

The Power of Partnerships

Presented by Stacey Marz, Administrative Director Alaska Court System
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Well thank you for having me and good morning I. I think it's still morning for you all. I'm going to share with you a project that we did in Alaska that's been guiding our access to justice projects and I think there's relevance regardless of the location because obviously Alaska is a bit different than New York, but I think the premise behind the project makes sense regardless of location. So I'm going to do a screen share now, I hope you see it, you can see it great. OK, fantastic.

So. 2/3 of adults in the United States, based on research that's been done by Rebecca Sandefur, showed that adults experienced civil legal issues at the rate of 2/3 of all adults in the past 18 months, and these individuals experience 2.1 legal needs in that same time period, which is pretty impactful because this can cause fear, income loss, physical or mental health issues, real or threatened violence based on legal issues that folks are experiencing.

And the Legal Services Corporation has also done some research about legal needs, and they found that about 80% of low income Americans do not seek professional legal help for the civil legal problems that they experience and the reasons are varied. But they don't know where to find it. They don't recognize their problem is legal. They also may decide to deal with the problem themselves in whatever fashion that they think can meet their needs. And so the result is that most people do not take their civil legal problems to court, and as a consequence we only see actually a very small proportion of the legal problems that people experience. So using the iceberg metaphor we just see the tip about 20% of the problems that people experience that are actually legal in nature make it to a lawyer or to court. But 80% of the problems of vast majority, we in the legal profession, never see, and that is really the crux of the problem that we were trying to address in Alaska. We really wanted to address the 80%. We wanted to figure out a way we could reach these folks so that we could try to attain our goal, which is 100% access to provide some solution to 100% of the people that experience a legal problem and not just that tip of the iceberg.

We also read some research that 900 hours actually refers to the pro bono that is required of every lawyer in the United States to provide some assistance to all the households who have legal needs. And if everybody paid for just one hour of what their legal needs are, it would cost \$50 billion to meet these unmet legal needs. So we could probably agree that getting a lawyer to do 900 hours of pro bono to help people or coming up with \$50 billion isn't really realistic. And knowing that, we really shifted our focus away from lawyers as the primary solution. And there's a lot of fantastic work being done across the country, including my own court, and this is kind of the spectrum

of the traditional access to justice work that's happened. And all of these things are incredibly important, but they're still really only trying to address the 20% who know they have a problem who are seeking out some kind of help for the problem that they have. So we're again trying to address that 80%.

So to give you a little bit of background about where I'm coming from, Alaska is a really large geographic state and. We have some of the geographically largest areas, least densely populated and most ethnically diverse places in the United States. Here's a closeup just of Alaska and the yellow dots are all of our communities and the very light gray line, which is harder to see, are our roads so you can see that most of our communities are not connected to each other by roads which makes transportation really difficult in our state because you have to fly to most locations. You can't drive to most locations and that has shaped a lot of how our services are provided in Alaska because we do, prior to the pandemic, a lot of our services occur by remote methods, either phone or telephone or video, because we aren't going to make folks jump on airplanes to take care of all their business, which is also really expensive.

So our rural courts serve villages from a very dispersed regional area and like I said, you can't drive to most of our court locations. And while this is some of the background of where I come from, we really share challenges with a lot of other states because most places in the United States have urban and very rural components, including your state too because while you have some very large cities, you also have some very rural communities as well, and then lawyers are concentrated more densely in urban locations and this is true, almost throughout the United States. And there's simply not enough lawyers or legal aid to meet all of the needs.

And that legal problems are often intertwined with other issues. They rarely exist in isolation. They commonly exist with poverty, homelessness, domestic violence, untreated mental health issues financial insecurity, domestic violence. There is just a range of issues that coexist with the legal problem.

