Ample Labs is a social startup committed to using technology to empower individuals facing homelessness.

Who we are

We are a grassroots organization comprised of designers, developers, researchers, public servants and people with lived experience who share a passion for empowering marginalized communities through technology.

We are **100%** volunteer run 🙋‍♀️🙋‍♂️ with no funding.

We have a team of **15+ people** that all have full-time jobs, we work on this weeknights & weekends.

Our current projects

🤖

ChalmersBot

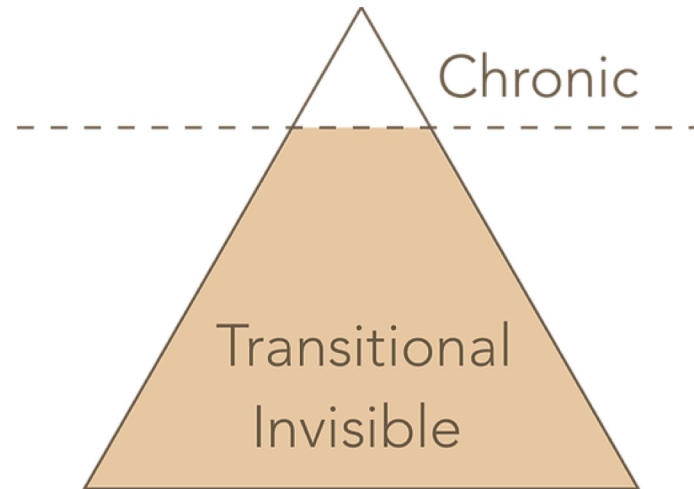Web-app to find local resources like free meals, drop-ins & shelter.

💼

Accelerator

Bridge the gap between youth who are homeless and job opportunities in the tech sector.

Early insights

Learning to see what's not always most easily visible

80-90% of people experiencing homelessness fall under the "transitional" or "invisible"

categories and do not belong to the chronic group of people that are often sleeping rough.

Early insights

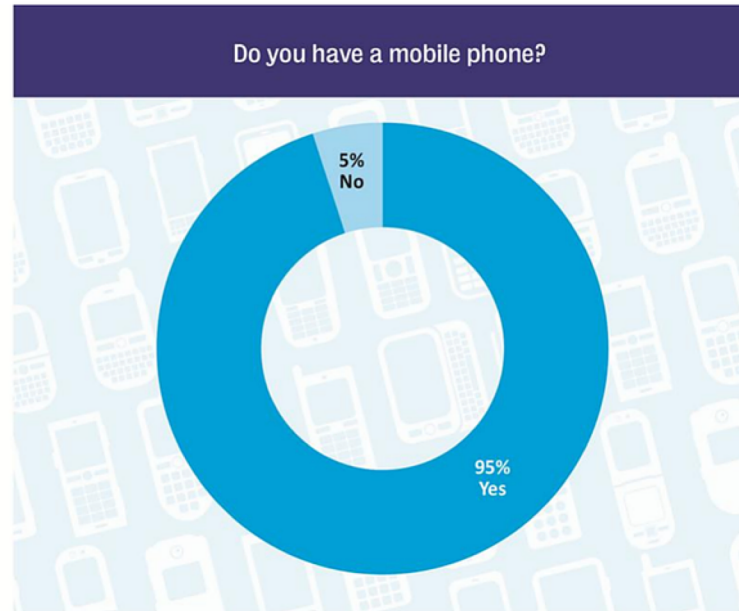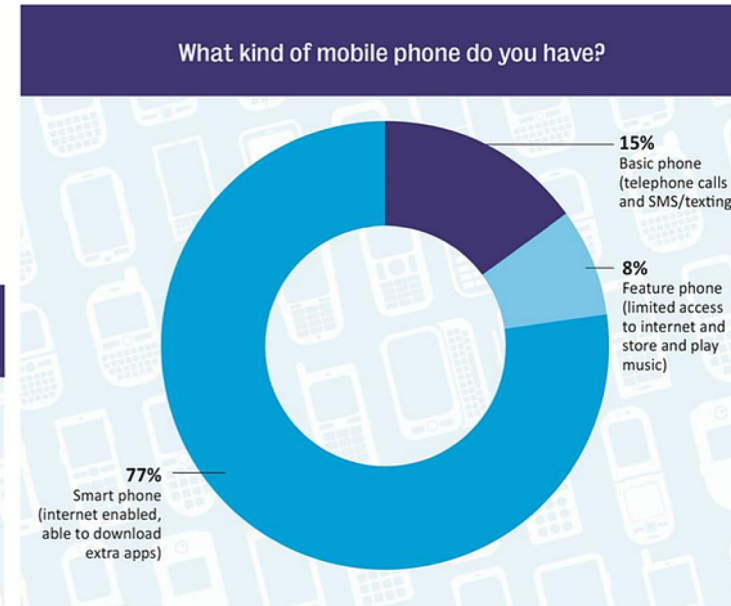FIG. **4**
Mobile phone ownership

Do you have a mobile phone?

