

Eugene-based entrepreneurs launch free new mobile app to combat loneliness and create stress-free social media

**EUGENE, OR – February 15, 2024** – Laura Illig and her husband, Robert Illig, via their startup [Sidekick Enterprises, Inc.](http://www.sidekick.online/), have responded to calls from the [US Surgeon General](https://sidekick.online/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Extra-Article.pdf) and others for a healthier alternative to existing social media by commencing a soft release of its free new mobile app for iPhones. The Sidekick [app](https://apps.apple.com/pt/app/sidekick-for-friends/id6463155701) is designed to help adult users connect online, based on their shared hobbies and interests, in order to meet up and make friends offline, in the real world. According to Laura Illig, Sidekick’s CEO, “the best way to make a new friend is to share a fun experience together.”

Sidekick was founded to foster real-world, human connection. Its goal is to re-imagine social media as a tool for authenticity and improved well-being. The Sidekick app does away with the “likes,” comments, follower-counts and other aspects of traditional social media that create dislocation and anxiety and contribute to the nation’s [ongoing epidemic of loneliness](https://sidekick.online/learn-more/). In their place, Sidekick offers a way for users to find people, groups and events that share common hobbies and interests.

Sidekick isn’t entertainment and it isn’t (merely) a way to chat online or connect with people its users already know. Rather, the app seeks to do something new – to be a ***social catalyst*.** Instead of relying on gamified content to keep us forever glued to our screens, Sidekick uses our phones to get us *off* of our phones and out into the real world. After all, as Illig put it, “we get something special from the friends we can see, laugh, and smile with in person.” And the [research](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3760892/) supports her instinct: when we double the number of our real-world friends, it has the same positive impact on our well-being as when our income increases by 50%.

The Sidekick app (available in the iOS App Store under the heading “**Sidekick for Friends**”) allows users to find new friends in two ways. Its “Discover” feature operates like a traditional feed that provides recommendations – nearby people, groups and events who share the user’s interests. However, Sidekick also provides a way for users to take control through its “Explore” feature. “Explore” functions as a search engine, empowering users to set their own filters, including age, gender, location, and interests. The company also plans to introduce banking-level security protocols that allow users to verify their identity based on government-issued ID as well as to limit their search to only other verified users.

Another unique Sidekick feature is the “**Kickit**” invitation. Kickits reduce the social anxiety associated with meeting strangers by allowing users to post a universal invitation, addressed to no one in particular, to engage in a fun activity. For example, a user might post an invitation to anyone interested in seeing Taylor Swift’s new movie on Friday night, or to anyone who wants to learn to play a kazoo. Kickits are free to use, can be any size, and can be either open-ended or tied to a specific time or event.

Sidekick’s management and investors believe that its free new mobile app can help reduce our nation’s epidemic of loneliness and begin to heal divisions. According to Illig, “our mission is to foster connection, belonging and joy by empowering adults to make new friends and pursue the activities they love.”

The current iteration of the app (version 1.4) is a beta version intended primarily for testing. Sidekick plans to test the app initially in Eugene and Springfield in order to discover what additional features are most desired. “Over time,” says Illig, “we hope that Sidekick’s users will be its true developers. We want this to be an app crafted *by* humans and *for* humans”

Interested users are encouraged to download the app on the iOS app store by searching for “**Sidekick for Friends**.” Sidekick plans to introduce an Android version later this year.

**ABOUT SIDEKICK**

Sidekick was founded by Laura Krebs Illig during the height of the Covid lockdown. It is a privately held, early-stage Delaware corporation headquartered in Eugene, Oregon. [Learn more](http://www.sidekick.online/) on our website or [download](http://www.sidekickapp.online/) the app.

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