

Final Written Report

IMANI UNIDAD

Innovation and Design Thinking
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Abstract

Imani Unidad is a nonprofit in the South Bend community whose focus is to provide HIV and substance abuse prevention, education and advocacy through community efforts. However, Imani Unidad is not limited to these efforts. The goal of the organization is to provide individuals with the tools and resources to become their own best self-advocates. The organization is also not limited to working with individuals who have been afflicted with HIV or AIDS. Instead the organization welcomes any and all who seek its services. One such population is individuals who face societal stigmas as a result of their history of incarceration, and now experience difficulties in attempting to apply for jobs and housing. Thus, our team was tasked with proposing an innovative solution to help these individuals overcome the barriers that prevent them from securing stable housing and employment.

To come up with a solution to this problem, we enlisted the help of individuals who had experienced the problem themselves and those who were familiar with it through their work. Through a combination of expert interviews, individual user interviews, interactive interviews, and immersions we were able to understand the problem from a variety of perspectives. After empathizing with those affected by the problem, we drew three main insights from our research. First, landlords and employers have a hard time trusting individuals who have previously been convicted of a crime. Second, individuals fall into bad behaviors because they are just following the examples that they see around them. And third, these individuals are unmotivated to change their lives because they lack a sense of self-purpose to drive them upward in a positive direction.

From there we were able to define our problem and pinpoint specific issues that were preventing individuals from rebuilding their lives upon being released from incarceration. We developed three guiding principles, which helped us ideate in the next stage of our project. The first principle was to help individuals become their best self-advocate. The second was to help them prove that they are trustworthy. The last principle was to provide them with a support system. Using these principles we developed four ideas to solve the problem. One of these ideas was a journey mapping and goal setting class taught at Imani Unidad. Another idea was a social media website like LinkedIn that allowed landlords and employers to interact with individuals who had been previously incarcerated. We also came up with an idea to put a tracking device on individuals' phones if they were at-risk of being incarcerated, which would alert a mentor when they left their homes at odd hours of the night for extended periods of time. Finally, the last idea was a career fair type event for previously incarcerated individuals where landlords and employers would come together and have the opportunity to meet and talk with applicants.

After consulting with our project sponsor, Debra, we decided to move forward with two of these ideas. We prototyped the journey mapping classes and the social media website using mock up designs. We sought feedback from individuals who would be using these services directly: landlords, employers, and the users themselves. With the testing that we did and the feedback that we collected, we were able to come up with our final solution, which fused these two ideas into one. The final solution that we recommended Imani Unidad use to help clients overcome the tremendous barriers that they face in applying for housing and employment is an online social media platform that allows landlords and employers to see the achievements and skills of individuals who have previously been convicted of a crime, but which can only be accessed by individuals upon their completion of an online curriculum for interactive journey mapping classes.

For a more comprehensive and thorough overview and explanation of the research we conducted, the initial ideas we came up with, and the prototyping we undertook, please refer to the team's online blog, which can be found at <http://sites.nd.edu/innovation-and-design-thinking/category/projects-spring-2017/imani-unidad/>.

Ethnography

The ethnographic aspect of design thinking played a crucial role in driving the success of our project. The initial problem presented to our group was rather abstract as it asked us to help Imani Unidad combat the societal stigmas against individuals who have been previously incarcerated. The ethnographic research played a large role in helping our group understand and identify the stigmas that these individuals face, which in combination make up the barriers that prevent them from securing stable housing or employment. As we delved into our ethnographic research, we quickly learned that individuals who have been previously incarcerated experience tremendous barriers when applying for jobs or housing because they often have to identify themselves as having previously been convicted of a crime on job and housing applications. Thus, our ethnography came to focus around why landlords are reluctant to rent to ex-convicts, and also how a lack of stable housing can really hurt an individual's chances of truly turning over a new leaf. The ethnography helped us develop key insights and principles that our final solution seeks to answer.

A large part of our ethnography was composed of interviews with individuals who hold a role in housing or employment services. For example, interviews were conducted with multiple landlords in the South Bend community. These landlords offered valuable insights as to why they are reluctant to rent to formerly incarcerated individuals; landlords are basically small business owners and renting to individuals who have a history of volatile and risky behavior jeopardizes their business. It just comes down to the fact that many landlords don't feel that they can trust ex-convicts to respect their property and regularly pay rent. They see formerly incarcerated individuals as just an unnecessary liability to their businesses and livelihoods. Additionally, one employer that

we interviewed who owns a small business, and has a history of hiring people who need second chances, said she would be wary about employing a formerly incarcerated individual because of the high levels of trust that she places in her employees. She did not think that an individual with a history of crime could be trusted to handle information that the livelihood of her business depends upon.

