



Venture-Devie

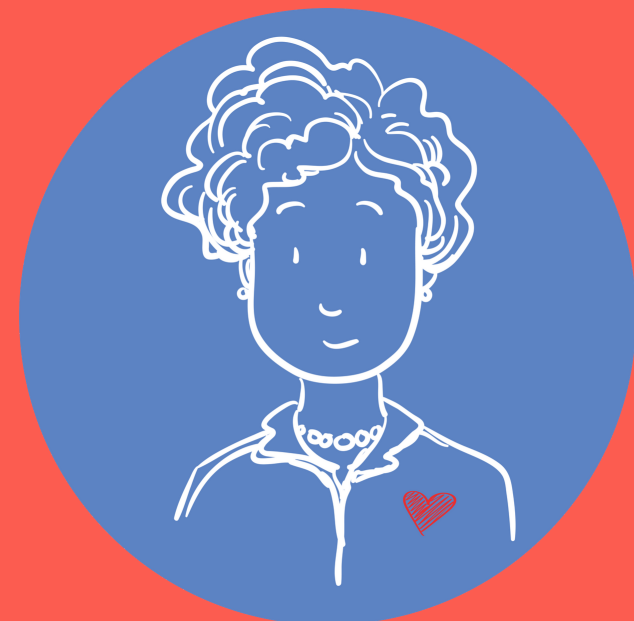
Institution - University of Oxford

Social science discipline - Early Childhood Development

Sector - IT & Communications, Healthcare

Route-to-market - Social Enterprise

Supporting parents and children through the early years



Puja Balachander

Role - Co-Founder, CEO

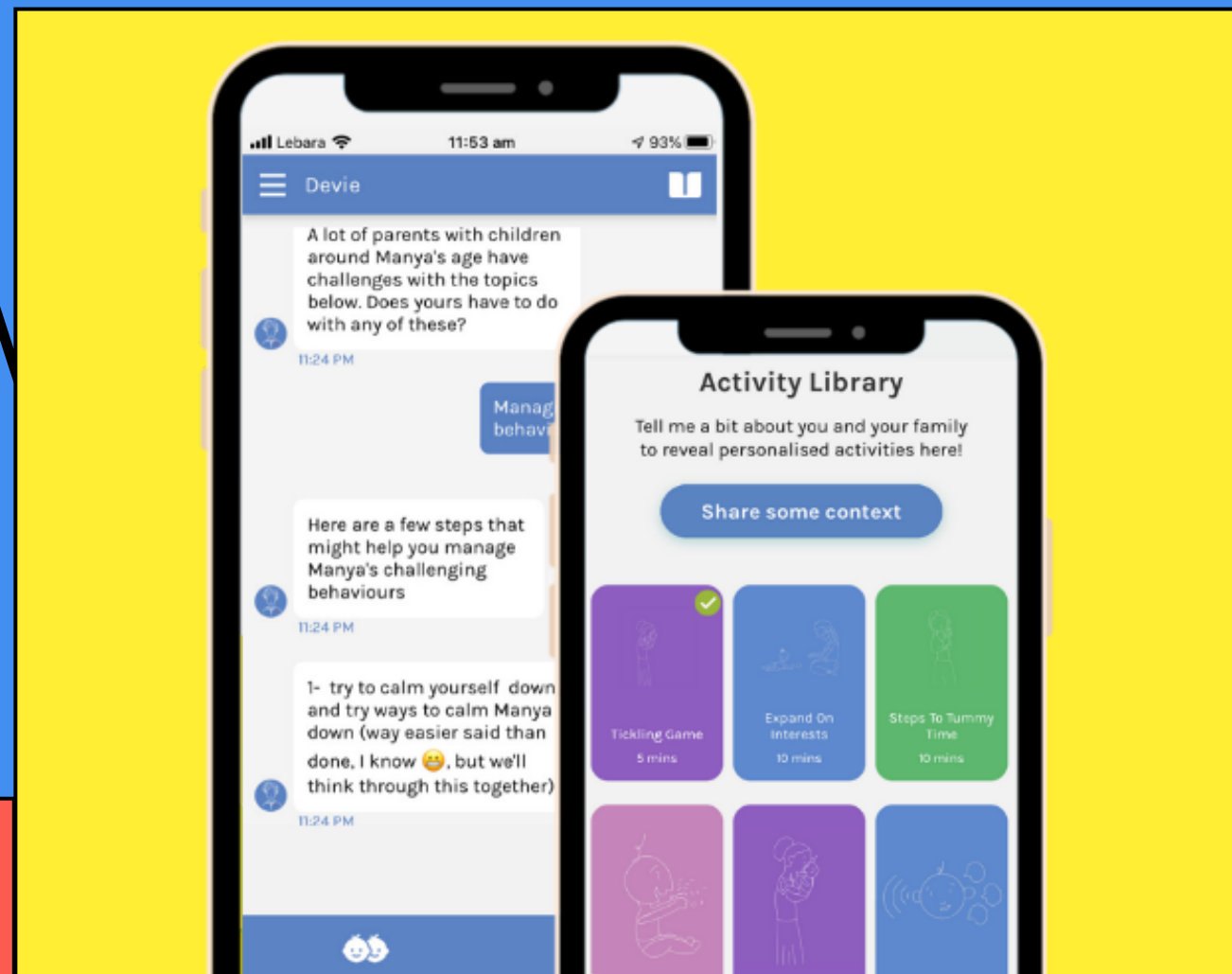
Degree - BA in International Studies from American University, 2015; Master of Business Administration, St Catherine's College, University of Oxford, 2019

