

How-to Guide

This guide offers more detailed information and advice for those who may be interested in adopting or adapting the initiative in their local area.

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Title	My Academic Family
Organisation	My Academic Family
Category	Emerging Practice
Poverty Impact	Mitigation and prevention
Introduction to the Project	
<p>My Academic Family is a social enterprise that provides information and support to first-generation students in Glasgow. Through one-to-one meetings, “new” students explore their new academic environment and how to navigate within it so they can identify the best opportunities for a positive higher education experience. Some topics covered in the meetings include strategies for managing stress and anxiety, strategies for getting better academic and social outcomes, and care mechanisms. Currently, all the mentorship is performed by volunteers.</p>	

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Initial Idea

Who had the initial idea?	
Carolyn Carter developed the idea from her experience as a first-generation student.	
How did the idea for the project come about?	
Carolyn Carter identified that first-generation students face different challenges during their studies, which affect their university experience and how people ask for help and support. She observed that people from low-income backgrounds were more familiar with asking for help and obtaining support. Still, other students felt shy or intimidated, so they isolated themselves from the different support networks and programs of the universities.	
Were plans informed by any published reports / papers / research evidence or practice from elsewhere?	
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
During Carolyn's Master's in Adult Education, she gained theoretical knowledge about designing and delivering support to adult learners. The modules on continuing community education and multiculturalism and education were keystones for increasing her understanding of the barriers, challenges and best strategies to engage and help. Also, her recent experience as a volunteer in supporting refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK provided her lived experience on the best way to deliver and engage in a project as my Academic Family.	
Was anyone else involved in developing the initial idea of the project?	
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
The Student Enterprise program at Glasgow University provided an incubator ecosystem that allowed the project to get more experience in business management and successfully apply for funding opportunities. First Support Fund, a Scottish charity that supports businesses and social enterprises, was then involved by providing funding.	

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Were those with lived experience of poverty involved in developing the initial idea of the project?			
No			✓
Yes			
Was funding required to support the development of the initial idea of the project?			
No			Yes
			✓
Please provide details of the funding that was used to support the development of the initial idea of the project.			
Which organisation provided funding?		First Support Fund	
How much was required?		Unknown	
What was the specific source of funding? (e.g., particular grant or policy)		Unknown	
Were specific resources – other than funding - needed when developing the initial idea of the project?			
No			Yes
			✓
Please provide details of the resources that were required when developing the initial idea of the project.			
Staff/Volunteer Time		Friends and volunteer experience.	
Facilities / Workspace		N/A	
Equipment		Computer.	
Local Knowledge		Friends and volunteer experience.	
Food and Drink		N/A	

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Did any barriers have to be overcome when developing the initial idea of the project?	
<i>No</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>The barriers the project experienced were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating a clear idea of what the project does: it has been challenging to advertise the project and explain what a mentorship is and its scope. • Inclusion as a support service in the university: since the launch of the project, communication within the university’s support services has been difficult as they perceive the project as a menace that rivals their “in-house” support programs. • Informing new users of the project. 	
Did anything in particular enable development of the initial idea of the project?	
<i>No</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Voice-to-voice contacts were necessary for setting the initial approaches with secondary students. Offering support free for refugees and students from low-income backgrounds also helped to gain more visibility.</p>	
How long did it take between having the initial idea and starting the project?	
4 Years.	
Who made the decision to introduce the project?	
Carolyn Carter.	

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Early Development – Pilot Project or Feasibility Study

Was there a pilot project or feasibility study?			
		No	
		Yes, a pilot project	✓
		Yes, a feasibility study	
What did the pilot study or feasibility study involve?			
The project didn't have a pilot or feasibility project, but Carolyn ran informally different coaching and mentoring activities that shaped the project, which could be interpreted as a "pilot project".			
Who was responsible for the design and/or delivery of the pilot or feasibility study?			
The activities were a be-friend system that allow any student to contact someone to chat and explore the different support programs available at the university. Most of the people that participated were in a vulnerable position as they were facing a low education performance due the challenges they were facing (i.e. isolation, depression, and financial), a position that was jeopardizing their permanence in their university course.			
Were those with lived experience of poverty among those involved in the design or delivery of the pilot project or feasibility study			
		No	✓
		Yes	
Was funding required to support the pilot project or feasibility study?			
No	✓	Yes	
Were specific resources needed to support the pilot project or feasibility study?			
No	✓	Yes	

