#AllOfUsLocal

A heartfelt guide to empowering estranged and care experienced students, and SU / council officers to create local communities and sociable, safe spaces

Introduction

All of Us is the community for estranged and care experienced students across the UK.

Our community is national, and it exists everywhere! We're online, we meet up in real life, we have societies, groups, group chats, dinner out... some of us don't do any of that, but we still feel like All of Us *just existing* helps us to feel part of something bigger.

Being nationwide is great but we also know that people are keen to set up things that bring people together a little closer to home. This is our guide to help you do that.

Consider it a roadmap to help you to create your own positive and inclusive spaces at your uni, college or SU, with support from us if you need it; under the All of Us umbrella (or flag, actually) so that estranged and care experienced students can easily recognise this is something for them.

An introduction from Muhsina
The heart behind #AllOfUsLocal

Why did I create this guide?

Simple. It's born from a place of understanding and empathy. I've seen the unique challenges we all as estranged and care-experienced students face – the feeling of being on the outskirts of university life. #AllOfUsLocal is our way of reaching out, of saying, "You're seen, and you're not alone."

Building More Than Just Communities

At the core of this guide is the idea of building inclusive and supportive spaces. It's about creating a sense of belonging where every student feels valued. Imagine a community that's not just a group of people, but a family within your academic environment.

Building Bridges, Not Just Communities

The guide kicks off with a simple yet powerful idea: let's build communities, but let's make them mean something. It's all about crafting a space where everyone feels included, heard, and valued. Think of it as creating a family within the university walls, one where every member truly matters.

Learning from Each Other

We learn, we adapt, and we grow – that's the mantra of #AllOfUsLocal. I've included strategies and feedback loops in the guide because I believe the best communities are those that evolve. Just like life, right?

From Leadership to Friendship

Creating a leadership team is about more than filling roles. It's about finding people who share your vision and passion. In the guide, I discuss how this team can be a strong support network, a group of friends working towards a common goal.

The Art of Communication

Effective communication is key. In #AllOfUsLocal, I stress the use of clear, friendly language, whether it's on social media or in person. It's amazing how the right words can bridge gaps and build connections.

Facing Challenges Head-On

No journey is without its bumps. In the guide, we tackle issues like insufficient university support. Through advocacy and networking, I've learned that these obstacles aren't roadblocks, but opportunities to grow stronger.

What You'll Gain from #AllOfUsLocal

I hope that this guide inspires you to take action, whether that's forming a support group, hosting an event, or simply lending an ear to someone in need. Each step you take can create a ripple effect of positive change.

Final thoughts

This is more than a guide; it's an invitation to start a journey of support and inclusivity. I encourage you to read it, share it, and use it as a stepping stone to build a world where every student feels truly included and valued. Together, let's turn this vision into a reality.

Are you interested in setting up your own local group/already have and want some help and to share learning? Or maybe you're a Student Union/politics/NUS leader and want to champion care experienced and estranged students?

Get in touch with Ira at Ira.Hakim@UniteFoundation.org.uk to join our #AllofUsLocal peer-support network.

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Setting things up

Step 1. Understand your community's needs

Action: Scope out what already exists and how many students there might be locally. Conduct surveys, focus groups, or informal chats to gauge specific challenges and needs.

Key Point: Determine the primary focus of your local group – is it advocacy, social connection, resource sharing, etc? What gap are you trying to fill?

"If your university doesn't have enough care experienced and estranged students to start a society, starting an informal regional group (or joining one if it already exists in your area) is a great way to foster a sense of community." – Emily –

"I organised an informative session for my university's open day about financial and well-being support available while at university, along with advice on the application and transition process. We hosted a pub quiz with free pizza for other estranged and care-experienced students to meet each other. My campaign produced a financial guide detailing all the financial support available from the university and how to access it." – Chloe –

Step 2. Craft a mission and a vision

Action: Develop clear, inclusive mission and vision statements describing what you aspire to achieve, with your community's needs in mind.

Your mission is what you have set out to do, your vision is what you want the results of that to be.

All of Us has a clear mission and vision, that you are welcome to use as your own, but you can create something more specific to your local group.

All of Us mission:
To bring together the estranged and care experienced student community, to find friends who get it and allies to organise with.

All of Us vision:
To bring together the estranged and care experienced student community, to find friends who get it and allies to organise with.

Strategies to develop your own

1. Examples and Templates

Look at successful models from other existing organisations for inspiration.

2. Feedback Loop

Regularly review and refine your statements based on member input and evolving goals.

