The Story of Served: A climate action project story

Hi! My name is Served, and I am a Climate Action Project. I started as an idea in only *two heads*. They had me because of a project Green Challenge competition, but that is a different story. I was born in a bar, at a table with two cups of beer, a notebook and a pen. Firstly I was just in *one head*. ‚It is genius!' was the *second head's* comment on me. How flattering. ‚So… it would reduce food waste AND directly increase food security? And it would help build strong and healthy communities based on sharing?'

I knew little about the outside world, but *the heads* knew more. People are not very good at behaving rationally, planning or reflecting. For example, 130 billion meals in America are thrown out each year, nearly 40% of all food in America [1]. And yet, in 2021, 10.2% of households were food insecure at least sometime during the year [2]. It makes no sense! Even in Denmark, a country with one of the highest food security in the world, there is a prevalence of low and very low food security of 6.0% and 2.4%, respectively. And yet, approximately 1 214 000 tons of food ends up in Danish trash cans each year, out of which one-third originates directly in Danish homes [3][4][5]! Still, not all… 24% of asked participants in a 2019 research said that food waste never crosses their minds while grocery shopping [6]!

My goals can be presented as three separate issues. Firstly – reducing the food waste in households. Secondly – getting people to reflect on their habits, bringing them to consciously think about the amount of food they waste (and how it adds up). Thirdly it is to fight loneliness and build strong and healthy neighborhood communities!

Firstly, there was a Facebook group, and *the heads* started posting food they would otherwise waste! They put up posters in hallways, trying to attract students' attention, and they also put a slideshow on the screen at the university entrance. They even had an article written about them in local news called Ugeavisen Esbjerg[9]. And even though this attracted some students to me, the group didn't work, and people weren't engaged. No one seemed to care.

Later on, in December, came the first exchange, a huge moment for me. But that was about it. People were still really detached from the idea. Not just that, people were even laughing at me! How are they supposed to know the amount? Should they be measuring it? Could they be posting leftovers directly from their plates? *The heads* had to do something about this! And so, *the heads* asked other users for opinions to find out how to improve me. Now it was clear what needed to get better! But that's not all! *The heads* also decided to sign me up for the university's development program called the Start-up program[10]. And imagine, I am such a good idea that I got accepted! It means *the heads* will get professional guidance even after Project Green Challenge is over, enabling them to develop me further! The last stage of the start-up project is delivering a working solution to the public, though this is only possible if the start-up gets funding from sponsors to develop.

In January, *the heads* started working with users' feedback to combat the low engagement. They implemented some comments, like moving me from Facebook to a messenger chat group, making shorter posts, and being more specific. The group was now anonymous. However, there was one more issue – people here don't live in dormitories, even though they are university students. Instead, students in this community live in separate flats! Neighbors don't know each other, people don't communicate, and they can't talk about me! *The heads* decided to leave leaflets in their neighbors' mailboxes to inform them. And so people realized I was worth their time and got involved. I felt very major relief, and so did *the heads.* Soo.. how does the group work since then? If you have food you know you will throw out, for example, because you leave to visit your family, you can post it on the group and see if anyone wants it! Then the person interested can pick up the item at your place, which helps the planet and gets you an unexpected friend!

In February, *the heads* surveyed my impact on the students involved. The survey made people reflect on their food waste behavior, and many admitted that they still throw food out. *The heads*

pitched me for the first time in Riggen, a Start-up center in Esbjerg, as part of the Start-up project [11]. It was an opportunity to discuss the verification process details and how crucial it is to get sponsors to bring the project further into an app anyone can use. And because of that, there is now a fundraiser to take me further! [17]

After the discussion in Riggen, *the heads* launched the website in March to give a concise and easy-to-access project overview [12]. This also gave them a space to post announcements about me and regular updates on my development. The website contains information about the project, the motivation behind Served and other stuff; check it out yourself [12].

Since *the heads* solved problems with engagement, the focus shifted to another aspect of me-organizing get-togethers to combat food waste and bringing the neighborhood closer. *The heads*, therefore, decided to throw dinner parties where anyone could share food with others! They looked for a place and contacted the local representation of a renting organization Ungdomsbo [13]. To support Served, Ungdomsbo rented free of charge twice! A prototype of the app was presented for the first time; see it yourself[18]! It is an easy way of showing and trying out the mechanism of Served. You can see your location and the distance you are willing to walk, make posts and see what others offer, and view your impact – how much food and CO_2 were saved thanks to your actions. Six people came to support me during the first dinner and seven during the second one. Only two were the same as during the first event! I also caught the interest of one Danish guy, Casper Wind [14], who contacted *the heads*. He told them he saw their website thanks to one of their posters and would like to try developing the app for them as it is close to his studies. He wants to join the project as a volunteer! Zeineb Ghachem [15], a Tunisian girl who is also a neighbor of *the heads*, wants to join them in their efforts as well. She would help them launch a social media account and a food waste prevention campaign for Served!

