

SMALL GRANT SCHEME 2021-22



Prioritising student mental health in unprecedented times

“provide an extra layer of support to our students”

This resource has been developed to share and promote the work that has come from the **third** 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.

Think Positive, NUS Scotland hosts the Student Mental Health Agreement project (SMHA) which is funded by the Scottish Government. This brings together the student association and institution to work collaboratively on mental health initiatives on campus. Only those taking part in the project during 2021-2022 are able to apply for the Small Grant Scheme.

The Small Grant Scheme award panel were impressed by the proposals submitted and all of which showed a dedication to improving the mental health support offer as well as commitments to collaboration. A survey from NUS 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.

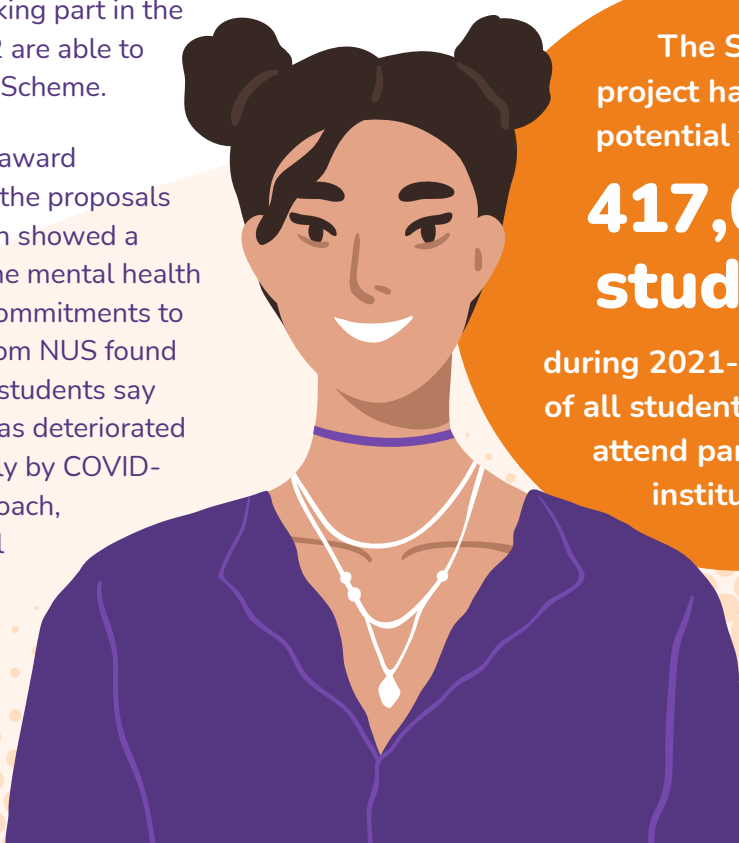
The problem of increased mental ill health within the student population and the growing demand from students for mental health support requires collaborative and informed responses like the proposals from this year's Small Grant Scheme applicants.

Students' 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!

This resource brings together all of those awarded funding during the 2021-2022 project year. We hope that by sharing these examples other institutions and students' associations are inspired to explore new mental health activities.

The SMHA project has had the potential to benefit
417,600+ students

during 2021-2022 as **78%** of all students in Scotland attend participating institutions.



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 this year to support the piloting of a new activity, campaign, or the trial of a new idea. We had a small pot of money and were offering a maximum of £250 to 10 Scottish institutions. Often project participants have really innovative ideas on what they'd like to deliver, but sometimes they just need a small investment to help make it happen!

Who could apply?

Our small grant scheme was open to any institution/students' association who is currently taking part in the Student Mental Health Agreement project. To help participants keep their idea and SMHA as in sync as possible, those leading on the Student Mental Health Agreement applied for the grant and applications were not means tested.

What would we fund?

The ideas submitted supported at least one of the aims of participants' SMHAs and they highlighted which aims it complimented. The work could have included a project, event, activity, campaign or something else! We were keen to not place unnecessary barriers and wanted to support creativity.

How were the grants awarded?

A marking panel consisting of Think Positive and members of the Project Advisory Group reviewed the applications and provided feedback to all applications. The panel individually voted on the applications, then got together to discuss how they had scored each individual application. Recipients were announced in February 2022.

**student
mental health
agreement**



We are delighted to announce that the 2021-2022 recipients of the Small Grant Scheme are:

Ayrshire College – Establishing an LGBT+ Library which will include LGBTQI+ fiction/ authors, non-fiction and self-help titles at the college's Learning Resource Centre.

Fife College – Hosting a six-week block of Tai Chi sessions during the Month of May to help students stay connected and in a better mindset whilst studying for their exams.

Glasgow Caledonian University – Hosting a Craft Pottery event for students to help them de-stress during a key point of the trimester.

Glasgow Clyde College – Funding towards new recreational equipment for the Student Space.

