Case Study

DV Assist: Domestic Violence Website Design Project

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Project overview

The product:

I designed a website for domestic violence victims to find local resources and support called "DV Assist".
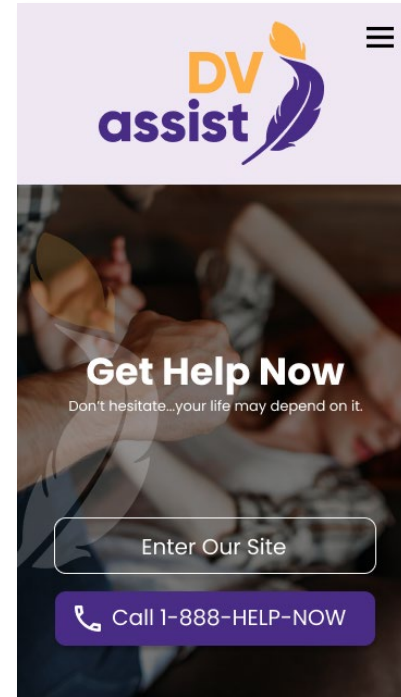
Important note:

After conducting user research it was determined DV victims rarely have access to a mobile phone where they can download an app, only a website will be created.

Project duration:

August – October 2023

Project overview

The problem:

Domestic violence victims have a hard time finding local resources to help them get out of their situation safely.

The goal:

For DV victims to find local resources quickly and safely so they can make a plan, talk to someone, or find local resources.

My roles:

UX designer, UX researcher, and project manager.

Responsibilities:

Initial User Research
Wireframing
Mockups
Prototyping
Usability Study

DV assist

Understanding the user

- User research
- Personas
- Problem statements
- User journey maps

User research: summary

I did a competitive audit for user research. I compared 2 different national Domestic Violence websites to view the functionality, design, and user experience they all offered. I learned a lot about strengths, opportunities, and weaknesses of both websites including **thehotline.org** and **ncadv.org**.

I made assumptions about the steps that a user would take to find domestic violence resources in their area by using a Google Search. I assumed the user would simply search for "domestic violence" or "physical abuse". After the competitive audit I discovered the victims don't use those terms often; especially women who are in denial or don't fully understand the abuse, and/or don't want to leave their abuser.

I found that these websites use phrases like love shouldn't hurt; types of abuse; my boyfriend hurts me; angry girlfriend/boyfriend; I'm not safe; or other such phrases that would be used in a Google Search that need to be used throughout my website so the victims can find the site easily.

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User research: pain points

1

Time

Abuse victims don't have time to do a lot of research. Their lives are stressful and time is limited.

2

Internet Connection

Many abuse victims have an abusive partner who limits their access to the internet.

3

Disabilities

Some abuse victims struggle with physical and cognitive disabilities, and websites that aren't accessible are hard for them to understand and/or read.

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WARNING

The following slides contain graphic images of domestic violence victims. Please proceed with caution. If you or someone you know is a victim of domestic violence please call the **United States national domestic hotline** for help with your situation or for access to resources:

1-800-799-7233

Persona: **Janelle A.**

Problem statement:

Janelle A. is a pregnant mom with 2 kids whose unemployed boyfriend is physically abusive, and she needs access to a website that gives her local resources for her to find help with food and rent if she chooses to leave her boyfriend.

"I want a better life for my kids but I'm never home because I work 2 jobs"

Goals
- Wants to raise her children in a stress-free environment and give them quality education
- Needs to find access to domestic violence resources in her area
- Desires to communicate with a DV advocate who is non-judgmental
- Would like to use a simple website, doesn't need an app

Frustrations
- Doesn't have reliable internet access at her apartment
- Gets annoyed with websites that just list DV statistics and do nothing to help her
- Doesn't know anyone in her area to help her find resources, and doesn't have much time to search

Janelle A.

