           | 10   |
| 2.2 Family Certificates Open .....                 | 13   |
| 2.2.1 Clients' Demographic Characteristics .....   | 13   |
| 2.2.2 Characteristics of Certificates Granted..... | 15   |
| 2.2.3 Service Plans.....                           | 18   |
| 2.3 Family Certificates Closed.....                | 21   |
| 2.3.1 Clients' Demographic Characteristics .....   | 22   |
| 2.3.2 Characteristics of Certificates Granted..... | 23   |
| 2.3.3 Service Plans.....                           | 26   |
| 3.0 Summary and Conclusions .....                  | 29   |
| 3.1 Summary.....                                   | 29   |
| 3.1.1 Characteristics of Databases Analyzed .....  | 29   |
| 3.1.2 Clients' Demographic Characteristics .....   | 29   |
| 3.1.3 Characteristics of Certificates Issued.....  | 29   |
| 3.1.4 Service Plans.....                           | 30   |
| 3.2 Conclusions .....                              | 30   |

## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

|            |  | Page |
|------------|--|------|
| Figure 2.1 | Marital Status of Individuals Involved in Family Law Legal Aid that were Resolved During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 .....                          | 5    |
| Table 2.1  | Location of Individuals Involved in Family Law Legal Aid Matters that were Resolved During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 .....                        | 6    |
| Figure 2.2 | How Family Law Legal Aid Matters were Resolved During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 .....   | 7    |
| Figure 2.3 | Disposition of Certificates for Family Law Matters Resolved During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 .....  | 8    |
| Table 2.2  | Primary Reason for Issuing Family Law Legal Aid Certificates for Matters that were Resolved During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 .....                | 9    |
| Table 2.3  | Type of Service for Which Family Law Legal Aid Certificates were Issued for Matters that were Resolved During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 .....     | 10   |
| Figure 2.4 | Types of Services Received by Family Law Legal Aid Clients who had Matters Resolved During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 .....                        | 10   |
| Table 2.4  | Location of Services for Family Law Legal Aid Clients Receiving a Service Plan and Having Matters Resolved During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 ..... | 11   |
| Table 2.5  | Service Plan Agency and Program Referrals for Family Law Legal Aid Clients who had Matters Resolved between September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 .....                  | 12   |
| Figure 2.5 | Marital Status of Family Law Legal Aid Clients who had Certificates Open During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 .....                                   | 13   |
| Table 2.6  | Location of Individuals Involved in Family Law Legal Aid Matters that had Certificates Open During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 .....                | 14   |

|            | Page   |
|------------|--|
| Table 2.7  | Number of Family Law Legal Aid Certificates Issued per Matter for Certificates that were Open During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 ..... 15               |
| Figure 2.6 | Disposition of Certificates for Family Law Legal Aid Clients with Certificates Open During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 ..... 16                         |
| Table 2.8  | Primary Reason for Issuing Family Law Legal Aid Certificates for Certificates that were Open During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 ..... 17                |
| Table 2.9  | Type of Service for Which Family Law Legal Aid Certificates were Issued for Certificates that were Open During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 ..... 18     |
| Figure 2.7 | Type of Services Received by Family Law Legal Aid Clients who had Certificates Open During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 ..... 19                         |
| Table 2.10 | Location of Service for Family Law Legal Aid Clients Receiving a Service Plan and Having a Certificate Open During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 ..... 20 |
| Table 2.11 | Service Plan Agency and Program Referrals for Family Law Legal Aid Clients who had a Certificate Open During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 ..... 21       |
| Figure 2.8 | Marital Status of Family Law Legal Aid Clients who had Certificates Closed During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 ..... 22                                  |
| Table 2.12 | Location of Individuals Involved in Family Law Legal Aid Matters that had Certificates Close During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 ..... 23                |
| Table 2.13 | Number of Family Law Legal Aid Certificates Issued per Matter for Certificates the Closed During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 ..... 23                   |
| Figure 2.9 | Disposition of Certificates for Family Law Legal Aid Clients with Certificates Closed During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 ..... 24                       |
| Table 2.14 | Primary Reason for Issuing Family Law Legal Aid Certificates for Certificates that were Closed During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 ..... 25              |

|             | Page   |
|-------------|--|
| Table 2.15  | Type of Service for Which Family Law Legal Aid Certificates were Issued for Certificates that were Closed During the period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 .....26          |
| Figure 2.10 | Types of Services Received by Family Law Legal Aid Clients who had Certificates Closed During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 .....27                             |
| Table 2.16  | Location of Service for Family Law Legal Aid Clients Receiving a Service Plan and Having a Certificate that Closed During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 .....27 |
| Table 2.17  | Service Plan Agency and Program Referrals for Family Law Legal Aid Who had a Certificate that Closed During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 .....28               |

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# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

In the summer of 2012, the Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family (the Institute) and Legal Aid Alberta (LAA) commenced discussions regarding undertaking a program of research in the family law area that would be beneficial to LAA in its ongoing efforts to provide legal assistance to vulnerable lower income Albertans while also fulfilling the Institute's mandate of contributing to a better understanding of how legal systems and laws deal with the family. The present report provides the findings of the first project arising from this collaboration.

Using data derived from LAA's Client Relationship Management (CRM) system for a one-year period from September 1, 2011 to August 31, 2012, this project outlines the flow of family law cases (excluding child welfare) through LAA's system, and provides a profile of LAA family law clients. It includes information on family law matters that are dealt with by LAA, as well as certificates that are granted for legal aid services. Available data included: demographic characteristics of clients; family law issues dealt with; how family law matters achieved resolution; the characteristics of family law certificates that were issued for some matters; characteristics of service plans prepared for clients by LAA; and agencies/ services to which clients were referred.

## 1.2 Family Law Legal Aid Services in Alberta

Potential legal aid clients can initiate contact with LAA through the following methods:

- in person at one of 11 Legal Service Centres operated by LAA across the province;
- in person at a Courthouse, correctional or remand centre, or other location where Legal Service Officers meet with potential clients; or
- by telephone.

Legal Service Officers (LSO) are the point of first contact for potential LAA clients and they have primary responsibility for identifying the client's legal issue and determining whether their legal needs fall within LAA's mandate. All individuals, regardless of eligibility for further LAA assistance, are entitled to information and referrals to other resources; if the LSO determines that a client's needs are outside of LAA's mandate, he or she may refer the client to another source of assistance that is appropriate for their issues.

If an individual's legal needs fall within LAA's mandate, the LSO creates a client file and matter and collects basic demographic information including the client's name, gender, date of birth, marital status and city/town of residence. The LSO also collects further information regarding the nature of their legal issue or question, including material facts of the case. The LSO then determines the types of services that may be available to the client from LAA and, depending on the nature of these services, may

collect information on the client's financial circumstances to allow assessment of financial eligibility for legal aid coverage.

LAA offers several services to individuals with family law issues. These services include:

- Information, Resources, and Referrals. As noted above, all individuals, regardless of financial eligibility, receive information, resources and referrals to appropriate agencies or programs by a LSO. In addition, clients who meet LAA eligibility requirements are also provided these services.
- Legal Advice and/or an Assessment of Legal Merit. Clients who meet eligibility criteria may receive these services which are provided by LAA staff lawyers.
- Brief Services. Clients who meet eligibility criteria may receive some services from a Staff Lawyer or LSO.
- Family Settlement Services. The Family Settlement Services pilot project offers clients who meet eligibility requirements with up to five hours of dispute resolution services provided by both staff lawyers and members of the private bar who are on LAA's roster. This pilot project is available in Calgary, Edmonton and Lethbridge.
- Limited Scope Service Contracts. These contracts are a pilot project of the Family Law Offices that began in 2010. The contracts provide, through the issuance of a LAA certificate, some assistance from a lawyer, but clients conduct their cases on their own. Eligibility requirements must be met to qualify for these contracts and services are mostly provided by private lawyers who are on the LAA roster.
- Full Representation. Clients who meet eligibility criteria may be granted a certificate for full representation by a lawyer who is usually a member of the private bar and is on the LAA roster.

### **1.3 The Present Project**

The present project is an exploratory study which involves an examination of family law matters dealt with by LAA during a one-year period from September 1, 2011 to August 31, 2012. A matter refers to the file that is opened by the LSO when he or she determines that an individual's legal issue falls within LAA's mandate. A matter does not necessarily result in the issuance of a certificate for service; however, a matter may result in the issuance of one or more certificates, depending on the issues involved in the matter. For purposes of this study, three databases created for the Institute by LAA were analyzed:

- all family law matters resolved during the one-year target period;
- all certificates issued for family law services that were open during the one-year period; and

- all certificates issued for family services that were closed during the one-year period.

It should be noted that there will obviously be some overlap among these databases and some matters will be included in more than one; thus, the databases should not be viewed as mutually exclusive. In particular, by definition, certificates that were closed during the target time period were also open during this period. Thus, the Family Certificates Closed database is a subset of the Family Certificates Open database.

#### **1.4 Limitations**

Certain limitations to the data analyses presented in this report should be noted. First, since more than one certificate may be issued for a single matter, the unit of analysis used in this report may be either the matter or the certificate, depending on the characteristic under consideration. The unit of analysis used is indicated in all tables and figures.

In addition, it is possible that a client may appear in a particular database more than once if he or she had matters opened by LAA on more than one occasion during the target period. Thus, for analyses conducted on matters, it must be kept in mind that the unit of analysis is the matter, not the individual client.

Finally, LAA certificates that were issued prior to June 13, 2011 are not contained in the CRM system. For this reason, not all certificates that were issued for matters contained in the matters resolved database will be included. It is likely that many matters that were resolved during the one-year target period commenced prior to the start of this period and may have had certificates issued prior to June 13, 2011; thus, the certificates that are contained in this database should be viewed as a subset of the total certificates issued for these matters.

## 2.0 FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of the analyses of three databases that were created from Legal Aid Alberta's (LAA) Client Relationship Management (CRM) system: (1) Family Matters Resolved, which includes all family law matters that were resolved during a one-year period; (2) Family Certificates Open, which includes all family law matters that were issued legal aid certificates and were open during a one-year period; and (3) Family Certificates Closed, which includes all family law matters that were issued legal aid certificates and were closed during a one-year period.

