Invite Process book

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01.
The problem

Problem statement

Why mobile home parks?

Need for affordable housing

Drivers and constraints

Problem statement

Neighbors within mobile home parks need a bridge to participate in one another's lives with ease and safety. Issues like physical disability or the need to work multiple jobs often prevent this from happening organically, leaving residents of all ages isolated and vulnerable.

Not having social interaction effects individuals physically, mentally and emotionally. How do we address this issue in order to help build relationships amongst neighbors?

Why mobile home parks?

Intergenerational

Mobile parks are home to seniors and young families alike, with a fairly even distribution of ages on average. 22 million Americans live in mobile parks, and manufactured home shipments have increased 44% since 2014.[1]

1. 2017 Manufactured Housing Facts. Manufactured Housing Institute, 2018, www.manufacturedhousing.org.

Affordable

The US faces a housing crisis, and mobile homes represent the single largest source of unsubsidized affordable housing.[2]

2. Sullivan, Esther. "Displaced in Place." American Sciological Review, vol. 82, no. 2, 2017

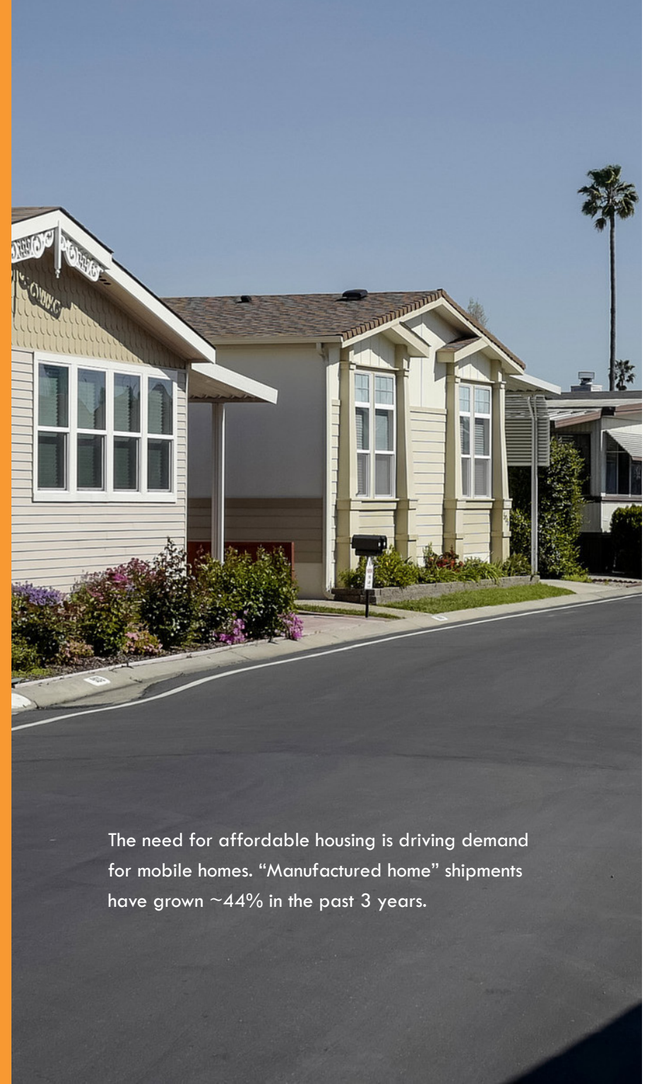
At risk

A wave of privatization and rent hikes is threatening the affordability of mobile parks. Building community isn't just good for residents' health - it can also build solidarity in uncertain times.[3]

3. Denvir, Daniel. "Mobile Home Park Evictions: The Other Affordable Housing Crisis." CityLab, 21 Sept. 2015

The problem

Need for affordable housing



The need for affordable housing is driving demand for mobile homes. “Manufactured home” shipments have grown ~44% in the past 3 years.

2030

Every day since January 1, 2011, some 10,000 American baby boomers have retired, and this will continue until 2030, when people over 65 will make up 19 percent of the population (up from 13 percent today). Boomers have less money to retire as well. 1 in 6 seniors lives in poverty.

