

# ANNUAL REPORT 2022

The Growing Club CIC

GETTING OUR OWN OFFICE SPACE.

The floor layout in the groups

We need to have a better layout to our...

GETTING OUR POLICIES & SYSTEMS SORTED

Our staff recruitment

The vision board and feedback from it.

... during the year

THE GROWING CLUB WAS ONCE IN JAMES LEWIS ROOM

THE LOCAL FEE SAVE AS COVERAGE

... during the year

The implementation of the plan

GROWING OUR TEAM

The Women that are currently involved in growing the growing club

All of the sessions at friends meeting house.

BEING GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO SELECTED THINGS

Some of the men of the 1st Department women

HOW MANY WOMEN HAVE BEEN THROUGH OUR COURSES

Finding a job where dyspraxia is understood!!

The training offered and teaching.

Getting systems in place (37% of the funds raised - 2022)

... being a participant in the way we work. The way we work is being

GETTING FUNDING TO KEEP IT GOING

Meeting up with our sewing club who have helped me w/ planning my future

WHERE THE Growing club is what from when it was first started

The Auction of Premises

MAKING CONNECTIONS ON ZOOM DESPITE CONSTRAINTS

The Auction of Premises

Getting a "Reconnection"

My new role.

The session on facing our fears. R + S

The AET course a nice teach over zoom

My experience with working with a business partner

The fundraiser went surprisingly well!!! Considering how much

... there were people who were looking at a team

... the open... about how much...

Support & Training from the Growing club

SOME MENING COUNCIL WITH THE MOTHER & VICE VERSA

have settled in esp. considering my circumstances of having to leave Leeds

Meeting women who have introduced me to new interests (i.e. Macaroni)

... about the lost of some planning evidence

WOMEN TOOK ME TO HELP THEM AND USED MY BUSINESS SKILLS TO HELP ME

... during the year

SOME WOMEN NOW HAVE VERY SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSES

... during the year

The Growing Club CIC  
January 2023

## BACKGROUND

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 November 2021 to October 2022, 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 much needed steady support.



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“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 the course. After leaving work I felt a bit socially isolated.”

## OUR STATED PRIORITIES FOR 2021/22

- 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



## The Team:

We welcomed Megan Pickles to the team, initially as a Kickstart placement and now event organiser extraordinaire.

In October we were all shocked and saddened by the unexpected death of Paula Eales.

We have continued to build our delivery team, having taken on new trainers to deliver core work, new mentors and welcomed new guest trainers for specific skills workshops.

We welcomed two new directors, Sophie Alkhaled and Jackie Bennet Shaw.

We feel grateful to have a strong office and delivery team which has enabled attention to be put on developing systems and processes, as well as new initiatives and have invested time and resource this year in team building and staff wellbeing.



The office team  
at the Promises  
Auction

## PROGRESS IN 2021/22:

We are very pleased to share that all our targets were hit, apart from rolling out the peer-listening and the probation work, which, being Home Office has involved a lot of negotiation. This will now start February 2023 and is an exciting initiative for us, as women in the justice system are a group we have spent 3 years trying to reach. Other targets have gone above and beyond what we expected, for example the campaign for a Lancashire-wide women and business strategy. Not only were we commissioned to write a county report, Growing Women, Growing Lancashire, with Wendy Bowers, but, working with Andrew Leeming, we now have a webpage and a County steering group in place.

<https://www.boostbusinesslancashire.co.uk/business-support/women-in-enterprise-hub/>

We have invested a lot of time exploring the future of our work, via work groups, including our newly formed Service Users Steering Group. And with help from Scott Leonard, via SSE and Royal London, we have had a mini-makeover, including a change of strap line. We have produced our latest social impact report, a report on the changing needs of women in the district and our Theory of Change all of which can be found here <https://thegrowingclub.co.uk/reports/>

As part of looking at our future, we explored the way forward for us regarding e-courses. We are prioritising affordable, self-learning and expanding the offerings with bite-size courses. See here <https://courses.thegrowingclub.co.uk>

We started 2022 brilliantly with the Your Money and Your Life residential. This theme was continued with women and numbers work and we have ended this year with a comprehensive winter survival programme funded by Population Health, which includes understanding our bills.

