

# ANNUAL REPORT 2024

The Growing Club  
CIC



The Growing Club CIC  
January 2025

## Introduction

This year at The Growing Club has been one of change, but it feels like we are entering a new phase of growth and renewal. This year we have said farewell to Patty and Megan who have moved on to new and exciting challenges (Patty with a full-time job and Megan onto a PhD), and Jane Binnion has been unwell with complications from long COVID. This has meant that Sarah Ludford stepped up to become Temporary Training Manager in August, working alongside our new Operations Manager, Ros Jones, who started in December 2023. Jane, Ros and Sarah report to Caroline Charnley, who joined us as voluntary Operations Director in January 2024. Jane will be retiring at the end of December 2024, more than 8 years after setting up The Growing Club. This will be another sad farewell, but the structures we have in place mean that her legacy will go from strength to strength.

In September 2024 we moved into our new space at 123 The Barracks, offering a larger office and two training rooms which can be opened out into a single space, providing more flexibility for events. This meant we were able to host the FSB Women in Business Networking meeting in October 2024. Whilst our long-term plan is still to find a space of our own, this new location provides us with the time and space to settle into our new organisational structure whilst giving us the additional room that we need.

### *The Growing Club Team*



“

Very pleased that I came.  
Excellent information and  
advice

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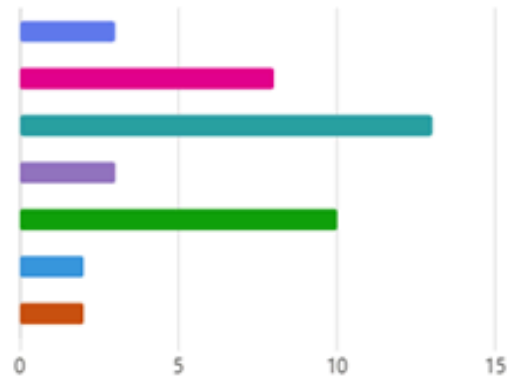
# Targets for 2023- 2024

Our third wellbeing day for women in business.

Held in November 2023 at The Storey, attended by 39 women (Responses, below, from 30 women. Women could choose more than one option).

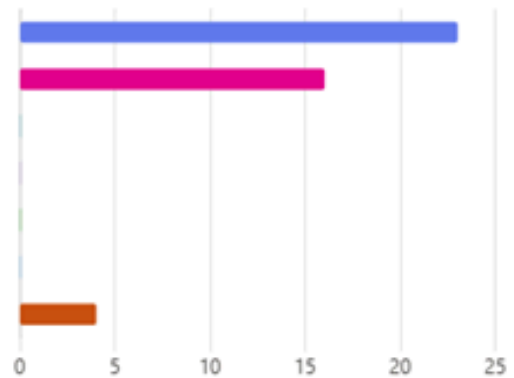
## 1. How did you feel before the day

● Content	3
● Optimistic	8
● Average	13
● Indifferent	3
● Exhausted	10
● Pessimistic	2
● Other	2



## 2. How did you feel after the day

● Content	23
● Optimistic	16
● Average	0
● Indifferent	0
● Exhausted	0
● Pessimistic	0
● Other	4



## Targets continued

### Launching the pilot Neuro-Nurture group

This ran in December 2023. Further funding was secured from The Lancashire Community Foundation for a course in March and October. The course was developed by one of our trainers, Julia Yates and was so successful (and with such high demand) that we applied for another 3 years funding from Smallwood. So far we have supported 28 women with the courses and coaching.

### A business growth retreat

Entitled Know your Worth, this was an overnight retreat in February 2024, giving women the space to explore their own sense of worth alongside the practicalities of pricing their services and products as business owners. It provided a space to gain clarity and focus for growth. 10 women attended.

### International Women's Day event with FSB, plus 3 other women in business networking events.

IWD in March 2024, with networking in January, July and October 2024. The October meeting was held at our new premises in The Barracks at White Cross.

### Delivery of Boost's Flying Start contract in partnership with Selnet

This ran from April - October 2024. Six women graduated, of whom one moved from claiming ESA to claiming Universal Credit, registered her business and started selling and trading. Another took out a loan that enabled her to outsource production and to focus on marketing and selling. A third ran pilot schemes to research her offers and will begin trading in January 2025. Two women left prior to the end as they got the support and opportunities to grow their businesses elsewhere.

