

SMALL GRANT SCHEME


think⁺
positive about
student mental health



nus
charity

nus *scotland*
national union of **students**

Prioritising student mental health in unprecedented times



“always try to be a little kinder than is necessary”

This resource has been developed to share and promote the work that has come from the second year of the Small Grant Scheme from the Think Positive Project and celebrates the ingenuity, tenacity and dedication to their members of those who took part.

NUS Scotland has hosted the Student Mental Health Agreement (SMHA) work since 2015 as the Think Positive project, funded by the Scottish Government. This brings together the student association and institution to work jointly on mental health initiatives on campus.

The SMHA collates everything the institution is doing to improve student mental health in one clear, easy-to-read document. This can focus on a variety of topics, which are determined by representatives from the student association and institution leads. It encourages staff to consider a range of improvements, which could have a positive impact on the staff and student experience and therefore actively work together to assess the areas to prioritise. No two SMHAs are the same, the scheme encompasses the diversity of student needs and institution differences.

The project is the only one of its kind which specifically focuses on improving student mental health and wellbeing in the FE and HE environment in Scotland. As the scope of the project is particularly direct, this allows for greater focus and the ability to produce measurable outcomes on the SMHA.

In a year like no other, we were incredibly impressed by the proposals submitted and all of them showed a dedication to these aims and showed a particular commitment to collaboration. A new survey from NUS has found that over half of the UK's students say that their mental health has deteriorated or been affected negatively by Covid-19, making this joint approach, led by students' needs, all the more vital.

The problem of increased mental ill health within the student population and the growing demand from students for mental health support requires collaborative and informed responses like the proposals from this year's Small Grant Scheme applicants.

Students' unions/associations and institutions have a vital role to play in ensuring the mental health support offered is effective, student-focused, and holistic. These small projects all have large impacts in mind and we can't wait to see the results!



Last year, almost a quarter of a million students in Scotland were positively impacted by their institution developing a Student Mental Health Agreement!

Small Grant Scheme

Inspiration. Ideation. Implementation.

“small opportunities are often the beginnings of great enterprises”

What is it?

As part of the Student Mental Health Agreement project, we were delighted to be able to offer a Small Grant Scheme again this year, after a successful launch in 2019/20, supporting the piloting of a new activity, campaign or the trial of a new idea at Scottish institutions. This was an opportunity for the Think Positive Project to give something back to our participants, offering them the opportunity to take more ownership of where the future of student mental health in Scotland could lie.

Who applied?

Our small grant scheme was open to any institution who is currently taking part in the Student Mental Health Agreement project. We were happy to fund all or part of an idea and the applications were not means-tested. However, our one proviso was that the application must support one of the working areas on a Student Mental Health Agreement – To have a working area – you have to be signed up to a Project! To help keep ideas and Agreements as in sync as possible, those leading on the Student Mental Health Agreement applied for the grants.

What did we fund?

The ideas submitted supported one of the aims of participants' SMHAs and they have highlighted which aim it compliments. We want to support our participants to realise the aims of their Agreements. Was it a project? An event? An activity? Was it a new campaign? We wanted to support ingenuity, imagination and inventions! Think Positive encouraged applicants to discuss ideas further, prior to the applications closing.

How were the grants awarded?

Recipients were announced in January 2021, and, under our new Project Cycle, they will have until May 2022 to introduce their proposal, pilot it and evaluate their progress.

**student
mental health
agreement**



We are delighted to announce that this year's recipients of the Small Grant Scheme are:

Fife College – Motivational handbook and calendar of events to help students keep track of work, stay motivated whilst away from campus, and combat stress.

St Andrews University – GotLimits Mocktail Masterclass to encourage alcohol-free social events and conversations around alcohol consumptions and mental health, encouraging a safe return to peer socialising on campus.

Open University in Scotland – “Big Blether” events to encourage connectivity and reduce isolation that has been magnified during the pandemic.

South Lanarkshire College – Positivity Mornings to help with stress management, including key motivational speakers and yoga sessions alongside much missed social interaction with peers.

Strathclyde University – Videos on several issues surrounding student mental health, to raise awareness in the student population and be embedded as part of student volunteer training.

University of the West of Scotland – Lived Experience Panel to feed into the improvement of their mental health work and inform the direction and focus of the institution's SMHA to ensure that students are leading the work at this critical time.

West Lothian College – Outdoor mindfulness space for students, where they can take time, reflect and look after their own mental health and wellbeing, chat openly and access peer support.

This year's recipients were all awarded a Small Grant of £375 to fully or partially fund their proposed work. In this second year, we were once again impressed at how much impact these projects will have and what the teams can accomplish with this money – small seeds grow tall trees!