And we did a legal needs study in Alaska and this is just a depiction of some important things that we took away that I think are important to look at in in any state. So what we did was we took the information we learned from Rebecca Sandefur about the number of legal problems that people generally experience and then we extrapolated them and we compared them to the number of court cases that we actually see. So if you look at the light Gray circle around these different locations, these are our court locations, we have 40 court locations across the state. We're a unified court system in Alaska and we have no county or municipal courts. Our state courts handle all of the legal issues that are filed in court that are not federal. So the light Gray circles show the population for each trial court location. And then the darker Gray ring shows the total estimated legal needs for that population, and then the blue dot shows the number of court cases filed

in for common civil case types that come up, which I call kind of regular people problems. That's domestic violence, divorce and child custody, eviction and debt collection cases. So if you compare the number of cases filed actually to the number of estimated legal issues, it's clear that people are not accessing the court system to address their legal needs.

So the next thing that we did in our justice for all project is we were looking at how do we define justice. Because we wanted to define the justice to which we wanted to provide access. And justice is defined broadly in the circumstances that we're using it using a people centered approach that identifies the range of factors that contribute to justice for Alaskans. So instead of limiting the definition to one involving Institutions like courts or law enforcement or specialized professionals like lawyers or judges, we identified the types of service needs that impact people's well being. So this includes education, employment, housing, safety, financial, medical care, mental health, food, transportation and legal, and many of which coexists with our justice system problems where people do come to court.

So these different domains here, there's 10 domains of justice were identified using international and national justice indicators and related research on justice and well being. So this is kind of our ecosystem approach that we find is responsive to a complete spectrum of needs that a person may have that includes kind of this full range of issues that transmit to if you have them all taken care of that you're living a just existence of well-being and it recognized that reality that most people legal issues do intertwine with these other issues. Importantly, if you focus on this variety of issues to make up your justice ecosystem, you expand the type of services and providers who are available to help people, and integrating the different kinds of services into this ecosystem exponentially expands the reach of each of the providers within this network to ecosystem.

So we're really approaching this work with a no wrong door approach and broadly defining justice is the key to this approach for us. So we convened a multisectoral steering group made up of folks from those different justice domains, so a combination of legal and importantly non legal providers that deal with those other domains and our committee was incredibly important to help provide information perspective connections with providers ideas, individuals from the non legal sector to do user testing. When we got further down the road and this is really important because of the scarcity of attorneys that we really wanted to bridge the gap between the legal and non legal communities and we did it using two pieces of technology. We used GIS mapping or geographic information system mapping and a social network. I'm going to talk about each of those.

So the first step was we wanted to identify who all the various providers were that would intersect with people that had legal problems from those various justice domains. So what we did was we called a bunch of publicly available lists of non profit organizations that had been incorporated in the state and were registered lists of professional organizations like social workers. You know just any kind of public list that we could provide and ran it through this system of deciding whether we should include it in our list. And so you don't have to understand the flow chart here, but just know that there was a method to identifying whether we should include an organization and it would be important for you to come up if you were going to do such an exercise, come up with some criteria so that you knew what you wanted to include in your list, and we ended up compiling a list of approximately 1500 different providers throughout the state who work with people facing challenges in those ten justice domains.

And we so this was basically kind of an inventorying process, where we were trying to understand who is out there and then once we understood that, we realized that they nicely grouped into four particular areas, the legal domain, the social services, medical services and Information Services, and the legal area was pretty self-explanatory. That was literally all the lawyers that were. Legally licensed to practice in the state we worked with the Bar Association on that we worked with all the legal aid providers, the different nonprofit providers that do legal services, and the court. And then we turn to the social service providers and those were primarily domestic violence programs, homeless shelters, drug and alcohol treatment, job centers, social workers. Faith based organizations were important as well, and then the medical services. Our hospitals, public health nurses, community health aides, village and community health clinics and behavioral health programs. And then Information Services were places where people go for neutral sources of information like libraries, K12 schools, law enforcement, tribal or municipal government on the local level, fire departments, post offices.

And this ended up creating the basis of our report. And we created a story map where we strung together a bunch of GIS maps and there's a link here and you can check it out after if you wanted to go through our full story map project.