Risk

Corporate investors buying parks and jacking up prices.

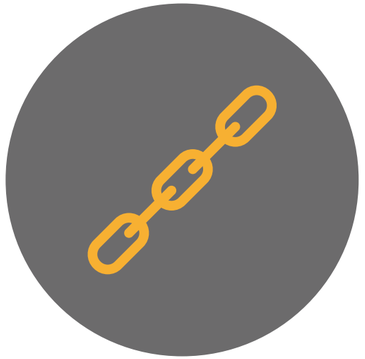
Solution

Residents organizing to form a coop and buy the parks themselves

2011

Drivers

- Facilitate intergenerational connection
- Build community
- Enable fun!



Constraints

- Be easy to use for any age
- Fit into busy people's lives
- Include isolated community members
- Be secure and facilitate trust

02. Audience

Personas

Interviews

Mobile home demographics

Lori

Age: 75 | Retired

Health

General health "good" but has to "slow down"

"I've already been to all the events and there is nothing new"

About me

Lori is a widow who lives in a mobile home community. She has 2 children and 3 grandchildren who she doesn't see that often

Social life

• Use to participate in Social Club events & be a member of directors with her husband when they first moved to the park

• Doesn't attend mobile home events/activities anymore

-See/interact the same people at events

-Generally the same events being held

-No interest, seem a little boring

• Has some daily interaction with immediate neighbors but not much other than that

Hobbies

• Stays busy doing small home improvement projects & hobbies

-Only goes out to visit kids/grandkids & run occasional errands

Technology

• Does not own tablet or laptop

• Has basic cell phone (does not use for entertainment)

Social media

• Does not have a social media

Ryan

"I would love to spend more time with my neighbors but I'm too busy"

Age: 37 | Engineer

Health

General health excellent

About me

Ryan is an engineer and father of a 6 year old. If he's not working he's running around taking his daughter to soccer and music class

Hobbies

- Planning family vacations
- Running
- Watching Sports
- Playing domino

Social life

- Likes to socialize & is eager to meet neighbors and friends but is limited on time
- Doesn't get to interact much with others due to busy schedule
- Enjoys talking to neighbors when he gets a chance

Technology

- Very knowledgeable in Technology
- Owns smart-phone, tablet and laptop

Social media

- Active on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Nextdoor etc

Betty

"I love socializing and meeting new people"

Age: 66 | Retired

Health

General health excellent

About me

Betty is a 66 year old retired teacher who lives in a mobile home community. Betty has a significant other and enjoys the company of friends and neighbors.

Social life

- Likes to go outside to talk & socialize with neighbors, including children
- Attends most of the events held w/in the park
- Member of Directors in social club for last 3 years
- Has many ideas for future events for the park
- Self-described "people person", likes to talk, interact and socialize w/people

Hobbies

- Coordinates activities for the mobile home park community
- Casino trips, chili cook-off etc.
- Baking
- Reading

Technology

- Very knowledgeable in Technology
- Owns smart-phone, tablet and laptop

Social media

- Active on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Nextdoor etc.

