

imii is on the way to reimagining immigration for a brighter future

Jane Fisher and her cofounder Alexandra Miltsin have built the social impact startup imii. Jane and Alexandra built this pocket companion app for immigrants due to a global demand for improved services for immigrants. Today we interview Jane and hear her firsthand experience as an immigrant and first time founder building the next generation app for immigration services.

Temps de lecture : minute

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This social impact entrepreneur is transforming the immigration journey with the power of both AI and community. imii offers personalised advice to immigrants and connects them with trusted local providers and businesses who speak their language and can provide advice.

How did you come up with the concept of imii and what led you to taking the big leap of being a social impact entrepreneur and follow the dream of reimagining immigration?

[Jane] Initially, I never dreamed of becoming a founder. In fact, I was convinced that I wasn't built to be a startup founder, despite being told by

many in the industry that it was something I should try. Then, in the winter of late 2022, I had a therapeutic experience that led me to the realisation that if I wanted to create the future I envisioned for myself — being the voice of change, making an impact, and leaving the world at least a little better than I found it — I needed to try building something of my own. Once that realisation struck me, there was no turning back.

After that, it was just a matter of figuring out the concept. I began to think about how I could apply my lived experience and expertise to create something that would reduce human suffering and make people's lives better, while also being a viable business. That's how I came to the idea of imii. It was inspired by one of my immigration processes where I had human assistance, and I realised that this experience could be digitised and democratised to help others going through this life-changing move.

Your dream of improving and recreating the immigration journey is coming true with this AI-driven app, that is now live! How did you go about finding your co-founder and building out the concept in the early stages of your startup?

My search for a cofounder was quite a journey, though smoother than many. I initially joined the Antler Accelerator, where you can find both a co-founder and an idea, but I didn't find the right fit or secure investment. After Antler, I tried working with a few people, but none of the partnerships worked out.

Then, I met Alexandra at a Rare Founders event, which happened to be Halloween. I was one of the few in costume and ended up pitching *imii* dressed as Alice in Wonderland, making quite an impression. Not sure that played any part in the fact that Alexandra and I connected that night, but we did: she was excited about the idea – and luckily, she had the necessary skills in product management, GenAI and ML that I lacked. After a test period, I realised she had the qualifications, initiative, and reliability to be my co-founder, and a couple of months later, we formalised our partnership.

To validate the concept, I initially conducted numerous interviews with immigrants and tapped into various immigrant networks. While we could have started with a Facebook group or WhatsApp chat, I didn't feel secure without a real product. So, we built the first version of the app — the MVP — on a modest budget. I took the risk, thinking, "If I lose that money, so be it." Fortunately, the experiment worked, and we now have a functional app on all platforms, proving the concept and giving us a solid foundation to grow from.

Can you talk a little about your work experience prior to *imii* and how it helped shape *imii*?

My background had little to do with technology — I trained as a journalist and worked in both writing and television. That experience significantly shaped my ability to tell stories and create narratives that resonate with people, which has been invaluable in building a social impact startup like *imii*. For a mission-driven venture, it's crucial to provoke empathy and engagement from as many people as possible — especially on an international scale — because without that, it's difficult to make a

meaningful difference.

After my journalism career, I transitioned into production and later digital content for tech companies, which eventually led me to the startup world. I was seeking a bigger purpose and found it at a cancer care startup, which also had a strong impact mission. At the same time, I was volunteering as a content team lead for a charity, where I learned to craft complex yet compelling narratives about people.

However, over time, I fell out of love with the startup I was a part of, because I realised I wasn't making the kind of tangible impact I had hoped for. That was a turning point for me — it made me realise that if I wanted to create something truly meaningful, I needed to take control and build it myself.

What also matters is that, at the cancer care startup, I started as head of communications, but soon became involved in product and strategy decisions. By the time I started imii, I had firsthand experience with strategic decision-making, learning both good and bad practices.

Additionally, my previous role helped me build a strong network, which was incredibly valuable when I relocated to London. Having those connections made the transition smoother and helped me kickstart imii with the right people around me.

You were also an immigrant yourself, how was this experience and knowledge vital for

you in building out the imii app?

