

# ARYA ABDOL

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Dear Bridgeable program:

Thoughtful gifts are often valued more than those that are expensive because of the intention and understanding behind them. Similarly, human-centered design gives people the power to understand and frame challenges in a way that can create thoughtful, meaningful results. It is a means of using methods that don't scale, to generate ideas and solutions that do. I am writing to express my interest in the Design Strategy position for the 2016 Designership program to do just that.

I've had a taste of experience in human-centered design, after completing IDEO's *Design Kit* course and applying principles to my work and independent projects. Throughout my professional and educational career, I've accumulated a breadth of diverse skill sets, from secondary research, rapid prototyping, and computer programming, to community outreach, peer facilitation, and event planning. Although my experiences are fragmented, as a whole, they have moulded a "prototype" of myself that has improved with every success and failure. I hope to use the Designership program as an opportunity to unite these experiences to further validate and strengthen my "prototype." Ultimately, I hope to build a career in design research and strategy to tackle challenges in resource-limited settings, where design thinking is of the utmost importance given the constraints.

From my time working in a small start-up environment, I aim to bring to the Designership team flexibility, resilience, and an outcome-driven mindset. To a service design-centric firm like Bridgeable, I bring a passion for improving health services and infrastructure from my education and involvement in mental and global health. If given the opportunity, I aim to contribute to my team in a capacity that not only exercises my strengths, but more importantly, in one that complements the needs and dynamics of our collaborative effort. I hope to have this opportunity to work with the Designership team at Bridgeable to take part in thoughtful design. Thank you for your time, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

**Arya Abdool**

# ARYA ABDOL

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## MISSION

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Through the Design Strategist position, I want to practice my love for doing things that don't scale, to discover solutions that do.

## SKILLS

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**Design:** Secondary Research, Literature Review, Human Centered Design, Agile Project Development, Rapid Prototyping

**Technical:** HTML5, CSS3, JavaScript, jQuery, Bootstrap, Sass, Git/GitHub

**Organizational:** Team Leadership & Collaboration, Peer Facilitation, Community Outreach, Educational Outreach, Event Planning

## EDUCATION

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09/10 – 06/15 University of Toronto, St. George Toronto, ON

- Honours Bachelors of Science – Neuroscience Major
- Physiology Minor
- Buddhism, Psychology & Mental Health Minor

08/15 – 11/15 Bitmaker Labs Toronto, ON

- Part-Time Course in Front End Development

01/15 – 04/15 Acumen+IDEO Toronto, ON

- Design Kit: The Course for Human Centered Design

## EXPERIENCE

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09/14 - Present MultiMension Incorporated Toronto, ON

### *Full-Time/Part-Time Research & Development*

- Recruited potential users, conducted interviews and co-led a focus group to better scope the problem of women's financial literacy. Used research findings to create personas to communicate users' needs to team.
- Produced a secondary research analysis report that aided in the company's finalist rank in the Communitech Women Entrepreneurs Bootcamp, winning a \$5,000 cash prize.

- Co-created and validated a paper prototype for a job-matching tool for individuals with developmental disability and their potential employers.

11/15                      Break Poverty Hackathon                      Toronto, ON

*Team Member: Researcher*

- Conducted secondary research around information inaccessibility in rural Kenya, ideated possible mobile SMS solutions for information retrieval, and created use cases for the final solution – a health information broadcasting network.
- User-tested the ease of onboarding of the solution, and drove improvements to make the process simpler, as well as to make remote-subscription to the SMS service possible for end-users.
- Created system map to visualize how end-users would be on-boarded, and how our solutions would be navigated through.

11/14                      Toronto Thinks Case Competition                      Toronto, ON

*Team Competitor*

- Conducted secondary research and a stakeholder analysis to propose a community-based intervention to alleviate maternal mortality in rural Afghanistan in light of geographic, cultural, and political limitations.
- Produced a simplified Gantt chart to project a timeline and milestones, and created a plan for impact assessment after project implementation.

09/11 – 04/15      UofT West Indian Student Association                      Toronto, ON

*President, Community Outreach Director*

- Created a partnership with other student groups and Toronto Caribbean community leaders, which resulted in \$1,500 in grant funds and 40 donated Caribana costumes, respectively, for the club's first ever Caribbean culture and fashion show.

02/14, 02/15      Student Voice Project                      Toronto, ON

*Peer Facilitator, Participant*

- Facilitated open discussion and activities with participating students to demystify the stigma around mental health, particularly in a university setting, and to foster a safe community for those experiencing mental health issues on the University of Toronto campus.

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INTERESTS

Global Health, Dessert Making, Biking, Travel, Photojournalism

Board Games, TV Comedy, Humans of New York

## Portfolio Piece 1

### Designing a message



The first step of an application process is quite a challenge to take on. I believe it's the most difficult part of the hiring process for applicants, because it means finding just the right balance of personality and professionalism to get a chance at an interview. Even more of a challenge is trying to distinguish yourself from dozens of other applicants who are trying to do the very same thing.

