

Superior Court of California County of Santa Clara

JESSICA KELLOGG
Public Information Officer



August 12, 2026

Justice Within Reach: 10 Years of Service at the Family Justice Center Courthouse

Ten years ago this month, the Family Justice Center Courthouse opened its doors with a clear purpose: to create a more coordinated, accessible, and community-centered location for Santa Clara County residents to resolve some of life's most consequential legal matters.

Since opening to the public on August 15, 2016, the courthouse has brought together family law, juvenile dependency, treatment court, traffic, and self-help services in one location. Over the past decade, it has become more than a building. It is a place where families seek safety, parents work toward stability, and community members turn to the justice system during periods of uncertainty and transition.

The courthouse's 10th anniversary offers an opportunity to reflect not only on what has been built, but also on what meaningful access to justice requires.

For many people, entering a courthouse is only the beginning. Understanding what happens next can be far more difficult.

Court processes involve rules, deadlines, and forms that may be unfamiliar to someone without legal training. Legal terminology can be confusing, and the financial cost of hiring an attorney may be prohibitive, resulting in a large percentage of self-represented litigants. Language, technology, transportation, and childcare can create additional barriers. For individuals already facing divorce, a custody dispute, the possible loss of housing, or a need for protection, navigating these requirements can feel overwhelming.

To address these challenges, the Court's [Self-Help Center and Family Law Facilitator's Office](#) is an essential part of our commitment to access to justice. Located at the Family Justice Center Courthouse at 201 North First Street in San José, the Self-Help Center is staffed with attorneys and legal clerks who provide free assistance to individuals who do not have an attorney. They offer general guidance on court procedures, provide self-help materials and sample documents, review forms for completeness, and connect court users with local nonprofit organizations and other resources.

The SHC assists with a broad range of family law matters, including divorce, legal separation, parentage, child custody and visitation, child support, and spousal support. Assistance is also available for guardianship, conservatorship, name and gender change, and landlord-tenant matters. Litigants can get in-person assistance at the Restraining Order Help Center for immediate safety issues such as domestic violence, civil harassment, and elder abuse restraining orders in addition to emergency custody and visitation, emergency guardianships, CARE petitions, and certain eviction issues.

This assistance has important limits. Self-Help Center staff do not represent litigants, provide legal advice, develop case strategy, or establish an attorney-client relationship. Because the SHC serves self-represented parties, its services may be available to more than one party in the same case. But even within these boundaries, procedural assistance and access to self-help resources can make a meaningful difference. A person who can identify the required forms, follow the applicable steps, and locate additional help is better prepared to participate in their case. Additionally, the Self-Help Center promotes and facilitates alternative dispute resolution, which can lead to improved outcomes and faster case resolution.

The Self-Help Center has also expanded the ways people can access its services and self-help resources. Court users may seek assistance through telephone, LiveChat, email, online workshops, instructional materials, and self-help videos. Online workshops address procedural steps associated with beginning a divorce, legal separation or nullity case; completing required financial disclosures; establishing parentage; seeking a guardianship or limited conservatorship; and responding to an eviction case. Videos describing Self-Help Center services are available in English, Mandarin, Spanish, and Vietnamese. Court users navigating a legal matter without an attorney are encouraged to visit the Court's Self-Help Center website to learn about available services, eligibility requirements, workshops, and ways to request assistance.

The Court recognizes that access is not defined the same for everyone. Some people may not be able to travel to the courthouse during the workday. Others may need to review self-help materials more than once or in a language they understand more comfortably. Technology cannot eliminate every barrier, but thoughtfully designed remote and multilingual resources can extend the Court's reach and guide more people through the next procedural step.

The Family Justice Center Courthouse also offers a free Children's Waiting Room for children ages 2 through 12 while parents and caregivers conduct court business in the building. Services like these reflect a simple but important principle: courts must consider the real circumstances people face when accessing court services.

None of this work happens in isolation. Meaningful access to justice depends on the dedication of judicial officers, Self-Help Center attorneys and staff, courtroom and clerk's office personnel, justice partners, community organizations, and many others who help court users navigate the system. Their work strengthens the connection between the Court and the community it serves.

As we commemorate 10 years of service at the Family Justice Center Courthouse, we also look ahead. The next decade will require continued innovation and stronger community partnerships, requiring us to listen to court users and evaluate how our services can be clearer, more responsive, and more accessible. Public trust in the courts is strengthened when people can navigate court procedures, know where to seek assistance, and believe they have had a fair opportunity to be heard. Ten years after its opening, the Family Justice Center Courthouse remains vital to the Court's mission of serving our community with fairness, dignity, and respect.