### 2.1 Family Matters Resolved

A database was created from LAA's CRM system that included all family law matters that were resolved<sup>1</sup> during the one-year period September 1, 2011 to August 31, 2012. This database contains information on 4,238 matters; 14 matters had more than one entry in the database indicating that these matters had more than one certificate for roster service issued (10 matters had 2 certificates issued and 4 matters had 3 certificates). Thus, the database contains information on 4,220 unique matters.

In addition, this database contains information on 116 certificates for roster service that were issued. It should be noted that certificates on the CRM system only include those that have been issued since June 13, 2011; thus, any matters that had certificates issued prior to this date are not contained in the database. For this reason, the certificates available in the database will not be a complete coverage of all certificates issued for these matters; instead, the certificates for which data are available should be viewed as a subset of all certificates issued for these matters.

#### 2.1.1 Clients' Demographic Characteristics

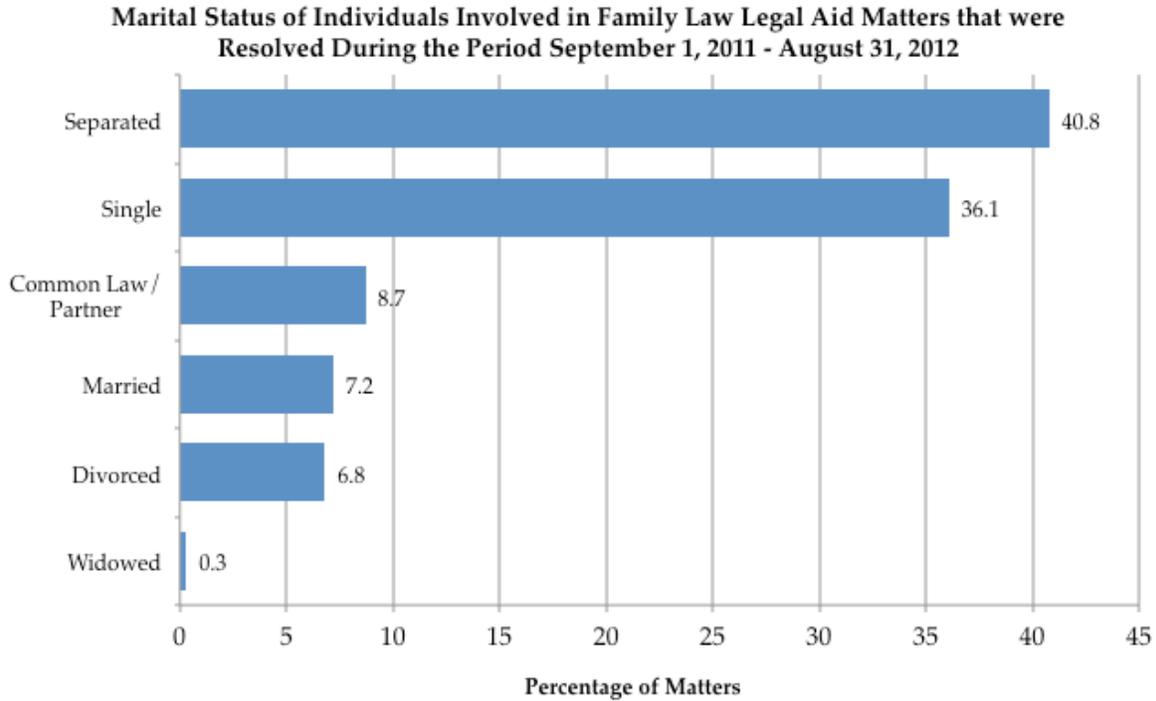
Information was available on family law clients' gender, age, marital status, and location. Over two-thirds of clients represented in the 4,220 unique matters were female (68.3%). Client's age was available in 2,834 matters and indicated that their average age was 36.4 years and ranged from 6 to 83 years. Males tended to be slightly older (mean = 37.7 years) than females (mean = 35.8 years).

Figure 2.1 presents the marital status of family law clients who had matters resolved during the target one-year period. Clients were most likely to be separated (40.8%) or single (36.1%). Relatively few clients were living with a partner in a common law relationship (8.7%), married (7.2%), or divorced (6.8%). When examined by gender, males (39%) were somewhat more likely to be single than were females (34.8%), while females (43.5%) were more likely to be separated than males (34.9%). Only minor differences were observed between males and females on the other marital status categories.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the term "resolved" as used in this report indicates that the matter was closed in Legal Aid Alberta's database, and does not necessarily mean that the clients' legal issues have been dealt

Figure 2.1



Source of data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System  
Total N=4,220; Missing Cases=147

The location of clients involved in family law matters that were resolved is presented in Table 2.1. Only locations that had 20 or more clients are presented in the table; the remaining locations are included in the "Other location" category. As would be expected, almost one-half of the clients were in Alberta's two largest centres of Calgary (25.8%) and Edmonton (20.8%). The next most common locations were Red Deer (5.3%) and Lethbridge (3.5%). All other locations each had fewer than 2% of clients.

**Table 2.1**

**Location of Individuals Involved in Family Law Legal Aid Matters that were Resolved During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012**

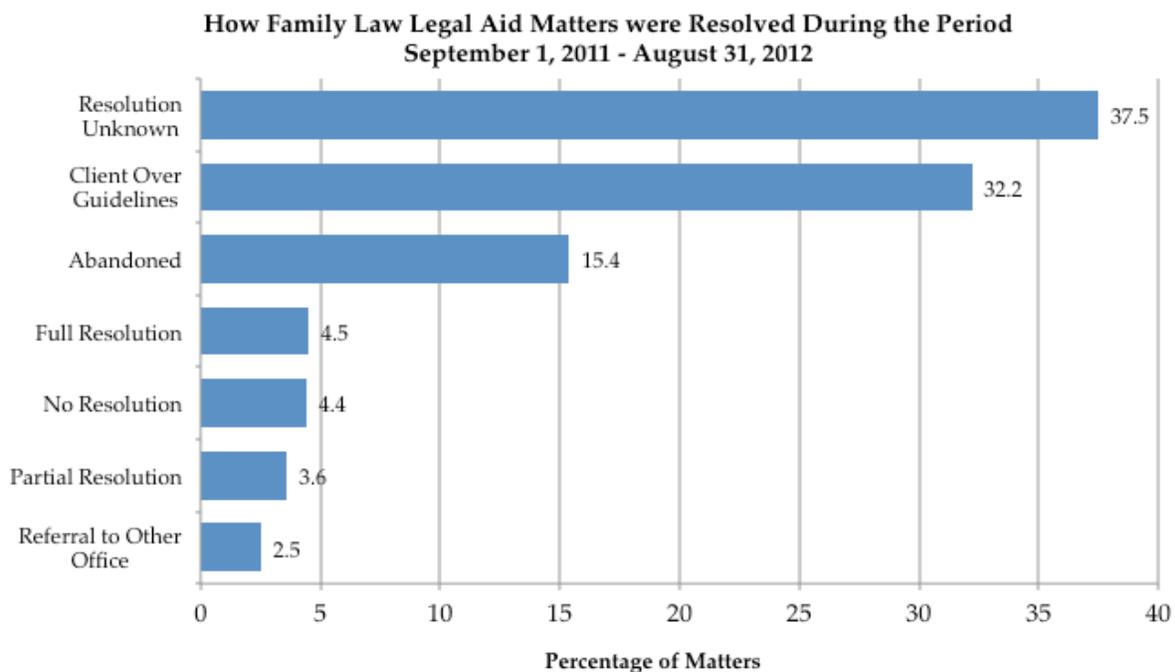
| <b>Location</b>      | <b>n</b>     | <b>%</b>     |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Calgary              | 1,087        | 25.8         |
| Edmonton             | 878          | 20.8         |
| Red Deer             | 222          | 5.3          |
| Lethbridge           | 146          | 3.5          |
| Siksika Nation       | 71           | 1.7          |
| Medicine Hat         | 69           | 1.6          |
| Fort McMurray        | 63           | 1.5          |
| Sherwood Park        | 53           | 1.3          |
| Airdrie              | 47           | 1.1          |
| Grande Prairie       | 47           | 1.1          |
| Spruce Grove         | 38           | 0.9          |
| Leduc                | 36           | 0.9          |
| Camrose              | 30           | 0.7          |
| Stony Plain          | 28           | 0.7          |
| Whitecourt           | 27           | 0.6          |
| St. Albert           | 24           | 0.6          |
| Sylvan Lake          | 24           | 0.6          |
| Fort Saskatchewan    | 23           | 0.5          |
| Rocky Mountain House | 23           | 0.5          |
| Lacombe              | 22           | 0.5          |
| Bonnyville           | 21           | 0.5          |
| Edson                | 21           | 0.5          |
| Lloydminster         | 20           | 0.5          |
| Peace River          | 20           | 0.5          |
| Other location       | 1,032        | 24.5         |
| Missing              | 148          | 3.5          |
| <b>Total Matters</b> | <b>4,220</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Source of Data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System

### 2.1.2 Resolution of Matters

Matters may be coded as resolved<sup>2</sup> by LAA's Legal Service Officers for any of several reasons. Figure 2.2 presents the method of resolution of the matters that were resolved in the target period. Over one-third of matters (37.5%) were coded as "Resolution Unknown," which indicates that the client may or may not have resolved the issue, perhaps after receiving information or a referral to another agency or duty counsel. In these cases, LAA was not directly involved in the resolution. The second most common resolution was "Client Over Guidelines" (32.2%), indicating that the client's income was too high to receive certificate service. The matter was coded as "Abandoned" in 15.4% of cases, indicating that the client abandoned the matter which may mean that the client did not comply with qualifying conditions or that they rejected the suggested process that was presented to them by LAA. "Full Resolution" was reported for 4.5% of matters, indicating that all issues involved in the matter were resolved, while 3.6% of matters achieved partial resolution, which means that some aid was provided by LAA to resolve one or more issues in the matter. No legal resolution occurred in 4.4% of matters, and a small proportion of cases (2.5%) were referred to another office.