Glasgow Kelvin College – Providing a mental health course to the Student Executive Committee who are in direct contact with students to support their learning journey and boost student engagement.

North East Scotland College – Hosting Wellness Days for students decided by students with targeted activities such as featuring game days and yoga sessions.

Open University in Scotland – Recruit student consultants to collaborate with on issues relating to mental health and wellbeing.

The Glasgow School of Art – Hosting a Wellbeing Day for students with a variety of workshops including a self-care group workshop and gardening workshop.

West Lothian College – Exploring what a mentally healthy college looks like and offering gift vouchers for students attending consultation exercises.

This year's recipients were all awarded a Small Grant of £277.70 to fully or partially fund their proposed work. In this third 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"



"an activity for students to enjoy and a place to engage with others which we all know helps supports a positive mind and lifestyle"

"workshops for targeted mental health, stress or mindfulness purposes"

"self-care techniques that students can utilise when feeling anxious or stressed in any setting"

"helping them build resilience and manage and maintain positive mental health"

"to improve students' mental health and well-being and give them an activity they can enjoy with other students"

"hoping to see a positive reaction from students both in how they found the event and how they feel it impacted on their mental wellbeing"

"empowering our students in their own wellbeing, break barriers to stigma, and improve our community spirit"

"amplify the student voice and strengthen the sense of belonging within our communities"

"improve students' understanding and ability to recognise the importance of their mental health and wellbeing"

"we want our students to feel comfortable and supported"

"activities which centre the student voice, particularly in relation to mental health and wellbeing"

Think Positive SMALL GRANT SCHEME Projects 2021- 2022

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



Ayrshire College and Ayrshire College Students' Association

LGBT+ Library



IDEA

The Students' Association will work in partnership with the Ayrshire College LGBTQI+ Students Group and the College's Learning Resource Centre to establish an LGBT+ Library which will include LGBTQI+ fiction/authors, non-fiction and self-help titles. Part of this work includes a consultation with students to determine which titles students would like to see included, what the resource should be called and where it could be located within the LRC.



NEED

The LGBTQI+ Students Group identified that there are a lack of LGBT+ resources within the College. Making the Learning Resource Centre a welcoming place for LGBT+ students will set the scene for the student experience, supporting positive mental health and wellbeing for our LGBT+ students. Research shows that LGBT+ students are disproportionately impacted by mental ill health.



IMPACT

The students' association and college want to provide students with opportunities and safe spaces to think, contemplate and access information. This project will be strongly linked to the college's Student Mental Health Agreement and the research conducted to complete the SGS funding application will inform which titles are bought, including which titles best promote positive mental health and wellbeing among LGBT+ students. This will give curriculum areas access to LGBT+ titles with their classes, creating spaces for healthy, safe dialogue around the mental health issues faced by the LGBT+ community.



Fife College and Fife College Students' Association

Tai Chi Wellbeing



IDEA

The Students' Association received feedback from students this year that they were missing out on social interactions and struggling with classes still being online. In response to this, they wanted to host a six-week block of Tai Chi sessions during the Month of May. This was to help students both make connections and engage in physical activities during exam times.



NEED

COVID-19 has impacted both students' mental health as well as how they engage in college life. Feedback received by the students' association highlighted that students wanted to come back to campus to interact with others. Students were asked which activity the students' association could provide that could significantly impact their mental health; frequent responses were mindfulness sessions, yoga sessions, and hosting clubs/societies. The proposed Tai Chi sessions will run alongside Fife College's 'Well-Being Wednesday' initiative. As Tai Chi is a low-impact form of exercise, it is suitable for everyone of all abilities. This includes being accessible for people with disabilities, such as wheelchair users.



IMPACT

As part of Fife College's SMHA, the sessions will encourage students to partake in sports and physical activities that will improve their mental health and well-being. This will contribute to the 'Wellbeing Wednesday Campaign' (dedicated time on Wednesday afternoons for student wellbeing initiatives). These sessions aim to improve students' mental health and wellbeing and give them an activity they can enjoy with other students. The six-week block will help students to de-stress during the exam diet. If there is an increase in student engagement, this could lead to introducing an FCSA Tai Chi Club.



Glasgow Caledonian University and Glasgow Caledonian University Students' Association

De-stress Week



IDEA

The students' association had the idea to hold an event for students to help them de-stress during a key point of the trimester. The event, which would be held by an external company called Craft Pottery, would come to the GCU Students' Association, and would allow students to paint a pottery piece for up to two hours while being able to casually socialise with peers. Additionally, this event would be held in the social learning space, rather than in the student bar, so that it can be alcohol free allowing for the students who do not want to be in a bar setting to participate.