Age: 24
Education: Some high school
Hometown: Spokane, WA
Family: Has 2 kids, pregnant
Occupation: Works 2 jobs: cashier at big box store and night shift stocker at a local grocery store

Janelle is a 24-year-old young mom of 2 kids living in Snohomish, WA, and is originally from Spokane. She is 6 months pregnant and her boyfriend John is the father. He has physically abused her on a few occasions and recently landed her in the hospital, but Janelle says she can't leave him because he takes care of her kids while she's at work. He doesn't currently have a job. Janelle has called DV shelters in the past and has looked for resources to help but she has little time to do any research. Janelle needs a way to look for emergency DV services using her neighbor's smart phone.

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Persona: **Tanika S.**

Problem statement:

Tanika S. is a stay-at-home mom whose boyfriend is physically abusive, and she needs access to a website that gives her local resources for her to find work and childcare for her baby after she makes a plan to leave her boyfriend.

"I feel trapped in my home. My boyfriend won't let me work and I can't provide for my daughter"

Goals
- Wants access to a computer and phone to do research and to contact her mom who lives far away in another state
- Wants the best possible life for her daughter
- Needs a way to safely and privately get access to DV resources

Frustrations
- Doesn't have a phone or computer at her apartment
- Can only use a public computer at the local library and has to be quick because they close at 9pm and her boyfriend gets off work at 9:30pm
- Gets overwhelmed with the number of DV websites and isn't sure who to contact

Tanika S.

Age: 20
Education: Some high school
Hometown: Chicago, IL
Family: Has a new baby
Occupation: Stay-at-home mom

Tanika is a stay-at-home mom of a baby girl. She has been with her boyfriend Trey, the father of the baby, for 2 years. Trey works long hours as a bus driver for the city of Chicago. Trey is physically abusive. Recently he gave Tanika two black eyes and broke her wrist. Tanika is afraid for her life and is worried about her baby. She needs access to domestic violence resources in her area but doesn't know where to start looking. She is not good with technology. She uses the computer at her local library when her boyfriend is at work, and she doesn't have a cell phone.

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User journey map

Mapping Janelle's user journey revealed how helpful it would be to add buttons to frequently visited pages on the homepage like "make a plan" and "get help now".

Persona: Janelle A.

Goal: access the internet on neighbor's smart phone after work to find domestic violence resources in her area and learn how to make a plan for escape.

| ACTION	Use her neighbor's smart phone to look up DV resources	Opens internet browser on phone	Types in "google.com", searches for "scared of boyfriend"	Finds a long list of websites	Chooses one to look at	Searches the site for ways to make a plan
TASK LIST	a) Gets home late after work, around 11pm b) Finds her kids and her boyfriend are asleep c) Knocks quietly on neighbor's door d) Neighbor opens door and sees Janelle, and gives her the smart phone to borrow	a) Looks for a Chrome icon or an "e" icon for the internet b) Has a little trouble but finds Chrome c) Taps on the icon to open Chrome	a) Even though she can search directly in the open Chrome tab she searches for "google.com" b) Does a few searches, first for "scared of boyfriend"	a) After searching she finds a long list of websites but also sees a 1-800 number at the top of the results b) Scrolls through the long list of websites	a) Searches for a few minutes for DV resources near Snohomish, WA b) Opens the DV website I'm creating	a) Looks at the website homepage b) Searches for "making an escape plan" c) Looks at results, finds online checklists and resources
FEELING ADJECTIVE	a) Stressed b) Nervous c) On-edge	a) Frustrated b) Relieved	a) Angry b) Scared c) Defeated	a) Curious b) Glimmer of hope c) Overwhelmed w/ results	a) Frustrated b) Hopeful c) Sad	a) Hopeful b) Nervous c) Scared
IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES	a) None	a) On android phones make the Chrome internet icon or the Samsung internet icon a default setting on the home screen (not in the long list of apps)	a) SEO: add various keywords and phrases other than "domestic violence" to the website – like "scared of boyfriend", "boyfriend hits me", etc.	a) Learn about the resources offered to her if she calls the 1-800 number before duplicating efforts	a) Add locations to the website SEO so if they search from their location they bring up "Snohomish WA" or "Chicago IL" in the search results	a) Make hotlinks at the top like "make a plan", "emergency resources" b) Add questionnaires so they can find out if they are indeed victims c) Make the site simple

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Starting the design

- Digital wireframes
- Low-fidelity prototype
- Usability studies

Digital wireframes

DV Assist Digital Wireframes
In these mobile webpage wireframes, I used the **Gestalt principle** of **common region** on the success stories page by putting groups of information in boxes so it is obvious that the boxed images and content are related.