My lifelong experience as an immigrant has deeply shaped imii. I often say imii is an extension of myself. Born to a family of immigrants from the Soviet Union who moved to Japan, I grew up appreciating different cultures and traditions. This upbringing taught me the value of a collaborative, global world where people can move freely, contribute, and build better lives.

I've had both assisted and unassisted immigration experiences. As a student in London, the process was easier because the university guided me. Later, in another country, I had a coordinator who helped me navigate every step, which inspired the concept for imii: replicating that guidance but through AI.

When I moved back to the UK as an adult, I assumed it would be easier, but I was wrong. Navigating fragmented information and chaotic online groups was much more challenging than expected. This experience confirmed that imii was needed — an app that could make the immigration process smoother and more supportive.

You were part of the Antler program - can you tell us a little bit about why you choose Antler and your experience during your Antler program? You have mentioned that you didn't find a cofounder, nor investment

whilst at Antler - yet you kept on going and found an amazing cofounder and you're now a team of 4. Can you tell us a little bit more about your startup journey, both the trials and triumphs you faced?

I chose Antler because I had heard about it and knew it was a programme where you could join even without a co-founder or a fully developed idea. At the time, I did have an idea, but not much else, so I thought it would be the perfect place to start. In fact, I applied for Antler the very day I decided I wanted to build something on my own, even before I had fully conceived the idea of imii. The selection process, which is quite rigorous, with only about 3% of applicants making the cut, was surprisingly smooth for me—I just sailed through it.

I always recommend Antler to anyone thinking about becoming an entrepreneur or startup founder, especially if they're unsure. The programme gives you two months to experiment, find a cofounder, and work solely on that, with the added benefit of receiving a grant. However, while Antler was the right decision for me at the time to kickstart my journey with imii, I've come to realise that it wasn't the best fit for the type of project I was working on.

Antler does claim to be interested in impact, and perhaps they are, but they're still a traditional VC operating a high-risk model. Their perspective is naturally biased towards projects that fit within that model, which is understandable when you're giving your money to someone who only has a deck and some validation of their idea. But for me, as someone who is very focused on social impact, the odds of finding a co-founder with the right skills and shared interest in that sector were extremely low. That part of the experience didn't play out well for me.

Additionally, I found some of the feedback during the programme quite crushing. I know they were trying to simulate the real world, where you do get tough feedback from VCs, but I'm not the kind of person who thrives on negative feedback. I understand its place in real situations, like when you're asking for investment, but in a classroom-like setting, it was more counterproductive for me. I've had similar experiences earlier in my career during my internships on TV, where the feedback was even more toxic and harsh, but over time I've learned that I thrive better with positive reinforcement. So, by the middle of the programme, I found myself slowing down and not progressing as much.

No hard feelings toward Antler — it's just not for everyone, especially for those who already have a clear vision of what they want to do.

As for my startup journey, one of the lowest points came after Antler. By the end of the programme, I was diagnosed with mixed anxiety-depression disorder. It wasn't caused by the programme itself, but it did contribute to catalysing it: I was still in the early stages of my immigration journey, which added a lot of stress. I was feeling vulnerable and miserable because I wasn't progressing and couldn't work effectively until I sought the right psychotherapy.

After that, I took a holiday to Colombia to recharge and reflect on whether I truly wanted to continue as an entrepreneur. For the first week, I seriously considered giving up — everything seemed so appealing there, from the weather to the friendly people. But by the second week, I felt recharged and knew I was ready to go back and try again.

One of the major triumphs after that low point was winning a pitch competition in November, where I presented to a panel that included the

Head of Google for Startups in EMEA. Winning that competition gave me the confidence to move forward, even though I only had a deck and a co-founder at the time. That was a turning point for me.

After that triumph, we faced another low point this summer when we were stuck trying to finalise and publish our MVP. It took much longer than expected, and the delays were frustrating and draining. But that turned out to be the darkest moment before dawn. Almost immediately after, our team grew to four people. Since then, we've been growing rapidly, gaining more validation, and attracting interest from potential service providers who want to partner with us.

