

ANNUAL REPORT

JANUARY
2022

The Growing Club CIC



BACKGROUND

The Growing Club CIC January 2022

The Growing Club is a Community Interest Company, formed in October 2016. The remit is to deliver employment and business skills training for women, including start-up and business growth programmes. We champion local economic growth and community wellbeing.

Our priorities are to work with women in Lancaster district, Lancashire and across the North West, helping women to increase confidence and reconnect with their skills for Decent Work (United Nations SDG 8.3) and to start - and grow - sustainable businesses.

This report will highlight programme areas delivered for our financial year 2020/2021, where our reach has continued to grow, despite this period including the ongoing impacts of Covid 19 - the second year of operating through the global pandemic.

As always, we offer a heartfelt thank you to everyone who has enabled the work of The Growing Club CIC during this sustained and turbulent period. We have demanded a lot from everyone - the administration team, the trainers, volunteer mentors, directors, consultants and funders - all of whom have provided a fantastic and steady support.

PRIORITIES FOR 2020/21

1. To get effective office systems in place.
2. Development worker to address networking, team building and fundraising
3. Record new e-courses and launch the remote learning platform.
4. Improve our marketing and online presence, building a library of case studies.
5. Run and evaluate the Wellbeing Programme.
6. Invest time into building strategic partnerships with local government and other relevant agencies.
7. Train a pool of peer-trainers to take over delivery from Jane, to enable her to focus on development work.
8. Explore age-related work, specifically unemployed young women.

PROGRESS IN 2020/21:

The Team

Lisa, a founding member, retired from office duties and Rebecca Webster joined the team. We now have a strong office team with Jane Booker as finance manager, Rebecca as office manager and Paula as an administrative assistant. This has enabled Jane to start to carry out development work strategy this year, and grow the trainers' team, which consists of Ginny Koppenhol and Nicola Garrett delivering the e-courses; Soaad Patel and Hazel Hardie delivering The Sowing Club; Sarah Ludford and Julia Yates have taken over Roots and Shoots, with Zoe Blundell as trainee-trainer; Nicola Combe leads the mentor training and support, and runs the weekly Drop-In sessions; Jane, Izzy Binnion and Soaad lead the young women's work; Jane and Lorraine Birch are the Peer Networks' trainers, along with Caroline Charnley as trainee facilitator.

Claire Stephenson and Katie Birks manage the online marketing and deliver digital training. We also have a pool of guest trainers who deliver the one-off skills workshops.



There was an
increase of
33%

in women's confidence following our Peer Mentoring Programme, which was part of Lancaster City Council Recovery & Resilience initiative.

PROGRESS IN 2020/21:

Statistics in 2020 showed that women were one of the social groups hit hardest by the pandemic, with additional pressures to cope with, including unpaid work such as home-schooling and caring responsibilities, with many women facing business closure and lack of financial support.

The London School of Economics stated that the UK government “consistently failed” to consider gender impacts on women during its Covid-19 response.

The Growing Club’s continued adaptation to the global situation has allowed us to research and further explore the needs of women in business and women with entrepreneurial skills who would like to start their own businesses.

Despite the pandemic, we have maintained and consolidated our core areas of work as a rolling programme and have already trained previous participants to take over delivery from Jane, with eight women successfully completing the Level 3 Award in Adult Education and Training.

Additionally, a grant from UnLtd enabled us to develop work on our governance and IT systems, ensuring we are up-to-date and operating effectively with best practice.

74

Courses, programmes
and workshops ran
during this year.



TRAINING COURSES, PROGRAMMES & WORKSHOPS

Throughout this time, The Growing Club ran 74 courses and workshops, ranging from half-day sessions to 12-month programmes, and 45 Drop-In sessions.

The Drop-Ins, although virtual during lockdowns, provided a weekly opportunity for women to access like-minded company during this stressful period, question and answer opportunities from women in business, and a way to connect for business support.

We maintained a strong presence, prioritised creating paid opportunities for women, to support the local economy and individuals' businesses, and we delivered a full programme of existing and new offerings. The Growing Club CIC had 698 attendees, which included 462 unique individuals - through programmes, workshops and events.



Roots and Shoots
Programme
evaluation in a
Word Cloud.

“The Growing Club tutors are experienced, patient and generous with their support. I loved having a diverse group of women to share the experience with. I have built up a toolkit of strategies that I will always be able to call on. The content is thought-provoking and covers the important aspects of running a business.”

WELLBEING FOR WOMEN

Wellbeing has been an ongoing issue that we knew we needed to continue to prioritise.

During the ongoing pandemic, we have experienced, first-hand within our network, and beyond, that women are one of the groups who have been more severely impacted. This is backed up by a variety of sources, including government data and a Policy Paper: COVID-19 Mental Health and Wellbeing Recovery Action Plan.