Figure 2.2

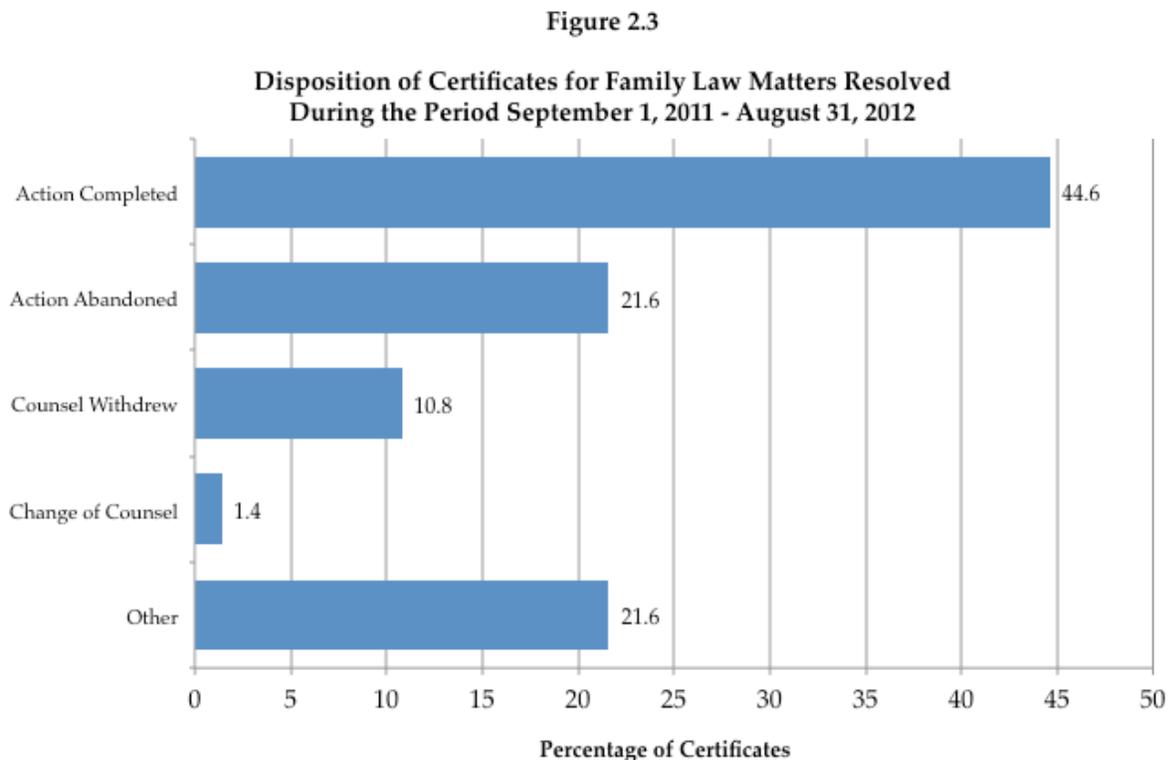


Source of data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System  
Total N=4,220

<sup>2</sup> As noted above, the term "resolved" indicates that the matter was closed in Legal Aid Alberta's database, and does not necessarily mean that the clients' legal issues have been dealt with in a final manner.

### 2.1.3 Certificates Issued

As noted above, data were available on 116 certificates for roster service that were issued for matters resolved during the target period. The roster lawyer provides information to LAA regarding the disposition of the certificate once it has been final-billed. Data were available regarding the final disposition of 74 of these certificates; in the other 42 cases, the certificate may still have been open at the end of the target one-year period (see Figure 2.3). Almost one-half of certificates where disposition data were available indicated that the action had been completed (44.6%), while in slightly over one-fifth of cases (21.6%) the action was abandoned. In 10.8% of certificates the counsel withdrew, while there was a change of counsel in 1.4%. An “Other” disposition was recorded in 21.6% of certificates; however, the nature of this other disposition was available in few cases.



Source of data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System  
Total Number of Certificates=116; Missing Cases=42

Table 2.2 presents the primary reason for issuing a certificate for roster service. Only reasons that were given for two or more certificates are shown in the table; reasons that were given for only a single certificate are included in the “Other reason” category. The most common reason, given for 13.8% of certificates, was a “Parenting Order,” followed by “Divorce – Custody/Access” (12.1%), “Parenting Order – Family Settlement Services” (9.5%), “Divorce – Custody/Access – Family Settlement Services” (8.6%), and “Civil Appeal – Initiate” (6%). The remaining reasons for issuing a certificate were each given in fewer than 4% of cases.

**Table 2.2**

**Primary Reason for Issuing Family Law Legal Aid Certificates for Matters that were Resolved During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012**

| <b>Reason</b>   | <b>n</b>   | <b>%</b>     |
|---|------------|--------------|
| Parenting Order   | 16         | 13.8         |
| Divorce – Custody / Access                                      | 14         | 12.1         |
| Parenting Order – Family Settlement Services                    | 11         | 9.5          |
| Divorce – Custody / Access – Family Settlement Services         | 10         | 8.6          |
| Civil Appeal – Initiate   | 7          | 6.0          |
| Vary Parenting Order – Family Settlement Services               | 4          | 3.4          |
| Continuation of Divorce – Custody / Access                      | 4          | 3.4          |
| Child Support – Family Settlement Services                      | 3          | 2.6          |
| Vary Parenting Order  | 3          | 2.6          |
| Emergency Protection Order – Oral Hearing                       | 3          | 2.6          |
| Divorce – Maintenance – Family Settlement Services              | 3          | 2.6          |
| Divorce – Spousal Support                                       | 3          | 2.6          |
| Vary Divorce Judgement re. Custody                              | 3          | 2.6          |
| Vary Divorce Judgement re. Custody – Family Settlement Services | 3          | 2.6          |
| Child Guardianship – Family Settlement Services                 | 2          | 1.7          |
| Spousal Support   | 2          | 1.7          |
| Property – Family Settlement Services                           | 2          | 1.7          |
| Divorce – Custody / Access – Limited Scope Representation       | 2          | 1.7          |
| Divorce – Spousal Support – Family Settlement Services          | 2          | 1.7          |
| Vary Divorce Judgement re. Access                               | 2          | 1.7          |
| Other reason  | 17         | 14.7         |
| <b>Total Certificates</b>                                       | <b>116</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Source of Data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System

Table 2.3 indicates the type of service for which certificates were issued. In 39.7% of cases, certificates were issued for Family Settlement Services, while in 5.2% of cases certificates were issued for Limited Scope Representation. In the majority of cases (55.2%) certificates were issued for other types of family services.

Table 2.3

**Type of Service for Which Family Law Legal Aid Certificates Were Issued for Matters that were Resolved During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012**

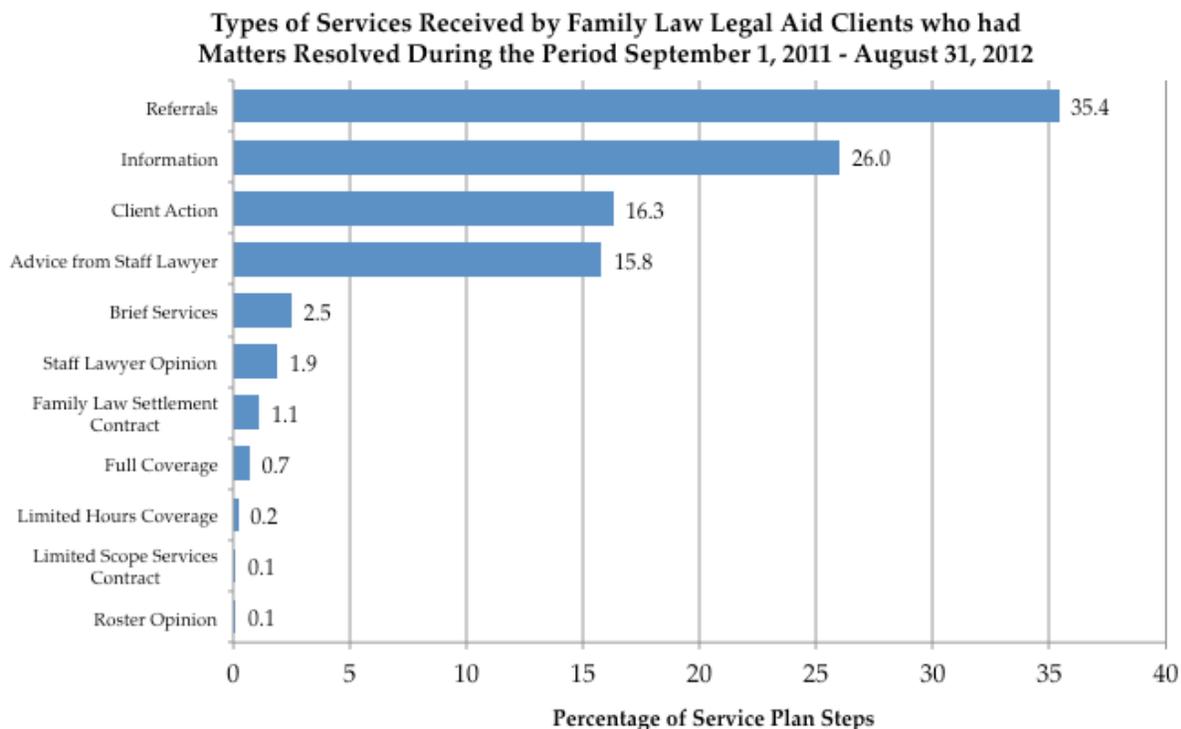
| Service                      | n          | %            |
|------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Family Settlement Services   | 46         | 39.7         |
| Limited Scope Representation | 6          | 5.2          |
| Other family service         | 64         | 55.2         |
| <b>Total Certificates</b>    | <b>116</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Source of Data: Legal Aid Alberta’s Client Relationship Management (CRM) System

2.1.4 Service Plans

For the majority of clients seen by LAA, a service plan is generated that provides an outline of the services that the client may receive or be referred to. A service plan may consist of several distinct steps. A breakdown of the type of services contained in the service plan steps is provided in Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4



Source of data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System  
 Total Number of Matters with a Service Plan=3,958; Total Number of Service Plan Steps=16,819

Of the 4,220 unique matters that were resolved during the target period, 3,958 (93.8%) had service plans documented in the database. These 3,958 matters had a total of 16,819 service plan steps. The number of steps per case ranged from 1 to 53, with an average of 4.3. Most cases had one (15.8%), two (16.8%), three (21.4%), four (16.9%), or five (10.7%) service plan steps. Over one-third (35.4%) of the service plan steps were for referrals, followed by information (26%), client action (16.3%), and advice from a staff lawyer (15.8%). Other services were each contained in less than 3% of service plan steps.

