

# Justice Connect's groundbreaking Gateway Project

Kate Fazio, *Head of Innovation and Engagement, Justice Connect*, discusses the Gateway Project

## Closing the justice gap in the digital age

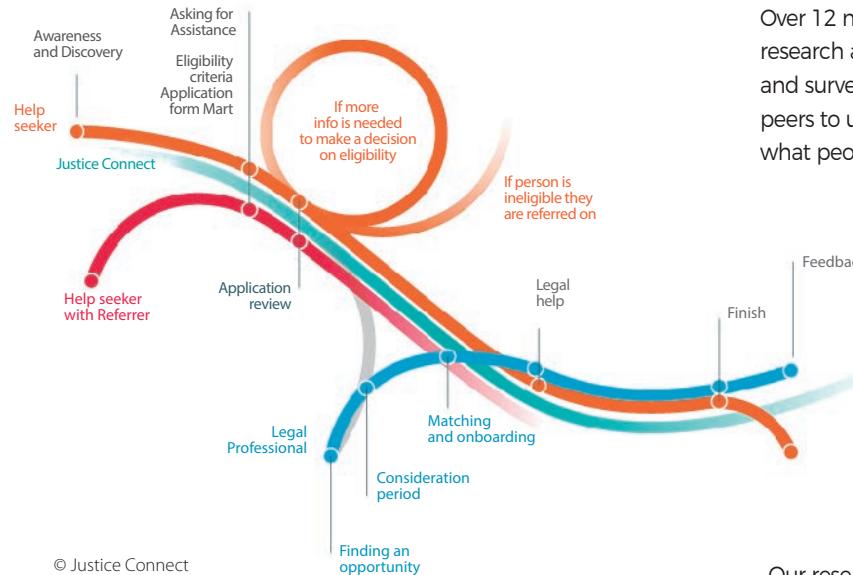
Technology offers huge potential to assist efforts to close the justice gap: reaching more people, supporting new ways of working to free up lawyers' time from repetitive tasks, supporting knowledge management and helping to deliver better client services.

In the face of extreme levels of unmet legal need in Australia, and barriers to scaling one-to-one services to meet the entirety of unmet need, in 2017 Justice Connect embarked on its Gateway Project. The aims of the project were to undertake a comprehensive program of human centred research, design and digital development in an effort to find new, scalable approaches to service delivery as well as making our working practices more efficient.

Justice Connect has now released the three key products that make up the Gateway Project – each aimed at addressing different access to justice challenges.

The three year project is now seeing clear indicators that targeted use of technology can create substantial impact, from improved service efficiencies, improved help-seeker experiences, and improved relationships with key stakeholders who are better supported by technology.

While technology solutions cannot be a panacea to solving access to justice challenges, they have an important role to play, and understanding where opportunities to effect real change and impact with technology is one of the sector's key current challenges. We hope that by sharing our work, we can add to the existing cases and examples to support sector decision-making around investment in technology projects.



## A human centred research approach

In 2017, we commenced our Gateway Project design research with seed funding of \$250,000 from Google.org. We set out to understand the experience of everyone that engages with our services and design new ways of working to better meet needs and increase our reach and impact. Where appropriate, we aimed to harness the potential of rapid advances in technology heralded by the digital era.

We believed that there were key areas of opportunity to investigate:

- > The way help-seekers find, connect with and enter Justice Connect and our services
- > The way our sector colleagues find and interact with us
- > The way we interact with our network of pro bono lawyers
- > The way we pull together insights regarding supply and demand to create a more efficient pro bono marketplace.

Over 12 months we followed a deeply human centred design research approach, including running workshops, interviews and surveys with all our stakeholders, service users and sector peers to understand how people experience our services, and what people need from our products.