At this point, I feel like I've finally overcome my imposter syndrome as a founder. I now feel confident that I can execute this slightly mad but highly ambitious concept with the potential to change the world.

You have launched your app as a MVP - but it is working and gaining traction, can you tell us a bit more about the process of launching and how you have managed to achieve all this whilst bootstrapping the company?

Yes, it's an MVP because it represents only a fraction of our full vision and has far fewer features than we ultimately want. But it's working, it's proving helpful, and it's gaining traction with very positive feedback. How did we manage to achieve all this while bootstrapping the company? Honestly, sometimes I wonder the same. But I do have an answer — we partnered with a contractor agency that was also new to the market. They took us on as one of their first portfolio cases, which allowed us to

develop the MVP at a very low cost.

However, it wasn't easy. The agency turned out to be inexperienced, so we made quite a few mistakes along the way. We had to invest a lot of our own time and effort into the technical side of things, especially when it came to launching the apps on the app stores. It was a learning experience, and we know that when we build the next version of the product after fundraising, we'll approach it very differently.

Despite the challenges, we made it work. A lot of the traction we've gained, and the partnerships we've secured with service providers, come down to my founder brand. I've been active in the community, and I have a distinct voice as a founder. That's been my superpower — starting my career by giving voice to things that matter, and now ensuring I give voice to something I believe will matter and create positive change in the world.

As for the rest of the team, we're all currently working on sweat equity. They trust me, and they know we'll fundraise soon and be able to start paying them. For now, we're all working part-time and bootstrapping as much as we can to keep things moving until we secure funding.

imii will clearly be a powerful tool for immigrants to settle into new countries and communities and it is truly a global app. With this in mind how do you navigate to task of taking on the world? What markets are you focused on and how do you plan to scale the

app?

Taking on the world is, indeed, our biggest challenge. As I often say, anyone can build the tech for what we're developing, but very few can connect all the dots, onboard stakeholders and providers, and make it a truly global app. Fortunately, connecting the dots has always been one of my strengths, especially from my time working with international organisations like WHO Europe, international charities, and multinational companies. So if anyone is capable of making this happen, I believe it's me — or at least, in this area, I don't feel as much of an imposter as I usually do!

How exactly are we going to do it? We're following the example of some of our predecessors, like the app *Homeis*, which unfortunately (or fortunately for us) shut down in 2021. By the time they closed, they had a million users worldwide and scaled from diaspora to diaspora, market to market. We're planning to use a similar strategy but with more caution to ensure we don't run low on funds before we've fully captured each market and begun monetising.

At the moment, we're focused on the UK market. The US market is also very tempting for us, even though we know our biggest competitor is likely to be based there once they launch. That said, they haven't launched yet, so we may still have the momentum to make an impact. We're also evaluating European markets to determine which countries would be the most viable for us to scale into first. We're still validating numbers and projections to see where we can make the biggest impact while ensuring the viability of our business.

If there were 3 areas of advice you could tell a first time social impact founder reading this article now about the startup journey what would it be?

My first piece of advice is this: just because something hasn't been done before doesn't mean you can't do it. This has been a mantra I've told myself throughout my life and career, and it's always worked.

Secondly, understand that it may take much longer than you think, and that's okay. Serious change, especially when you're aiming to shift paradigms, takes time, and that's part of the process.

Finally, don't be afraid to ask for and accept help. If you're building something with a social impact, there will be people who genuinely want to support you. Be cautious of those who might try to take advantage, as that's common in the startup world, but there are many more people who will be eager to help you in meaningful ways. You'll need that help—often, you'll find that people are willing to offer valuable assistance for free simply because they believe in your mission.

So, to sum up: don't be afraid to break new ground, don't worry if it takes longer than expected, and don't hesitate to seek or accept help when it's offered.

Where are you in the fundraising process? Have you secured any funding or are you entirely bootstrapping the business? Do you think fundraising is necessary for all startups?

We're still early in our fundraising process. We have investors in the loop who are waiting for updates, particularly on our financial projections, which I've been working on for the past few weeks. Most of our investor interest has come through my network and warm introductions — I haven't done any cold outreach yet, partly due to imposter syndrome. But now that we have our three-year P&L forecast, it's time to move forward with targeting wider.