5% No

95% Yes

FIG. **5**
Mobile phone type: Basic, Feature and Smart phone

What kind of mobile phone do you have?

15% Basic phone (telephone calls and SMS/texting)

8% Feature phone (limited access to internet and store and play music)

77% Smart phone (internet enabled, able to download extra apps)

In a 2014 survey conducted in Australia of over 100 people experiencing homelessness, 95% of respondents owned a phone and 77% had a smartphone.

The journey to ChalmersBot (Beta)

Early March 2018

We started with research

We've conducted user research with over **30+ people youth and adults** living inside shelters. We also conducted many 1–on–1 interviews with shelter staff.

We spoke to them about:

- Painpoints & Pleasurepoints
- Shelter Resident Needs
- Experience with Technology
- Goals

The participants had the following demographic breakdown:

Location (Toronto)
- Age (17–56)
- Gender (18 Male, 12 Female)

Problem: Finding resources is difficult

🤷🏽‍♀️

Most people don't know where to look or what's available.

🔍

1/4 people we interviewed went to Google as the first place

🙅🏻‍♂️

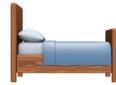Existing sources like 211 or government websites are not user friendly

What we learned

Word map of what the most needed services where.

V1 (Beta) scope

🍔

Free Meals

🛏️

Overnight Shelter

👕

Clothing Banks

🏠

Drop-ins

👀

Capture whatever else
people are looking for

📣

Give real-time feedback &
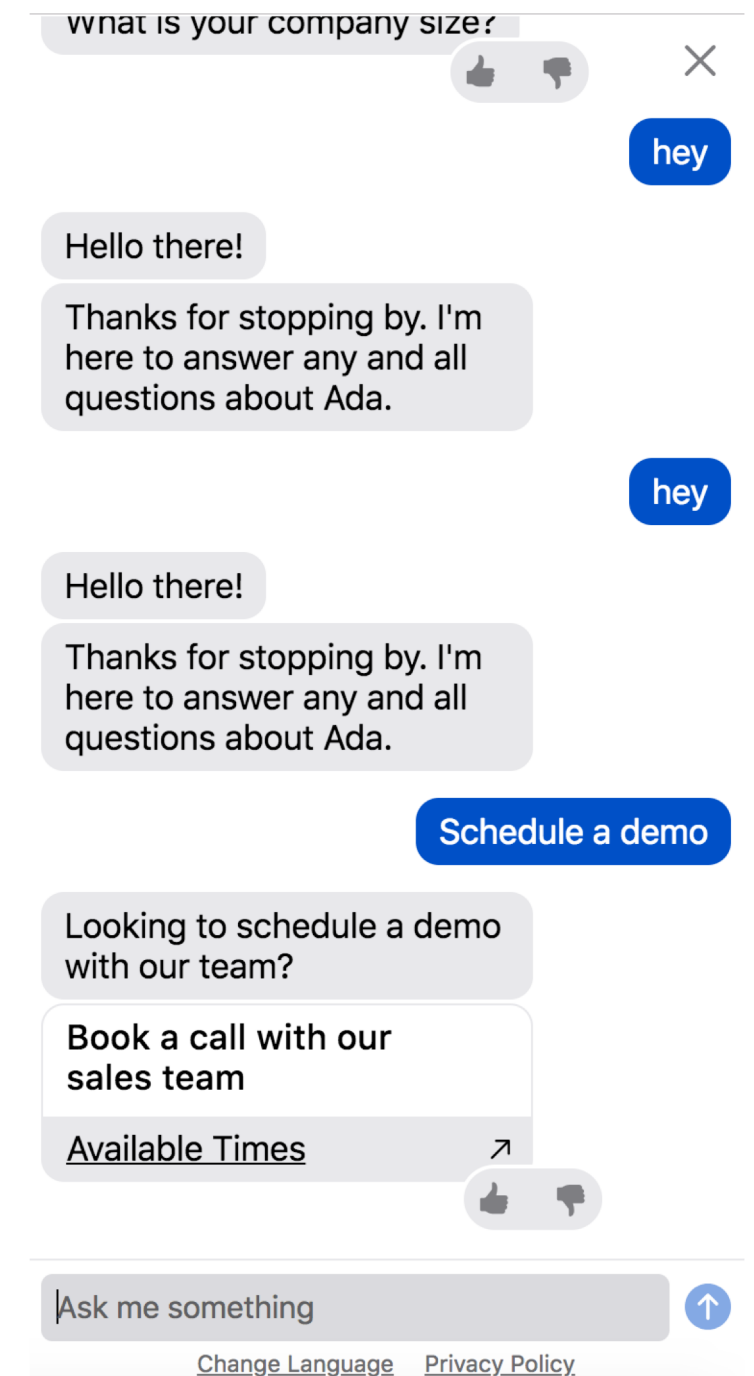update information

August 2018

Let's try someone else's platform

Why we got on ↔️ ON!

