

## **Stepping in Stigmatized Shoes: Developing Empathy through Design Thinking**

Increasingly, experts agree the ability to identify with the feelings and perspectives of another person, that is, to be empathetic, constitutes the cornerstone of successful problem solving (Kolko 2015; Krznaric 2014; Leonard and Rayport 1997). Cultivating empathy has proven critical in fields such as medicine and social work, where empathic responses are associated with fewer malpractice claims and better patient outcomes (e.g., Gerdes, Segal, Jackson and Mullins 2011). Additionally, a growing number of businesses have begun supplementing diversity and ethics training with empathy training. However, current empathy training largely puts participants in the role of observer. While intervention techniques, including experiential activities where participants literally walk in someone else's shoes, show promise, scaling such efforts can be cost-prohibitive and limited in reach.

The research team of Jane Machin, Natalie Ross Adkins, Elizabeth Crosby, Justine Rapp Farrell, and Ann Mirabito proposes the development of a flexible and scalable simulation app to help consumers, service providers, and public policy stakeholders gain increased understanding of being targets of stigma in the marketplace. By figuratively walking in the shoes of others via an app, more stakeholders can be exposed to the experiences of stigmatized groups, establish empathy, and consequently, transform marketplace practices and public policy.

Following the process of Design Thinking (Kolko 2015; Battarbee, Suri and Howard 2014), the team will be utilizing a participatory action research approach to gather information and generate ideas with community partners, stigmatized consumers, and service providers in the months preceding TCR 2019. Following the discover and define phases of design thinking, work at the conference will focus on ideation and prototyping laying the groundwork for app development and testing during Summer 2019.