25

workshops ran during  
this year



## Targets continued

### Delivery of the Cumbria LEP business support contract

During this time we have supported 25 women. Further funding was received to continue this work until March 2025.

### Bid for 3 new contracts

We successfully bid for further coaching for women in Cumbria with Enterprising Cumbria (formerly Cumbria LEP) to provide additional 1:1 coaching support.

### Appoint Operations Manager

Ros Jones started in December 2023.

### Start to grow new Training Manager to replace Jane in 2025

Sarah Ludford started her role early (August 2024) due to Jane's long-term illness. Jane will officially retire in December.

### Look for a suitable new building for the Women and Enterprise Hub

Moved to 123 The Barracks in September 2024.

### Angels Den 3

Planned for September 2025.

### Recruit 2 new peer-trainers

Five new peer trainers recruited for a variety of courses: Changing Direction, Business Start-Up, Business Growth and Neuro-Nurture.

### Deliver a face-to-face programme outside of Lancaster district

The Business Start Up course was delivered in Preston (for Flying Start - Boost / Selnet collaboration).



“

Excellent knowledge and how she delivered it was brilliant, absolutely amazing. Am so grateful.

”

## Targets continued

### Reach 20 more socially excluded women

This was related to prisons' work. We were unable to fulfil the demands of the contract, we handed back the grant, so did not meet this goal.

### Explore alternative income streams, including using our skills to deliver in the corporate world

Ros has been working on an updated Funding Strategy and looking at alternative income streams including:

- Fundraising activities - e.g. Kitty Brown Fashion Show, planned for December 2024.
- Fundraising newsletter - to raise our profile and share the impact of the work we do.
- Hotdesking & room hire in our new premises.
- Jane and Sarah started working with a coach to develop our corporate offering.

### Explore funding for a wider mentoring scheme pilot

We applied for funding but were not successful. This will be reviewed in the year ahead.



## Our Impact

### Our Impact in 2023-24

- 334 unique women supported (2022-2023 = 321).
- 102 new contacts for this year.
- 28 women who accessed the online training hub, for the following courses - Getting your pricing right (6), Business Start Up (8) Knowledge is power (1) Business Planning (8), Business Growth (5) and Debt and Budgeting (1).
- 10 contracted trainers
- 16 volunteer mentors
- 5 directors
- 5 office staff

### Core courses

- Changing Direction - 4 courses and 26 women graduated. 1 went onto our Business Start Up course and another went onto be a trainee trainer on the course.
- Roots & Shoots - rebranding as Business Start Up. 2 courses started and 2 were completed, with 15 graduates during the period. 10 women reached a turnover of £1000.
- Business Growth - 9 women attended and graduated from this course

### Workshops

- 25 workshops across the year with 100 women attending.

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Insightful in terms of what is possible. I realised I can get organised. I feel positive about this now.

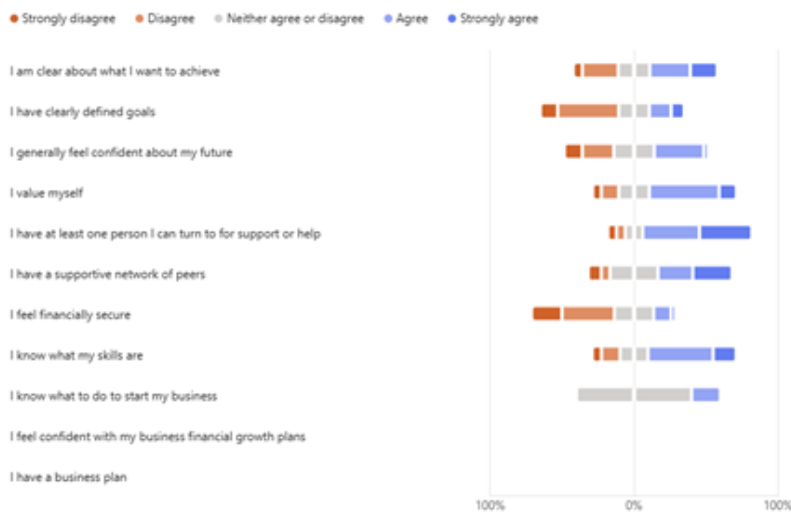
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# Our impact

Based on a snapshot of feedback forms from June 2023-May 2024, where we asked our women a series of questions before and after each course. Women were asked to tick the box which best described their current circumstances. The graphs show a clear improvement in goal setting, self-confidence, and resilience (in terms of support). The data is based on responses from our 3 core courses: Changing Direction, Business Start Up (formerly Roots & Shoots) and Business Growth (formerly Bloom & Grow).

