



Project Proposal



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The Project

A LUNOS is a platform created for the homestay industry. The solution reaches all participants in the process: homestay providers (agencies/schools), students, and homestays (host families).

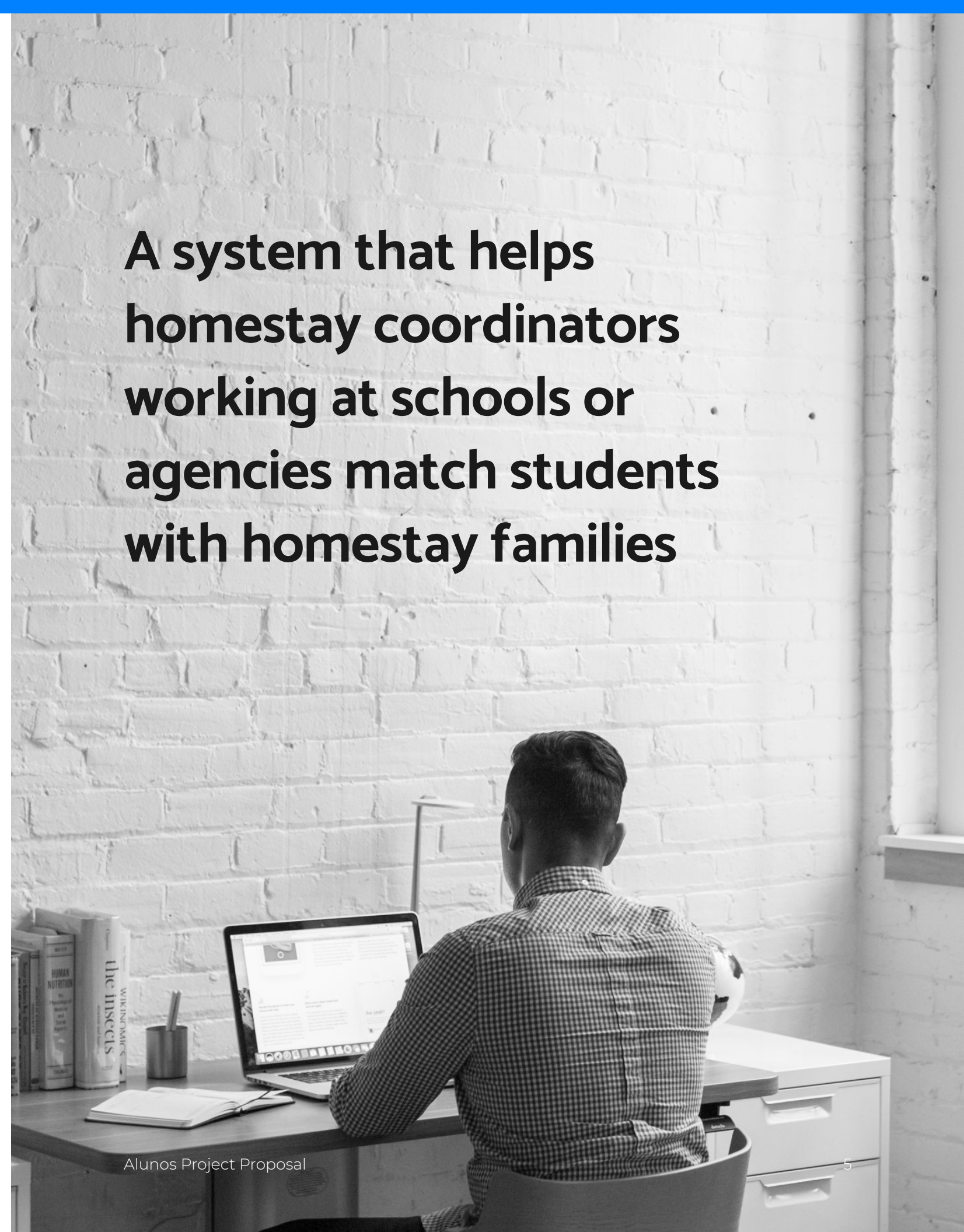
The goal of this project is to solve lots of problems identified in this industry, but particularly:

Automate and improve the complete homestay management process for the homestay providers (agencies/schools).

Improve the experience of students staying at homestays, mainly by improving communication between those involved (students, homestays, and providers).

Create an easy and accessible tool for the host families to manage their homestay.

A system that helps homestay coordinators working at schools or agencies match students with homestay families



Features

The application provides the ability for all users to easily interact and access their homestay information and activities. ALUNOS offers three interfaces carefully designed that communicate with each other, meeting the specific needs of its users.

The platform provides a web dashboard for homestay providers to manage all areas of the process, from application filing to the final day of the student's stay. The goal of the application is to automate tasks, reduce errors, facilitate the matching process and issue management.

