United for Retail: Care & Support for Retail Workers

Why United for Retail

We developed a mobile application tailored to retail workers experiencing stress, isolation, or frustration—offering support grounded in a relational and distributed organizing model. The app creates a peer-based digital support community that fosters emotional well-being, connection, and the foundations for collective action in a sector where safe, worker-centered spaces are rare. Unlike general-purpose commercial platforms, our app is purpose-built for retail workers, aligning its design with the principles of distributed organizing to enable trust, agency, and solidarity from the ground up.

Key Design Goal of United for Retail

One central question was: *What features of online groups are most effective in improving mental health and enabling collective action among workers?* The product was designed not just to reduce social isolation and provide support, but to test, iterate, and evaluate which features foster the strongest outcomes for individual well-being and group cohesion.

Core Features of United for Retail

1. **User Registration and Permissions**
   - Secure account creation, authentication, and consent-based permissions to ensure user control over data and identity.
   - Allows users to opt in to research and messaging while maintaining anonymity.

2. **Survey & Data Collection Tools**
   - Embedded pre-test, onboarding survey, and in-app micro-polls capture baseline mental health, stress levels, and engagement metrics.
   - Survey tools are dynamically configured through the admin portal, enabling updates without requiring app redeployment.

3. **Onboarding Experience**
   - A guided, welcoming sequence that includes a first post, introduction to a trained moderator, and invitation to participate in group discussions.
   - Designed to immediately reduce user anxiety and create psychological safety.

4. **Group Management System**
   - Tools for creating, managing, and moderating small peer groups (with size limits to enhance intimacy and trust).
   - Enables moderators to foster connection, prompt discussion, and enforce community norms.
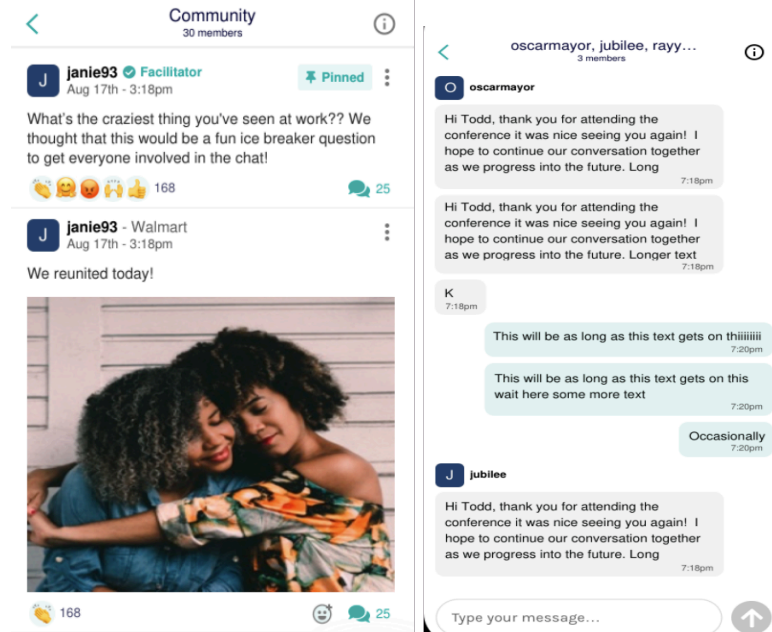
5. **Direct Messaging**
   ○ Moderators can reach out to individuals in private 1:1 conversations, offering deeper engagement or crisis referrals when needed.
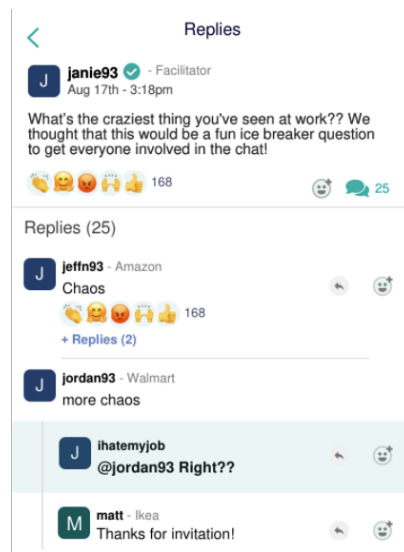
6. **Notifications**
    ○ Push and in-app notifications support continuous engagement and reinforce a sense of community presence.

7. **Evaluation Layer**
    ○ User interactions (posts, comments, time spent, survey responses) are tracked to assess health impacts, engagement trajectories, and group dynamics.
    ○ These insights inform ongoing design iterations and broader research into the role of digital tools in worker well-being and solidarity.

United for Retail Evolution

The underlying technology developed for the United for Retail platform has evolved beyond its original purpose, now serving as the core infrastructure for a storytelling platform that collects and amplifies the voices of people in low-wage jobs. By aggregating individual experiences, the platform reframes the broader narrative of what's happening across low-wage industries—ensuring these stories are told in the words of workers themselves, with authenticity and respect for their lived realities. This worker-driven storytelling has powered campaigns that have helped win over $11 billion in wage increases, advance policy reforms, and expand access to parental benefits.

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