I've been financing the business myself, and we've kept expenses lean. But now we need to fundraise, as our team is working on sweat equity, and we'll need to pay salaries to go full-time.

Fundraising isn't necessary for all startups. If you can fund your venture from savings or secure grants, that's ideal. Fundraising — especially through venture capital — can sometimes pressure startups into hyper-growth, which may force founders to compromise on their mission. That's why we're careful about who we approach, ensuring alignment with investors who share our vision. Financial returns are important, but they can't come at the cost of our mission.

How is the competitor space? What areas

does imii excel in and provide a point of difference for expectant immigrants compared to other apps on the market?

The competitor space exists, but few are doing exactly what we do. Most competitors focus on B2B relocation services because that's where the money is, while many who started with B2C eventually pivoted to B2B due to the difficulty in generating revenue in B2C.

We're different because we don't focus on relocation services like visa processing, which are manual and resource-heavy. Instead, we operate in the "settling-in" space, with a strong focus on B2C. This allows us to create social impact and maintain an open ecosystem that offers immigrants diverse services, options, communities, and cultural enrichment.

What sets us apart is that we don't gatekeep information or resources. We aim to create a collaborative, open ecosystem that fosters integration and cultural diversity.

Our closest competitor was *Homeis*, but they shut down in 2021, likely due to not monetising early enough. WelcomeTech in the US is a potential competitor, but they haven't launched yet. We may face competition from them, but this could lead us to target different market segments or adjust our US offering.

We also plan to partner with government and public sector organisations to ensure greater outreach and meaningful integrations: more than

anything, we are committed to delivering real social impact, especially for underserved and vulnerable immigrant communities.

Immigration is a huge market and growing year on year due to climate related events and raging wars. What is it that makes imii a must-have app companion for these people and communities?

While the current version of imii is still quite basic, the way I envision it is as both a trusted friend and a guardian for those making the life-changing move of relocating to another country in search of a better life for themselves and their families. It will be there to help them not only navigate the hurdles of settling in a new country but also find the support they need without being scammed or spending endless hours searching for reliable information in sketchy online communities.

Imii will be a tool that helps prevent people from being taken advantage of and offers a unique, tailored, and personalised integration experience—something that's either non-existent or currently very one-size-fits-all. We also plan to offer multilingual support, which is especially crucial for those who are not yet fluent in the language of their new homeland.

Ultimately, imii is designed to make the entire settling-in process easier, safer, and more supportive for immigrants, including those from vulnerable communities, so they can focus on building their new lives without unnecessary stress and uncertainty.

Where can people find the app and how can housing, healthcare and banking businesses get involved?

The app is available on both Google Play and the Apple App Store. You can easily find it by typing in "imii". At the moment, it's free to use, with a basic version available, and we'll be introducing a paid premium subscription in the next few months.

As for how businesses can get involved, any business that caters to immigrants or is immigrant-founded can participate. We're currently building and introducing a new feature with trusted service providers, which will soon be available on the app. We already have our first service providers lined up. They will be showcased on the platform and offered to our users, with special offers and fees provided whenever applicable. In return, we will onboard them for free and monetize through a commission based on the clients we help them acquire.

At the moment, it's not a full marketplace as we envision it for the future, but more of a catalogue of vetted and trusted providers that can offer valuable services to our community. For example, we already have providers offering car insurance, business legal assistance, and credit-building services, with more in the pipeline.

To get involved, businesses can simply email me or reach out via [LinkedIn](#).

What does success look like for imii?

Success for imii has many moving parts, but our immediate milestone is to secure fundraising, start operating full-time, and really focus on making an impact. In the long term, success would mean seeing at least half a million people using imii by the end of three years, around December 2027. I envision companies benefiting from imii as a vital support tool for their international employees, and thousands of immigrants living happier, more peaceful lives as they settle into new countries.

While studying the market, I realised there is no dominant player—no "Google" or "HP" of immigration, so to speak. There isn't even a "Sony" of immigration, if you catch the metaphor. I would like imii to become that recognisable name—the "Apple" or "Sony" of immigration, setting the standard for immigrant support worldwide.



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