Funded by The Smallwood Trust, a full Wellbeing Programme was implemented for women, including a brand new Peer Listening Programme,

The Peer Listening Project provided an opportunity for women to learn how to listen well and to be listened to. It explored how to create a safe space for others, how to really listen, and how to take care of personal wellbeing whilst listening to others. Women were then matched as long-term listening partners.

Due to the success and benefits, a second cohort has since run, creating more opportunities for powerful peer support for women.

“

The Peer Listening Project has helped me in two ways:
1) I now feel able to listen in a more focused way, and will take this forward with me in all areas of my life, and 2) Having a listening buddy is a lovely concept and is helping me feel listened to. I've also met a lovely group of women in the virtual sessions!

“

Having a Peer Listening partner has allowed me to offload the clutter that builds up on a daily basis. Running a busy business and working with a wide variety of clients leaves my head feeling continually pressurised and less able to make clear decisions with ease.



PROGRESS...

New workshops and events were offered as part of the comprehensive Wellbeing programme, such as The Gratitude Gallery with the photographer, Ginny Koppenhol. This month-long smartphone photography gratitude practice was designed as a mood-boosting creative group activity.

Sarah Ludford ran an end of 2020 reflection and intention setting session – marking the turning of the year and Mindfulness Coach, Hazel Hardie PhD ran a special interactive mindfulness session to help start a fresh new year, feeling calm and positive.

Additional workshops and Facebook Live sessions included movement, massage, dance, talks on hormones, nutritious cooking, online art sessions, self-compassion, financial resilience with Cleona Lira, which led to us applying for the Royal London Changemakers programme, meditation, and a Facebook Live with Chartered Physiotherapist, Leah Dalby.



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Overall, during the Covid 19 pandemic, more women than men were furloughed across the UK, with young women in particular, being impacted.

House of Lords
Covid-19: Empowering women in the recovery from the impact of the pandemic

AGE-RELATED WORK

Just before the first lockdown was introduced, we completed delivery of a project funded by Rosa, Voices from the Frontline, for women aged 50-plus.

The aim was to explore the position of older women in our region, who are now required to work until the age of 66, looking at their role in the workforce and their skills and experience, which often go to waste.

This project resulted in a short film which we were finally able to launch during the Lancashire Innovation Festival in October 2021, hosting a showing and discussion session at The Dukes Theatre in Lancaster.

This was a great success, with many of the older women present at the launch reporting that they felt more confident and hopeful. Other audience members stated they will approach things differently going forward, recognising what skills, for example, carers have developed, rather than writing them off.

ADDING VALUE

- In collaboration with the FSB, we run regular Women in Business networking and seminar events throughout this period, with seminars being delivered by local women in business.
- Jane became a member of the Lancashire Innovation Forum, representing social innovation, and completed her course with the School of Social Enterprise, Scale Up programme. Also, we have two young women continuing on their journey with the University of Cumbria's Aspiring Leaders Degree programme.
- Funding from Rosa, allowed us to offer women one-to-one coaching sessions with Rebecca Batstone MBA. We provided this service for women who wanted guidance on which The Growing Club course would be most suitable for them, or women who were feeling lost or stuck with some aspect of their business or career journey.

“ CASE STUDY: NIKKI COOKSON

The Growing Club really get self-care and they understand where you're coming from. It's not just about business-business... it's more about how you need to feel and care for yourself whilst running a business, which is just as important if not more so because if you're taking care of yourself, then you'll be better placed to run your business more effectively.

ONLINE TRAINING HUB LAUNCH

A grant from the Walney Extension Community Grant Fund gave us the opportunity to develop and create a brand-new online training hub, where women can access business training wherever they are located. This hub went live on the 28th June 2021, offering our Roots and Shoots programme - a six-month training course for women who have just started or want to start their own business, and our anchor course - Bloom and Grow Online - our six-month training course, designed for women who have already been running their own business for 12-months or more, and who would like to grow their business in a sustainable way.

As part of the continued work on a Covid recovery agenda bespoke for women, the value of offering business training courses online means our supportive and creative methods are accessible, and open to women wherever they are located.

Jane, Ginny, Katie and Nicola prepared and filmed the training courses in a studio in advance of the launch.



“

CASE STUDY: PAULA EALES

The Growing Club is so much further reaching than what people can see. It's like a constant for life, like arms reaching out, that are always there and seem to grow forever. I feel very fortunate.

WE ARE CHANGEMAKERS!

We were thrilled to have been chosen as one of ten changemakers in the UK and Ireland, to collaborate on a Changemakers programme, with a committed £1.5 million over three years to support social enterprises that have created bold and innovative ideas to improve resilience and protect against financial life shocks, such as illness, divorce or change in income.