But the mapping was really interesting because we mapped all of the legal providers, so this represents the light blue circles represent the lawyers in the state and it's by density, so all of the lawyers pretty much group in some of our largest areas, and many, many of our communities have no lawyers at all. The green circles are where we have courts and often where we have courts we have legal aid programs as well. And then the next layer of mapping we did was we overlaid our social service providers and those are the orange squares and if you clicked in our actual story map on each orange square, it doesn't represent just necessarily one provider, but you would get more information about the quantity and types of providers in each of those locations. And then the third mapping we did was our medical service providers. And this is where,

interestingly, the density really starts to build out. And this is because in Alaska we have a very developed and robust tribal health consortium and we have a lot of Alaska Native communities and every community kind of, regardless of whatever else they have, they have a village health aide clinic, which is usually staffed by a lay person who has been trained to perform a number of medical procedures based on their various certification levels and we do a lot of telemedicine, where specialists in the bigger hub communities can see patients by video. And then the fourth layer of mapping, which is represented by the purple circles, is our information service providers. So those are K12 schools, which usually include the library for the community which they open up to the community, and also that may be the only source of Internet for their community, municipal and tribal governments, law enforcement from the local level to the state troopers, fire departments, and post offices, it's basically places where people go to get information.

So these are just the four maps side by side and you can see the progression of when you start layering these services on top of each other. You really can tell a story of who are present in the various communities and so we wanted to make sure that we didn't just use the top left map which we had been kind of relying on prior to this project because it's so much less dense than the maps as you go around to the other three maps, and it seems silly to just rely on such a less dense group, particularly when you don't have any specialists or lawyers, and most of your communities, but you have these other players who are seeing people usually for the issues that are also intertwined, possibly with their legal issues, and so we really wanted to build out our network to start reaching out to the folks in these other communities because we have the same customers, be they patients, clients, patrons of some other provider. And so we wanted to work with them to include them as legal extenders to provide information and referrals to the people with whom they work when they learn of a legal issue or think that they could benefit from assistance to address the legal issue. So you may not have the same configuration of providers in your communities, but it's important to figure out who your providers are and to work with them to extend the reach of those who provide legal information and services.

So once we had our legal providers identified and mapped, we did a survey and we worked with a company called Polinode which is actually out of Australia because there they do social network analysis and so they provide the infrastructure. We did have to pay for it and we had a grant to do so. And so we worked with them and we created a survey and we used our steering committee to help vet the questions and make sure that they made sense and it was a really good thing we did this because the group that was working on the survey was kind of pretty much inside baseball. And when we sent the draft survey to our non legal providers they didn't know what we were talking about. With many of our questions. So it took a lot of work actually to get the survey such that it

would be able to extract the information we were actually seeking so people could understand what we were trying to do. So that was really helpful to use the people on our steering committee as a user testing group to make sure that our survey questions were clear. And so we sent this survey out to those service providers that we identified on that initial list of 1500 people and we actually got a really good survey response rate. We got a 40% re survey response rate on the survey, which in the survey response World is actually quite good. And we then took that information and ran it through the polinode system and it did a social network analysis with those responses to analyze the network ties between the different organizations when they received certain types of issues coming in their door, either from their patient, their customer, their client. We wanted to understand. Primarily when somebody comes and they present a legal issue, either because they say they have it. Or because you think they might benefit from addressing something that had a legal component in nature, what do you do as provider? What do you do? Do you tell them to call somebody? Do you try to send them somewhere? Do you say oh that's not my area, I don't know anything to help you with? Do you say nothing? So what does the provider do in that area?

OK, we also did community outreach, so we sent a couple folks to six of our communities around the state and asked all the providers on the ground if they hadn't filled out our survey, we explained it and worked through the survey with them to kind of round out getting the answers in some of our more far flung service areas and also shared information about our project and learned about the kinds of projects and providers they had in their community and expanded our list of folks that might be relevant to help people.