#### All my ambitions

When I learned that the Designership application criteria weren't just your standard cover letter and resume, I was excited to have a chance to really make my application more than paper and ink (or rather, only a PDF).

In my excitement, I couldn't help but think of all the possible ways I could demonstrate to the Designership hiring team how amazing I was. I wanted to create something unique that would really stand out. Because I am not a visual designer, I decided to focus my energy on a process by opting to create a design research project around the question:

*"How might I improve the application-reviewing process for employers undergoing the hiring process?"*

I set out creating a plan for the entire process, outlining assumptions I had about the experience and questions I wanted to have answered. I scouted LinkedIn for content written by hiring managers, human resources representatives, and designers about "Things employers wish every job applicant knew,". Since I wanted to create a personal website for my application, I read a fair share of user experience design guidelines and handbooks. I reached out within my small personal network to learn from anyone who had ever been involved in a hiring process.

It wasn't until I chatted with someone who was very involved in service design that I realized I wasn't conducting my research process well. I was very interested in her experience so I had asked about the common challenges she faced and how she often can across them. She really had had the opportunity to understand who she was solving a problem for, and was able to describe users' challenges as if she had experienced them herself. My design process wasn't bringing me closer to an understanding of the Designership hiring team; it was allowing me to keep guessing, which wasn't enough. I realized my efforts

were bringing me closer to a solution. I didn't want to undermine the power of a well thought-out research and design process by presenting a poorly executed one. That was not the message I wanted to send.

### **Pivot, pivot, pivot!**

It was shortly after that I realized processes take shape in many different forms. I pivoted to focusing on designing a message, rather than a much more tangible application, because I believed I could present that process with greater strength. Describing a (unfortunately) poorly executed design process in my portfolio just because it is a process did not make it better than any other. Sometimes, even the worst ideas sound brilliant when they're first introduced. Sometimes, a brilliant idea becomes a nightmare due to poor execution. Processes are meant to guide people to the right discoveries, decisions, and actions, and in order to do that, they may need to change their course. Although it wasn't the easiest choice to abandon my original idea, the decision helped guide my process of creating a message for this application –that every prototype, much like myself, needs a chance to be validated because the faster you fail, the sooner you can learn to succeed.

## Portfolio Piece 2

# The Break Poverty Hackathon

Since 2007, countless Kenyans have been using their mobile phones to deposit, withdraw, and transfer money, as well as pay for goods and services. In 2014, North Americans were impressed with the release of Apple Pay.

### A pool of potential ideas

With this premise, our team of 6 was challenged to use the power of SMS to address issues surrounding health, education, and agriculture in rural Kenya. We interviewed as many Free the Children staff (who'd be implementing the solution) as we could at the time, and conducted secondary research around the issues in Kenya to ideate a pool of potential solutions:

- *Idea 1:* Food waster redirection from farmers to schools
- *Idea 2:* Girls education in agricultural business, to empower the women of the future
- *Idea 3:* A targeted health information network, to maximize the reach of health infrastructure
- *Idea 4:* Farm equipment sharing, to increase crop production by giving farmers access to the right tools

### Choosing an idea to run with

With 48 hours to produce a solution, we had to prioritize our ideas and choose one. Despite the fact that a majority of our ideas fell under agriculture, we chose to prioritize the health sector. Our goal was to create something that would have high impact and that Free the Children could realistically implement. From our stakeholder interviews, the idea that health clinics were at the center of the communities resounded with us – and health was something applicable to everyone.