As I designed the homepage I wanted to keep a few items in mind that are important to users: they like to see success stories, they need an emergency phone number ever-present, and they want resources listed as buttons or links.

Mobile Site Wireframes
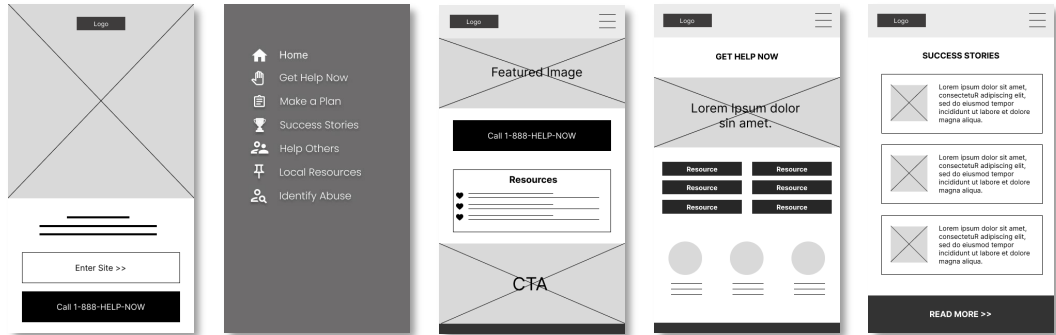
The user research proved that DV victims need to see an emergency phone number at the top

The user research proved that DV victims like to see success stories so they can identify with other victims and feel like successfully leaving is possible

Low-fidelity prototype

DV Assist Mobile Site Prototype

This prototype starts on the initial screen of DV assist. The user will usually go from the initial screen to the homepage, choose from the list of 6 resources or buttons, and find a page they want to view. They also need the 1-888 number on all pages.

Mobile Website
Lo-Fi Prototype
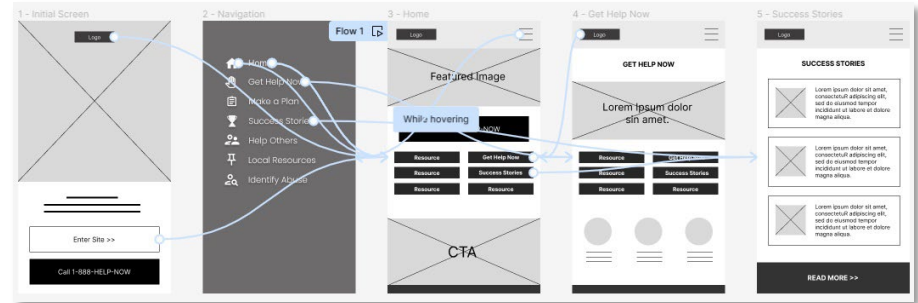
Usability study: findings

A usability study was done for the DV Assist site using 5 participants on September 30th, 2023. They were asked to use the prototype and complete tasks. Then they shared how the experience was for each task. This activity brought to light some common themes of issues the users had using the website, and I discovered insights that will improve the website.

1. I need to add the word "confidential" throughout the site and include a section on it on the "Get Help Now" page

2. the site needs to be reviewed for accessibility – specifically color contrast. The images need to be made darker so the white text over top can be read more easily

3. the colors for all buttons need to be adjusted to be consistent across all screens and match the color scheme

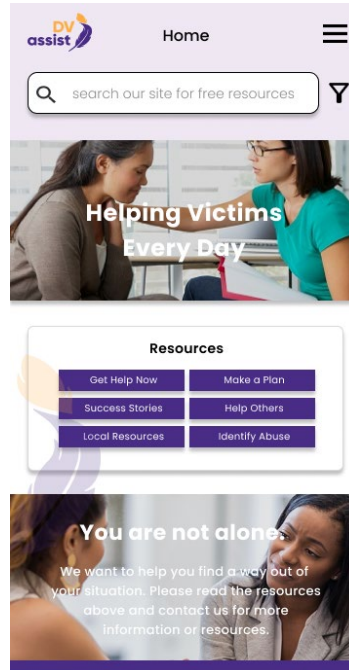4. success stories should be its own page in the navigation

