

THE GROWING CLUB

where every
woman thrives

The Growing Club CIC
Feedback Evaluation Report

Anamaria Tigan
September 2022

Foreword

We have carried out our feedback survey every 2 years for the last 6 years. The previous one was early in the pandemic; this one is in the aftermath of that, with a looming economic crisis. Anamaria has compared the data from the 3 surveys and not surprisingly confidence, wellbeing and optimism about the future have all fallen. On the other hand, I am glad to see that our input means that over 85% of our respondents do still feel optimistic, even in this prolonged period of uncertainty.

This year we added a new question, about education level, because we have noticed a trend of women with degrees and even post graduate qualifications coming to us. Initially we were not sure what that was saying about our work, but we came to realise that the pandemic has impacted women across the board, and unfortunately, having higher qualifications does not automatically change the position of women.

Thank you to Anamaria Tigan for sticking with us for 6 years and being the external lens through which we can observe our work.

Jane Binnion October 2022

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my special gratitude to Jane Binnion, the Founder of The Growing Club CIC, for the guidance and support in completing this project, as well as for providing necessary information regarding the project.

We also wish to express our gratitude and appreciation towards Managing Directors and all the wonderful women who took part in this study and shared their journeys with us. The completion of this project would not be possible without their contribution.

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Introduction

The current report once again entails both journeys of hardships, and growth. In the recent years there has been a significant increase in women setting up businesses in the UK. Yet running a business is not a straight-forward option and research tells us that most start-up businesses fail in the first three years¹. The Growing Club CIC is committed to changing those figures and boosting the local economy. It manages to do this by systematically providing the support and training in the processes essential to thrive as a sole trader in the business world.

In 2018 and 2020, we researched the social impact that The Growing Club CIC created across local communities in North-west of the UK. We inquired about participants' wellbeing, confidence, financial situations, networking opportunities, and whether The Growing Club had any impact upon such areas on a professional or personal level in their life. We also asked whether they gained any practical skills and whether we have equipped them with skills enabling them to handle upcoming challenges in a different manner. We found there was an array of benefits our programmes brought in women's lives.

Across both previous studies, participants shared that business growth and sustainability occurred because they:

- found a sense of community where they can relate to and collaborate with and support one another in difficult times (including during the Covid-19 pandemic).
- found that knowledge enhancement, expertise provided, and structured approach were instrumental and made women feel less overwhelmed.
- felt more confident and empowered to handle both business and life challenges.

Four years of growth

As it can be seen in the figure below, we continued to deliver and drive growth when we looked at the data obtained in 2018, 2020, and 2022 (current study).

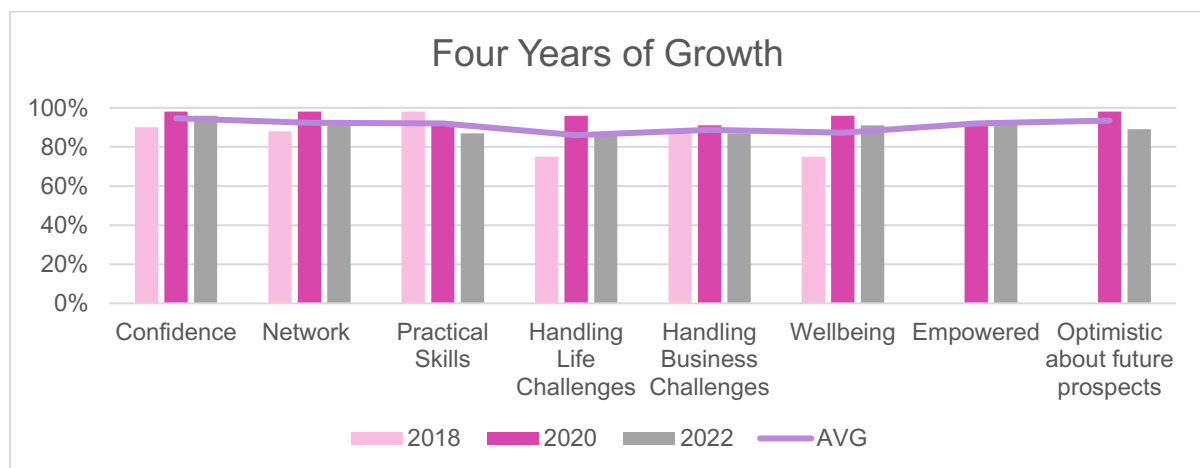


Figure 1.

Survey responses indicating continuous growth across three different social impact reports (2018, 2020 & 2022), with average drawn across.

¹ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/01/24/start-ups-across-uk-going-bust-need-careful-management-economy/>

merely a few of the most frequently used in the feedback we received. However, we do believe this depicts in essence the impact The Growing Club has had in the local community, but also in women's lives. It can also be noted that two years after the Covid-19 pandemic begun, challenges are still present, which are also explored later in this report.

The following sections will discuss themes and patterns of meanings across the qualitative responses, also imbedded in the quantitative data. The main themes identified consist of: Work-Life Challenges and New Directions, Empowerment and Connection, and Entrepreneurship and Confidence (see Appendix D for a full description of Themes and Subthemes). Each of these themes will be discussed in the following chapters.

Theme 1. Work-Life Challenges, and New Directions

We begin this chapter by providing a background of demographics of some of the women whom we reached out to, to illustrate merely a few of the circumstances, but also life challenges that women who took part in our survey are experiencing.

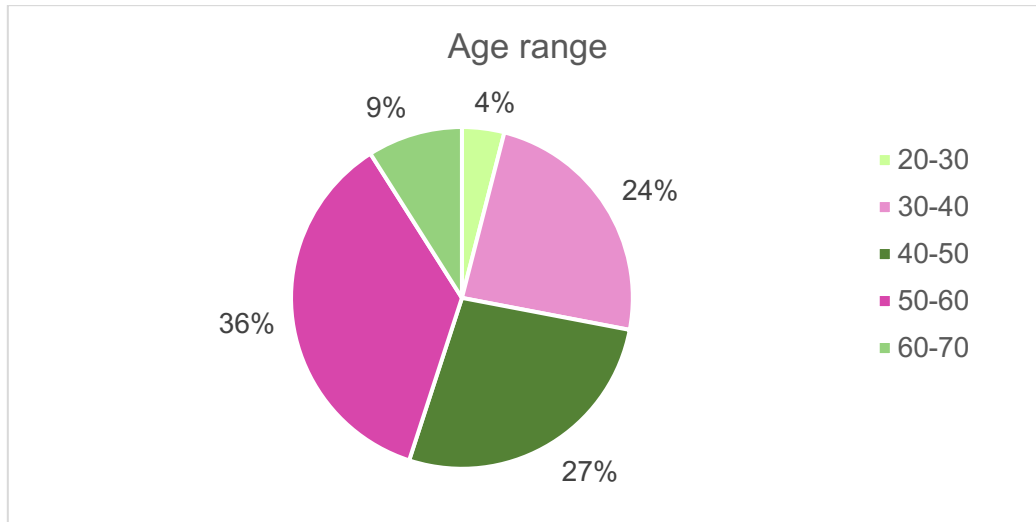


Figure 3.

Age range of participants who took part in The Growing Club Social Impact Report 2022.

More than half of our respondents are aged between 40 and 60 years (63%, see figure above), with 28% aged between 20 and 40 years, and 9% aged between 60 and 70 years.

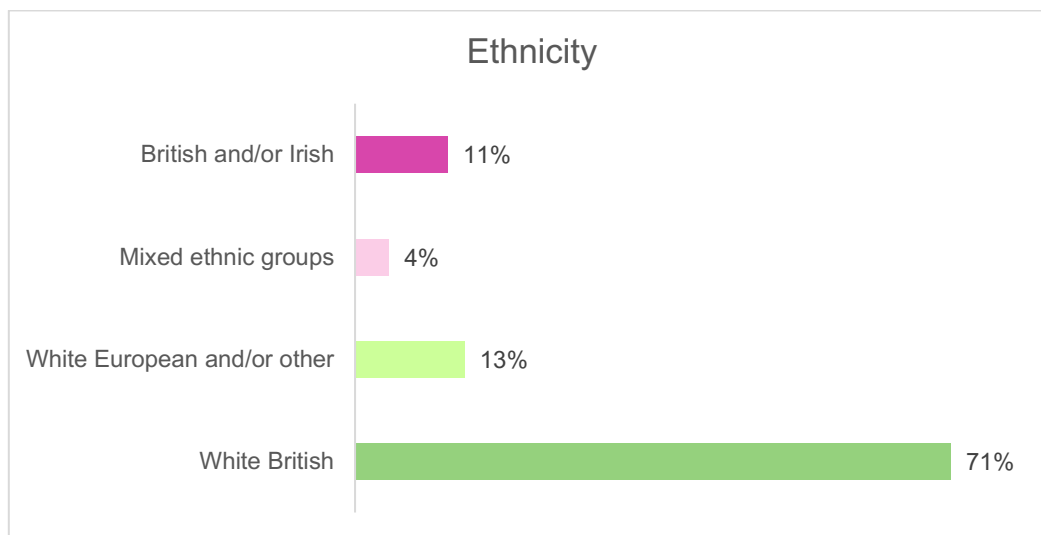


Figure 4.

Self-reported ethnicity of participants who took part in The Growing Club Social Impact Report 2022.

When we asked about ethnicity, we allowed participants to fill in as preferred, and we found that 71% participants identified as “White British” and almost a quarter of women identified as “White European and/or other”, as Figure 4, above, indicates. The rest of women identified as British only (9%), and Irish only (2%), as well as mixed ethnic groups, such as “Mixed UK/Chinese” (2%), and “Mixed White Asian” (2%).

Juggling different roles, caring responsibilities, and personal difficulties

A great number of women training with us will have experienced difficulties balancing caring responsibilities, as well as full-time employment, self-employment, or both. Almost a third of women (29%) stated juggling a mix of self-employment and other roles (see Figure 5, below). These scores consisted of women who stated they had other roles such as part time or full time employed/self-employed, and/or training courses, alongside their self-employment. The figure below also illustrates that just over a third of women reported they were self-employed part time (33%), and less than a quarter of them stated they were self-employed full time (22%). We have also managed to reach out to a significant number of women who were either unemployed or in receipt of Care Allowance (11%, under “Unemployed”, figure below).

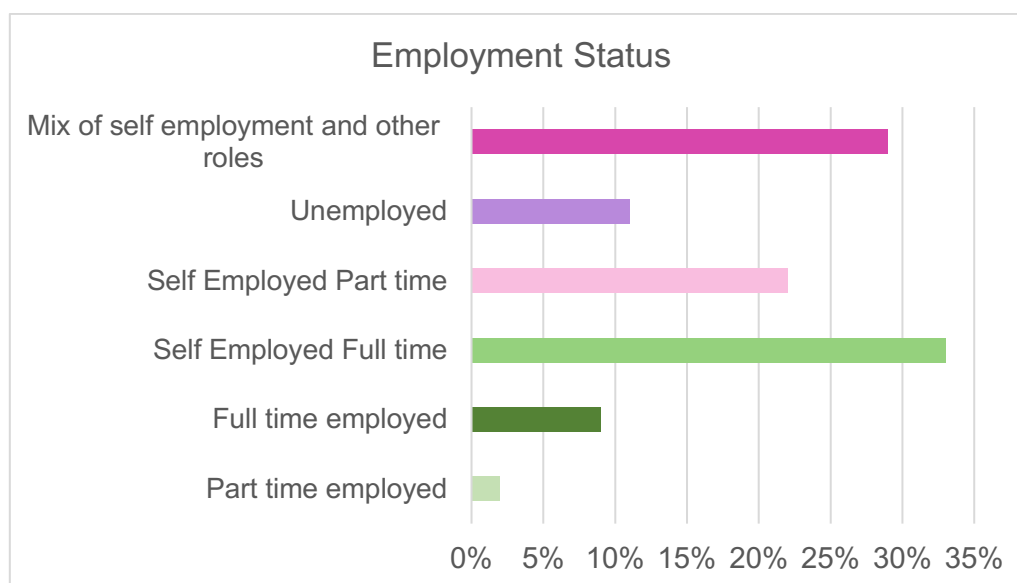


Figure 5.

