

Human Centered Design & Personas

Personas provide an innovative, engaging and enduring approach for workers to see the whole client. They can help workers focus on their individual programmatic responsibilities, as well as the perspectives of everyone else who interacts with the client/customer. In short, personas help describe the value of interoperability from a nontechnical, human viewpoint.

Personas embody “human-centered design” principles when they are used to capture the complex and multifaceted needs, wants and interactions of customers. They have been used in industry, including the technology sector, to improve customer understanding, product performance, software design and user acceptance. Stewards of Change believes there is considerable value for health and human services to embrace personas and use them as a way to communicate across an organization, so that everyone can understand the client’s complex needs and incorporate that knowledge into their particular viewpoint and discipline.

Personas can serve as a means to bridge the different program silos that ultimately serve the same client. Understanding the whole range of services that a client can access is beneficial to case workers who are responsible for the health, well-being and/or safety of an individual or family. Personas help workers from program, policy, budget, legal, business and technology viewpoints see the whole person, so they have a common understanding and a clear perspective of the impact of their decisions. Ultimately, this full view of the client can help the organization design and develop more-comprehensive and responsive services and processes, ultimately reducing redundancy, fraud, waste and abuse.

Finally, embedding the persona methodology into an Organizational Change Management process can be used for innovative training purposes. Personas provide a tangible way for workers from across programs and functions to understand various client needs as new programs, models and technologies are developed. As a result, decisions can be made that take into consideration a uniform understanding of a whole person, despite the fact that workers each have responsibility for a small percentage of the client’s needs.

The Benson Family Persona

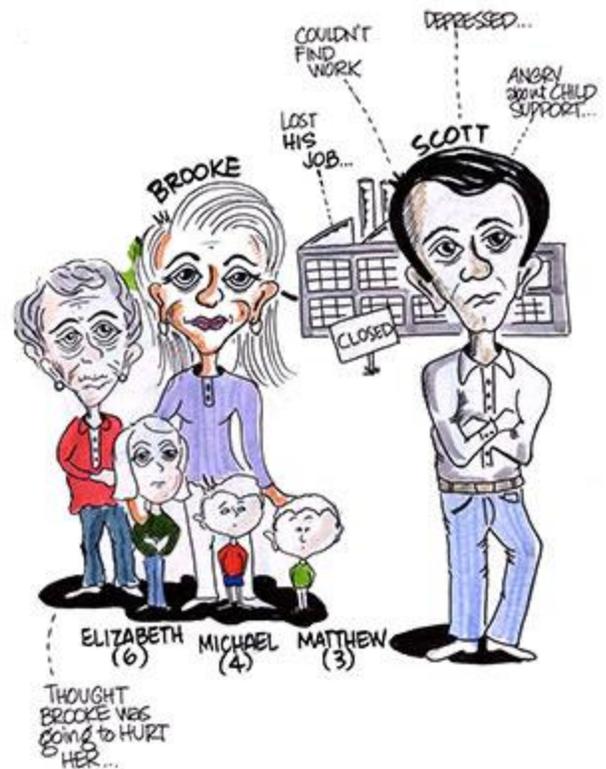
Brooke and Scott Benson were high school sweethearts and have been married for seven years. They have three children: Elizabeth (6), Michael (4) and Matthew (3). They live in a three-bedroom house in Bridgeport that they own. Two years ago, Scott lost his job when the company laid off almost one-quarter of the employees. He could not find other work and, once they exhausted his unemployment compensation, Brooke went to work at a McDonald's.

Scott stayed at home and continued to try to find work but was unsuccessful. Even with Brooke working double shifts, they could not pay the mortgage and the utilities and feed their family, so they decided to apply for benefits at the state Department of Social Services (DSS). Their local Community Action Agency informed them that they were eligible for Medicaid and LIHEAP, but not for TFA or SNAP (food stamps).

Unfortunately, the financial challenges put a strain on their relationship and Scott and Brooke began to argue on a daily basis. Eventually, they lost their house, and due to the continued relationship challenges, Brooke and the three children moved in with her 83-year-old grandmother. Because of her fragile condition, Brooke's grandmother used her first-floor living room as her bedroom, so Brooke and the children slept on the second floor.

Brooke went back to DSS and applied for and began receiving TFA and food stamps for herself and the children. (She also wanted to apply for childcare subsidies for Michael and Matthew, but was told she had to go elsewhere to apply.) As a condition of receiving her benefits, Brooke filed for child support from Scott.

Brooke's living arrangements became unbearable, and there was always a great deal of arguing since Brooke's grandmother did not like how the children were behaving.





Sometimes the arguments were very loud; Brooke's grandmother told her closest neighbor that she thought Brooke was going to hurt her. The neighbor called the Elder Abuse hotline number that she saw on the television, so someone could investigate what was going on in the house.

Meanwhile, Scott became so enraged when he was contacted about child support, he falsely reported to DSS that a man was living in the house with Brooke and that he was supporting her while she was receiving TFA, food stamps and Medicaid. Brooke is now anxious about the future for her children, grandmother and herself.

Brook & Scott Benson Chart