We also reached out to community leaders who worked with nonprofits that focus on addressing similar problems that we were working to solve. These community leaders served as a valuable bridge between our project team and the users that we were designing for. Through our conversations with community leaders and experts on the issue, we were able to gather anecdotal evidence of ways in which individuals with a history of incarceration are discriminated against. Due to the sensitive nature of this subject and users' requests for anonymity, the ethnographic research we did on the people who work with these users on a regular basis was most valuable in helping us better understand the problems our users face. Hearing indirect quotes and secondhand accounts allowed us to synthesize concrete stigmas, which we needed to directly address in our solution.

Finally, the ethnographic research that we did on the users themselves gave us further clarity and understanding of the alternative perspective on the issue. The users lacked the confidence and the motivation to turn their lives around because they were used to being told, "No," and they had a hard time finding their purpose in life because they felt rejected by society. By targeting their wants and needs we were able to develop a solution that appeased the concerns of both those applying for housing and employment and those granting it. Overall the ethnography allowed us to fully immerse ourselves in a problem that none of the team members had prior experience with or knowledge of. As third-party ethnographic researchers, we were able to identify the differences between the users and the parties preventing them from getting stable jobs and housing. Ultimately our final solution helps to mitigate the trust issues that landlords and employers have with formerly incarcerated individuals, while giving these individuals a sense of purpose that keeps them motivated to continue searching for housing and jobs.

Industry Trends

The industry in which Imani Unidad operates is a very niche industry with virtually no other player in the South Bend community. The organization primarily serves individuals from the African-American community who are part of a greater at-risk population for incarceration and drug use. In looking at industry trends, we primarily focused on trends for individuals with a history of incarceration as this was the focal point of our project. These trends surrounding previously incarcerated individuals play a pertinent role in furthering the stigmas against this population and creating great hurdles for them to overcome and start their lives anew. First of all, individuals who have been released have a high chance of being re-arrested. The Bureau of Justice Statistics completed a study that tracked over 400,000 prisoners from 30 states after they were released in

2005.¹ Within the first three years of their release, 67.8 percent of these individuals had been re-arrested; and within five years of their release, 76.6 percent had been re-arrested. And of those re-arrests, 56.7 percent occurred within the first year.

In turning to how past incarceration affects housing and employment opportunities, we again see that individuals who have previously been incarcerated are more likely to be homeless and more likely to be denied jobs. With a large number of employers running background checks and including a question on applications that asks about prior convictions, we see unemployment rates of over 60 percent amongst individuals who have been released within the past year.² For those male ex-offenders who are able to secure employment, they work less weeks and make 40 percent less in wages per year than men who had never been convicted of a crime.³ Furthermore, the risk of homelessness is greater for people who have been incarcerated and the risk for incarceration is greater for those who are homeless. Of the incarcerated population, 15 percent have a history of homelessness; whereas only 5 percent of the general population have experienced homelessness.⁴ And without stable housing, homeless people are arrested more frequently, incarcerated for longer periods of time, and re-arrested at higher rates than those who do have stable housing.⁵ It is evident from these statistics that a history of incarceration negatively impacts an individual's ability to get a job or find stable housing.

We found that other nonprofits that work at solving these problems often do so from a more legislative perspective. They are active in lobbying and petitioning governments and legislative bodies to change the policy on housing and employment so that it would be more friendly towards individuals with a history of incarceration. As a relatively small nonprofit operating in the South Bend community, Imani Unidad's resources are limited when it comes to changing policy for individuals who have previously been convicted of a crime. So in studying industry trends, we instead sought out other services that helped individuals find jobs and housing and paralleled our solution to these models. The social media type platform presented in our solution is a program that would allow formerly incarcerated individuals to tell their story and show how they have changed since their release from incarceration. The site would be a LinkedIn-Twitter hybrid, albeit on a much more local scale, with user profiles for each of Imani Unidad's clients that include relative skills and interests endorsed by the organization. Potential landlords and

¹ Durose, Matthew R., Alexia D. Cooper, and Howard N. Snyder, "Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 30 States in 2005: Patterns from 2005 to 2010 (pdf, 31 pages)," *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report*, April 2014, NCJ 244205.

² Joan Petersilia, "When Prisoners Return to the Community: Political, Economic and Social Consequences," *Sentencing & Corrections* (9) (2000): 3, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/184253.pdf>.

³ Bruce Western and Becky Pettit, "Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility," *The Pew Charitable Trusts*, 2010, http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pes_assets/2010/collateralcosts1pdf.pdf.

⁴ Greenberg GA, Rosenheck RA. Jail incarceration, homelessness, and mental health: a national study. *Psychiatr Serv* 2008;59(2):170-7.

