Needfinding

The Legal System

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CS 147 A1

INTRO – TEAM MEMBERS

Meet the Team



Lauren Kim

Major: Computer Science

Year: 2028

Favorite app & why: Google Maps because I love to organize places w/ lists while traveling!



Alyssa Landa

Major: Symbolic Systems

Year: 2027

Favorite app & why: Beli because it's fun and useful to keep track of where you've eaten!



Nicole Nguyen

Major: Symbolic Systems

Year: 2027

Favorite app & why: Duolingo because the gamification and scary owl actually works!



Alexis Young

Major: Computer Science

Year: 2027

Favorite app & why: Spotify because I'm always listening to music!

PROBLEM DOMAIN

The Legal System



Studio Theme Description

Design for Offline Experience: “Projects in this studio will pursue ways that digital tools and AI can enrich offline experiences without dominating attention: by **sparking the conversation, supporting shared decisions** , and **helping people better express themselves** . How can technology offer support before or after the experience to remain unobtrusive during? How might our tools be responsive to the social dynamics and context?”

Why This Area of Focus?

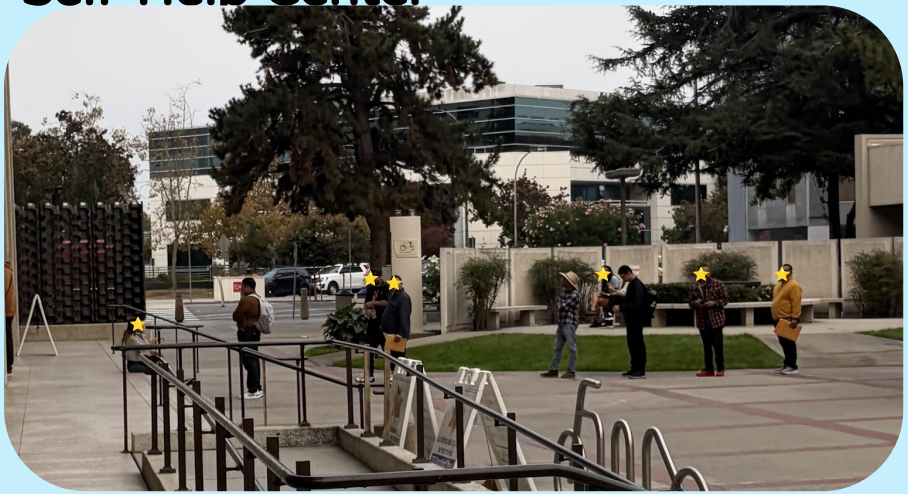
The legal system involves many types of in-person social interactions. From meeting with lawyers, appearing in court, to expressing concerns when getting assistance at self-help centers, how can technology help to improve high-stakes offline social interactions like in the legal system?

NEEDFINDING METHODOLOGY – LOCATION



📍 Superior Court of the County of San Mateo, Redwood City

Self-Help Center



Who We Spoke To

Attorney Alan

WHY THEY WERE CHOSEN

A supervising attorney with ~10 years of experience at the self-help center who triages family law

WHY THEY ARE APPROPRIATE

Offers system-level view of capacity, handoffs and legal limits

HOW THEY WERE RECRUITED

We got in contact with the self-help center of the Superior Court of San Mateo, reached out via email

WHERE INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED

In-person at the Superior Court of San Mateo in Redwood City.

Volunteer Vincent

WHY THEY WERE CHOSEN

Serves the litigants directly at the self-help center

WHY THEY ARE APPROPRIATE

Have a hands-on perspective with aiding people navigating the legal system.

HOW THEY WERE RECRUITED

By email after getting into contact with the self-help center.

WHERE INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED

In-person at the Superior Court of San Mateo in Redwood City.

Litigant Bob

WHY THEY WERE CHOSEN

Has a lot of experience dealing with the legal system in real estate.

WHY THEY ARE APPROPRIATE

Has the perspective of a litigant but has more knowledge of legal matters than the average litigant.

