NSW Legal Information and Referral Forum Report to NLAF

LIRF met online on 9 March 2021

Seeking legal help online: understanding the 'missing majority'
Presented by Raquel Dos Santos, Manager Service Delivery & Principal Lawyer, Justice Connect

This research was funded by the Victorian Law Foundation to help better understand the attitudes and behaviors of people looking for and using legal self-help resources online to solve common civil law problems. The aim of the project was to inform better design and deployment of digital self-help resources across the legal services sector.

Due to COVID-19 the research was undertaken online with 15 participants. The participants were recruited from priority groups vulnerable to legal problems and often assumed to have lower capability or limited access to online resources. Despite the research group being relatively small there was deep engagement. *The research highlights the strengths and frustrations of this highly capable and determined cohort.*

Raquel provided an overview of the self-help journey, how people search for legal help online, how people define legal problems, recommendations and design principles.

How online resources can be improved for help seekers:
- invest in information design and user experience
- involve people with lived experience
- break down silos
- establish communities of practice
- invest in consumer outreach, SEO, communications, and marketing.

Good online resources:
- are easy to find first by those who need them, when they need them
- have names that describe what they do
- set clear expectations
- are as easy to read as possible
- describe processes
- work equally well for everyone
- are current
- are quick to use
- connect to other resources and services
- build in extra support
- allow some people to speak to a human
- are designed with communities.

Points to note

- The best online resources are a result of co-designing with communities from an early stage, rather than simply involving them in testing at the end, shifting from an expert mindset to a participatory mindset.
- People go looking for help because they want to fix their problem before being forced to take legal/court action. Participants reported that they would do absolutely all that they could to resolve the issue out of a court or tribunal.
- It is important for designers of legal self-help resources to think about how their resources will complement and support the broader system of resources available in other locations online, to best serve the end user.

The Justice Connect website has a page dedicated to this project that includes the webinar launching the report, covering:

- how to set up an accessible, strength-based human-centred research project
- levels of partnership to consider in order to support a research project
- tips and tricks for testing tools and connecting with communities in new ways.

Go to: https://justiceconnect.org.au/about/digital-innovation/missing-majority-report/

Law informed: the value of telephone legal information services to clients
Presented by Catriona Mirrlees-Black, Senior Principal Researcher, Law and Justice Foundation of NSW.

This project looked at telephone legal information services and whether they fill a valuable place in the legal assistance landscape. Under its Research Alliance with Victoria Legal Aid (VLA), the Law and Justice Foundation followed up clients of VLA`s Legal Help over three months after their initial telephone call. Legal Help`s information and referral service is available to anyone in the Victorian community and is the main gateway for legal assistance to the general public and the entry point for legal triage to more intensive service providers.

Catriona's presentation looked at the following aspects of the research:
Why the research was undertaken

- 2018 Review recommendation that VLA are the primary entry point for legal issues
- Program of work on the role and contribution of information services within VLA
  - o Literature scan
  - o Development of program logic
  - o How to assess the contribution of information services

How the research was done

- Client calls Legal Help
  - o Legal Help staff record information about the call
  - o With client agreement, information shared with researchers
- 1 week later
  - o Researcher calls client
  - o Offers incentive token
  - o Completes questionnaire online
  - o Requests permission to recontact
- 3 months later

- o Client requested to complete second questionnaire online
- o Telephone interview provided as option
- o Second incentive token

The features of telephone information that work for clients
- The Legal Aid brand and Legal Help offering
- Quality staff, well trained and well supported
- Backed up by quality tools and procedures

The challenges for information/referral services
- Reactive model
- Range of problems
- Range of client capability
- Incentive to provide "help"/referral
- Referral merry-go-round and when to get off
- Resourcing the infrastructure

Read the report here:
http://www.lawfoundation.net.au/ljf/app/&id=6893EB76A34C4F158525856D0028BFFC

Points to note

- Telephone legal information services are reactive and need to be supported by proactive services that reach people who don't know that legal help is available for their problem.
- Services are hard-wired to help clients, to provide them with something, rather than tell them that they cannot help. While referrals to the correct service occur, it is very important to avoid putting clients on a referral merry-go-round. In this research some clients were still trying to do something about their matter 3 months later.
- The research showed that a person's motivation to do something about their problem decreased the more referrals they received.

Both presentations are available on the NLAF website accompanying this report.
http://www.nlaf.org.au/cb_pages/legal_reports_to_nlaf.php

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