Refining the design

- Mockups
- High-fidelity prototype
- Accessibility

Mockups

Originally I placed white text over images for a modern look. According to results from the usability study, the white text was hard to read and therefore inaccessible. As a result of this insight I made the images darker so the white text is easy to read now. Also, users wanted to see an emergency phone number so I placed it above the fold.
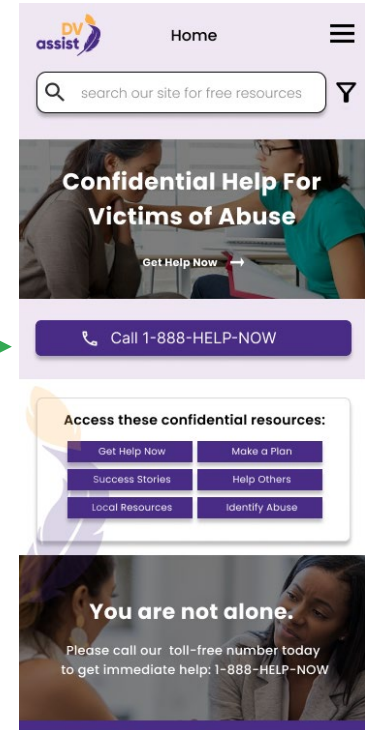
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Home

search our site for free resources

Helping Victims Every Day

Resources

Get Help Now   Make a Plan
Success Stories   Help Others
Local Resources   Identify Abuse

You are not alone.
We want to help you find a way out of your situation. Please read the resources above and contact us for more information or resources.
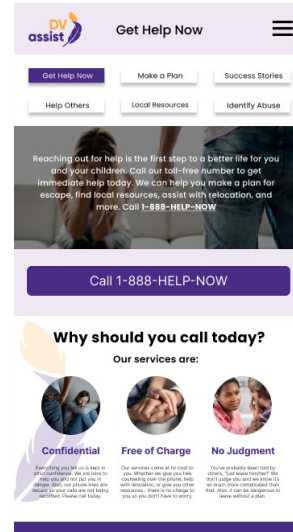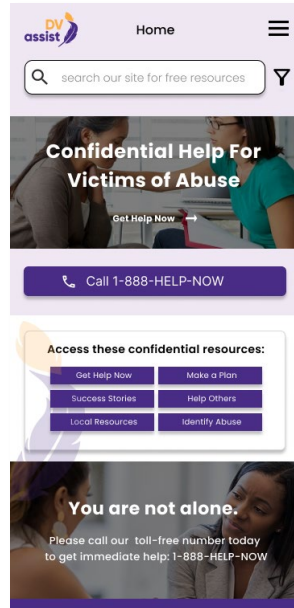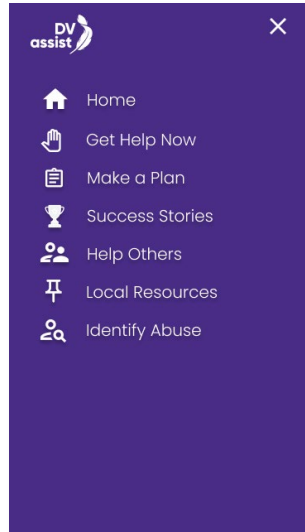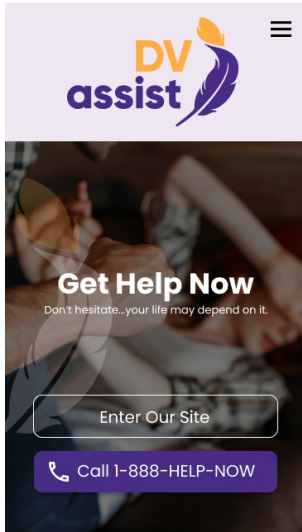
Darker background behind image to make white text more legible for accessibility