HOW THEY WERE RECRUITED

Roommate's Dad

WHERE INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED

Zoom (He lives in India)

Attorney Alan

Domain Expert

Team Member Roles

Interviewers: Lauren (lead) and Nicole (notetaker)

Both asked questions

Apparatus

Voice Memo on iPhone

Location: in-person at Superior Court

Attorney Alan

(Domain Expert)

01. Can you tell us a bit about your role and what you do? Why did you want to work at the self-help center?

02. How do you decide which cases or questions you can help with? How do you delegate the cases?

03. How do the cases and people who come in person compare with those who reach the center online?

04. What does a typical interaction look like from start to finish?

05. What is your thinking on how to delegate cases to your staff?

06. What do you spend time re-explaining most often?

07. What information do litigants frequently bring that turns out not to be useful, and what do they often forget to bring? Are there small mistakes that people make on forms?

08. Do you have an idea about knowing what part of the process the litigant is at?

09. How do you know whether someone was actually helped? Is there a way you measure success?

10. Is there anything you'd want to communicate to people before or after their visit that you currently can't?

NEEDFINDING METHODOLOGY – ATTORNEY QUOTES

"Family law, everything gets so murky into the individual facts of the people and their lives that it is so hard to get something to have a universal fit."

"If they get in to see us, we will get them across the line"

"It is a self-help service. So we aren't doing the entire process for them. We're helping to facilitate them being able to do it for themselves."

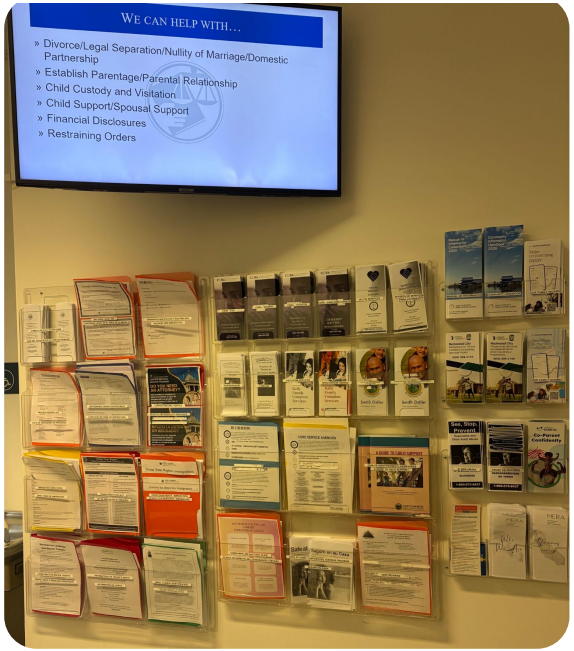
"We are teaching people. We're empowering people. We're helping them to become more."

"Explaining service to people and having them understand how it works is one of the most common components."

NEEDFINDING METHODOLOGY – ARTIFACT PICTURES



"In our current physical situation, that literally is a **physical back and forth** where we have our **workroom, which is separate from our office suites**. So the volunteer or clerical staff member is literally physically having to walk back and forth."

