MAYA

Navigating a Sudden Job Loss - “I need assistance, but I don’t even know where to start.”

HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Maya is grappling with a sudden job loss due to unexpected layoffs. Maya is a single parent with two young children (one of whom needs additional support as a child with autism) living in a suburban area. She feels overwhelmed by the need to meet basic expenses while managing the emotional toll of unemployment, which has worsened her depression. Maya loves baking and finds respite in the kitchen. The kids love joining in, and the memories they build sustain her.

NEEDS & GOALS

- Healthy food for her and her children.
- Stable, full-time employment.
- Childcare assistance so she can attend interviews, workforce training, and eventually her new job.
- Healthcare that allows her to accommodate her child’s needs and seek mental health support to manage stress and uncertainty of her situation.

CHALLENGES

- Lack of simple, accessible resources to understand benefits eligibility.
- Bureaucracy of mental health services and matching with service providers.
- Finding it hard to navigate unfamiliar systems like SNAP and UI.

BEHAVIORS & PREFERENCES

- Wants support for completing paperwork including flexible timelines, frequent reminders, and leniency for missing documents.
- Wants mobile-friendly applications.
- Likes in-person supports like community centers and caseworkers.
- Has to bring her children to appointments if she cannot find childcare.
- Can experience depressive episodes that make it hard to function.

ANA

Supporting a Mixed-Status Family - “I want to support my family, but I don’t know where to turn to.”

HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Ana is striving to care for herself and her two children while her husband is still waiting to enter into the United States. She is facing inequities as a member of a household where the members have different immigration statuses - she does not have an eligible immigration status to receive benefits, but her children do. Because of this, she often feels excluded from resources designed for citizens. She lives in a rural area and works low-paying jobs in the hospitality and childcare fields. Ana is high-risk for adverse health outcomes (e.g., suicide, postpartum depression). She is glad to receive support from her friends and has made connections to other single moms through a local community-based organization.

NEEDS & GOALS

- Stable access to food and healthcare for her family.
- Education and training to find a well-paying job ($80,000+) and advance in her desired career path.
- Assurance of privacy and safety in accessing benefits.

CHALLENGES

- Information is not in her primary language.
- Caseworkers are not trained in culture competency or flexible with documentation requirements.
- Fear of negative effects on her and her family’s immigration statuses.
- Lack of knowledge about eligibility for her U.S. citizen children.

BEHAVIORS & PREFERENCES

- Prefers face-to-face interactions in trusted community settings, from trusted community leaders and culturally-specific organizations.
- Wants written ***and*** verbal information on eligibility for mixed-status families in her preferred language.
- Is hesitant to share personal information online or in government systems.

LEAH

Breaking the Cycle of Generational Inequity - “I don’t want me and my kids to be on these programs forever.”

HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Leah is a single mother living the effects of generational inequality, determined to create a better future for her and her children. She lives in a community that has been negatively impacted by structural and systemic racism and has limited economic opportunities as a result. This situation has led her and her community to feel a sense of hopelessness and trauma, afraid to imagine a better world for themselves. However, she knows she didn’t create these problems, and she is a very vocal advocate for herself and her community. She feels grateful to have a strong support network of women and grandmothers who help her navigate the programs and offer financial assistance when they can.

NEEDS & GOALS

- Healthy food for her and her children.
- Financial support to return to nursing school.
- Access to healthcare and providers who are considerate of Black women.
- Personalized support with empathetic, human-centered processes.
- Streamlined recertification processes for ongoing benefits.

CHALLENGES

- Long wait times for benefits.
- Distrust of government and systems.
- Lack of tailored resources.

BEHAVIORS & PREFERENCES

- Avoids government offices due to past negative experiences.
- Leverages social media and peer networks for advice on navigating systems.
- Likes interacting with advocacy groups.
- Is interested in mobile outreach programs.

JAMES

Seeking Stability After Reentry - “I feel like I’m being left behind by programs and services I desperately need.”

