



**Venture** - I Speak  
Mental Health

**Institution** - University of Glasgow

**Social science discipline** - Business &  
Management Studies

**Sector** - Healthcare

**Route-to-market** -  
Research Collaboration, Social Enterprise

**Democratizing  
access to mental  
health resources**



# Emma Defty

**Role -** Co-Founder

**Degree -** Emma is a third-year student in Product Design at the Innovation School of the Glasgow School of Art, where she learns the principles of design thinking and developed a methodology to approaching design problems.

Emma is I Speak Mental Health's co-founder and designer. While volunteering as an assistant teacher in Serbia, she founded an art class for interested students. The classes culminated in an exhibition called "Zavicaj" (Home), which received national media coverage. At University she founded the XR Society and is the representative of her year.

**Website -** <https://www.ispeakmentalhealth.com/>  
<https://www.gla.ac.uk/>

**Contact -** emmalou.defty@gmail.com



# Alejandro Serrano

**Role -** Co-Founder

**Degree -** Alejandro is a graduate of Glasgow University, obtaining a degree in Psychology in June 2020. During his time at Glasgow Alejandro's UofG Connections entry to the University of Glasgow Co.lab Start-Up Competition was awarded 1st place. Alejandro also was part of the winning team of the TechStars Covid-19 UK Startup Weekend competition and was invited with his team to their international bootcamp for promising ventures.

Alejandro is responsible for research and the evidence-based modelling of each kit item. He has worked as a researcher in three separate universities in Santa Barbara, Milan and Glasgow. Having started two other profitable businesses since high school, Alejandro has also scaled projects in the education and retail industry to each become profitable after six months. While in Santa Barbara, he was the Professional Chair of his university's entrepreneurship society, organising professional events and workshops.

**Contact -** [alejandro.serrano.saunders@gmail.com](mailto:alejandro.serrano.saunders@gmail.com)



# Ana Isabel Bacallado

**Role -** Co-Founder

**Degree -** Ana graduated in June 2020 with a Business & Psychology degree from Glasgow University (Adam Smith Business and Psychology School). In her third year, she went to Hong Kong where she also worked in three different industries.

Ana currently works as an IT Project Manager at a multinational corporation. Since university, she has been involved in several social projects, such as working on a social enterprise in Asia, where she helped communities suffering from poor hygiene. She has also been involved in different overseas volunteering projects and conferences, such as the United Nations Symposium in Thailand.

**Contact -** [anaibacallado@gmail.com](mailto:anaibacallado@gmail.com)



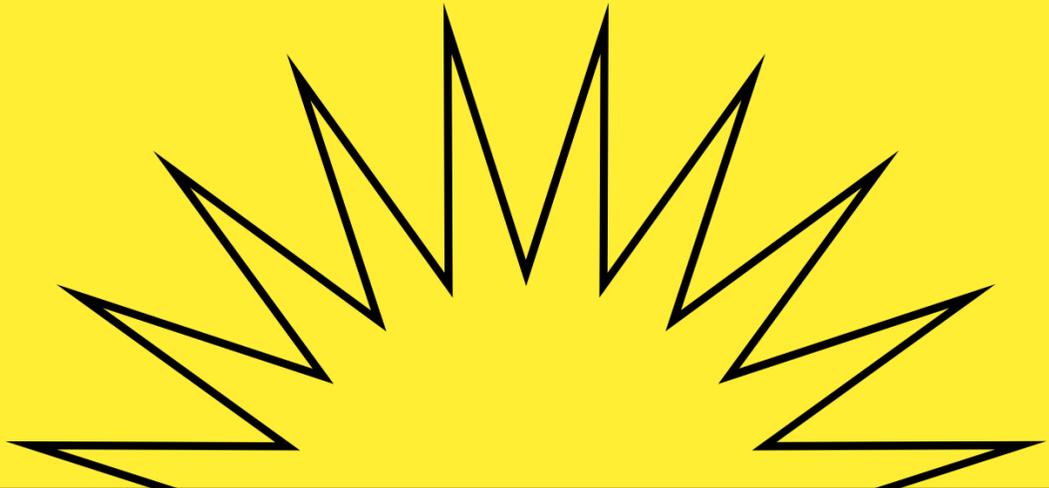
**Thanks to the creation of its Mental Health First Aid Kits, I Speak Mental Health empowers people to help themselves, while also helping others**



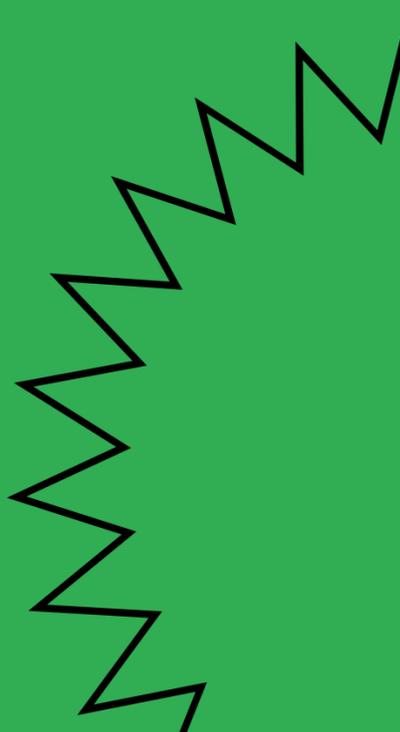
In 2019, the global pandemic led to a mental health crisis in the UK. The challenges of working remotely, uncertain employment security and prospects, as well as knowledge of the strain on critical NHS services, came together to produce a perfect storm which affected vast swathes of the population. In universities, the problem was acute. Students faced extensive wait times for under-pressure NHS and HR psychological support services, with private therapy often beyond their financial means. Moreover, societal stigmas conspired to prevent students from seeking mental health support.



