

THE GROWING CLUB



Sunflowers Club



Prepared by Wendy Dickinson

Contents

	Page
Executive summary	3
Introduction	3
Methodology of the Evaluation	4
Attendance	4
Participants	4
Weeks 1 -8 Feedback	4
Measuring my Growth Form Results	6
Overall Feedback	7
Outcomes	8
Lancashire County Council Strategy For An Ageing Population	9
Improvements	10
Reflections from the Course's Leader	10
Conclusion	10
References and Resources	11

Sunflowers Club Pilot Evaluation

Executive summary

The Growing Club is a Lancaster based community interest company. The organisation's aims are to empower women to be sustainably economically active, while having a healthy balance between the multiple and complex needs of their lives. The Growing Club designs and delivers business pre-start up, start-up and growth programmes, bridging the gap in business education for women, alongside the monthly skills workshops and a weekly drop-in session for advice and guidance. Work is delivered to women aged 19 plus. The Growing Club has responded to an increase of older women joining the programmes by gaining funding specifically for enterprise training for those aged 50 plus who are unemployed, on a low wage or facing redundancy.

The Santander funded 8-week enterprise "Sunflower Club" ran from 18th January to 8th March 2019. At the start of the pilot: 5 women were not in paid work, 1 was working part time and 1 was in full time work. At the end: 2 more participants were in paid work, one is being supported through redundancy with 5 actively perusing Self Employment. All reported higher wellbeing scores by week 8. Regarding Lancashire County Council's Ageing Population Strategy, the group felt that the course touched on all of its aspects.

The Sunflower Club pilot programme and evaluation has enabled The Growing Club to test the effectiveness of the vision with the view to producing a model that can be scaled up.

Introduction

Rosa is a UK Fund for Women and Girls which was set up to support initiatives that benefit women and girls in the UK. This extract below is taken from their paper Economic Justice, (July 2015).

"Women's average income in retirement is only 57% of the average for men. Women who have occupational or private pensions reach retirement with pots worth on average 47% less than men (£107,00, almost half that of men who, on average, retire with a fund worth £201,000). Nearly a quarter of women approaching retirement will rely solely on the state pension, which is currently a maximum of £113.10 per week. The relative poverty that women experience throughout life is continued in old age. Women live longer than men and they do so with less income."

Entrepreneurship and Innovation (2018), a paper written by Jane Binnion the Founder of The Growing Club, proposed a pilot scheme that would address reducing women's poverty in later life by providing enterprise training for those aged 50 plus. The "Sunflower Club" pilot was funded through Santander and ran for 20 hours over 8 weeks. It provided an opportunity for the participants to explore:

- what they want and need.
- what skills they want to learn.
- what skills they have to share.

in relation to:

- being economically active for longer and with dignity, in meaningful enterprise.
- building support networks to break isolation and loneliness.
- improving mental and physical well-being.
- creating a culture shift that values the skills and experiences of our elders, creating a new and positive dialogue for ageing.

The accompanying evaluation's aim was to capture qualitative and quantitative evidence showing how the programme contributes to empowering women to be sustainably economically active, supporting the local and national Strategy for an Ageing Population.

Methodology of the Evaluation

Data was collected using qualitative and quantitative base lining, mid point and end point questionnaires. These drew on the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale, previous Growing Club SROI campaigns and the local and national Ageing Population Strategy. Qualitative examples of participant experiences and subsequent changes in their beliefs / behaviours along with resulting outcomes were recorded by direct observation in weeks 1, 4 and 8.

Attendance

Out of 10 sign ups, 7 attended the pilot programme. Of the 3 that did not attend at all, 2 were because of caring reasons (personal care timings for 1 and for the other, sudden care of a family member) and the third was prevented from attending due to travel distance.

Of the 7 participants, 1 attended all 8 sessions. Reasons for non attendance ranged from caring responsibilities to work demands as well as Jobcentre Plus appointments.