Web Dashboard

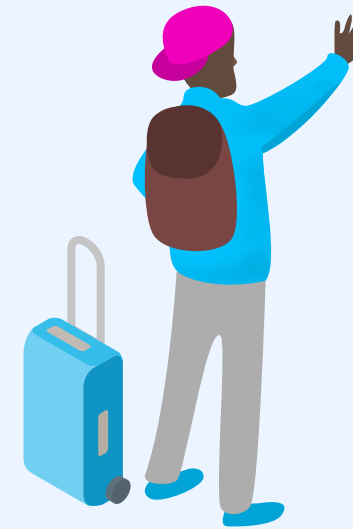
For the homestay providers in agencies and schools

- Receive and process students and homestays application
- Manage students and homestays
- Match the student with suitable homestays
- Handles the acceptance/rejection of the student by the homestay
- Alert about issues reported by students or homestays
- Requests and processes the students' feedback regarding the homestay
- Send cultural/day-to-day tips for the students

For the students, ALUNOS provides a mobile app through which they can add their profile information, see all the information regarding their homestay, and manage activities such as reporting issues, get daily cultural tips and provide feedback for the agency/school. All the recent activities will be communicated by push notifications and displayed on the initial feed screen.

Mobile App for students

- Feed/Notifications
- Student profile (birthday, contact, photos, allergies, diet preferences, etc.)
- Homestay info (rules, members details, contacts, photos, etc.)
- Add posts
- House issues (add, view and manage)
- Ask for help / Report critical issues (for the agency/school)
- Daily Tips



For the homestays (host families), ALUNOS provides a mobile app through which they can add their profile information, see the information regarding the students they are hosting, do activities such as reporting issues, and manage the homestay itself – rooms, meals, students, rules, etc. All the recent activities will be communicated by push notifications and displayed on the initial feed screen.

Mobile App for host families

- Feed/Notifications
- Homestay profile (members details, contacts, photos)
- Management (accept/reject students, manage students, rooms, meals, rules, etc.)
- Add posts
- House issues (add, view and manage)
- Ask for help / Report critical issues (for the agency/school)



Platforms

The LUNOS team built the application platforms by carefully considering the needs of each user group. For the homestay providers, the web dashboard brings very useful features for them to manage all the processes related to students and homestays activities. For the students and host families, the solution comes as a mobile app, which is the platform most used by end consumers due to its portability and intuitive interface. The three platforms communicate between each other and provide a safe environment for the users to exchange information.

Homestay Providers

Security is a part of its solution. An SSL certificate was issued for the domain to keep sensitive information sent across the Internet encrypted. Passwords are hashed with bcrypt, which is a current hash methodology that is extremely resistant to attacks. OAuth 2 is used for issuing tokens, which allows other applications to communicate with ALUNOS, facilitating integrations.



Timeline

	Design	Development
Week 1		Team formation / Project ideas discussion
Week 2		Project selection: ALUNOS Market research / Competitors research
Week 3		Surveys and interviews Project features definition / User flows
Week 4	Team Logo Student App wireframes v1	Tech stack definition / GitHub repositories Studies of technologies
Week 5	Video addressing the problem Customer journey	Mobile apps structure / API structure Draft of database
Week 6	Project Logo / Student App wireframes conclusion / Marketing website wireframes	Server setup / Database conclusion Marketing website structure
Week 7	UI Kit / Wireframes conclusion Student App mockup	Additional project settings API development / OAuth implementation
Week 8	Marketing website mockup / UI Guide Student app prototype / Brand colours definition	Student app UI development / Marketing website UI development / Dashboard structure / DB seeding
Week 9	Proposal styling v1 Homestay app mockup v1	Student app routes / Dashboard UI development Marketing website content / DB seeding
Week 10	Homestay mockup conclusion	Student app API connection Dashboard API connection
Week 11	Proposal styling conclusion	Homestay app development
Week 12	Marketing materials	Homestay app API connection
Week 13	Presentation styling	Tests / QA / Bugs correction
Week 14		Proposal printing / Project Final presentation

Market Research

The homestay industry is not regulated by the government in Canada, and this is one of the reasons that turns it very difficult to find information about. No relatively safe and up-to-date data was found on the number of homestays providers in Canada or host families. Currently, just in Homestay.com, it's possible to find almost 2,000 homestays available in the country, and this is just one of the various marketplace websites. Furthermore, a big part of the homestays is associated directly just with schools or agencies and are not listed on these websites.

We could find statistics about international students, which are the main final clients of this industry. According to the Government of Canada, in 2019 there were about 642,000

international students in the country, mainly from India, China, South Korean, and France (2019), and most of the international students are enrolled in postsecondary programs.

Considering that the direct clients of ALUNOS are the homestay providers – agencies/schools, we tried to get rough idea of the size of this market by researching the number of postsecondary schools in Canada, as there is no information available on the number of homestay agencies. Currently, there are approximately 2,000 colleges and universities in Canada (CICIC). Additionally, there are over 200 language schools in the country, that receive lots of international students that come to study English in Canada.

Homestay Providers

ALUNOS conducted interviews with two homestay providers for international students, which companies' names will be preserved. Both of the interviewed related the processes and pain points, which are shared by them in some ways, but also different in lots of aspects.

