



## A Neighborhood Childcare Solution

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# Abstract

CommUNITY is a program where families provide childcare for one another in neighborhood pods. Background checks and interviews are performed on all participants before they can join a pod. The program aims to address the need for childcare for working parents and in low-income communities.

## Key Words

Childcare | Service | Unity



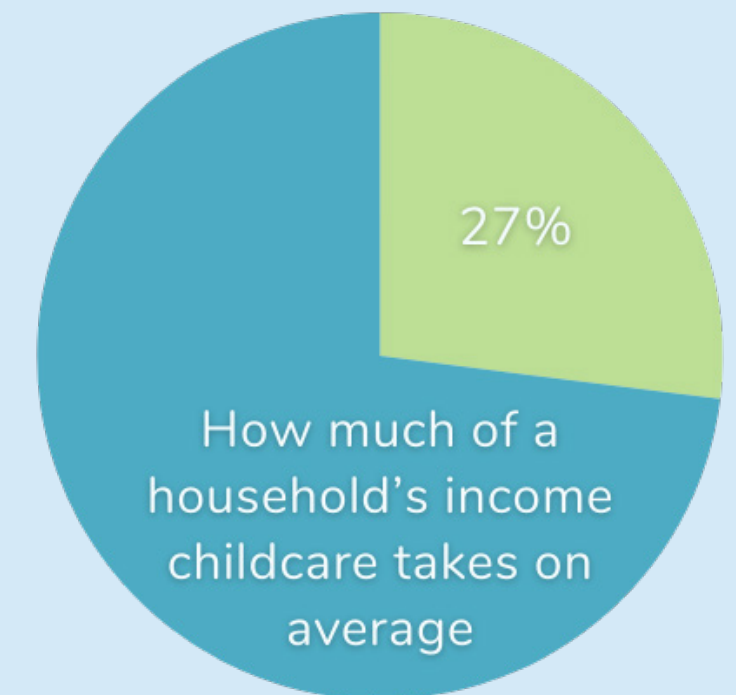
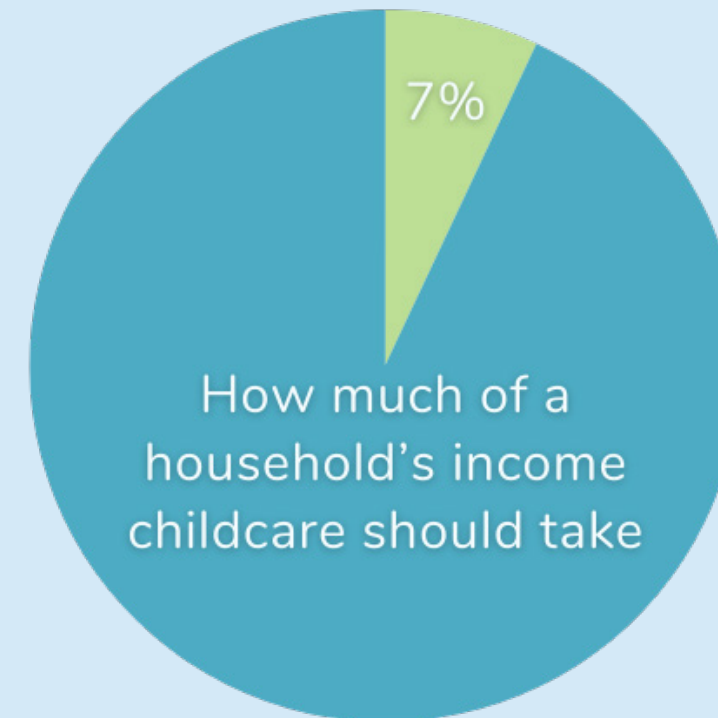
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# Introduction

The U.S. considers childcare affordable when it takes less than 7% of a household's total income. Despite this, the average American family spends 27% of their household income on childcare (Sola, 2023). Only 6% of companies in the US offer any childcare benefits. When childcare was added for Patagonia workers, they saw 100% retention in the workforce of working parents (Roddy, 2020). With this in mind, how can childcare be redesigned to be affordable and integrate generational connection?

This is what led to the creation of CommUNITY, a service-based design that connects communities to provide childcare for one another. An app acts as the scheduler for all participants. All users must undergo a background check and interview before they can join a pod. Once in a pod, each family unit must provide at least two slots of care time where they are available to watch other's children. This keeps the service free while ensuring equity.



# What is the Problem?

The primary problem being addressed with this design is that parents cannot afford childcare. This leads to the problem statement:

**Parents need a better approach to childcare that is affordable and community-based.**



# Type of Environment

## *Interface*

A mobile application will be the primary interface, but it serves as a scheduling tool. The majority of interactions through this service will be in-person.

## *Integration*

The service would reach out to existing organizations, such as PTAs, Fit4Mom Workout Groups, and related community-based social networks and find someone to spearhead a care pod in each community. A stipend would be provided to pod leaders to keep the groups afloat.

## *Holistic*

Childcare and community are the primary themes of this service.

In evolving childcare to be community based, neighborhoods create a deeper sense of belonging.