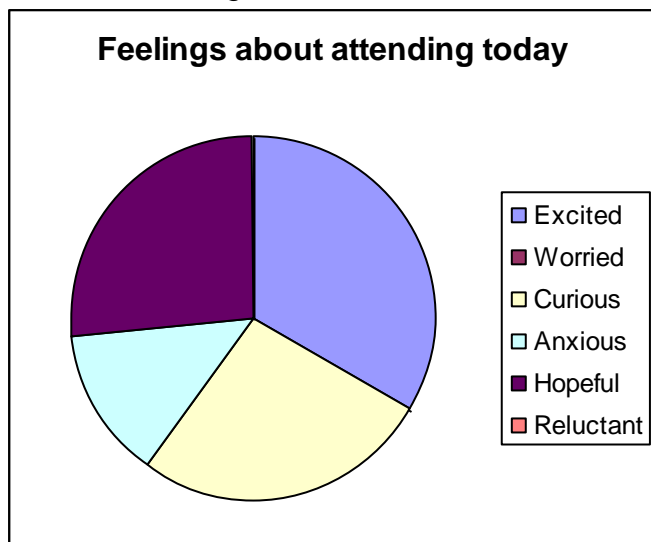
Participants

The women were from across Lancaster, Morecambe, Heysham and Bolton Le Sands. Largely arts based, 4 of the women had more than 1 business interest, 3 had clothing based ideas, 1 aimed to be a Karaoke Entertainer, 1 a Painter/Author as well as retailing a hot desert sauce, 1 aimed to have a healthy food business, 1 had a cooking course based interest and one was focussing on personalised 1:1 mental health support.

At least 4 of the women were educated to degree level or higher and were not using their education professionally i.e. were underemployed.

Week 1 - Introduction

Prior to attending their first session the women reported feeling mainly excited.



None selected that they were feeling worried or reluctant

Most popular elements were: the Introduction to the course as well as Individual Introductions and meeting the other women.

"You become a thing once you become married and have children ...putting everybody else first."

"I want something that fits in around my family. No employer can give me that....I don't want to work weekends.....[or] be in work before my daughter goes to school."

"I don't often meet anybody because I don't work, my husband and daughter have all kinds of friends here."

Week 2 - Gabrielle's Story - A Personal Perspective

The most popular element was: hearing the guest speaker's journey to Self Employment.

"[The session] Confirmed that I won't be on my own if I start a business. There will be plenty of practical and equally importantly - emotional support."

"I found the conversation about menopause and work really supportive."

Week 3 - The Stories we tell ourselves

The most popular elements were: Introduction to "The Stories" and What actually makes us who we are?

"The mind is very powerful so it's important to be conscious."

"I got to know myself a little bit more and how much fear gets in the way of most plans."

Week 4 - Self Employment

The most popular elements were: the Grounding exercise and the round the table Good News.

"[Gratitude Journal] Makes you realise what you're actually grateful for."

"I'm going through something really tough at work and I've suddenly got a really upset stomach."

"It's validating ourselves and feeling that we're worthy.... My sons have said to me "Mum don't Poundland yourself.... You know what you want and what you need"."

Week 5 - Personal and Business Finance

Most popular elements were: Essential Budget for Business and input from the guest speaker who is an Accountant.

"Budget has been a personal problem hard to tackle."

"Looking at my business budget was an important reminder that I needed."

"Being made aware of the Smallwood Trust has been useful and I am in the process of making an application to them."

Week 6 -Successful business attributes and skills

This was the least well attended session over the course's duration however it should be noted that this fell at the same time as the school's half term holidays.

"Wellbeing is compulsory."

"I really needed the discussion on pricing as I struggle to put a value on the service I want to provide as Self Employment."

Week 7 - What do I need to do to run a successful business?

Most popular elements were: Revisiting the Self Employment exercise, What needs to be in place pre-starting - essentials and Who will help.

"Good to focus down on the business idea i.e. what do I need to put in place to actually start?"

"New Enterprise Allowance was very useful."

"It was good to look at what needs to be put in place to get started/pre-starting/12 months."

Week 8 - Evaluation

The final session was spent reflecting on the previous 7 weeks as well as committing to next steps (see Outcomes below).

