

PEACEPOST

An Action-Research Report

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Introduction

Social design is a framework that places human and social needs at the forefront of design processes to address complex social issues (Resnik, 2019). It calls on designers to engage with communities to co-create solutions that promote well-being, inclusivity, and positive social transformation (Manzini, 2015). This action research report aims to analyze the development of PeacePost, a social design project that provides refugees with stable mailing addresses to access essential services.

The concept for PeacePost emerged from our team recognizing a fundamental barrier refugees face: the lack of a permanent address. This obstacle hinders their integration into a new society as it prevents them from completing forms, receiving critical mail and packages, and accessing employment. PeacePost sought to address this problem by providing refugees with a consistent and secure means to receive mail.

This report will reflect on the project's design process, deliverables, and outcomes. In doing so, it offers a reflective analysis of social design methodologies and their potential to drive positive change.

Identification of the social issue

Our team initially brainstormed marginalized groups that faced unique challenges. We were drawn to the plight of homeless individuals and noticed their lack of a permanent address, which created a cycle of disadvantages for them. Accessing crucial and fundamental services and securing employment becomes nearly impossible without a stable mailing address.

However, we sought a broader social impact and shifted our focus to refugees. Our team researched and found that according to UNHCR's Mid-year Trends (2023) report, over 110 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide as of mid-2023. This displacement creates barriers – the lack of a permanent address that would hinder their ability to rebuild their lives. Our team also conducted empathy exercises, which proved crucial in understanding their challenges.

This led to our team settling on a 'Problem Solution' statement, which would be a foundation for our social design project.

Problem and Solution

The following is our problem statement for our social design project:

How can refugees without a permanent address fill out forms that require an address, and also receive mail?

The lack of a permanent address poses a significant barrier to refugees. According to the UNHCR (2024), displacement often disrupts essential administrative systems and hinders access to civil registration processes and the ability to secure official residency documents. This creates many obstacles for the refugee when navigating essential bureaucratic processes, such as enrollment forms, applying for employment, and accessing other vital social services. Refugees remain trapped within a system of limited opportunities and rights without an official address (Walther & Luik, 2019)

We addressed this problem by creating PeacePost, which provides refugees with a stable mailing address linked to an existing physical location. This allows refugees to enter an address into crucial forms and receive important mail and essential paperwork that would aid them. The solution that we chose aligns with social design principles by prioritizing human needs by improving the well-being of a marginalized group that is facing a complex social challenge, while also prioritizing human needs (Resnik, 2019)

What is PeacePost, who is it for, and how does it work?

In essence, PeacePost is a web service that generates mailing addresses that registered users can use for their needs.

Target Audience

PeacePost is designed for refugees who:

- Have reliable access to the internet in order to register and use the platform
- Reside in locations where a permanent address is crucial for completing forms related to employment, education or social services.

How PeacePost works



Figure 1 - How PeacePost works.

Registration: Refugees must first register on the PeacePost. This includes a simple registration process where they provide basic information such as their names, email addresses or phone numbers, and date of birth. The verification process is done in the form of an OTP (One Time Password) sent to either the phone number or the email address (depending on which they provide).

Address Generation: The website has its own 'Generator page,' which asks the refugee to provide their current address, after which they are asked to verify the information they provided during registration. The system identifies the nearest available post office, which is partnered with PeacePost, and combines the information in the database (refer to Figure 2) with that provided by the refugee to create the mailing address.

Reference No.	Address 1	Address 2	City	State	Country	Zip / Postal Code	Unique Identifier	Extra Comment
1	18C Street	AL Qouz 1	Dubai	Dubai	United Arab Emirates	00000	PP - DXB -01	General Delivery/ Poste Restante
2	Bestekar S N 30/4	Kavaklıdere	Çankaya	Ankara	Turkey	06284	PP - ESB -01	General Delivery/ Poste Restante
3	Al Sukhneh Street	Amman	Dubai	Dubai	Jordan	11901	PP - AMM -01	General Delivery/ Poste Restante
4	Cr 80 No. 20A-154	nil	Medellin	Medellin	Colombia	169420	PP - MED -04	General Delivery/ Poste Restante
5	37 4th Cross Street	nil	Colombo	Western Province	Sri Lanka	91235	PP - CMB -05	General Delivery/ Poste Restante

Figure 2 - Database of different PeacePost addresses

Generated Address: The address, which is generated includes the refugee's name, the post office's location, a General Delivery/Poste Restante designation (which would ensure the mail is stored in the post office instead of being dispatched for delivery, a unique PeacePost code (for internal tracking), and the refugee's contact information (email and phone number). Refer to Figure 3 to see an example of a generated address.