Employment Status of participants who took part in The Growing Club Social Impact Report 2022.

The Growing Club acknowledges the lack of training opportunities for women with little to no financial support, by continuing to deliver services such as The Sowing Club. This programme provides funded, employment skills courses for women who are unwaged or deemed to be socially disadvantaged due being on benefits, having a disability, lone parenting, escaping domestic abusive relationship, or leaving prison. During this course we wish to reach out to women who are not economically active and would like to explore their options for employment, education or self-employment. It aims to support women in reconnecting with their skills and dreams. We were delighted to hear that almost a quarter of women (20%) took part in this training programme (see Figure 6, next page), and some who attended shared that:

“I am so grateful to have attended the Sowing Club. I really wanted to know what is next for my future and your help has empowered me to realise my direction and see that it is possible. Now I need to take the steps. Your support is invaluable. Thank you so much.”

In terms of the other programmes delivered, Roots and Shoots is a start-up course, for those who feel ready to start a small business (and may have completed the former course). This course takes place over 12 months, and during this time women take part in a systematic

programme of starting and growing a solid sustainable business. We aim to achieve this by equipping participants with the skills to run a small business, breaking the isolation and build confidence through peer support. As Figure 6 below depicts, almost half of women who participated in the current survey attended, or are currently attending, this programme.

The Growing Club also continues its original 12-month business growth and sustainability programme, Bloom and Grow. We believe this course further embodies the ethos of the organisation, by bridging the gap between business education and women entrepreneurship, and noted that 16% of the women who responded to our survey took part in this programme, or are currently enrolled onto this course (see Figure 6, below).

The Growing Club Social Impact Report 2022 Services Provided

Roots and Shoots	44%
Bloom & Grow	16%
The Sowing Club (short course for unwaged women)	20%
Peer Support, Mentoring, Social & Wellbeing Events	81%
Networking Events, Training, & Skills Workshops	73%

Figure 6.

Services delivered and accessed by percentage (see Appendix B for an in-depth attendance illustration)

In a similar direction, The Growing Club successfully expanded to provide opportunities for further training as well as business skill enhancing. For instance, we accessed the Adult Training Qualification, to open doors to further training opportunities. This course has been invaluable as some shared:

“I attended the adult trainers’ courses and was able to achieve my qualification, and this gave me the confidence to conduct training workshops in my business, this has been a huge help to my business. I also attended some well-being courses, initially in person then by zoom as lockdown was forced upon us. This made such a huge different to my mental health at this really difficult time. Just seeing familiar faces was wonderful, knowing that we had this support despite it being such an uncertain time for all of us.”

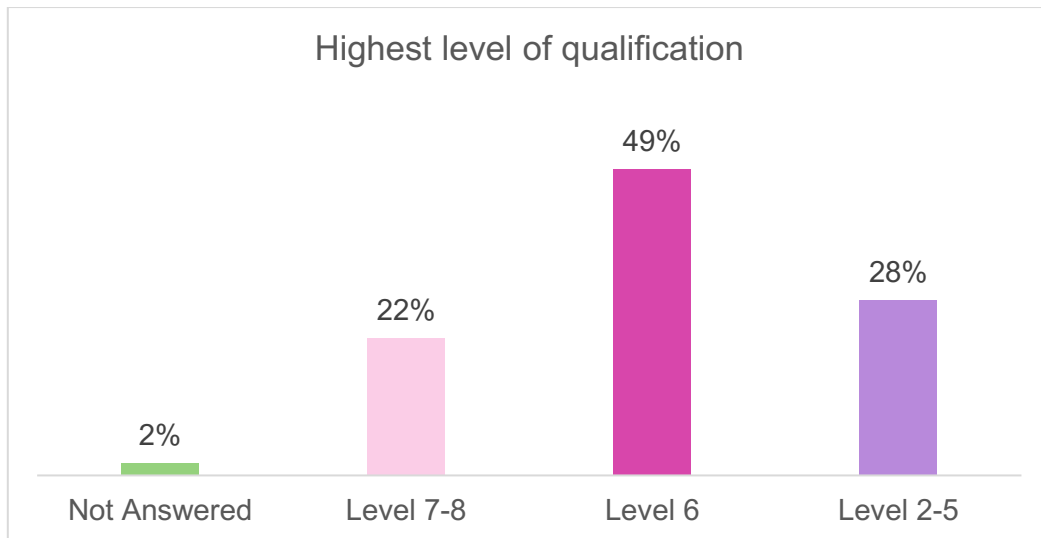


Figure 7.

Participants' highest self-reported levels of qualification in The Growing Club Social Impact Report 2022, using Gov. guidance on Levels (<https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels>).

Our data showed that we managed to reach out to women from all educational backgrounds. Almost half of our participants reported that their highest level of education was Level 6 (Bachelor's Degrees), with almost a third of women having achieved qualifications between Level 2 – 5 (further studies such as GSCE, NVQ, Diplomas, & Teaching qualifications), and less than a quarter of participants having achieved qualifications between Level 7-8 (Master's Degrees & Doctorates), as Figure 7, above, depicts. We found that regardless of their educational background, women struggled to become financially active due to disabilities and health concerns as some kindly shared with us:

"I have a doctorate degree, for the last few years before joining roots and shoots I was unable to work due to disability."

"I had a degree and was self-employed before. Then had period of ill health and lack of confidence. Then everything changed and my business started to take off a bit"

When we asked women to describe their professional background prior to finding us, we found we reached out to women from different career paths, as few described below:

"I had worked for 20 years in a previous role, never fit, hatred of the industry really is not a strong enough feeling. I only stopped to bring up my family but was not looking forward to stepping back into the industry, especially after having 10 years off with my family. So grateful for the growing club for encouraging me to follow my dream and turn and hobby into a business."

"I have had my own business for 15 years and am still learning all the time. I have a diploma in management studies and a master's in business, but I appreciate the more practical element that the Growing Club gives. It is also helps me to keep up to date."

"Before I joined the Growing Club, I was registered self-employed, but only just beginning the process of starting up my own business and earning very little income."

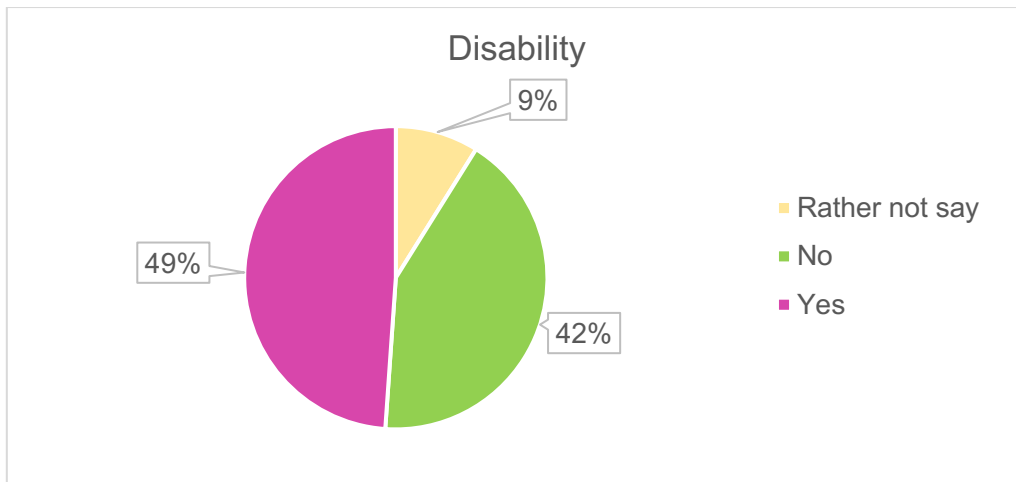


Figure 8.

Participants who stated whether they consider themselves to have a disability, in The Growing Club Social Impact Report 2022.

We found that almost half of participants, reported living with a disability (see Figure 8, above). Participants described these as either mental health difficulties (depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder), neurodivergent experiences (ADHD and Dyslexia) or physical health difficulties such as rheumatic arthritis, spinal injuries, hearing impairment, physical disabilities, auto-immune disease, and endometriosis. This has tremendous implications on participants' ability to access employment and training opportunities, as well as managing life challenges, as the following quotes illustrate:

"I'm a professional with a doctorate degree, for the last few years before joining roots and shoots I was unable to work due to disability"

"I have a degree but had struggled to find work since having children and developing a chronic illness."

We also found that a total of 67% of women stated they had caring responsibilities such as looking after close family members, and/or children (see Figure 10, below).

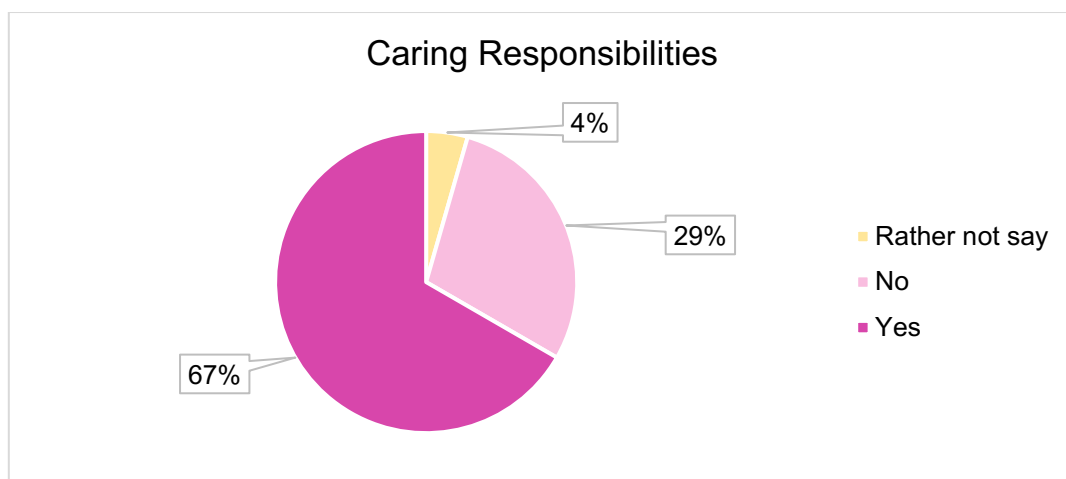


Figure 10.

Participants who stated whether they had caring responsibilities (either looking after children and/or close family members) in The Growing Club Social Impact Report 2022.

Many women feel overwhelmed with responsibilities and challenges. In our report, women shared their struggles, and stated how much this impacts their work-life balance, but also the benefits of having our support as below comments indicate:

“I am carer for my son and home schooling, so in the short term my work/life balance will always be skewed towards him as my priority and making myself available whenever he needs me.”

“I became a family carer unpaid- and it has really negatively affected by finances but have a new business developing and the Growing Club workshops have supported me in this new venture.”

Some joined The Growing Club, just following major life stressors such as relationship breakdowns, added family and caring responsibilities, or even complete burn out. We also managed to reach out to women from various backgrounds when it comes to relationship and family support networks. Whilst we found that more than half of women were either in a relationship and/or married, more than a third were either divorced, widowed, separated and/or single (see Figure 9, below).