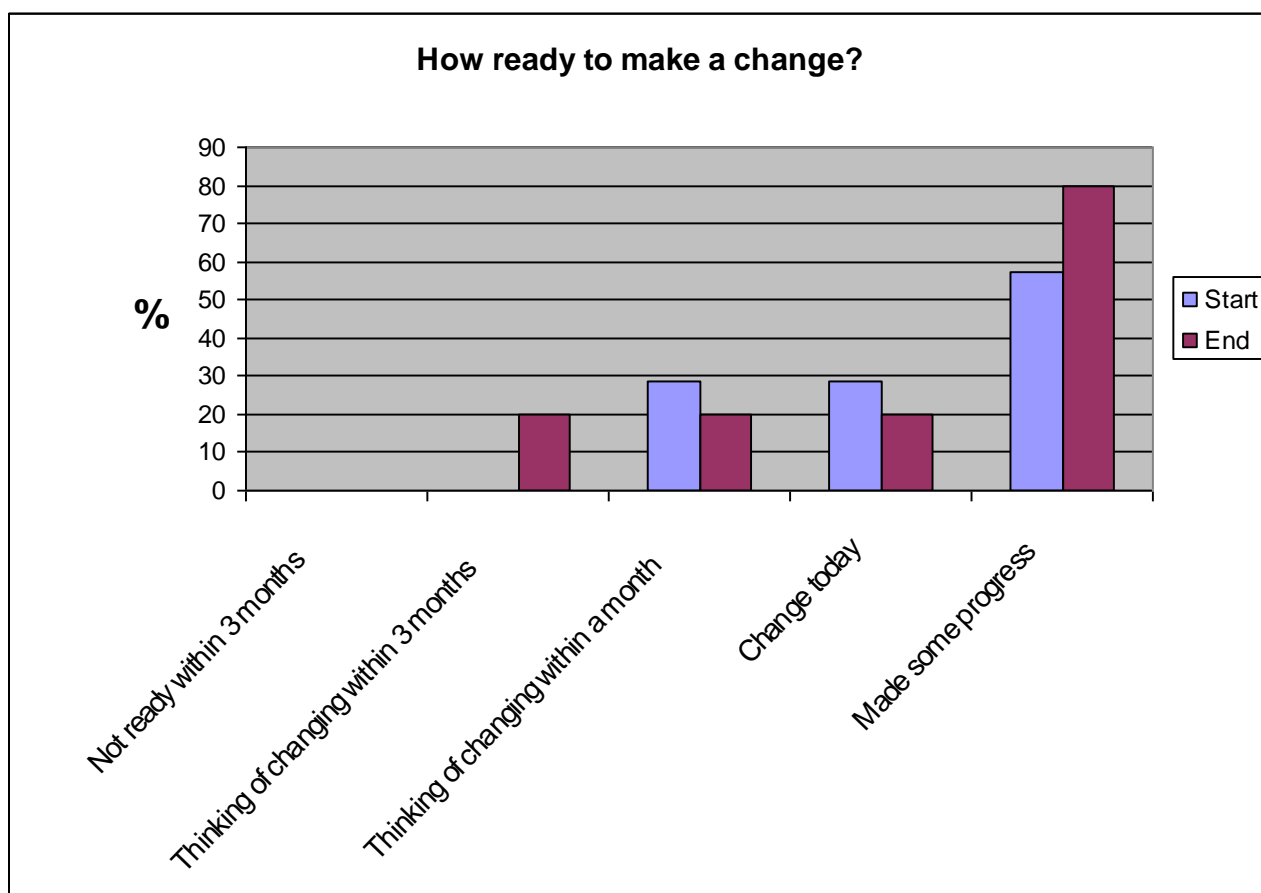
"This group has been very important because it's helped me to think, realise that it is important that women need to share with women to make advances."

"When I came on this course I was thinking about retiring, semi retiring. Now I'm definitely stopping work [due to redundancy] and my business has to make money."

"Confidence to actually go ahead and do something. I don't actually feel stressed because if it doesn't work, at least I tried."

Measuring my Growth Form Results

This was completed at the start and then revisited in week 8. The average confidence level at the start was 7 with 4 participants listing it as a weakness. This score rose to 8.6 by week 8. The ability to cope with stress levels was initially 6.9 and rose to 7.7. This shows a marked average improvement for participants following the course.