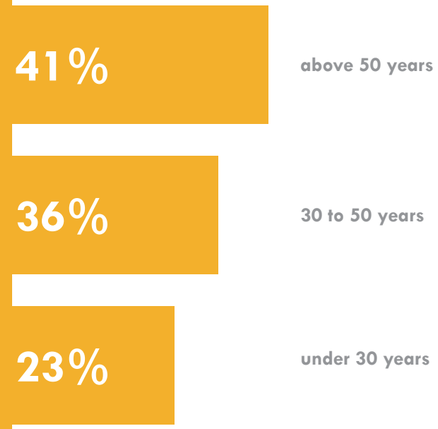
Interviews

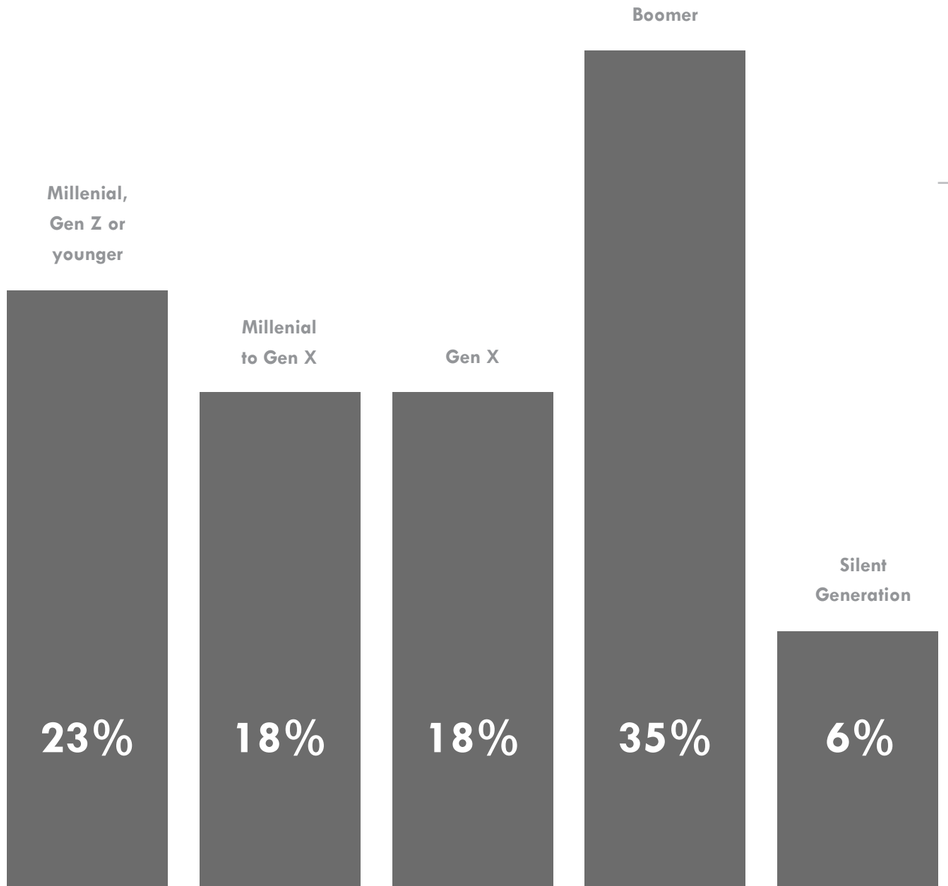
We developed drivers and constraints for our design from interviews with 6 park residents. Participants ranged from elderly couples, to baby boomers working multiple jobs, and Millennials living alone on disability. Through those interviews we discovered that many neighbors feel isolated and if social interaction were easier, they would participate.

Mobile home demographics

Mobile home parks are a unique opportunity space because they are both affordable and intergenerational. Demographic data shows that 22 million Americans of all ages live in mobile home parks.

Age distribution of mobile home residents, USA





Audience

03.
Research

Desk research

Existing solutions

Community need-finding workshop and brainstorm

Desk research

Desk research discovered that mobile parks are uniquely affordable, intergenerational, and growing in popularity. Validated the mental and physical health benefits of social connection.

It showed that social isolation contributes to depression, and is on par with smoking and obesity when it comes to lifespan reduction. Also revealed that building social connections can improve mental and physical health for all ages, and even helps seniors maintain mobility, leading to increased autonomy. Key sources include Manufacturedhousing.org, Harvard Business Review, The NIH and UC Berkeley.

Neighbor connections helps save a community

Palo Alto Buena Vista Mobile home park is an example of a community that came together and benefitted from the union of neighbors. Buena Vista residents were at risk of being evicted and a deal to preserve the mobile home park did not come until 5 years later. So how did these residents manage to deal with the uncertainty of being removed from their home? "Residents formed the Buena Vista Residents Association. As negotiations continued, residents and community members often packed a series of meetings held to discuss the park's fate.