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Was the pilot project or feasibility study evaluated?		
	No	✓
	Yes	
Was there evidence from the pilot project or feasibility study that confirmed that it was working / it would work?		
	No	
	Yes	✓
<p>As it was a befriending system, there was a closer relationship between the mentor and the mentee. The success of the activities was evidenced as all the people who was supported during this period stayed and successfully finished their studies.</p>		
Who made the decision to continue with the project beyond the pilot or feasibility study?		
Carolyn Carter.		
Was the design of the project modified following the pilot project or feasibility study?		
	No	✓
	Yes	

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Accessing the Service and Engaging with Service Users

Is there a referral process?		
	No	
	Yes	✓
<p>My Academic Family doesn't have a referral system. Most service users engage directly with the project through its website or direct contact with Carolyn; sometimes, a former mentee recommends the project to new service users. Refugees and people seeking asylum contact Carolyn through the charity Inclusive Homework Club in Glasgow.</p>		
Is referral the only way that potential clients are made aware of the project?		
	Yes	N/A
	No	N/A
Other than referral, how do potential clients come to know about the project?		
<p>My Academic Family promotes its services through indirect means (social media and mailing lists) and direct means such as college and university stalls, information material distributed in charities, and voice-to-voice experiences.</p>		
What is the most common way through which users typically access the service?		
<p>Online.</p>		
Do you take steps to keep in touch / reach out to service users?		
	No	
	Yes	✓
<p>Currently, most contact with the service users is made by email. The project uses social media for posting information, but their response hasn't been as expected. However, there are plans to create an online forum to facilitate the interaction between the service users, the volunteers/mentors and the project.</p>		

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Working with People with Lived Experience of Poverty

Are those with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>delivering</u> the project?		
	No	
	Yes	✓
<p>Yes. Some volunteers were first-generation students who mentor others by sharing their experiences as students. By providing their stories, they help the mentees to put their concerns into words, develop means to identify their circumstances and journey, understand the best way to access the support they require and find the paths available according to their circumstances.</p>		
Are people with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>managing</u> the project or project governance?		
	No	✓
	Yes	
Are people with lived experience of poverty involved <u>in any other aspect</u> of the project? <i>If so, please describe below.</i>		
	No	✓
	Yes	

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Leadership, Governance and Partnership Working

Who is responsible for managing the project?	
Carolyn Carter as founder and manager.	
Is this the only responsibility of the person managing the project?	
Yes	✓
No	
What proportion of the manager's overall workload is given over to this project?	
Most of it	✓
About half of it	
Just a small proportion of it	
Is there a Project Steering or Advisory Group?	
No	✓
Yes	
Are any other governance arrangements in place to review strategy and performance?	
No	
Yes	✓
<p>The principal agreement is the Training and Guidance handbook provided to the volunteers. This document was co-produced by the volunteers and the manager, and it compiles the best practices for delivering the mentoring services. Also, there are regular follow-up sessions between the manager and the volunteers to check the project's delivery (i.e. challenges, concerns, etc.).</p>	

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Links to Wider Policies, Strategies and Statutory Requirements

In your opinion, is the project aligned with national and/or local anti-poverty strategies and priorities (e.g., local authority or health board priorities)?	
Don't know	
No	✓
Yes	
Is the project part of any other strategy?	
Don't know	
No	
Yes	✓
Yes, the project received funds from Glasgow Business Gateway. This service has been bonded into Glasgow's Action Plan for Change, where Business Gateway supports micro-businesses that deliver projects that tackle poverty in the city.	
In your opinion, has the project benefitted from being part of this strategy?	
Don't know	✓
No	
Yes	
Is the project delivering a service that is a statutory commitment?	
No	✓
Yes	

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Funding

Has external funding been secured to support the work?		
		No
		Yes
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please provide details of the external funding that was used secured to support this work?		
Which organisation provided funding?	The project received support from Glasgow Business Gateway and currently works under a model of paid mentorship.	
What was the specific funding stream/source/scheme?	The project is funded by the payment of the monthly fee for the mentorship. Only refugees and people seeking asylum are not required to pay.	
How much funding was secured?	Unknown.	
For how long has funding been secured?	Unknown.	
Is future funding from the same external source a possibility?		
		Don't know
		No
		Yes
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Has a specific sum been secured from the host organisation to support this work?		
		No
		Yes
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

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What are the future - longer-term - prospects for this work if existing funding sources were no longer available?

If current funding sources were no longer available, My Academic Family would aim to sustain its activities through a mix of small grants, social enterprise income from paid mentorship, and building stronger partnerships with universities and community organisations. The long-term vision is to embed the service as a recognised complement to university support structures, potentially supported by institutional funding or sponsorship. Without funding, activity would be scaled back but could continue at a reduced level through the commitment of volunteers and the CIC structure, ensuring that at least some mentoring and guidance remain available.

