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CARt

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Overview: CARt coordinates convenient, affordable, reliable transportation for low-income individuals with limited vehicle access to get to and from supermarkets that are fully stocked with healthy food.

The Problem: Accessing healthy food is a challenge for many Americans. Defined by the United States Department of Agriculture, food insecurity is a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. Forty-eight million Americans, fully 14% of households experience food insecurity. Those experiencing food insecurity often live in neighborhoods without supermarkets and may have easier access to fast food restaurants and high-priced food at convenience stores. Inadequate access to healthy food has implications for hunger and obesity.

History: We are four University of Michigan women studying business, public health, and sustainable systems who joined together in September 2014 to tackle the problem of food insecurity. Through extensive customer discovery, we identified inadequate transportation as a main barrier to lack of healthy, affordable food. We generated a solution: CARt.

We use existing rideshare infrastructure to get individuals to and from supermarkets and their home. To test our solution, we provided rides to shoppers at Prince Valley Market in Southwest Detroit in February 2015. Our 10 riders told us they would use our service again. We then pitched our idea in a student competition, Innovation in Action, where we received some funding.

We put that funding toward a month- long pilot with the Meijer on Eight Mile in Detroit. We provided 46 rides for our target users, this time testing a pricing model where the supermarket paid 50% of the ride and the user paid the remaining 50%. We found that our users were not only willing to pay, but recommended us to their neighbors, friends, and family. We collected surveys and receipt data from our users.

In November, we participated in a statewide student business competition, Accelerate Michigan, where we won first place.

Future: We received funds to conduct in-depth interviews with storeowners and focus groups with our target customers to finalize pricing models. We are competing in The Michigan Business Challenge, at the University of Michigan. With our earnings, we will be able to build out tech infrastructure that will allow us to streamline our product. We will begin to provide services in Detroit this summer.