- Our GPS off by a mile

- Beautify UI (we didn't have existing UI / UX)

-     Dashboard & Analytics

-     NLP capabilities

Why we got off 🛑

- But UNBEARABLE (too rigid)

- We have a unique use case!

September 2018

The Tech

Tech Stack
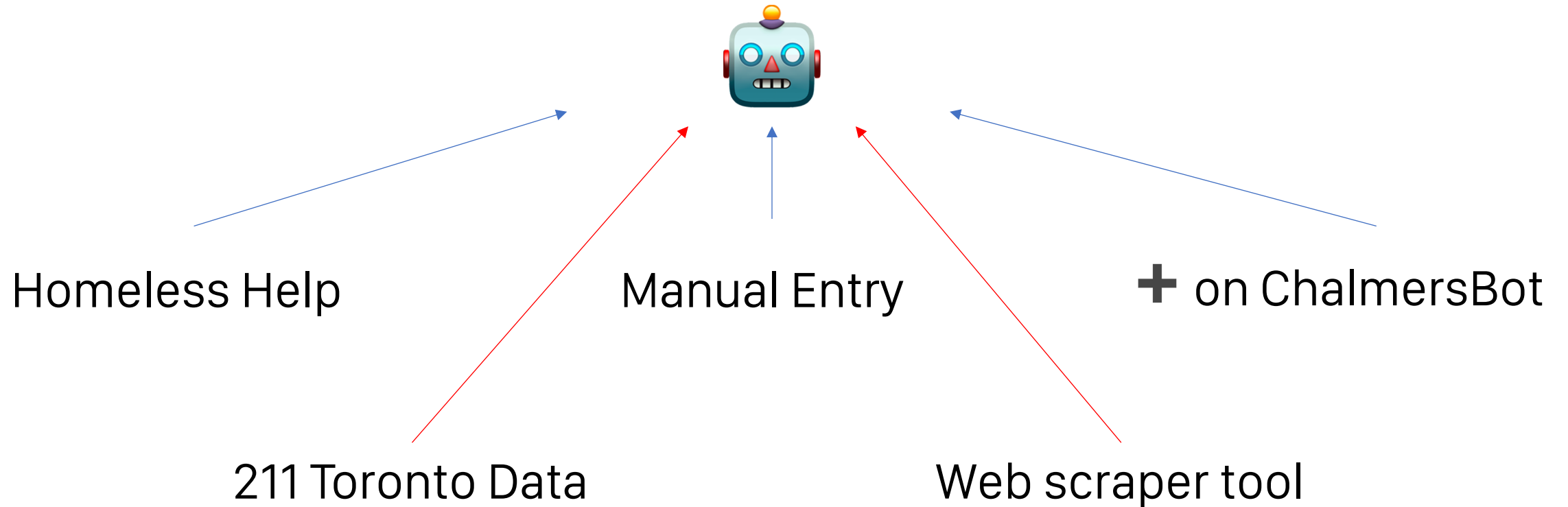
- Amazon Web Services, e.g. Lex, Lambda. etc.

- Vue.js with Vuetify

Workflow

- Github (https://github.com/amplelabs) / Slack

- Everything is OPEN SOURCE!

- Serverless

What data are we using?

Homeless Help

Manual Entry

+ on ChalmersBot

211 Toronto Data

Web scraper tool

Quick Demo

👉 www.chalmersbot.amplelabs.co

In Summary

Snapshot

⏰
250+ hours

📆
8 months

🙋🏽‍♀️🙋🏼‍♂️
25+ people

💔💦😭
Lots!