44

Courses, programmes and workshops ran during this year, including our first weekend residential.



## TRAINING COURSES, PROGRAMMES & WORKSHOPS

Throughout this time, The Growing Club ran 44 courses and workshops, ranging from one-to-one coaching and half-day workshops, to 12-month programmes plus 47 Drop-In sessions. It felt good to hold our first face-to-face Christmas party since 2019.

In addition, we hosted 4 women in business networking events, and ran 2 additional events, The Women in Business Wellbeing day and the Auction of Promises. We trained new mentors and introduced trainers' forum meetings, which have been very positive.

This year we also ran our first ever weekend residential course, on women and money, thanks to funding from Royal London, This was so impactful we certainly hope to run more.

All courses and drop-in sessions are now back face to face, but we still deliver some sessions via zoom for balance of access.

The Growing Club CIC had 1304 interventions with 204 individual women -50 of these were new contacts



January's Your Money and Your Life Residential

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“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.”

# WELLBEING DAY FOR WOMEN IN BUSINESS



In December, we ran our first, experimental wellbeing day for women in business, and, despite the pandemic, it was a huge success with women requesting that we make this a regular event. Far too often self care falls off women's agenda as they are too busy. As a result most women who attended reported feeling exhausted before they came.

We need to keep putting attention on changing this mindset.



Before and After  
The Wellbeing Day



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49% of women who came to us have a disability or long term health condition

## AGE-RELATED WORK

After a lot of negotiation, we finally started an experimental course with young women at Lancaster and Morecambe College in October, funded by FCST.

The aim is to engage young women at risk of leaving school with no job or further education plans, to explore their skills and options for Decent Work (UN SDG 8.3)

## ONLINE TRAINING HUB DEVELOPMENT

As part of looking at our future, we explored the way forward for us with regard to the e-courses which we had started as a result of lockdown. The Walney Extension Community Grant Fund gave us the opportunity to develop our online training hub, a resource that enables women to access business training wherever they are located.

We are now prioritising affordable self-learning and expanding the offerings with bite size courses. See here <https://courses.thegrowingclub.co.uk>



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“[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.”



## ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

We mentioned last year that we had been chosen for the Royal London sponsored Changemakers programme, run by SSE. This has been such a fantastic resource for us and has included mentoring, coaching on our image and tidying up what and how we measure, as well as two residential experiences, which provided such important peer-support during this difficult time.

In addition the grant enabled us to run our first residential with women and pay Rebecca, our office manager to also do our social media. This has made a big difference to our online presence.



“ 91%

of participants feel there has been an improvement in their wellbeing after joining The Growing Club

“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.”

## We moved



With the spread of Covid our room was no longer a suitable group training space. This led to additional costs of renting elsewhere, and room hire in Lancaster is not cheap.

When our room contract was up for renewal, we made a very quick decision to move upstairs, to a room with windows. This is more expensive, but meant we were able to start moving all courses back into our space, which is a much better experience all round. And, being right next to a lift we are still accessible.

However, in reality we have outgrown our space and so the search continues for a suitable building that we can turn into the Women and Enterprise Hub.

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### Connection and empowerment

We found that 93% of our participants felt empowered having been involved with our services. A great proportion of the feedback we received talked about group support and its empowering nature. For some, it brought an invaluable sense of connection

## Auction of Promises

On the 20th of May 2022, we held an Auction of Promises event at the Gregson, a local community centre. This was the perfect place for it, as at its core this was a community event, with The Growing Club community showing up for it. There were about 70 people in attendance of the event, and the night was a huge success.

We planned the event to raise money for a seed fund. This will be for women who are on benefits and looking to go self-employed, but may not be able to take that next step due to not having the funds. This is needed to help fill the gap left by New Enterprise Allowance, which ended in December of 2021. The discontinuation of the NEA meant that women who may have wanted to use skills and experiences to become self-employed, now face a further hurdle, meaning that starting a business was looking like only an option for those with capital.

