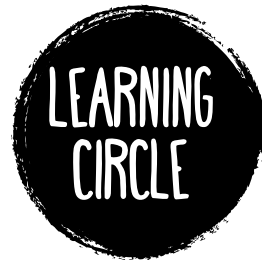# FROM WAITING TO LIVING

FINDING NEW WAYS TO SUPPORT PEOPLE ON THE WAITLIST

LEARNING CIRCLE

Lisa Manuel and Maria Huijbregts
Family Service Toronto

Pain points & Segmentation

Our pain points

Our initial pain point: *There are too few counselling times available for people contacting Family Service Toronto. This leads to distress, frustration, difficulty coping, lack of stability, and anxiety in staff.* Our initial user group was people on the LGBTQT counselling wait list.

After doing research with our initial user group, we revised this pain point to: *too many people on the waitlist feel like the seasons are passing without things changing.* And we focused on 'Light Seekers': people on the waitlist open to other types of non-therapeutic supports - from peers, groups, etc.

How did we get to know the 'Light Seekers'?

We set-up sessions with people on the waitlist. In each session, we used photo prompt cards to help people describe their experiences waiting for services. We asked people to react to a set of early ideas - what did they think about peer supports, getting books & media, going for walks, etc.

Meet two Light Seekers:

Meet Chris
Age 31
Waiting for: 5 months

Reality feels like:
"I'm always waiting in the darkness. I feel like I'm looking at the clock, day after day."

Aspiration is:
"To live life normally"

Networks of support:
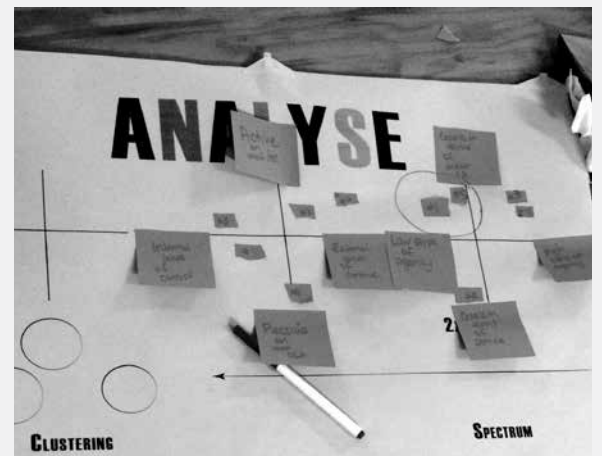"I have no friends, really, or family members. I rely on doctors for support."

Meet Mandy
Age: 33
Waiting for: 11 months

Reality feels like:
"I am worried that I will not make it to age 35. I've been going round and round for 8 years."

Aspiration is:
"Figuring out where I belong."

Networks of support:
"My relationship with family is part of the tension"

Segmentation:

Ideas & prototyping

Three ideas for the Light Seekers

Give an hour get an hour

Create & connect

On-demand content

Sign-up to receive our weekly email, full of good videos to watch, podcasts to listen to, places to go, and resources to access whilst you wait. Get tips and ideas.

Get matched with someone who has been through our counselling program whilst you are waiting for service.

An arts-based group designed for people who are waiting for service. People waiting for service could create their own groups around topics they find interesting. [Inspired by Saddleback church's small groups]

Prototyping 'On-demand content'

How do people on the waitlist engage with the "on-demand content" email? Do they open the email? What do they click on? Which sections do they find useful? Which sections don't they find useful? Why?
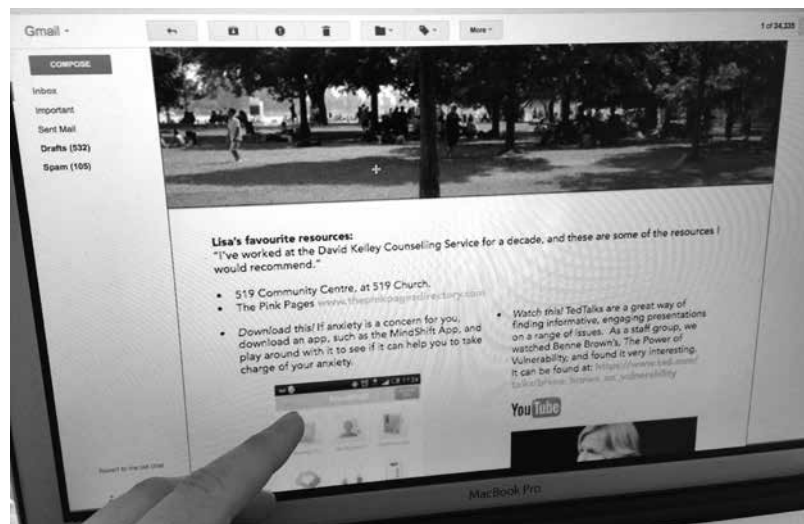
What's next?

Tensions we couldn't resolve...

We often left work to the last minute, which meant that we didn't necessarily carve out enough time to be in the learning circle headspace. We are used to structure enhancing learning. How can we be productive with such chaos and emergence? How to balance rigour with a rapid turnover of ideas? How do we know if we are making the right choices and keeping the best ideas? How much investigation is required before we determine an idea isn't working, and we modify or change it? How do we facilitate more rapid change in our work? How to get support from other staff for proposed changes?

Future opportunities

We met with the clinical team that we did this work with and they are really amazed at the work that was done and eager to try out this prototype with the people we interviewed.

What are we taking away ourselves?

Not just words.
In our more traditional, qualitative research, we rely on words - and words, only - to have people think about their experience. Using pictures to broaden participants' thinking about their experience led to a different conversation and many insights we might not have gotten otherwise.

People power.
Hearing directly from clients also made us realize that it may be important to rethink how we provide services, and how to build on people's strengths - so they are moving forward and contributing to others' moving forward.

More projects.
This work holds promise for applying to other programs. We'd like to adapt these methods for other purposes.