Timeline

March 2018

Began
Research

June 2018

Began Release
Planning

July 2018

Got on Ada

Sept 2018

Got off Ada

Nov 2018

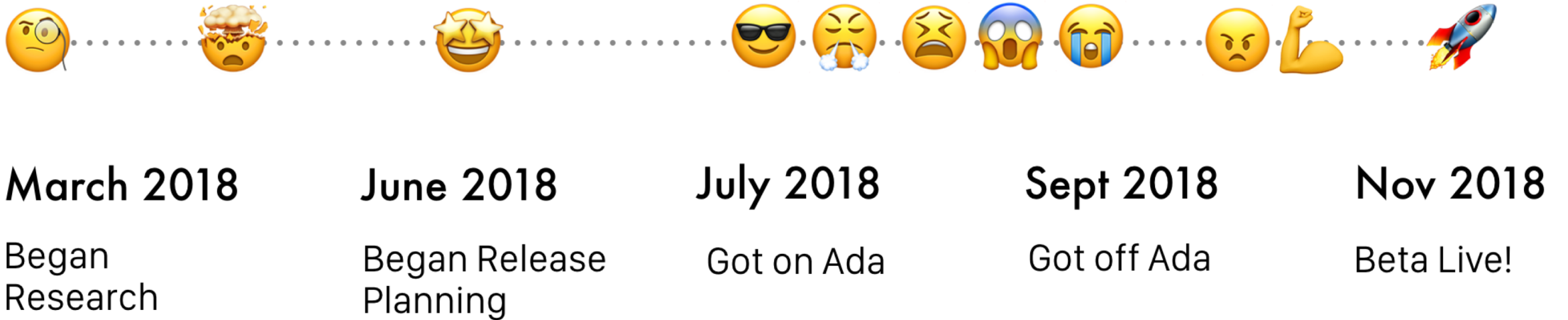Beta Live!

Tell your friends & family about ChalmersBot (Beta) 🎉

The Accelerator Project

What is the Accelerator Program?

This program aims to provide the skills and supports for homeless youth to achieve employment in the information, technology and communications sector – one of Toronto's most in-demand sectors of the future. This program is in partnership with Fred Victor.

Program status: *under development*

The Opportunity

1. **High rates of unemployment among homeless youth** – key barriers to employment include skills and education. **While low educational attainment** among homeless youth, most are interested in **continuing education**.

2. Rapid growth in the information technology & communications (ICT) industry has led to **shortage of skilled labour in tech**, and businesses are increasingly filling these skill gaps with non-degree workers.

3. Numerous programs exist in Toronto to help homeless youth obtain employable skills, but nearly all are focused in industries with a **"surplus" of similarly skilled labour** (e.g., food preparation).

4. Despite **proliferation of non-degree education programs in technology**, **they may not be suitable for homeless youth** (e.g. fast-paced, no integration with wrap-around services).

5. There may be an opportunity for a non-degree education program specific for homeless youth with appropriate wrap-around services to enable stable, meaningful employment in Toronto's technology sector.

Progress to Date

Extensive secondary research review; work continues as new insights emerge (e.g., 2018 Street Needs Assessment released last week)

Leveraging primary research from chatbot on needs of street-involved youth

Continue **building our network of partners**: social services providers, tech employers, and educators

On November 27th, conducted **first major workshop with 20+ stakeholders from across sectors** to begin to shape program

   o Focused on identifying potential barriers to youth employment

   o Laid groundwork for future consultations, research, and co-creation

What we are learning

Program must address basic needs first	➤ Cannot create mindshare for training / job search if youth are worried about housing, safety, food, etc.
Barriers to tech jobs are not purely skills-based	➤ Lack of mentorship, social inclusion in tech community, & professional networks are all factors
Tech employment is uniquely precarious	➤ Gig / project-based nature of the work does not help youth escape the "living day-to-day" mentality
There are reasons for employers to be excited	➤ These youth are resilient in a way employers love; need to develop a "power narrative" to showcase it

What comes next

1. Finalizing synthesis of learnings from Nov 27th session – you can cover a lot of ground in 2 hours!

2. Launch next round of research and consultations, including with youth; planned to start in Q1 2019

3. Acquire funding for the program: several grant applications already underway

4. Stay tuned for more: www.amplelabs.co.
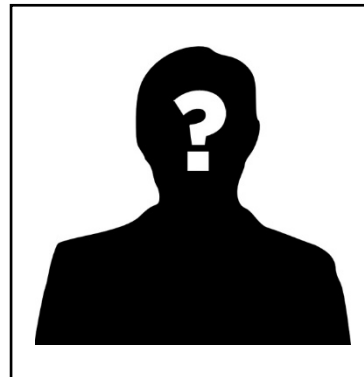
Join the accelerator team!

Dilini Kurukulaarachchi,
Senior Advisor, *Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care*

Shubhi Sharma,
Consumer Insights Analyst, *Loblaw Companies Ltd.*

Will Meneray,
Principal, *Oliver Wyman*

You?

Want to get involved or help?

👋

We are always looking for new volunteers, mentors and advisors to join Ample!

💵

We are currently looking for funding opportunities for our two projects!

Thank You!