Before the course (33 responses):



After the course (43 responses):



Note 1: 'I know what to do to start my business' and 'I have a business plan' was only relevant for the Roots & Shoots course, with a small number of respondents.

Note 2: 'I feel confident with my business financial growth plans' was only relevant for the Bloom & Grow course, with a small number of respondents.

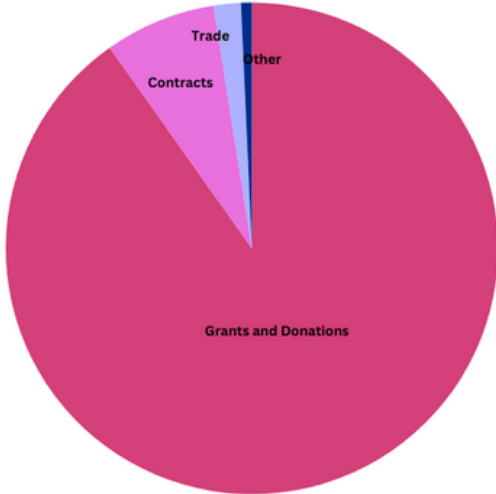


## Funding & Finance

### INCOME

In 2023-24 we received a total of £160,388 income from grants, contracts, online course sales and donations. Whilst most our income is currently from grants we are exploring ways to diversify our income streams. This year we have spent funding from:

Community Foundation for Lancashire, Francis C Scott, Lancaster City Council, Lottery Reaching Communities, Multiply, NatWest Project NE, Money Saving Expert, NW Enterprise Initiative, ROSA, Royal London Change Matters, UKSPF, Winter Survival NHS Fund.



### EXPENDITURE

Our total expenses in 2023-24 were £166,272, meaning we had a deficit of £5,889. Whilst disappointing, this was to be expected with so many changes in the last year (not to mention the cost-of-living crisis), but we remain in a stable financial position for the year ahead.

We have created paid work for 51 women this year, almost the same number as last year.



334 individual women attended our courses and workshops in 2023/24

# Targets for 2024-25

- Start working with volunteers (in addition to our existing Directors and Mentors).
- Continue to diversify funding sources including development of a corporate offer.
- Secure funding for extension of the Neuro Nurture course and develop the course further based on feedback from participants and trainers
- Implement hotdesking & bookable space with an online booking system.
- Incorporate financial resilience training into all core courses, plus workshops.
- Add at least 3 more trainers across our core courses.
- Develop a 360-degree feedback system and offer train the trainer sessions to support our trainers' development.
- Increase the number of 'under-served' women (e.g. BME, young women) that we support to more than 50.
- Deliver to 2 more neighbouring authorities.
- Devise and test a toolkit with one organisation to aid them in supporting the women in their community.
- Provide holistic support with other service providers to assist 60 women with basic needs so they are more able to access our programmes.
- Promote and develop our affordable, online self-learning e-library so that more women have access to our resources and training.
- Deliver Angels' Den in September 2025.

“

It was a really clear and empowering session - very interactive with the other members of the group in a supportive environment.

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## And a special thanks to...

The last year would not have been possible without an incredible team effort. From our volunteer directors (who give so much time and support) and our incredibly hard-working office team Rebecca Ansell & Jane Booker (who always go above and beyond), to our wonderful trainers, and our volunteer mentors.

We would also like to thank the staff at White Cross for their incredible support in renovating our new office space, all of our funders, and of course the women who attend our courses and provide us with the feedback we need to ensure that we are doing our best to meet their needs.

“

Don't think about making women fit the world - think about making the world fit women.

Gloria Steinem

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