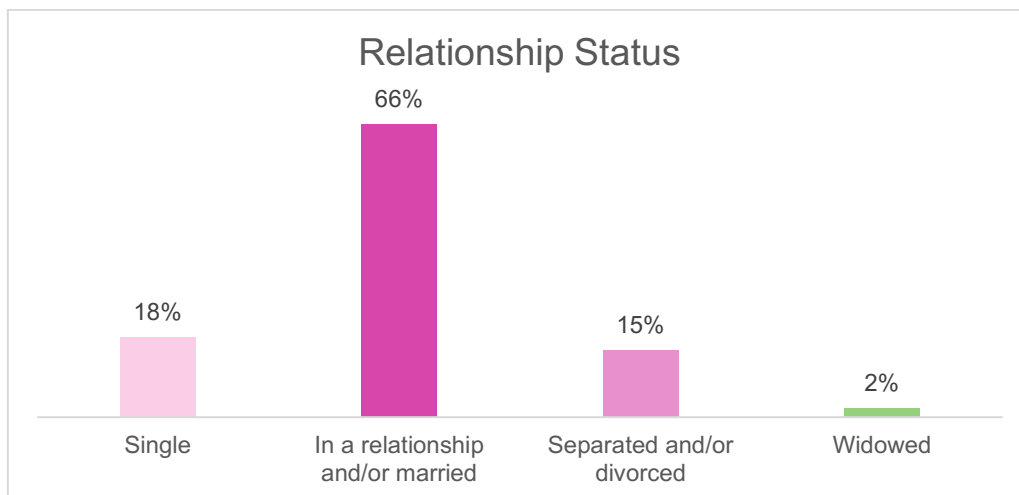


Figure 9.

Participants’ relationship status in The Growing Club Social Impact Report 2022

In such circumstances, women shared they found our support when most needed, as one participant shared: *“When I signed up with the sowing club, I was just about to lose my job and was signed off with stress from work.”*, but also that they experienced *“a total burn out”*, following relationship breakdowns. The Growing Club managed to provide a learning environment where they felt that they could be supported by others and heal in this process. They commented as follows:

“I joined the group after my 2nd breakdown, and I have never looked back. It's changed my life and was recommended”.

“I became single mum on benefits. I got myself onto the sowing club. I found it a really gentle introduction and such a supportive environment. It was lovely to have that time to work on myself- I was still a little emotionally delicate and it was kind of therapy for me. After that I decided to enrol on the Roots and Shoots and I'm still doing it now”

Women also mentioned that having a strong support network in terms of families and relationships is invaluable in starting and sustaining a successful business, as a sole trader. This can provide a sense of direction and grounding in prioritising wellbeing alongside business success, which is also something we strive to support women with. In this sense, one of our participants shared:

“I have wanted more work, but also wanted to know which direction to go in for myself. Now I know that, I can start to make it happen. Time wise my balance has been ok but mentally I have been unable to switch off from thinking about what to do. Now I know, it’s so exciting to put my thoughts down. I will enjoy that, and feel inspired to enjoy life more all round. My family also influence this.”

It has been our mission to ensure that our courses are accessible, but also that women feel included and truly seen in our courses. We were extremely pleased to find that when we asked participants whether they felt welcomed and included at The Growing Club, 100% said “Yes”, or that they “found it nurturing welcoming and kind”, as well as letting us know they “feel that it’s a safe space to speak up and love how women support each other”. Others also shared that they “felt extremely welcomed and included, and able to let [their] guard down, and deal with emotional stuff that in turn helped with [their] mental health”.

New directions as a result of challenges

Having experienced such hardships in their life, our respondents also shared with us their journey towards new directions. Provided with the right support around, hardships seem to have inspired women to become greatly determined in pursuing their goals and passions. We found that flexibility allows for a better work-life balance, so that they can continue their caring responsibilities, as some shared:

“Much prefer self-employment as caring for children/adults easier to juggle”

“My business has enabled me to spend valuable time caring for my mum.”

“I was looking to create a work life balance due to children with disabilities”

In the face of great difficulties and uncertainty, some found the necessary drive to pursue their passions, saying that:

“The pandemic made me bold. I knew I wanted to work outdoors and for myself. Previously I had done several jobs over the decades, having not completed a degree course in my 20s. I took a career change from managing to achieve a better work life balance, before the pandemic, to a minimum wage job.”

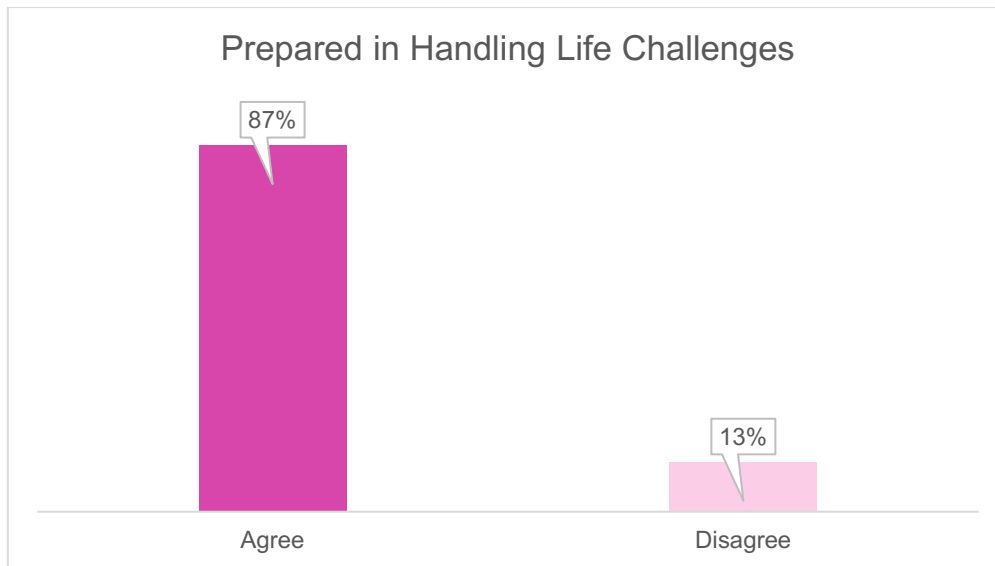


Figure 11.

Participants' responses to the statement "As a result of joining The Growing Club, I feel more prepared to handle life challenges", in 2022.

We were delighted to hear that we managed to support women holistically. The previous life challenges mentioned, disabilities and hardships are a mere sample of what women from all socio-economic backgrounds experience. In this survey, 87% of women stated we also supported them in handling life challenges, as the following comment illustrates:

"I am still in the process of establishing my business, so the main benefits have been overcoming psychological hurdles and meeting and mutually supporting some amazing women. I'm certain I could not have come as far as I have without the Growing Club."

We strive to continue to support women holistically, because we are mindful that having your own business can have its potential toll on your work-life balance, with the lack of external boundaries of working hours. Hence, we also asked how women felt about their work-life balance now, after being involved with our services, and if we managed to influence this at all. Some shared as follows:

"I didn't have clear boundaries for work and social life [Before joining The Growing Club]. Now these are clear and enabled my business to grow whilst still enjoying family/ social life."

"Before the growing club I wasn't able to set aside time to spend working on my business. But with the support I got from attending roots and shoots I have started to make it a priority (although life does have a way of getting in the way at times!)"

"I feel the course I'm currently doing with The Growing Club will help me in so many ways to develop my business, which I feel will in turn help me develop a great work-life balance. It is not only supportive but grounded and kind rather than harshly delivered in a more corporate style."

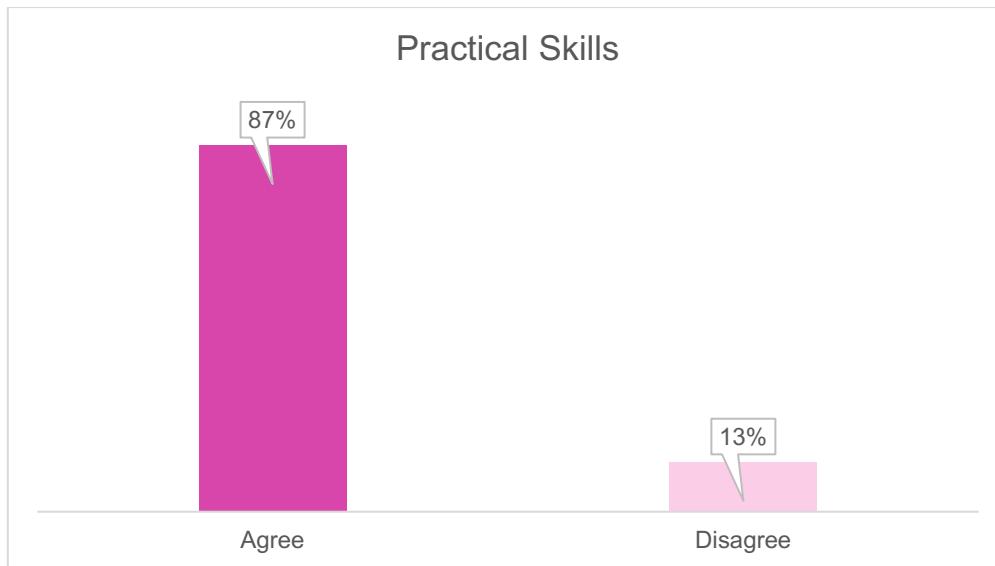


Figure 12.

Participants' responses to the statement "As a result of joining The Growing Club, I gained practical skills", in 2022

As we mentioned earlier, it seems that for most women who turned to self-employment, the idea of having a business was appealing due to the flexibility and personal satisfaction. This newly acquired flexibility eased hardships by creating a balance. Most comments depicted women prioritising their values, which inspired them to choose new directions and follow their passions. The following stories highlight how the change in their approach to business and employment opportunities led to a greater satisfaction, but also the invaluable impact that The Growing Club had in empowering women to pursue these:

"I put so much into my job and my career. The stress caused by almost losing my job has made me re-evaluate what is important to me. The sowing club has helped me to get a grounding space to build my confidence and start to look at other paths I could take to create stability and balance in my life."

Theme 2. Empowerment and Connection

“I have been empowered to have choice about what I want to do and how I do it.”

Connection and empowerment

We found that 93% of our participants felt empowered having been involved with our services (see Figure 13, below). A great proportion of the feedback we received relied on group support and its empowering nature. For some, it brought an invaluable sense of connection, as the following comment shows:

“I met other women with the same concerns and problems. That made me feel stronger and I have lots of satisfaction from support I can offer my friends from course. After leaving work I felt a bit socially isolated.”

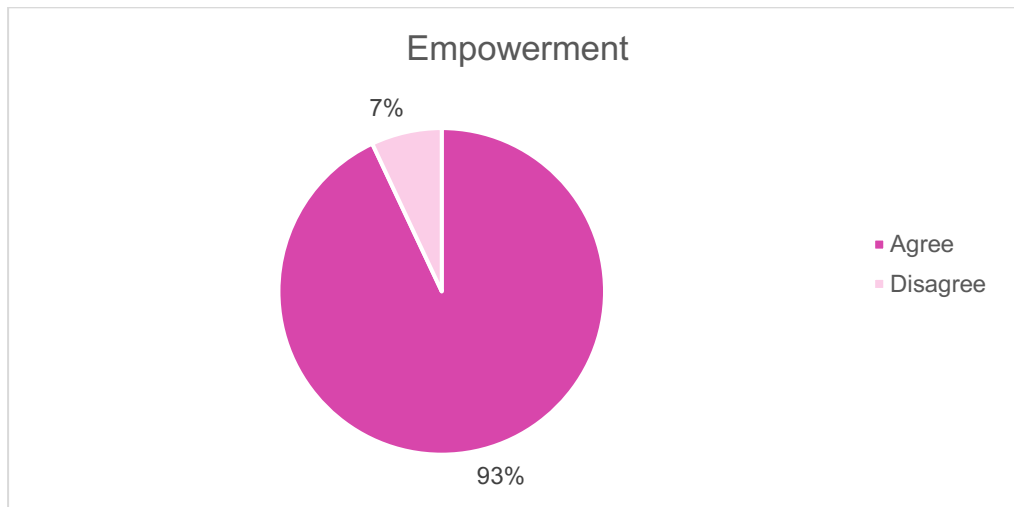


Figure 13.