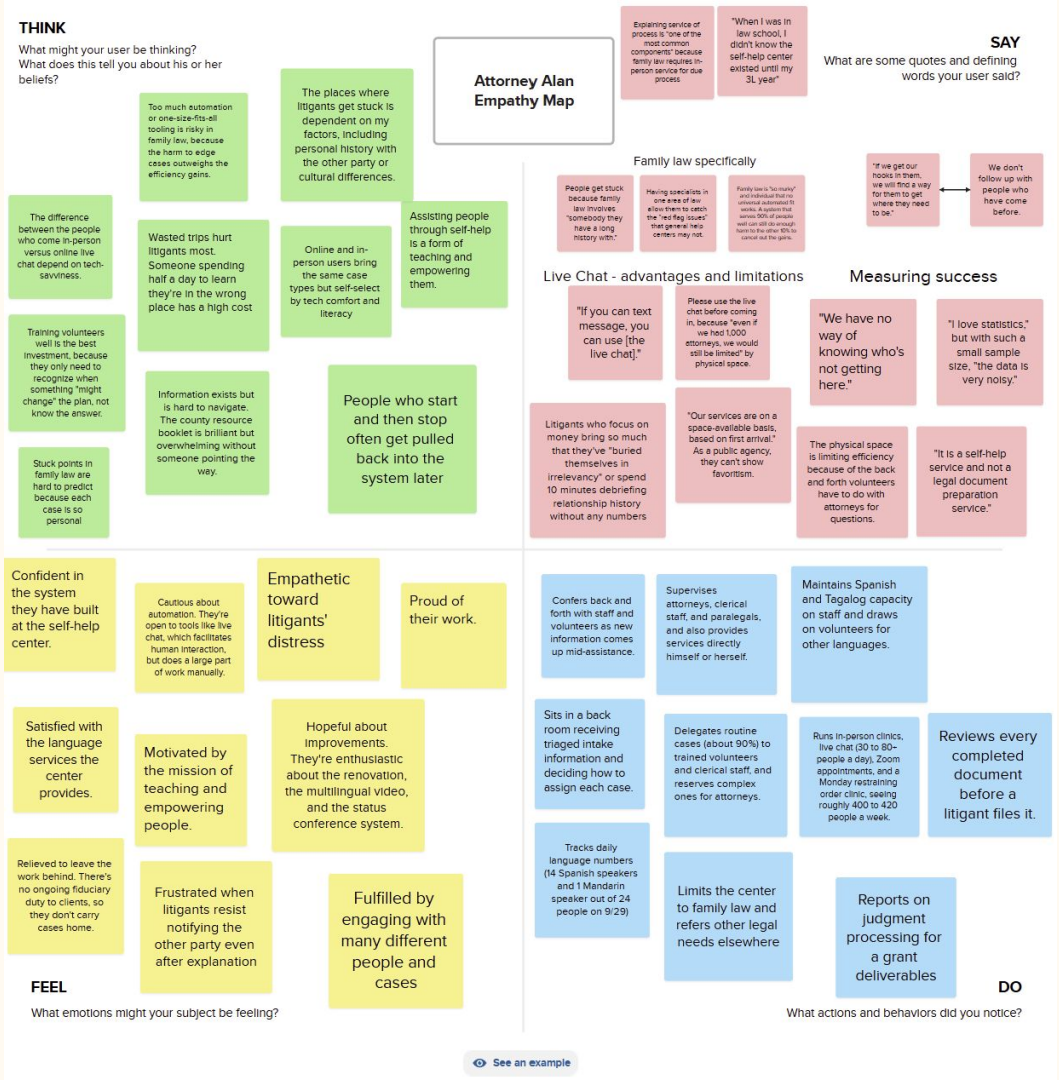


"But they're in so many different resources. We have an **entire wall of pamphlets** out there."

Attorney Alan

Empathy Map

[LINK HERE](#)



Attorney Alan

Contradictions & Insight

Contradiction

Attorney Alan stresses that "it is a self-help service and not a legal document preparation service" which means litigants are responsible for doing the work themselves. But he also says, "If we get our hooks in them, we will get them to where they need to be" which is a promise to see people through to the end. However, the center doesn't follow up with people who have come before so whether a litigant reaches "where they need to be" depends on them returning on their own

Say

"If we get our hooks in them, we will find a way for them to get where they need to be."

We don't follow up with people who have come before.

"We have no way of knowing who's not getting here"

"It is a self-help service and not a legal document preparation service"

Insight

It's hard to measure success. The center has systems in place and measures outcomes but not the full litigant experience that leads to them. It's up to the litigant to take action.

Feel

Confident in the system they have built at the self-help center.

Do

He reviews grant deliverables that determine the amount of concluding judgements

Say

Measuring success

"We have no way of knowing who's not getting here"

"I love statistics," but with such a small sample size, "the data is very noisy."