So this is what the network analysis looks like, and it looks like a piece of in my mind, beautiful modern abstract art. But it's actually telling us something when you understand what it's supposed to do, so I'm going to give you a very quick pointer on a social network analysis. So the nodes are the entities that we are looking at. So basically each circle is a different provider, and then the lines. Between them are called edges and those are the connections between providers and they can vary in strength or density based on how many connections are made between providers, and this area is somewhat complicated, but it can also tell you whether an individual organization is central to a network or their more peripheral to it, and how connected different entities within a network are.

So here's one example of the results of our social network, and this is the legal information referral system that we came up with. So the things that are tagged here are different entities that provide legal services, and the biggest one that came out is the circle toward the left. That's kind of a big green one, and that's Alaska legal services. So there are LSC or Legal Services Corporation in Alaska, and they have Offices throughout the state, and this is actually kind of a testament to the great outreach that

they have done in communities because everybody who has a legal problem that is identified by some kind of provider in the state, tells somebody to call Alaska legal services. Now the director of Alaska Legal Services, when she sees this social network analysis, she cringes a bit, even though I think she's proud that actually have such good outreach that everybody knows about them. The problem is, everybody refers to them, even if they can't help them. Even if they don't meet criteria, even if it's the wrong kind of problem, could be a criminal legal problem, the people could be higher income, they might not meet their priorities. So what they wanted to do is they want to get the appropriate legal referral. So people aren't spinning their wheels getting sent to someplace that can actually help them, and it also takes away from their ability to deliver services when they're constantly having to tell people that they can't help them. So that's actually time spent more time not spent well, because they could be using that time to actually help people. And then in the top blue you see something says I do not make legal referrals, so that's all of the answers from providers who said I don't make legal referrals. So they don't tell them to refer to anybody, they just don't do anything. And that's an interesting piece of information because we wanted to target also people that say they don't make legal referrals to teach them how to make appropriate legal referrals. So that was really interesting information.

So there was a lot of findings. Once we did all the analysis, but it's important I'll share a few of the. So the health and the safety organizations in the state have the farthest reach into communities which actually isn't surprising when we looked at our medical mapping. Working with medical providers is the key to building the capacity to access to justice services because they have such a far reach into communities and they're so well established. And this was a really interesting finding that I did not expect. The rural communities are more networked than urban counterparts, and actually this is now borne out now that we've met with providers. This is actually true, but we always kind of thought from my urban perspective that because we have so many more services in the urban areas that that was just a strength and better. But what we found is that our urban providers are actually less networked with each other than the rural communities are, so the rural communities may have less to offer, but they know what each other is doing and make more appropriate referrals within their communities. And maybe it's not surprising in hindsight because everybody knows everybody and they know what they're doing, which isn't true in the urban environment. The legal providers need to strengthen their relationships with the non legal providers because the non legal providers are often making bad or erroneous referrals to the legal providers. And there's a great variety in the small community networks, often defined by geography and service domain, so they actually have quite good networks within smaller communities. We found that certain particular areas, consumer finance and immigration and refugee services had the lowest density of service domains within the statewide network, meaning most people did not respond to questions that they knew how to get help in those particular areas.

So we already identified that Alaska legal Services was the most central actor. We had a lot of paths to legal referrals which indicated a lot of redundancy and confusion in our network. The legal providers were referring clients to each other a lot more than non legal providers were referring to legal providers. And we found there was a lot of referrals to remote and web based self-help services, which made me happy at the time because I was overseeing our self-help services, which is purely a remote system. And then I'm gonna skip that one.