Participants' responses to the statement "As a result of joining The Growing Club, I feel more empowered", in 2022.

We also found that our approach empowered women to fulfil their true potential, to feel valued, recognized and seen, as some stated: *“I'm living rather than just existing”*. Women also shared that this was achieved by *“Being asked the right questions in a safe, and supportive space. Being set free to be [me]. Being given permission.”* They found a place where others shared their journey and understood as the following response shows:

“Knowing that there are people who understand my plight”

In delivering our services we made it our mission to deliver holistic support, and we found this was greatly appreciated, as below quotes show

“The greatest benefit of being involved with the Growing Club is knowing there are genuinely kind and caring experts who can help if and when you need it, both practically and emotionally.”

As well as

“To be in a safe environment with women that want to help and empower each other.”

We strongly believe that providing an empowering training environment has tremendous implications for the future opportunities for women sole-traders, as some acknowledged themselves. In answering what motivated them to complete our survey, we were touched to hear the impact The Growing Club has had. One participant shared:

“You’ve changed my life. Helped me when I needed it. I want to help other women flourish and fulfil their potential.”

Empowerment and support

As we strive to continue to offer a supportive working but also collaborative environment, we found that almost all women told us they increased their network after getting involved with The Growing Club (see Figure 14, below). Some of the single biggest benefits of joining us revolve around the support and inspiration women received, as below quotes show:

“Without doubt [the single biggest benefit of joining The Growing Club is] access to an incredible group of inspirational and supportive women who are all doing the right things for the right reasons.”

As well as

“[Feeling] Empowered, thankful and grateful, to be part of this family and at the start of my journey with them and numerous women that I have already connected with and excited as to who I will meet next.”

The Growing Club is dedicated to ensuring that all roles are celebrated in society and creating business opportunities. As such, these are examples that demonstrate how we achieved this so far. We were told that this form of connection we nourished is merely the beginning of future collaborations, as some participants shared that they were:

“Feeling buoyed by the energy - and starting to see those connections within the group as we discover common business interests, ways we can work with each other, or just support one another by buying products - it’s pretty inspirational!”

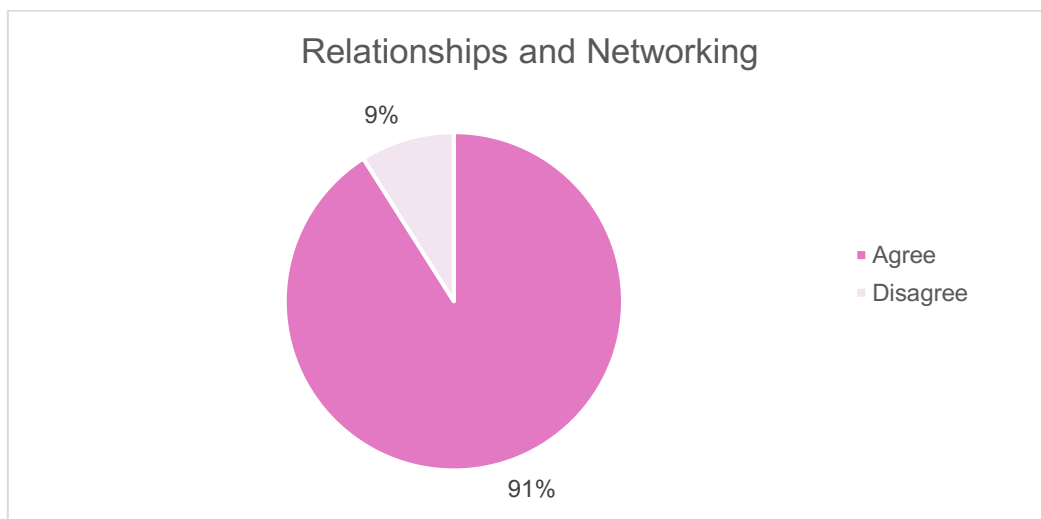


Figure 14.

Participants’ responses to the statement “As a result of joining The Growing Club, I built relationships, and my network has increased”, in 2022.

Connection and inspiration

When we asked participants what brought them to our services, we were touched to hear responses such as:

“From social media presence, I knew that The Growing Club was a very positive, nurturing and ethically sound organisation to become a part of”

“I attended a meeting to watch a video to hear about other women's business experience through the Growing Club. I was greatly inspired.”

It is also essential to mention that 81% of women who shared their story with us this year, have been involved in Peer Support, Mentoring, Social and Wellbeing events that we facilitated (for full extent of variety of services offered, please consult Appendix B). Thus, we were delighted to see that a significant amount of 91% of women said their wellbeing improved as a result of their involvement with us in their journey of growth (see Figure 15, below). Some shared that:

“I definitely needed the inspiration and role models to help me switch my mind set into believing that I could be a successful business woman.”

As well as

“Being surrounded by supportive women who want to see each other thrive. Being a part of this group has been inspiring and exactly what I needed.”

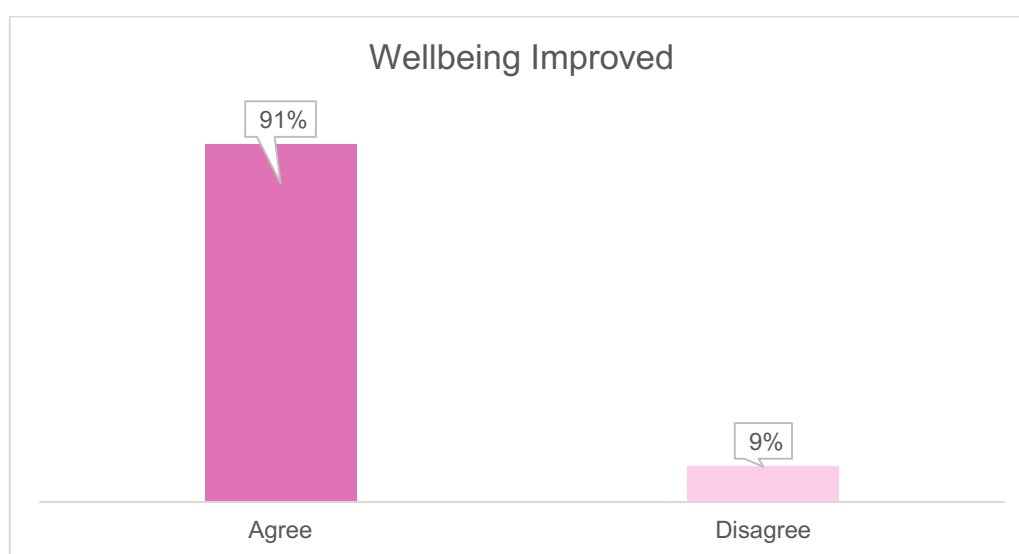


Figure 15.

Participants' responses to the statement "As a result of joining The Growing Club, my wellbeing has improved", in 2022.

The support we offered, we were told has been instrumental in connecting with other women who understood and empowered each other, but also in learning how to look after themselves and gain perspective, as participants shared:

“A significant part of Roots and Shoots contributed to my change in perspective about looking after myself ... particularly mentally and emotionally ... that looking after everyone else to my own detriment hadn't done me any good at all ... and now going through the menopause on top of everything else ... meant a re-think, which Jane Binnion and her wise words really had an effect upon me.”

The connection in the aftermath of Covid-19

“Being able to attend Graduates Group online was such a support. Thank you.”

A very common theme across the comments we received was also the invaluable support The Growing Club has offered throughout the covid-19 pandemic and is continuing to offer years to follow. In the context of social isolation and lack of opportunities, we immediately acknowledged the great need of our support for women from all backgrounds. The Growing Club persevered in providing support and guidance online within a week’s time. As part of our mission to make all courses accessible, we held weekly virtual drop-in sessions that have become weekly goal setting and check-in sessions. Thus, we were pleased to hear that being able to access our courses has provided a constant in great uncertainty. Some shared as follows:

“I joined the Bloom and Grow online course during lockdown which helped develop my confidence and encouraged me not to give up when things were difficult.”

“The women on my Bloom and Grow course became good friends and were a huge help in supporting me through covid and in fact were instrumental in my decision to leave that job. The wider Growing Club Team were also a massive source of support and encouragement and I feel very privileged to have got to know them during this time.”

“The online course during lockdown kept me going both practically and emotionally through a very difficult time. The support of the ladies on the course encouraged me to use the time when I was closed to develop new ideas for when I re-opened.”

Two years after the pandemic started, we asked what the benefit (if any) was of joining The Growing Club in such circumstances. We found that being able to access our support and events enabled women to feel heard, process what happened, and motivate one another, as the following comments show:

“I found the pandemic traumatic at times emotionally. However, it did free me to change direction and get to know people and the area at a more measured pace. The peer listening course was a turning point. It was nourishing and helped me to process my experiences returning to business in a safe place. I continue to share listening sessions with my buddy from the course and it is really helpful. I enrolled on Bloom and Grow in October and I sense that we are all somewhat affected by the pandemic in our business and personal lives. It is helping me to stay on course and meeting in person has been amazing”

“The Growing Club helped me a lot during COVID as a support network. Since then, life is gradually getting back to normal but the lack of certainty, and the loss of the feeling that you are in charge of your own destiny is something that I think will take many years to recover from.”

Reflecting on their journey some even told us that: *“I realise how far I have come in the past year having come out of lockdown and some difficult personal health and life issues. It's made me reflect on how fortunate I am too have met some amazing women on thus course but also in my own support network previous education and life experiences including work options”*

Theme 3. Entrepreneurship and Confidence

Q: What has been the single biggest benefit of joining The Growing Club?

A: *"The confidence to say I am a woman who owns a successful business!"*

The core of our values is to support women from all socio-economic backgrounds to build and consolidate self-confidence and personal growth. This year, we found that a sense of increased confidence was mentioned across three major areas in women's lives: confidence in their own abilities (self-confidence), confidence in earning an income, and confidence in managing their own business.

We begin this section discussing the self-confidence women experienced. Here, we found that almost all women participating in our survey expressed an increase in their confidence due to joining The Growing Club (see Figure 16, below). This confidence translated in women finding a sense of direction, consolidate their knowledge, and ultimately trust in their own abilities to materialize their business aspirations, as the following quotes demonstrate:

"Before I didn't really have much of a clue how I was going to do this - suppose I didn't think about it too much (maybe it was blind confidence). But having been on the roots and shoots has given me the confidence to feel like it's going to happen."

"I felt more confident with what I was doing and made my business feel more 'real'"

"The growing club gave me confidence in my abilities and supported me when I needed it the most."