What were they thinking?

"ideas come from everything"



"aims to address challenges associated with mental health, breaking down barriers and removing stigmas"

"We are looking to create a safe space for students"

"Support events, activities and initiatives for students in Scotland to foster an improved sense of belonging"

"build community and sense of belonging and to combat loneliness"

"our students can use the tools that have been shared and that they can make use of them within their own time"

"vital we look for ways to engage students who may be struggling with their mental health, to promote connection, and prevent loneliness and isolation"

"encourages students to actively spot the dangers of social exclusion and encourage them to take action to correct it"

"We have designed it to be a tool that can be used for years to come"

"Through this project we are aiming to further our desire to build a culture of collective care"

"empower students to take these conversations forward"

"Students take an active role in influencing and informing the content of this year's Student Mental Health Agreement"

Think Positive SMALL GRANT SCHEME Projects 2021

“Storm?
Shine your
light and make
a rainbow.”



The University of St Andrews and University of St Andrews Students' Association

GotLimits – Mocktail Masterclass



IDEA

The University of St Andrews will create an alcohol-free event, GotLimits Mocktail Masterclass featuring bartender-led activities on how to mix different types of mocktails. The event will also include having a dinner that students attend, where they can enjoy the various mocktails that they have just crafted together. This will facilitate alcohol-free socialising and conversations around alcohol consumptions and mental health, encouraging a safe return to peer socialising on campus.



NEED

One of the main goals of GotLimits at St Andrews is to promote inclusivity around alcohol consumption. Studies have shown that more than half of university students in the UK feel that there are not enough social events that don't involve drinking or having to get drunk to harmful levels. As stress levels rise amongst students, they can turn to alcohol to cope with stress, self-medicating anxiety and mental ill-health. There is a need on campus for an event that is social, formal and fun, whilst not prioritising alcohol consumption.

A large part of the university culture in St. Andrews revolves around these formal events where students are given the opportunity to socialise and enjoy a break from their studies; these types of events are by far the most popular and they typically generate the largest turnouts and are often driven by alcohol consumption.



IMPACT

St Andrews will use this project to educate students about other alternatives to consuming alcohol at social events. The Mocktail Masterclass is an inclusive event that allows students who prefer not to drink to experience the culture at St Andrews and not feel isolated. Project evaluation will include questions on whether they enjoyed the class, whether they typically feel comfortable attending these types of events where alcohol is present, and whether they would like to see more of this type of activity. This feedback will then be used to plan future events.

In the future... St Andrews hope to expand GotLimits events by holding a speaker panel with counsellors and specialists to educate attendees about safe alcohol consumption.



University of the West of Scotland and The Students' Association of the University of the West of Scotland Lived Experience Panel



IDEA

UWS will establish a student-led, lived-experience panel focused on mental health, which will provide students with:

- Spaces for social interaction
- Taking an active role in influencing and informing the content of this year's SMHA, ensuring the plans in the agreement reflect the needs of those directly affected
- Opportunities to learn new skills across a range of areas, including campaigning, event management, presentation skills, influencing and negotiating and put these skills into practice by supporting the roll-out of the University's SMHA



NEED

To engage students who may be struggling with their mental health, to promote connection, and prevent loneliness and isolation. Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic, student mental health is more important than ever and this project will provide connections and opportunities for students to be able to take an active role in managing their own mental wellbeing and inform UWS' planned aims in supporting them.



IMPACT

Creation of a well-embedded, whole university approach to mental wellbeing, with the work informed by students.

- The panel gives their input in the SMHA
- They bring their ideas for all student's mental health on to campus
- Students grow in their own confidence and abilities

The Future... UWS intend that the panel would be supported to start a student society, with support as required from staff members, and continue to meet as a self-facilitated group to ensure student mental wellbeing is embedded across the university and that the student voice plays an important role in this process.



South Lanarkshire College and South Lanarkshire College Students' Association

Positivity Morning



IDEA

SLC will deliver Positivity Mornings, with key speakers hosting sessions on the benefits of positive thinking, delivering practical approaches on how to change negative thoughts to positive ones and tips on how to boost motivation and start the day with a foundation for success and wellbeing. Part of these sessions will be a collaborative effort, a yoga & mindfulness session for the students, led by one of the lecturing staff who is a fully trained instructor.



IMPACT

SLC have chosen positivity for the aim of this project as their student association have identified that with all the changes to students' lives, they are finding it hard to keep their positivity levels up. By embedding these practical, socially interactive sessions, they intend to lessen the negative impact of frustration and disappointments, amplified by increased social media connectivity.



