WAZO App for Peer Mental Health Support

About this Project

My Role: Lead UX Research & Design
Team: 1 Product Manager / 3 Designers

Overview

We transformed a in-person peer counseling service into a digital platform, enhancing accessibility and efficient scheduling. This project aim to offer disclosure environment.

My Skills

Planning and adapting user research
Setting design goals
Creating wireframes, prototyping and profile pages
Creating color palette, icons and illustrations

Background

39% of college students struggle with their mental health & some parts of their college life

Stigmatization and **limited resources** at place

Peer counselors are presenting students from getting the help they need

Wazo started as a **fully in-person service** which pairs trained student mentors with mentees for a well-week counseling program

As its next steps, Wazo seeks to transform the peer counseling program to an online service in hopes of:

1. Set grounds for potential expansion
2. Improve timeliness of support

Research

Research Methods

Peer Mentorship Feedback Survey (50+ responses)

Semi-structured Interviews (6 students, 3 mentors)

Key Insights

There are huge pure in mentorship experiences (motivations and barriers)

- Improper self-advocacy
- Lack of time and energy to commit to mentorship

Low mentee retention (Mentees are more likely to receive meaningful support and benefit in long-term for college)

- Mentees are concerned about being a burden to their mentors
- Mentees are concerned about being judged by their mentors, if they were to use an online platform for mentorship

Mentees are concerned about being a burden to their mentors, if they were to use an online platform for mentorship

Design Requirements

Adapting expectations for counseling effectiveness

Providing timely & accessible support

Creating a safe environment for disclosure

Each designer primarily focused on 1 design requirement, **adapting expectations** (expanding mentorship).

On what aspects do mentor and mentee expectations not align? Why?

Brainstorming

To start with, I revisited the research through another round of affinity mapping to identify mentor and mentees' desires/ concerns/ pain points/ expectations.

What are the aspects of interests?

- Personality
- Mentee Expectations (Trust)
- Conversation Style (empathetic vs solution oriented)
- Emotional Commitment

Why misalign?

- Mentees hesitate to discuss some of the expectations face to face, or many of them can feel very personal

Design Direction?

Help mentors and mentees communicate expectations **asynchronously & at their own pace**

Design Iterations

Solution 1 : Add a expectation - oriented section to the pairing form questions

Initial Concept Testing

Adding expectation questions **leads to more specifics in what they want** and help make sure they get matched with someone who meets their expectations. However, the original pairing flow only include demographics questions. With this guideline from the scheduler counseling unit, **added an expectations & preference section** to the pairing form questions, and tested several concepts with potential users to determine **how to make this form fitting experience feel quick and fun**.

Content

Intro
Expectations & Preferences Questions
Pronouns
Ethnicity
Gender
Sexual Orientation
Relationship Status
Hobbies
Personality
Mentor Preferences
Mentee Preferences
Mentee Preferences
Mentee

Appendix

Personas

ETHAN

Mentee

19, Freshman at UCLA

Extrovert — Introvert
Sensing — Intuition
Thinking — Feeling
Judging — Perceiving

STRUGGLES

First Heartbreak
LGBTQ+ Identity
Freshman Adjustments

GOALS

- Feel less lonely
- Get to know why his past relationship had fallen apart
- Get advices on future emotion regulation
- Meet more new people, particularly those within the LGBTQ+ community

STORY

It is the beginning of a new quarter at school, but Ethan is already finding it hard to pull through. He had a small but close cohort of friends shared with his ex-boyfriend, but after their break-up last week, he suddenly found himself not having anyone he feels comfortable talking to. Overwhelmed by sadness and loneliness, he is no longer able to focus on coursework and other aspects of life.

COPING STRATEGIES

- Ruminate & Reflect
- Seek solace in finding out why frustrating things happen

QUESTIONS & CONCERNS

"Will I scare my mentor away if I start talking about really personal feelings?"

"LGBTQ+ is a small community... I don't want my mentor to accidentally disclose my information to a mutual acquaintance."

"What do I do if I don't like the mentor I get?"

TAM

Mentor

23, Senior at UCLA

Extrovert — Introvert
Sensing — Intuition
Thinking — Feeling
Judging — Perceiving

EXPERIENCES

- 1 year volunteering at UCLA LGBTQ Center
- 6 weeks of mentor training at Wazo

GOALS

- Support more LGBTQ+ students and other minorities
- Gain hands-on experience of counseling

STORY

Being the older sister of a transgender brother, Tam understands how hard it could be for young people struggling with their identities. To help more who are just like her brother, she signed up to volunteer at the school's LGBTQ center. She deeply enjoyed bringing warmth to others and many student she supported describe her as a compassionate listener and an inspiring mentor. She aspires to take the career path of counseling, so that she could provide more professional help to those in need.

