

THE FINAL REPORT

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The Problem

After sexual assault survivors undergo their forensic exam to collect evidence they are released. Often survivors find themselves experiencing trauma and PTSD after this event. When the crime lab and investigators find a DNA match to their kit, the survivor must then be notified that a match has occurred. Current methods of notification vary but the most intrusive is a visit to the survivors home to deliver the news. Survivors wanted more control over their re-entry into the criminal justice system.

Our Motivation

The motivation for this project is simple. We have a desire to use our skills to help survivors of sexual assault who are not normally given much attention once evidence is obtained from them. Our aim is to give them a voice, and more control over their process.

Value?

This system provides a valuable service to an under served portion of society by connecting all parties involved in an empathetic way.



PROJECT PHOENIX: Help for The Silent Epidemic of Sexual Assault

Sexual Assault is an epidemic in our country. Someone is sexually assaulted every 2 minutes in the United States. EVERY 2 MINUTES! In the ten minutes that I have been writing this 5 more people have been added to that list.

Sexual Assault is traumatic in and of itself and research has found that the investigative process of reporting and gathering evidence from victims can be just as traumatic when traditional rape kits are used. This 16 step process is invasive, and can be used to gather trace evidence like fibers and DNA as well as physical evidence like bruising, or other more personal injuries. Victims often have a rape crisis advocate present during their exam. A stranger to them up until the time of their crisis. Exams must be performed by a licensed medical professional and each piece collected tagged and dated. Once the kit is complete the victim is sent home and the kit is sent to law enforcement agencies for processing. This is where the survivors wait begins. It can last upwards of 30 years in some cases that have been backlogged before a hit occurs. For



Constraints

1. Early attempts at gathering sexual assault survivor data were difficult. We did not have clearance necessary to get past the people who work with them and treat them so little to no headway was given to our project. Sexual assault survivors are difficult to reach, unless they wish to speak voluntarily about their incident. Social media outlets were used to solicit volunteers.
2. Our initial design was deemed too bright and harsh with regard to our target audience during usability testing. We refined our look to soften it.
3. Security issues were presented during our usability testing. How secure would this information be? Would attorneys have access? Could investigations be compromised? This is a communication portal that will house high encryption. 128 bit SSL (Secure Socket Layer).

victims of sexual assault, psychological trauma like regression and PTSD are frequent occurrences and for many these effects are long lasting.



Formative Study and Results

Our initial focus was placed on technology and how it might be used to solve the backlog issue that exists in the processing of DNA. As we researched we discovered the complexity of this issue, the varying levels of difficulty, and the constraints that this direction afforded us. It was also during this research that we discovered a touchpoint in the survivor story where we could be of service. We have since conducted interviews with medical professionals, law enforcement officers and sexual assault survivors. We have done extensive research online, and studied case studies, Census Data, created storyboards, user scenarios and other in depth research provided by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ). They were able to provide valuable insight into the subject of victim engagement, detachment, and participation in sexual assault investigations. The discovery of this information changed the direction of our project completely and allowed us to center on the survivor vs. a focus on technology. It brought about a sense of empathy that enabled us to gain a better understanding of the sexual assault investigative process which enabled us to set a definitive course toward a solution to the problem of re-engagement of survivors into the investigation after months or years of poor communication. The NIJ data told us:

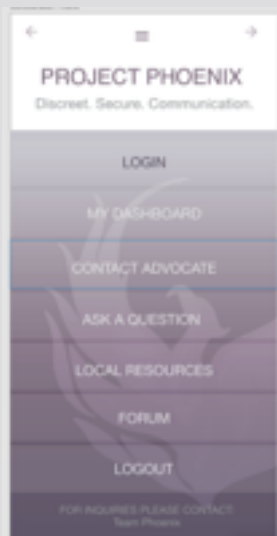
- How to understand the natural reactions of survivors - that people weren't necessarily "lying" in repeat testimony but instead exhibiting signs of psychological trauma.
- The importance of involving Sexual Assault Nursing Examiners (S.A.N.E. Nurses) in discussions as they are the first line of interaction with the victim as they conduct their forensic evidence exam.
- How to recognize the signs of PTSD and the realization that survivors often had a hard time remembering and can't always do things sequentially as a result. This often lead to blaming the victim, or discrediting them in court because it seemed as if their facts "didn't add up" or that they were changing their story.

Scenarios

We created a user scenario using information gathered in an interview with a survivor of sexual assault who was willing to discuss the details of her investigation with us. Dates and names were changed, but the events are the same. We also took a look at the scenario of the law enforcement officer and of the advocate during the initial rape exam. These insights gave us the information we needed to narrow our scope and develop a prototype of our application.

Prototype

Development of our prototype began as a series of low fidelity wire frames that evolved into a high fidelity mockup of our application using Adobe XD. You can see an interactive mock up of our prototype here: <http://www.project-phoenix.info/prototype>



Prototype for the mobile app

- The NIJ discovered as we did, the importance of viewing the investigation from the SURVIVOR PERSPECTIVE.

Through this process our scope was refined and direction clearly set. We discovered that we have an opportunity to keep the survivor updated throughout the entire investigative process from the point of submission of their forensic evidence kit.

HEARING THEIR VOICE

Taking what we learned gave us new insight and opportunity to provide a service to an underrepresented area of the population.

- It gave us the chance to assist survivors connect with their investigation on their own time anywhere throughout the process.
- We now had the opportunity to connect survivors with specialized advocates and professionals to help them heal available to them at any time
- It also was a chance for investigators to have a place for open communication with all parties involved
- It gave discretion to something that survivors didn't want to talk about with other people who had not experienced it before.
- Opportunity to design for an unheard almost "voiceless" portion of society

FUTURE SCOPE



The future of this project is dependent upon 3 factors. The first being the introduction of this concept to the people that began this journey of communication. The NIJ. This application will be presented along with a proposal to independently manage this service as a start up for victims of sexual assault. By removing the bias that law enforcement may have when interacting with survivors, and to ensure that survivors are met with empathic highly trained advocates, this creates a synergy among all parties involved that could lead to a renewed trust between the public and police. Working together with applicable laws and regulations is a necessity as is gaining the trust of sexual assault advocates. The NIJ has already expressed their willingness and success in gaining insight through the employment of multi-disciplinary teams so we are hoping for a positive reception.