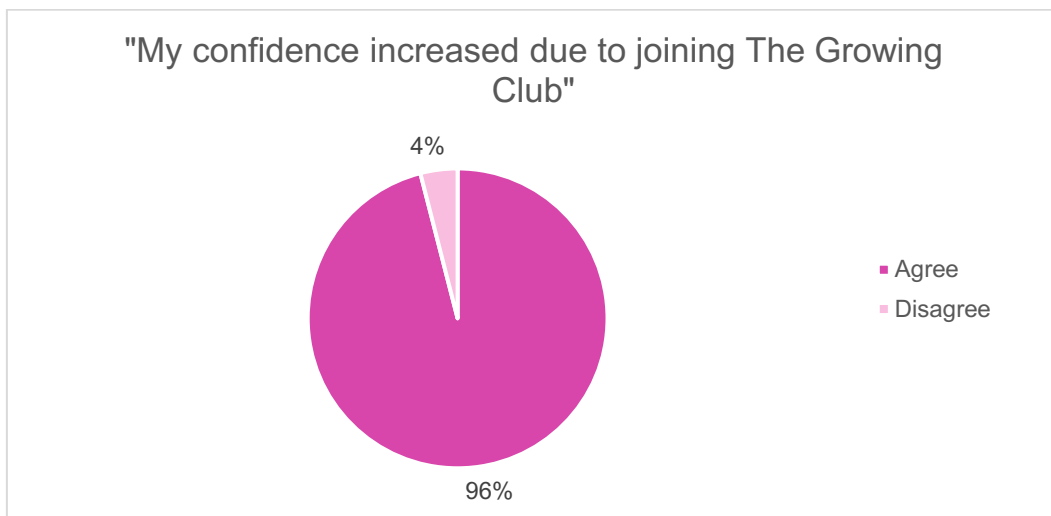


Figure 16.

Participants' responses to the statement "My confidence has increased due to joining The Growing Club", in 2022.

In a similar direction, we were touched to read some of the single biggest benefits women mentioned after taking part in our services:

A: *"Confidence building/believing in my ability to do things."*

A: *"Giving me the confidence to run my own business and get a better life balance."*

We then found that 89% of women shared they felt more optimistic about their prospects (see Figure 17, next page). We were told that the resources, support and increase

in confidence The Growing Club equipped them with has been a great contributor to this, as the following quotes show:

“I’m very grateful for the growing club and for the great foundation the roots and shoots course has given me for my business, and I feel confident moving forwards knowing there will still be support when I need it.”

“I am more able to handle responsibilities and forward planning. I have drive, ambition, and confidence for the future, personally and professionally. I feel completely safe and supported by the club and its members.”

“I strongly believe that my business will achieve success and I’ll be able to live from the income it will bring.”

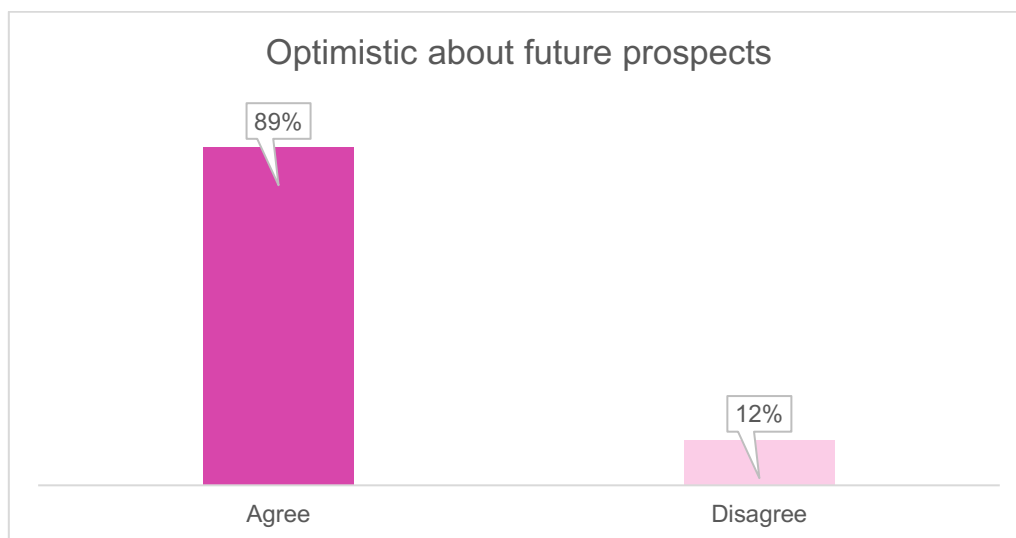


Figure 17.

Participants’ responses to the statement “As a result of joining The Growing Club, I feel more optimistic about my future prospects”, in 2022.

To further identify the value (if any) created, we asked if participants could describe their current circumstances, had they not been involved with The Growing Club services. In these comments, almost all women spoke about the potential lack of confidence, as below:

“[without The Growing Club] I don’t feel I would have been as confident as a business woman in my own right. I’m not sure I would have the same level of business confidence.”

“I can certainly see that going forward over the coming year it will place me in a far stronger position than I would have been in without it.”

Although a great number of participants stated they *“realise how much [they] have learned in running a business and look forward to the future”*, we also acknowledge the reality that maintaining and growing a business in the current financial circumstances is far from an easy task. Some told us they feel *“More confident in taking the little steps I need to keep moving forwards”* but also that they *“still get days when my confidence is low in what I want to achieve!”*.

Confidence in their own abilities to earn an income

“It feels liberating to control how much I earn!”

Prior to joining us, some women shared that their confidence in earning an income had been quite low, which posed a threat to their financial security, but also overall confidence in building a sustainable business. The following quotes illustrate such circumstances:

“My confidence in my ability to earn a living income was extremely low prior to joining Growing Club. Having participated in both Sowing Club and Roots and Shoots, I would describe my confidence as growing; it will take more time, but I am glad that I have started this process and feel motivated to keep taking small steps forward. It has also been very encouraging to hear from women who are already successfully running their own business, and who generously and honestly shared their experiences.”

“[Before joining The Growing Club] My confidence [in earning an income] was very low and I felt so disillusioned with the impact of potentially losing my job and career I had worked so hard to get. Now being involved with the sowing club I realise there is support and a journey to take to empower myself and build my confidence again.”

This years' financial circumstances have yet again been particularly challenging due to the economic impact of Covid-19, which also translated into the cost-of-living crisis that the UK has experienced since late 2021³. When examining our data, we noticed that even in such circumstances, more than half of women stated their income has increased because they joined The Growing Club, as it can be seen in the figure below:

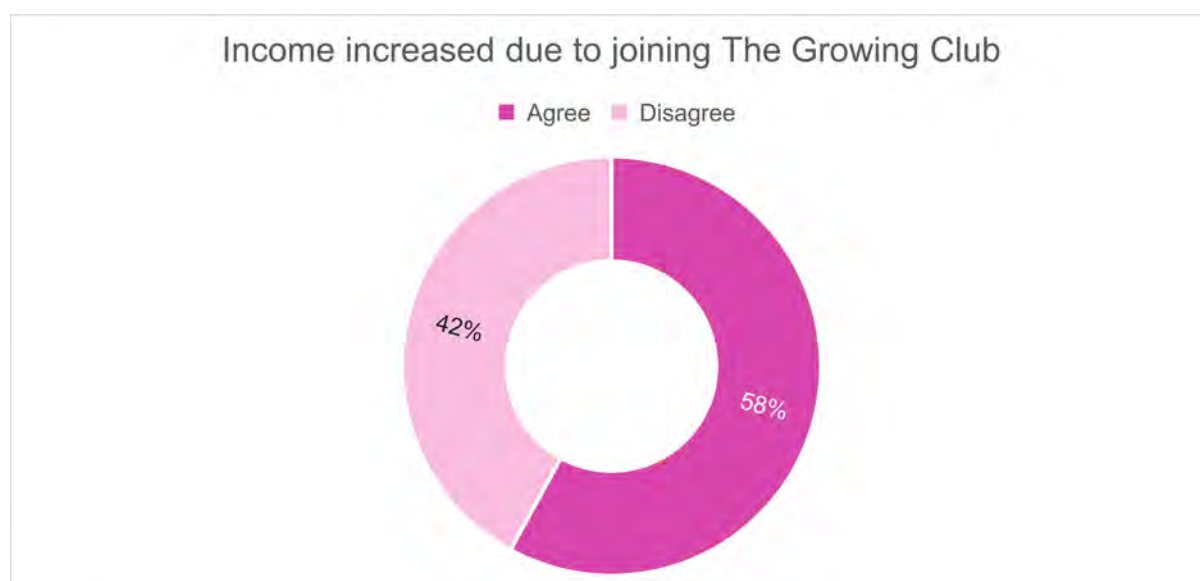


Figure 18.

Participants' responses to the statement "My income has increased due to joining The Growing Club" in 2022.

As part of our mission, we strive to help women to start their own businesses and open doors to entrepreneurial opportunities. We endeavour to facilitate this growth, by equipping women with the necessary tools and skills to consolidate and understand their own values.

³ (reference - <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/cost-living-crisis>)

The introduction of financial planning skills training has also been an addition following feedback we received in 2018, where women shared they had great difficulty with:

“I struggle with the accounting side of setting up a business, having a session on setting up spreadsheets and how to do spreadsheet formulas etc would be useful for me.”

“One of the bits I struggled with, and still struggle with, was the big goals into achievable tasks homework. I'd really love some help with that, like a day of coming together in a workshop to get clear on this and make a personalised plan.”

“Financial planning”

[2018, Feedback]

Our findings indicate that The Growing Club has successfully created opportunities for women to become financially active and improve their career prospects, as the following comments illustrate:

“[Without The Growing Club] I would be trying to get by on Universal Credit or would have ended up applying for admin jobs without much prospect.”

“Prior to working with the Growing Club, I didn't have a clear financial plan. Since the Bloom and Grow course I know my financial goals and aims. I also have the confidence to know my own worth and to say no to projects that don't represent this.”

“I remember a workshop on finances, led in a compassionate way, and found this opened up avenues in myself to lose the fear around finances and figures.”

“I feel more confident now, particularly having had conversations around "knowing your value" and practicing confidently stating prices etc - makes me see that if anything I have undervalued my skills and experience and feel comfortable charging prices that more accurately reflect both.”

The reality of the current financial climate does however reveal a tremendous impact on women's confidence to sustain their own businesses. Women expressed their concerns as to what may happen next. They also highlighted the continuous uncertainty, the challenging and necessary steps taken for surviving as a sole trader in the current financial circumstances:

“Initially I grew my business and was able to take a lower paid job part-time job and made a substantial improvement in the growth of my business, but the increasing cost of living has meant that I have had to take a full-time more demanding job and so now the challenge is maintaining a work-life balance whilst still trying to grow my business and not go backwards.”

“We are not drawing from the business yet. We want to build a safety net for the unexpected.”

We hope to be able to continue to create opportunity for women to continue to build on their confidence in their own abilities to earn an income. We were touched to hear comments such as below, which already illustrate the long-lasting impact of our work:

“I am much more confident that my business will be sustainable and provide me with a good income, but it is going to take longer than I had initially envisaged.”

“I’m sure that my business idea would probably never become a reality without the Growing Club.”

“I thought it was not going to be possible to really earn a living income prior to joining. I am now confident that I am on the right path to starting a viable business that will allow me to earn a living, have the right work life balance”

Confidence in managing own business

We found that being part of The Growing Club has been an invaluable experience also for its practical and professional support for a great number of our participants, as they have shared with us. When we asked participants whether they felt more prepared to face and handle business challenges due to benefiting from our services, 87% of the respondents said they did (see figure below).