That effort was joined by Santa Clara County and Palo Alto in early 2015, which initially each set aside $8 million to prevent eviction of the residents. That soon snowballed into an effort to save the park that attracted national attention and involved past and present representatives, nonprofits, school board members and hundreds of community members.

"I think it's so important to know the role that the residents played," Simitian said." – Mercury News

This is a perfect example that demonstrates that communities that are better connected socially have more opportunity to advocate for themselves.

Social Connection is linked to health.

Physically

Former surgeon general: "The reduction in lifespan [for loneliness] is similar to that caused by smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and it's greater than the impact on life span of obesity."[1]

Mental

Higher quality social connections are closely and consistently associated with lower levels of depression.[2]

Autonomy

Helps maintain mobility, reinforces healthy habits (even increases early cancer screenings), creates opportunities for neighbors to help seniors with tasks of daily living, cognitive decline 70% less for seniors with strong social ties, increases senior autonomy because social activity is related to motor function.[3]

1. Murthy, Vivek. "Work and the Loneliness Epidemic." Harvard Business Review, 5 Sept. 2018
2. Werner-Seidler, Aliza, et al. "The Relationship between Social Support Networks and Depression in the 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Well-Being." Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology, vol. 52, no. 12, Sept. 2017
3. Suttie, Jill. "How Social Connections Keep Seniors Healthy." Greater Good Science Center, UC Berkeley, 14 Mar. 2014

Existing solutions

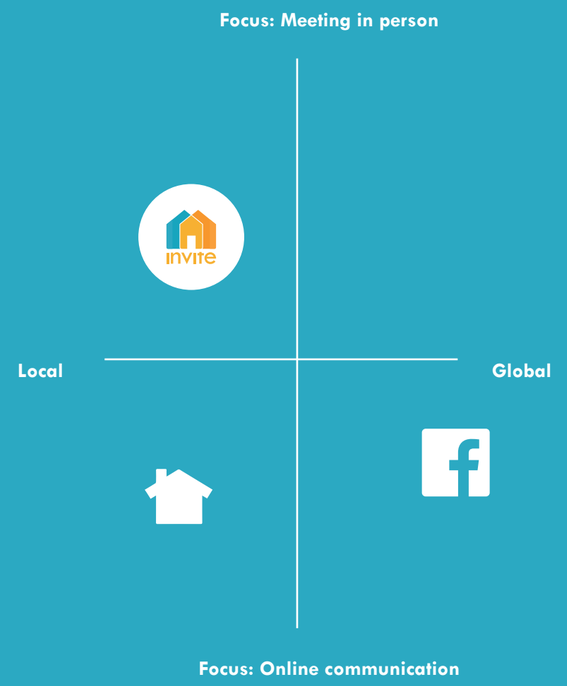
Nextdoor

Nextdoor.com is a neighborhood-level social network that has been adopted in 116,000+ neighborhoods in America. However, the platform has been designed primarily as an online communication tool. Nextdoor's VP of Business Development has characterized the site as "a hyper local Angie's List," explaining that 93% of posts on the site focus on information exchange, such as listing items for sale, or messaging about suspicious activity. Events account for only 7% of posts, and none of the residents we interviewed who use Nextdoor leverage the platform to actually meet neighbors in person. Also, being a digital-only solution limits the appeal and usability of nextdoor.com, which may not be viable for less tech-savvy seniors.

Mobile park social club

Plaza Del Rey, the mobile park where we conducted our user research, does have an active social club that holds events for residents. However, in our user research we discovered that the large group events thrown by the club only appeal to a small subset of residents, mainly able-bodied, extroverted seniors. Younger residents, introverted seniors, and residents of all ages with disabilities are not currently being served by this option. We found that even if the type of events were adjusted, many residents would struggle to attend due to busy schedules or physical limitations that keep them inside their homes.