"It depends and varies wildly.. like, it depends if it's a formal group (i.e. student society) or if it's a message group/informal space for CE/E students to just chat etc. If it's a formal group, you'll need to look into how societies are run, you'll need a mission statement, student exec members like a treasurer, events and social media person, etc. You will need to familiarise yourself with filling in funding applications, contacting people via email, lots of meetings etc. I'd advise getting in touch with the university's widening access team (if they have one) and student services within the Union. The elected student exec also. All of these groups can help in different ways." – Sam –

"Consider what you want and why you're setting up the society/group. You can focus on policy campaigning to change the experience for fellow estranged and care-experienced students, run social events to connect with other estranged and care-experienced students, or produce informative infographics and guides for fellow students." – Chloe –

"Understand the students who are there by speaking with the professionals who work with them" – Ikra –

Step 3. Form a leadership team

Action: Assemble a diverse team with various skills. If you are creating a more formal student society, roles might include President, Treasurer, Social Media Coordinator, etc.

Consideration: Training and incentives for leadership roles, especially for those balancing studies.

You may not need this when starting out! But it is a requirement of formal student societies. Talk to your union/student council about this.

Step 4. Communications and social media

Action: think about how you can utilise various platforms to spread the word about your local group. Things like social media, email newsletters and local bulletin boards that are up in your university, department, accommodation and union/guild.

Key Points:
Ensure clear, jargon-free, and carefully chosen language
Agree who will be responsible for communications

NB: Use our community flag on all your social media and on any materials to promote your group, society or local community, that way, estranged and care experienced students will be able to easily see this is a community or space for them ▬▬ There is a download link on the next page ☺

Our flag is the symbol that unites us all, wherever we are.

Co-created with estranged and care experienced students, the colours represent our entire diverse and dynamic community, flanked by the symbol of equality.

You can download the flag here for use on digital or printed materials. If you're designing or printing on a white background and need a version that will work on that, please email rebecca.rymsza@unitefoundation.org.uk who will be able to help!

If you want to use any of the colours or fonts in this guide for your local materials, we absolutely encourage it! ☺

You can find everything you need by going to the 'Our identity' section of the All of Us website.

"Societies also need a way to communicate – some use Instagram group chats, Discord message boards, Facebook/Whatsapp groups etc."
– Sam –

"Reaching out to All of Us and other groups like EaCES, as well as contacting your university, is a good way to advertise your group."
– Emily –

Now you're set to go

What to think about next?

Organising meet ups and events

Action: Plan diverse, accessible events like workshops, social meetups, and speaker sessions.
Consideration: Reflect the diversity of the community in events, keeping costs low or free.
Organise initial meetups in well known spaces such as your Student Union, to foster a safe atmosphere.

Creating a welcoming environment

Action: Foster a safe and respectful atmosphere. Begin with familiar spaces like the Student Union or well-known student cafe/bar. Starting somewhere people feel comfortable and at ease can really help build this vibe.

Strategy: Use informal meetups, Q&A sessions, and clear community guidelines.

All of Us: the community for all estranged and care experienced students across the UK

Building partnerships

Action: Consider collaborating with your student union/guild/council, local businesses, non-profits, and university departments for support and resources.

Benefit: This enhances what your community can offer its members, for instance a good relationship with your university might lead to free resource access such as funding to help run an event.

Sustaining and growing your local community

Action: Implement long-term engagement strategies like mentorship programs.
Goal: Adapt and evolve according to your members' needs. It doesn't need to be perfect first-time and we're all human! Your community will ebb and flow over time and that's okay.

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Monitoring and Evaluating how it's going

Action: Regularly assess the impact you're making through surveys, attendance tracking, and member feedback. (You can just ask them what they want !)

Method: Balance survey use with in-person workshops to avoid fatigue.
Benefit: with evidence you can show your college or university and show why they should be supporting you local community.

Potential challenges

(and some potential solutions)

Challenge: Funding

Potential solutions:

- Grant Applications: Seek grants from your uni/college, Student Union/Guild, and even local businesses.
- Fundraising Events: Organise events like bake sales, charity runs, or auctions.
- Partnerships: Collaborate with local businesses for sponsorships or in-kind donations.
- For meetups, reach out to the Unite Foundation.

Challenge: Member Engagement

Potential solutions:

- Offer relevant/diverse activities, maintain open communication.
- Adaptability: Continuously engage with members to understand and adapt to changing needs.