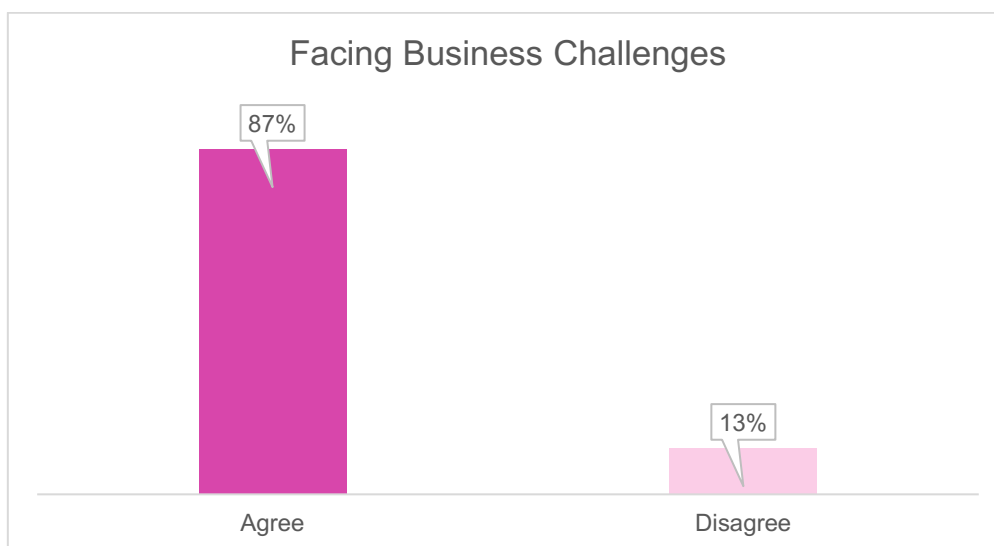


Figure 19.

Participants’ responses to the statement “I feel more prepared to handle business challenges due to joining The Growing Club” in 2022.

This translated into confidence in managing their own business, as comments below indicate:

“As I move through the steps of Roots and Shoots, I know I’m learning the groundwork to enable me to be successful, not only in being a successful artist, but mainly to bring about a unique business idea that could greatly benefit myself and others.”

“[Joining The Growing Club] It has perhaps given me more confidence to get things going and really interrogate who my potential clients are and how to set prices - and I certainly feel the benefit of being part of the community in terms of confidence and feeling supported.”

We are committed to deliver training that leads to enhanced employability and enterprise skills. We are doing so by skill building and upskilling. Our survey showed that 73% of women attended our Networking Events, Training and Skills Workshops (see Appendix B). Here, women have the opportunity to ask questions, be provided with IT, accounting guidance, and benefit from business coaching. This is also an avenue where we endeavoured to provide

networking opportunities for women sole traders. These have been invaluable for both new starters, as well as women who already had their own business, as comments below show:

“I think I would still be clueless [without The Growing Club] when it came to business planning and also alone as I don't share my ideas regarding my business dreams as I have had them for so long. Despite previous attempts to start (which I have) and numerous previous business courses, this is the first that has really resonated with me.”

“There's also just somewhere to go with it, for the guidance and structure, just the basics of which foot to put in front of the other.”

“Would still have been self-employed [without The Growing Club], but maybe not so far on with it.”

A great part of comments received also focused on the value of mentoring. As part of our mission to create further training opportunities, we introduced the Mentor Training course, which allows women business owners to become a business mentor and support other women from the start-up groups in their business journey. This decision was also inspired by the feedback we received in our previous surveys, where women encouraged us to introduce the service of *“Training trainers and expanding”* [2018, Feedback]. The Mentor Training course entails a comprehensive training programme aiming to strengthen women's leadership skills and support their continuous professional development. This also ties in with our mission of creating further financial opportunities for business owners by enabling women to apply for paid mentoring opportunities, after completing this training.

Back in 2018, we had just begun to introduce the idea of having a mentor, and women asked us to introduce more of this in our training:

“A Continuing program of mentors available for people when they finish courses or the opportunity to continue with their mentor, If they gained a mentor through their course.”

“Recently I have been considering seeking a mentor and wondered whether there could be a peer mentoring system set up, where you're assisted to find a compatible mentor from others who have been part of the GC group. To be matched with someone, but then left to get on with it and arrange our own meetings etc. after that.”

“A buddy to go through hurdles with”

[2018, Feedback]

This service has proven to be invaluable, as women who benefitted from mentoring support commented:

“The support during the months of setting up my business was priceless and reduced my stress levels. I doubt my marketing for the business would be as varied had I not received the training through TGC. It's great having a business mentor to ask questions of.”

“[Single biggest benefit of joining The Growing Club] My stress levels with regard to the business have reduced as I have a mentor who I can ask any questions I have”

Undoubtedly, what we provided was instrumental in empowering women to trust their own abilities to manage their business. For instance, some shared that:

“The Roots and Shoots course provided us with a workbook which we filled with notes during the sessions. I regularly look back through these notes - which cover everything from

business planning to self-care - and it has become a practical 'toolkit' which gives me strength whenever I start to feel lost."

Reflecting on their journey, women shared they felt thankful for the opportunity to take part in this research project, and that they are looking forward to their future progress and career prospects. What is certain is that almost all participants found this refreshing, telling us that they feel:

"... A bit tearful!!! but excited about "Cracking on!!!"

"... Gosh- grateful- keen to continue the journey and check out how I can fill continuing gaps by upskilling through you.

"It has made me feel grounded and reminded me why I am doing this. Sometimes you forget in the stresses of running your own business."

Further suggestions and business training

When we asked about what we could do next, we collected some constructive feedback on future suggestions in delivering The Growing Club courses, such as running shorter programmes, evening/pre-recorded courses, and focusing more on sales training. A further suggestion has also been to explore the possibility to assist with a *"childcare crèche for parents with young children to attend courses"* (see Appendix D, Table of themes containing extensive list of further business training ideas proposed by participants).

We found that most women used this opportunity to let us know that our services were *"Excellent and well-run"*, and that they *"can't think how it could be better"*. They used the space to let us know what this support has meant for them and some even shared that:

"I have found no room for improvement so far. I am really grateful to have been able to get a place on this course and totally trusting of the process so obviously well structured."

However, it is also essential to highlight that here some women shared they *"Didn't qualify for any government support. The Growing Club support and advice has been amazing."* and used the space to encourage us to:

"Get us young! Go into schools. Stop the rot early."

We strongly believe that comments such these, as well as the following ones, highlight the need for further support and how imperative it is for The Growing Club to continue to deliver its courses. For instance, women let us know that what motivated them to fill in our questionnaire this year was:

"My appreciation of the training and support I've received. I feel very lucky to live in an area covered by such support for WOMEN setting up their businesses."

"My opportunity to "give Back" and reciprocate plus, the fact women like me need you and all that you provide."

Lastly, women encouraged us to:

“Just keep doing what you're doing but maybe try to reach more women!”

“Keep doing what you do- it's brilliant!”

“Don't change! keep supporting our women!”

“Keep being as supportive as you are! Thank you everyone!”

Report Summary

“Inspiration, acceptance, professional respect, confidence boosting and bucketfuls of honesty, integrity and caring as well as tried and tested advice!”

We found above feedback to summarize what The Growing Club aims and managed to deliver. This year’s report focused on the efficacy and sustainability of the training programmes delivered by The Growing Club, and it allowed us to understand how exactly we manage to inspire confidence and empower women. As part of The Growing Club’s Theory of Change, developed in 2022 (see Appendix C), its mission is to continue to empower women from all backgrounds. It will continue to do so by providing ethical training and expertise that acknowledges lack of opportunities for employment and development for women wishing to become sole traders and fulfil their full potential.

The results highlighted once gain the great need for economic and practical support for women sole traders. This report indicated many and yet only a few of the challenges that women experience in becoming financially active. We found that most women face the challenges of being single parents, juggling responsibilities of childcare, being a carer for their loved ones, whilst also juggling several job roles, alongside having their own business. Women also shared their experience of poor mental health, physical and mental health disabilities. They shared with us that this impacted their wellbeing to such extent that they were unable to maintain or even begin to become financially active prior to being involved with The Growing Club. This fuels our drive to continue to create opportunities where women can thrive, not merely survive from a professional and economical aspect.

It is certain that Covid-19, as well as the current financial circumstances and cost of living crisis, also have a long-term impact on women’s wellbeing, The repercussions impacted women’s confidence in their own ability to sustain their business, which brought uncertainty when thinking of business prospects. Services like ours have been invaluable in providing the necessary business, but also wellbeing and peer support. Such opportunity enabled women to stay connected, empower and inspire one another. This encouraged them to follow different career paths and fulfil their true potential. The fact that women participating in this study highly appreciated once again a welcoming and supportive environment that allowed them to be heard and seen for their true potential, reiterates the need for a shift in training approaches.

The Growing Club not only acknowledges the lack of opportunities for women sole traders, but also addressed this by introducing ethical business training. This was greatly appreciated, and our participants found it invaluable. Women spoke of a significant increase in their confidence in earning an income and having a sustainable business, as well as gaining confidence in their own abilities to manage their business. This was credited to the support provided by The Growing Club, particularly in relation to how we empowered women to “know their own value”.

Above all, our results demonstrated that The Growing Club is successfully contributing to social innovation and societal change. It managed to do so by successfully implementing ethical approaches to business and employment training, as well as creating further employment and training opportunities. However, we also acknowledge there is still a great need of support to allow women to thrive as sole traders and further stories of successful empowerment such as those presented in this study would be unattainable in the absence of further funding opportunities.

Appendix A
Questionnaire Items

Part 1 –Quantitative Data Gathering

Which Growing Club Service have you attended since 2020, and/or are currently attending?
(Please tick as many as appropriate)

- Bloom & Grow (The Growth Programme) Face to face
- Bloom & Grow e-course
- The Sowing Club (short course for unwaged women) Face to Face
- The Sowing Club via Zoom
- Roots and Shoots (the start up course) Face to Face
- Roots and Shoots e-course
- Graduates Group
- Women and Money Retreat
- Voices from the frontline
- Drop-in Sessions
- Adult Trainers qualification
- Back her Business Crowdfunding
- Women in Leadership
- Networking Events
- Skills Workshops
- Peer Listening
- Mentor Training
- Social Events
- Wellbeing Events
- Peer Network (BEIS funded action learning for those with 100k

turnover)

- Peer Mentoring for Lancaster Women in business
- One to one support
- Other (Please specify)

As a result of my involvement with The Growing Club services... (please select the answer that reflects your honest experience, for each of the following statements)

	Definitely agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Definitely disagree
My confidence levels have increased	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I built relationships and increased my network	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I gained practical skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am more prepared to face life challenges	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel prepared to face business challenges	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My income has increased	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My wellbeing has improved	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel more empowered	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel optimistic about my future prospects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Did you feel welcomed and included at The Growing Club? (Please feel free to expand if you wish to do so, in the "Other" section)

- Yes
- No
- Rather not say
- Other ...

Part 2 – Open Ended Questions

For the next questions, please feel free to expand on your answers. Again, please remember, there are no right or wrong answers. We want to know your story.

1. When I first came to The Growing Club, I needed help with ... (please complete this sentence to help us find out when and how you got involved us)

2. Please tell us about your professional and educational background before you joined us. Similarly, we would love to hear about your journey with your business (if applicable).

3. How has your work-life balance been prior to and after joining us? What other aspects of your life have influenced this? (i.e. support network, family, colleagues etc.)

4. How would you describe your confidence in your ability to earn a living income prior to and after joining The Growing Club?

5. How has your employment, work-life balance, and/or business been affected by COVID-19? (if applicable) Please share with us if & how your involvement with us has helped you throughout this time.