Matrix



Community need-finding workshop and brainstorm

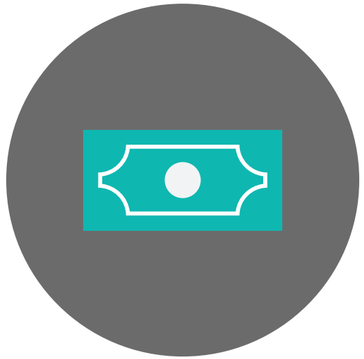
Location: Plaza Del Rey Mobile Home Club House

We held a workshop at Plaza Del Rey Mobile Home Park to gain insight on the interactions and relationships neighbors have. Through conversation with attendees we got to understand the current state of the neighborhood, identified gaps and opportunities for connecting neighbors. We discovered the opportunity to have interactions with neighbors is there but it does not happen.

Residents feedback on social interaction

- People might socialize if it were easier
- Physical limitations impede social interaction
- Cost, mobility and technology prevent people from coming together
- Those who are homebound suffer from loneliness because they can't get out and interact with others getting together

What prevents mobile home neighbors from interacting?

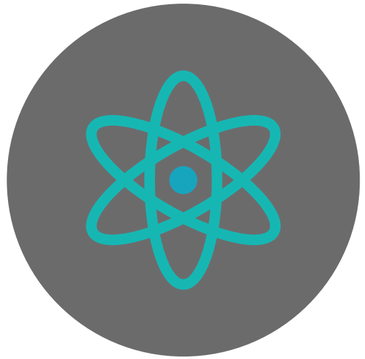


Cost

Special events require funding, while home activities like gardening and watching a sports game are free.

Mobility

Residents of all ages may face mobility restrictions that prevent them from leaving their home.



Technology

Only 40% of seniors have smartphones.[1]

Busy Lives

Residents often work multiple jobs, and need ways to connect on their own schedules.

1. Pew Research Center" to the end of the Technology point. Here's the full citation if you decide to be consistent with the other research slides: "Anderson, Monica, and Andrew Perrin. "Technology Use among Seniors." Pew Research Center, 17 May 2017

04.
Ideation

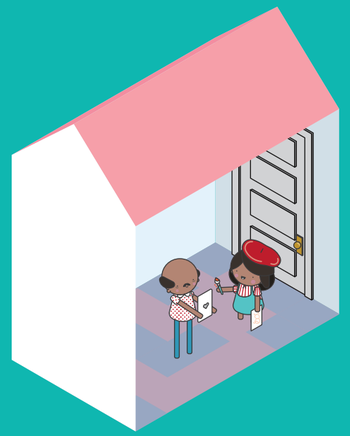
Brainstorm
Prototype 1- Storyboard
Door Sign
App
Prototype 2- Canvassing
Test Event

Brainstorm

After research, resident interviews, and feedback our team had a brainstorm to generate some ideas. Most of our brainstorm was a list of events or activities that brought neighbors together. We decided we didn't want to prescribe the types of events people would participate in or have only one specific activity that brought people together. Instead the idea of a platform that connects residents around activities they would typically do alone, like baking, gardening or watching a baseball game on TV was developed.

Prototype 1

After much research and conversation with Plaza Del Rey residents, we designed a tool to facilitate inter-generational connection between neighbors in mobile home parks. The service would give residents a way to invite their neighbors to join them in activities they would otherwise do alone, like planting a garden, baking cookies or watching a baseball game. The idea was to empower neighbors to gather on their own terms and timetable.



Storyboard

The storyboard depicts what a potential interaction between neighbors using the service might look like.

A 'social senior' introduces the service to a new resident, who is able to invite neighbors both online via the app, and those just passing by via the physical door sign.