Table 2.4 presents the location of services for the 3,958 resolved matters with service plans. The majority of services were provided in Calgary (35%), Edmonton (29.1%), Red Deer (9.9%) and Lethbridge (6.6%). The remaining locations each accounted for less than 5% of services.

**Table 2.4**

**Location of Service for Family Law Legal Aid Clients Receiving a Service Plan and Having Matters Resolved During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012**

| Location                   | n            | %            |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Calgary                    | 1,386        | 35.0         |
| Edmonton                   | 1,151        | 29.1         |
| Red Deer                   | 393          | 9.9          |
| Lethbridge                 | 261          | 6.6          |
| St. Paul                   | 158          | 4.0          |
| Peace River                | 108          | 2.7          |
| Wetaskiwin                 | 107          | 2.7          |
| Whitecourt                 | 96           | 2.4          |
| Medicine Hat               | 89           | 2.2          |
| Fort McMurray              | 80           | 2.0          |
| Grande Prairie             | 70           | 1.8          |
| Ontario                    | 2            | 0.1          |
| Saskatoon                  | 2            | 0.1          |
| Missing                    | 55           | 1.4          |
| <b>Total Service Plans</b> | <b>3,958</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Source of Data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System

Out of the 3,958 resolved matters that contained service plans, 2,074 (52.4%) had referrals to one or more agencies or programs. The total number of referrals made was 4,114, and the number of referrals per matter ranged from 1 to 12, with an average of 2 referrals per matter. Most matters had one (43.3%), two (31.5%), or three (16.1%) referrals.

Table 2.5 contains a breakdown of the agencies or programs that clients were referred to. Only agencies or programs that received 20 or more referrals are contained in the table; the remainder are contained in the “Other agency/program” category. The most common referrals were to the Lawyer Referral Service (21.5%) and Family Justice Services (18.9%). Fewer referrals were made to Student Legal Services of Edmonton (8.3%), the Family Law Information Centre (7.4%), and the Parenting after Separation Seminar (7.4%). All other agencies and programs each received fewer than 5% of referrals.

**Table 2.5**

**Service Plan Agency and Program Referrals for Family Law Legal Aid Clients who had Matters Resolved between September 1, 2011 and August 31, 2012**

| <b>Agency/Program</b>                     | <b>n</b>     | <b>%</b>     |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| Lawyer Referral Service                   | 886          | 21.5         |
| Family Justice Services (FJS)             | 776          | 18.9         |
| Student Legal Services of Edmonton        | 341          | 8.3          |
| Family Law Information Centre (FLIC)      | 303          | 7.4          |
| Parenting after Separation (PAS) Seminar  | 303          | 7.4          |
| Calgary Legal Guidance (CLG)              | 199          | 4.8          |
| Alberta Courts                            | 161          | 3.9          |
| Law Information Centre (LInC)             | 82           | 2.0          |
| Central Alberta Community Legal Clinic    | 78           | 1.9          |
| Student Legal Assistance                  | 76           | 1.8          |
| Family Centre Society of Southern Alberta | 67           | 1.6          |
| Central Alberta Law Office (CALO)         | 58           | 1.4          |
| Maintenance Enforcement Program (MEP)     | 49           | 1.2          |
| Government - Other                        | 48           | 1.2          |
| Law Information                           | 41           | 1.0          |
| Child Support Recalculation Program       | 35           | 0.9          |
| Department of Justice Canada              | 35           | 0.9          |
| Website(s)                                | 34           | 0.8          |
| Duty Counsel                              | 30           | 0.7          |
| Native Counselling Services of Alberta    | 24           | 0.6          |
| Lethbridge Legal Guidance (LLG)           | 23           | 0.6          |
| Money Mentors                             | 23           | 0.6          |
| Other agency/program                      | 442          | 10.7         |
| <b>Total Referrals</b>                    | <b>4,114</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Number of matters receiving referral(s) to agencies/programs=2,074

Source of Data: Legal Aid Alberta’s Client Relationship Management (CRM) System

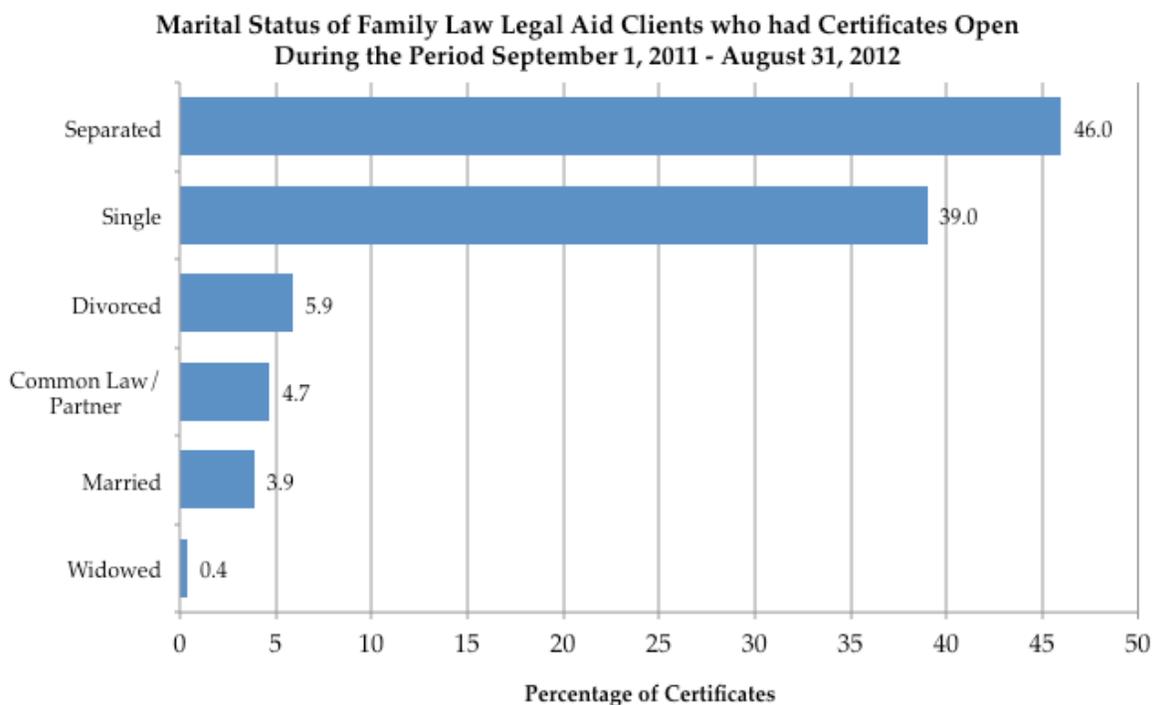
## 2.2 Family Certificates Open

The second database analyzed for this report contained information on all family law matters that were issued legal aid certificates and were open during the period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012. This file consisted of data on 7,132 certificates; since multiple certificates can be issued for a single family law matter, the database included 5,579 unique matters.

### 2.2.1 Clients' Demographic Characteristics

Data were available on clients' gender, age, marital status, and location. Over three quarters of clients in the 5,579 unique matters were female (76.8%). Client's age was available in 3,569 matters and indicated that the average age was 33 years and ranged from 2 to 85 years. Average age of males was slightly higher (33.7 years) than females (32.9 years). Figure 2.5 presents the marital status of clients who had certificates open during the target period. The majority of clients were either separated (46%) or single (39%), with relatively few clients divorced (5.9%), living in a common law relationship (4.7%), or married (3.9%). Males (44.5%) were more likely to be single than were females (37.4%), while females (49.2%) were more likely to be separated than were males (35.1%). No substantial differences between males and females were observed on the other marital status categories.

Figure 2.5



Source of data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System  
Total N=5,579; Missing Cases=134

The location of legal aid clients who had family law certificates open during the one-year target period is provided in Table 2.6. Only locations that had 20 or more clients are included in this table; the remaining locations are included in the “Other location” category. As would be expected, the majority of clients were located in Edmonton (25.1%) or Calgary (22.8%). The next most frequent locations were Red Deer (3.8%), Grande Prairie (2.6%), and Lethbridge (2.2%). All other locations each had fewer than 2% of clients.

**Table 2.6**

**Location of Individuals Involved in Family Law Legal Aid Matters that had Certificates Open During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012**

| <b>Location</b>   | <b>n</b> | <b>%</b> |
|-------------------|----------|----------|
| Edmonton          | 1,400    | 25.1     |
| Calgary           | 1,270    | 22.8     |
| Red Deer          | 214      | 3.8      |
| Grande Prairie    | 143      | 2.6      |
| Lethbridge        | 125      | 2.2      |
| Medicine Hat      | 81       | 1.5      |
| Fort McMurray     | 77       | 1.4      |
| Sherwood Park     | 72       | 1.3      |
| St. Albert        | 63       | 1.1      |
| Spruce Grove      | 61       | 1.1      |
| Leduc             | 54       | 1.0      |
| Airdrie           | 53       | 0.9      |
| Cold Lake         | 51       | 0.9      |
| Stony Plain       | 46       | 0.8      |
| Fort Saskatchewan | 43       | 0.8      |
| Hobbema           | 36       | 0.6      |
| Camrose           | 35       | 0.6      |
| Wetaskiwin        | 31       | 0.6      |
| Okotoks           | 29       | 0.5      |
| Strathmore        | 28       | 0.5      |
| Chestermere       | 27       | 0.5      |
| Lacombe           | 27       | 0.5      |
| Morinville        | 27       | 0.5      |
| Lloydminster      | 26       | 0.5      |
| Edson             | 25       | 0.4      |

Continued

Table 2.6 (Continued)

| Location             | n            | %            |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Whitecourt           | 25           | 0.4          |
| St. Paul             | 24           | 0.4          |
| Bonnyville           | 23           | 0.4          |
| Cochrane             | 23           | 0.4          |
| Lac La Biche         | 23           | 0.4          |
| Hinton               | 22           | 0.4          |
| Innisfail            | 22           | 0.4          |
| Drayton Valley       | 21           | 0.4          |
| Peace River          | 21           | 0.4          |
| Taber                | 21           | 0.4          |
| Other location       | 1,261        | 22.8         |
| Missing              | 49           | 0.9          |
| <b>Total Matters</b> | <b>5,579</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Source of Data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System

## 2.2.2 Characteristics of Certificates Granted

As noted above, a matter may have multiple certificates granted. Table 2.7 presents the number of certificates granted per matter. The majority of matters had a single certificate granted (77%), while 18.8% of matters had two certificates and 3.6% of matters had three certificates. Very few matters had more than three certificates granted.