6. What do you think your life would look like now, had you not been involved with The Growing Club?

7. What has been the single biggest benefit of your contact with us? Please explain your answer in a sentence or two.

8. How do you think we could improve what we do?

9. What motivated you to spend your precious time helping us with this questionnaire?

10. How do you feel at the end of this process of answering these questions and reflecting on your journey?

Thank you for reflecting on your journey with us so far. The next section will just include a series of questions about your age, background, etc, to help us understand the characteristics of those who benefitted from our support.

Part 3 - Demographics

Do you have any caring responsibilities either paid or unpaid, such as looking after children or vulnerable adults? (Please expand if you wish to do so in the "Other" box)

- Yes
- No
- Rather not say
- Other ...

Do you consider yourself to have a long-term health condition/disability? If so, how would you describe this?

How would you describe your gender?

Are you...

- Single
- Married
- In a relationship
- Widowed
- Separated
- Divorced
- Other ...

What is your highest level of qualification?

Are you currently ... (Please tick as many as appropriate)

- Unemployed
- Full-time employed
- Part-time employed
- Self-employed full-time
- Self-employed part-time
- In training/education full-time
- In training/education part-time
- Other ...

What is your age range?

- 20-30
- 30-40
- 40-50
- 50-60
- 60-70
- 70-80

Appendix B

Services delivered and accessed (by percentage), in The Growing Club Social Impact Report 2022*.

Bloom & Grow (The Growth Programme) Face to face	9%
Bloom & Grow e-course	7%
The Sowing Club (short course for unwaged women) Face to Face	18%
The Sowing Club via Zoom	2%
Roots and Shoots (the start up course) Face to Face	42%
Roots and Shoots e-course	2%
Graduates Group	7%
Voices from the frontline	7%
Women and Money Retreat	11%
Drop-in Sessions	7%
Adult Trainers qualification	7%
Women in Leadership	2%
Networking Events	13%
Skills Workshops	20%
Peer Listening	7%
Peer Mentoring for Lancaster Women in business	7%
Peer Network (BEIS funded action learning for those with 100k turnover)	2%
Mentor Training	11%
Social Events	22%
Wellbeing Events	20%
Sales Communications Training	2%
Lives Challenge	2%
Back her Business Crowdfunding	0%

***Services delivered have been grouped as below in the main text.**

Roots & Shoots (incl. e-course & face to face)

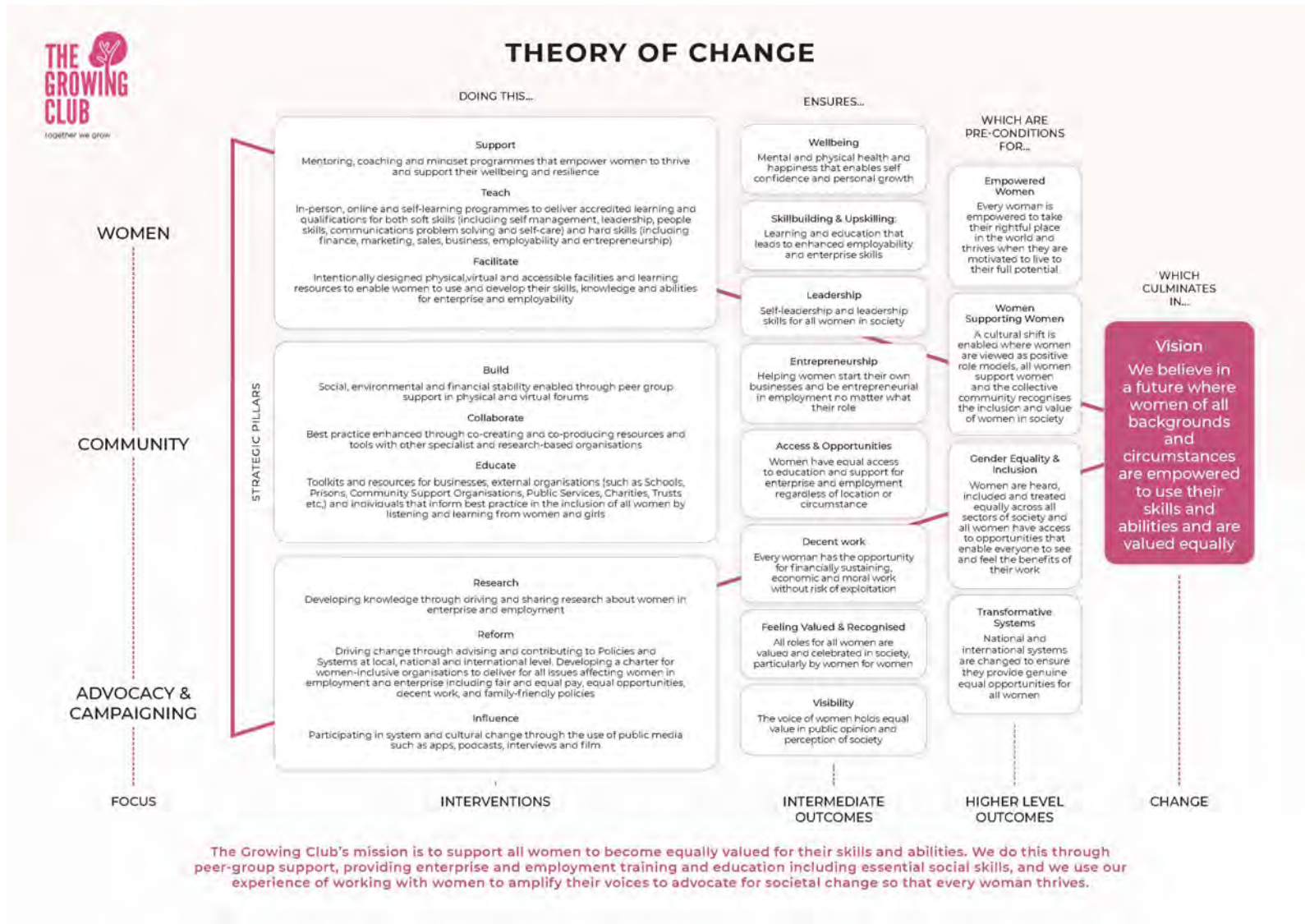
Bloom & Grow (incl. e-course & face to face)

The Sowing Club (incl. e-course & face to face)

Networking Events, Training, Skills Workshops (incl. Skills Workshops, Drop in Sessions, Women and Money Retreat, Sales Communications Training, Adult Trainers qualification, Mentor Training, Networking events & Peer Network)

Peer Support, Mentoring, Social & Wellbeing Events (incl. Social Events, Peer Listening, Voices from the frontline, Wellbeing Events, Peer Listening, Graduates Group, One to one support, Peer Mentoring for LWB, Lives Challenge & Women in Leadership)

Appendix C



Appendix D

Table of Themes and Comments

Theme	Data Extracts for each Subtheme
<p>Work-Life Challenges, and New Directions</p>	<p><u>Juggling different roles, caring responsibilities, and personal difficulties</u></p> <p><i>“I have wanted more work, but also wanted to know which direction to go in for myself. Now I know that, I can start to make it happen. Time wise my balance has been ok but mentally I have been unable to switch off from thinking about what to do. Now I know, it’s so exciting to put my thoughts down. I will enjoy that, and feel inspired to enjoy life more all round. My family also influence this.”</i></p> <p><i>“I was always looking to dip into my creative side again but never quite did it. Then I became single mum on benefits. I got myself onto the sowing club. I found it a really gentle introduction and such a supportive environment. It was lovely to have that time to work on myself- I was still a little emotionally delicate (...) and it was kind of therapy for me. After that I decided to enrol on the Roots and Shoots and I'm still doing it now”</i></p> <p><i>“When I signed up with the sowing club, I was just about to lose my job and was signed off with stress from work.”</i></p> <p><i>“I have a degree but had struggled to find work since having children and developing a chronic illness.”</i></p> <p><i>“I have health issues which mean that I can't work full-time and was having trouble finding employment. I came up with an idea for a business within my physical capabilities that I could run from home.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am carer for my son and home schooling, so in the short term my work/life balance will always be skewed towards him as my priority and making myself available whenever he needs me.”</i></p> <p><i>“I became a family carer unpaid- and it has really negatively affected by finances but have a new business developing and the Growing club workshops have supported me in this new venture.”</i></p> <p><i>“I attended the adult trainers’ courses and was able to achieve my qualification, and this gave me the confidence to conduct training workshops in my business, this has been a huge help to my business. I also attended some well-being courses, initially in person then by zoom as lockdown was forced upon us. This made such a huge different to my mental</i></p>

health at this really difficult time. Just seeing familiar faces was wonderful, knowing that we had this support despite it being such an uncertain time for all of us.”

“I have a doctorate degree, for the last few years before joining roots and shoots I was unable to work due to disability.”

“I had a degree and was self-employed before. Then had period of ill health and lack of confidence. Then everything changed and my business started to take off a bit”

“I am so grateful to have attended the Sowing club. I really wanted to know what is next for my future and your help has empowered me to realise my direction and see that it is possible. Now I need to take the steps. Your support is invaluable. Thank you so much.”

New directions as a result of challenges

“I am still in the process of establishing my business, so the main benefits have been overcoming psychological hurdles and meeting and mutually supporting some amazing women. I'm certain I could not have come as far as I have without the Growing Club.”

“[Before joining The Growing Club], I didn't have clear boundaries for work and social life. Now these are clear and enabled my business to grow whilst still enjoying family/ social life.”

I put so much into my job and my career. The stress caused by almost losing my job has made me re-evaluate what is important to me. The sowing club has helped me to get a grounding space to build my confidence and start to look at other paths I could take to create stability and balance in my life.”

“Before the growing club I wasn't able to set aside time to spend working on my business. But with the support I got from attending roots and shoots I have started to make it a priority (although life does have a way of getting in the way at times!)”

“Much prefer self-employment as caring for children/adults easier to juggle”

“My business has enabled me to spend valuable time caring for my mum.”

“I was looking to create a work life balance due to children with disabilities”

	<p><i>“The pandemic made me bold. I knew I wanted to work outdoors and for myself. Previously I had done several jobs over the decades, having not completed a degree course in my 20s. I took a career change from managing to achieve a better work life balance, before the pandemic, to a minimum wage job.”</i></p>
<p>Empowerment and Connection</p>	<p><u>Empowerment and support</u> [Single biggest benefit of joining The Growing Club:] A: <i>“I’m living rather than just existing”.</i> A: <i>“Being asked the right questions in a safe, and supportive space.</i> A: <i>“Being set free to be [me]. Being given permission.”</i></p> <p><i>“I met other women with the same concerns and problems. That made me feel stronger and I have lots of satisfaction from support I can offer my friends from course. After leaving work I felt a bit socially isolated.”</i></p> <p><i>“The greatest benefit of being involved with the Growing Club is knowing there are genuinely kind and caring experts who can help if and when you need it, both practically and emotionally.”</i></p> <p><i>“To be in a safe environment with women that want to help and empower each other.”</i></p> <p><i>“You’ve changed my life. Helped me when I needed it. I want to help other women flourish and fulfil their potential.”</i></p> <p><i>“Without doubt access to an incredible group of inspirational and supportive women who are all doing the right things for the right reasons.”</i></p> <p><i>“Empowered, thankful and grateful, to be part of this family and at the start of my journey with them and numerous women that I have already connected with and excited as to who I will meet next.”</i></p> <p><i>“Feeling buoyed by the energy - and starting to see those connections within the group as we discover common business interests, ways we can work with each other, or just support one another by buying products - it’s pretty inspirational!”</i></p> <p><u>Connection and inspiration</u> <i>“From social media presence, I knew that The Growing Club was a very positive, nurturing and ethically sound organisation to become a part of”</i></p>

"I attended a meeting to watch a video to hear about other women's business experience through the Growing Club. I was greatly inspired."

