

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023

The Growing Club  
CIC



The Growing Club CIC  
January 2024

## BACKGROUND

The Growing Club is a Community Interest Company, founded 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 in 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 work delivered in our financial year November 1st 2022 to 31st October 2023.

Women's meaningful economic participation is integral to achieving greater security and stability around the world. When women are economically secure, they invest in their families and communities, spurring economic growth and creating more stable societies.

Women's Economic Empowerment - US Department of State



“

A safe space for any woman to laugh, cry and build confidence for exploring your future.

”

## THOUGHTS FROM FOUNDER & MANAGING DIRECTOR, JANE BINNION

It feels very odd for me to write this, my last annual report as Managing Director.

Having been awarded 5-years of funding from National Lottery Reaching Communities, we are now able to split my job as planned, meaning I will become Training Coordinator on February 1st 2024.

It has been enlightening to re-visit last year's annual report, which covered a period when we were emerging from lockdown. Whilst, as a society we still have not recovered from that, it seems such a long time ago.

This has been another hard year for our communities, in terms of the cost of living crisis. We know that women carry the biggest burden during these times. However, I can see our organisation is in a very different place. This time last year we were stressed and over-stretched, due to funding uncertainty. So much funding was short term and funders were taking an extraordinary long time to make decisions, which had an obvious impact on the third sector.

But here we are now, January 2024, in a healthy position having received 5 years of funding from the National Lottery, Reaching Communities, 2 years delivery funding from Lancaster UKSPF, other contracts coming in, and a strong team to take us forward.

*Jane*

**THE  
GROWING  
CLUB**

where every  
woman thrives



# Targets for 2022- 2023

These were our stated priorities for 2022-23

- \*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

ROOTS  
AND  
SHOOTS

THE  
SOWING  
CLUB

BLOOM  
AND  
GROW



THE  
GROWING  
CLUB

where every  
woman thrives

## Key achievements:

I will tackle the list on the previous page one by one.

### \*Angels Den 2.

Megan's big event of this year was to organise our 2nd Angel's Den evening (see more on this below). This took place in November and was a fantastic event, hosted by the Health Innovation Campus. We even raised £100 from raffle ticket sales to buy Christmas food for the food bank.

### \*Applying for core funding as Reaching Communities support comes to an end in April.

This was an 8-month piece of work, but with lots of help, we were awarded 5 years of core funding. This pays key salaries, and rent and has been the single most important thing to happen to us at The Growing Club, as it means we can breath and plan for 5 years. Plus we have been able to advertise for an Operations Manager, meaning Jane can focus on managing the training.

### \*Build and strengthen the trainers team.

We have taken on 3 more trainee trainers, again graduates from previous courses.

.

### \*Build our e-course offerings.

We have added 4 new bite size courses to our e-course offerings, using funding from Multiply, and UKSPF.

### \*Deliver Peer Networks, Young Women's work and Probation courses.

We have successfully delivered all of those, reaching new women.

# 56

Courses, programmes and workshops ran during this year,



## Key achievements:

\*Develop Women & Numbers work. We received a contract via WEA to deliver on the government's maths programme - Multiply. We delivered workshops and one to one lessons to 27 women.

\*Support for women in third sector

Our concern for the wellbeing of those women running third sector organisations during the pandemic, led to us running a specific breakout session at the Women in Business Wellbeing Day, followed by 2 peer support sessions.

\*Women and neurodiversity campaign project.

This has been a fantastic and much needed initiative (See input from Megan on page 11).

\*Continue to address our sustainability systems and resources.

This is an ongoing agenda item for us and runs through all we do.

\*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.

We have continued to keep this on our agenda and this is now a priority job for the Operations Manager to focus on in 2024.

\*Explore a wider and more comprehensive mentoring offering.

We have recruited more brilliant volunteer mentors, who we train and support. We would like to get funding, to expand this initiative.

\*Explore international trade as an income option via exporting our services.

This was a dead end, but we will explore it further in 2024, starting with an Accidental Exporter workshop.



“

Interesting session looking at our own beliefs and how we talk to ourselves, and how to change these into more positive words.

Live Your Worth Workshop



## TRAINING COURSES, PROGRAMMES & WORKSHOPS

Throughout this period, The Growing Club ran 56 courses and workshops, ranging from half-day workshops, to our 12-month programmes, plus 47 Drop-In sessions, and ran 39 one-to-one coaching sessions. And of course our Christmas party.