- 28 CO-DESIGN WORKSHOPS WITH DIFFERENT USER GROUPS
- 22 COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES PARTICIPATED IN RESEARCH AND TESTING
- 49 HELP SEEKERS TESTED TOOL IN-PERSON
- 80 INTAKE TOOL USERS PARTICIPATING IN FOLLOW UP RESEARCH
- 14 LAW FIRMS PARTICIPATED IN PORTAL PILOT

Our research showed us that for help-seekers the legal system is confusing, difficult to navigate, and that people looking for free legal help regularly have poor experiences of finding and connecting with relevant services. While some help-seekers are not able to self-help, or do not have easy access to the internet, many help-seekers expressed strong desires to connect with services online, at their convenience.

We also heard that our sector colleagues wanted to better understand Justice Connect's different services and feel more confident in making referrals to Justice Connect.

We found that lawyers want to do more pro bono work, but that matching up unmet need with relevant expertise is time-consuming and labour-intensive.

*"I spent two years seeking help and thought Justice Connect was the place I would find it, but sadly not. My legal problem is still just that. It turns out, being on a pension doesn't afford you legal representation."*

## Our Gateway Project products

Based on our research and co-design, we created a vision for a suite of products to transform Justice Connect. We developed and refined these products with our co-design contributors throughout 2018.

The Gateway cornerstone products, now released, are:

- > an intelligent online intake and triage tool that helps people quickly and easily understand whether they are eligible for our services, and make a full application online.
- > a referral tool that helps our sector colleagues understand when we can help, and easily warm-refer clients deep into our system, reducing referral drop-out.
- > a pro bono portal to revolutionise the way we work with our network of 10,000 pro bono lawyers, ensuring we're making the most of their capacity, and connecting them more efficiently, transparently and effectively to unmet legal need. It includes abilities for Justice Connect to send targeted requests to particular firms based on their preferences, or post opportunities to a browsable opportunity board.

Importantly, each of these products has been developed to enhance Justice Connect's services, reach and impact. We recognise that not all help-seekers want to or are able to engage with services in an online setting, and through many of our programs we are committed to deeply embedded community outreach, for example through our Health Justice Partnerships, and our Homeless Law program.

Through our Gateway Project, we aim to offer a menu of channels through which to engage with Justice Connect, each suited to a particular cohort. We also aim to use technology in the background of our services to do automatable work that can



free up the time of our staff to spend in one-on-one interactions with the most vulnerable.

## Evaluation, impact and accountability

Each of the three Gateway products is now live and being evaluated and iterated.

### Intake tool

We have completed and published a formal evaluation for our Help-Seeker Intake Tool.

High level evaluation findings show that:

- > since September last year, 13,000 have reached our new online help page <https://justiceconnect.org.au/help>
- > many Australians prefer to make applications for legal assistance online compared to over the phone
- > 66% of users surveyed preferred to make applications for assistance online
- > although some vulnerable cohorts may have lower digital capability, within these cohorts there are users who not only perform well in digital settings, but prefer to engage with services in digital settings
- > users find our tool easy to engage with and almost all would recommend it to a friend
- > the tool has led to efficiency gains for between 22-44% in intake processes for Justice Connect services
- > staff feel that our intake tool makes our organisation appear more professional, modern, and they also find processing applications less emotionally stressful than running an intake process by phone only.

## Those who prefer online do so because:

*"I don't like the phone due to social awkwardness."*

*"No waiting, questions help clarify, dealt with application in one step."*

*"Time to think, edit, consider phrasing. Your own words and not another parties."*

*"I am abroad."*

*"Easier to do at any time of the day/night"*

*"Takes too long to explain on phone and more likely to forget points."*

*"Sick of repeating myself and not getting help."*

*"Gives me time to think."*

*"English is not my first language. I can take time to express myself."*



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Our decision to publish an unabridged report is driven by our aim to assist other organisations investigating online intake to learn from what we've learned.

### Pro bono portal

After initial research and development, we set up a pilot process enabling us to test our pro bono product in a live environment with a smaller set of users from 14 participating pilot firms.