Table 2.7

Number of Family Law Legal Aid Certificates Issued per Matter for Certificates that were Open During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012

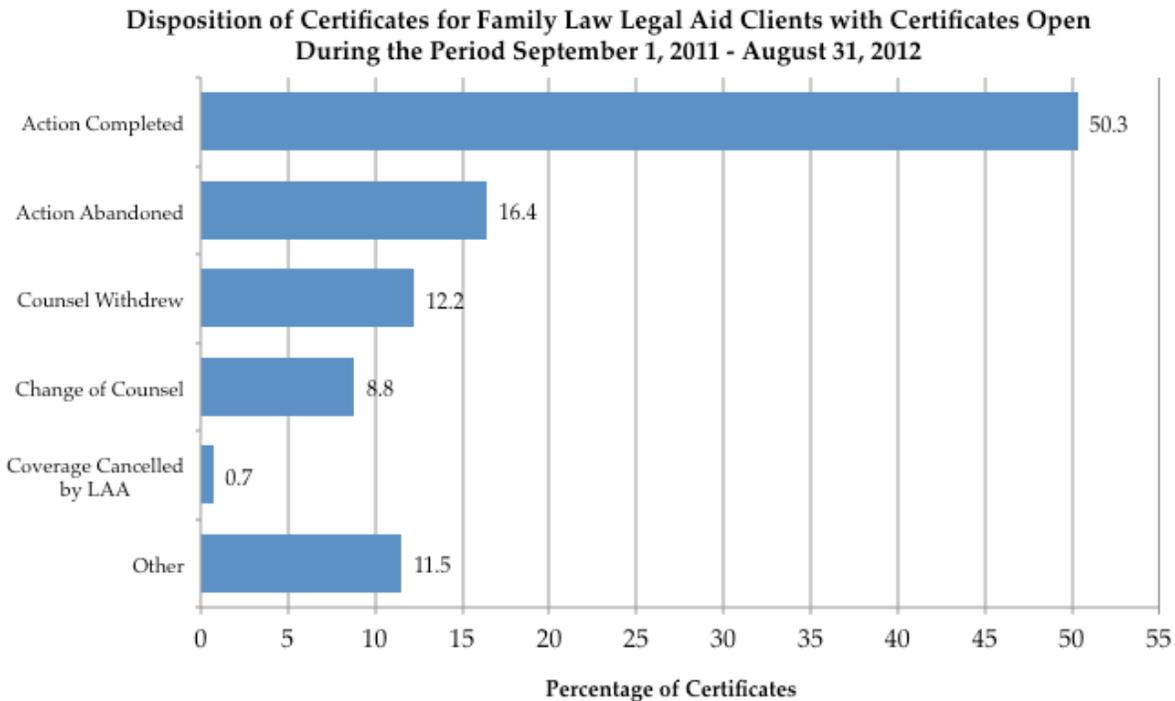
| Number of Certificates per Matter | n            | %            |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1                                 | 4,297        | 77.0         |
| 2                                 | 1,050        | 18.8         |
| 3                                 | 199          | 3.6          |
| 4                                 | 29           | 0.5          |
| 5                                 | 2            | 0.03         |
| 6                                 | 2            | 0.03         |
| <b>Total Matters</b>              | <b>5,579</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Total number of certificates=7,132

Source of Data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System

The roster lawyer provides information to LAA regarding the disposition of the certificate once it has been final-billed. Data were available regarding the final disposition of 3,631 of the 7,132 certificates that were open during the target period; in the other 3,501 cases, the certificate may still have been open at the end of the period (see Figure 2.6). For one-half of certificates (50.3%), the final disposition indicated that the action was completed; in 16.4% the action was abandoned, in 12.2% counsel withdrew, and in 8.8% there was a change of counsel. Coverage was cancelled by LAA for a very small proportion of certificates (0.7%). An “other” disposition was recorded for 11.5% of certificates; however, the nature of this disposition was available in very few cases.

Figure 2.6



Source of data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System  
 Total Number of Certificates=7,132; Missing Cases=3,501

Table 2.8 presents the primary reason for issuing a certificate. Only reasons that were given for 20 or more certificates are included in the table; the remainder are included in the “Other reason” category. The most common reason for issuing a certificate was for a “Parenting Order” (25.1%), followed by “Divorce – Custody/ Access” (19.8%), and “Vary Parenting Order” (10.7%). The remaining reasons for issuing a certificate were each provided in less than 4% of certificates granted.

Table 2.8

Primary Reason for Issuing Family Law Legal Aid Certificates for Certificates that were Open During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012

| Reason  | n     | %    |
|---|-------|------|
| Parenting Order   | 1,792 | 25.1 |
| Divorce – Custody / Access                                      | 1,415 | 19.8 |
| Vary Parenting Order  | 765   | 10.7 |
| Independent Counsel for Child – Parental Guardianship / Contact | 249   | 3.5  |
| Divorce – Spousal Support                                       | 238   | 3.3  |
| Divorce – Custody / Access – Family Settlement Services         | 196   | 2.7  |
| Parenting Order – Family Settlement Services                    | 185   | 2.6  |
| Child Support   | 168   | 2.4  |
| Vary Child Support  | 165   | 2.3  |
| Child Guardianship  | 163   | 2.3  |
| Continuation of Divorce – Custody / Access                      | 124   | 1.7  |
| Vary Divorce Judgement re. Custody                              | 117   | 1.6  |
| Divorce – Custody / Access – Limited Scope Representation       | 106   | 1.5  |
| Divorce – Maintenance   | 100   | 1.4  |
| Vary Divorce Judgement re. Maintenance / Arrears                | 94    | 1.3  |
| Spousal Support   | 74    | 1.0  |
| Statement of Claim – Constructive Trust                         | 72    | 1.0  |
| Parenting Order – Limited Scope Representation                  | 67    | 0.9  |
| Contact with Child  | 63    | 0.9  |
| Vary Divorce Judgement re. Access                               | 62    | 0.9  |
| Child Support – Family Settlement Services                      | 61    | 0.9  |
| Emergency Protection Order – Oral Hearing                       | 53    | 0.7  |
| Divorce – Maintenance – Family Settlement Services              | 45    | 0.6  |
| Property – Family Settlement Services                           | 44    | 0.6  |
| Independent Counsel for Child – Divorce / Variation             | 43    | 0.6  |
| Civil Appeal – Initiate   | 42    | 0.6  |
| Continuation of Divorce – Spousal Support                       | 42    | 0.6  |
| Vary Parenting Order – Family Settlement Services               | 36    | 0.5  |
| Matrimonial Property Action                                     | 36    | 0.5  |
| Initiate Divorce  | 33    | 0.5  |

Continued

**Table 2.8 (Continued)**

| <b>Reason</b>  | <b>n</b>     | <b>%</b>     |
|--|--------------|--------------|
| Rescind Maintenance / Arrears                          | 29           | 0.4          |
| Oppose Guardianship (Adult)                            | 28           | 0.4          |
| Terminate Guardianship                                 | 26           | 0.4          |
| Divorce – Spousal Support – Family Settlement Services | 24           | 0.3          |
| Continuation of Divorce – Maintenance                  | 23           | 0.3          |
| Matrimonial Property Action                            | 23           | 0.3          |
| Vary Contact Order                                     | 22           | 0.3          |
| Other reason   | 307          | 4.3          |
| <b>Total Certificates</b>                              | <b>7,132</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Source of Data: Legal Aid Alberta’s Client Relationship Management (CRM) System

Table 2.9 provides the type of service for which family law certificates were issued. Certificates were issued for Family Settlement Services and for Limited Scope Representation in 9.4% of cases and 3.6% of cases, respectively. The substantial majority of certificates (87%) were issued for other family services.

**Table 2.9**

**Type of Service for Which Family Law Legal Aid Certificates were Issued for Certificates that were Open During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012**

| <b>Service</b>               | <b>n</b>     | <b>%</b>     |
|------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Family Settlement Services   | 667          | 9.4          |
| Limited Scope Representation | 257          | 3.6          |
| Other family service         | 6,208        | 87.0         |
| <b>Total Certificates</b>    | <b>7,132</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

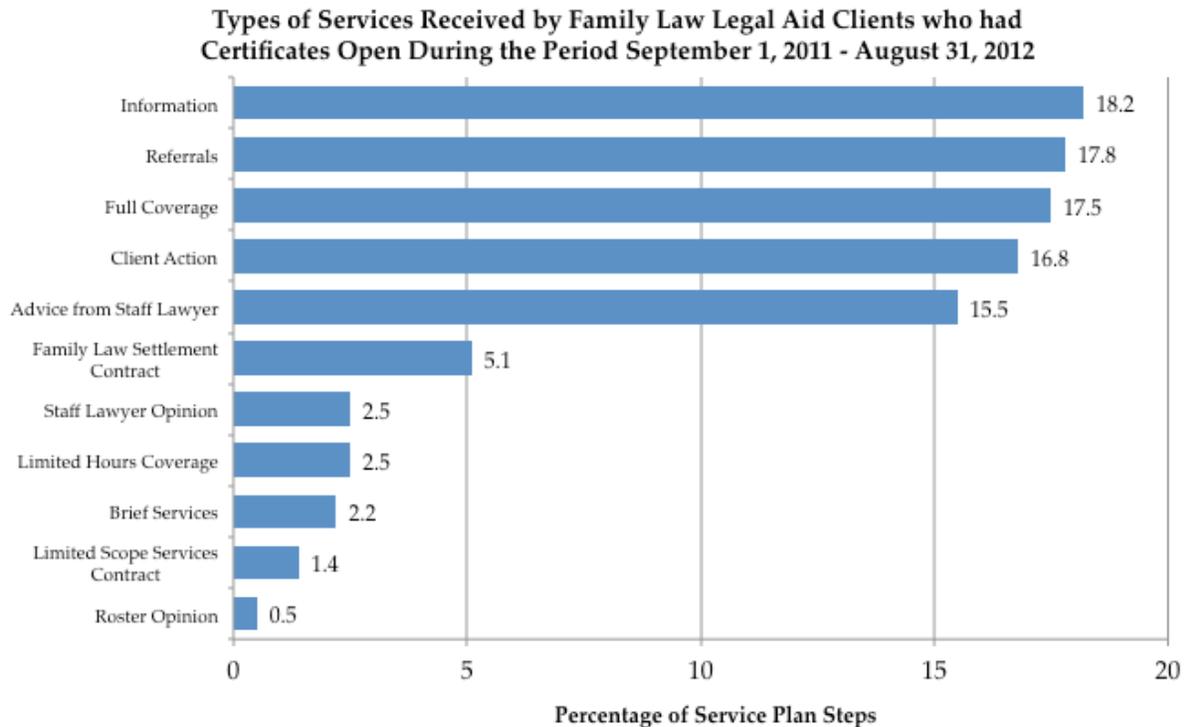
Source of Data: Legal Aid Alberta’s Client Relationship Management (CRM) System