In addition, we hosted an International Women's Day event to launch the UKSPF Lancaster funded work, a second Women in Business Wellbeing day (which will now be an annual event), re-launched the FSB women in business networking events and ran Angel's Den 2.

We trained 4 new mentors (alongside recycling existing mentors) and our quarterly trainers' forum meetings, are now well established.

In response to demand, we re-introduced a series of 9 social media workshops led by Tasmin Lofthouse, both face-to-face and via Zoom. In addition we held 10 business focussed workshops covering issues such as tax returns, pricing, book-keeping software, and networking.



The Growing Club CIC trained 321 individual women, of these 102 were new contacts  
- 52 more than last year

“

Perhaps the most important thing I have gained is the momentum to keep moving forwards one step at a time, even if my journey takes longer than anyone else's.

”

## Specialist Work.

### Angels' Den

This year saw the return of our Angels' Den event.

The premise of Angels' Den is much like the show Dragons' Den, where budding entrepreneurs each have a few minutes to pitch their start-up ideas to a panel of businesspeople. The twist with Angels' Den, everyone gets support.

On the 30th November, at the Health Innovation Centre, women from our Start-up programme, Roots and Shoots, pitched to 9 business owners from around the district. Business Angels then agreed who could best support who, offering services such as marketing help, website design, sales training and accountancy.

The evening, which included supper, showcased local innovation and entrepreneurship and highlighted the community and mutual support of the Lancaster District, which is very special to us at The Growing Club. Special thanks to Kelly Ann Sharp from Voice Work, a voice and speaking coach, who provided vocal coaching and warm up exercises before the event. Joanne Barlow from Access to Finance Lancashire who coached the pitchers in groups and 1:1 to help them refine their pitching skills And Glyn Jones from the HIC facilitated the use of the lovely space for the evening.

A huge thank you to our Angels for being generous and community-minded sharing their time and services to support start-ups. We are so proud of the pitchers for being brave enough to put themselves out there. Finally, thanks to everyone who has supported behind the scenes who were key in making the event very special.

We look forward to putting on another Angels' Den in the future.

“

An excellent opportunity to describe my business to a audience and ask for help





## Winter Survival Project

Over the winter period of 2022-2023, we were awarded funding from the NHS Population Health Investment Fund to run a 5-month collaborative Winter Survival Project. We partnered with Gabriella, from the Artisan Bazaar, Ebony at Rose Tinted Financial CIC, and Georgina at Green Rose CIC with the aim to help local women maintain their health.

Georgina ran an Energy Advisors drop-in every Thursday offering one-to-one support and advice regarding any winter pressures and making referrals to LEAP, the Local Energy Advice Partnership. She also ran two Energy Champions workshops. These half-day workshops gave attendees practical advice on staying warm and reducing their energy bills and gave them the skills and knowledge to help understand their bills. These resulted in two women gaining paid employment.

The fund allowed us to run makers sessions with Gabriella making cook bags and draught excluders from recycled materials. Draught excluders are one of the most simple yet effective tools for keeping a room warm, and cook bags can help reduce cooking expenses. Along with learning a practical skill, it was a safe and relaxed space for women to connect, which is vital as isolation during winter impacts mental wellbeing.

Ebony from Rose Tinted Financial Solutions CIC ran a course to empower women to make informed decisions regarding bills and budgeting, as well as providing debt advice.

Alongside this, we provided food vouchers from Positive Futures, for a hot meal, signposting to local food banks and food clubs, Citizens Advice, and Credit Union; and bought simple energy saving devices such as LED lightbulbs, draught excluders, chimney balloons for women to take away.

“

Practical.  
Accessible.

Fun but so much knowledge.

Energy Champions Workshop



## Rosa

In February, we were awarded funding from Rosa's Voices from the Front Line fund, for a campaign called "Empowering Neuro-divergent Women in the Workplace." We have been collecting first-hand research on the effects of late (or no) diagnosis of neurodiversity and the barriers it may present for women in employment and education.

Many of the women who come to The Growing Club are neuro-divergent and choose to become self-employed out of necessity, due to struggling in employment. Through interviews, focus groups and surveys, we are collecting accounts of these experiences as well as positive experiences the women had at work, where they have felt supported and able to work to their strengths.

The information will be in a booklet, which will be an open-source. It will be launched at our first ever conference, an event to bring together employers, decision-makers and neuro-divergent women.

Neurodiversity in women is still very under-researched. Many women who got in touch to talk about their experiences have expressed relief that someone was listening. This is just the beginning of our conversation, with plans on doing much more work with neuro-divergent women moving forwards.