Puja started her career at the Obama White House, where she designed services for young families, and advised on national child and family policy. Then she moved to the World Bank, where she worked on making quality maternal and child healthcare and nutrition accessible to every family.

Contact - puja@deviecoach.com

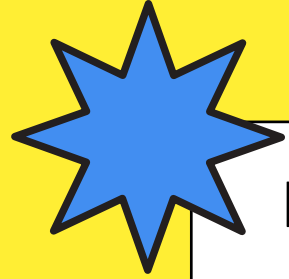


A digital coaching app supporting parents of early years children through a range of activities, advice and mental health support

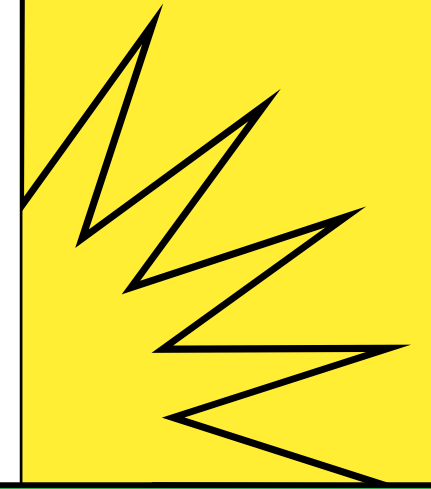


Behavioural challenges can leave parents feeling stressed and isolated with vast numbers of Millennial and Gen Z parents seeking support in the US and UK alone. The current support available is often fragmented, judgmental, unsupported by evidence, and costly. Studies show that parents would benefit from 24/7 access to judgment-free guidance to support their children to develop key social and emotional skills in their critical early years of development (gov.uk).





Devie is an automated app providing customised evidence-based advice, which supports parents by helping them to more actively engage in their child's development. Parents facing behaviour issues in their child can use the app to improve their responses to these challenges thus enabling and supporting their child's social and emotional development. The caring AI coach is in its final round of testing with parents before being released to a wider audience.