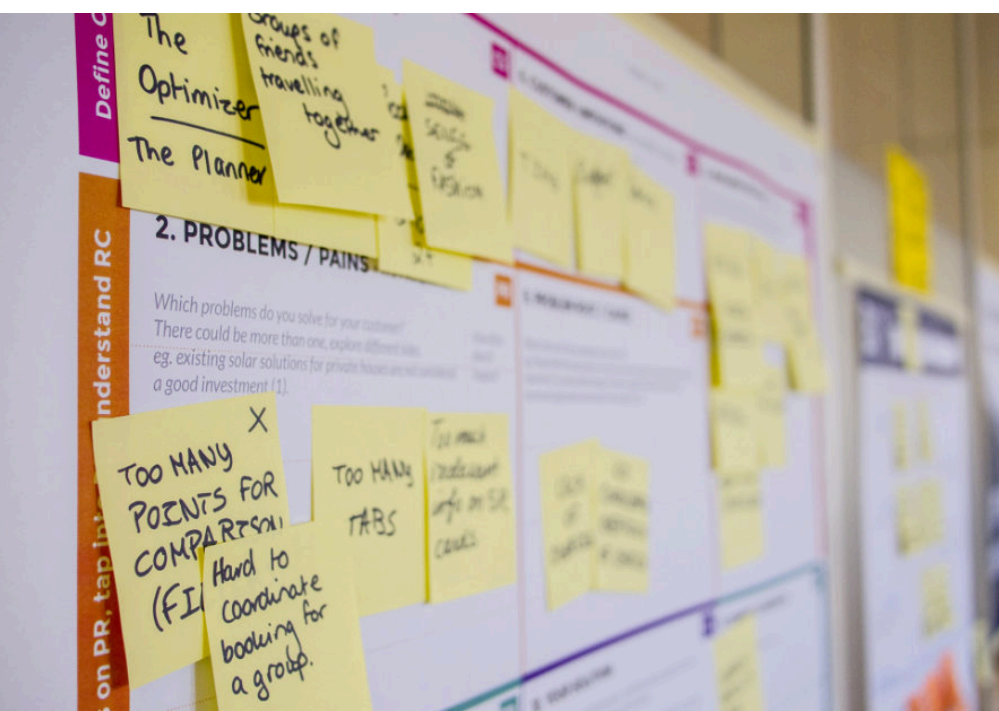
One of the providers – a big homestay agency – uses an in-house software which helps the agency to manage tasks, but there's no interface for the students or homestays. The software still requires lots of improvements, and all the knowledge about the system is inside the developer's head. This provider is more focused in minor students, which come to Canada to attend high-school, and for this reason the agency needs to be more careful when choosing the host family. The interviewee reported problems due to the poor communication between the parties, explaining that, even having a detailed matching process which usually takes around 15 days to be done, it is very common for the students to have their expectations not met during their homestay experience. This happens mainly because, before traveling, they don't have enough clarification about some important things such as family culture and food, and also because the communication between the house members is not always efficient.

When talking about the agency tasks, the interviewee related that the agency directly employs more than 50 people and several regional agents as contractors, and most of the details about the host families are only in the agents' heads. Because of that, it's very difficult when one of the agents quit and the agency needs to retrieve information about host families in that region.

The second provider – a private college – has no system or platform to manage process, just a database with students and homestays information. According to the interviewee, all the processes are done mainly through email, phone, papers, and sometimes in person, which makes it difficult to keep all the information updated in one place and easily accessible. The agency works mainly with students of age, so the matching process is not so detailed and can be done in some days, but the interviewee said that to offer a more compatible match they need at least two weeks to find a family.

When matching a student with a homestay, several criteria are considered such as allergies, age, diets, location, special requests, but the interviewee reported many issues related to poor communication and expectations not met for all parties and said that it is very common for students to ask to be relocated.

To understand more deeply the needs of those who relate to the homestay market, the ALUNOS team conducted research and interviews directly with its users: homestay providers, students, and host families.



Both providers usually do just one feedback round with the students to know how things are going with the homestay, and both agree that a structured periodic feedback would help them to assess homestays and prioritize the best rated at the time of the matching process. Furthermore, they reported that the lack of a good software makes tasks more time consuming and more exposed to errors, as well as the lack of an interface for students and families hinders communication between the parties.

We shared with the interviewees the features of ALUNOS and quickly they could relate their problems to some solutions we are bringing. By offering a modern and complete interface for all the parties, our solution can definitely help them to improve communication and avoid lots of issues from students and homestays. The web dashboard can help them with automating processes and keeping all the information in one single place, facilitating updates and access to data. According to them, there's no specialized software for this industry.

They showed to be excited about our solution proposal, saying that this industry is poorly served and that our application is covering all the departments. One of them finalized the interview saying that "this (platform) is a must in this city and this country".