Royal London's research shows that 15.9m UK adults are more financially vulnerable as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. One-third of those attributed the increase in financial vulnerability to a reduced income and one in five (19%) had a lack of savings to fall back on in the pandemic.

To help improve financial resilience in the UK, Royal London launched its Changemakers programme, with selected organisations, including us here at The Growing Club CIC.

Our delivery work on the Changemaker programme will focus primarily on Your Money, Your Life, which begins with a residential weekend in January to explore the topic of money. Our plan is to create an e-course with the content we develop to enable us to support women to deal with money better, to create sustainable futures for themselves and their loved ones.

MP VISIT

We were thrilled to receive a visit from our constituency MP, Cat Smith. She joined us to celebrate our fifth year of operations, along with meeting several women from our network and hear their stories of coping with a business during the pandemic.



Discussions centred around Ms Smith hearing the women's stories of how they came to entrepreneurship, the type of business they run and how their businesses are battling through the pandemic.

Cat Smith MP said:

“There's no doubt Covid has disproportionately hit women more than men, with study after study to back this up. Women are more likely to carry out homeschooling, caring for elderly relatives, reducing business hours...there is a clear gender divide and women are more likely to shoulder the burden.

“It's been great to see such a diverse range of businesswomen here today, hear their stories and the support that women within The Growing Club CIC provide to each other.”

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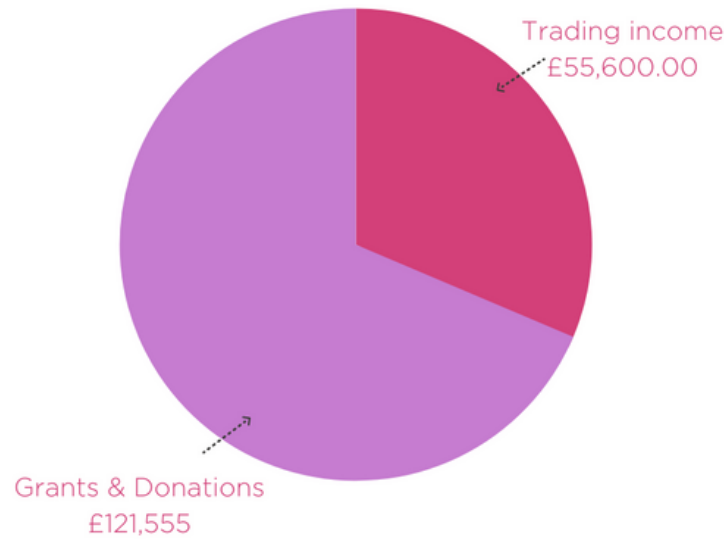
CLAIRE STEPHENSON

From women who aspire to run their own business to women who are running successful businesses and want to focus on sustainable growth, The Growing Club has resources and training to help support, encourage, mentor and grow, for all women.

INCOME

In 2020/21 we received a total of £177,155 in funding, from grants, training courses, branded product sales, contracts and donations.

Total Income 2020/2021



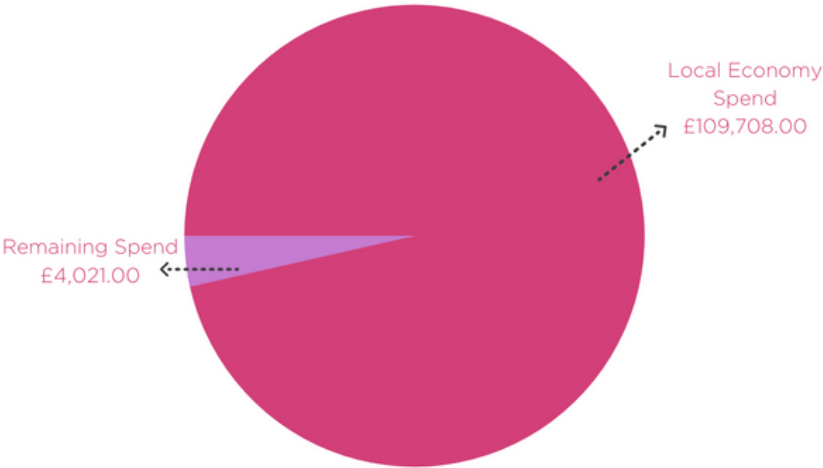
In addition to trade and donations, the majority of our income comes from grant funding. This year we have received funding from:

UnLtd, The Smallwood Trust, The National Lottery, Natwest BHB Rosa, Royal London, Lancaster City Council, Lancashire County Council, Lloyds Bank, School of Social Enterprise, Workers’ Educational Association, Walney Extension Community Fund, Social Enterprise Support Fund and Francis C Scott Charitable Trust.