NEED

With the impact that restrictions has had on their students, SLC have identified the essential need for a space at the start of the day to check in on them and offer support, in a social setting with their peers and breakfast food which will continue their day on a positive note! To meet the need for support, the speakers and instructors will focus on practical skills the students can apply to help manage anxiety and stresses.



University of Strathclyde and Strathclyde Students' Union

Physically Distant – Socially Connected: Collective Care Training Videos



IDEA

Strathclyde will produce training videos designed to inform and raise awareness, as well as playing a role in the training of student volunteers and leaders, allowing them to identify students in need and conduct relevant sign-posting to appropriate support where deemed necessary. The videos will cover issues related to the themes within their SMHA:

1. Eating Disorders
2. Loneliness & Building Communities
3. Stress & Setting Boundaries on Work
4. Domestic Violence
5. Asking for help and reaching out

This project will provide both Training and Education to student members while also building social inclusion throughout their campus.



NEED

Social Inclusion as well as Training and Education are two of their four main working areas from their SMHA. This project encompasses meeting the needs set out in both of these aims.

Covid-19 has resulted in little to no in person experience at the University of Strathclyde. Many students have been in repeated periods of prolonged social isolation – putting strain on students' mental health and increasingly risks social exclusion. Strathclyde will produce content that encourages students to actively spot the dangers of this and encourage them to take action to correct it.

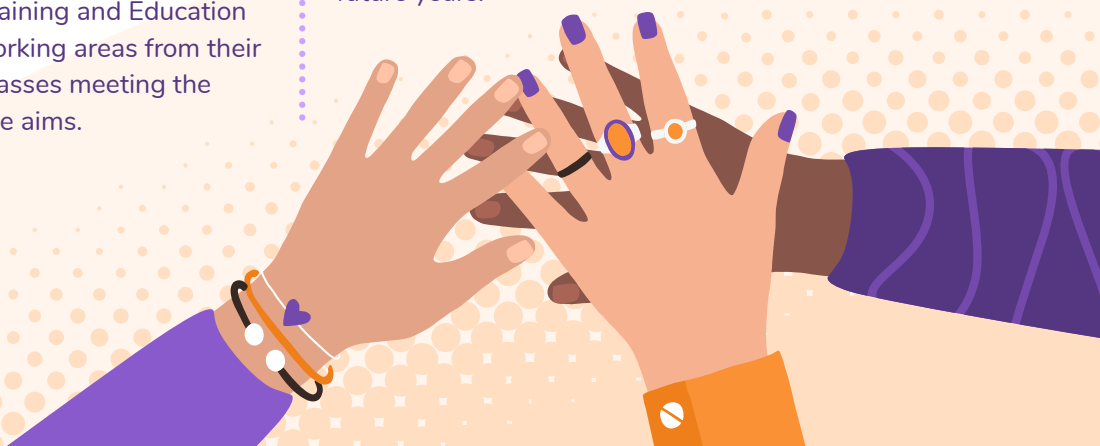


IMPACT

The videos will be shared publicly on social media channels and spread widely among their student population in order to promote the key messages.

Through this project they are aiming to build a culture of collective care at Strathclyde that moves beyond basic principles but ensures that students and staff actively look out for one another during their time at University.

The future... Strathclyde intend that after this project is completed, the videos can be embedded as part of their new blended training delivery for student volunteers, extending the impact into future years.



The Open University in Scotland and Open University Students' Association

The Big Blether



IDEA

The Big Blether will bring OU in Scotland students together to create community, a sense of belonging and to combat loneliness. It also aims to address challenges associated with mental health, breaking down barriers and removing stigmas.

The Big Blether will offer a series of online events, allowing students to meet and chat with peers, Association Representatives and staff, and with the input of an expert speaker on a specific topic.

This pilot project is a development of an initiative undertaken by a Faculty Representative, that series of 'Guid Auld Blethers' set up a forum for students to come together informally. Following the development and publication of their Student Mental Health Agreement, OU in Scotland and their Students' Association will pilot a series of 'Big Blethers' which have a specific focus on mental health and wellbeing.



NEED

OU in Scotland have gathered feedback from students identifying the need for these forums, and how they feel they would benefit from a series of 'blethers' with a focus on mental health and wellbeing.

Piloting these themed 'Big Blethers' would continue to build the sense of community and wellbeing, working to promote good mental health in line with their SMHA. This includes raising student and staff awareness of support available, ensuring signposting to services & resources and maintaining strong, visible leadership in promoting good mental health.

This project will provide tailored information for groups of students with particular support needs to help address specific challenges and promote inclusion.