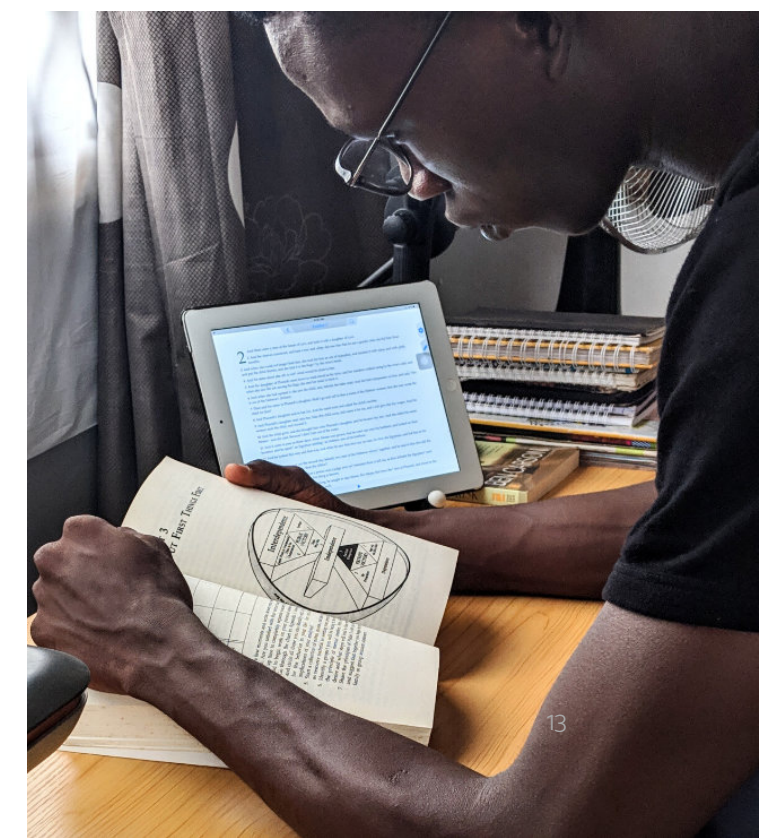


Students

In order to reach a higher number of students who had a homestay experience, ALUNOS prepared an online survey with students. We could get 46 responses, and below we present an analysis of the results:

- ▶ Just about 6% of the participants were less than 20 years old when they have stayed in a homestay, which agrees with the government information that the number of international students that comes to attend high school programs is much lower when compared to other programs in postsecondary schools. For MVP, our student app focus on students of age as the main users.
- ▶ About half of the participants declared they have chosen homestay over other types of accommodation because of cultural immersion, which indicates that it is really important for the students to have ways of improving their experience regarding local culture. Thinking about that, we believe our Tips functionality will be useful for them.
- ▶ About 73% of the participants found their homestay through an agency or school, and just 8.5% found it in marketplace. It shows that homestay agencies and schools are still the most important source for this service, although the marketplace is becoming more popular recently and can't be ignored.

- ▶ Although just about 12% of the students have requested a homestay less than 30 days before traveling, about 53% of all students said they received the confirmation of the homestay less than 30 days before traveling. It shows the matching process is not very fast - when interviewing the homestay providers, we could notice that the lack of tools and lack of updated information makes the matching process difficult and slow.
- ▶ Half of the participants declared they could not easily communicate with the host family and that they received just a few information and just a few or no photos before traveling, so we believe our solution can help with that by proving a communication channel prior their arrival.



- ▶ The participants declared the main challenges faced in their homestay were:
 1. Food (53%): by providing richer information prior to arrival, our solution can help to reduce the problems with food/diet preferences – the matching process will be improved, and the student will have more realistic expectations about the homestay
 2. House issues (44.7%): our feature for managing House issues can improve the communication inside the homestay, and the feature Critical Issues can offer a help channel for the student to talk with the school/agency about how to solve these problems.
 3. Lack of communication (34.2%): our solution can definitely facilitate communication between house members before traveling and during stay.
 4. Behavior issues (28.9%): although our solution can't change people's behavior, it can help the student to easily communicate the school/agency about the problems and find a way to solve it. Furthermore, by providing more information about the house members, we have a chance to reduce conflicts by making people to better know each other.
- ▶ From the participants that have requested to change their homestay (about 23% of the total), just 10% had their request answered. It shows the difficulty of schools/agencies in managing available spaces for the students.
- ▶ About 57% of the participants declared the communication with the agency/school was

not direct and/or fast, and almost half of this group declared it was tough to reach them, which shows that a solution that helps to improve this communication can be very useful.

- ▶ About 85% of the participants declared that communication with the family regarding tasks or issues was done in person. It shows that the majority had no way to keep track of these topics and had to trust their memory - and our application can definitely help with that by offering communication tools.
- ▶ 39% of the participants declared their agency/school NEVER asked for feedback about the homestay, and about 31% declared they asked just once. With automated feedback requests and a friendly mobile interface to answer it, we believe our platform can improve this process a lot.
- ▶ About 25% of the participants declared they would NOT recommend their agency/school to a friend, while about 34% said “maybe”, and the numbers are very similar regarding recommending their homestay. We can notice that there's a high level of dissatisfaction on the part of the students – one of the main goals of our application is to improve the students' experience and level of happiness.
- ▶ Most of the participants (about 53%) declared to be “Reasonably satisfied” with their homestay experience, and about 17% felt “Not satisfied”. Again, we believe our platform can be a great ally for the students in improving their homestay experience.

Homestays - host families

ALUNOS conducted 2 interviews with host families who have years of experience hosting international students. Although they didn't report as much disappointment as the students and agencies/schools, these users also feel there's a lack of communication between all parties.

One of the interviewed reported that the agencies don't offer enough support for both students and families, and the service is so poor that maybe the homestay would be better without the agency, by renting the room directly in marketplace. At the same time, both interviewees agree that it's difficult for the students who are having a bad experience in their homestay to not have an agency support, so the ideal scenario would be to find a way to improve communication and agency support – which relates directly with the goals of ALUNOS solution.