Door Sign

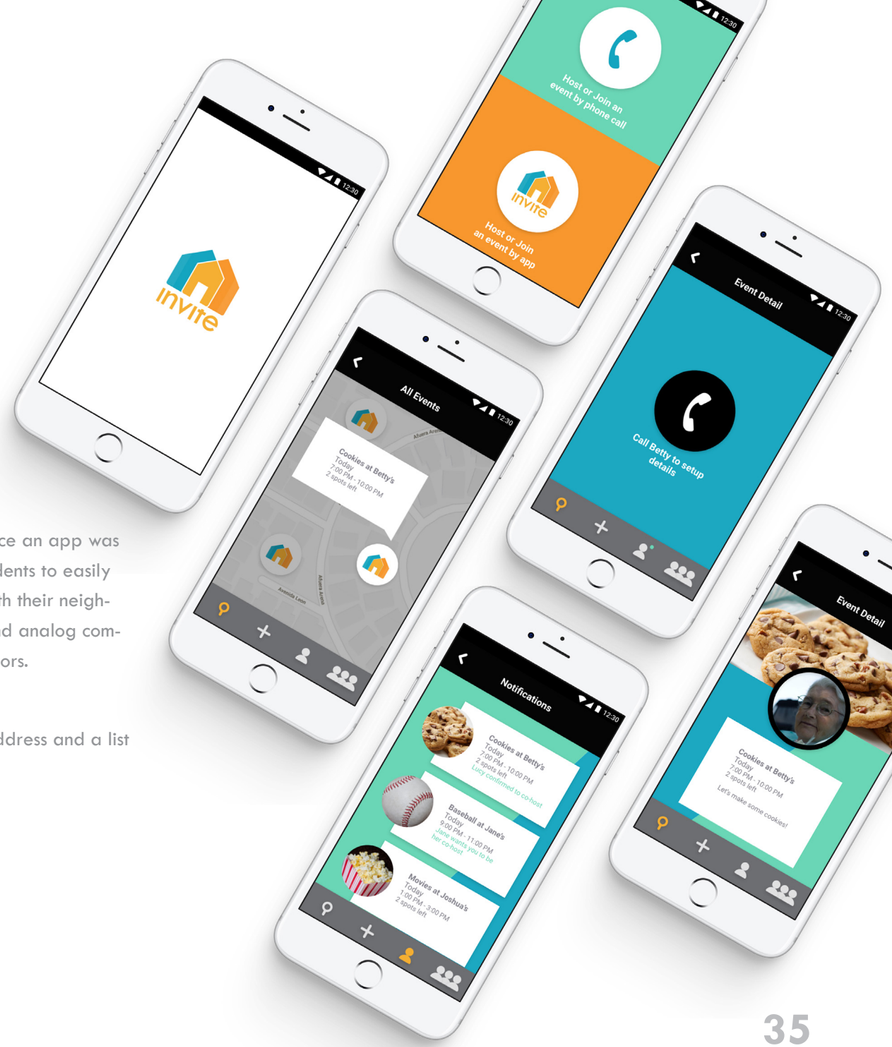
When an event occurs, the host can hang a physical door tag on their homes to catch the attention of passing neighbors who may want to join in.

App

After developing the flow of the service an app was designed. The app enables park residents to easily plan or attend informal gatherings with their neighbors. The app contains both digital and analog components to include less tech-savvy seniors.

App features:

- Resident profile- Includes resident address and a list of hosted events (including pictures)
- Event posting
- RSVP for event
- Co- Host an event
- Call to host or RSVP for an event



Prototype 2

Canvassing

The invite team did canvassing around Plaza del Rey to spread the word about the idea and receive feed-back. Flyers that had information on what invite was were distributed and face to face interactions with neighbors were made. Positive feedback was received from neighbors about the idea, 4 out of 6 people said they would use invite.

Canvassing insights

- Existing Solutions are not good enough:

"Nextdoor is so negative, it's just a big bitch session."

"The social club is too cliquey."

- Neighbors want to connect:

"I don't feel like there is a lot of social connection here."

- Building Connection in a Mobile Park:

"There is a sense of affiliation for being in the same park, instead of living in a general neighborhood."

Test event

A test event was held to see if neighbors were willing to attend events hosted by other neighbors. The event had a good outcome, four residents attended. One of the attendees was a resident who when interviewed prior to the event said she wouldn't attend any Invite events but was interested when she saw the event posting. Others that read about the event post online said it was nice a gesture and others asked if there was a fee to attend the event. This event helped confirm that park residents are looking for social interaction and are willing to attend events.