Volunteer Vincent

Team Member Roles

Interviewers: Lauren (notetaker) and Nicole (lead)

Both asked questions

Apparatus

Voice Memo on iPhone

Location: in-person at Superior Court

Volunteer Vincent

01

How did you get involved with the self-help center? Why did you join?

02

Do you feel like your expectations coming into the program kind of meet the experience you've had so far?

03

How do you figure out what someone needs when it's a brand new person you haven't seen before?

04

What info must be collected every time? How do you handle repetitive cases?

05

What devices/resources walk them through paperwork (physical paper vs. digital)?

06

Could you say more about how you explain the serving process to litigants?

07

What common reactions or concerns do you hear from litigants when explaining this?

08

For court/admin work, briefly describe what that process looks like from your view?

09

Holistically, what is the most frustrating part? Any repetitive tasks or constraints?

NEEDFINDING METHODOLOGY – VOLUNTEER QUOTES

“What's frustrating about the setup of the center is that it's rushed/chaotic energy, so we can't serve them all for long durations of time. It feels like help this person come and get out"

"With the litigants I have to reiterate a lot of things over and over, even if they understood it the first time, they keep wanting to hear a different answer"

"Varies case by case... There's a lot of triage going on before you sit down with them" on figuring out needs”

"Spending 40 minutes with someone makes me think 'I need to help the next person'"

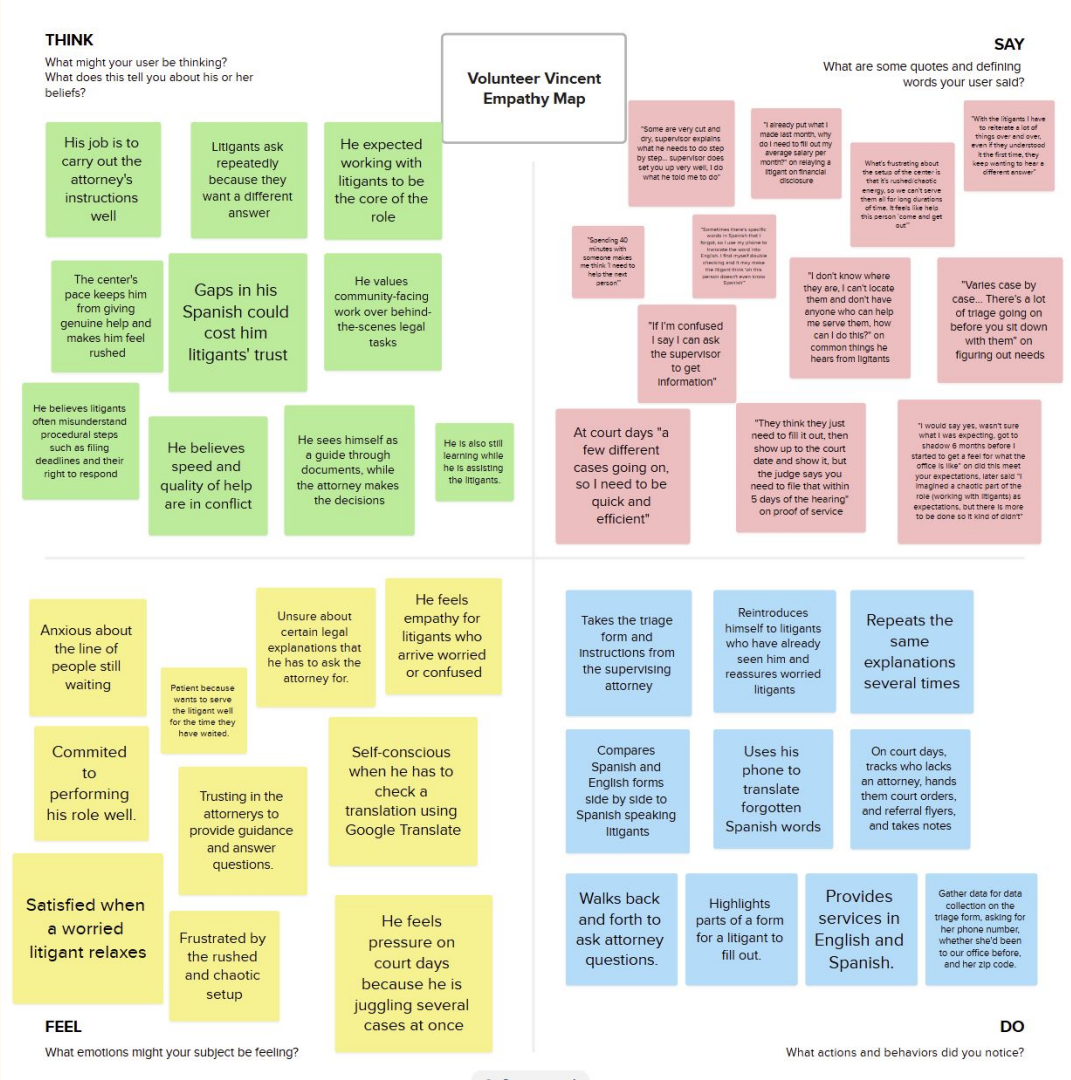
"If I'm confused I say I can ask the supervisor to get information"