Both interviewees said they have no solution to manage their homestay and that it would be very helpful if they could have a tool to help them with this activity. Lastly, one of them reported that, in the way the process is currently done, it is pretty difficult to differentiate the good homestays from the bad ones, so by having more students feedback maybe the agencies can offer better rated options for students, albeit at an additional cost.

We shared with them our project idea and both demonstrated to be excited about it.



Personas

Personas

Homestay Provider: Thomas Roy

Thomas is the CEO of a homestay agency for more than 4 years, and he has some difficulties with keeping and updating families' and student's information. He hired 4 clerks to take care of matching students and families based on different criteria and availability. He does not have any accurate standard of the process of assigning family to a student and following up with them, which sometimes brings problems to him. He is eager to automate the whole process and help his clients to have a better experience with his agency, as well as reduce his labor costs.

Persona role: Homestay Agency CEO

Age: 39

Gender: Male

Education level: MBA

Residential environment: Vancouver, BC

'I want to improve the existing process in my agency to give a better service to both hosts and students and reduce my costs with labour.'

Professional Goals

- ▶ He wants to have updated information about families and students
- ▶ He wants to automate the application process for students and families
- ▶ He wants to automate the process of matching students with families in order to satisfy both
- ▶ He wants to make the communication easier between the agency and students and families
- ▶ He wants to have an easy way of following up and getting feedback from students about the families
- ▶ He wants to give the best homestay services in Vancouver to boost his business

Challenges

- ▶ All the process is manual and requires a team to execute it
- ▶ Students and families information stored in excel sheets and most of the time outdated
- ▶ The process of asking students and families to give information and updating them on spreadsheets is frustrating
- ▶ No feedback from students and families, which may cause a bad reputation of the agency without even knowing the problem
- ▶ Not able to give the option to students to choose between families

Sources of information

- ▶ Though phone calls
- ▶ Online
- ▶ Contact with schools



Student 1: Maria Wilson

Persona role: Student before being hosted, accepted as an English Student at an ELC School

Age: 22
Gender: Female
Education level: Bachelor
Residential environment: Buenos Aires, Argentina



Maria was born and raised in Argentina, after graduation from university in Argentina, she is planning to move to Canada to improve her communication skills in English. It will be her first time living in Vancouver and she doesn't know anybody there. She is looking for safe accommodation in a homestay, so she can learn more about the city and culture with local people.

'It is really important for me to feel comfortable with my new family and to learn about the country culture as much as possible.'

Motivators

- ▶ Find a good match in terms of meals, location, price, etc.
- ▶ See options of families and choose the right one for her.
- ▶ Know about the family before arrival.
- ▶ Get familiar with cultural differences.

Challenges

- ▶ No information about the family before getting there.
- ▶ No image of the room before I arrive there.
- ▶ Hard to trust hosts and agencies - lack of information.
- ▶ No much details and options available to make a good choice.

Sources of information

- ▶ School website
- ▶ Search on Google

Student 2: Julio Santos

Persona role: Already hosted, Postgraduate Student at UBC

Age: 26
Gender: Male
Education level: Post graduate
Residential environment: Vancouver, BC



Julio is a 26 years old international student from Brazil, he is currently living in a homestay with a family for about 6 months but he is feeling this could be a better experience for him if there was any further support from agency and even he had a choice to better know the family before settling down.

'I want to have efficient communication with my host family and be able to quickly reach my agency in case of problems.'

Motivators

- ▶ Having better and easier communication with the family.
- ▶ He wants to be able to report critical issues to the agency or school.
- ▶ Improve his information about local cultures.

Challenges

- ▶ I can not give any feedback about the family, in case of some difficulties with the family I have no idea what to do.
- ▶ Sometimes I forget to inform the family about not being for dinner.
- ▶ I had no idea about the home and family before I get here .
- ▶ I am not familiar with their culture especially in some special events.

Sources of information

- ▶ Internet
- ▶ Ask peers to check if they have information

Homestay Host: Victoria Smith

Persona role: Homestay family, retired teacher

Age: 65

Gender: Female

Education level: Bachelor of Science

Residential environment: Vancouver, BC

Victoria is a 65 years old lady living in Vancouver, she is a retired teacher and she lives with her husband. She has 2 rooms available in her house and she hosts international students to earn more money.

Motivators


- ▶ She wants to have all information about the student before her/his arrival.
- ▶ She wants to make sure if the student is a good match.
- ▶ She wants to easily manage her homestay.
- ▶ She wants to communicate with agencies easier and get a quicker answer.

Challenges

- ▶ Not sure if the student is a good match.
- ▶ No tool to help her with the homestay management.
- ▶ Have a problem in communication with agencies.
- ▶ Not sure if the student knows all the rules of the house.

Sources of information

- ▶ Agencies
- ▶ Schools
- ▶ Online



‘I want to better manage my homestay and to host students that are suitable for me.’

Competitive Analysis

Currently there is no specialized platform in Canada that offers all the features that ALUNOS is providing for the users. Some agencies/schools have part of the processes managed by some software, but these solutions have a very reduced scope when compared to ALUNOS, and due to their limitations, they still require lots of manual processes to run in parallel.

In terms of software, there are some management systems helping agencies working in education domain to manage their operations, such as www.inteleagent.io and geteducation.link. We consider them as competitors because they might expand to homestay as well.