05.
Solution

What is Invite?

Branding

Features of Invite

Storyboard

Digital & Analog

Why should Neighbors use invite?

What is Invite?

Invite is a platform that connects residents of all ages in mobile home parks around activities they would typically do alone, like baking, gardening or watching a baseball game on TV. Busy or homebound residents can bring the world to them!

First, residents sign up and verify their address with the help of a local Invite Liaison. Next, they can invite neighbors to participate in activities of their choosing. Residents exchange invitations and RSVPs via recorded voice message to build trust. Residents can choose to access Invite by mobile app or landline telephone, depending on how tech-savvy they are.

Invite was informed by research showing that social isolation contributes to depression, and is on par with smoking and obesity when it comes to lifespan reduction. Research shows that building social connections can improve mental and physical health for all ages, and even helps seniors maintain mobility, leading to increased autonomy.

However, our user research indicates that park residents often miss out on the health benefits of intergenerational connection. While there is a desire to connect, neighbors tend to stay to themselves due to issues like physical disability or the need to work multiple jobs. That's where Invite comes in, empowering neighbors to connect in their own ways, on their own schedule.

Branding

The palette chosen for this logo is bright and vibrant. The use of orange evokes a feeling a warmth, happiness and is welcoming.

The union of the three homes symbolizes the union of neighbors. The goal of the logo was to be inviting and friendly.

Features of Invite

Address verification + co-hosting + voice note rsvp

Builds trust and security.

Intimate informal gatherings

Are less intimidating for shy residents.

Digital + Analog Options

Provide choice and flexibility of use for all ages.

Self produced gatherings

Can be spontaneous, and are customizable to residents' interests.

Storyboard

SIGN UP

1. Betty, (an isolated senior) moves into the park

2. Lori, the Invite liaison, welcomes Betty to the neighborhood, and helps her sign up for Invite.

USING THE SERVICE

3. Betty feels lonely, so she dials 1-800-INVITES and records a voice message inviting her neighbors to come bake cookies.

4. Using the Invite app, Lucy hears Betty's message and sends a voice message back, agreeing to help Betty co-host.

5. Joshua and his daughter Alice decide to join Betty's cookie party instead of watching TV by themselves.

6. Jane is walking through the neighborhood when she sees Betty's Invite sign on her door. Using the mobile app, she sees that a cookie party is in progress, and joins the fun.

7. The neighbors have a great time and post a picture on the Invite app.

Digital

Host or co-host an event, create a profile, or RSVP to an event via the digital app

Analog

The analog version allows those who are not tech savvy to use a dial phone to host or rsvp for an event

Why should neighbors use invite?

Invite is unique in that it empowers neighbors to connect face to face on their own terms. It allows for self-produced gatherings which can be spontaneous and customizable to residents' interests. It allows for intimate, informal gatherings which are less intimidating for shy residents. It provides both digital and analog interfaces for choice and flexibility of use by all ages. Finally, unlike other online social networks, Invite is designed to bring people together in the real world.

Live Healthy

Enjoy the mental and physical health benefits of intergenerational connection.

Live Happy

Turn your neighborhood into a community.

Live Free

Isolated neighbors can bring the world to them, on their own terms.

A Design Challenge and a Discovery: The Relationship Between Intergenerational Connection and Social Change

By James Getomer

It was an idyllic November day when my fellow San Francisco State University students and I arrived at the Plaza Del Rey mobile home park in Sunnyvale, California. Our team of five design students had entered a Stanford design competition focused on facilitating connections between people of different generations. Our team member, Letty, lives in Plaza Del Rey, and the mobile park seemed like a perfect location for our project, being home to neighbors of many different age groups.

We had reserved a room in the park's community center, hoping to entice residents to speak with us about opportunities for intergenerational connection with the promise of free coffee and doughnuts. Thankfully, five generous souls took us up on our offer, but our turnout paled in comparison to an event taking place at the same moment in a much larger hall next door.