### 2.2.3 Service Plans

For the majority of clients seen by LAA, a service plan is generated that provides an outline of the services that the client may receive or be referred to. A service plan may consist of several distinct steps. Of the 5,579 unique matters that had a certificate open during the target period, 5,437 (97.5%) had service plans documented in the database. These 5,437 matters had a total of 28,419 service plan steps. The number of steps per matter ranged from 1 to 111, with an average of 5.2. Most cases had one (12.2%), two (19%), three (18.4%), or four (14.4%) service plan steps.

A breakdown of the type of services contained in the service plan steps for matters that had certificates open during the target one-year period is provided in Figure 2.7. The majority of service plan steps were for information (18.2%), referrals (17.8%), full coverage (17.5%), client action (16.8%), and advice from a staff lawyer (15.5%).

Figure 2.7



Source of data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System  
 Total Number of Matters with a Service Plan=5,437; Total Number of Service Plan Steps=28,419

Table 2.10 presents the location of services for the 5,437 matters with certificates open that had service plans. The majority of services were provided in Edmonton (35.5%), Calgary (29.4%), Red Deer (7.5%) and St. Paul (6.4%). The remaining locations each accounted for less than 5% of services.

Out of the 5,437 matters with certificates open that contained service plans, 1,424 (26.2%) had referrals to one or more agencies or programs. The total number of referrals made was 2,848, and the number of referrals per matter ranged from 1 to 15, with an average of 2 referrals per matter. Most matters had one (49.8%) or two (29%) referrals.

Table 2.10

Location of Service for Family Law Legal Aid Clients Receiving a Service Plan and Having a Certificate Open During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012

| Location                   | n            | %            |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Edmonton                   | 1,931        | 35.5         |
| Calgary                    | 1,600        | 29.4         |
| Red Deer                   | 410          | 7.5          |
| St. Paul                   | 347          | 6.4          |
| Lethbridge                 | 255          | 4.7          |
| Wetaskiwin                 | 215          | 4.0          |
| Grande Prairie             | 195          | 3.6          |
| Peace River                | 153          | 2.8          |
| Medicine Hat               | 122          | 2.2          |
| Whitecourt                 | 109          | 2.0          |
| Fort McMurray              | 99           | 1.8          |
| Missing                    | 1            | 0.0          |
| <b>Total Service Plans</b> | <b>5,437</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Source of Data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System

Table 2.11 contains a breakdown of the agencies or programs that clients were referred to. Only agencies or programs that received 20 or more referrals are contained in the table; the remainder are included in the "Other agency/program" category. The most common referrals were to the Parenting after Separation Seminar (19.7%), Student Legal Services of Edmonton (15.7%), and Family Justice Services (15%). Referrals to the Alberta Courts and the Lawyer Referral Service represented 6% and 5.5% of all referrals, respectively. All other agencies or programs each represented less than 5% of referrals.

Table 2.11

Service Plan Agency and Program Referrals for Family Law Legal Aid Clients who had a Certificate Open During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012

| Agency/Program                                | n            | %            |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| Parenting after Separation (PAS) Seminar      | 561          | 19.7         |
| Student Legal Services of Edmonton            | 448          | 15.7         |
| Family Justice Services (FJS)                 | 428          | 15.0         |
| Alberta Courts                                | 171          | 6.0          |
| Lawyer Referral Service                       | 156          | 5.5          |
| Family Centre Society of Southern Alberta     | 125          | 4.4          |
| Family Law Information Centre (FLIC)          | 105          | 3.7          |
| Department of Justice Canada                  | 68           | 2.4          |
| Duty Counsel                                  | 67           | 2.4          |
| Calgary Legal Guidance (CLG)                  | 39           | 1.4          |
| Emergency Protection Order Program            | 38           | 1.3          |
| Government – Other                            | 36           | 1.3          |
| Law Information                               | 29           | 1.0          |
| Maintenance Enforcement Program (MEP)         | 28           | 1.0          |
| Money Mentors                                 | 27           | 0.9          |
| Native Counselling Services of Alberta        | 25           | 0.9          |
| Law Information Centre (LInC)                 | 23           | 0.8          |
| The Support Network                           | 21           | 0.7          |
| Website(s)                                    | 20           | 0.7          |
| Alberta Works – Income Support Contact Centre | 20           | 0.7          |
| Other agency/ program                         | 413          | 14.5         |
| <b>Total Referrals</b>                        | <b>2,848</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Number of matters receiving referral(s) to agencies/ programs=1424

Source of Data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System

### 2.3 Family Certificates Closed

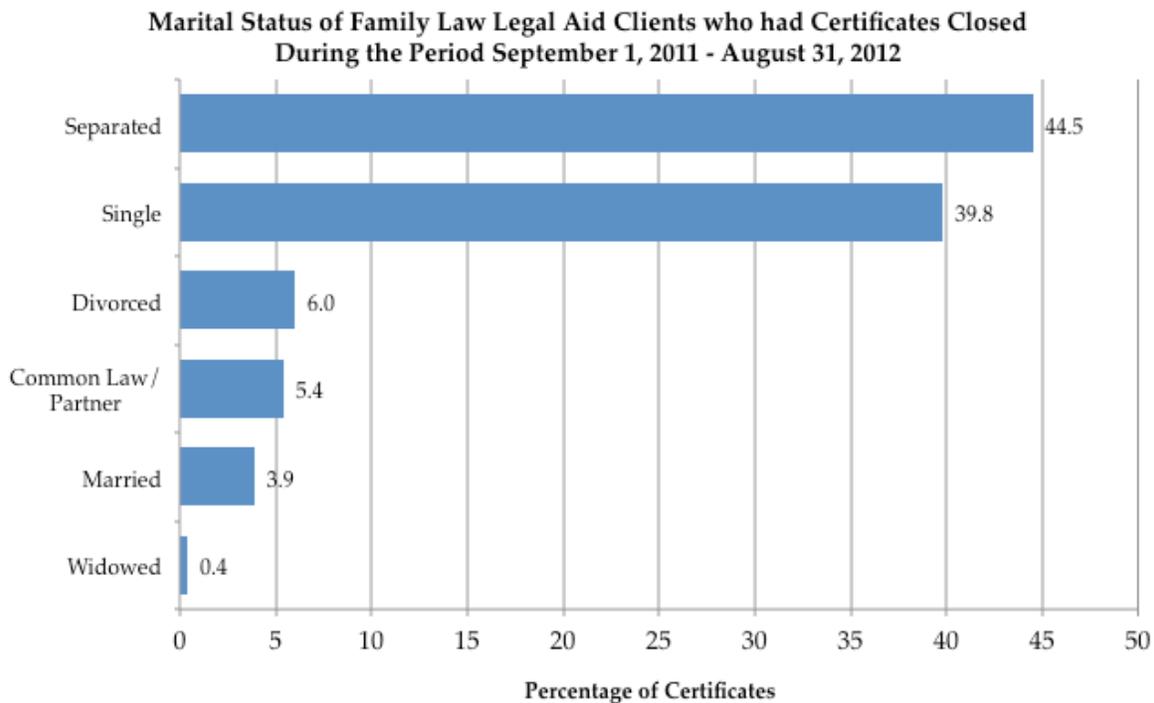
The third database analyzed for this report contained information on all family law matters that were issued legal aid certificates that were closed during the period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012. Since, by definition, certificates that were closed during the target time period were also open during this period, this database is a subset of the Family Certificates Open database. This file consisted of data on 2,108 certificates; since multiple certificates can be issued for a single family law matter, the database included 2,004 unique matters.

### 2.3.1 Clients' Demographic Characteristics

Data were available on clients' gender, age, marital status, and location. Over three quarters of clients in the 2,004 unique matters were female (76.7%). Client's age was available in 1,275 matters and indicated that the average age was 32.7 years and ranged from 3 to 79 years. Average age of males was slightly higher (34.3 years) than females (32.3 years).

Figure 2.8 presents the marital status of clients who had certificates closed during the target one-year period. The majority of clients were either separated (44.5%) or single (39.8%), with relatively few clients divorced (6%), living in a common law relationship (5.4%), or married (3.9%). Males (42.5%) were more likely to be single than were females (38.9%), while females (47.5%) were more likely to be separated than were males (34.7%). Males (9.1%) were also more likely to be living in a common law relationship than were females (4.3%). No substantial differences between males and females were observed on the other marital status categories.

Figure 2.8



Source of data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System  
Total N=2,004; Missing Cases=55

The location of legal aid clients who had family law certificates closed during the one-year target period is provided in Table 2.12. Only locations that had 20 or more clients are included in this table; the remaining locations are included in the "Other location" category. The majority of clients were located in Edmonton (25.7%) or Calgary (22.6%). The next most frequent locations were Grande Prairie (3.5%), and Lethbridge (2.4%). All other locations each had fewer than 2% of clients.