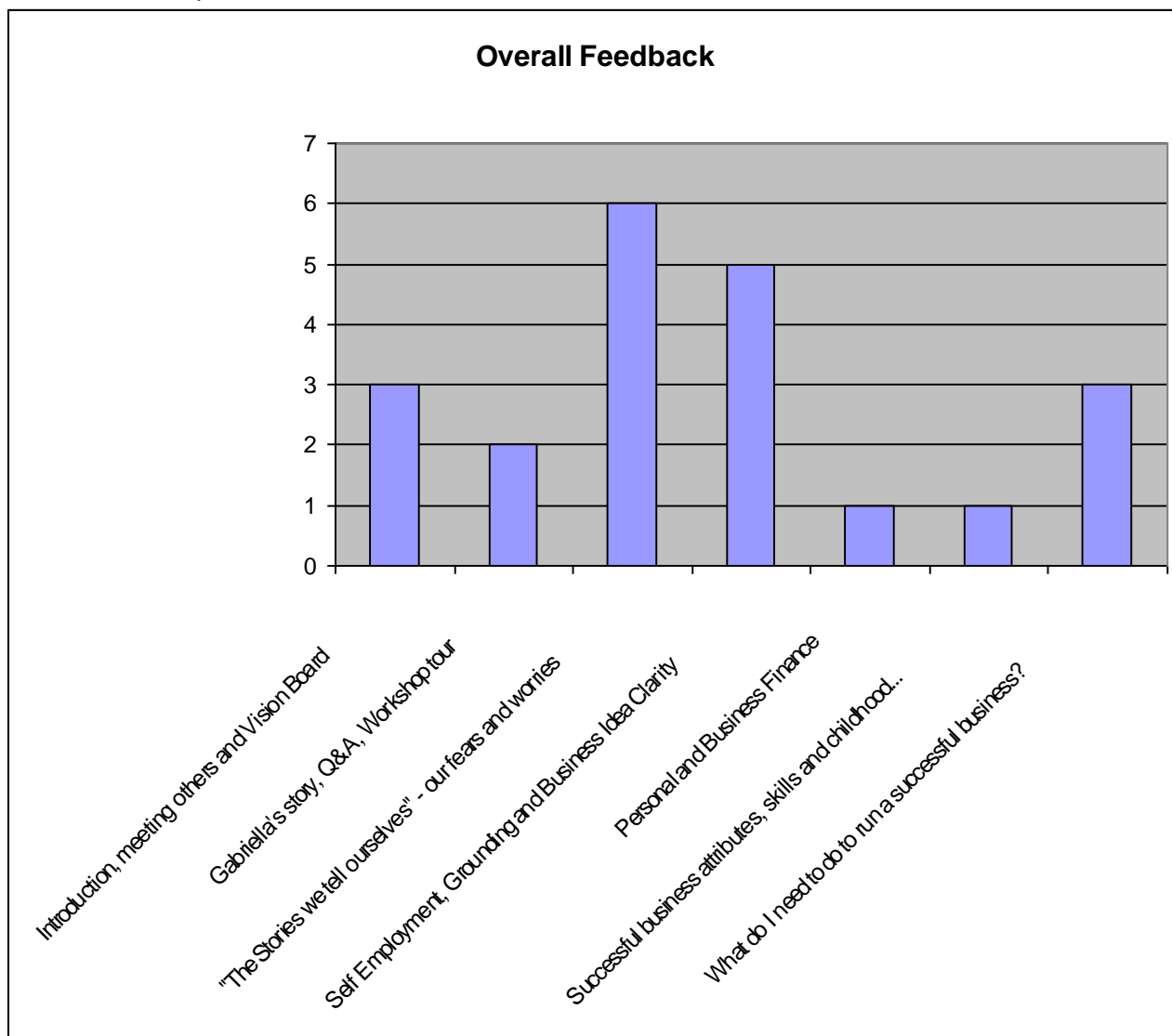


"Confidence matters more than anything which has been elevated because of bonding with women."

"I feel that my scores reflect my positive journey over the last 7 weeks."

"The course gave me a focus every week. I looked forward to all the sessions and it helped me to clarify what I want / need to do to help to keep [me] moving forward."

As confidence was reported as a key weakness, when asked to pick 3 of the most useful weeks it's not really a surprise that *"The Stories we tell ourselves" - our fears and worries* came out on top.



"Difficult to choose only 3 sessions. They were all very useful."

Outcomes

By the end of the pilot the participants were much more focussed on their business ideas and their next steps. As already mentioned 2 have gone into paid employment and:

- 2 are setting up an Etsy shop following the Skills Workshop on 12th March 2019.
- 3 attended the Women running micro-manufacturing businesses event (held on 27th February 2019 and to be held ongoing on a quarterly basis).
- 1 has been approached by the NHS to help create healthy meal plans.
- 1 is applying to the Smallwood Trust and has a New Enterprise Allowance meeting.
- 1 is contacting Cancer Care to offer her services.
- 5 want to join the Growing Club's lottery funded comprehensive start up course in June 2019.