So what are my results after such an inspiring journey filled with ups and downs? Well… approximately 13.3 kg of food was saved, 46 products that would have otherwise been tossed into the garbage and that would have created 33.1kg of CO_2!! *The heads* are the proudest of this – of the impact I left in the world! The messenger group has 36 members. On campus, with 411 students, according to the 2021 statistics [16], it amounted to 9% of the student body. Out of 36 members, 13 were active at some point, and nine were engaged repeatedly (leaving *the two heads* out). *The head's* goals, however, did not change. Now that all the aspects of the group are verified, the app's development is forwarded, like testing and further growth. This, however, requires resources. As an inspired volunteer provides the development of a beta version of the app, the costs are significantly reduced. Yet, servers for both the website and app must be covered. And the more users the platform will have, the more expensive its maintenance gets. *The heads* learned the true potential individuals hold and what perseverance can bring, how sweet the fruits of hard work taste and the feeling of victory over general society's inactivity.

Summing Served up, 13.2 kg of household food waste (46 products) was rescued, and 36 group members were educated and brought to reflection. 75 % of participants responded in a final survey that Served made them more conscious of their food choices. This covered the first two goals of Served. Two dinners to create a close-knit community were successful, and several people made new acquaintances, which addressed the third issue. Within next semester *the heads* want to double the number of members of Served, bringing the active part of the student body to 20%, and at least double the amount of saved food; turning dinner parties into regular events starting with one per month can be an effective way to continue educating. Friends living in Austria will implement the messenger group on their campus in the city of Linz, as that can further verify the universality of mechanisms. Launching a household food-saving campaign advertising Served is one of the next steps. Within next year, once the app is ready, it will substitute for the messenger group on our campus. When it is successful, *the heads* will keep expanding to other campuses and iterating the idea.

SOURCES:

[1] https://www.feedingamerica.org/our-work/reduce-food-waste ;27.03.2023; 10:26

[2]https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/food-security-and-nutrition-assistance/ ;27.03.2023; 10:26

[3] https://borgenproject.org/tag/food-security-in-denmark/ ;27.03.2023; 10:37

[4] https://www.bureauveritas.dk/en/needs/certification/food-waste ;27.03.2023; 10:37

[5]https://nexs.ku.dk/english/staff/?pure=en%2Fpublications%2Ffood-insecurity-in-denmark(ec5757ec-d367-4304-b1d0-476b9c69e751).html ;31.03.2023; 15:58

[6] https://foodinsight.org/consumers-perception-food-waste/ ;27.03.2023; 10:50

[7]https://www.statista.com/statistics/1222815/loneliness-among-adults-by-country/   ;27.03.2023; 10:57

[8] https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20220609110221496 ;27.03.2023; 10:57

[9]https://ugeavisenesbjerg.e-pages.pub/titles/ugeavisenesbjerg/7987/publications/602/articles/1702438/74/3 ;31.03.2023;16:09

[10] https://www.se.aau.dk/students/startup-program/ ;02.04.2023; 13:24

[11] https://www.riggen.dk/ ;02.04.2023;13:24

[12] https://projectserved.com/ ;02.04.2023; 14:07

[13] https://www.ungdomsbo.dk/ ;02.04.2023;14:16

[14]https://www.linkedin.com/in/casper-wind-bb446783/;02.04.2023;13:55
https://github.com/CasperWind ; 02.04.2023;14:03

[15] https://www.instagram.com/zeinebghachem/ ; 02.04.2023;13:55

[16] https://www.en.aau.dk/about-aau/key-figures/students ;02.04.2023; 14:39

[17]
https://chuffed.org/project/served?utm_campaign=campaign&utm_id=96486&utm_medium=facebook&utm_source=chuffedreferral&fbclid=IwAR3MSezfqpS_ppzn6uVF6foMahOMD-m9-VCdm9urPbGU1ZzGkxSh7XKBldg ;02.04.2023; 14:45

[18]
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1SWo3gVelB3TpGxno_N_tzqMmZZAqtGQy/edit?rtpof=true&sd=true ; 02.04.2023;15:24