In order to compare our solution with other options available to execute the same tasks, we show a comparison table between ALUNOS and two types of competitors:

- ▶ Marketplace: C2C platforms such as AirBnb and Homestay.com
- ▶ Human workforce: homestay coordinators in schools/agencies

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

ALUNOS improves the level of transparency for students as well as homestay owners.

Student gets the information well ahead of time and can see the room and family pictures before arrival.

ALUNOS not only automates the application process for students and hosts, but also gives management platform for both parties for daily operations.

The automated process reduces chances for human errors, thus providing better user experience.

Currently, there's no specialized platform in Canada dedicated for managing all homestay related processes, which gives ALUNOS leading edge.

MVP Limitations

In the MVP, ALUNOS does not have an option to automate criminal background checks for hosts, which will still be done manually by the agencies and schools.

In the MVP, ALUNOS does not have an option to automate the homestay inspection activity.

The processes and services in each agency/school are different in many ways, making the definition of the platform more complex.

Opportunities

The current problem area where the entire process is manual and through emails creates a lot of human errors, which is an opportunity for ALUNOS to solve this problem for a lot of agencies.

Cities like Vancouver have many ELS and postsecondary schools where international students register, which is an opportunity for ALUNOS to offer the solution for such institutions.

According to the research done, all those involved reported several problems and a high level of dissatisfaction with the processes in general.

Threats

Some platforms such as www.inteleagent.io and geteducation.link are very similar solutions but in the education domain. These might expand their services to include homestay, which is a threat for ALUNOS.

Marketplace solutions (C2C) are increasingly popular

A considerable number of homestays are run by elderly people who are not totally familiarized with technologies.



Tech Stack

Project Management, Code Editing and Version Control



To manage all the project activities, we have chosen to use Jira, which is a tool widely used in the market that provides issue tracking and agile project management. Jira allows the users to easily communicate plans and connect the roadmap goals to the team's everyday tasks. It has integration with many popular third-party software, such as Slack. It's highly customizable and offers a simple interface for the user to access all the issues and related documentation.

For code editing we used Visual Studio Code, which is a free platform which offers smart tools such as IntelliSense, debugging, built-in git and lots of useful extensions that makes the coding activity easier and more efficient.

For Version control we used GitHub mainly because it's the most popular remote collaborative tool for version control and code review.

Design



After researching the market and the project problem the team created a concept that included the following values - safety, convenience, excitement, youth, reliability and transparency.

Designers of Alunos took on a challenge and, in addition to Adobe Suite, they grasped and used Affinity Photo, Designer and Publisher while creating the assets. Additionally, designers used Miro, InVision and Figma.

Front-end



ALUNOS offers three different interfaces. To make the Front-End scalable and sufficient we used Quasar, which is an open source Vue.js based framework. Quasar offers detailed documentation, and also has a library of material design components, which helps us to achieve the UI demands for a modern and efficient interface. We can have a hybrid mobile application by running Cordova behind it. For styling, we combined Quasar material theme customization and Sass for a responsive platform.

Vue.js is an open source JavaScript library which has benefits like single page applications. VueJS optimizes the load time of user interface, hence improving the user experience. IT helps to divide the user interface into fully functional components which can be reused. We made different components for all pages and reused some components in all of them such as footer and header.

To interact with the API and fetching the data, we are using Apollo and GraphQL to get the queries and using Vuex to manage states inside the Vue.js.

Back-end and APIs



ALUNOS platform uses PostgreSQL database which is an object-relational database and it is the best choice to perform complex and high-volume data operations. For integration of database and User-Interface, it uses Restful API as intermediate, which makes it flexible and adaptable.

To make Restful API, we used Laravel, which is a PHP framework with expressive and elegant syntax. Using Laravel integrated with GraphQL, which is a query language for APIs, gives us the power of querying data in a request to obtain the exact data needed in a single round trip to the server.



Future Enhancements

ALUNOS is a solution for an industry that is currently poorly served. There is no specialized software for managing homestay-related activities or applications to be used by students and host-families to communicate and manage their activities.

The solution offered by ALUNOS in its MVP (Minimum Viable Product) already helps the parties involved in the process and brings a significant improvement in their general experience. However, in order to be able to solve all the problems proposed and offer the desired quality of service, the scope of the project needs to be expanded and new features need to be added.

Some features planned for the next ALUNOS versions:

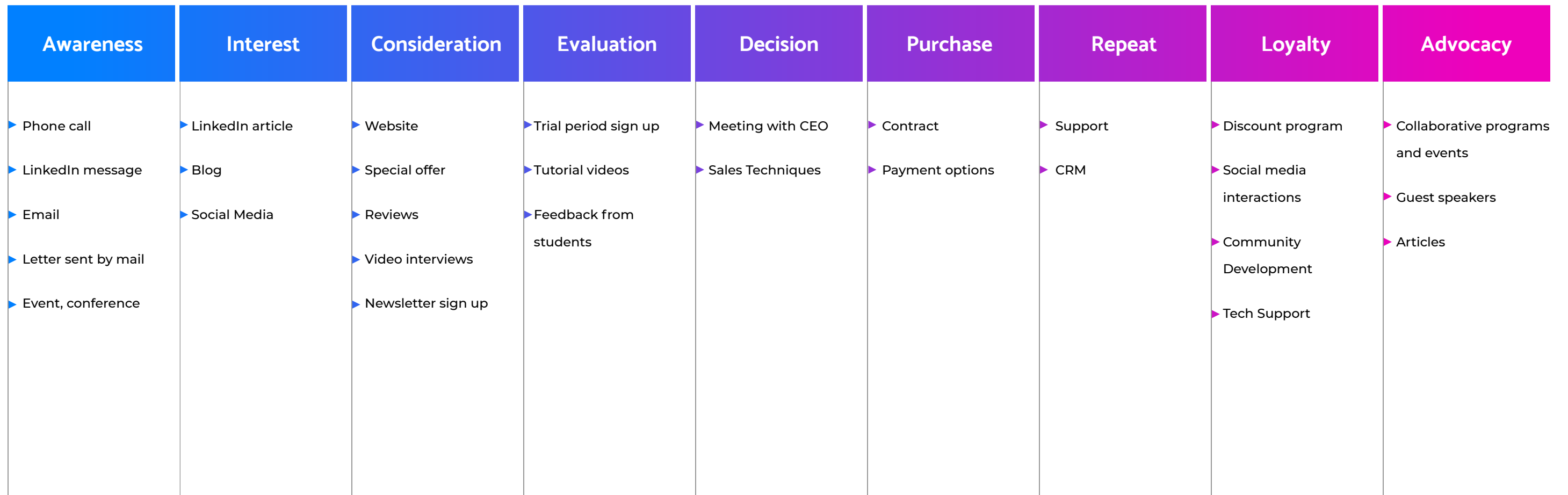
- Homestay inspection automation
- Multi language
- Agent management
- Customizable feedback and application forms
- Chat with the agency
- Star Families concept (best rated homestays)
- Option for the student to choose between different homestay options

Marketing

Alunos Conversion Funnel

B2B Service: Web Dashboard that helps matching international students with homestay host families.

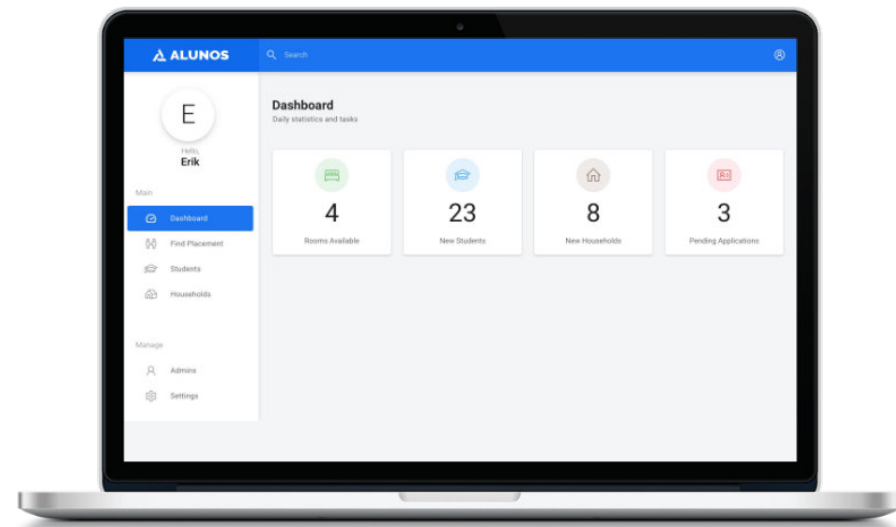
Target Audience: Homestay coordinators at School and Agencies.