⁵ HCH Clinicians' Network, "Keeping Homeless People Out of the Justice System," *Healing Hands* 8(6): Dec. 2004, http://www.nhchc.org/Network/HealingHands/2004/HealingHands12_17_04.pdf.

employers would be able to view their profiles so that they could gain a better understanding of the individual's character beyond what is indicated by their application, which highlights their history of crime. Also, before being allowed to create a profile, all users will be required to complete an interactive journey mapping class on the Imani Unidad website. This class will also be targeted towards at-risk populations within the community to help these people fully understand the potential ramifications of their choices and actions.

The social media industry is still relatively nascent, but it has gained quick traction since its inception in the early 2000's. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and more, all serve to bring people together through news feeds that allow aspects of their personal lives to be shared. People post picture and status updates and share news stories or videos. Only until recently, with the creation of LinkedIn, has the social media industry shifted off into a more professional direction. Employers can search for hopeful employees via profiles that include relevant skills and qualifications, in the hope of finding adequate candidates. This idea of a professional social media platform is the inspiration for the recommended service for Imani Unidad. It would really attack the multifaceted and highly correlated problems their clients are facing regarding unemployment and homelessness.

Next Steps

The next steps for this concept would be for Imani Unidad to further test the idea and gain feedback for it from a larger pool of their clients. We were not able to fully test the service among the target users due to accessibility and time restrictions. A lot of the individuals who would be taking these classes and using the social media platform are under certain restrictions, which prevent them from leaving their homes for anything other than work, medical appointments, and group counseling such as the Peer2Peer Group. They are also lower income individuals and do not have easy access to other forms of communication such as emailing and text messaging. We also were not able to test the service with as many employers and landlords as we had initially intended to. We had trouble getting in contact with many employers and landlords as many of them were unresponsive to our phone calls and emails. Furthermore, the sample that we did receive feedback from was very limited and not representative of the types of housing and employment opportunities that would be presented to individuals with a history of incarceration. Also, some research should be conducted to gauge the interest in the online class aspect of the service among at-risk populations. Individuals in this at-risk population might be less inclined to participate in these online journey mapping classes because they have yet to hit that rock bottom spot, which is what has driven a lot of the individuals that we spoke with to turn their lives around.

If the concept gathers positive feedback from clients and the public, Imani Unidad could move forward with obtaining funding through grants and then hiring a website designer and developer to build the interactive journey map class and social media platform. They would then have to sit down with each client who has completed the journey

mapping classes to create a user profile on the social media platform. At that point, the site will be ready to be opened up for local businesses and landlords to join and view the client profiles. To make this service most beneficial to both the users and their potential employers and landlords Imani Unidad would simultaneously need to launch a marketing initiative that would garner it better name recognition throughout the community. Furthermore, it would need to partner with other trusted organizations in the area and invite them to participate in the social media platform as well in order to build its reputation. If these more well known organizations could endorse individuals, the service would seem more trustworthy as a whole and users would likely see more results in terms of receiving interviews or getting approved for housing.

Business Model Canvas

The Business Model Canvas		Designed for: Imani Unidad	Designed by: Luke Muldoon, Victoria Velasquez, Wen Cong Toh	On: dd/mm/yyyy
				Iteration #
Key Partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local, state, and federal government for grants - Local employers (i.e. Walmart, Meijer) - Housing Authorities - Landlords and property managers - AIDS Ministries - Nonprofits serving similar populations - Web designers 	Key Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintaining website and expanding features to make the end goal of finding housing/work easier for formerly incarcerated and at-risk individuals - Create and update social media type feed of current ongoing successes of these individuals 	Value Propositions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The product is a social media type site that provides information such as skills and aspirations to employers and housing authorities that is legitimized by required classes and key partnerships - This provides value to the user as it aids them in mitigating their negative past so they may progress and build a more meaningful life 	Customer Relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The customer relationships stem to the profiles created after completing the classes - Continued relationships would either be indirect with the customers via employers or direct by continued use of the site 	Customer Segments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide a platform for individuals that struggle with finding work and/or housing due to history of incarceration - Individuals aged 18 and above that have been previously incarcerated and are thus trying to turn their life around in a positive way - The service can also be expanded to those younger than 18 as well as to those who have not been convicted but are at risk of being convicted in the future
		Key Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grants are the biggest resource we rely on as they will be used to create and fund the product until it may become self sustaining - Other crucial resources lie in the partnerships we have to legitimize the program 	Channels <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The channels to reach the final users are through internet services to have an active profile, thus through any device that can reach and internet the website - To gain access to the site and create a profile, the class must be completed which is also through computer 	
Cost Structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The service will be created and maintained from a pro-bono standpoint and thus all relevant costs would be to wages for technical upkeep as well as any other associated costs of rolling out the product. These costs will be funded from grants received and donations from partnerships. 			Revenue Streams <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revenue from specific employers and housing authorities that decide to advertise on the website to gain more exposure and thus more employees or more tenants (these firms would have already got on board with hiring individuals who have been previously convicted) 	

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