"I definitely needed the inspiration and role models to help me switch my mind set into believing that I could be a successful business woman."

"Being surrounded by supportive women who want to see each other thrive. Being a part of this group has been inspiring and exactly what I needed."

Connection in the aftermath of Covid-19

"Being able to attend Graduates Group online was such a support. Thank you."

"I joined the Bloom and Grow online course during lockdown which helped develop my confidence and encouraged me not to give up when things were difficult."

"The women on my Bloom and Grow course became good friends and were a huge help in supporting me through covid and in fact were instrumental in my decision to leave that job. The wider Growing Club Team were also a massive source of support and encouragement and I feel very privileged to have got to know them during this time."

"The online course during lockdown kept me going both practically and emotionally through a very difficult time. The support of the ladies on the course encouraged me to use the time when I was closed to develop new ideas for when I re-opened."

"I found the pandemic traumatic at times emotionally. However, it did free me to change direction and get to know people and the area at a more measured pace. The peer listening course was a turning point. It was nourishing and helped me to process my experiences returning to business in a safe place. I continue to share listening sessions with my buddy from the course and it is really helpful. I enrolled on Bloom and Grow in October and I sense that we are all somewhat affected by the pandemic in our business and personal lives. It is helping me to stay on course and meeting in person has been amazing"

"The Growing Club helped me a lot during COVID as a support network. Since then, life is gradually getting back to normal but the lack of certainty, and the loss of the feeling that you are in charge of your own destiny is something that I think will take many years to recover from."

	<p><i>"I realise how far I have come in the past year having come out of lockdown and some difficult personal health and life issues. It's made me reflect on how fortunate I am too have met some amazing women on thus course but also in my own support network previous education and life experiences including work options"</i></p>
<p>Entrepreneurship and Confidence</p>	<p><u>Self-confidence</u></p> <p>Q: What has been the single biggest benefit of joining The Growing Club?]</p> <p>A: <i>"The confidence to say I am a woman who owns a successful business!"</i></p> <p>A: <i>"Confidence building/believing in my ability to do things."</i></p> <p>A: <i>"Giving me the confidence to run my own business and get a better life balance."</i></p> <p>A: <i>"Gaining confidence and a more positive outlook on the future."</i></p> <p>A: <i>"Confidence to speak to others about my business and go for big contracts as I know now, I can do it"</i></p> <p>A: <i>"Confidence"</i></p> <p>A: <i>"I have more confidence"</i></p> <p>A: <i>"giving me the reminder to believe and trust in myself and that I do have the skills, knowledge and experience to run workshops and produce my own work. To not bother with people who aren't interested!"</i></p> <p><i>"Inspiration, acceptance, professional respect, confidence boosting and bucketfuls of honesty, integrity and caring as well as tried and tested advice!"</i></p> <p><i>"Confidence and knowing I have a support network behind me if I need any help or advice"</i></p> <p><i>"Before I didn't really have much of a clue how I was going to do this - suppose I didn't think about it too much (maybe it was blind confidence). But having been on the roots and shoots has given me the confidence to feel like it's going to happen."</i></p> <p><i>"I felt more confident with what I was doing and made my business feel more 'real'"</i></p> <p><i>"The growing club gave me confidence in my abilities and supported me when I needed it the most."</i></p> <p><i>"I'm very grateful for the growing club and for the great foundation the roots and shoots course has given me for my business, and I feel confident moving forwards knowing there will still be support when I need it."</i></p>

"[without The Growing Club] I don't feel I would have been as confident as a business woman in my own right. I'm not sure I would have the same level of business confidence."

"I can certainly see that going forward over the coming year it will place me in a far stronger position than I would have been in without it."

"I was a working in a previous role for 25 years before being made redundant. The Growing Club helped me to have confidence to change direction when my circumstances changed."

"My confidence has increased greatly, which has also positively affected other areas of my life."

Confidence in their own abilities to earn an income

"I strongly believe that my business will achieve success and I'll be able to live from the income it will bring."

"I thought it was not going to be possible to really earn a living income prior to joining. I am now confident that I am on the right path to starting a viable business that will allow me to earn a living, have the right work life balance"

"[Before joining The Growing Club] My confidence [in earning an income] was very low and I felt so disillusioned with the impact of potentially losing my job and career I had worked so hard to get. Now being involved with the sowing club I realise there is support and a journey to take to empower myself and build my confidence again."

"Before joining The Growing Club, I was completely lacking in confidence and did not believe I could create a viable business from scratch. I didn't know the difference between 'turnover' and 'profit' and was worried about insurance, tax and the practicalities of business but I have learnt a lot in a short space of time and am confident that I can earn a living."

"Before I didn't really have much of a clue how I was going to do this - suppose I didn't think about it too much (maybe it was blind confidence). But having been on the roots and shoots has given me the confidence to feel like it's going to happen."

	<p><i>"I remember a workshop on finances, led in a compassionate way, and found this opened up avenues in myself to lose the fear around finances and figures."</i></p> <p><i>"I am much more confident that my business will be sustainable and provide me with a good income, but it is going to take longer than I had initially envisaged."</i></p> <p><i>"Before, very low confidence, now I feel much more confident."</i></p> <p><i>"My confidence in my ability to earn a living income was extremely low prior to joining Growing Club. Having participated in both Sowing Club and Roots and Shoots, I would describe my confidence as growing; it will take more time, but I am glad that I have started this process and feel motivated to keep taking small steps forward. It has also been very encouraging to hear from women who are already successfully running their own business, and who generously and honestly shared their experiences."</i></p> <p><i>"Prior to working with the Growing Club I didn't have a clear financial plan. Since the Bloom and Grow course I know my financial goals and aims. I also have the confidence to know my own worth and to say no to projects that don't represent this."</i></p> <p><i>"Hugely improved. I'm sure that my business idea would probably never become a reality without the Growing Club."</i></p> <p><i>"I feel more confident now, particularly having had conversations around "knowing your value" and practicing confidently stating prices etc - makes me see that if anything I have undervalued my skills and experience and feel comfortable charging prices that more accurately reflect both."</i></p> <p><i>"[Confidence in earning an income] Massively increased. It has been a few years before I entered the realms of earning money from my business, but it is down to me to make it work. The growing club gives me the fuel to make this happen."</i></p> <p><i>"I've been able to meet new people who use my services and recommend me to others, so my ability to earn has improved"</i></p>
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"Prior- very low confidence. After- more confident in my abilities which gave me the courage to apply for a job."

"It feels liberating to control how much I earn! However, we are not drawing from the business yet. We want to build a safety net for the unexpected."

Confidence in managing their own business

"I am more able to handle responsibilities and forward planning. I have drive, ambition and confidence for the future, personally and professionally. I feel completely safe and supported by the club and it's members."

"I had been in the previous profession for 30 years and a spinal injury proved to be the push I needed to leave and pursue my passion. I didn't know if I could make this work as a business. I do now!! As well as attending Roots and Shoots, I also attended other courses, which combined unearthed a new determination in me with much higher aspirations than I had before meeting other small business owners."

"[Joining The Growing Club] It has perhaps given me more confidence to get things going and really interrogate who my potential clients are and how to set prices - and I certainly feel the benefit of being part of the community in terms of confidence and feeling supported."

"[Without The Growing Club] I would be a great deal further behind in my self-employment journey. I would have a less clear idea of the steps I need to take going forward, and less confidence in taking those steps. I would also be a lot more isolated."

"The support during the months of setting up my business was priceless and reduced my stress levels. I doubt my marketing for the business would be as varied had I not received the training through TGC. It's great having a business mentor to ask questions of."

"There's also just somewhere to go with it, for the guidance and structure, just the basics of which foot to put in front of the other."

	<p><i>“As I move through the steps of Roots and Shoots, I know I’m learning the groundwork to enable me to be successful, not only in being a successful artist, but mainly to bring about a unique business idea that could greatly benefit myself and others.”</i></p> <p><i>“[Without The Growing Club] I’d still have no idea what I was really doing or what to do.”</i></p> <p><i>[Without The Growing Club ...]</i></p> <p><i>“I would not have the necessary skills for business start-up.”</i></p> <p><i>“I may not have applied for the job so I may be unemployed.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would not be working, or I would have tried to set up a business and it would have failed.”</i></p> <p><i>“Would still have been self-employed, but maybe not so far on with it.”</i></p> <p><i>“I think I would still be clueless [without The Growing Club] when it came to business planning and also alone as I don’t share my ideas regarding my business dreams as I have had them for so long. Despite previous attempts to start (which I have) and numerous previous business courses, this is the first that has really resonated with me.”</i></p> <p><i>“[Single biggest benefit of joining The Growing Club] My stress levels with regard to the business have reduced as I have a mentor who I can ask any questions I have”</i></p> <p><i>“I have had my own business for 15 years and am still learning all the time. I appreciate the more practical element that the Growing Club gives. It is also helps me to keep up to date.”</i></p>
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<p>Further Suggestions & Feedback</p>	<p><u>Further business training ideas proposed by participants</u></p> <p><i>“The next FSB / Women in Business / The Growing Club networking event is on Zoom. Now we're able to meet face to face it'd be good to do so.”</i></p> <p><i>“I feel the Bloom and Grow course could incorporate the impact of the pandemic, which is not something we can ignore as we move forward. For future cohorts, hopefully it can be discussed in the past tense, and I expect quite a few people have started out during the pandemic”</i></p> <p><i>“Maybe more on the financial/money side of business”</i></p> <p><i>“Run more short courses around business set up needs, rather than a year long one”</i></p> <p><i>“Some higher level stuff, sales training maybe? peer groups for sharing general business experience.”; “I would love affordable help with my website.”</i></p> <p><i>“More connections to local businesses/organisations”; “Reach out to Blackpool!”</i></p> <p><i>“For the online course have at least 12 participants”</i></p> <p><i>“More evening courses or pre recorded ones to watch in an evening”; “Evening online courses or pre recorded courses Childcare crèche for parents with young children to attend courses”</i></p> <p><i>“The only thing I can think of is that I would like more courses on listening skills and effective communication with clients”</i></p> <p><i>“More guest speakers. Making the sessions more personal.”</i></p> <p><i>“I think it would really help to have very clear written information on: what organisations, groups are out there to help local business women; sites to assist with leaflet design, website, and business cards; accounts etc and use if social media. I feel a lot of these areas which can be vital to businesses have been discussed but the nuts and bolts of them have been missed.”</i></p>
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"Communication with trainers and students can always be worked on. I found the role of trainer/facilitator a bit bewildering at first and would have liked advice on invoicing, attending meetings etc when I got my contract."

"It would have been great if my male business partner could have attended too"

Gratitude & Encouragement

"The Growing Club already offers a wide variety of courses, training, and social activities, both online and offline, that would suit the individual needs of many different kinds of people. I think these can only improve as more women participate and offer unique perspectives."

"We are improving and changing all the time so I can't see anything major at the minute"

"Do more of it and let more people know about what you do."; "Just keep doing what you're doing but maybe try to reach more women!"; "Get us young! Go into schools. Stop the rot early."

"The Growing Club is great! I can't think how it could be better."; "Everything was great & well run sessions"; "I can't think of anything. It has been an excellent course"

"Keep doing what you do- it's brilliant!"; "Don't change! keep supporting our women!"; "I love what you do."; "Great service"

"You're great and I really don't know what can be improved"; "I have found no room for improvement so far. I am really grateful to have been able to get a place on this course and totally trusting of the process so obviously well structured."

"Keep being as supportive as you are! Thank you everyone!"