We are delighted to announce that The Growing Club managed to raise £3000 for a Growing Club seed fund. This is to be added to £1000 which was donated to us by The Zynthiya Trust and £25 donated by the Lancaster Siroptimists. This couldn't have been done without the wonderful community of small business owners who either kindly donated a promise to be auctioned off, or bid for promises on the evening.



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“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.”

## Steering Group

This year, in September, we held our first Growing Club Steering Group meeting. It has been an ambition of The Growing Club CIC to improve our approaches to service user involvement, as we want to strengthen our methods of engagement for steering service provision beyond our current feedback systems.



In the first group, we looked at where we stood on the “ladder of participation”. This is a framework which is widely used in health and social care to evaluate how well organisations are ‘user led’, and participatory it is, based on Arnstein’s ladder of participation (1969).

The orange represents where the steering group members thought we sat currently, and the blue represents where they want us to move to. We aim to move up this ladder, and the steering group is one way in which we are going to do this, and explore how to move up the ladder.

“ 89%

of participants feel more optimistic about their future prospects after joining The Growing Club - despite the economic crisis.

**"I feel like the first session we had was productive and added value to TGC, in terms of garnering feedback and making suggestion. I can see that this group, led by the women that access TGC services, will have a positive impact on the work taking place."**

## Systems Update

A lot of work has been done this year to tidy up all systems and processes for efficiency and simplicity.

CRM- We introduced a CRM system in late 2021 to help us to be more efficient and secure when storing information. We chose Capsule as it was an easy to navigate system that we were able to modify to meet the needs of The Growing Club.

The support we received from them and Lorraine Birch (Director) was second to none and the CRM now allows us to maintain records, ensuring that personal details are kept secure, with limited access to them.

It helps us to manage our data, see at a glance the information we need and what is no longer necessary for us to keep, which means more accurate reporting.

Royal London - We were kindly offered some support from Royal London to help with our evaluation process. As an organisation, we are fantastic when it comes to delivery and asking for feedback but there was a gap in what we then did with this information as it came in to us in different formats.

We were assigned a small team from Royal London who listened to what we needed and helped us to create a simple form that met our needs. This form can be adapted but ensures that the feedback that we receive is now all in the same format and is easier to understand and interrogate. We will also be going online with the form, via a QR code to ensure that we are being more environmentally friendly.

The whole process was a pleasure to be a part of and we are very grateful for this support.

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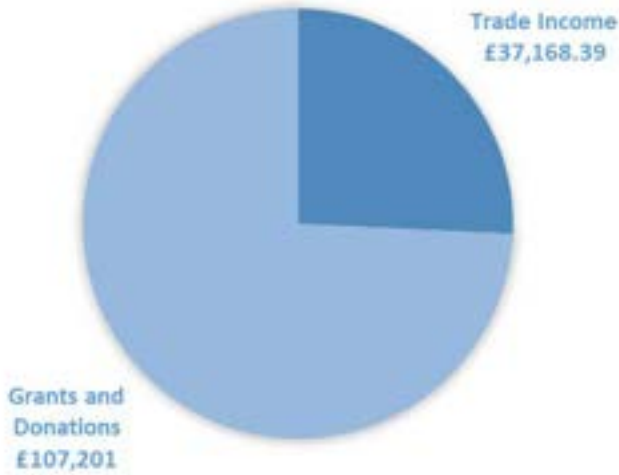
The Growing Club helped me a lot during COVID as a support network. Since then, life is gradually getting back to normal but the lack of certainty, and the loss of the feeling that you are in charge of your own destiny is something that I think will take many years to recover from.”

## INCOME

In 2021/22 we received a total of £146.819 in funding, from grants, training courses, branded product sales, contracts and donations.