IMPACT

This project will engage students meaningfully in the development of healthy cultures and communities, promoting good mental health and wellbeing through the sharing of knowledge and expertise. One of the long-term aims of the project is to empower students to take these conversations forward and as informed by measurement metrics, could become a continuing series of events.

This collaborative team will measure their success by gauging uptake and gathering feedback from students following the first session. This will keep an open forum for students to engage with one another, whilst giving the team information on how to tailor the future sessions to ensure needs are being met.

Fife College and Fife College Students' Association

Motivational Handbook/Planner



IDEA

FCSA will produce a booklet with self-help tips on motivation that is also a foldable wall-planner. It is designed to be used both as a paper and digital resource that is packed with helpful and easily accessible content to motivate, support and structure routines, including:

- Top Tips
- A To do/Ta da list
- A Budget Planner covering financial health
- Course Contacts
- Weekly Planner (Motivation Monday/Wellbeing Wednesday/Feel-good Friday)
- Motivation Station (Set up an effective place to work at home & playlists/podcasts)
- Staying Healthy (Links to Think Positive resources/other services)
- Helpful Apps and Contact Details (College and external)



NEED

The feedback received from their students this year at FCSA has been overwhelmingly that they are lacking in motivation and struggling to follow a routine with the move to blended learning. Keeping track of work, staying positive, motivated, and focused are just a few of the issues that have been highlighted.

FCSA have also engaged students via interactive sessions to identify what they need, providing them with something different to help with the current feeling of isolation and monotony.

Additionally, students are struggling to find real world work experiences, so the project will offer a group of students the experience of creating a brief and seeing the results of their efforts benefitting others. FCSA will also pay student designers involved, easing some of the additional worry of financial stress.



IMPACT

FCSA have created this project due to the demand and feedback from their students and are inputting additional funds from campaigns/events to cover costs and are seeking to collaborate with their institution to ensure the impact is as wide-reaching as possible, contributing to retention & success and embedding the Handbook as a tool that will be used for years to come. Motivating students, it will also have the practical impact of gaining skills through the creation of the resource and financial help via employment of student designers.



West Lothian College and West Lothian College Students' Association

Mindfulness Outdoor Space For Students



IDEA

Student mental health and wellbeing is a major priority for West Lothian College and West Lothian College Student Association.

They will create a safe space for students outside where well-being activities are delivered and students can socially interact with peers. The space will have comfy, relaxing seating, in a quiet place on campus away from the busy outdoor learning spaces in the college square.

The project will involve collaborating with student designers to create images for the space, promoting mindfulness and well-being and with construction students, who will build large planters and trellises to enclose the space and allow for shrubs and herbs to be planted to encourage relaxation, these relationships will cement student-ownership of the space and its benefits.



NEED

One of the college's main working areas from their SMHA is to ensure that anyone experiencing poor mental health can continue their studies. Due to Covid-19 students have a number of blended learning courses, meaning they are only on campus for a limited time.

The College gym is closed to Students and sessions such as seated yoga and other physical activities that benefit mental well-being, including mindfulness sessions have all been moved online.

This is a place where students can partake in these activities again, can chat openly and gain peer support and it is equally vital for students to simply have a space where they can reflect, take time out and breathe.



IMPACT

West Lothian want to create a space where students can take part in therapeutic activities to promote self-care and create meaningful well-being activity in a peaceful and calming environment resulting in improved student health and wellbeing and ability to self-care and progress with college and life.

They will measure the impact by monitoring usage, planned and non-planned activities and engagement, involving students in planning space & activities and feedback evaluation. This project is intended to be a long term space that grows with the students.



What is ahead?

“Share your ideas with other people and make something new”



Think Positive would like to thank everyone involved in this project, particularly this year's applicants for making this process so worthwhile and highlighting the incredible work that institutions and student associations across Scotland are doing to support their students and their mental health and wellbeing.

A special thank you goes to the Scottish Government for their continued support of the Think Positive project, creating important change across Scotland.

Everyone involved has made this second year very special in an unprecedented time. Your work is incredible.

If you have any questions relating to this year's Small Grant Scheme or would like to discuss the work referenced in this resource further, please do not hesitate to get in touch:

thinkpositive@nus-scotland.org.uk

Commitment to the Student Mental Health Agreements and the creation of projects like this year's recipients of the Small Grants, will have impacts far into the future.

We hope some of these projects will inspire other organisations to undertake something similar and we encourage all of the participants from this year to share best practice with each other and continue to collaborate and innovate – your commitment to the work during this time has been truly inspirational.

We are so excited to see what we can all achieve next!



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