Founder Puja Balanchander's background is in product design services with early childhood development focus; designing services and products for young families. She started Devie to help make early parenting support accessible to every family so that every child, including those from lower-income families, has the strong foundation they need to thrive in school, work, relationships and beyond. To achieve this, the start-up's impact and measurement metrics are driven by the 'Devie Theory of Change', a variety of strategies, outcomes and targets to deliver this support to families. These measures include helping to resolve early years behavioural challenges demonstrated by using positive parenting methods.

Devie's social mission is to decrease parent bias in certain situations (for instance how they deal with a child's tantrum) so that behaviour is improved in the long term and enhance the cognitive, socio-emotional, behavioural developmental indicators in children. The app has been developed with PhD early childhood development researchers from the University of Oxford and has behavioural insights built-in which provide key data on parents' usage and feedback. These insights enable Devie to provide emotional support to users via the daily chatbot function and increase their confidence. The emotional support includes personalized advice, automated based on the parent's interaction and feedback on their current feelings and emotions. The app also contains the 'Devie Parents Feedback & Advice Community', a safe, non-judgmental space where parents can help and support each other.

THE I M P A C T

Tool for self-support: Devie provides personalised support to parent end-users, equipping parents with the tools to respond, rather than react, to difficult parenting situations which they may have otherwise had to face 'alone'.



Advocating for inclusion and equality in lifelong opportunities: committed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (particularly SDG 4), Devie promotes the right to equality, education and early childhood development. Not all parents have access to support networks - Devie is a companion, aiming to provide free, quality information to all.



Improving social and emotional development: the app's developers and end parent users are committed to equipping children with the social and emotional skills required for school and beyond. Psychological research shows that such skills are essential in determining future prospects.

The start-up journey

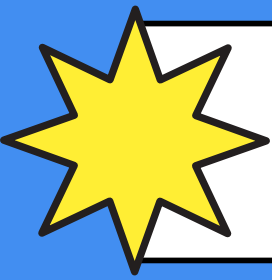
Devie has received a wide range of support from the University of Oxford and particularly from the Saïd Business School, in terms of funding and resources. In 2019 whilst completing her MBA, Puja won a place on the L.E.V8 Women pre-accelerator programme, run by the Oxford Foundry. This immersive learning programme helped Puja develop her confidence as a leader and key business skills needed to progress the start-up including how to pitch for investment. Devie also won £5,000 at the 2019 Skoll Venture Awards run by the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship, which helped to fund the development of the app.

The app has helped with advice on certain problems such as bedwetting along with providing activities that I can do with my daughter. It also provides me with the emotional support I need, particularly when I've had a bad day with her, behaviour wise.

Lousie, Devie user

Key Learnings :-

- ◆ Recruit wisely – choose your team carefully and ensure that they receive a valuable onboarding experience and understand the core aims and values of the company so that they are willing to ride the highs and lows of the startup journey with you.
- ◆ Clarify how you will measure your success, during the early stages of the business, and ensure these metrics are built in from the beginning. We built our metrics and analytics after developing the product which made things difficult. Ensure you use any initial money to start the business efficiently and use funds to focus on developing your metrics.
- ◆ Research and listen to your target market: the qualitative interviewing process is essential to the app's development and really helps to collate parents' feedback which is essential for further development of the app and its content. Data analytics can only show so much; they can't speak on behalf of parents who feedback "I don't know what I would have done without Devie", or raise particular instances in which the app felt most helpful.



What's next for Devie?

Excitingly, Devie is aiming to leverage artificial intelligence to create a more personalised service. Rather than responding to multiple questions, the goal is for the app to deliver tailored advice and challenges to parents. Research into Natural Language Processing is being conducted to deliver these results. Responding to its beta-testing phase (comprising a user-group of 100 parents) Devie hopes to continue improving the app's user experience based on real-life testimonies.

Another key goal for the start-up is to ensure that all parents will be able to access Devie's 24/7 parenting advice for free.

In 5 years, the start-up wants to be the go-to resource for early years parenting, and to be recommended by parents, governments, educators, and experts globally.