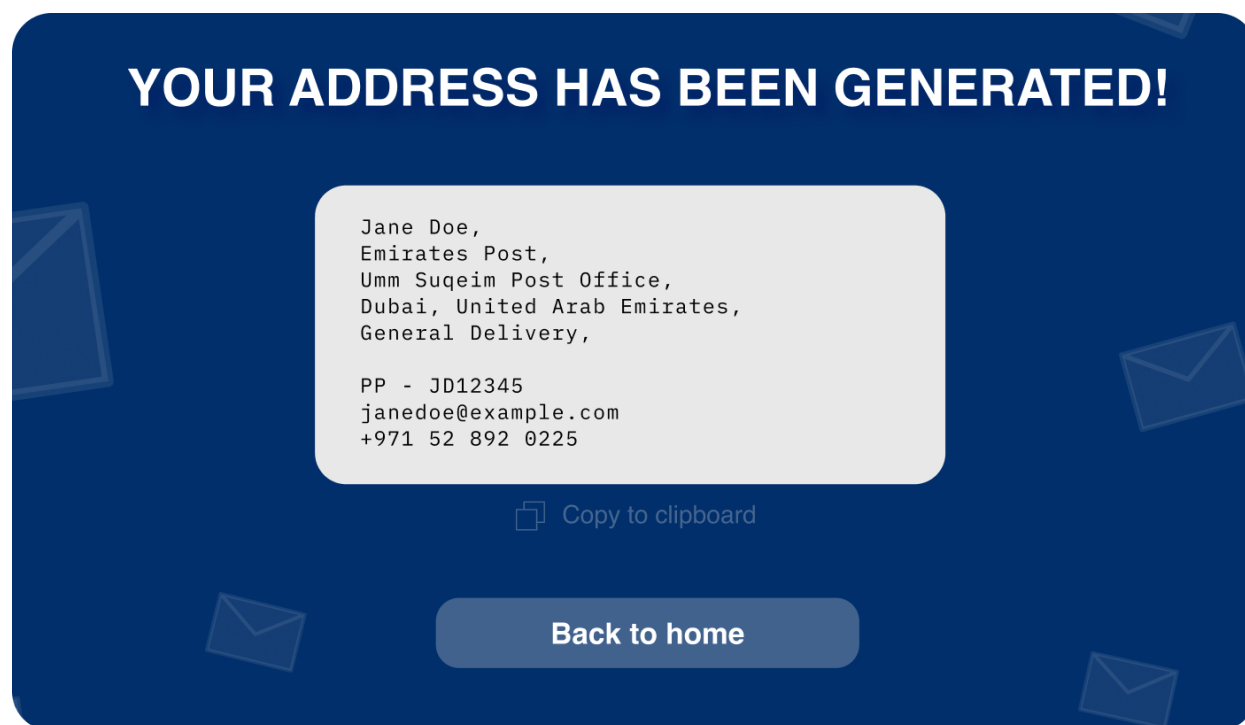


Figure 3 - Example of a mailing address that PeacePost generates for you

It is important to note that PeacePost is mainly focused on providing the mailing address. Refugees would need to visit the designated post office in person to retrieve their mail.

Benefits of PeacePost

Accessibility: Provides refugees with access to various services that require them to have a permanent address.

Integration: Enables refugees to participate more fully in their new communities, paving the way for long-term integration and self-sufficiency.

Scalability: The model can be adapted and scaled across different locations facing refugee crises.

Pitch Presentation and Challenges

After developing the initial concept for PeacePost, our team made a pitch presentation to introduce the concept and highlight its social impact. This presentation was shared with our module instructor, which led to valuable feedback.

Early on, we faced a few challenges. Understanding that our project can start on a small scale, we decided to focus on the UAE as a starting point. We identified Emirates Post as an ideal partner due to its extensive infrastructure and semi-governmental role. However, we have not received a response after attempting to contact their representatives. Additionally, surveys made and distributed by our team on refugee-focused social media platforms have not received any responses.