OK, so this was all a lot of information actually to get to our end goal which was to create a plan. What do we do with that information? How do we use it appropriately and so our plan was that we needed to build an ecosystem of justice services and we needed to bridge across providers and get outside of the typical networks that we were used to working in. So we had several goals i- educating providers about legal information and services, we wanted to expand our technical capacity, which we are doing with a statewide legal navigator portal online where somebody can sit down and work with the provider to help self assess what is the legal issue by asking several questions using a A2J author, which is a program that I know is used widely in your forms area in New York, in your DIY forms. We're doing that to try to triage issues to get to an action plan at the end, and this is a tool that will be used by our non legal providers. So when the non legal provider and I hate that it's a terrible term but people who don't typically provide legal services, but social service providers, for example, hospital, social workers or community health aides and health clinics if they are sitting down with a patient or librarian, sitting down with Patron. And they start talking and they realize they have a problem with their housing or they have a problem with their finances and they understand they may, or they may be getting evicted and not realize that's a legal issue. They can sit down and work through the legal navigator to answer questions. To get to a fine tune response at the end of an action plan which will spit out what are the options for them in their legal areas.

So that's the technical piece we are also working on creating human capacities, so one of the most exciting things that I think is going on is that our legal aid program has partnered with our university here called Alaska Pacific University, which is in the process of becoming tribal university and partnering with Alaska. A tribal health consortium which is the biggest provider of medical services through the tribal system and they are doing an education project for the community healthy program. So again those are the lay people that have been trained to do a suite of medical procedures. Depending on their training and their certification, now they're getting built into their certification program how to help assess legal issues. And so there's online curriculums being built right now and have been rolled out in several areas so SNAP the food stamp program, denial of those benefits is one because we have identified that. That's a huge issue, people being denied food stamp benefits and that creates a lot of problems in

communities and so teaching the Community health aides to help people identify when there's a SNAP problem and then how to address it. That's the first curriculum that was rolled out. There's also curriculums about debt collection, others are planned with guardianship and housing issues and family issues and so teaching the people in these health clinics how do I address issue spotting on legal issues and then we have this legal navigator that is soon to be rolled out to be the tool to help the non legal providers walk people through what their legal options may be. And so this is all done because we knew who was out there and what the particular connections work. Because we didn't want to reinvent the wheel.

So in closing, we think it's really important to build partnerships and this African proverb if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together really sums it up to me. The theory of the work that we're doing, that I think regardless of what is going on in your state, you could do this on a local level. Depending on the size, like in a city, you certainly can do it. You could do it on a county basis and you can even do it on a state basis, but I think looking at connections between existing organizations is really important. I'm happy at this point to answer questions and I think what I'll do is I will try to stop the screen share. If I can figure out how to do that. OK, that is here. And have I successfully stopped the screen share? Yes, you have Stacey, OK, great.

At at the present time we do not have any questions in the chat, so I'm going to just take the advantage and ask you, can you tell us about the costs involved in this project? Yeah, we had a justice for all grant that was through the National Center for State Courts. Then what I used that money for was to hire people to help me do this work because I was already kind of at my own capacity. So I had a couple folks that were part time. I had a tech fellow through the access to Justice Tech Fellows program, which is a really fantastic research resource which is now run out of the University of Pennsylvania by an excellent guy named Miguel Willis who actually at the time was my tech fellow and that was a really low cost. I think it was about \$5000 for him. We did pay for the GIS mapping with the grant and I actually can't remember exactly the cost, but I would say it might have been, I'm just throwing out this number 'cause I can't exactly remember. I think it was about \$12,000. But after I did that project I realized I might have been able to do that for free because I didn't know at the time that there was GIS specialists who are employed with the city, the municipality of Anchorage, as well as the state of Alaska in their department of Natural Resources and both said they would have helped me with that project. So there may be free resources for that. The Polinode social network analysis was not very expensive. I think it was less than \$5000 for that so. The whole project we had over \$100,000 but a bunch of it was reserved for travel. I think we had about 25,000 to travel around the state and then the rest was so I could hire part time consultants that I put on staff to help me do the work over a period of a year and a half.

Great thank you Stacey. We have some very grateful comments, but I think we're done with questions we really appreciate you presenting early in the morning. For us, we've recorded this and we will make that recording available. Thank you so much, Stacey.

Thank you and good luck with all your really important work that you guys are doing there, thanks.