

HAVEN FELLOWSHIP REFLECTION: BUILDING AT HUMAN SCALE

By Molly Josephs, Digital Thriving Fellow

During my fellowship at the Harvard [Center for Digital Thriving](#), I had the privilege of co-creating Haven with teenagers—a platform that fundamentally rejects the logic of scale that governs most digital spaces. Haven is a creative community platform limited to 100 members at any time, where teens gather in clubs (e.g. calligraphy, postcards, knitting, textile club) to make things together. But Haven is more than a product. It's an argument, made in code and community, that digital spaces can be built differently.

The platform emerged from [This Teenage Life](#) (TTL), the youth dialogue and podcasting program I run, which has taught me that the most meaningful teen interactions happen in carefully held spaces where listening matters more than performing. Haven extends this ethos: it's designed for creation, not consumption, and its 100-person limit isn't a phase before scaling—it's the entire point. We're building something that can't be venture-funded or "disrupted," something that stays small enough to remain a real community.

What makes Haven truly distinctive is that how we built it mirrors what we built. We think of this as "third wave" platform development—small batch, ethical, responsive. A teen coded the entire platform, which is due to launch this spring. A young artist hand-drew the interface. We moved at teenagers' pace, not product timelines. This wasn't just participatory design; it was a transfer of creative agency. When teens use Haven, they encounter something made with and by their peers, and that changes the nature of their engagement. The platform embeds the values it's meant to hold.

As we prepare to launch, former This Teenage Life participants will serve as club leaders, bringing our conversational norms and listening culture into creative spaces with teens from around the world. These alumni aren't just peer moderators—they're culture-carriers, practicing and teaching a different rhythm of online interaction, a culture we have cultivated over the past eight years while running TTL, which you can learn about [here](#).

The next year is about implementation— we have already done this small-scale, creative club-based work through TTL and now we are transferring it to other creative outlets. We'll be documenting everything because this process itself is central to what we are doing. In a landscape where every platform optimizes for growth, Haven asks a different question: what becomes possible when we build digital spaces that are deliberately, permanently, joyfully small, which consider youth creative producers desiring meaningful connection, especially across differences, rather than content consumers driven by likes in their own content bubbles?