"I feel really positive about my ideas. They've come together in a way that they've never done before Coming here for these sessions has really focussed me I want to go in there [New Enterprise Allowance appointment] and put my business plan on the table and say 'Here it is. This is what I've thought about'. I feel in a much stronger position now."

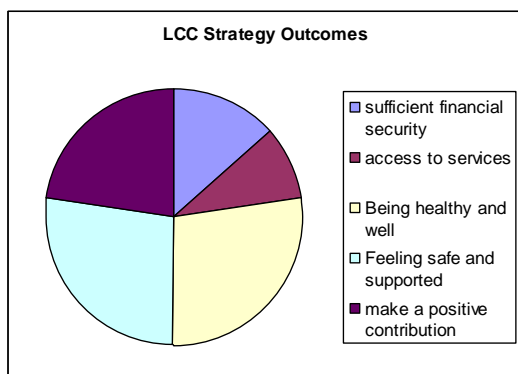
"I'm so ready to fly and I'm also ready to fail forward [take a risk] because there's no such thing as failure really."

"I decided to get a job in the hope that each month I can buy my Karaoke equipment bit by bit. I did not want Job Centre funding me as this would put tremendous pressure on me."

"Gave me hope that if I do have an illness, I can still work and bring in an income and support myself."

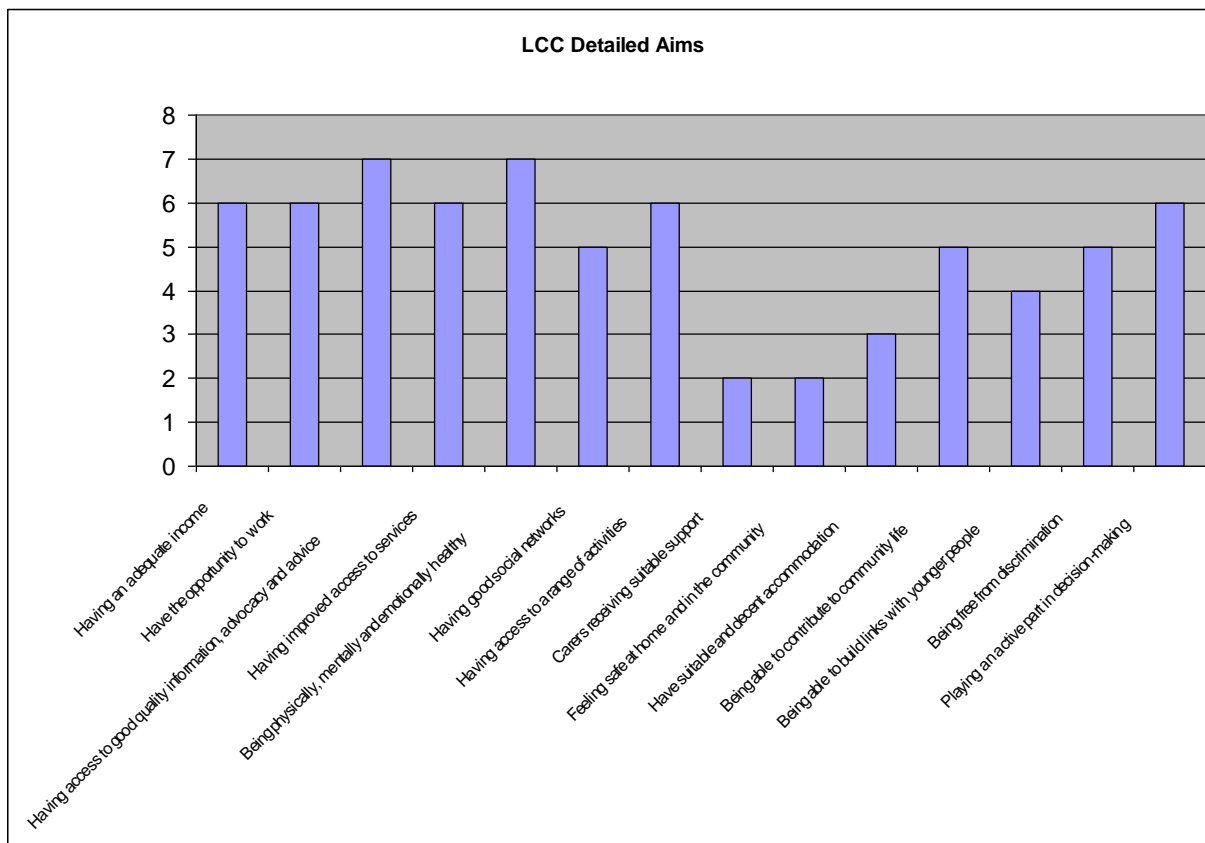
Lancashire County Council Strategy For An Ageing Population

The group was asked at mid point and at the end to reflect on how they felt the pilot touched upon the Outcomes and Aims of Lancashire County Council's Strategy For An Ageing Population.



