



MEDIA RELEASE
LAUNCH OF THE PRIMARY JUSTICE PROJECT
ON 9 MAY 2014

1 At the State Courts¹ Workplan 2013, The Honourable the Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon announced that the State Courts will introduce the “Primary Justice Project”, a scheme in which litigants pay a fixed fee for basic legal services geared towards settlement, as an intermediate step between self-help and the commencement of legal proceedings in Court.

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“Litigants will be able to obtain more affordable legal and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) services, will have the opportunity to resolve their disputes more expediently, cheaply and amicably. Over time, the Primary Justice Project will establish a scheme of paid, basic legal services geared towards settlement, and, it is hoped, that in due course it will embed a pro-settlement and pro-ADR culture in our society...”

“The Primary Justice Project envisages a future where a greater number and variety of disputes will be resolved expediently and amicably outside the court system. While our Courts will, without doubt, continue to play a vitally important role in the administration of justice, they will no longer be viewed as the place where the resolution of disputes begins; instead, the Courts will be the forum that one turns to after other primary methods of resolving disputes have been exhausted.”

– Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon
State Courts Workplan 2013
1 March 2013

3 The Primary Justice Project, a collaboration of the Community Justice Centre, State Courts and The Law Society of Singapore, will be officially launched on 9 May 2014 by Judicial Commissioner See Kee Oon, Presiding Judge of the State Courts, at the State Courts Auditorium at 4.45 pm. The launch event will be attended by representatives from The Law Society of Singapore, ADR providers and legal practitioners, amongst others.

4 Please refer to Appendix A for more information on the Primary Justice Project.

JOINTLY ISSUED BY:
COMMUNITY JUSTICE CENTRE
STATE COURTS
THE LAW SOCIETY OF SINGAPORE

¹ The State Courts were known as “Subordinate Courts” before 7 March 2014.



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For further information or clarification, please contact:

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About the Primary Justice Project

1. What is the Primary Justice Project (PJP) about?

The PJP is intended to facilitate a paradigm shift in the Singapore justice system. The concept of “primary justice” has been created by analogy with the healthcare industry. In the healthcare context, a person who falls ill will first self-medicate, then turn to a “primary healthcare provider” such as a general practitioner. The primary healthcare provider will only escalate the matter to a specialist or hospital if it cannot be resolved. Similarly, many litigants usually attempt different forms of self-help such as attempting to negotiate with the other party. They may then resort to hiring a lawyer if these attempts fail.

The PJP is an intermediate step between self-help and the commencement of legal proceedings in Court. It aims to encourage the society to resolve a greater number of disputes expediently and amicably out of Court. In this way, the Courts will no longer be perceived as the place where resolution of disputes begins, but as a forum to turn to after other ways of resolving disputes have been exhausted.

The PJP scheme is jointly developed by the State Courts, The Law Society of Singapore and Community Justice Centre, in consultation with members of the Bar. These organisations have also developed the necessary materials and tools for PJP lawyers’ usage.

The PJP scheme is administered by the Community Justice Centre (CJC), an independent charity offering services to court users who have no legal representation. The CJC receives applications from interested parties, matches them to an available PJP lawyer for the matter, and monitors the progress of each case. Where parties need help to complete forms, the CJC may also provide volunteers to assist them.

2. What types of cases are suitable for the PJP?

The types of cases that fall within the ambit of the PJP are generally:

- (a) civil claims below \$60,000 and beyond the jurisdiction of the Small Claims Tribunals; and
- (b) divorce matters with most ancillary issues close to settlement (maintenance, division of matrimonial assets and arrangements for the children)

3. What kinds of services are provided by the lawyers under the PJP?

Lawyers involved in the scheme will provide basic legal services for their clients at a fixed fee for up to six hours, with the specific aim of attempting to achieve an amicable resolution through mediation or negotiation. Forms will be provided for the clients to complete before meeting their PJP lawyers. The Primary Justice Lawyers, who have been trained in alternative dispute resolution skills, will provide their clients with basic legal advice and facilitate settlement negotiations. The parties may also, with the help of these lawyers, engage a mutually chosen mediator to facilitate the resolution of their dispute.

4. Where and how can interested parties apply for the PJP?

Interested parties may approach the Community Justice Centre (CJC), which is located at Level 1 of the State Courts (1 Havelock Square, Singapore 059724).

They can also contact the CJC through:

- Tel: 65574100
- E-mail: help@cjcc.org.sg
- Website: www.cjcc.org.sg (for more information on the PJP)

5. What are the charges for the PJP services provided?

Parties who use the PJP service will be charged a fee of \$400 (\$100 administrative fee to the Community Justice Centre and \$300* for legal fees) for the first hour of consultation with their Primary Justice Lawyer. During the consultation, the various options for resolving the dispute will be explored before the party decides on the next course of action.

If the party decides to explore resolution with the other party with the Primary Justice Lawyer's assistance, he or she will be charged \$300* per hour for the lawyer's assistance, with a cap of five hours of work. These five hours of work will include negotiation with the opposing party, assisting and representing the client during mediation for one session and any post-mediation assistance.

* plus GST if applicable

6. Are there any criteria for parties who wish to use the PJP service?

Parties may use the PJP service if they have any of the following types of claims:

- (a) civil claims below \$60,000 and beyond the jurisdiction of the Small Claims Tribunals; and
- (c) divorce matters with most ancillary issues close to settlement (maintenance, division of matrimonial assets and arrangements for the children).

7. Who are the PJP lawyers?

There are around 50 lawyers on the panel of Primary Justice lawyers.

These lawyers have at least three years of post-qualification legal experience, and have been trained by the Singapore Mediation Centre in mediation or mediation advocacy skills. The State Courts, The Law Society and the Community Justice Centre have also conducted a training session for them and provided them with the necessary materials and tools, such as a directory listing the different ADR providers in Singapore.

8. How will the PJP benefit:

- (a) parties in conflict,**
- (b) lawyers?**

- (a) For Parties

Potential litigants who do not fall within the requirements for legal aid and yet are unable to afford the legal fees for their civil claims or matrimonial disputes need not resort to self-representation as they can now engage a Primary Justice lawyer at a basic fee to facilitate the early resolution of the dispute, and avoid escalating the matter to Court.

In this way, parties will have access to more affordable legal services. They can also resolve their disputes more expediently, cheaply and amicably than through litigation.

(b) For Lawyers

The PJP scheme creates additional space for lawyers to offer basic legal services for clients that are not necessarily connected to commencing legal proceedings in Court. .

In addition, the PJP potentially broadens the scope of lawyers' work. Many of them who have training in ADR now have the opportunity to play a wider role (as negotiator/mediator vs litigator).

The PJP also gives lawyers the opportunity to assist parties beyond what they can do in the context of legal clinics where volunteer lawyers can give legal advice for the limited time span of the clinic but cannot then follow up on the initial contacts to help bring the case to a resolution. The PJP is an enhanced platform from pro bono clinics as lawyers will facilitate access to justice by offering primary legal services for basic legal fees.