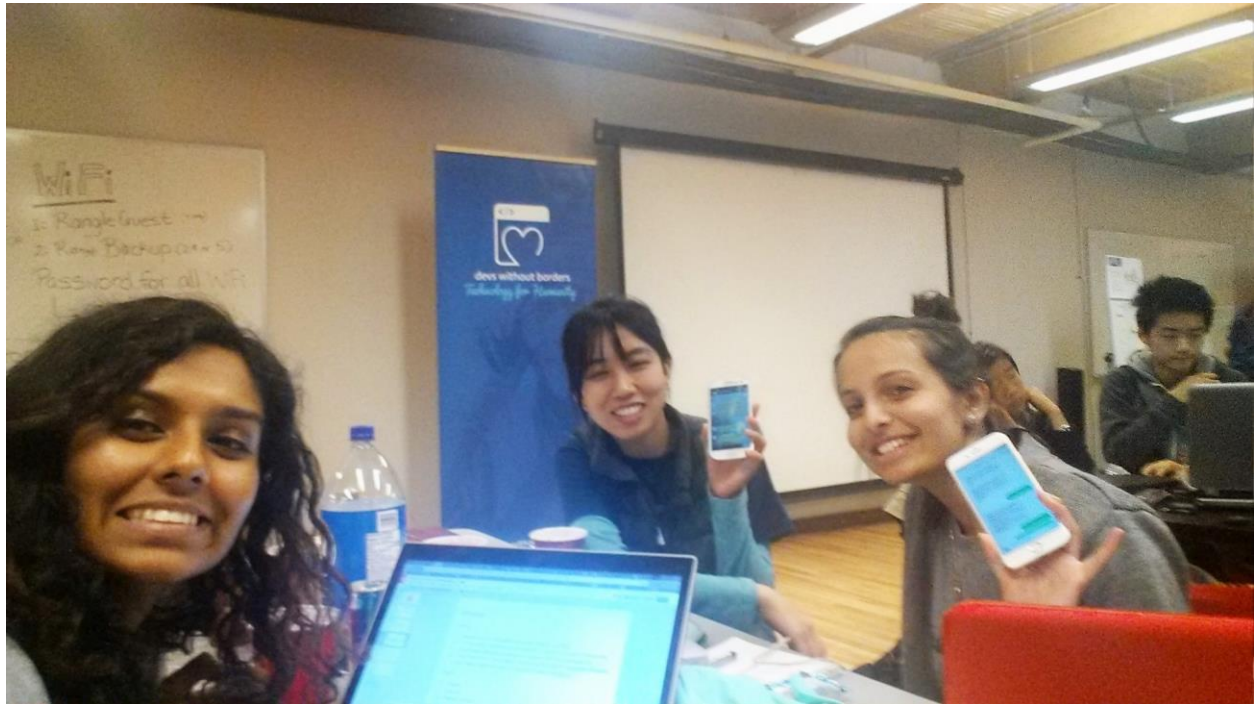
### Refining the idea

We decided to answer the question: *How might we improve access to health information in rural Kenya by facilitating an SMS community network?*

To really frame our problem and pinpoint the solution we were going to “hack” together, we revisited our initial notes from our interviews and secondary research. Throughout the early stages of the challenge, we also consulted Kenyan hackathon participants in Nairobi, who would have a better understanding of the context. After piecing together bits and pieces of information, we gained valuable insights that help guide the features of our SMS networks.

- *Insight 1:* Ease & Efficiency
  - o Clinics were over-burdened with responsibility and information was distributed manually via travelling outreach workers
- *Insight 2:* Timely Response
  - o Individuals needed timely and situationally-relevant health information and resources; distance was a huge barrier to access
- *Insight 3:* Prevention & Control
  - o Prevention and control information for injuries and disease outbreaks were found to

After our developer team created the initial prototype, I recruited some event volunteers to test for basic usability and ease of user onboarding. From this, we learned that even for advanced mobile phone users, onboarding was difficult to navigate and too lengthy for situations where immediate access might be necessary.



*1: Partial-team selfie with one of our user-testing recruits, and pushing over 24 hours without sleep.*

### **The final product: Zote**

An SMS-based information broadcasting network to connect community members to timely health information when they have limited access to health professionals. Individuals have greater independence in their care management, and are better equipped to control and prevent disease, and address emergency medical situations. Clinic staff, our other end users, can more efficiently deliver relevant information to the masses. In the end, information gaps are filled, regardless of distance and manpower.



## Portfolio Piece 3

### Becoming a musician

I once wore a hat with plumes and was a part of every music group you could imagine: concert band, theatre orchestra, jazz ensemble, and competitive marching band. I'm proud to say I was a band geek. I learned perseverance, attention to detail, history, improvisation, and creativity –but most importantly, I learned how to be a part of a team.



### Going solo

When I first began taking music seriously, I would practice for hours, learning scales, chords, and fingering techniques on my flute and tenor sax to perfect the fundamental basics. I had always wondered how the greats were so great –and I eventually learned (with help from an awesome teacher) that they had mastered the basics to lay a strong foundation for their creative expression. After doing musical drilling for hours on my own to improve my sound and mechanics, gradually my muscle-memory grew stronger, and I could hear improvements when I played in our ensemble.

### Contributing to the ensemble

As I became better at the basics, I came to appreciate music as more than a sum of parts made of musicians, instruments, and compositions. In every performance and practice, our director would give direction and cues to instrumental groups and sections, never just one person. I learned that a good musician was someone who



could play their part well, while a great musician could understand their role in the greater scheme of a piece, and how it fit with others' roles. Every instrument and musician has a distinctive voice, but good communication within a group is more about listening and responding than it is about speaking.

### **Considering the dynamics**

In my experience, every ensemble starts off fragmented, with competing voices. Everyone wants to have a solo; everyone wants to take a break when they have to hold a really, *really* long note. Because most communication is unspoken in music, team dynamics are essential to understanding when individual members should shine or rest while others support.

Great musicians, who can mould to musical dynamics, can unite a fragmented group into a harmonic ensemble. Great musical ensembles leverage and understand the importance of every member's role, no matter how big or small, loud or quiet.

Thank you.

**ARYA ABDOL**

Design Strategy Applicant

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