

Initial Project Proposal

Moving is rarely a pleasant process, especially when you are moving a long distance from home, and the process isn't over when you unpack your last box. You are still in an unfamiliar environment, surrounded by an unfamiliar community. This can turn an already unpleasant experience into a stressful, antisocial nightmare. Local communities are often willing and excited to incorporate new members, but do not have the tools to easily do so. That disconnect is where we want to focus our work. The U.S. Census Bureau states ~40 million people move residence every year, greater than 14 percent of the entire U.S. population. Over 16 million move outside of their county, and nearly 8 million move out of state. This is a large pool of people uprooting from old neighborhoods and forced to make new ties. Now, with more and more social activity moving online, new movers can feel more isolated than ever. This problem is challenging because it is trying to help connect stressed and tired users with communities that do not know them, who perhaps are more used to online communication. That said, it is vital to the health of all local communities (and individuals) to accept new members and grow. Right now, however, communities are forced to work with outmoded and ill-fitting tools that do not properly equip them to deal with new movers.

We specifically want to look at people moving to a new urban environment, as this is where these social disconnects happen most frequently. Also, we want to look specifically at a single city in this project (Seattle) so that we can narrow our focus, though the project could certainly be expanded to cover multiple cities and countries. Right now moving to a new city is often a welcome fresh start, a forced spring cleaning that lets people reset their image and mental view. We don't want to take this away, but rather give these people the tools to build up their new communities in their new home. There are many city-specific apps and websites that exist to pass on local knowledge, however these come from places of transportation (such as OneBusAway) or travel (such as the "Seattle Essential Guide" or other tour-guide apps). These either solve specific problems for locals, such as bus transit, or give wide-sweep knowledge about the city for tourists. None of these touch on the specifics of new movers to a city, with the kind of information or networks they need. Most importantly, however, none of them involve the community, just the user. Moving companies such as Moveline or Redfin give details on local communities, eateries, neighborhoods and educational districts, but again do not involve communities and are focused on the process of moving in, not what happens next. Elements of all these are successful in how specific they are to the individual city and neighborhoods; but when we bring the locals into the conversation, we can dramatically change the effectiveness of these tools, for the better.

We can imagine a newly graduated student moving to their first full-time career out of state or country; this is not an uncommon concept, especially to many of us at the UW. The challenges one might face can seem insurmountable and perhaps even so off-putting as to make this newly graduated student reject an out-of-state offer! However, if they do accept, there are the immediate challenges of finding and preparing reasonable housing, driver's licenses,

documentation, or visas. But this is certainly not all as local drug, alcohol, traffic, and other laws are expected to be understood without ever being taught. That is not even touching on the social, educational, transportation, spiritual, etc. expectations that one community might have that others would not. All of these things are never taught to new movers, and they are supposed to learn all of these things without a local support community! However, if there was a technology that would help these locals get in touch with newcomers from out-of-town, some of the classic mentality of welcoming your new neighbor with cookies at the door might be brought into the age of social networking. Locals would get to share their knowledge and help new movers and the new movers would not be so isolated and unknowledgeable. This is where we feel our solution can fit in, and why we feel this bridge needs to be built.