# Proposal

What can be designed to improve the lives of parents so they experience less burnout with affordable childcare?

The idea for the CommUNITY service is to create a community-based care network where neighborhoods come together by sharing childcare duties. It is unique in that it has a community-centric approach to childcare rather than only allowing those with financial means to access the care they need. Background checks are conducted on all participants and interviews are held before users can join a community pod. In the future, the service would also work with employers to facilitate this community-based care so the burden is not on parents and care-takers to negotiate a better work-life balance. Households must also provide two open slots of care time per week to ensure equity in this free service.



# Comparative Market Analysis

## *Product Positioning Mapping Matrix*

Competitors	Cost	Availability	Community-Centric	Logistics	Vetting Process
<b>Daycare Centers</b>	High Cost	Daytime/Working Hours	Somewhat	Only During Set Hours	Hiring is typically thorough and well regulated
<b>Nannies</b>	High Cost	On-Call	No	On-Call	Subjective based on parent opinion
<b>Workplace Accomodations</b>	N/A	Sometimes flexible, often not	N/A	Must be self-advocated	
<b>Proposed Solution (CommUNITY)</b>	Low Cost	Rotates with availability of parent/caretaker community	Yes	Flexible	Background checks and compatibility interviews

CommUNITY is different from existing market solutions because it is free and community-based.



# Concept Features

## *Neighborhood Pods*

One parent or retiree will spearhead the program and begin recruitment. During testing, these people will be sourced from existing community network groups. Interested participants will sign-up and undergo a background check. Once their background check is cleared, they will link with other participants in their neighborhood that are looking to start a childcare pod.

## *Application Interface*

Neighbors support one another and create a community with convenient childcare pods. Scheduling is done in a convenient application that imports existing schedules and matches for compatibility.

# User Design and Experience

The service is centered around a community-based design and experience, where scheduling is facilitated in an app, but all other interactions take place in person. Community members would become aware of pods in their neighborhood through word of mouth marketing at community centers and similar organizations. They would then download the app, sign up and complete the background check, and join a care pod in their community by interviewing current participants and importing their availability.



# Design Description

The process of the service would occur as follows:

- The service would choose a parent to lead pod creation for a specific community.
- Background checks are run on everyone during signup before they are able to participate.
- Care would not begin until an introductory meeting occurs where allergies, needs, etc. are discussed.
- The scheduling system would pair people based on availability.
- Scheduling would occur one month in advance to ensure consistency and reliability for the children's safety and security. The scheduling system will take into account the children and parent's lifestyles.
- Parents must provide two slots of caretaking time per week to be able to participate in the care share program.

Interaction in the app would occur as follows:

- During promotion, leaders would share a QR code that leads to a landing page where potential users can download the app.
- After download, users would sign up by providing information on the demographics (age, gender, allergies) of their children and their needs (if applicable), and then be led to complete a background check through the BeenVerified service.
- Once their background check clears, they will be invited to join a care pod with an introductory interview meeting with the existing participants. The existing pod will decide if the applicant fits well into the needs of the group and will then extend an invitation to join their shared scheduler.
- One month in advance, schedules will be sent out for all participants. As changes are needed, they will be requested through the platform.

# Product Inspiration and Drivers

The inspirations come from busy parents, including our siblings and friends, juggling school and/or work to make ends meet. It also comes from a similar program that Madi's neighborhood utilized in the 90s without the vetting and technology.

Our team's mission is to improve communities through child-care support for working parents. Since the status quo work culture no longer works for most families—particularly those with very young children—we can help working parents regulate a balanced lifestyle by providing a safe community in which people look out for their neighbors.

Our primary benchmark would be positive feedback from parents, children, and community members.





# User Personas



## *Angie, 34*

Before becoming a mother, Angie was a high-school teacher. Now with two children, it is more cost-effective for her to stay home and take care of her kids than to send them to daycare, as she would not make enough money to offset the cost. Her husband is able to work, but with one income, they are struggling to make ends meet.

Angie is social and loves meeting people in her neighborhood. She doesn't live close to family, but would love to develop connections in her community.

# Current User Journey Map

Angie

	Angie Becomes a Parent	Angie’s Parental Leave Ends and she must find childcare	Angie leaves her job as she cannot afford childcare	With only one income and two children, Angie’s family is struggling to make ends meet
Actions	After eight months of pregnancy, Angie gives birth to her son one month early. He spends time in the NICU and is sent home healthy.	Angie gave birth in August and took the fall semester off from her teacher job. She is preparing to go back to the class-room and looks at childcare rates.	After looking for childcare and not finding anything affordable, Angie and her husband decide that she is going to stay home and take care of their kid. She loved her job, but it doesn’t make enough money to adequately cover her family’s needs.	Angie has another child within the next year and her family continue to live on one income. They live very frugally and worry about what would happen if her husabnd lost his job.
Goals	Recovery	Finding affordable care	Adjust to a lower income	Budgeting, Finding more sources of income
Feelings	Anxiety, Excitement	Nervous, Overwhelmed	Stress, Anxiety	Instability, Stress
Opportunities	Learning more about parenting, Helping her son develop	Creating affordable childcare, Having a family member help out when needed	Finding other sources of income	Finding other sources of income, care sharing with other families
Pain Points	Exhaustion, Adjusting to a new schedule	Finding something affordable and reliable within her salary as a teacher feels impossible. Her husband works, but that would leave her home with one income.	Loss of income, reliance on one income for three person hoursehold	Angie has no breaks and is overwhelmend and often worries about her family’s income.



