

# ENGAGING FAMILIES TO ENGAGE STUDENTS

OLT NATIONAL  
TEACHING  
FELLOWSHIP

*Forging productive partnerships with families to assist first in family students navigate their higher education journey.*

*“Rather than focus on what people lack, better understanding is gained from focusing on strengths in order to develop ways of understanding first in family students that seek to challenge notions of access and participation.” (O’Shea 2015)<sup>1</sup>*

## Why focus on first-in-family students?

- Over 50% of the current university population is first in the family to come to university (Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013).
- Over a quarter of first-in-family respondents in AUSSE (2011) indicated departure intentions in the first year of university and this figure increased to 34% for later year students.
- Students in OECD member countries who are from a more educated family are ‘almost twice (1.9)’ as likely to attend university than peers (OECD, 2013 p.3).
- Students with a parent or family member who has attended university are statistically more likely to successfully complete higher education studies (McMillan, 2005).

“My mother now uses me as an example for my little brother and so it’s that extra tool in the house to get him to do something and even with my older brother – because we’ve seen the positive impact it’s had on my life and they know the ins and outs – I tell them everything so they can see that it’s not the scary, unknown thing anymore, it’s known and it’s not scary, it’s wonderful. It’s really changed the dynamics of the household.”

(Nigel, 26, 1st year Education)

## Activities included in the Fellowship:

- A series of workshops / mentoring offered to higher education providers to assist in the retention of FiF learners.
- Development of National Principles for engaging with the family and community of first-in-family students.
- Design and implementation of a suite of outreach activities and online resources.

## THE JOURNEY SO FAR

### STAGE ONE (UOW Grant - Completed)

Qualitative interviews with 25 first-in-family / mature age undergraduate students.  
Initial analysis of qualitative data with emergent themes providing a ‘taxonomy’ of support.

### STAGE TWO (OLT Seed Grant)

Interviewing / surveying FiF students across three institutions studying in both face to face and online modes.

### STAGE THREE (OLT National Teaching Fellowship)

Further development of and also implementation of *National Principles for Supporting First in Family Learners and Their Families*.

## Want to be involved?

- Join the conversation on the **blog** at [www.firstinfamily.com.au/blog](http://www.firstinfamily.com.au/blog) or on **Twitter** @Uni\_FiF.
- Contact Sarah at [saraho@uow.edu.au](mailto:saraho@uow.edu.au) who can provide mentoring on ways to better support and engage first-in-family students including delivering workshops for staff.
- Access the resources available on the **website** at [www.firstinfamily.com.au](http://www.firstinfamily.com.au).
- Register your interest to participate in a short interview about first-in-family learners ([saraho@uow.edu.au](mailto:saraho@uow.edu.au)).

“The workshop was great, very useful. Great layout and enjoyed opportunities for questions and discussions.”  
(Workshop Attendee, USyd)

“The Research was solid, meaningful, helpful. Concrete strategies; deep understanding of diverse experiences FY students bring to uni. Success is deeply personal so hearing stories from students shows how we need services to be agile.”  
(Workshop Attendee, QUT)

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<sup>1</sup> O’Shea, S. (2015). “It [university] wasn’t spoken about at home, it was just assumed that we would start working....” First in family students, family capital and higher education participation. In Hill, M., Hudson, T., McKendry, S., Raven, N., Saunders, D., Storan, J., & Ward, T., (eds.) *Collaborate to Widen Participation: To, Through and Beyond Higher Education*. FACE Publications: London.