Election season was in full swing, and local political candidates were conducting town hall-style meetings to court the mobile park's residents. While the concept of intergenerational connection seemed nice, these neighbors had more pressing concerns for the politicians, largely focused on the sharp increase in rental rates threatening their ability to stay in the park -- and for some, their ability to stay in the Bay Area they had called home for decades.

The conversation our team had with a handful of neighbors that morning was invaluable in kicking off our intergenerational design project, but we couldn't help but feel like we were missing the mark by not tackling the most salient issue faced by this community -- affordable housing.

What we learned over the course of the next five months surprised us. It turns out that designing for intergenerational connection is not just a warm and fuzzy "amenity." In fact, it may be key in facing some of the largest problems our society faces today, from mental and physical illness to affordable housing.

Our idea

After much research and conversation with Plaza Del Rey residents, we designed Invite, a tool to facilitate intergenerational connection between neighbors in mobile home parks.

Mobile home parks are the largest source of unsubsidized affordable housing in the country, and given their shared common spaces and proximity to neighbors, they have the potential to become genuine communities where people feel connected to one another.

But these ingredients don't automatically create community. Neighbors want to connect, we learned, but some older residents have trouble leaving their homes, and younger residents often face schedules packed with multiple jobs, children and family responsibilities.

Our design would overcome these barriers by giving residents a way to invite their neighbors to join them in activities they would otherwise do alone, like planting a garden, baking cookies or watching a baseball game. The idea was to empower neighbors to gather on their own terms and timetable.

To get neighbors face-to-face, instead of keeping them online like so many other social networks do, we designed the invitation process around recorded voice messages. This way, people over 65 (only 40 percent of whom own a smartphone) could participate using an analog phone instead of a computer or app.

We thought we had a pretty good idea, but as we heard from advocates for affordable housing, Invite could deliver even more value for residents than we'd hoped.

The biggest threat

As we saw at Plaza Del Rey, the most urgent problem facing many mobile home residents is a financial one. They own their manufactured homes but rent the land underneath them. Since the 1990s investors have been buying mom-and-pop mobile parks and dramatically raising rents. Since many mobile homes are not actually mobile, residents have had no recourse but to pay up or abandon ship.

Enter Resident Owned Communities USA, a nonprofit that helps residents band together to buy the parks where they live. To date, ROC USA has empowered residents in 200 communities to buy their own parks and take control of their economic destinies.

Mary O'Hara, founding director of ROC USA Network, told us that she loves the idea of Invite, for several reasons. First, when neighbors feel socially connected, she explained, they are more likely to trust one another and attend important meetings.

Second, she likes the way seniors could access Invite via analog phone, "opening the door for digital immigrants and digital natives from different generations to exchange knowledge, skills and interests."

And third, she believes Invite could boost social mobility for mobile park residents. "It's people's social connections that allow them to move up in the world, because that's how you hear about new jobs or internships."

A community organizer at Habitat for Humanity -- now working to redevelop a Virginia mobile home park in partnership with existing residents -- added a fourth reason. She said Invite might help reach isolated seniors living in the park and get them engaged with others. That's no small trick. AARP estimates that social isolation, and its toll on the physical and mental health of older people, adds an estimated $6.7 billion to Medicare spending each year.

Lessons learned

Invite beat out 90-some other entries to make it to the Stanford Challenge finals but, alas, didn't win. Still we made some useful discoveries during the design process.

Mobile home parks present a tremendous opportunity for both affordability and intergenerational connection, if one can mitigate the risk of predatory rent increases.

Recorded voice notes can be used as a common denominator that connects younger and older people on their smartphones and analog phones respectively.

And perhaps most important, social connection plays an important role in social change.

We hope these insights inspire others to build on this solid foundation.

James Getomer, Leticia Miranda, Jessica Noriega, Mariana Souto and Michael Scapulong are students in the school of design at San Francisco State University. Their advisors for the Stanford Design Challenge were Professor Ricardo Gomes and Professor Mari Hulick of SFSU as well as Eunice Nichols of Encore.org. To find out who won and get more inspiration ideas on intergenerational connection, visit the Stanford Design Challenge.

invite