This year, 96.3% of our expenditure has been spent in the local economy - an increase of 4.67% from the previous year. This includes supporting women running small businesses, workshop providers and training facilitators.

We have created paid work for 55 women during this year - an increase of 10 from the previous reporting period.

Spend in the Local Economy 2020/2021



462

unique women attended our courses and workshops in 2021.

CHALLENGES

The ongoing global pandemic of Covid-19 has again hindered our operations, in terms of how we are able to deliver our services, due to on-off lockdown situations, new strains and the obvious physical and emotional wellness issues that a pandemic brings. Alongside that, a member of our core team was off long term, undergoing aggressive cancer treatment.

Most of our work continued and was delivered online, via Zoom, including our Christmas party, but that inevitably excluded some women, so we delivered face-to-face whenever we were able because it helped to address isolation issues. All trainers have had to adapt to delivering training wearing a visor, and shouting across a large room of socially distanced women!

The January 2021 lockdown was hard on so many of us, and we were left negotiating with funders as we had to delay the start of some courses, the young women's work in particular, as interagency work was again put on hold so people could respond to the crisis.

We have very much outgrown our space at Whitecross, aggravated by the limited numbers we can safely have in the training room and the office at any one time, which means we continue to have additional costs of external room hire.

It has felt like a year of constant two steps forward, one step back, and we have to remind ourselves that that dance is still progress.

“ CASE STUDY: HAYLEY COOPER

Meeting so many different women in business has been really beneficial to me. I've got a business buddy too, and I'm connecting with another woman to talk about mutual business referrals. It's been lovely to connect alongside others and the course has really helped me to focus on different areas – every month is something different to learn and talk about.

GOING INTO YEAR 6...

Focal Points for Year 6

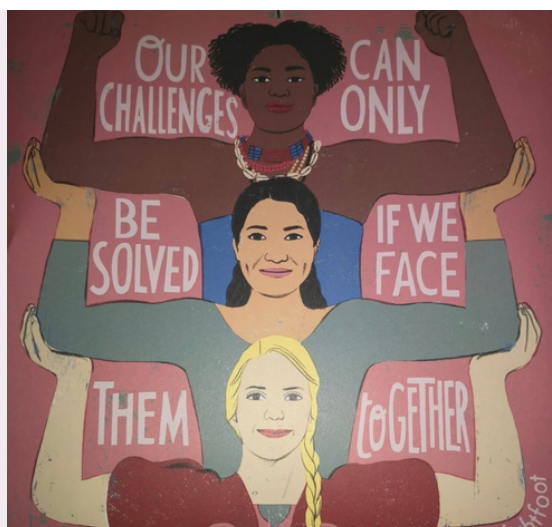
In the coming year, November 2021 to October 2022, our plans are to:

- Deliver an experimental Women and Money Programme.
- Deliver experimental Women in Business Wellbeing Day.
- Deliver 2 female cohorts of the BEIS funded Peer Networks.
- Finalise our Theory of Change model.
- Recruit new directors.
- Increase our peer trainers' team.
- Deliver a pilot enterprise skills programme in partnership with the probation service.
- Explore the market for the Peer Listening programme as an income generation product.
- Market and bring in income from the remote learning e-courses.
- Bring in a consultant to address the measuring and reporting of our social impact.
- Produce a financial strategy in preparation for the Reaching Communities grant ending April 2023.
- Work with a team of Lancaster University students to produce a report that identifies if the needs of women in Lancaster district have changed as a result of the pandemic, which will be shared at our IWD event in 2022.
- Build stronger service delivery relationships with local authorities.
- Campaign for a Lancashire-wide women and business strategy
- Build a seed funding pot for start-ups, following the NEA ceasing.
- Continue our search for a suitable venue for a Women & Enterprise centre

ROOTS
AND
SHOOTS

THE
SOWING
CLUB

BLOOM
AND
GROW



THE
GROWING
CLUB

together we grow

FINAL THOUGHTS FROM FOUNDER & DIRECTOR, JANE BINNION...

Without a doubt it has been another challenging year, demanding that people dig deep to provide the services and support so badly needed.

It has been hard to observe, and feel, the ever-increasing divisions in our society, and it is painfully clear that many aspects of social policy go nowhere near addressing the social issues that we currently face, leaving the severely underfunded third sector to step in - out of necessity.

However, we remain committed to, and proud of the work we do, and we will continue to endeavour to help the women left behind to get their voices heard.

Jane

“ *I raise up my voice - not so that I can shout,
but so that those without a voice can be heard...*
We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back. ”

Malala Yousafzai