To respond to these challenges, our team sought guidance from the instructor and decided to reframe PeacePost as a 'Speck Project.' Doing so allowed us to continue with our project without being constrained by immediate obstacles to implementation. Our team had also experienced initial disorganization, which was addressed by restructuring roles and responsibilities (a topic we will explore later).

Outlining deliverables

After team discussions and meetings, the core deliverables for the PeacePost project were decided. The deliverables would be centered around building a digital presence and demonstrating the service's functionality. The primary focus was designing a working **website prototype** using Figma. This process involved creating a sitemap, low-fidelity wireframes, high-fidelity mock-ups, and ultimately, the prototype itself.

Additionally, we developed a **social media campaign** that would raise awareness of the challenges faced by refugees and promote PeacePost as a potential solution.

Team Roles and Reassignment

Our team consists of six members, including a designated project manager. Early on during our ideation and preliminary phase, we faced challenges with team efficiency and clear direction due to overlapping responsibilities and tasks. To address this challenge and maintain work efficiency, I reassigned team roles, resulting in improved productivity and task completion.

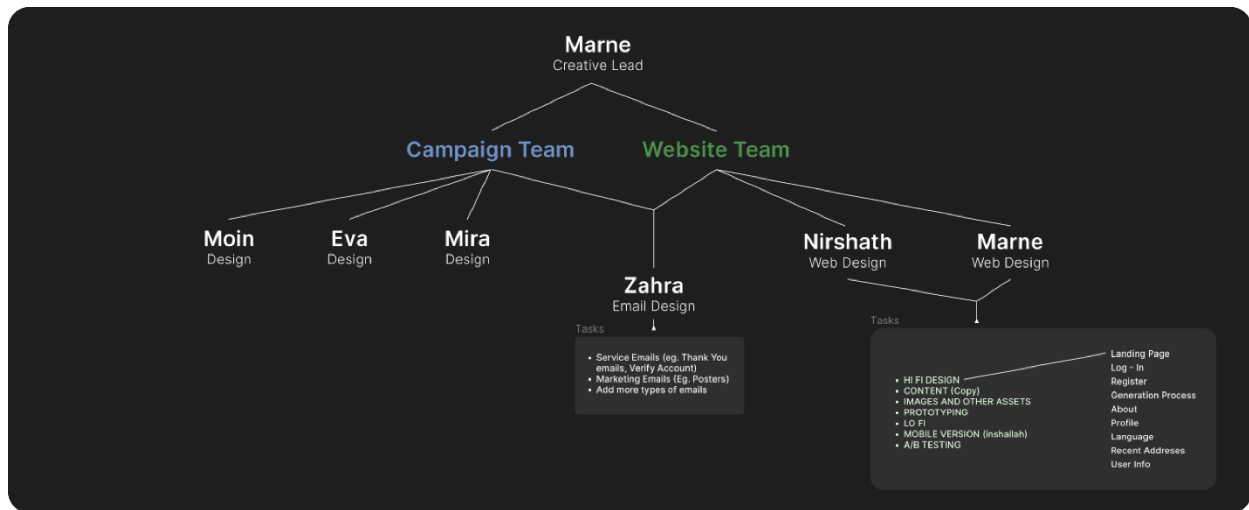


Figure 3 - Our new team structure.

Our team was divided into three sub-divisions:

Campaign Team (3 members): tasked with creating elements related to the Social Media campaign of PeacePost.

Website Team (Myself + 1 member): responsible for creating the low-fi, high-fi, and prototype of the PeacePost website and all other website elements.

Emails (1 member): responsible for creating mock-ups of emails that would be sent by PeacePost

Social Media Campaign

Our campaign team developed a campaign designed to raise awareness about the challenges that refugees face while also promoting PeacePost as a potential solution. The campaign was centered around two main themes: "Know Our Story" and "Share Your Story"

Know Our Story: This theme focused on highlighting PeacePost's mission, impact goals, and core values. The team used storytelling techniques, impactful visuals, and concise messaging to inform and engage the audience.

Share Your Story: This aspect encouraged user-generated content (UGC) and also fostered community engagement. Refugees and supporters were invited to share their experiences, insights, and successes related to PeacePost.

The campaign aimed to increase brand awareness, drive website traffic, and build trust and credibility. The content is tailored for platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Posts were created in English and Arabic to reach a wider demographic, reflecting the focus on the UAE region.

The team used various content formats, including:

- Carousels on Instagram and Facebook
- Banners and Posters on Instagram and Facebook
- Reels and Motion Graphic videos on Instagram and Youtube
- Mockup WhatsApp Chat, to simulate conversations and potential user interactions with PeacePost.