COPING STRATEGIES

- Seek distractions
- Focus on other things in life instead of the current frustration

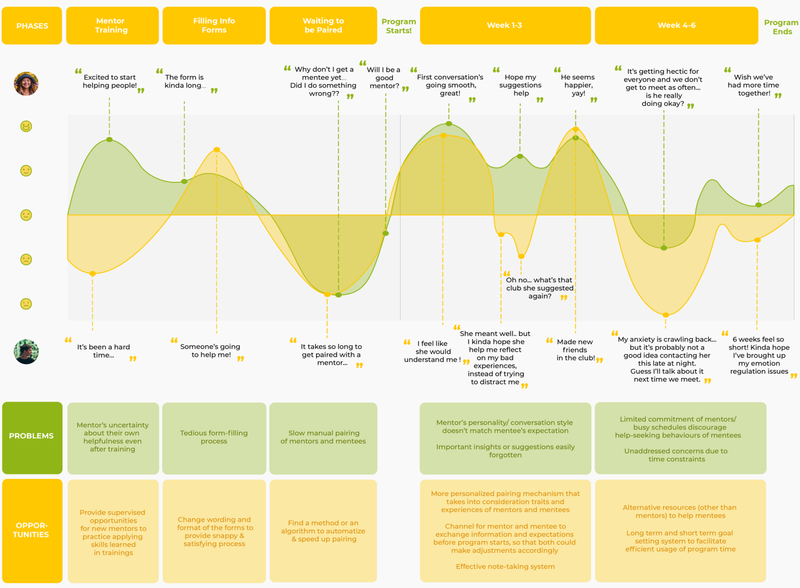
QUESTIONS & CONCERNS

"What kind of person is my mentee? Will we get along?"

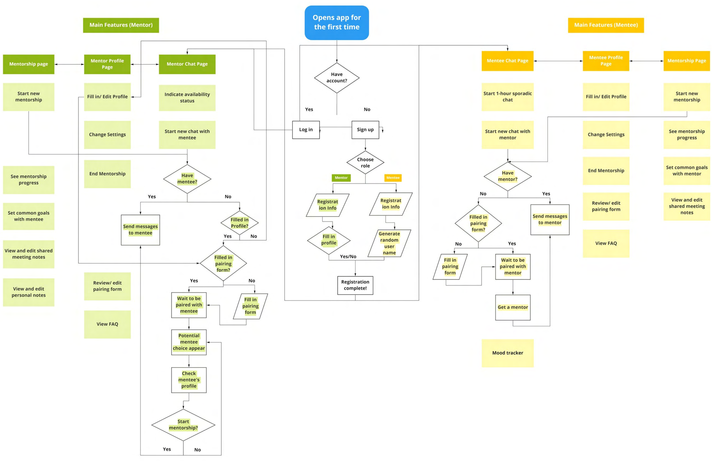
"How do I get my mentee to open up to me?."

"What should I do if I don't think I would be enough to help my mentee?"

User Journey Map



App Site Map



The Problem
For a design team of 3 including me, the challenge was to **transform a 6-week in-person mental health peer mentorship program onto a mobile App** to expand impact and improve mentorship effectiveness. The mobile App was to be created as the first product of a budding startup, which originally started as an organization providing peer mentorship program at UCLA. Goal-alignment meetings with the CEO and PM helped me decide initial directions of the mobile product, while professional advice sought from the counseling unit on campus provided insights on special considerations in approaching our user base.

User Population and Constraints
The user base was primarily college students including those who struggle with their mental health. Therefore, sensitivity should be given to not adding to their existing mental load. Also, since the peer mentorship program has a professionally defined structure and has been running in-person for a few years, we needed to avoid altering it when designing the mobile App. We aimed to build an MVP in a time frame of 3 months, so priorities were given to features that are key to the mentorship experience.

Process
To learn more about how mentors and mentees feel about the in-person program, we analyzed over 50 feedback forms on past mentorships, and condensed several aspects we wanted to know more about through affinity mapping. Afterwards, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 6 past mentors and mentees to further explore their past experiences with the mentorship program.

Initial research revealed 3 major user pain points and each designer was responsible for resolving one. I was solely responsible for tackling the challenge of **expectation misalignment between mentors and mentees**. A second round of affinity mapping and a user-journey map were created to further understand the different aspects of misalignment.

I adopted an Iterative design process towards creating the final prototype. For initial concepts that I'm unsure about, I created sketches and asked for quick verbal feedback. Afterwards, I mapped out several important user flows through wireframing and tested them with 3 potential users before iterating again and creating the high-fidelity prototype. I also resorted to the university counseling unit for feedback on textual content.

Solution
The mobile App MVP allows one to fill in a pairing form, get automatically paired with a mentor/mentee, see one another's identity and preferences, chat during the mentorship while tracking goals and progress. My design contribution was on tackling the **expectation misalignment** pain point through **creating channels** for mentors and mentees to **communicate expectations asynchronously and at their own pace.** I achieved it through adding a preference-oriented section to the pairing form, designing a mentorship page for users to align goals and share notes, as well as encouraging users to display important identities on their user profile. To measure success of this MVP for initial goals on increasing impact and improving mentorship effectiveness, I would measure the change in mentorship enrollment rate after launch on campus, as well as the change in average mentorship satisfaction rating indicated on the mentorship feedback form.

Reflection
One thing I learned was to prioritize design ideas with overall goals and constraints in mind. There were many instances during which I needed to push back on ideas that seemed useful but add to mentees' cognitive burdens or are non-essential to the main mentorship flow. Also, since the App would allow mentors to be reached at any time, I'd like to conduct long-term usability studies (e.g. diary studies) on mentors to see whether the switch to online would overwhelm them with the additional responsibilities.