“

Visibility and support are crucial. Embracing my dyslexia as a part of my identity is important because it has so many unique strengths. Let's focus on the strengths, not the challenges.”

## MSE

In March 2023 we were awarded funding from The MSE Charity to work with parents and carers at a primary school situated in one of the most deprived areas in the country, West End Primary School.

The aim was to help them find new ways to think about and manage their money, making healthier decisions for themselves and their family, and becoming positive role models for their children.

Working in collaboration with TP Financial Solutions, Green Rose CIC and Rose Tinted Financial Services workshops, one to ones and coffee mornings support is being offered and well received. We are working on developing trust between our organisation and parents and carers in need of support.

We have exciting plans for the second half of the year, including producing a Signposting Guide that can be used to support more people as well as recording an e-course.

The parents who attended the first set of workshops were grateful for this time and support, giving them simple steps. And the safe space to talk about money has made a difference to them and their own money mind-set.

## Work with Ukrainian Refugees

Having a presence at the City Council's start-up event has led to Ukrainian women coming to us for support. This then led to us applying to the Integration fund to enable us to run a cohort of Changing Direction specifically for Ukrainian Refugees, which was very powerful and much needed work for those living in limbo.

“

The course was very good. I think I can now make positive changes in my life. I will focus on the good news and use my new skills to find positive solutions to everyday problems.

## Young Women

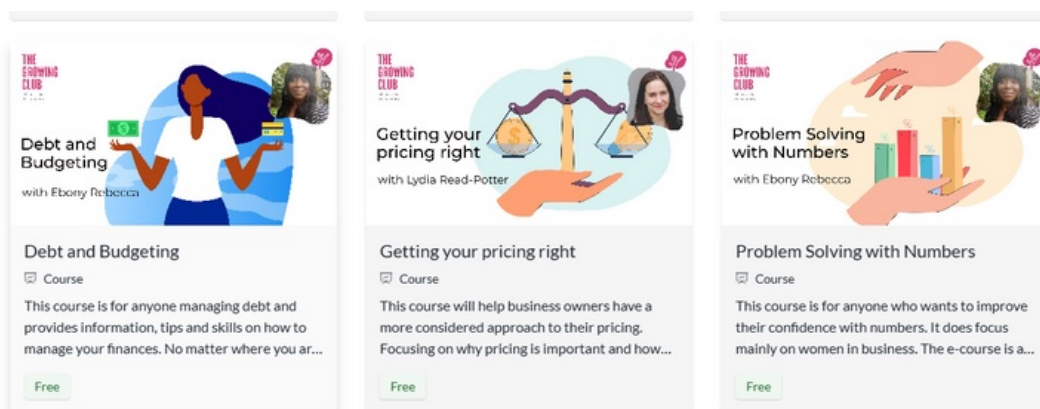
Our work with young women, funded by the FCSCT, has worked well in Morecambe Academy, with very positive feedback, and more sessions are planned for 2023/24. The aim is to engage young women at risk of leaving school with no job or further education plans, to explore their skills and options for Decent Work (UN SDG 8.3).

## Channel 4

There was lots of excitement at the women and enterprise hub when Channel 4 news called us and set us the challenge of 18 hours to bring together a small group of women aged 50-plus to debate the spring budget. It was a fabulous discussion and we were all chuffed to be featured as part of their news item.

## ONLINE TRAINING HUB DEVELOPMENT

We are currently putting attention on affordable/ funded self-learning by expanding our offerings with a growing range of bite size e-courses. See here <https://courses.thegrowingclub.co.uk>



“

This has been incredibly enlightening. I feel so much more confidence about pricing my workshops and knowing my value.

Pricing Workshop

”

## CHALLENGES

It goes without saying that the cost of living crisis is having a dreadful and long lasting impact, and it is difficult to see how or when this will end.

It is harming the local economy with businesses closing, having still not recovered from the pandemic. And many of our start-ups have had to take on part-time employment, thus taking their attention away from their own business.

With Jane preparing to step down as MD we have had to do a lot of work to re-structure the Directors team. Thank you to Sharon Phillips from CVS and Debra Presley for your help with preparing us to change.

We have been able to run more collaborative projects this year, but it has proven very difficult to collaborate with main stream agencies, due to the pressure on them to hit their key targets. As much as they want to bring in new initiatives, they are too busy to give it the attention it needs. So it is slow progress - but still progress.