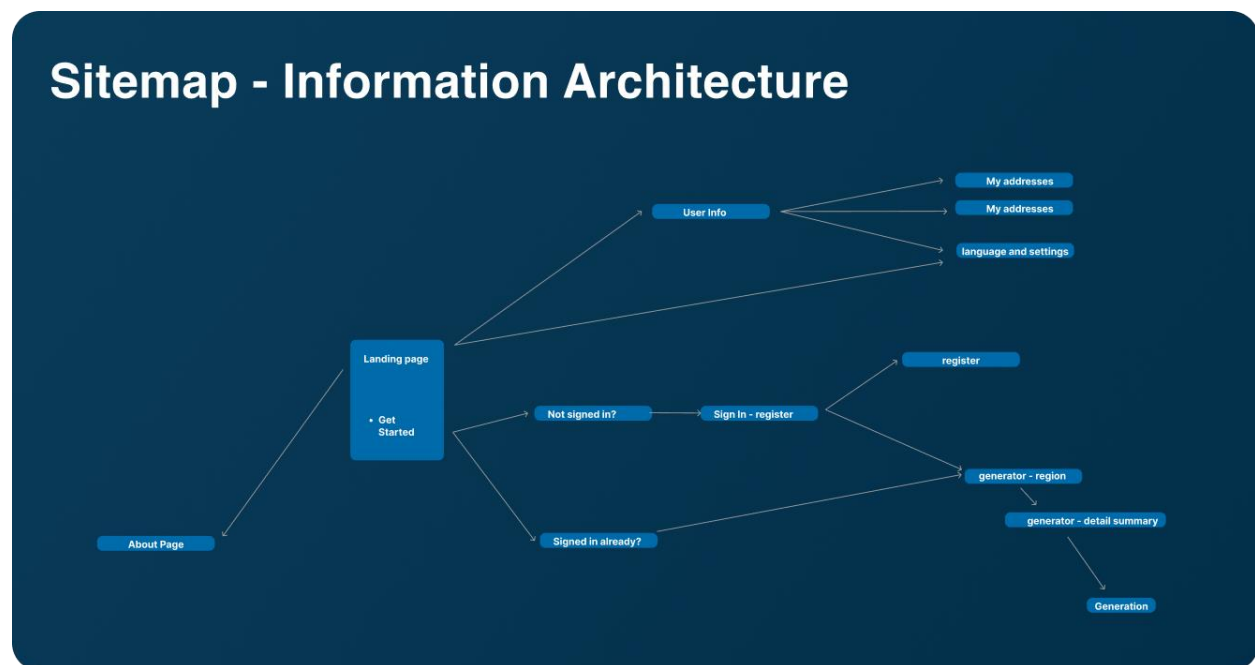
Website – My contribution

As the lead UI/UX designer for the PeacePost website, I was responsible for conceptualizing and creating the website – a core deliverable of our social design project. The website was envisioned as an accessible platform enabling refugees to register and obtain permanent mailing addresses. This empowerment-focused approach aimed to bridge communication barriers and facilitate integration within their new communities.

The website was intended to be an easily accessible platform that would allow refugees to register and receive permanent mailing addresses.