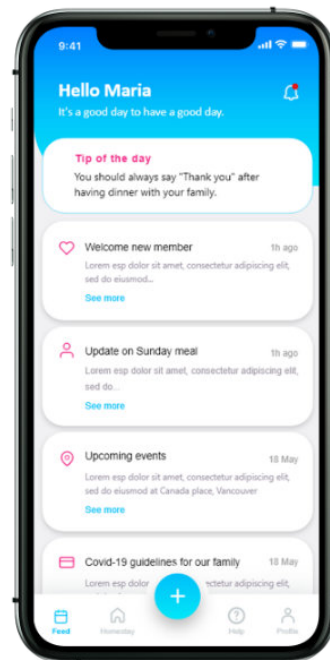
Mockups

Mockups

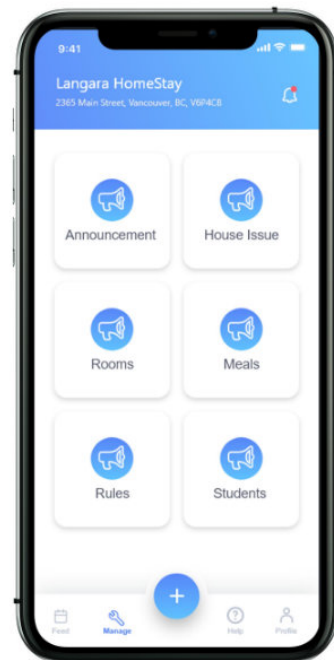
Dashboard



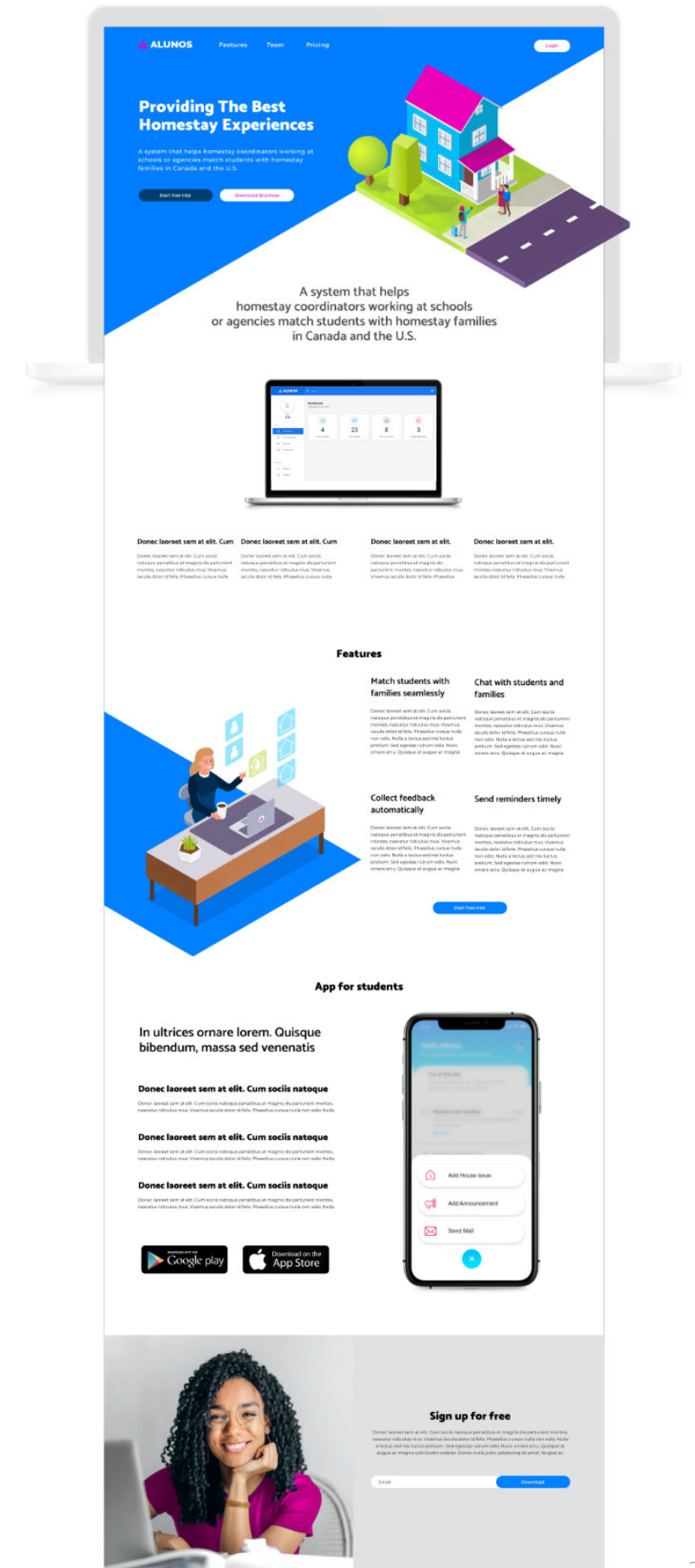
Student app



Host app



Website
Visit alunos.ca >



Meet The Team



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Heloysa Tancredo PM and Frontend Developer

My experience includes 6 years working as a Business Analyst and Project Manager. Passionate about technology, I've been dedicated to gaining in-depth knowledge of web and mobile application development in the last two years. I love solving problems and in the area of entrepreneurship.



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Walter Galvão Full Stack Lead Developer

I love to build products, with strengths in the technical arena, which is my specialization, but also in the whole business structure. Growth hacking, business strategies, features proposition, team growth, and management are challenges that give me extra motivation.



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Alexander Vasilyev UX/UI Designer

My core strength is my experience in solving business problems through graphic design and web development. I am passionate about improving people's lives by crafting user experience and user interfaces for web, mobile and print assets.



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Parminder Kaur UX/UI Designer

I am keen on creating human centric solutions. My Passion for creativity led me to the design field where I challenge and push myself to the limit with every project. My educational background is a bachelor's degree in Computer Science and I am currently finishing the post-degree diploma in web and mobile app design and development.



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Nazanin Ahmadi Frontend Developer

I started my professional journey 8 years ago by computer networking and running servers, in between I implemented an ERP system and became familiar with Databases. Now I am a junior web application developer.



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Jyot Sarup Kaur Frontend Developer

I am a web and mobile application developer with over 3 years of industry experience. I am in this industry because I have always had keen interest in critical thinking and analysis. My goal is to keep doing this by developing business solutions.



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Jaskaran Singh Backend Developer

I am a software engineer with a dream of connecting the world through code and those who believe that technology can make the world a better place. I have expertise in developing web and desktop-based applications. I am passionate and excited to learn about new technologies. I have an experience of 3 years in solving problems by writing efficient code.

Credits

Photography

<https://unsplash.com/photos/AkW3oAjhA2o>

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/person-reading-on-book-2380263/>

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/man-wearing-red-while-sitting-inside-concrete-bulding-7065/>

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