The founders of I Speak Mental Health witnessed the deleterious impact of Covid-19. Together, Ana Isabel Bacallado, Alejandro Serrano and Emma Defty realised that healthcare providers and HR departments would struggle to deal with the increased demands on their services. Their social science backgrounds meant they were all too aware of the corollary: that unaddressed mental health leads to poor academic performance, high drop-out rates and losses in productivity.



**After consulting with students concerning their experiences with psychological support services, I Speak Mental Health designed a Mental Health First Aid Kit, which provides mental health education and offers physical tools based on psychological interventions used in research and clinical practice. It is designed to be used during wait times for psychological support and alongside counselling. The kit is easily accessible, low-cost and minimally intrusive, allowing students to learn about and address mental health challenges as they arise.**



**I Speak Mental Health's mission – to empower people to help others and themselves, and, through learning, to speak the language of mental health – focuses on two of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing) is met in a variety of ways, while I Speak Mental Health align with SDG 4 (Quality Education) because, through a greater understanding of mental health literacy, learning environments and their stakeholders can be safer and better protected against challenges such as stress and suicide-risk as they occur within university settings.**



The evidence-based research underpinning the kit promises greater clinical efficacy for the user than alternatives, including most mental health apps (many of which offer no scientific backing to their design, while also necessitating awareness and initiative from the user to seek and download).

# THE I M P A C T

Universities will be able to assist their stakeholders at earlier stages of distress, whereas most mental health apps currently focus on addressing symptoms of mental health which have already arisen.



Many workplaces – where the kit is set to be as helpful as within universities – have neither the time nor the funds to book mental health courses for their employees, given that they can cost upwards of £1,000 per daily session. I Speak Mental Health's kit can make a difference to the UK's workforce, too.



In February of 2020, the team trialled the distribution of the I Speak Mental Health kit with a group of 14 university students through Elephant In The Room (a spin-off mental health awareness project of SeeMe Scotland). All 14 students responded positively to the kit, saying the physical nature of the kit had engaged them more than online resources and apps.



I Speak Mental Health has sold the kits to three different organisations – a students' halls support service, a charity and a university workspace. These three organisations have given their kits to 80 users, who are now receiving mental health support.

# The start-up journey

Ana, Alejandro and Emma say, “University was a key platform to help us connect with other students, allowing us to build a team of people who had a similar vision and goals.” Additionally, societies such as ENACTUS and the University’s Students Enterprise Team helped them reach their goals, either by connecting them to professionals or through competitions and funding.

**During their time with Enactus Glasgow, I Speak Mental Health raised £1,000 in crowdfunding and grants from University of Glasgow alumni. They were also able to secure one of the only four places available at the Santander Summer Company Programme 2020 and were awarded the 2020 Jay Smith Innovation Award for creative approaches to tackle societal issues. Both opportunities resulted in funding of £3,000, money which has helped pay for manufacturing of the kit.**

AI Speak Mental Health is currently taking part in the Aspect Student Accelerator Program (ASAP), which is a four-month social sciences student and alumni accelerator hosted by LSE to support and scale socially responsible student and alumni ventures. “This programme has been fantastic for us,” says Ana. “It has helped us develop the start-up further, make key connections and has also given financial support.”

# Key Learnings

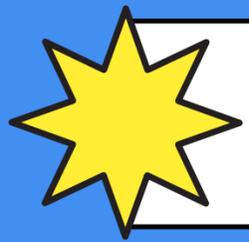
- ◆ Build a good team which shares the same vision.
- ◆ Share your why with others so that those with a similar passion want to get involved.
- ◆ Listen to your customer.
- ◆ Be very disciplined.
- ◆ Start now! Do not wait for the perfect time as it may never arrive.

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**It has been an absolute pleasure to work with Ana, Alejandro and the I Speak Mental Health team through the ASPECT ASAP impact programme. In the past five months they have progressed their idea rapidly, developing their product, making sales and engaging with customers. We're so pleased that they are members of our community and have contributed a lot to the growth of other members within our first cohort.**

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**Kiran Arokiasamy, Accelerator Programme Manager**



# What's next for I Speak Mental Health?

I Speak Mental Health are developing the next iteration of their mental health kit, one that will incorporate more feedback from their consumers.

I Speak Mental Health have spoken with the department leads and counselling leads of various universities, some of whom confirmed that they want to collaborate with I Speak Mental Health for the next academic year.

The team are dedicated to their mission of wants to help students and employees, so that everyone can have a better university and workplace experience.



**At I Speak Mental Health, we believe in the power of self-care. This is why we have developed our Mental Health First Aid Kit, a kit designed by experts which teaches us about mental health – and how we can look after it.**



Ana Isabel Bacallado, Alejandro Serrano and Emma Defty