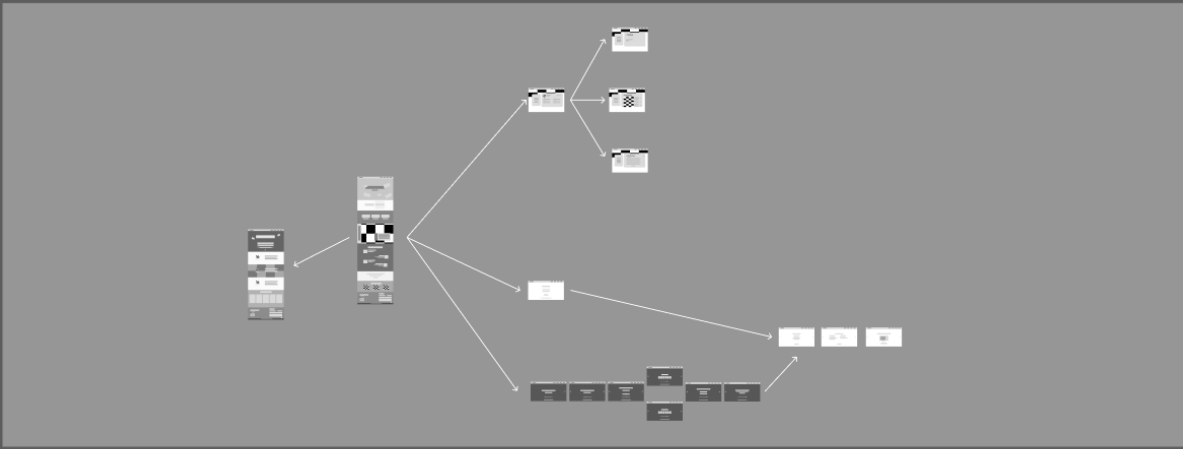
Design Process

The development of the website followed a structured, iterative process on Figma, moving through the following phases:



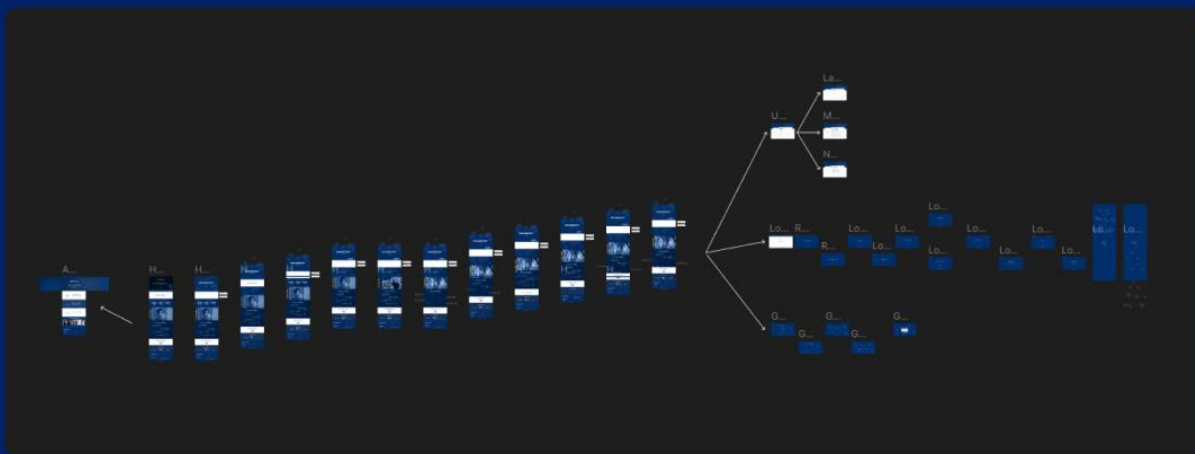
Sitemap: I outlined the site's structure and content hierarchy, ensuring a logical and user-friendly arrangement of necessary pages. This served as a blueprint for the website's overall organization.

Low - Fidelity



Low-Fidelity Wireframing: Focusing on functionality, I created basic wireframes with placeholder elements to visualize layout and element positioning. This stage facilitated feedback and informed the following high-fidelity design.

High - Fidelity



High-Fidelity Design: Drawing on our brand identity, I crafted the visual aesthetic, incorporating colors, typography, and imagery. The use of royal blue aimed to convey trust and compassion (Compassion International, 2024), while Monument Extended

(Pangram Pangram Foundry, 2021) and Helvetica (Miedinger, Hoffman, 1957) fonts were chosen for their clarity and simplicity.