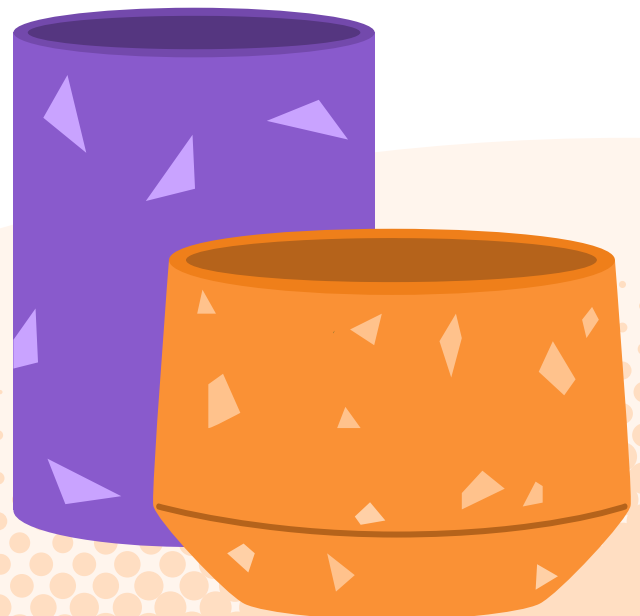
NEED

With more classes returning to on-campus learning, it was felt that students would be feeling the pressure and stress of returning to university more than ever before, having a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing. Students got used to their own types of learning and may find socialising exhausting or daunting. By holding a calm event which allows students to take part without the stress of alcohol, students would hopefully be able to take their minds off their coursework for a short while and make new friends whilst doing so integrating them back into social settings.



IMPACT

Similar events like this have been held previously for students and feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Holding an event available for all levels to sign up for would ensure an equal opportunity for GCU students to look after their mental health during a stressful key point in the trimester. The students' association felt that holding this event in week 6 at the mid-point of the trimester would increase mental wellbeing and decrease stress levels for students. Students reporting that events like these have had a positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing helps inform future work and wellbeing of students in future years.



Glasgow Clyde College and Glasgow Clyde College Students' Association

Student Space Improvements



IDEA

The college will purchase new recreational equipment for their student space area. The officer team at the students' association were keen to make the student space somewhere that students could go to relax and spend time with their friends and the purchase of recreational equipment would allow for an inclusive activity for students to do during down time which supports positive mental well-being.



NEED

Recreational student spaces are important for students and their mental health and wellbeing. It gives them a chance to relax and engage with others, therefore extra additions to these spaces helps the areas to be more attractive and better used by students as well as providing more ways for students to relax and take time-out. Due to the nature of home and blended learning for the last few years, student spaces are more important than ever now that students are returning to campus. Students have missed the social side of college which allows them to get to know their class, meet other people and engage face to face with their peers which promotes positive mental wellbeing.



IMPACT

It is important that we have outlets for students and sport/activity can be a key way of students letting out stress or engaging with others. Increasing the access to recreational activities on campus will have a positive impact on the mental wellbeing of students. The equipment will provide an activity that students can take part in to de-stress and spend time with their friends, improving socialisation and wellbeing.



Glasgow Kelvin College and Glasgow Kelvin College Students' Association

Mental Health Course



IDEA

The college and students' association will use the grant to help upskill the Student Executive Committee through attending an external mental health course. This group are in direct contact with students to support their learning journey and boost student engagement, therefore it was identified that having some mental health knowledge would be beneficial for members. The Student Executive Committee are also directly involved in developing the Student Mental Health Agreement work.



NEED

There has been an increase in students requesting mental health and wellbeing support as a direct result of COVID-19 and the implications this has had to their learning journey and college experience. Students are experiencing social isolation, stress and worry which is leading to a decline in their overall mental health and wellbeing. The student executive team highlighted mental health as a current focus area and one they would like to promote throughout the college. The team would like to upskill in this area, to benefit them in their learning journey as well as when working with other students.



IMPACT

The Student Executive Committee having increased mental health awareness, understanding and managing stress or anxiety and appropriate self-care methods will benefit the student population. The College's Student Mental Health Agreement pledged to raise awareness of stigma by "providing sessions that educate students of the facts surrounding mental health and the reality of living with it." With this training, the SEC will be more confident and knowledgeable in this priority area.



North East Scotland College and North East Scotland College Students' Association

Wellness Days



IDEA

NESCol will run targeted wellness days for students. Through consultation, students will be the ones deciding what activities to do, this will benefit their wellbeing and create better engagement. These days will be trialled at one day a month and if engagement is good will be increased. It is an opportunity for students to take part in new experiences that they may not have the opportunity to try elsewhere as well as make new connections. The grant money will be used to help supply the resources to run the days to their full potential.



NEED

The Student Advice and Support Team have reported that increasing numbers of students are experiencing declines in their mental health and reporting that they feel isolated at home. The College identified the need to do something to improve student wellbeing. With input from students regarding activities they would enjoy, it is hoped that the wellness days will have a positive impact on the overall wellbeing of students.