The downside of the growing demand for our work is that we have well and truly outgrown our space, and we are again having to resort to borrowing rooms elsewhere. Special thanks to Fraser House, Gabriella Bavone, and Bob Hall for letting us use their rooms on occasions when we have two courses running at the same time. And to The University of Cumbria for hosting our start-up graduation.

Of course, the main challenges for women still remain, and sometimes we wonder if we have made progress as a society at all. It is good to see a growing campaign about inequality in the domestic sphere. That childcare, elderly care and general housework are still not shared equally is being identified as one of the biggest things holding women back now.

We all need to be more aware of our role modelling.

“

I want to visit The Growing Club every week, not just for courses.  
Thanks a million.





# GOING FORWARD INTO YEAR 9

## Our priorities for 2023-24

- \*Our third wellbeing day for women in business
- \*Our first conference. Women, Neurodiversity and the Workplace
- \*Launching the pilot Neuro-Nurture group
- \*A business growth retreat
- \*International Women's Day event with FSB, plus 3 other women in business networking events
- \*Delivery of Boost's Flying Start contract in partnership with Selnet
- \*Delivery of the Cumbria LEP business support contract
- \*Bid for 3 new contracts
- \*Appoint Operations Manager
- \*Start to grow a new training co-ordinator to replace Jane in 2025
- \*Look for a suitable new building for the Women and Enterprise Hub
- \*Angels Den 3
- \*Recruit 2 new peer-trainers
- \*Deliver a face-to-face programme outside of Lancaster district
- \*Reach 20 more socially excluded women
- \*Continue with school work with NEET young women
- \*Explore alternative income streams, including using our skills to deliver in the corporate world
- \*Explore funding for a wider mentoring scheme pilot

ROOTS  
AND  
SHOOTS

THE  
SOWING  
CLUB

BLOOM  
AND  
GROW



THE  
GROWING  
CLUB

where every  
woman thrives

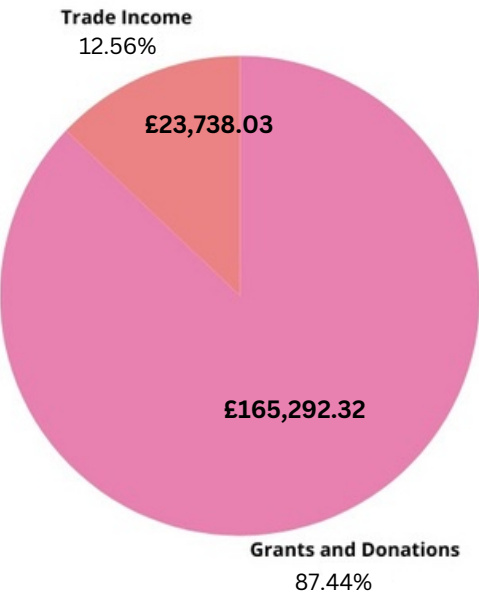
# INCOME

In 2022/23 we received a total of £189030.35 income from grants, training courses, branded product sales, contracts and donations.

The majority of our income still comes from grant funding. This year we have received grants from:

The National Lottery, NatWest BHB, NatWest North East, Rosa, Voices from the Frontline, Rosa Follow On, Royal London, Lancaster City Council, Walney Extension Community Fund, NHS, MSE, UKSPF and Francis C Scott Charitable Trust.

And contracts from: HM Probation, Cumbria LEP, Lancaster City Council and Lancashire County Council.



# EXPENDITURE

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

We have created paid work for 52 women during this year - this is 6 more than last year.



321 individual women attended our courses and workshops in 2022/23

## The Team:

Being a grass roots organisation which has grown organically, some team members have moved on and others have joined us.

We now have a strong delivery and support team made up of:

Directors 6

Office Team 5

Contracted Trainers 8

Volunteer Mentors 16



Celebrating the  
amazing news  
from the Lottery

## And a special thanks to...

As always, we offer a heartfelt thank you to everyone who has enabled the work of The Growing Club CIC during this period.

As ever, we have demanded a lot from our team - the administration team, directors, our trainers, volunteer mentors and Angels, consultants and funders - all of whom have provided a much needed steady support.

Thank you to everyone who has believed in us, funded us, given us your time, helped us out in our times of need, and challenged us to constantly improve.

..

“Women have always worked. They have worked unpaid, underpaid, underappreciated, and invisibly, but they have always worked. But the modern workplace does not work for women. From its location, to its hours, to its regulatory standards, it has been designed around the lives of men and it is no longer fit for purpose.”

Caroline Criado-Perez