Design

#042F66
#E8E8E8
#3A3A3A
#D9D9D9

MONUMENT EXTENDED

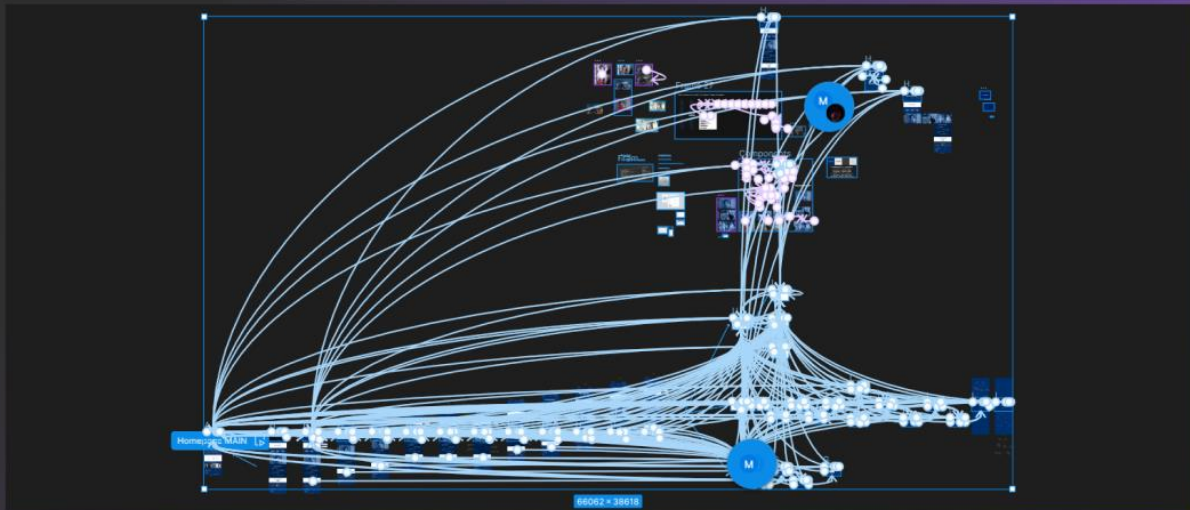
Helvetica Now Display XBold

Helvetica Now Display Medium

Helvetica Now Display Light

Helvetica Now Display Thin

Prototype



Prototyping: Using Figma's prototyping tools, I developed a functional website prototype. Animations, transitions, and interactive elements were integrated to enhance user experience. The homepage featured unique animations, requiring a slightly different technical approach (sacrificing scrolling for navigation arrows) to deliver optimal functionality.

Key Website Features

Homepage: Designed as the primary entry point, it offers an overview of PeacePost's mission, impact statistics, refugee stories (Cleland, 2024), instructions, an address generation button, partnership information, and contact details.

About Page: This section provides details about PeacePost's mission, vision, values, and team member profiles.

Registration: The registration and login process were streamlined, aiming for ease of use with minimal input requirements.

Address Generator: In partnership with a postal service like Emirates Post (2024), the generator leverages a database of post office locations. Users' input (location, contact details) is combined with a pre-existing address, creating a unique, permanent address they can copy and use.

Profile Pages: This section contains:

- User Information (contains editable personal details)
- My Addresses (a history of generated addresses for easy access)
- Languages (allows users to switch the website language)
- Notifications (displays service updates and relevant resources)

Design Philosophy

Accessibility and simplicity were guiding principles. The design supports the project's social goals by making it easy for refugees to navigate, understand, and utilize PeacePost's services.

Challenges and Refinements

Our low-fidelity process began before our team's role reassignment. The quality of work led to our team receiving helpful yet negative feedback. In order to ensure that our website was up to standards, I took over the responsibility to refine and create a version of our prototype that was much better in terms of design, usability, and overall user experience.

Reflecting on the website design process

Designing and prototyping the entire website, though it was challenging, proved to be a great learning experience, especially in terms of applying user-centered design principles within a social context. I also gained a great deal of prototyping experience, as there were many opportunities for me to create unique animations while overcoming the challenge of figuring out how to implement them in software like Figma. It was extremely rewarding and satisfying to witness the animations work as per our team's standards.

Upon completing the final prototype of the website, I used OBS (2024), a screen-capturing software, and various Adobe tools to create a walkthrough video showcasing the website.

Reflection

The process that our team undertook to develop PeacePost as a social design project has taught us the power of social design in addressing real-world challenges. Our team aimed to create a tangible service that had a positive impact on the lives of refugees who would make use of our service. The challenges that we faced, such as the initial feedback and the need to restructure our team, highlighted how important it is to be adaptive and resilient during the design process. This whole process reinforced our belief that design can be a catalyst for social change, while also empowering individuals and communities.

Conclusion

Our social design project, PeacePost, demonstrates the potential to improve the lives and well-being of refugees by providing them with a stable, permanent mailing address. The project contributes to greater inclusivity and integration efforts by addressing certain barriers that are faced by those who do not have a permanent address. PeacePost would benefit from forming partnerships with postal services and NGOs, enabling our team to implement it in the real world. This action research report has also highlighted the importance of teamwork, task delegation, iterative problem-solving, and empathy in designing with social elements in mind. The journey of designing PeacePost has been a deeply enriching experience, solidifying my interest in pursuing a career centered around designing for social impact.

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