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

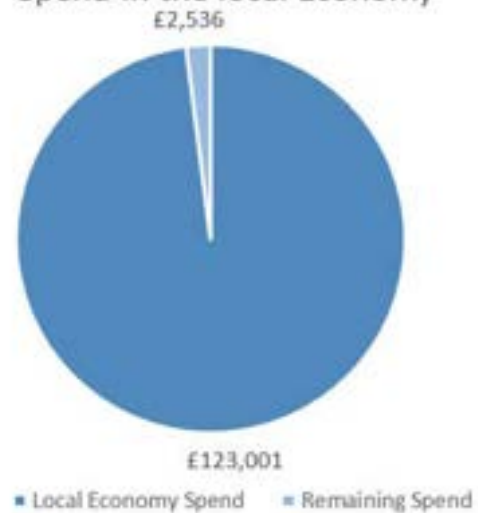
The National Lottery, NatWest BHB, Rosa, Royal London, Lancaster City Council, Lloyds Bank, School of Social Enterprise, Walney Extension Community Fund and Francis C Scott Charitable Trust.



This year, 97.97% of our expenditure has been spent in the local economy - an increase of 1.679% from the previous year. This includes supporting women running small businesses, workshop providers and training facilitators.

We have created paid work for 46 women during this year.

### Spend in the local Economy



# 218

individual women  
attended our courses  
and workshops in  
2021/22.

## CHALLENGES

Where do I start?

Covid-19 and the emotional fallout of the pandemic, continues to impact our work. We have seen increased illness and anxiety amongst participants.

Most of the year saw us hiring venues elsewhere for Covid safety. This resulted in a lack of connection for women on courses with the wider organisation, but the decision to move upstairs to a space with lots of windows has enabled us to start bringing work back into our base. And by January all face-to-face courses will be delivered back in GCHQ.

To emerge from the pandemic into an economic crisis has been devastating, for the women we work with, and our organisation.

Delays by funding decision makers has meant that both our income is down this year and it is hard to plan. Three lots of funding that were expected in this financial year have slipped into 2022/2023. On top of this everyone is reporting significantly greater competition for reduced pots of funding.

I have never known such a prolonged period of uncertainty.

“ 96%

of participants felt more confident as a result of joining The Growing Club

“The Growing Club gave me confidence in my abilities and supported me when I needed it the most.”

# GOING FORWARD INTO YEAR 7

In the coming year, November 2022 to October 2023, our plans are now largely consolidation of our core work, with a focus on outreach to reach more marginalised women. These are our priorities:

- \*Angels Den 2
- \*Applying for core funding as Reaching Communities support comes to an end in April
- \*Build and strengthen the trainers team
- \*Build our e-course offerings
- \*Make the Development worker's job two doable roles, Training Coordinator and Operations Manager, in preparation for hand over.
- \*Deliver Peer Networks, Young Women's work and probation courses
- \*Develop Women & Numbers work
- \*Support for women in third sector
- \*Women and neurodiversity campaign project
- \*Continue to address our sustainability systems and resources
- \*Continue to look for a suitable building for the Women and Enterprise centre and work with service users on a design plan for the centre.
- \*Explore a wider and more comprehensive mentoring offering
- \*Explore international trade as an income option via exporting our services



# THE GROWING CLUB

where every woman thrives



## FINAL THOUGHTS FROM FOUNDER & DIRECTOR, JANE BINNION

Frustratingly, I have to once again write that it has been another highly challenging year, in many ways even harder than the pandemic.

People were already tired but have been required to dig even deeper to provide the services and support so badly needed, whilst faced with so much uncertainty and significantly reduced resource. I have spent far too many hours writing bids and proposals, for relatively small amount of money. This takes me away from the important development work we need to do

We are seeing a huge contrast between the grassroots organisations who work hard to respond quickly to need, and the unbearably cumbersome processes of some of those who hold the purse strings.

But still we remain committed to the work we do because we see the impact on the lives of individuals and families. There is a much reduced pot of money available to support women's work, nevertheless, we will continue to endeavour to help the women left behind get their voices heard.

Jane

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*“No country can truly develop if half its population is left behind.” Justine Greening MP*

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**THE  
GROWING  
CLUB**  
where every  
woman thrives