IMPACT

The Wellness Days will create a collaborative space between students and the Students' Association, providing an opportunity to check in. The social aspect of meeting new people and socialising will reduce the isolated feeling students have reported having while working from home. As an example of potential impact, many students expressed interest in having a Dungeons & Dragons Day but none felt confident enough in running a society. If this was one of the sessions for students it could help their confidence and social skills. It is possible that by taking part in this activities and talking to other students they may feel more confident in the idea of running a society.



The Open University in Scotland and Open University Students' Association

Student Engagement & Community Building



IDEA

This project will recruit 1-2 student consultants with lived experience of, or an interest in, issues relating to mental health and wellbeing, to help the university design and deliver activities relating to some of the actions in their Student Mental Health Agreement 2021-23. This would include activities such as co-creating resources, initiatives and events to raise awareness of available support and to improve a sense of belonging.



NEED

Having developed, delivered and evaluated a number of activities which centre around the student voice, in relation to mental health and wellbeing, the university has identified a need to increase student engagement in a meaningful and effective way.

The university want to ensure that students are being offered an environment where they can learn effectively, stay on course and achieve positive outcomes. By having students involved in the design and delivery of the SMHA actions, it will ensure that the student voice is heard and shapes the future of mental health and wellbeing support that the university is able to offer.



IMPACT

This project will increase the university's understanding of the students' needs and challenges, as well as their preferences in relation to activities, initiative, events and resources which aim to mitigate them. It will amplify the student voice and ensure that the mental health and wellbeing support being offered is relevant and catered to students. It directly complements some of the actions the university are committed to in their SMHA, for example, 'Involve students, staff and other stakeholders in co-creating accessible services and resources'.



The Glasgow School of Art and The Glasgow School of Art Students' Association

Self-care and Gardening Workshops



IDEA

The Glasgow School of Art will organise a 'Wellbeing Day' for students in the halls of residence. This will include workshops on self-care and gardening.

The self-care workshop will be focusing on developing sensory self-care techniques that students can utilise when feeling anxious or stressed in any setting. The workshop will explore how to use senses in a self-soothing way and how utilising senses can help people feel grounded and present. Through discussion on stress and anxiety, the students will have a space to share how they experience, if they choose to, these and explore how they manage so that they can share their strengths with each other. Simple but effective items, such as fidget toys, bubbles, essential oils, stress balls, music, hand massage etc will also be explored in this practical workshop. The gardening workshop will teach students basic gardening which encompasses the principles of mindfulness and has been proven to improve mental wellbeing. The students will be shown how to utilise the space in the common back gardens of the halls of residence (using planters) by planting flowers and herbs, as well as how to plant individual plants to keep in their dorm rooms.



NEED

Mental Health and the growing concerns related to the student population have never been more prevalent supported by the recent findings and recommendations of the Thriving Learners Survey which recommended increased focus on and funding for wellbeing support including the ability to increase capacity and interventions for wider wellbeing support.

During this pandemic, students have needed support in looking after their mental health and wellbeing more than ever. There has been a rise in reported anxiety and depression cases, as well as struggles with isolation and loneliness.



IMPACT

The university believes that putting on this Wellbeing Day will provide an extra layer of support to their students. It will make them more equipped to tackle everyday life in the current pandemic climate and educate them on the importance of looking after themselves and others. It is hoped that there will be a large uptake from students on both workshops and this will lead to the running of some of these workshops regularly and expand on the range of workshops on offer.

West Lothian College and West Lothian College Students' Association

Student Focus Groups



IDEA

The college will run focus groups for students to create an accessible and widely understood definition of what a mentally healthy college looks like. They applied for funding to purchase vouchers to give to students as an incentive for coming along to these engagement sessions. This information will help to shape the College's Student Mental Health Agreement and possibly add additional priorities.



NEED

West Lothian College recognised that everyone has mental health and wellbeing and wanted their students to feel comfortable and supported no matter where they fit on the spectrum. The College recognised the need for the student voice to inform what makes a mentally healthy college and open the discussions on mood, sleep, physical activity, stressors, mental health, stigma, support and how students can look after themselves.

Some people can find it hard to access services in the community or the support they need, and it was felt that if the College and students' association heard from students about what they would find helpful, this would improve their support offer and inform the SMHA.



IMPACT

This series of group sessions will increase both the students and colleges understanding and knowledge of what a mentally healthy college might look like. It will highlight the students' needs and challenges, as well as their preferences in relation to activities, events and resources. It will ensure that the mental health and wellbeing support being offered is relevant and catered to 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.

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 at **thinkpositive@nus-scotland.org.uk**

Commitment to the Student Mental Health Agreement project and the creation of projects like this year's recipients of the Small Grant Scheme, will have impact 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 is truly inspirational.

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



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