Over three months we worked extremely closely with our pilot firms to refine the portal receiving regular feedback, having face-to-face interviews, and releasing product updates on a weekly basis.

The contribution from our pilot firms has been exceptional, and their attitude to participation in a software pilot of this kind has been enriching to the product's development.

Pilot outcomes indicate that the Portal is creating greater transparency around matters and unmet legal need for firms, is assisting in record keeping in the referral process with all communication and document stored in a single location, and at some firms has even led to a change in the operation of the pro bono practice, enabling firms to distribute responsibility for finding appropriate matters to teams with particular expertise.

A significant immediate impact for Justice Connect staff of the adoption of our Portal is the benefit of rich, real-time reporting which allows us to track many metrics of firm engagement, spikes in need and interest, the ratio of expressions of interest to conversion to taking on a pro bono referral, and which of our staff are having the most success at posting opportunities that are taken up by firms.

Through our pilot period we have identified key further features which we are currently building. We look forward to welcoming the rest of Justice Connect's 55 member firms onto the Portal soon.

### Referrer tool

We have recently commenced in-person and online testing of our referrer tool, and will share our findings on our website once they are synthesised. You can test our tool at <https://help.justiceconnect.org.au/referral/>

### A firm participating in our pilot said:

*"We strongly support this thoughtful, design-led approach to harnessing technology so that we can better match unmet legal need with pro bono resources."*

## Contributing to a global movement to transform access to justice

Justice Connect's digital innovation work forms part of a global movement to transform approaches to access to justice. The justice gap exists globally, and we have increasingly realised that many pain points and challenges in providing access to justice are shared globally, and therefore solutions should also be developed collaboratively on a global scale. To de-risk and increase efficiency, as a sector, we need to look for more opportunities to adopt each other's solutions, and spend less time trying to solve from the ground up.

We have benefitted substantially from the work of international organisations, in particular the online intake and triage community in the United States that meet annually at the Legal Service Corporation Innovation in Technology Conference. We are glad to now contribute back to the community through sharing our work and evaluation. We regularly attend and present at national and international conferences to ensure that we are sharing our learning, and learning from the work of others.

### Next steps, new possibilities

Three years into our Gateway Project, with our cornerstone products released, we are now looking at measures to increase the potential for the system to increase our scale and impact, and get more people legal help.

This includes:

- the potential to increase access to our network of pro bono lawyers, enabling other legal service providers to post to our Pro Bono Portal
- the potential to extend the Pro Bono Portal platform to international collaborators to support pro bono in emerging jurisdictions, and
- enhancing our online intake system with the incorporation of natural language processing, driven by AI that we will develop with our now extensive bank of examples of legal problems described in natural language by everyday Australians

## Online access helping to connect any time, any where



When Sue was sued, she was shocked, concerned and knew that as a pensioner she couldn't afford the legal advice that she would need to defend a court action.

Sue's daughter helped her to find Justice Connect through an online search, and Sue lodged an application for assistance with us, late at night, from her home.

We were able to quickly match Sue with a pro bono firm, Carroll O'Dea, who provided Sue with pro bono advice and representation, and resolved her matter.

Sue said access to a lawyer "gave me hope that I wasn't about to lose everything that I'd worked for all my life."

Now that her matter has resolved, Sue says "the weight has lifted, and I'm so appreciative. I'm really grateful for the way in which it was given, the generosity and the way it was delivered to me."

Justice Connect

For more information, please visit <https://justiceconnect.org.au/>

*Kate Fazio is Head of Innovation and Engagement at Justice Connect. Kate has 7 years of hands-on experience working at the intersection of law, design and technology, and regularly speaks at national and international conferences on the importance of human-centred design and technology's role in improving access to justice. Kate has led significant projects including the Not-for-profit Law Information Hub and the Justice Connect Gateway Project. She has a background as a corporate lawyer, in communications and holds a Masters of Social Impact. She was recently recognised as the "Best Accidental IT Person" in the Australian Not-for-profit Technology Awards.*