Button with emergency phone number above the fold

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Home

search our site for free resources

Confidential Help For Victims of Abuse

Get Help Now

📞 Call 1-888-HELP-NOW

Access these confidential resources:

Get Help Now   Make a Plan
Success Stories   Help Others
Local Resources   Identify Abuse

You are not alone.
Please call our toll-free number today to get immediate help: 1-888-HELP-NOW
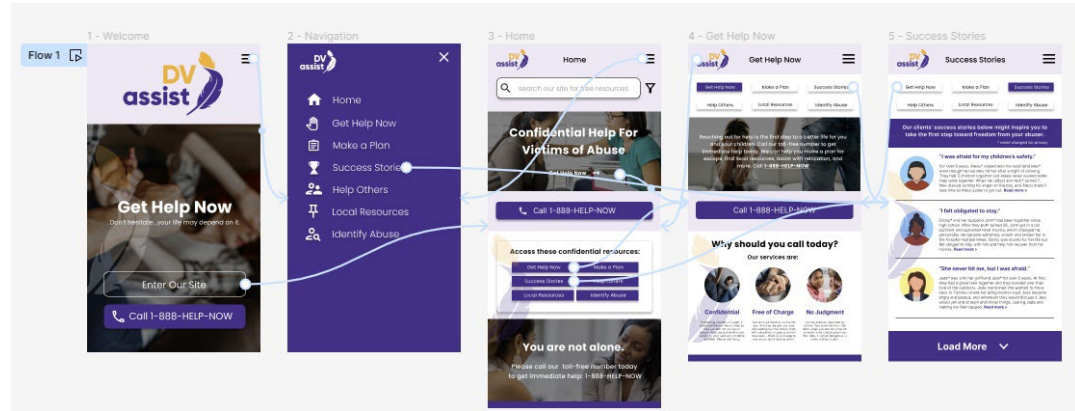
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Key mockups

High-fidelity prototype

[DV Assist Hi-Fi Prototype](#)

This high-fidelity prototype starts on the welcome/splash page of the DV assist site. Images and color are now a part of the prototype. The user will typically go from the welcome page to the homepage and click on a resource in the middle of the screen or click "get help now" in the featured image.

Accessibility considerations

1

I considered color contrast for accessibility. Through the user research I determined that that white text on the darker images worked better for accessibility than white text on regular-color images. The new color contrast worked better for all people, not just for those with low vision or no vision.

2

I chose many icons to use throughout the site for accessibility reasons. If the user has a hard time finding the page they want if they don't speak English or if they have visual impairment, they can easily find the homepage with the home icon, the pin icon for local resources, etc.

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Going forward

- Takeaways
- Next steps

Takeaways

Impact:

After conducting usability studies and refining my designs, one of my users stated,

"now it's easy to see on the site what I need to do and what local resources are available to me."

What I learned:

I learned that all users are different – what works for some users doesn't work for others. I assumed I would be creating an app and a website but after user research I determined an app would be useless because DV victims won't download an app that their partner could find, and don't have the internet access to do it anyway. This was a surprise but good to know as I designed.

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Next steps

1

Continue working on additional pages on the website with wireframes, mockups and prototypes to finish the entire site.

2

Do research for DV resources in each major city across the US so I can create a robust database of resources for users in different areas, making the site extremely useful.

3

Use this case study in my portfolio as I try to get a job in UX design, and link to it in my resume.

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Let's connect!

My name is Melinda Thome. I live in Washington State, and I have an MBA from Northwest University in Kirkland, WA. I have spent 15+ years designing WordPress websites for clients in the Pacific Northwest, and I have been a contract employee at Microsoft on and off since 2007. In my last role I served as a communications and visual design consultant at Microsoft in the sales division.

Because of my love of design and my experience in a large software company I would like to transition to corporate UX design which is why I'm working on the Google UX Design Certificate.

You can reach me via email or you can check out my website:

✉ | 🖥 | in

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Thank You