# Human Centered Design Integration

User Testing, a Human Centered Design Method, is the primary method that would be utilized if this service design and mobile application was launched. The user testing that was implemented at this phase of the project included user feedback from parents, which is highlighted at the end of this presentation.

Since this service design is so community centric, it is important that other Human Centered Design Methods are integrated as well. Though not a co-design, it is a community partnership where feedback from neighborhoods would highly influence changes to the system.

Reflecting throughout this process with interviews, utilizing techniques such as the five whys will be crucial in obtaining thorough feedback.



# Final Concept Solution

## Ideation

One of the main sources of ideation for this project were life transitions and their relation to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The project addresses the transition to parenthood, where feelings of belonging become different for many people.

In creating community-centric care, more **security** is created for parents and children.

All participants should feel a sense of community and **belonging** as all people are needed to make the system run smoothly.

There is development of **esteem** in parents and children by promoting confidence in social settings.



# Final Concept Solution

## *Initial Prototypes*

Initially, the name of the product was “Parenthood.” This was abandoned after feedback showed that people were associating this with the television show of the same name.

The colors and branding were also very bland and did not include any imagery beyond the logo. Users responded better when faces were shown, so cartoons of people were added to the final app design.



# Final Concept Solution

## Updated Customer Journey Map - Angie

	Angie Becomes a Parent	Angie’s Parental Leave Ends and she must find childcare	Angie and her family join CommUNITY	CommUNITY provides the care Angie’s family needs
Actions	After eight months of pregnancy, Angie gives birth to her son one month early. He spends time in the NICU and is sent home healthy.	Angie gave birth in August and took the fall semester off from her teacher job. She is preparing to go back to the classroom and looks at childcare rates.	At Angie’s Fit4Mom class, another parent tells her about their newly started CommUNITY pod that links families in the same community for childcare needs. Angies goes home and signs up.	With CommUNITY, Angie is able to find reliable care for her kids with the help of another family who lives two doors down.
Goals	Recovery	Finding affordable care	Finding care within CommUNITY	Growing the care pod in her neighborhood
Feelings	Anxiety, Excitement	Nervous, Overwhelmed	Excited, Interested	Joy, Belonging, Esteem
Opportunities	Learning more about parenting, Helping her son develop	Creating affordable childcare, Having a family member help out when needed	Joining a network of free care, connecting to neighbors in similar situations.	With the success of CommUNITY for Angie’s family, she wants to spread the word and help other neighborhoods start their own pods.
Pain Points	Exhaustion, Adjusting to a new schedule	Finding something affordable and reliable within her salary as a teacher feels impossible. Her husband works, but that would leave her home with one income.	Nervousness around connecting online, waiting time for background check and interviews	N/A



# Final Concept Solution

## *Final Prototype and Solution*

The final application prototype is shown below and would be used by pods to onboard users and coordinate care times. It is important to note that the app is only a small part of the service design, and the majority of interactions will occur in-person.



# Feedback, Insights, Reflections

Angie, a stay at home mother who desires to work, provided feedback on the prototypes. Angie expressed her enthusiasm for the idea, appreciating the user-friendly interface. She envisions both herself and her fellow parent friends utilizing the concept.

Throughout this project, a lot was learned about current childcare standards in the US for the average middle class family. It is extremely difficult for families to find affordable childcare, and looking into their own communities is a start in solving this problem.

Overall, the product would need to be thoroughly tested in a non-profit space to ensure it is effective as proposed.





# Proposed Implementation Strategy

## *Staffing and Marketing*

The mobile app design would first need to be developed, costing about \$100k. Once the app is developed, the existing team would then find leaders in community-center outreach to start neighborhood pods. These would primarily be volunteer positions, but could include a small stipend if further incentives are needed. Once the service takes off, a grants manager would be hired with a compensation of \$80k/year. They would be responsible for applying for government and private grants to keep the program running.

## *Funding*

The revenue would come from three sources:

1. Donations and sponsorships: Workplaces and individuals can donate or sponsor a care pod in their community. This can be an alternative to providing on-site childcare or daycare services.
2. In-app advertising: Ads would be vetted through regulations processes where only community-centric promotions would be shown.
3. Government grants: There are many grants for childcare services that the CommUNITY service can apply to for funding.

# Conclusion

## *Next Steps*

Ideally, this product would be launched and tested in a real neighborhood pod with families who have undergone background checks and interviewed one another. If successful, it would be ideal to branch this out to include businesses that cannot afford a full daycare service but can sponsor a caretaker. This would provide additional funding for the program as a whole to continue to expand.



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