

How tech can help us bridge the access to justice gap: Josef's story



Co-founders from L-R: Kirill Kliavin CTO, Tom Dreyfus CEO, Sam Flynn COO

Sam Flynn, Co-founder and COO of Josef, talks about his experience of founding Josef, and writes about how community organisations and pro bono legal professionals can use legal technology and automation to do more good work.

If you've ever read "The Trial" by Franz Kafka, you'd be familiar with the hellish ordeal faced by protagonist Josef K. He's arrested by an unknown authority for an unknown crime. Without the help of lawyers, his trial is a hopeless one.

This gritty tale inspired the name of Josef, the no-code legal automation platform I co-founded with CEO Tom Dreyfus and CTO Kirill Kliavin a few years ago. Five billion people in the world have unmet justice needs, and anyone can be Josef K.

Josef was created with the purpose of helping community legal centres grapple with the age-old question: how can we service and meet the ever-increasing demand for legal services, while our resources and capacity are either static or falling?

Before Josef came to fruition, I launched an online web-based application called mykifines in 2016, which gave people automated guidance and advice in relation to public transport ticketing infringement law in Victoria.

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We had 30,000 users on the first day, and 60,000 by the end of the first month. The success of this automated legal tool, along with other strategic initiatives, prompted the government to repeal an unfair law.

Our vision of empowering the community

Following this success, Tom Dreyfus and I came together to figure out how to empower community legal centres to build digital tools to help more people and bridge the access to justice gap. We spent the next six months building an automated tool for a community legal centre in Victoria that gave guidance and advice in relation to tenancy law.

And that's when it really hit us. In those six months, we had to learn the ins and outs of the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (Vic) to build out this digital tool. We realised that this was a really inefficient way of affecting change in the world – especially given all the different types of laws, jurisdictions and specialities that go together to make up the global legal industry.

Our vision then became about empowering people who already have legal expertise and specialist knowledge to build these tools themselves. This became Josef, a no-code legal automation platform. No-code refers to a tool that you can use as a non-technical person to create a digital product. Examples of no-code products include Wix or Squarespace, which allow users to easily build a website without a line of code.

With no-code tools like Josef, you can build a legal app or "bot" that automates legal tasks that we perform every day as legal professionals, such as generating documents like letters of demand or agreements, providing advice and guidance, answering FAQs, and doing intake, triage and interviews.

By doing this, community legal centres can scale their services by creating self-serve tools, therefore helping more people. They can also work more efficiently and save precious time in order to do strategic, high-value

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Some of the best (and busiest) legal aid organisations use Josef



work, instead of losing hours to repetitive, low-level work. For example, many of these organisations have built bots to automate intake, saving some of them between 30% to 50% of the time it usually takes to onboard a new client.

Strategic partnerships with other organisations

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We’re also involved in a number of exciting strategic partnerships, like one between the University of Western Australia and Community Legal WA – the peak body for community legal centres in Western Australia – to build out a referral system for all CLCs in the state.

To be clear, Josef is a rapidly growing, for-profit startup, and we work with some of the biggest law firms in the world like Clifford Chance, and with in-house teams at large corporations, like L’Oreal, in order to create a high-growth business.

This gives us the space to partner with legal assistance organisations and community legal centres that are doing the work on the ground to provide accessible legal services to those who can’t otherwise access or afford it.

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Josef will continue to focus on and invest in our work with community legal centres and legal aid. We are optimistic about the future and the different ways community and government sectors, legal teams, and law schools are experimenting and partnering with one another to figure out how legal technology can be applied to the access-to-justice space in a meaningful and results-focused way. ■



Sam Flynn is the Chief Operating Officer and Co-founder at Josef, leading the company’s business operations, governance, marketing and customer success functions.

Sam has worked in advertising, as a lawyer and as an associate at the Supreme Court of Victoria. He is an advocate for using legaltech to bridge the access to justice gap, and serves as an Advisory Board member of the Centre for Legal Innovation (CLI).

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