HUMAN EXPERIENCE

James has recently returned from the carceral system after five years in prison, eager to rebuild his life but facing significant barriers to employment and housing. James lives in an urban area and has limited access to transportation. He has severe anxiety, depression, and PTSD, which were worsened by his time in prison. While he was incarcerated, there were significant updates to technology, which he is having to learn as he tries to navigate programs and in all other aspects of his life. He is also on parole, which means he must jump through hoops to make various appointments within specific timeframes. In prison, James earned his welding certificate and led programs, such as yoga lessons and a book club.

NEEDS & GOALS

- Reconnect with family and community.
- Healthy food.
- Long-term employment that will hire someone with a criminal record, with an end goal of starting his own business.
- Flexible, nonjudgmental assistance from caseworkers trained in trauma-informed care for returning citizens.
- Healthcare, including therapy or counseling to address past traumas.
- Stable housing support.

CHALLENGES

- Lack of ID and work/rental history.
- Stigma from employers and property managers.
- Digital skills gap.
- Debt & financial burdens.
- Parole requirements.
- Lack of reliable transportation.
- Unsure if he is eligible for programs due to this criminal record.

BEHAVIORS & PREFERENCES

- Prefers going through step-by-step, guided processes with social workers and community programs to help navigate applications.
- Largely relies on support through in-person community-based organizations, libraries, and call centers because of lack of access to and unfamiliarity with technology.

CHRIS

Recovering from Industry Downsizing - “I never thought I would need these programs, but now I need someone to guide me through them.”

HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Chris is mentally tired. He’s experiencing sudden financial instability after industry downsizing led to him losing his manufacturing job. He was one of the first to be let go after his boss found out that he’s transgender. He lives in a rural area with limited internet connectivity. His check was going toward supporting his girlfriend, her younger brother and her child. He hopes to find more work with his hands because it helps him feel like a provider and supports him to calm racing thoughts.

NEEDS & GOALS

- Healthy food.
- Healthcare, including gender-affirming care.
- Workforce training and employment programs that address local opportunities.

CHALLENGES

- Struggles to access unemployment insurance and navigate online forms due to poor broadband infrastructure.
- Relationships with blood family are strained and it’s putting pressure on his personal relationships.

BEHAVIORS & PREFERENCES

- Goes to the nearest library to use public wi-fi for job searches and benefits applications. Prefers offline resources, such as in-person and mailed materials.
- Struggles with long, complex application forms.
- Goes in-person to workforce centers to find resources.
- Drives 2 hours to attend a transgender support group once a month.

HEATHER

Supporting People Accessing Programs - “I want to help, but I can’t do it alone.”

HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Heather works in a service center with other program staff on site. She takes her role as the face of the agency seriously, as she believes in supporting families going through hard times. She is often disheartened seeing repeat customers or when she is met with resentment because her services are seen as a roadblock to receiving benefits. She is responsible for maintaining client records and hosting workshops in addition to client and agency meetings. She tries to ensure clients are meeting requirements and refers them to other agencies for needed assistance. She goes above and beyond her job requirements, often using her own phone to text clients and accept photos of verification documents.

NEEDS & GOALS

- Time to create meaningful client relationships and provide individualized service to customer goals.
- Capacity to foster empathy and communication for all clients, showing she is on their side and will advocate for them.
- Balanced caseload to avoid burnout.
- Ability to provide long-term solutions to clients along with short-term relief.

CHALLENGES

- Duplicative, complicated, and outdated data systems and processes which increase administrative burden and decrease time she could be spending with clients.
- Insufficient referral methods and disconnected partners systems which complicate referrals.
- No direct influence over policy or technology decisions.

BEHAVIORS & PREFERENCES

- Struggles with burnout due to high caseloads and administrative burdens.
- Is overwhelmed by inefficiencies, leading her to disengage from meetings or delay tasks at times.
- Prefers collaboration and voice in conversations with leadership to inform potential improvements.
- Finds motivation in small wins, such as helping a client secure benefits.