As is illustrated below the pilot's content was considered to be far reaching, including all elements of the strategy.

"... in the job market 50 seems to be a tipping point as well as in our own lives. There's actually another 20 years that we're expected to work and financially contribute..... Why do we need to start thinking about it at 50?... Why shouldn't we move seamlessly towards it."



Improvements

When asked what could have improved the learning experience, the participants listed the following:

- Personal Business Plans (i.e. Zoe and Miranda exercise)
- Handouts (possibly)

Action Planning is an integral part of building a business. A recommendation for future courses, from the observation of week 8, would be to cost in offering some 1:1 time with each participant to help them to develop effective plans.

A further recommendation would be to cost in following up with participant outcomes at 6 and 12 months after completing the course.

Reflections from the Course's Leader

"To be in a room with a group of wise women was amazing."

Responding to the feedback from previous pre start up courses, this pilot ran for 8 weeks rather than 5. As a group with lots of life experience and collective wisdom, it was felt that participants moved through the curriculum quickly and with more focus than previous cohorts, however it was also noted that they struggled to recognise the value of their life experiences (reflecting society's attitudes). There was also more engagement in discussions with better grasping of new concepts. Even though the participants reported not being confident, it was felt that they had more than the generally younger women who had been through the pre-start up course previously.

Health was a recurring issue as was redundancy, caring (including of school aged children), homelessness and delayed access to a pension. This with the exactingness and inflexibility of the benefit system (following the introduction of Universal Credit), added to the vulnerability of some of the women. They expressed a need for them to be able to stand on their own two feet, reducing their reliance on anyone else. Several showed great resilience through the stories they shared. What was very obvious was the gratitude they felt for the opportunities that the pilot offered as well as the access to the other spin off services with a real excitement about taking part in the upcoming Slow Fashion Show.

Conclusion

It has been clearly demonstrated by the 7 positive progressions (2 into work and 5 actively pursuing Self Employment) that there is a need for this type of bespoke female centred enterprise development. The women left the course with higher confidence levels, more of a sense of purpose, a growing supporting community as well as a new direction to pursue. Each left with at least one "Next Step" which will continue them on their journey. They can continue to receive support from The Growing Club through the funded weekly Drop Ins as well as the subsidised Skills Courses. In addition, the group demonstrated that the pilot's content addressed not only their needs but also the Outcomes and Aims of Lancashire County Council's Strategy For An Ageing Population. Although this pilot has been a success, there is clearly more to be done to support women to be successful later in life and close the gaps and inequalities identified by Rosa (2015).

Post script – 1 year later January 2020

Two participants progressed to Roots & Shoots, our start-up course. They graduate in April and now have mentors.

One joined our enterprise skills course *Crafty Women* and set up her own business.

Three women were supported to put outfits on the Slow Fashion Show cat walk for the first time.

The remaining women got employment

One woman was supported to apply for a Smallwood trust grant as she was in insecure housing.

We gained funding from ROSA Voices from the Frontline and will be working with 10 women to create a short film on older women and employment issues, which will be launched in June this year.

References and Resources

Binnion - November 2018. EMBA (unpublished) - Exploring innovation to address the issues of an ageing society. How can The Growing Club CIC best support people to have extra years of health and independence?

GOV.UK

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-value-act-information-and-resources/social-value-act-information-and-resources>

Lancashire County Council Strategy For An Ageing Population -

<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/462302/strategy-for-an-ageing-population.pdf>

Office for National Statistics -

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/measuringequality>

Rosa - UK Fund for Women and Girls

<http://www.rosauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Rosas-Four-Pillars-Economic-Justice.pdf> p.4

Social Value Hub

<http://www.socialvaluehub.org.uk/about>



The women & enterprise hub.
6-0-5 Alston House
White Cross
Lancaster,
Lancashire
LA1 4XQ
Tel: 07892712417
Email: Jane@thegrowingclub.co.uk
<http://thegrowingclub.co.uk/>

April 2019