INTERVIEW RESULTS – OBSERVATIONS

Volunteer Vincent

Empathy

LINK HERE



INTERVIEW RESULTS – CONTRADICTIONS AND INSIGHT

Volunteer Vincent

Contradictions & Insight

Tension

Volunteer Vincent's help ends when the litigant leaves the center but the steps people most often get wrong happen afterward (e.g. filing proof of service on time before their hearing, completing paperwork). He explains these steps clearly in person but nothing carries his guidance forward unless the litigant actually decides to act on it.

Insight

There is a lot of responsibility on the individual to remember and act on next steps.

Say

"Sometimes there's specific words in Spanish that I forgot, so I use my phone to translate the word into English. I find myself double checking and it may make the litigant think 'oh this person doesn't even know Spanish'"

Do

Provides services in English and Spanish.

Uses his phone to translate forgotten Spanish words

Compares Spanish and English forms side by side to Spanish speaking litigants

Say

"They think they just need to fill it out, then show up to the court date and show it, but the judge says you need to file that within 5 days of the hearing" on proof of service

"I don't know where they are, I can't locate them and don't have anyone who can help me serve them, how can I do this?" on common things he hears from ligitants

Think

He believes litigants often misunderstand procedural steps such as filing deadlines and their right to respond

Litigant Bob

Extreme User

Team Member Roles

Interviewers: Alyssa (lead) and Lexi (notetaker)

Both asked questions

Apparatus

Zoom and Zoom auto transcription

Extreme User

“Bob” - Real Estate Professional

- Extreme on the axis of experience
- Has many years of experience dealing with cases involving land disputes
- Has a legal team within his company

Self help center litigant

- Has no previous experience with the legal system
- Has limited resources to engage with the legal system

NEEDFINDING METHODOLOGY — INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Litigant Bob

Extreme User

01. Tell us a little bit about yourself and your career, and also, like, how the legal system applies to that at all?

02. When dealing with real estate, were there ever any legal troubles where you had to go to a lawyer to dispute an argument and could you just talk about your experience with that?

03. Could you like take us through what resources you would actually go to to start this legal process?

04. Do you do anything to prepare for these kinds of situations and this entire legal process?

05. Are there any points during this process where you feel unsure about what you're supposed to do next?

06. So was there ever a point during your business where you didn't have this much like legal support, like these advocates, or were they always there?

07. How you feel about lawyers, specifically.

08. How do you decide what is worth going up to a lawyer about, especially when it costs so much money to talk to these lawyers?