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Staffing and Resources

Do existing staff from the host organisation contribute toward the work of this project as part of their broader work for the organisation?			
		No	
		Yes	✓
Currently, only the manager.			
Are existing staff from the host organisation paid extra to contribute toward the work of this project?			
		No	✓
		Yes	
Have additional paid staff been employed to contribute toward the work of this project?			
		No	✓
		Yes	
Are volunteers involved in delivering the project?			
		No	
		Yes	✓
The project is delivered through the volunteers in the role of mentors. Most volunteers have lived experience as first-generation students, or in other cases, they have experience in the corporate world. They deliver the mentorship following the guides explained in the volunteer guidance book.			
Are specific resources – other than staff/volunteer time and money - needed to support the delivery of the project?			
	No	✓	
			Yes

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Are any of the resources needed to deliver the project provided in-kind, rather than budgeted from project funds?		
	No	
	Yes	✓
Experience in studying for a university degree, Community Interest Company management. My academic family provides a guidebook and training.		
Were new IT systems, additional software, or upgrades to existing software required to deliver this project? .		
	No	
	Yes	✓
My academic family established a website for communicating the project.		
Was additional training – for staff or volunteers - required to deliver this project?		
	No	✓
	Yes	

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Monitoring and Evaluation

Is there baseline data to describe what things were like before the start of the project?				
	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Is the difference that the project is making measured or monitored by the host organisation?				
	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
	No	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Who within the host organisation is responsible for monitoring the impact of the project?				
The performance information is collected every month after the sessions between the General Manager and the volunteers.				
How often is the impact of the project monitored or measured by the host organisation?				
Monthly.				
What methods, techniques or strategies are used by the host organisation to measure the impact of the project?				
Online surveys and data analysis.				
What information is collected by the host organisation about the project?				
Number of users	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Profile of users	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experience of users	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outcomes for users	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Anything else	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

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Has the data that has been collected by the host organisation been used to adapt the way the project works?	
No	✓
Yes	
Has an external organisation been employed to formally evaluate the project?	
No	✓
Yes	
Is there an intention to employ an external organisation to evaluate the impact of the project in the future?	
Don't know / no current plans	
No	✓
Yes	
Is there an intention to undertake your own formal evaluation in the future to estimate the impact of the project?	
Don't know / no current plans	✓
No	
Yes	

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Impact

To what extent have the aims of the project been achieved?	
Fully met	
Making progress toward meeting Aims	✓
Not making progress	
The increased number of volunteer mentors and the rate of successful applications show the project's potential.	
What difference has the project made?	
The project encourages people to continue and keep their studies despite the barriers and challenges of their socioeconomic background. It builds students' confidence not only for applying to higher education degrees but also provides a safety net for creating a positive experience during their studies.	
Have conditions or demand changed since the project was introduced?	
No	
Yes	✓
One of the most significant changes is the need to support refugees and people seeking asylum in applying to higher university degrees under the platform of colleges and Universities of Sanctuary - https://universities.cityofsanctuary.org/	
Has the project had the capacity to meet these changing conditions and demand?	
Yes	✓
No	
My Academic Family is expanding by exploring how to get involved in refugees' support networks, such as STAR (Student Action for Refugees) and EaCES (Estranged and care-Experienced Students) which help refugees and people seeking asylum on the path to higher education in the UK. However, it is still too soon to evaluate the capacity of My Academic Family to deliver this service.	

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Has the project changed through time?		
	No	✓
	Yes	
What changed		
Why has it changed		
Has the project had any unexpected or unintended outcomes?		
	No	✓
	Yes	
In your opinion, is the project having an impact on tackling poverty?		
	No	
	Yes	✓
<p>Under the project's current stage, measuring the impact of tackling child poverty is challenging. My Academic Family helped a couple of people to successfully apply and enter to higher education.</p>		

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Learning from Experience

What is working well?	
My Academic Family is building new partnerships to increase the project's visibility. The manager highlighted the partnership with Education Evolved, which allows them to promote their work. Also, they got a partnership with Snazzy Creative, which is a digital design company that helped in the design of the website and construction of the brand and marketing campaigns.	
What, if anything, is working less well?	
The involvement with the Student Union and other services that offer support to university students has been more difficult than expected. Also, communicating effectively to high-education students about mentorship has been challenging. Many students do not perceive the need to have a mentor or misunderstand the role and how it can benefit their experience.	
What are the key learning points that you'd like to share with other practitioners?	
NA	
Are there plans to develop or expand the project in the future?	
No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
How easily do you think this project could be replicated in another setting?	
Not specified.	

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