Table 2.12

Location of Individuals Involved in Family Law Legal Aid Matters that had Certificates Close During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012

| Location             | n            | %            |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Edmonton             | 515          | 25.7         |
| Calgary              | 452          | 22.6         |
| Grande Prairie       | 70           | 3.5          |
| Lethbridge           | 48           | 2.4          |
| Red Deer             | 38           | 1.9          |
| Sherwood Park        | 33           | 1.6          |
| Medicine Hat         | 31           | 1.5          |
| Fort McMurray        | 30           | 1.5          |
| Spruce Grove         | 26           | 1.3          |
| Airdrie              | 20           | 1.0          |
| Other location       | 727          | 36.3         |
| Missing              | 14           | 0.7          |
| <b>Total Matters</b> | <b>2,004</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Source of Data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System

2.3.2 Characteristics of Certificates Granted

A matter may have multiple certificates granted. Table 2.13 presents the number of certificates granted per matter. The substantial majority of matters had a single certificate granted (95%), while 4.8% of matters had two certificates and only 0.2% of matters had three certificates. No matter had more than three certificates.

Table 2.13

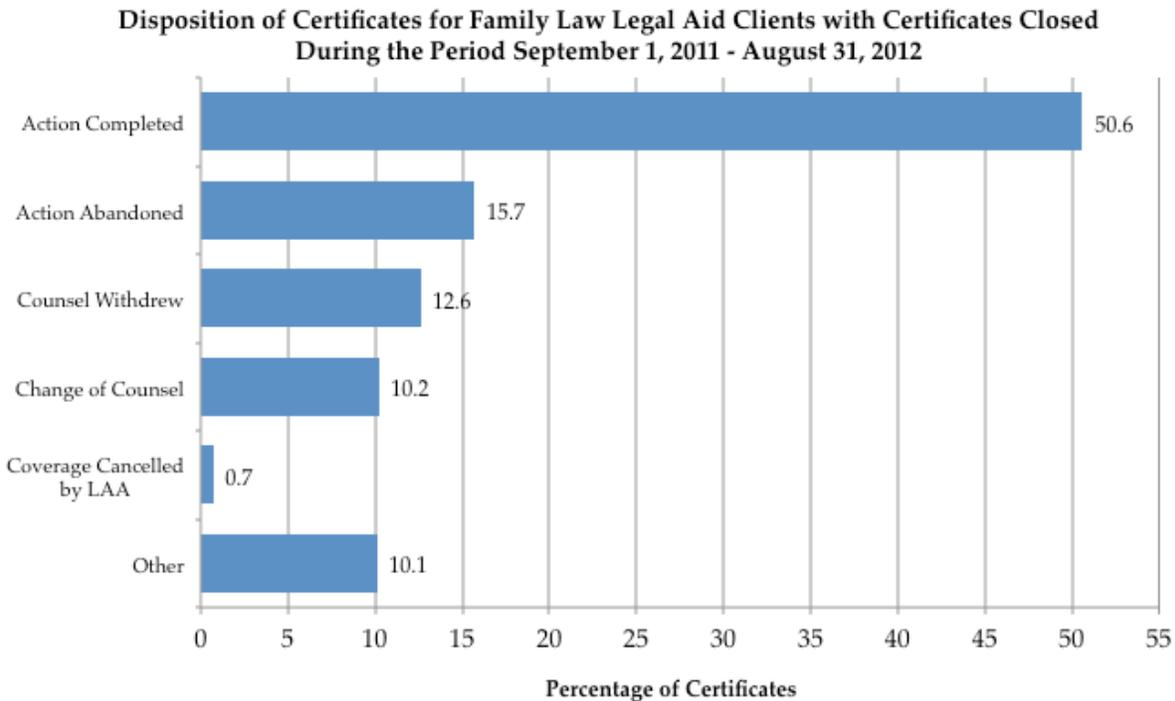
Number of Family Law Legal Aid Certificates Issued per Matter for Certificates that Closed During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012

| Number of Certificates per Matter | n            | %            |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1                                 | 1,904        | 95.0         |
| 2                                 | 96           | 4.8          |
| 3                                 | 4            | 0.2          |
| <b>Total Matters</b>              | <b>2,004</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Source of Data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System

The roster lawyer provides information to LAA regarding the disposition of the certificate once it has been final-billed. Data were available regarding the final disposition of 2,052 of the 2,108 certificates that were closed during the target period; data were missing for the remaining 56 cases (see Figure 2.9). For one-half of certificates (50.6%), the final disposition indicated that the action was completed; in 15.7% the action was abandoned, in 12.6% counsel withdrew, and in 10.2% there was a change of counsel. Coverage was cancelled by LAA for a very small proportion of certificates (0.7%). An “other” disposition was recorded for 10.1% of certificates; however, the nature of this disposition was available in very few cases.

Figure 2.9



Source of data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System  
Total Number of Certificates=2,108; Missing Cases=56

Table 2.14 presents the primary reason for issuing a certificate. Only reasons that were given for 20 or more certificates are included in the table; the remainder are included in the “Other reason” category. The most common reason for issuing a certificate was for a “Parenting Order” (27.1%), followed by “Divorce – Custody/ Access” (12.8%), “Vary Parenting Order” (11.7%) “Parenting Order – Family Settlement Services” (5.4%), and “Divorce – Custody/ Access – Family Settlement Services” (5.1%). The remaining reasons for issuing a certificate were each provided in less than 3% of certificates granted.

Table 2.14

Primary Reason for Issuing Family Law Legal Aid Certificates for Certificates that were Closed During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012

| Reason  | n            | %            |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| Parenting Order   | 572          | 27.1         |
| Divorce – Custody / Access                                      | 270          | 12.8         |
| Vary Parenting Order  | 246          | 11.7         |
| Parenting Order – Family Settlement Services                    | 113          | 5.4          |
| Divorce – Custody / Access – Family Settlement Services         | 107          | 5.1          |
| Divorce – Spousal Support                                       | 62           | 2.9          |
| Independent Counsel for Child – Parental Guardianship / Contact | 58           | 2.8          |
| Vary Child Support  | 52           | 2.5          |
| Child Guardianship  | 51           | 2.4          |
| Child Support   | 47           | 2.2          |
| Child Support – Family Settlement Services                      | 41           | 1.9          |
| Vary Divorce Judgement re. Custody                              | 28           | 1.3          |
| Property – Family Settlement Services                           | 27           | 1.3          |
| Vary Divorce Judgement re. Maintenance / Arrears                | 27           | 1.3          |
| Vary Parenting Order – Family Settlement Services               | 25           | 1.2          |
| Divorce – Maintenance – Family Settlement Services              | 25           | 1.2          |
| Contact with Child  | 21           | 1.0          |
| Spousal Support   | 20           | 0.9          |
| Continuation of Divorce – Custody / Access                      | 20           | 0.9          |
| Emergency Protection Order – Oral Hearing                       | 20           | 0.9          |
| Other reason  | 276          | 13.1         |
| <b>Total Certificates</b>                                       | <b>2,108</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Source of Data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System

Table 2.15 provides the type of service for which family law certificates were issued. Certificates were issued for Family Settlement Services and for Limited Scope Representation in 18.9% of cases and 1.7% of cases, respectively. In over three-quarters of cases (79.5%) certificates were issued for other family services.

Table 2.15

**Type of Service for Which Family Law Legal Aid Certificates were Issued for Certificates that Were Closed During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012**

| Service                      | n            | %            |
|------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Family Settlement Services   | 398          | 18.9         |
| Limited Scope Representation | 35           | 1.7          |
| Other family service         | 1,675        | 79.5         |
| <b>Total Certificates</b>    | <b>2,108</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Source of Data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System

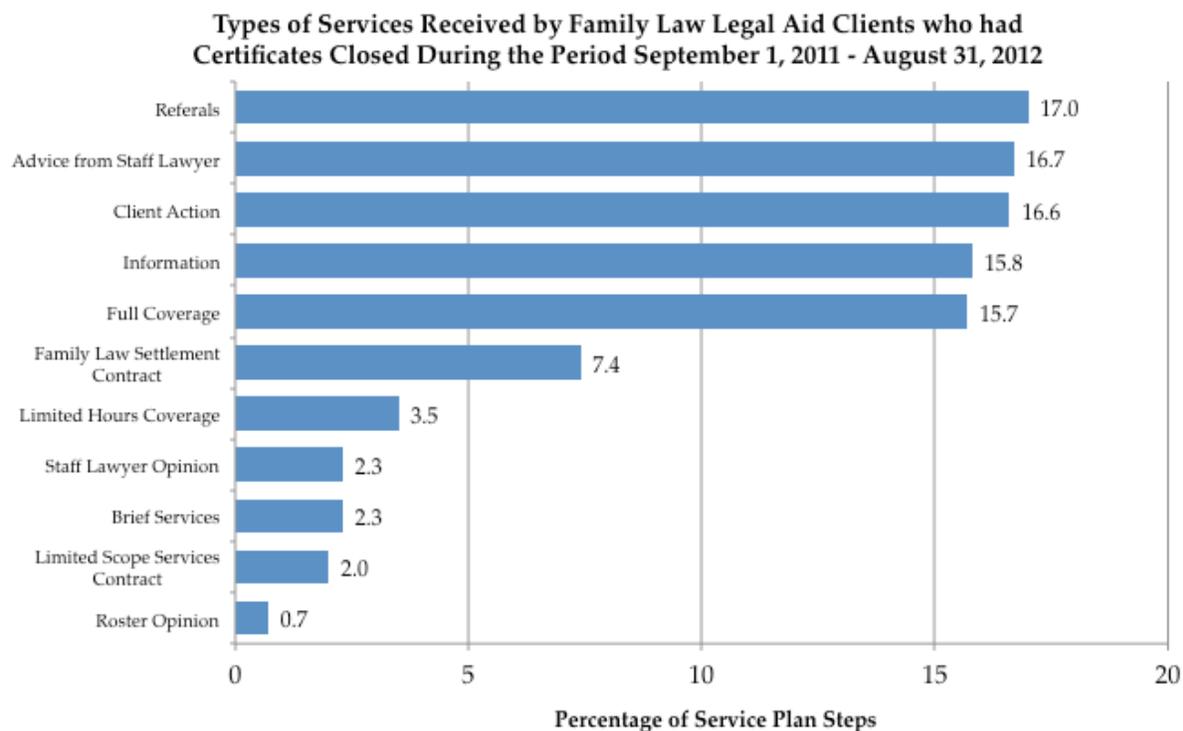
### 2.3.3 Service Plans

For the majority of clients seen by LAA, a service plan is created that provides an outline of the services that the client may receive or be referred to. A service plan may consist of several distinct steps. Of the 2,004 unique matters that had a certificate closed during the target period, 1,953 (97.5%) had service plans documented in the database. These 1,953 matters had a total of 12,307 service plan steps. The number of steps per matter ranged from 1 to 111, with an average of 6.3. Most cases had one (10.4%), two (18.9%), three (15.3%), or four (13.8%) service plan steps.