09. Is there anything that you think would be helpful to know for people that are beginning their process?

10. How is the process of communicating information with your council and legal team?

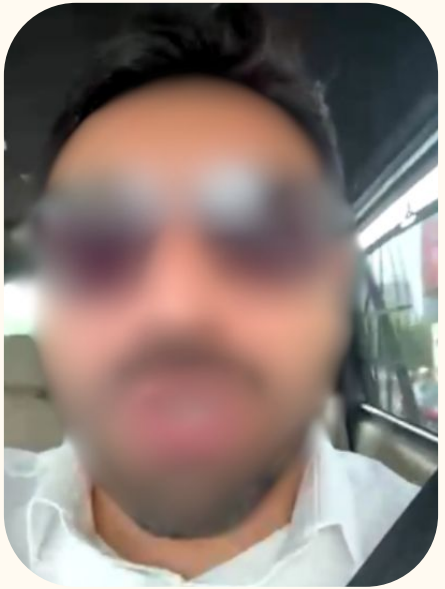
Litigant Bob

Extreme User

11. Is there anything in particular that's the most stressful for you?

12. How much of your life would you say is taken up by these court cases?

13. Would you say that your overall experience with the system is positive or negative?



14. Is it worth it to go through this process?

15. How do you organize all the cases that you're going through?

NEEDFINDING METHODOLOGY – LITIGANT QUOTES

"Sometimes… we're using a gun to kill a fly"

"Lawyers are not liked very much"

"We've almost become friends (referring to lawyers)"

"I believe in the system, so we are staying put."

"It doesn't allow me to, plan many things, because, you know, the dates can come up anytime."

"But still, it takes 3 years to get those 30 minutes."

Litigant Bob

Empathy Map

[LINK HERE](#)



INTERVIEW RESULTS – CONTRADICTIONS AND INSIGHT

Litigant Bob

Contradictions & Insight

Contradiction

Bob believes in the courts and thinks they are high quality and deliver justice yet calls litigation the most frustrating thing in the world and laments how time consuming it is.

Insight

There is more frustration directed at access to a system rather than its quality. The delay, and the emotional strain it creates, is what wears down trust.

Say

"But if anybody wants to litigate, it's the most expensive. frustrating, annoying, thing in the world, I would say."

“all we want is a hearing. We have everything in place, the law is on our side, the merits are on our side, all we need is time, is our time in court that's like, 30 minutes. Tops. But still, it takes 3 years to get those 30 minutes. So that's frustrating.”

Feel

Drained from dealing with an almost 3 year long case

Trusts India's court system

Faithful in getting justice if deserved

Insights

It's hard to measure success. The center has systems in place and measures outcomes but not the full **litigant experience** that leads to them.

There is a lot of **responsibility on the individual** to remember and act on next steps within a system.

There is more **frustration directed at access** to a system rather than its quality. The **delay, and the emotional strain** it creates, is what wears down trust.

Whether or not people have an attorney, there is need at the level of the individual, including their emotional state, confidence, and ability.

Reflection

How did the experience of interviewing meet or defy your expectations?

- Thought the interviewer would be talking more, but the interviewee actually took up far more time than expected
- Had more difficulty than expected in recruiting interviewees

Were you surprised by anything?

- The interviewee's emotions are really apparent especially when they are passionate about what they're speaking about.
- Seeing lots of optimism in individuals going through tough times

How did you adapt in the moment?

- Really went off script and tried to dig deeper into the interviewee's emotions.
- Ex: asking for specific moments of a feeling of frustration
- Asking clarifying questions of legal processes

Were there key differences to the examples shown in the design discovery lecture?

- Lecture examples involved more concrete, observable experiences, while our legal topic was complex, high stakes, and much more emotion was attached.

Summary

Key Learnings

- Emotional toll of the legal system
- Individual responsibility on people to move their case forward
- The complications of each step confused us as they were being explained, we could only imagine what it would be like for someone who is navigating it with limited resources

What's Next

- Narrowing our scope to just litigants
- More interviews with litigants
- Ask more questions about individual experiences, pain points, and emotions

Thank you!