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Challenge: Conflict Management

Potential solutions:

- Clear Guidelines: Establish a code of conduct with defined conflict resolution procedures.
- Mediation Training: Train leaders in conflict resolution and mediation techniques.
- Open Forums: Hold regular meetings where members can voice concerns and resolve issues amicably.

Challenge: Lack of Knowledge

Potential solutions:

- Mentorship: Seek guidance from experienced students or faculty.
- Resource Sharing: Utilise online resources, webinars, and workshops on community management.
- Collaboration: Join forces with existing societies for shared learning and support.

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Challenge: Time Management

Potential solutions:

- Delegation: Divide tasks among team members to spread the workload.
- Prioritisation: Focus on key activities that align with the group's mission.
- Efficient Planning: Use tools like calendars and project management software for organisation.

Challenge: Lack of Support from University/Student Union

Potential solutions:

- Advocacy: Present the value and purpose of the society to key decision-makers.
- Networking: Build relationships with faculty and staff who can advocate for the group.
- Alternative Resources: Look for support outside the university, such as community organisations.

Top tips!

From those in the know…

Reaching out for support and advice

Feedback from students who have set up their own groups recommended reaching out to the following:

- Your Student Union, Student Guild, Student Council
- Your University/College
- Your named care leaver/experience or estranged student contact
- Other care experienced/estranged students you knew
- A local or national charity or non-student organisation e.g. Stand Alone, Rees Foundation, Unite Foundation, Become, Who Cares? Scotland
- Your supervisor and other people in your search group

"A big challenge is identification – unis don't just give out the list of names of CE/E students. You can advertise events as solely CE/E , but you can't exactly police it so you just have to trust that the people coming are actually from the community. It's been a difficult one to navigate – we use QR codes for registration etc to try help this issue. This is why I'd advise speaking to the widening access team – they can advertise events on your behalf, and the union can help a lot with having events specifically for CE/E people (i.e. book quieter event spaces etc)." – Sam –

"I have to work closely with other professionals to know how many other students are out there in my university. However, I did come across them in events e.g. during a Christmas Event" – Ikra –

"Research what else exists first! And definitely reach out to your uni cause they can give you funds to do stuff, most places have widening access budgets and this is perfect for it". – Anon –

"At the end of the day, do try not to overthink it. You are all there to have fun and connect. You're not anyone's therapist and you don't have to solve anyone's problems. It's a good and cool thing you're doing by setting up a local community." – Anon –

"Stick up posters everywhere!!!! Like in your library, su, etc . Leave an email or number or something people can get in touch with if you're comfortable".
– Kirsty-Marie –

Maintaining Personal Well-being

- Action: Prioritise mental health and avoid burnout. Delegate responsibilities and take breaks when needed.
- Strategy: Plan for busy periods, like exams, and ensure a support system is in place.

"My biggest piece of advice is not to let it affect your mental health. Student-led groups for care experienced/estranged people can be incredibly exhausting in ways – people like to forget they are usually run by people who have been affected by trauma(!) So if you're CE/E yourself and decide to take on that responsibility, always take care of yourself first and learn to say no to things if you know you're not able to do it. The post is voluntary and should always feel like it's fun, not a burden. Be aware of how long you will be at uni for, make a plan for when you have exams and deadlines etc – your degree comes first. Don't be afraid to step back if you need, just make sure the group is looked after if you need to take some time away." – Sam –

"it's incredibly rewarding and I have learned so much from being President of the society. I'm so proud to have been a part of it and I've met some amazing friends. I would really recommend having that support network and there's so many ways to make it a great thing." – Sam –

"It can be quite demotivating at the start when you don't have much attention or support, and very few people show up to your event, but please keep going! Even if you help one person, your society can make a significant difference." – Chloe –

"I would say reach out to people (and use this guide) and get advice on what they would do. Most of the time there are other people who can help!" – Ikra –

Useful resources

Helpful links

- University societies – what are they, how can you join them and why should you get involved? – The Uni Guide
- How to set up a student society | ApplytoUni
- NCLW: A guide for allies by Isabelle Kirkham – Become (becomecharity.org.uk)

Supported by Unite Foundation

All of Us

Thank you for taking the time to read this and thank you to everyone who contributed to this guide:

Muhsina Saidova, Community Catalyst (author) Chloe Pomfret, Ikra Shabbir, Emily Rose Wagner, Sam Upton, Kirsty–Marie and anon others – with their feedback on direct experience running or founding a group.

The All of Us Sounding Board

Students from across the community