A breakdown of the type of services contained in the service plan steps for matters that had certificates closed during the target one-year period is provided in Figure 2.10. The majority of service plan steps were for referrals (17%), advice from a staff lawyer (16.7%), client action (16.6%), information (15.8%), and full coverage (15.7%).

Table 2.16 presents the location of services for the 1,953 matters with certificates closed that had service plans. The majority of services were provided in Edmonton (36.3%), Calgary (27.6%), and St. Paul (8.6%). The remaining locations each accounted for less than 5% of services.

Figure 2.10



Source of data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System  
 Total Number of Matters with a Service Plan=1,953; Total Number of Service Plan Steps=12,307

Table 2.16

**Location of Service for Family Law Legal Aid Clients Receiving a Service Plan and Having a Certificate that Closed During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012**

| Location                   | n            | %            |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Edmonton                   | 709          | 36.3         |
| Calgary                    | 539          | 27.6         |
| St. Paul                   | 167          | 8.6          |
| Lethbridge                 | 95           | 4.9          |
| Grande Prairie             | 92           | 4.7          |
| Wetaskiwin                 | 80           | 4.1          |
| Red Deer                   | 76           | 3.9          |
| Peace River                | 69           | 3.5          |
| Medicine Hat               | 48           | 2.5          |
| Whitecourt                 | 41           | 2.1          |
| Fort McMurray              | 37           | 1.9          |
| <b>Total Service Plans</b> | <b>1,953</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Source of Data: Legal Aid Alberta's Client Relationship Management (CRM) System

Out of the 1,953 matters with certificates closed that contained service plans, 482 (24.7%) had referrals to one or more agencies or programs. The total number of referrals made was 1,177, and the number of referrals per matter ranged from 1 to 15, with an average of 2.4 referrals per matter. Most matters had one (35.5%), two (35.3%), three (8.7%), or four (11.4%) referrals.

Table 2.17 contains a breakdown of the agencies or programs that clients were referred to. Only agencies or programs that received 10 or more referrals are contained in the table; the remainder are contained in the “Other agency / program” category. The most common referrals were to Student Legal Services of Edmonton (19.8%), the Parenting after Separation Seminar (16.9%), Family Justice Services (15.4%), and the Alberta Courts (6%). All other agencies or programs each represented less than 5% of referrals.

**Table 2.17**

**Service Plan Agency and Program Referrals for Family Law Legal Aid Clients who had a Certificate that Closed During the Period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012**

| Agency/Program                            | n            | %            |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| Student Legal Services of Edmonton        | 233          | 19.8         |
| Parenting After Separation (PAS) Seminar  | 199          | 16.9         |
| Family Justice Services (FJS)             | 181          | 15.4         |
| Alberta Courts                            | 71           | 6.0          |
| Family Centre Society of Southern Alberta | 57           | 4.8          |
| Lawyer Referral Service                   | 56           | 4.8          |
| Department of Justice Canada              | 40           | 3.4          |
| Family Law Information Centre (FLIC)      | 38           | 3.2          |
| Duty Counsel                              | 33           | 2.8          |
| Law Information Centre (LInC)             | 16           | 1.4          |
| Money Mentors                             | 15           | 1.3          |
| Law Information                           | 14           | 1.2          |
| Calgary Legal Guidance (CLG)              | 13           | 1.1          |
| Native Counselling Services of Alberta    | 13           | 1.1          |
| Emergency Protection Order Program        | 12           | 1.0          |
| The Support Network                       | 12           | 1.0          |
| Website(s)                                | 12           | 1.0          |
| Government – Other                        | 11           | 0.9          |
| Maintenance Enforcement Program (MEP)     | 11           | 0.9          |
| Other agency / program                    | 140          | 11.9         |
| <b>Total Referrals</b>                    | <b>1,177</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Number of matters receiving referral(s) to agencies / programs=482

Source of Data: Legal Aid Alberta’s Client Relationship Management (CRM) System

## 3.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This project examined the characteristics of family law cases dealt with by Legal Aid Alberta during a one-year period ranging from September 1, 2011 to August 31, 2012. Three databases were analyzed: family law matters that were resolved during the target period; family law certificates that were open during the period; and family law certificates that closed during the period. This chapter provides a summary of the findings and discusses conclusions that may be drawn.

### 3.1 Summary

#### 3.1.1 Characteristics of Databases Analyzed

- The Family Matters Resolved database contains information on all family matters that were resolved during the period September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 and includes data on 4,220 unique matters and 116 legal aid certificates issued.
- The Family Certificates Open database includes all legal aid certificates that were open for family matters during the target time period and contains information on 7,132 certificates issued for 5,579 matters.
- The Family Certificates Closed database includes all family law legal aid certificates that were closed during the target period and contains information on 2,108 certificates issued for 2,004 matters.

#### 3.1.2 Clients' Demographic Characteristics

- The majority of clients in all three databases were female and ranged from 68% in the Matters Resolved database to 77% in the Certificates Closed database.
- Average client age ranged from 33 years (Certificates Open and Certificates Closed) to 36 years (Matters Resolved). Males tended to be slightly older than females in all three databases.
- The marital status of clients in all three databases was most likely to be either separated or single.
- Approximately one-half of clients in each database were located in Calgary or Edmonton.

#### 3.1.3 Characteristics of Certificates Issued

- Over three-quarters of matters in the Certificates Open and Certificates Closed databases had a single legal aid certificate issued.

- Approximately one-half of certificates in all three databases with information on their final disposition were coded as “Action Completed.” The second most common certificate disposition in all databases was “Action Abandoned.”
- The most common reason for issuing a certificate in all three databases was for a “Parenting Order,” followed by “Divorce – Custody / Access.”
- The percentage of certificates issued for Family Settlement Services ranged from 9% in the Certificates Open database to 40% in the Matters Resolved database.
- The percentage of certificates issued for Limited Scope Representation ranged from 2% in the Certificates Closed database to 5% in the Matters Resolved database.

#### 3.1.4 Service Plans

- The substantial majority of matters contained in all three databases had a service plan generated.
- The average number of service plan steps per matter ranged from 4.3 in the Matters Resolved database to 6.3 in the Certificates Closed database.
- The most common types of services provided were referrals, information, advice from a staff lawyer, and client action.
- The majority of services were provided in Calgary and Edmonton.
- Approximately one-half of matters resolved that contained service plans had referrals to one or more services or programs, while approximately one-quarter of matters in the Certificates Open and Certificates Closed databases with service plans had referrals.
- There was an average of two referrals per matter.
- Common programs/agencies to which referrals were made included: the Lawyer Referral Service; Family Justice Services; the Parenting After Separation Seminar; and Student Legal Services of Edmonton.

### 3.2 **Conclusions**

Legal Aid Alberta’s Client Relationship Management database provides a rich source of information regarding the characteristics of Albertans who approach LAA in the hope of receiving assistance with their legal issues. In addition, information is available regarding the nature of the legal issues involved and what services were provided by LAA in an attempt to assist people in resolving their issues. It is clear that LAA makes substantial use of its ability to provide information and refer individuals to other agencies for services. This is a valuable service for people who do not meet the

financial eligibility criteria for LAA coverage but nonetheless may not be able to afford legal representation on their own.

However, it is unfortunate that no data are readily available regarding the extent to which individuals who receive information and referrals from LAA actually make use of these resources. Findings from LAA's Client Satisfaction Survey, which is conducted quarterly by Prairie Research Associates, suggest that approximately one-half of individuals who receive service plans state that they do make use of them.<sup>3</sup> However, information is not available regarding which components of their service plans are used. Further, for those who do make use of the information and referrals they are given, no data are available regarding the extent to which these resources assist them in achieving resolution of their legal issues. Future research on these issues would be very beneficial to LAA in determining if the information and referrals they are providing are useful to the vulnerable Albertans that they serve.

In addition, very little information is available regarding the resolution of cases for individuals who approach LAA for assistance but are not eligible for direct legal aid service. Further research on this group would provide valuable insight into the legal outcomes of these individuals. It is our understanding that plans are underway for the Family Law Offices to collect more detailed data on case outcomes.

Across all three databases analyzed for this report, a relatively large proportion of certificates granted resulted in a disposition of "Action abandoned," ranging from 16% of certificates in the Certificates Closed database to 22% of certificates in the Matters Resolved database. Similarly, a substantial proportion of certificates in all databases resulted in a disposition of "Counsel withdrew," ranging from 11% of certificates in the Matters Resolved database to 13% of certificates in the Certificates Closed database. Further research into why these dispositions are quite common might be of use to LAA in its efforts to improve the outcomes of services it provides to clients.

Also noteworthy is the fact that, for certificates that were closed, almost three-quarters of certificates granted for Family Settlement Services (74%) resulted in the action being completed, compared to just over one-half of certificates granted for Limited Scope Representation (54%) and under one-half of certificates granted for other family services (45%). Similarly, the proportion of certificates that resulted in the action being abandoned was higher for both Limited Scope Services (29%) and other family services (16%) than for Family Settlement Services (13%). This finding may point to the relative success of the Family Settlement Services program; however, further evaluation research is warranted to determine if this is in fact the case and, if so, what factors are contributing to the success of the program.

It is apparent from the analysis presented in this report that the majority of certificates issued by LAA for family law matters cover child-related issues such as parenting orders and custody and access disputes. It is encouraging that legal aid funds are being used to help those most vulnerable in family law disputes – the children.

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<sup>3</sup> Bertrand, L.D. (2013). *Findings from Legal Aid Alberta's Client Satisfaction Survey: A Comparison of Clients with and without Family Law Matters*. Calgary, AB: Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family.